Unraveling learners' perception towards the development of language proficiency under a learner-centered approach

Christof Thomas Sulzer
Universidad de Guanajuato

Abstract

In recent years, the idea of emphasizing the foreign language as a tool to construct knowledge and not only as a mere metalinguistic entity has gained considerable importance in many parts of Europe (Dalton-Puffer, 2007); however, in most Mexican public universities more traditional perspectives regarding foreign language learning still prevail (Davies, 2009), whereas the idea of less hegemonic learning environments remains mostly an alien concept. This paper is an attempt to address an aspect of learner-centred learning at a public university in central Mexico and presents the analysis of a research that comprises disciplinary English as a foreign language (EFL) learning workshop. Its objective is to unravel the perception of two tertiary EFL students towards this relatively uncharted approach in Mexico. The students were encouraged to use the target language as both an instrument to improve their language proficiency as well as to socially construct knowledge in disciplinary content.

Aclarar la percepción del educando: hacia el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera mediante una propuesta enfocada en el estudiante

Resumen

Últimamente, la idea de subrayar la importancia del aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera como herramienta para construir conocimientos, y no sólo como mera entidad metalingüística, ha cobrado importancia en grandes partes de Europa (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). No obstante, en la mayoría de las universidades públicas mexicanas aún prevalecen las perspectivas más tradicionales en cuanto al aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras (Davies, 2009). Por tanto, la idea de un entorno de aprendizaje menos hegemónico sigue siendo, generalmente, un concepto ajeno.

Este artículo aborda el tema del aprendizaje enfocado en el estudiante en una universidad pública mexicana y presenta el análisis de una investigación piloto, que consta de un taller para aprender inglés como lengua extranjera. Con la finalidad de aclarar o desenredar la percepción que dos estudiantes tenían del aprendizaje del inglés, el taller se focalizó en el uso de la lengua de estudio, tanto

para mejorar el dominio del mismo como para construir conocimiento socialmente en cuanto al contenido disciplinario.

Introduction

Finding a way to explain the manifold dimensions that account for second language acquisition (SLA) and eventually encountering the ultimate approach towards teaching and learning a foreign language has been subject of interest to a broad and fast-growing community of SLA researchers worldwide (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). Every so often, this venture has resembled a never-ending quest that does not seem to allow any concluding result (Kelly, 1969), mainly because learning a foreign language is an interdisciplinary process that is not compatible with any type of general learning theory (Norton, 2000). Along similar lines, Block (1996; cited in Firth & Wagner, 1997, 758) argues that there is a difference between 'normal science' and SLA, the latter consisting of multiple theories that comprise both accepted and rivalling findings from different disciplines within the boundaries of SLA research. Language learners are individuals, and putting them together in a classroom does not make them a homogeneous group. Their learning context inevitably changes from country to country, from school to school, and most importantly, from person to person. Thus, imposing over generalised teaching approaches, as promoted in popular textbooks, appear to be foredoomed to failure (Block, 1991) and can lead to dissatisfaction and frustration among learners and teachers. Despite all efforts researchers have made over the past decades in order to come up with new methodologies that could enable learners to master a foreign language, many would be in agreement with Prabhu (1990) who maintains that the single best method simply does not exist and that no one method is best for a particular context (p. 162). It therefore seems almost natural to first have a look at the learners themselves, to scrutinise their sociocultural context as well as their educational background, and then to design a learning environment that is more likely to fulfil the learners' learning needs. Bell (2007) even suggests that teachers should "build their own methods or decide what principles they would use in their teaching" (p. 143) instead of following externally designed, commercial teaching trends or using international textbooks with pre-packaged lessons. Otherwise, as Davis (2009) argues, language classrooms, especially in Mexico, become unfavourable environments that give rise to disenchantment and distaste for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.

Drawing on these premises, the research described in this article comprises a one-year, disciplinary language-learning workshop that focussed on the learners' language proficiency at a discourse level. It was built around the learners' academic fields of expertise

and interest, facilitating an environment that emphasised the learners as socially interactive and knowledgeable beings. The target language became an instrument for both improving foreign language proficiency through inherently stimulating content as well as for sharing and constructing disciplinary knowledge.

