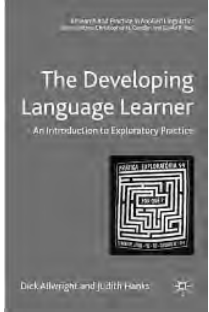


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The Developing Language Learner: An Introduction to Exploratory Practice			
Author:	Dick Allwright and Judith Hanks		
Publisher:	London: Palgrave Macmillan (2009)		
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Although there are many prevailing theories on meeting the needs of language learners, there is often little consensus that a practitioner can turn to in the heat of the moment. The balancing of outside pressures, institutional pressures, and the forces of institutionalization often seem at odds with teachers’ instincts and the bond that they have forged with their learners. Allwright and Hanks address many of these concerns and present an alternative to a teacher-centered classroom in *The Developing Language Learner*.

The book begins by setting forth five propositions about language learners. As expressed in their introductory chapter, the authors note that learners are 1) unique individuals, 2) who learn most effectively in social situations, 3) are capable of taking their learning seriously, 4) are able to make independent decisions regarding their learning, and 5) can develop as practitioners of learning. These five propositions are the rubric by which the authors review the field of applied linguistics and measure their new approach to learner development.

Part I, “The Developing View of the Learner,” contains seven chapters that evaluate assessment, teacher training, methodology, learner variables and Second Language Acquisition in terms of their ability to meet the authors’ five propositions regarding language learners. Allwright and Hanks examine each in turn and find that not one of them currently meets the five propositions entirely. From this review, they conclude that a new approach to teaching and learning is needed.

Part II, “Research Models, What We Have and What We Need,” contains three chapters and turns from linguistics to research in the classroom. As with the first part of the book, Allwright and Hanks put forth two aims for language learner research as 1) developing understanding of learners’ roles in the classroom, and 2) develop understandings in order to

assist learners in their development as practitioners. The authors proceed to explore the ability of third party and action research to meet those goals. As in Part I, they find current models wanting in their ability to aid educators' understandings of language learner. The book also raises valuable epistemological and ethical questions regarding the conduct of third party research. As Allwright and Hanks demonstrate through past examples and research, divorcing researchers from practitioners and practitioners from learners creates an attitude of counterproductive mistrust and incomplete findings. Based on their findings, the authors proceed to enumerate several principles of language learner research, based on cooperation, inclusiveness, and seeking to understand and develop quality of life.

Having explored the existing views of learners and existing research models, the book proposes an alternative that synthesizes the five propositions, the two aims of research, and the seven principles established in the end of Part II—they call this alternative Exploratory Practice. Part III, “Inclusive Practitioner Research in Practice,” includes # chapters that explore several case studies of Exploratory Practice (EP) in action. The fourth and final part lists materials and resources that prospective teachers and learners might draw upon.

There is much to recommend the book to prospective readers. Allwright and Hanks's writing is clear, precise, and accessible to the general reader. They draw heavily upon past case studies, thinkers in the field and the anecdotal evidence of teachers and learners to build their case. Their analysis in the first two sections is balanced and fair and they are more than willing to acknowledge the strengths of one approach to learners even as they expose its failings vis-à-vis their premises. The points that are raised regarding the marginalization of the learners in preexisting teaching and research models are well-argued and logically followed to their conclusion of supporting the call for new approaches to teachings and research.

After finishing the first two-thirds of the book, the outlook does appear to be bleak. Part III feels rather like a breath of fresh air following the rather gloomy first two sections. Exploratory Practice (EP) as presented in *The Developing Language Learner*, holds much promise. Developing inclusive practitioner research will provide opportunities for learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Seeking to turn issues into puzzles to be understood first rather than assuming that they are problems to be fixed will also allow for more objective analysis on the part of the reviewers. If educators wish to understand learner motivations and roles in the classroom, it would follow that actively engaging them as more than human guinea pigs would be effective.

Educators looking for practical ways to make use of Exploratory Practice will not be disappointed. Part three cites specific steps that practitioners have taken to introduce and develop EP in their classrooms. The outline of these procedures also includes analysis and reflection on their effectiveness by the authors and the participating members. Part four further lists materials and resources that teachers may draw upon to incorporate the approach into their teaching.

As with any book dealing with such a complex topic, it is not without its weaknesses. Readers may question why more details were not drawn from case studies outside of Brazil. Only three of the nineteen case studies in the third section come from different contexts. A deeper examination of implementation outside of a single context might help educators deal with different cultural expectations of teacher and learner relationships. Additionally, less

experienced educators might find the implementation of EP in their classroom to be daunting. Although confident in its adoption by teachers who have been exposed to it in their training, Allwright and Hanks themselves concede that such a concern is “a crucial issue for [them]” (p. 255) in their final evaluation of EP.

All and all, *The Developing Language Learner* offers much food for thought for educators. It is a clear and thorough exploration of Allwright and Hanks’ perspectives on learning, learners, and research. They deftly weave multiple voices, perspectives and case studies to make a strong case that deficiencies exist in current paradigms and to put forth Exploratory Practice taken up by classroom practitioners as a possible solution to those deficiencies.

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