
Reviews/Comptes rendus

Face[t]s of First Language Loss

Sandra G. Kouritzin

Laurence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, 1999
230 pages, ISBN:0-08058-3186-X

First language loss is a common occurrence among the general population of Canada. Just about every Canadian has lost a heritage language, either personally or in past generations. Canada is a nation of First Nations peoples and of people who have immigrated from all parts of the world. Only English-speaking immigrant Canadians have not experienced language loss to some degree. It is surprising, then, that this topic is not more commonly talked about in Canadian society and in ESL circles.

In her book *Face[t]s of First Language Loss*, Sandra Kouritzin explores the issue of language loss and gives it depth by interviewing 21 volunteers who have experienced some form of language loss. In the book she presents five of these individuals in detail and allows readers to listen in on their experiences. According to Sandra,¹ the Japanese word for interview consists of two characters. The first means *face* and the second *touching*; so she calls the process face touching. Early in the book Sandra quotes Chong (1995) who said, "Once my research was done, the challenge was to press it flat onto the page of a book" (p. 5). In this book Sandra has overcome this problem in a creative and life-giving way. She has effectively enveloped three-dimensional people into the flat pages of a book.

An exciting feature of this book is the amount of interaction that takes place between Sandra and the volunteers. Sandra says that in the beginning she wanted "to find a methodology that could simultaneously help to define language loss, look at its causes, and track its effects" (p. 19). By using the life history model, where the investigator and the participant work together to create a written summary of their experience, Sandra allows the reader to see clearly through a window that might otherwise be opaque or blurry. We can see how her interview style changed over time, how her personal circumstances affected the interviews, and how the setting contributed to the interviews. At times she lets us know what kind of chair she was sitting on, which way she was facing in the room, what food they were sharing, and how long the sessions lasted. By quoting excerpts from her personal journal she shares what her impressions and interpretations were of some of the comments made. In her own words, Sandra says that the model she used was

good at “demonstrating how life has an impact on research, and research on life” (p. 165). All the details she gives us about her interactions with her participants help to paint a picture of the faces of the people she spoke with and of Sandra herself.

As I read this book the faces became so real that I could not separate myself from the life histories of the people in the book. Not only did I get to know Sandra and her participants, but I was also compelled to examine my own personal experience with language loss and the implications the loss has had on my life. In fact I had to control myself not to rush out and look Sandra up and tell her my own unique experience with losing German.

The title of the book is awkward. Initially one wonders, is it *faces* or is it *facets*? Why couldn't she decide? And after reading the book I can understand that this is the problem that the author and editors had when deciding on the title of the book. They probably hoped to show that the book explores the faces of individuals who have lost a language (through face touching) and the different facets of losing a language. Near the end of the book Sandra speaks about a few of those facets by saying, “It has become apparent to me, in exploring the complexity of family relationships when language loss is involved that there is a lot of shame, anger, frustration, and embarrassment attached to the loss of a first language” (p. 175).

The experiences and feelings of the people whom she examined bring to light the far-ranging consequences of language loss. In the end the book is more than just a personal statement or even a collective statement about language loss. It ultimately becomes a political matter. It touches Canadian society and government and has implications for our ethnic mosaic model. Sandra briefly touches on the political nature of this topic and the rage and other emotions that it evokes in her volunteers and the “frightened public” (p. 207) in a chapter called “Discordance.” She mentions that although it is tempting to write propaganda, she refrains from doing so because it is not the purpose of this book.

It is my hope that this book will become part of a building momentum that will cause us not only to examine our attitudes and policies toward additional (heritage) languages but also to change these attitudes.

Note

¹Sandra Kouritzin put so much of herself into the book that I feel that I know her and that we are on a first-name basis. Choosing the style of research that she did allowed her to become one of the faces that I touched as I read this book. Therefore, throughout the review I call her by her first name, Sandra.

Phyllis Mann

The Reviewer

Phyllis Mann is an instructor of English for Academic Purposes at the English Language Centre at the University of Manitoba. She also taught how to teach EFL at a Teachers' College in northern Sudan for three years.