The main research subject of interest is the learners' perception towards the process of EFL learning in an academically challenging environment, and its main purpose is to unravel, analyse, and understand better the learners' situation as such a challenging shift in language-learning philosophy usually has a considerable impact on the learner and can lead to a clash of old and new learning patterns. Consequently, acceptance, adaptation, or even rejection are phenomena that can occur in such a process of change (Shamim 1996). EFL learning and teaching in Mexico has undergone many changes in a relatively short period of time; none of these changes, however, have yielded satisfying results that prepare Mexican tertiary students sufficiently for tackling academic tasks in English (Davis 2009). In response to the situation described by Davis, the present research is also concerned with the challenge EFL learners face in a new learning environment and thus gears towards giving them a voice to express their perspective.

As promising as the consideration of the learner as a knowledgeable individual might sound, such an approach also entails major challenges and implications. In Mexico, and especially at the University of Guanajuato, EFL learners are used to experiencing hegemonic, transmissional instruction from their teacher, and experiencing such a new modality they may feel like they are not learning, as this shift of power within the immediate learning environment inevitably challenges their previous EFL learning experiences. This could have a hefty impact on their attitude since the lack of the doctrinaire classroom hierarchy can cause problems in the assumption of more responsibility than they are used to. Hence, this research also wants to shed light upon critical aspects that this new learning concept manifests.

This article belongs to an on-going research study at the Department of Education, which forms part of the Social Science and Humanities Division at the University of Guanajuato in central Mexico. It offers its students an alternative option towards EFL learning, and thus, its outcome will help us adjust and amend the learning context and give us a more precise panorama over the learners' perspective towards this new direction in EFL.

Theoretical framework

The ways of approaching SLA are numerous. Throughout the history of second language learning and teaching, both of these areas have undergone remarkable changes according to the desired

type of language proficiency the learners, institutions, or entire nations have required (Kelly, 1969). The ultimate goal of language learning research seems thus not to be finding a universally applicable approach, but rather trying to fulfil the various needs that emerge in a specific context. On logical grounds, the ways of explaining the theory behind SLA have thus alternated synchronically.

In this search for understanding the process of learning a second language and finding appropriate ways to teach it, the Chomskyan metaphor regarding the learner's mind as a computer (1956) has had a considerable influence on the way we have comprehended and interpreted the process of language acquisition and on the notion of second language learnability in particular. Nonetheless, assuming that learning a foreign language happens merely because of the input to which we are exposed implicitly reduces the issue of second language acquisition to a strictly cognitive, or worse, computerised process that occurs exclusively in the learners' mind and that largely neglects their sociocultural context. Lantolf (2000) claims that second language learners need to be regarded as more than processing devices with an innate language module that converts linguistic input into output, whose stance considers the foreign language learners as individuals with a capacity to define and amend the conditions for their learning. Furthermore, McKay and Wong (1996) maintain that each individual learner holds needs and desires with regard to the foreign language learning process and that these needs and desires are:

> not simply distractions from the proper task of language learning or accidental deviations from a pure or ideal language learning situation, rather they must be regarded as constituting the very fabric of students' lives and as determining their investment in learning the target language. (p. 603)

While the impetus for a socio-psychological component to second language acquisition primarily came from the work of Vygotsky (1978), further scholars (Davydov, 1999; Wertsch, 1998) seized on the idea, propounding the notion that social interaction plays a major role in the language learning process, with learners constructing new language through socially mediated interaction. Other researchers like Firth and Wagner (1997) also validate the notion that the second language learner is an interactive social being and not just an isolated element in the classroom. Lantolf & Pavlenko's (2001) view rests on the assumption that the learner's mind is "formed and functions as a consequence of human interaction with the culturally constructed environment" (p. 144). This theory of mind, also known as activity theory (Leont'ev 1978; Engeström 1987), argues that "the social environment is not the context in which mind is formed, but the very source out

