Review of *Exploring Psychology in Language Learning and Teaching*

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Knowledge of psychological factors involved in the process of language learning and teaching is indispensible for teachers of languages. Such knowledge is especially crucial for many novice teachers. Therefore, resources that can help new teachers gain such insights always prove useful and needed in the field. *Exploring Psychology in Language Learning and Teaching* by Marion Williams, Sarah Mercer, and Stephen Ryan is a timely venture as the authors aimed to provide readers, with little or no previous knowledge of psychology alike, with an overview of some key points in educational and social psychology. However, I found that with the clarity of writing offered by the authors, the book can also be of use for further studies at the postgraduate level. Therefore, I feel at ease to recommend the book to both undergraduate students taking psychology of language learning courses and postgraduate students who aim to advance their understanding as well as to language teachers who would like to evaluate and reflect upon their own actions in language learning classrooms. This is one of the must-read books in the field.

What follows is a brief introduction and review of the book. The book has been organized into eight chapters. Each main chapter is devoted to the exploration of various concepts from psychology while connections to other concepts discussed in other chapters are also highlighted where relevant.

The book sets out to explore, in the introductory chapter, major psychological approaches. The authors review briefly behaviorism and cognitive approach to psychology and its advocates such as information processing and constructivism, followed by humanistic and sociocultural approaches. Finally, more recent developments such as ecological and complexity approaches are reviewed. Having

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examined each approach, the authors, then, provide their reflections on educational psychology in general and concurrent development in foreign and second language (L2) education. In doing so and reflecting on various models they dwell on, the authors quite effectively and usefully provide implications for language teachers to help them understand their own teaching practices and to find suitable strategies to employ in their own classes.

The notion of 'the group' is the subject of the second chapter of the book. Language learning does not happen in a vacuum as language learners are often embedded in a set of '**nested systems'** (Davis & Sumara, 2006), the starting point of which is the learner and expanding towards to the family, school/class, local community and finally national culture. In line with this understanding, the authors delineate the related concepts like group membership within contextual networks and how such structures are translated into the language classroom as a 'community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where learners and teachers cooperate with an ultimate aim of learning. This chapter elucidates what teachers can do for forming and managing effective group work in the language classroom. Different forms of group structures are discussed thoroughly with their implications and challenges for language teachers.

In the third chapter, the concept of 'the self' and its relation to language learning and teaching is explored. Firstly, the authors try to highlight the need for understanding the self since our sense of self within the process of language learning often plays an important role in how we navigate all encounters either as a teacher or a learner. Self and self-related constructs are then elucidated. These include self-efficacy, second language linguistic self-confidence, self-concept, self-esteem, and identity. The chapter successfully describes how individuals come to develop a form of self and elaborates on some salient factors on the development of the sense of self: *cultural factors, experiences of success and failure, internal comparisons, feedback, social comparisons, and self-driven behavioral styles*. Each factor is clearly illustrated with vivid examples by the authors. The authors acknowledge the complexities implied in the development of a sense of self and the possibility for teachers to help language learners to develop a positive and healthy sense of self. They offer suggestions as to what can be done by the class teacher to create an environment that is conducive to the development and maintenance of a positive sense of self among language learners.

The 'beliefs' that learners and teachers hold about language learning and teaching do exert an impact on their approach to learning and teaching. In the fourth chapter, the authors turn their attention to explaining beliefs that are helpful to learning. In order to define beliefs accurately, they make a clear distinction between belief and knowledge. The strength and nature of the beliefs –either facilitative or debilitative-are influential factors that also have an effect on learners' actions. The authors provide clear illustrations of these factors on learners' actions and offer suggestions to language teachers. They, then, explain that beliefs are not static; on the contrary, they can change and evolve over time. Therefore, it is better to think of beliefs as

existing on a continuum from 'slight hunch' to 'firm conviction'. Contextual factors, cultural background, situational factors, and experiences and interactions with other people are provided as some of the factors affecting the beliefs in general. The authors acknowledge beliefs have an emotional nature (Frijda & Mesquita, 2000), and some learners can have strong emotional bounds to their beliefs. In order to help learners reevaluate their beliefs, especially the ones impeding their language learning, it is advised that teachers need not only to figure out specific beliefs learners hold, but also to understand the emotional significance of those beliefs. The authors, then, move on to focus on three sets of beliefs, epistemological beliefs, mindsets, and attributions respectively, which are important in classroom settings in order to facilitate learning. At the end of the chapter, they offer specific manifestations of both learners' and teachers' beliefs in language classrooms.

