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Book Review

Second Language Teaching: A View from the Right Side of the Brain, Marcel Danesi (2003), Springer, ISBN 978-1-4020-1489-5

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1. Introduction

The history of education has always been struggling with the question of why a small number of learners are able to achieve a native-like proficiency at the end of a course of study. This question has always been bothersome for teachers dealing with Second Language Teaching (SLT) one of whom is Danesi (2003) who was disenchanted with the existing methodologies and searched for insights from the domain of neurosciences. Those who are interested in the second language issues and attempt to find a high academic value for the role of neuroscientific perspectives toward SLT can hardly resist reading *Second Language Teaching: A View*

from the Right Side of the Brain authored by Danesi (2003).

Being a rich 182 page textbook, it opens the door to new insights to neuroscientific perspective towards SLT and Bimodality Theory (BT). Brains compatibility of teaching approaches have also been addressed in this book. The author believes that the neuroscientific domain has forced teachers to look more attentively and critically at the situation they have in their classes and the underlying theories proposed by educators. It offers a practical introduction to the use of neuroscience in SLT. It focuses on how the brain learns, how this can be used to construct classroom activities, and the relationship between the two.

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This book begins with an introduction provided by the author mainly focusing on the key concepts and theoretical frameworks behind the ideas of neuroscientific perspective towards second language learning as well as the general layout of the book. It is continued with five chapters.

2. Chapter I: The Second Language Teaching Dilemma

Chapter 1 mainly focuses on the Reform Movement that happened in the 1880s in the course of language teaching. The purpose of language reformers was to tackle the problems students of languages have at school and the low proficiency they have by the end of the course of study. However, Lenneberg (1967) criticizes the reformist paradigm by claiming that the critical period for language acquisition is from birth to about puberty. Lenneberg (1967) believes that after the critical period, the brain loses its ability to acquire a new language to the same degree that is possible before puberty.

The goal of this opening chapter is to build a historical framework that will allow the discussion of the dilemma faced by the reformers and the paradigms. The ineffectiveness of classroom instruction is discussed and the search for the best method is addressed. Among the methods reviewed are the Grammar- Translation Method, Audio-lingual, Cognitive-code and Communicative Language Teaching. Some key terms and abbreviations which are used in the discussion of SLT are also presented here such as acquisition, learning, the Universal Grammar Theory, and the Critical Period Hypothesis.

3. Chapter II: Looking to Brain Research for Insights

Considering the interest among second language educators in the brain sciences, the objective of chapter 2 is to discuss neuroscientific trends in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and the practical insights it has provided for SLT. Danesi (2003) believes that neuroscientific research has implications for SLT classroom since knowledge about the brain provides a theoretical basis upon which the reformist paradigm can be rebuilt to meet contemporary conditions and expectations. In

order to make a background for the discussion, a schematic outline of the brain physiology and a short historical survey of neuroscience are also provided.

This chapter starts with the construction and analysis of the brain – the brain stem, neuronal structure, and memory- and then the ideas of cerebral dominance theory and complementary hemisphericity theory are discussed in details which support the notion that both hemispheres of the brain are needed in doing any task. The author believes that, the Neurolinguistic Methods (NLMs) like Suggestopedia proposed by Georgi Lozanov (1960), Total Physical Response proposed by James Asher in 1965, and the Natural Approach proposed by Tracy D. Terrell (1977) are resulted from the updated reformist view of things. A result of the designed methods would be the activation of the brain in learning a productive trend.

4. Chapter III: Making Second Language Teaching “Brain Compatible”

The objective of chapter 3 is to consider the idea of right brain learning and left brain learning and it tries to show that neuroscientific constructs can have pedagogical consequences. Relevant brain research is taken into account and pedagogical principles are discussed in this chapter. Four such principles valuable for consideration are: (1) the modal flow principle, (2) the modal focusing principle, (3) the contextualization principle, and (4) the conceptualization principle. The notion of *modal flow* believes that language learning should flow from the right hemisphere to the left hemisphere.

Based on the author’s observation, neuroscience has now established that the brain’s two hemispheres do not differ much as to the type of stimuli they are designed anatomically to process, as to the manner in which they process information. Edwards (1979) supports this idea by stating that there are no such things as *right brain learning* or *left brain ideas*. On the other hand, terms such as *L-Mode* and *R-Mode* are preferred. The idea of Revamping Contrastive Analysis is later discussed as a theory of SLA and as an organizing principle for language teaching.

5. Chapter IV: Fine Tuning the Brain for Language Acquisition

Metaphor, which is a fundamental cognitive force in human conceptual system, is considered as a central strategy in the delivery of abstract concepts to students. There are two significant trends, namely Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Cognitive Linguistics which have been under investigation for many years.

The main purpose of chapter 4 is to discuss the implications of metaphor in SLT. MacLennan (1994) has also clarified that scientific work on metaphor has definite implications for SLT, with the most important implication being that it suggests concrete ways of 'fine tuning' the learners' brain for acquiring conceptual competence. The author also suggests that linguistics and communicative competencies have a great role in the overall process of classroom SLA.

6. Chapter V: Activating the Brain in the Classroom

Since the reform movement, there have always been two questions attracting attention, why it is so difficult to learn a second language in a classroom situation and what can be done to make it less problematic for teachers to handle the SLT dilemma. Therefore, there has been a constant search for the best method.

In the post method era, neurosciences have produced some interesting insights for handling the SLT dilemma. Various techniques have been introduced to tackle this problem and the question of which techniques can be employed to 'activate the brain' in the classroom constitutes the final chapter of the book. At first a repertoire of techniques is given to the readers including structural, visual, lucid, humor, and role-playing techniques; then, some organizational issues are discussed.

7. Concluding Remarks

This volume has been designed by the author as a neuroscientific essay which has been written with a specific view from the right side of the brain. The comprehensive language of the book can be a motivating factor for readers and the

interesting topics can be an inspiration for them. This book includes an extensive glossary of terms and abbreviations for the complicated words at the end. There is also a general bibliography which includes both the cited works in the text and the related studies for interested readers who like to find related works.

It should be noted that an in-depth treatment of neuroscience cannot be found in this book. Furthermore, readers should not expect to find a prescription for the best method here. However, the implications of BT have been discussed in details for language teaching practices.

In conclusion, evaluating methods and approaches from the perspective of brain functioning, this volume is indispensable in courses designed for language teachers, curriculum planners, and applied linguists. Moreover, it can be a valuable book for those who want to explore and develop some new techniques for SLT.

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