Journeys in Language and Learning: ESOL Students in Elementary Classrooms Around the World

Marilyn Lewis

ITPN Nelson Canada, Scarborough, ON

174 pages, ISBN: 0-17-605545-2

Journeys in Language and Learning: ESOL Students in Elementary Classrooms Around the World by Marilyn Lewis focuses on the efforts of teachers, primarily in New Zealand, Canada, the United States, and South Africa, to make language learning interactive and meaningful for young ESOL students. It delivers actual teacher accounts of ideas, activities, and environments that promote an active and independent process in learning. This process is illustrated mainly through observations of cooperative learning, writing activities, reading programs, integration of content areas, peer tutoring, and the balance between teacher talk and student talk. Marilyn Lewis endeavors to share with her audience what it is that constitutes a positive language learning environment.

Does Lewis cover her topics in a balanced fashion? Yes. The examples that Lewis presents are balanced in the sense that in each of the techniques is country- and language-specific. She demonstrates the beginning point at which students begin (proficiency level), traces how they progress, and reflects on the causes of the progress. She provides reflective questions for us to ponder regarding our own classes.

Lewis is wholeheartedly supportive of interactive learning environments, whether it involves cooperative learning, jigsaw, or peer tutoring. Lewis reinforces the fundamental element of socializing, which provides a "real" need for students to communicate, and even help each other, formally or informally. She does not call it independence, but that is what she is supporting. She presents techniques that provide students with an opportunity to explore and use language in their own way, to achieve their own goals, to communicate their own ideas.

Lewis also addresses the need for students to have self-confidence and self-esteem before they can attempt to communicate their ideas. Historically, researchers and teachers have diminished the importance of emotions in learning. Lewis takes into account the fact that before one can teach a language and apply many cognitive principles in that time, one must first

establish an atmosphere of support, perhaps by glorifying the students' achievements, large or small.

This type of positive reinforcement is just one of the basic approaches Lewis encourages teachers to adopt. She builds a convincing case that shows that most talk in the classroom is spoken by the teacher, and usually in directives. This begs the question: How can students effectively learn a new language, if their use of it is continually monopolized by someone else? This idea of balancing the talk by teachers and students is valuable, especially if teachers reflect and adapt their questioning and discussion techniques to allow for increased student participation.

Student participation is further reinforced with a clear theme of *choice* running through the text. Students are made essential by involving them in their choice of topics to investigate, whether it be fire engines or a classroom book collection. Students are invited to choose not only the topic, but what they may want to talk or write about. This naturally increases motivation and provides meaningful learning contexts for a variety of children with varying backgrounds.

What children needed next was to learn to relate the notion of adding details to a sense of achieving reader or writer goals. At the same time, Christine didn't want to give them a formula of fixed steps, blanks to fill in, or a model to copy, for these would prove limited when it came to individual students' purposeful, creative writing tasks. (p. 119)

Does Lewis cover all the relevant topics in teaching ESOL students? No. Although confidence level is a well-explained and rationalized element in learning, the value of the students' previous culture, and the teaching of the new culture, seem to be avoided. Arguably, one could say the first and second culture would be validated informally in the student interactions, for example, peer tutoring and cooperative learning, and the opportunity for students to choose their own goals and topics to express. But culture is a relevant enough topic in ESL that more explicit attention should be spent conveying its importance and the types of "culture-teaching" that go on here and elsewhere.

Also, the students shadowed throughout this book appear to have among the best resources and supports. "He was also aware of having been placed in a prestigious school so that he could learn English, although the motivation for doing this was obviously his parents' rather than his" (p. 16). Although the students themselves represent a number of ethnic and language backgrounds, the economic status of the school is projected as well equipped, and unencumbered by below-average socioeconomic variables. "This school is in a generally well-off socio-economic area very close to the harbor. Many of the immigrant families have come to Australia for business purposes or for

skilled jobs. The children are from many ethnic backgrounds" (p. 132). Lewis does acknowledge that not all schools are this fortunate.