of which specifically human kinds of mind develop" (Lantolf & Pavlenko 2001: 144). The individual learners consequently construct and mentally shape their own proficiency goals, and they constantly renegotiate them with their social surroundings. This renegotiation leads to a dialectic endeavour between the community and the learner's language learner identity (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, 149), which requires a language learning pedagogy that "not only recognizes but builds upon the uniqueness of the concrete individuals that come together to form the community of practice known as the language classroom" (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, 157). This uniqueness goes beyond the sole acknowledgement of learner variables; it demands educational settings to offer the learners an environment that will allow them not only to unfold their individuality but also to live and share it with the rest of the learning community. By drawing upon the learners' prior knowledge and cultural capital, disciplinary tasks and language tasks coalesce and take each learner to a different sphere of intellectual engagement with the target language. Unlike classroom settings with only one pedagogical denominator and the dominance of vertical transmission of knowledge, learning environments that draw on the activity theory are more likely to socially engage the learners in their process of learning a second language and will lead to individually relevant and personalised rather than to uniform and standardised learning outcomes (Sfard 1998). Consequently, language aptitude, as Leont'ev (1981) trenchantly remarks, does no longer have to be seen as an inherent gift or prerequisite for successful language learning, but rather as an emerging ability that occurs in the course of a learning period.

The question of whether social interaction accounts for SLA has also caused much debate in recent research. Pica (1996) acknowledges that the sociocultural theory may not fully account for full linguistic competence. Also Gass, Lee & Roots (2007) contend that "one cannot explain acquisition in its entirety through purely social factors, nor can one explain acquisition in its entirety through purely mentalistic or cognitive factors" (p. 790). It seems, however, that there is mounting evidence that foreign language learning always takes on social meaning for the learners. Considering the language learner not only as a mere decontextualized information-processing mechanism but as a radically social being offers potential for new educational courses to be struck, and the fields of second language acquisition are a fertile ground for this to happen.

The Workshop

There is ample evidence corroborating the notion that the traditional, teacher-centred foreign language learning classroom structure

entails many dents (Lee & Van Patten, 1995), and Mexican public universities are particularly affected (Davies, 2009). On these grounds, the Department of Education at the University of Guanajuato has designed a disciplinary language-learning workshop for its students coined by the activity theory discussed earlier. The cardinal goal of this pilot workshop was to promote true engagement within a non-authoritarian hierarchy, and the idea of learners shaping their EFL proficiency, which is inherent to Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory, has been key to this workshop.

Guilford (1967) distinguished convergent from divergent ways of thinking, the former allowing only one correct answer and the latter granting several, creative ways of responding to a problem. Another pillar of the workshop was then the emphatic encouragement to divergent thinking in order to explore the possibilities of not only learning but also working with the target language in a disciplinary context. It gave priority to a setting that allowed more than one path to achieve a goal. The creative design of ideas was prompted by the motivation of a more pertinent road towards EFL learning, and since the participants' areas of academic knowledge defined the content of the workshop, they have been encouraged and enabled to shape its structure. As Davies (2009) maintains, tertiary language learners require an academically challenging and worthwhile preparation in order to succeed in their professional and academic future. Thus, moving away from the idea of the learner as an ignorant and therefore often neglected element in the classroom who needs to be taught in order to become proficient may help them appreciate a new liberty that allows them to set academic priorities and to consider language learning as something more than a tedious and useless requisite.

This ideological shift in methodology naturally harbours the danger of provoking a clash with the learners' previous language-learning experiences. This may lead to long-term consequences that in turn would need to be problematized. This workshop is thus not a concluded project, but an alternative proposal that is both subject to change and up for debate.

Methodology and research participants

According to Holliday (2007), research that looks at a specific context drawing social boundaries is qualitative in its nature. The main tool in qualitative research appears to be the researcher him or herself because that person "with all of her or his skills, experience, background, and knowledge as well as biases [becomes] the primary, if not exclusive source of data collection and analysis" (Maykut & Morehouse 1994, 26). As mentioned previously, the prime study aim is to unravel the complexity of

the learners' perception towards an approach that celebrates a view centred on learning instead of teaching. Thus, in order to gain new understandings about the challenges and the impact changing learning conditions have upon learners, two participants—Diego[1], who has a beginner level English proficiency and Laura[2], who possesses intermediate English proficiency—have accepted to be part of this study. Both are undergraduates in the BA in Education at the Department of Education, and both have experienced previous English learning conditions in different institutions and under different teaching and learning approaches. Together with fourteen other learners, they participated in a language-learning workshop that endorsed the learners as a knowledgeable individual and that put a syllabus to use that was subject to negotiation for all participants.