In the fifth chapter, the authors examine affect, emotions, feelings, and moods which are all related to successful language learning. The definition of each term is provided with clear examples. These aforementioned elements mediate learning, use of language, behaviors and attitudes towards the language, the class, the materials, and even people themselves. To elaborate more, an emotional reaction is described as having three important components; namely, physiological element, expressive behavior, and subjective feeling. In regard to language teaching, any emotional response to teaching materials and activities is dependent on the interactions between an individual, the task, the setting, and the meaning of the situation for the individual. The authors go on to focus on how emotion and affect are related to language learning and teaching. The most influential affects in language learning are Krashen's (1985) affective filter and anxiety that has a specific form known as foreign language anxiety related to learning a foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Having clearly and briefly talked about these aspects, the authors continue to deal with less frequently examined aspects; namely, positive emotions, positive psychology, and the role of emotional intelligence in the process of language learning.

In the following chapter, the authors attempt to review theories of motivation that are connected with foreign language learning. Starting from behaviorist perspectives on motivation such as push-pull and drive theory, they move to cognitive theories of motivation. Among cognitive perspectives, the authors usefully make achievement, goal-setting and self-determination theories more accessible to many inexperienced readers. Along with a description of each theory, they offer suggestions to teachers with regards to how to reflect these on their own classroom practice. On the whole, cognitive theories provide a framework to understand behavior; however, they lack showing the whole story. Therefore, the authors also refer to the role of emotions in motivation. To them, emotional responses are also a key factor in understanding people's motivation, and teachers need to take into account this new dimension since physical and emotional states can be superior to cognitive processes. This chapter is especially useful as it makes current developments in the L2 motivation easily discernible for many novice readers of work on motivation. The authors provide an easy-to-read account of historical overview of the key developments in foreign

language learning motivation. They start from Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, and move on to focus on a process model of L2 motivation, and then to Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 motivational self-system. Finally, at the end of the chapter, the authors offer practical suggestions to language teachers and demonstrate quite vividly how theory can be translated into practice.

In the seventh chapter, the authors touch upon the learner's agency and self-regulation in language learning. The authors emphasize the agency as the feeling that one can act and have control over one's actions. For successful learning, learners need to develop a sense of agency in that they believe they have the ability to learn a language. In order to promote learners' agency and engagement, the authors suggest looking at Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Related to the agency, a useful tool is language learning strategies. The authors provide a brief account of strategies and their properties and types. After providing a clear explanation of learning strategies, they deal with the concept of 'learner styles' as it is closely linked to the language learning strategies, which is then followed by the concept of self-regulation which involves taking control and regulating one's own learning. According to the authors, self-regulated learners are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, able to set goals to be achieved, and motivated to accomplish these goals, observe and evaluate themselves during the course of language learning and lastly, have a sense of control in their ability to regulate their own learning processes. The authors emphasize the language teacher's role in helping language learners become self-regulated. In doing so, they suggest, the teacher can help language learners adopt 'SMART goals' (Doran, 1981), that stand for *specific, measurable, achievable, realistic* and *relevant*, and *time-bound*. Another crucial aspect of self-regulation has been identified as metacognition. The concept implies one's awareness of one's own cognitive processes in the process of learning (Flavell, 1979). The authors review samples of studies where language learners employing metacognitive strategies were often found to become effective learners, develop autonomy and a sense of agency.

In the final chapter, the authors first try to bring together different aspects of learning addressed in the previous chapters, and attempt to provide a complete picture of learning with reference to related terms of educational psychology. They attempt to show how different factors converge to influence the learners and the teachers. One's willingness to communicate is offered as a byproduct of such an interplay between many factors (MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). In the second part of the chapter, the authors offer eight principles based on the discussions in the previous chapters to give an idea for structuring a more holistic classroom practice about language learning. Each principle is quite effectively drawn discussions in the relevant chapters of the book. The final chapter in particular and the book as a whole illustrate vibrantly that learning is dependent on a complex interaction of factors, in a way that there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for language teachers.

In the final analysis, it has been a great pleasure to read such a simplified, to the point book related to language learning psychology. I found the book realistic and down-to-earth in that ever-confusing issues have been effectively made accessible

even to the novice teachers of languages who took up an interest in psychological aspects of language acquisition. The authors successfully examine each individual factor, provide clear examples, and offer suggestions to teachers to reevaluate their own practices regarding language learning. It is not, therefore, surprising at all to learn that the book has won Ben Warren Memorial Prize for contributing successfully to teacher education. My humble recommendation for future versions of the book is that a holistic chapter organization without any numerical titles is not always helpful for concrete readers to follow. While avoiding enumerating titles and subtitles looks charming, use of such signposting elements could add to the ease of navigation for inexperienced readers. However, this minor issue should not cloud the effectiveness of the analysis and synthesis of important psychological factors in language learning.

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