Above-average socioeconomic status may mean that these students, despite ESL, may have more resources at their disposal at home and/or in the school. It makes a significant difference in teaching and learning when a school can provide teacher aides, excursions, activities that integrate areas that involve hands-on learning, and suitable class sizes. This takes money. Teachers may want to read realistic accounts of student learning, crowded classrooms, resources one can reasonably expect to find, smart activities that anyone can do, and a better understanding of pedagogical theory surrounding ESOL. How can one take an "ivory tower" seriously when one may see education crumbling due to cutbacks, political maneuvering; low socioeconomic families who cannot afford computers and magazines; or sociological factors such as gangs, discrimination, perhaps even students with near-empty stomachs. "You can't teach philosophy to people who are starving" (Hardy, 1969).

Although, Lewis does affirm that the integration of skills, reading, writing, speaking, and listening are integral to building lasting memories, she does not illustrate the value of tapping into multiple intelligences, brain research, or to differentiate learning in any way. She may argue that the integration of curriculum skills gets at this automatically. But does it? A discussion of multiple intelligences would illustrate a greater need to integrate with a broader repertoire of activities, such as music, movement, and logic, to name but of few. The discourse on curriculum skills is imperative, but the focus on it alone is reductive.

Marilyn Lewis provides a fairly comprehensive description of necessary pedagogical practices for teaching ESOL students. She has brought forward important themes of interaction, confidence, independence, reading programs, peer tutoring, and integration. She has also provided informed teachers' accounts, reflective questions for teachers, and observations and techniques to observe and implement in any ESOL classroom. However, teachers may also be seeking discussion of differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences, and teaching contexts that lack financial support and other needed resources. Moreover, culture must be emphasized in an ESOL classroom. To write a text on ESOL and not include a chapter on culture teaching, validation, and clashes almost seems reckless.

All in all *Journeys in Language and Learning: ESOL Students in Elementary Classrooms Around the World* is a valuable contribution to all teachers in elementary classrooms with ESOL students. Perhaps a sequel is needed.

Reference

Hardy, T. (1969). *Return of the native*. New York: Norton.

Nancy Chislett

The Reviewer

Nancy Chislett has been teaching university entrance English and history courses for four years. For the last two years she has taught as the English and history instructor for the nationally renowned Career Internship Program at River East Collegiate in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Because We Can Change the World: A Practical Guide to Building Cooperative, Inclusive Classroom Communities

Mara Sapon-Shevin

Allyn and Bacon, Toronto, ON, 1999

262 pages, ISBN: 0-205-17489-2

This book is not strictly speaking a resource for ESL teachers, but it is one I would not hesitate to recommend for all teachers in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, particularly in K-12 schools. In fact I was fortunate enough to receive a desk copy of this book from the publisher, and more fortunate still to pick it up and read it; I consider this book to be my discovery of the year, a discovery I want to share.

The book begins in the Preface by outlining the social agenda that has been set for schools in the United States. The social agenda—building classroom communities around shared visions of courage, inclusion, the value of all people, integrity, cooperation, and safety—has been determined by the increasing racial-, linguistic-, and abilities-heterogeneity of classrooms. The author sets herself the monumental task of answering the questions:

What do I do when kids fight? How should I handle name calling? What if some students have no friends and are isolated? Should children have to work with others if they don't want to? How do I create a classroom community that feels like a safe and supportive place for the students and for me? (p. xi)

She also tries to help teachers feel prepared to deal with broader social issues such as poverty, unemployment, racism, violence, abuse, and intolerance by suggesting ways and means of dealing with these topics in preschool to middle years' classrooms.

Each chapter begins by describing "The vision" and "Challenges to the vision." These two sections constitute a theoretical and philosophical (yet entertaining and easy to read) description of ideal school communities, of why we want to know ourselves and others, of giving and getting support in classrooms and communities, of building collaborative learning spaces, of telling the truth. They articulate a vision of classrooms that we all want to be part of by illustrating with stories, anecdotes, quotations, poetry, and songs (the songs are included, with musical notation, at the end of the book) some of the injustices that have been played out in classrooms, some of the barriers

to fully inclusive education, and the rationale behind teachers working against those injustices and barriers with their students.