For this study, data has been collected for a period of one year, which has yielded enough information to draw an illustrative description of what occurred in that period. The two participants were kind enough to express their perception of a learner-centred language course by writing a reflective journal containing their perspective as well as a logbook containing a record of their progress regarding their performance inside and outside the classroom. Finally, after one year, both participants were interviewed in order to express any additional or concluding remarks regarding the workshop. While it is common that most research questions can be answered in different ways, I also support Maykut & Morehouse's (1994) notion according to which "the question one poses for study suggests the kind of data that are necessary or potentially useful in trying to answer the question" (p. 113). Nonetheless, no attempt is made to over generalise, and, as stated in Mertens (1998, 183), it is ultimately left to the reader to determine the degree of similarity between the study site and the receiving context.

In the journals, Laura and Diego reflected upon different aspects of their learning experience, for instance, whether the learning sessions were useful, effective, different, or meaningful. If they encountered problems, they tried to analyse them and to find ways to resolve them; if they engaged with a topic, they were encouraged to strengthen and build on it. The logbook turned out to be an accurate reference to compare the progress described in the journal with the actual performance in the workshop, and lastly, the interviews facilitated not only an oral supplement of data that emerged from the previous two research tools, but also provided clarifying information that has helped to understand better the phenomenon described.

1 The name of this participant has been changed to protect his identity.
2 The name of this participant has been changed to protect his identity.

Findings and discussion

One year of data collection has brought forth a wide and dispersed range of information about the learners' perception of the workshop. In this section, the most prevalent topics will be presented and discussed in order to unravel and understand the complexity this new learning methodology has borne for the two participants. Both Laura and Diego were facing an approach that challenged their previous, teacher-centred learning experiences. Hence, their reaction regarding the idea behind the workshop and the corresponding, new working method were expectedly strong:

> The changes in the methodology of the English subject are confused for me [*sic*]. (Diego, January 2012)

Changes in language learning methodologies have been found to have a significant impact on the language learner. Kuntz (1996) asserts that preconceived beliefs, coined by previous learning methodologies, may directly influence a learners' attitude and can even determine their success or failure in learning a foreign language under a new approach. While supportive beliefs towards EFL help to tackle language problems and therefore build and sustain motivation, biased or negative beliefs affect motivation and can cause frustration (Kern, 1995; Oh, 1996). Accordingly, successful learners are able to gain actual insights into their language learning processes, their own abilities, and the use of effective learning strategies, which have a facilitative effect upon learning. On the other hand, learners who do not achieve such insights are more prone to a sceptical attitude (Victori & Lockhart, 1995), and to classroom anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Muñoz de Cote (2008) claims that this phenomenon can be observed in students graduated from the Mexican public school systems, who tend to believe that EFL proficiency first and foremost consists of possessing structural knowledge about the language (p. 112). Unfortunately, this distorts the perception of their abilities and understandably has an impact on their overall attitude towards EFL learning when entering tertiary level. Horwitz (1987) reckons that unsuccessful learning experiences may likely lead learners to the conclusion that special abilities are required to learn a foreign language and that they do not possess such abilities. This explains Diego's initial intense attitude, which can inhibit the learners' understanding of the ideas and activities presented in their new context, particularly when the approach is not congruous with the learners' previous experience (Cotterall 1995: 203).

The workshop tried to encourage the participants to overcome previous, negatively connoted experiences by offering them a new surrounding that allowed them to interactively develop their

individual proficiency according to their disciplinary expertise and initiative. By connecting language learning with sociocultural forces, the learning outcome will inevitably yield individual, personalised results even though the learning conditions are similar. Mantle-Bromley (1995) adds that by also taking into account the learners' affective and cognitive components when designing a learning environment, both the length of time learners commit to language study and their chances of succeeding in it can be increased. Stevick (1980) is of the opinion that success depends less on the material and teaching methodology within that environment and more on what goes on inside the learners. Hence, through facilitating an environment that draws on the individuality of the learner, the workshop allowed both participants to interact and co-construct knowledge. This required adaptation from the participants, as the standardized Mexican educational system does usually not emphasize this sociocultural notion (Davies, 2009). As a matter of fact, the process of adaptation could be noticed after one semester:

