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Raising Awareness to Form Nick Ellis Research Implies Changes to Krashen Model

In a recent article "The Dynamics of Second Language Emergence: Cycles of Language Use, Language Change, and Language Acquisition" (Modern Language Journal, 2008), Nick Ellis explains "an emergentist account of second language acquisition," i.e., why language learners who are taught without explicit attention to form tend to hit a ceiling in their proficiency below what is required for academic success in the second language.

The emergentist argument addresses spoken language, and ways in which some of the most frequently used sounds tend to be reduced, making them difficult or impossible for learners to perceive in the streams of speech they are exposed to. Many of these sounds are what Ellis refers to as "grammatical functors," and because these are typically missing from the comprehensible input in the ideal communicative settings that Krashen, Terrell, Brown, Candlin, VanPatten, and others have promoted over the years (Ellis does not take on these authors directly), "maximum contact languages learned naturalistically can thus simplify and lose grammatical intricacies."

To fill in these language learning gaps, Ellis proposes the use of "dialectic forces, socially recruited, involving the dynamics of learner consciousness, form-focused attention, and explicit learning."

Sylvia Ashton-Warner's concept of "organic reading," from the book "Teacher" (1963) develops texts for learning from the students' own pictures, ideas, and immediate interests. Similarly, Freire built his literacy instruction for construction workers by starting with the words for the tools and objects they were most familiar with.

In 1983, Dixon and Nessel described how Ashton-Warner's organic reading could be adapted to teach ESL learners, in their book "Language Experience Approach to Reading (and Writing)" (Alemany Press).

LEA may be a perfect complement to standard communicative or "natural" approaches to ESL/EFL instruction, because, as Marcia Taylor points out in her Eric Digest article ([ED350887](#), 1992), these organic texts

fulfill Krashen and Terrell's requirements for the selection of reading texts:

In Taylor's words:

The reading must be 1) at a comprehensible level of complexity and 2) interesting to the reader. Reading texts originating from learners' experiences meet these two criteria because 1) the degree of complexity is determined by the learner's own language, and 2) the texts relate to the learner's personal interests.

The other advantage of LEA is that it provides a way to raise the individual learner's consciousness regarding elements and aspects of English which are either not present or not clearly discernible in comprehensible spoken input, addressing Nick Ellis's concerns about a proficiency ceiling (which he calls "the Basic Variety") beyond which learners cannot progress without attention to form.

The Learning Experience Approach goes like this:

First, the learner tells a story or recounts a personal experience, and the teacher or another helper writes down everything he or she has said, word for word, including every sound and without trying to fix anything.

Second, this original transcript becomes the text for the teacher to go over together with the learner, focusing on grammar and word choice, leaving the paper marked up as needed.

Third, the learner writes the text again, taking care to incorporate all the changes and corrections.

Fourth, the learner reads the revised text aloud to the teacher, experiencing what it is like to express himself or herself with enhanced clarity.

These exercises which encourage the learner to focus on his or her areas for improvement (in speech and writing) are likely to reach more deeply into their long-term awareness of the second language in ways that become evident in spoken (and written) performance.

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