The third section in each chapter, entitled "How to begin" lists and describes a wide variety of classroom activities, games, songs, and children's literature selections that will help in building inclusive classroom communities and cooperative learning environments. In one of my preservice education courses for early-years teachers, I had the students review some of the activities and role-play them in our classroom. Many of them went on to try similar activities in their classrooms and found the suggestions did indeed create supportive classroom environments.

The fourth section in each chapter addresses the links to the curriculum. For example, in chapter five, "Setting Goals and Giving and Getting Support," links are made (unfortunately for our purposes, to US curricula) to historical contexts of goal-setting (such as goal-setting in terms of inventions or civil rights that have changed the course of history), helping (examples of people helping one another historically), to current events (working together to ensure that no one would die during a national disaster), and to language arts activities (creating books, advice columns, and other writing activities).

The final section in each chapter poses the big question "Is this working?" This section poses a series of reflective or reflexive questions that teachers would ask themselves in order to see how effective the activities have been. Many of the questions are framed such that teachers can use them to begin planning action research projects.

I cannot say enough positive things about this book in a short review, so I merely state that this is one book that I will recommend, but not lend. Yet it is not a book designed for or by ESL teachers. For us the value of this book lies in its multiple suggestions, in its readability, and in its support for teachers who care for marginalized children. Our challenge is to apply our own professional knowledge to these activities in order to foster language development.

Sandra G. Kouritzin

Holiday Jazz Chants

Carolyn Graham

Oxford University Press, 1999

80 pages, ISBN 0-19-434927-6

Children love holidays and they love to sing. Holidays are an important component in language and cultural teaching and understanding. To her collection of Jazz chant materials (*Jazz Chants, Jazz Chants for Children, Small Talk, Jazz Chant Fairy Tales, Grammmarchants, Mother Goose Jazz Chants*), Carolyn

Graham has added *Holiday Jazz Chants*. *Holiday Jazz Chants* consists of 50 songs and chants that the ESL instructor can use in the classroom. A cassette or compact disc is also available to accompany the book.

Jazz chants are rhythmic expressions of Standard American English as it is used in situational contexts (Graham, 1978). Jazz chants are to be used as a tool in language acquisition to help students appreciate the rhythm and intonation patterns of spoken English. The primary purpose is to improve speaking and listening comprehension skills. Using the songs and chants may reduce anxiety levels, increase motivation, and help students retain concepts and ideas. The chants appeal to the linguistic, musical, and kinesthetic intelligences of the children.

The book is set up in 12 units corresponding with the months. Traditional US holidays are represented in the various months, except August and September, which have seasonal themes. August's theme is "Summer Fun" and September's theme is "Back to School." Songs in the book also include the musical notation showing the melody and the associated chords.

The book includes a section of teacher's notes. In this two-page section the author outlines the make-up of the book. Suggestions for presenting the songs and chants give the teacher step-by-step information on how to present each holiday. The five steps presented guide the teacher to use different teaching strategies to appeal to different learners. They also encourages teachers to incorporate musical instruments from the students' own cultures.

The section on extending and reinforcing the language in the songs and chants gives teachers some helpful direction and advice. Teachers are encouraged to personalize the songs and chants to involve the students. For example, in the chant "New Year's Resolutions" students can make their own resolutions instead of using the ones in the book.

Cloze activities with the songs and chants give the students an opportunity to use other vocabulary. The cloze activities can be done orally or in writing. Teaching language "chunks" and doing role-play and movement helps many learners retain new language learned. Inexperienced teachers will find this section helpful in using this book in the classroom to involve the students in varied and interesting ways.

A two-page alphabetized grammar structure key is also given. This lists specific grammar structures such as future, past tense, and plurals, and includes a list of chants and songs in which each structure is presented. This is helpful if the teacher wishes to find a song or chant to focus on a grammar structure.

The chants and songs could be used for preview, review, and for enjoyment. The book is filled with colorful and appealing illustrations. The many

good features of these materials will enable children to find these chants exciting and fun in language learning.

Reference

Graham, C. (1978). *Jazz chants*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tracey Giesbrecht

The Reviewer

Tracey Giesbrecht is a Master of Education student in the Teaching English as a Second Language Program at the University of Manitoba. She previously taught English in Taiwan for four years.