> I'm starting to like this semester. Doing projects for me is very interesting maybe is hard to begin writing about a topic [*sic*]. But I think the as students we have the opportunity to choose any topic of concern, so that way the work done during the project becomes interesting [*sic*]. (Laura, March 2012)

The excerpt above suggests that Laura's priorities in EFL leaning have been reset. Although still not easy, the language appears to develop into something interesting due to the fact that EFL learning has become more personalised. No longer are there predesigned language activities to complete but rather individual academic tasks to attend. This allows the focus to move away from the teacher towards the learners, who can now share their findings with others. The following two quotes confirm this new circumstance:

> I feel that the topic chose by the team is going to be very interesting to all most everyone in the group [*sic*]. (Laura, October 2011)

> I would try to do my best, and transmit what I learned to my classmates [*sic*]. (Laura, April 2012)

Interweaving the learners' disciplinary knowledge and cultural capital with the target language embarked a new way of dealing with the learning process that embraced them as knowledgeable university students, who already possess cultural and linguistic resources and who are now challenged to work with the target language at a discourse level. In 1939, Dewey stated that "the beginning of all instruction shall be made with the experience learners already have [and that] this experience and the capacities that

have been developed during its course provide the starting point for all further learning" (p. 27). Cummins (1996) also emphasises the importance of integrating EFL learners' cultural and background knowledge into their learning context that acknowledges their individual identities:

> When students' language, culture and experience are ignored or excluded in classroom interactions, students are immediately starting from a disadvantage. Everything they have learned about life and the world up to this point is dismissed as irrelevant to school learning; there are few points of connection to curriculum materials or instruction and so the students are expected to learn in an experiential vacuum. Students' silence and non-participation under these conditions have frequently been interpreted as lack of academic ability or effort, and teachers' interactions with students have reflected a pattern of low expectations which have become self-fulfilling. (p. 2-3)

As any language learner, Laura and Diego have made a significant, lifelong investment in acquiring prior knowledge and communicative experience inside and outside their fields of expertise, which can now be used in the language learning process. Batstone (2002) puts forward the view that "the belief that we use what we already know to throw light on what we do not yet know is, of course, well established" (p. 221). Cromley (2000) even argues that it is virtually impossible to learn without associating new information with previous knowledge. The workshop then put emphasis on taking into account this prior knowledge, giving the participants an opportunity not only to connect new information found in the target language with information they already possess, but also to work with the language at a discourse level that transcends the mere act of memorizing disconnected linguistic knowledge.

Based on Engeström's (1987) major study regarding expansive learning, the participants transformed their previous knowledge into an enormous resource, which could be expanded into new, collaborative learning opportunities. Interacting with each other led the learners to discover the contrast between what they are learning from others with what they already know. By contrasting new knowledge with their prior knowledge and practice, they were able to go beyond the boundaries of a traditional language classroom context and to deepen and expand as well as to transfer their learning into their own societal context.

The perception towards taking the learner as a starting point to begin the workshop was expressed as follows:

> I feel happy because I had time to think what would be the most suitable theme for my interest. (Diego, April 2012)

After each semester, Laura and Diego were asked about the most remarkable aspect in the workshop, to which Laura mentioned the ability of becoming able to strengthen her skills to be creative within the language-learning environment. Furthermore, the sovereignty over the content of the academic tasks within the workshop has been accentuated:

> I believe that all the energy that was put into the projects was because personally I had the opportunity to choose any topic of my interest [*sic*], so that was what I really liked the most. (Laura, November 2011)

> The way that it was worked this course was something new. But I can say that I really liked working under an interdisciplinary workshop model. As a student, I had the opportunity to develop autonomy, initiative by working individually, interes, as a reflective thinking of my career and future life [*sic*]. (Laura, May 2012)

Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (1998) argue that collaborative learning that allows the discussion of complex ideas can result in both academic success as well as have an effect on attitude towards language proficiency. However, it is of great importance to acknowledge that the workshop does not have the power either to instantly overcome the learners' previous learning experience or to ensure their full satisfaction regarding the learning philosophy and the desired language proficiency. To the interview question about what he missed in the workshop, Diego answered the following:

> Grammar first and foremost. Basic and intermediate grammar. (Translation by the author. Diego, May 2012)

A study by Yorio (1986) claims that language learners often show obvious reluctance to abandon traditional teaching approaches (p. 672). Diego's previous EFL learning experiences seem to have shaped his perception, and it becomes evident that a one-year workshop does not radically change it. His statement rather shows that perceptions towards a new learning approach entail a complex and interconnected web of old and new beliefs. Both participants have been exposed to a clash of two inherently different language-learning philosophies—the one promoted in the workshop and the one experienced before entering the same—and it requires time and endurance to figure out the benefit and drawback of each approach. Ultimately, it must always be the learner who determines the ideal language learning circumstances and not an external agency. Smith (1990) describes this dilemma as "problems of knowing—of being told one thing, but in fact knowing otherwise on the basis of personal experience" (p. 632).

Conclusion

The question of what constitutes successful EFL learning has always engendered much interest. New proposals towards language education are arising and offer interesting and important opportunities for research. The main characters and potential profiteers of such studies are always the learners, and it is thus vital to explore their perception towards such a significant change in learning methodology.

The stance of EFL learning under an approach that emphasises learning rather than teaching is relatively new in Mexico; however, we have considered it worthwhile to explore its effectiveness in order to remedy the precarious situation in Mexican public universities described by Davis (2009).

By considering the language learning process as a social construct that entails both cognitive and interactional features, this paper has attempted to illuminate the complex nature of learners' perceptions towards a new proposal of EFL learning at the Department of Education at the University of Guanajuato, including the social, cultural, and contextual factors that shape them. As Wenden (1986) points out, when attempting to discover what characterizes successful language learning, we need to find out what learners think about their learning situation and provide them with an environment that allows them to examine these beliefs.

Data from a period of over a year has yielded the insight that a shift in language methodology represents a struggle for the learners, who inevitably see their previous learning experiences challenged. Moving away from the transmissional model of language teaching and adapting to a more responsible position within the learning environment has encouraged them to overcome previous, negatively connoted experiences, to accept a new surrounding that allows them to interactively discover new sources of motivation triggered by connecting language learning with sociocultural forces, and to discover new learning possibilities through setting personal language priorities.

As the participants will continue reshaping and negotiating their identity as language learners, this study does not allow any conclusive consensus about success or failure regarding the stance towards language learning presented in this article, and it would be premature to over generalise its results; however, it does provide an insight into the perceptions of the learners that allow this research to continue.

References

Batstone, R. (2002). Making sense of new language: A discourse perspective. *Language Awareness 11*(1), 14-28.

Bell, D. (2007). Do teachers think that methods are dead? *ELT Journal 61*, 135-143.

Block, D. (1991). Some thoughts on DIY materials design. *English Language Teaching Journal 45*(3), 211-217.

Block, D. (1996). Not so fast: Some thoughts on theory culling, relativism, accepted findings and the heart and soul of SLA. *Applied Linguistics 17*, 63-83.

Chomsky, N. (1956). Three models for the description of language. *IRE Transactions on Information Theory 2*, 113-124.

Cotterall, L. S. (1995). Readiness for autonomy: Investigating learner beliefs. *System 23*(2), 195-205.

Cromley, J. (2000). *Learning to Think, Learning to Learn: What the Science of Thinking and Learning has to Offer Adult Education*. Washington, D. C.: National Institute for Literacy.

Cummins, J. (1996). *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society.* Ontario, California: California Association for Bilingual Education.

Dalton-Puffer, C. (2007). Outcomes and processes in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): Current research from Europe. In W. Delanoy & L. Volkmann, (Eds.), *Future Perspectives for English Language Teaching* (pp. 139-157). Heidelberg, Germ.: Carl Winter.

Davydov, V. (1999). The content and unsolved problems of activity theory. In Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen & R. L. Punamaki (Eds.), *Perspectives on activity theory* (pp. 39-52). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Davies, P. (2009). Strategic Management of ELT in Public Educational Systems: Trying to Reduce Failure, Increase Success. *TESL-EJ 12*(3), 1-22.

Dewey, J. (1939). Experience and education. In S. B. Merriam (Ed.), *Selected Writings on Philosophy and Adult Education*. Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company.

Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*. Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit.

Firth, A., & Wagner, J. (1997). On discourse, communication, and (some) fundamental concepts in SLA research. *Modern Language Journal 81*(3), 285-300.

Gass, S., Lee, J., & Roots, R. (2007). Firth and Wagner (1997): New ideas or a new articulation? *The Modern Language Journal 91*, 788-799.

Guilford, J. P. (1967).*The nature of human intelligence*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Holliday, A. (2007). *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*. London, Engl.: Sage.

Horwitz, E. K. (1987). Surveying student beliefs about language teaming. In A. L. Wenden & J. Robin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 119-132). London, Engl.: Prentice Hall.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125-132.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R., & Smith, K. A. (1998). *Active Learning: Cooperation in the College Classroom*. (2nd ed.). Edina, Minnesota: Interaction Book Company.

Kelly, L. G., (1969). *25 centuries of language teaching. 500 B.C.-1969*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.

Kern, R. G. (1995). Students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning. *Foreign Language Annals 28*, 71-92.

Kuntz, P. S. (1996). Beliefs about language learning: The Horwitz model. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. ED397649).

Lantolf, J. P. (2000). Introducing sociocultural theory. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 1-26). Oxford, Engl.: Oxford University Press.

Lantolf, J. P., & Pavlenko, A. (2001). (S)econd (l)anguage (a)ctivity theory: Understanding language learners as people. In M. P. Breen (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research*. (pp. 141-158). New York, NY: Longman.

Lee, J.F., & Van Patten, B. (1995). *Making communicative language teaching happen*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Leont'ev, A. N. (1978). *Activity, consciousness, and personality*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Leont'ev, A. N. (1981). *Problems of the development of the mind*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Mantle-Bromley, C. (1995). Positive attitudes and realistic beliefs: Links to proficiency. *Modern Language Journal 79*, 372-386.

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophic and Practical Guide*. London, Engl.: The Falmer Press.

McKay, S. L., & Wong, S.-L. C. (1996). Multiple discourses, multiple identities: Investment and agency in second-language learning among Chinese adolescent immigrant students. *Harvard Educational Review 66*(3), 577-608.

Mertens, D. M., (1998). *Research Methods in Education and Psychology. Integrating Diversity with Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. London, Engl.: Sage.

Mitchell, R., & Myers, F. (1998). *Second language theories*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Muñoz de Cote, L. M. (2008). *Monologues and Dialogues in the Language Classroom: A Study of Students' Experience in Trying to Learn English as a Compulsory Component at a Mexican University*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Canterbury: University of Kent.

Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Harlow, Engl.: Longman/Pearson Education Limited.

Oh, M. T. (1996). Beliefs about language learning and foreign language anxiety: A study of American university students learning Japanese. *Dissertation Abstracts International 57*(9), 3858A.

Pica, T. (1996). Second Language Learning Through Interaction: Multiple perspectives. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics 12*(1), 1-22.

Prabhu, N. S. (1990). There is no best method – why? *TESOL Quarterly 24*(2), 161-176.

Shamim, F. (1996). Learner resistance to innovation in classroom methodology. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the language classroom* (pp. 105-121), Cambridge, Engl.: Cambridge University Press.

Sfard, A. (1998). On two metaphors for learning and the dangers of choosing just one. *Educational Researcher 27*(2), 4-13.

Smith, G. (1990). Political activist as ethnographer. *Social Problems 37*(4), 629-648.

Stevick, E. W. (1980). *Teaching languages: A way and ways*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Victori, M., & Lockhart, W. (1995). Enhancing metacognition in self-directed language learning. *System 23*(2), 223-234.

Wenden, A. (1986). Helping language learners think about learning. *English Language Journal 40*(1), 3-12.

Wertsch, J. (1998). *Mind as action*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Yorio, C. A. (1986). Consumerism in second language learning and teaching. *Canadian Modern Language Review 42*(3), 668-687.