

Book Reviews

This is an ongoing column featuring reviews of books and other materials for ESOL teachers and students. Please send submissions to the columns editor, Elizabeth Fonseca, at columns@idiom.nystesol.org

Steven Brown and Jenifer Larson-Hall. *Second language acquisition myths: Applying second language research to classroom teaching*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012.

by Chelsea Walter

Positioning themselves as academics of second language acquisition (SLA), Steven Brown and Jenifer Larson-Hall aim to present real-life examples, research literature, and practical classroom applications to resolve commonly held but mistaken beliefs about SLA. Claiming that the audience for this book includes non-specialists as well as teachers of practicing English as a second language (ESL), English as a foreign language (EFL), and languages other than English (LOTE), the authors are methodical in their content selection and presentation of material for this book; its strengths include its reader-friendly approach and its practicality for use as an introductory text for general education teachers, as a teaching guide for those in the field, or as a springboard for those wanting to know more about SLA.

A unique feature of this book is that the contents are listed by both myth and by topic. Examples of some of the myths included are “A true bilingual is someone who speaks two languages perfectly” and “Language learners always benefit from correction” (p. iv). Those familiar with the SLA field may be more comfortable with the topics-organized contents, whereas novices may recognize SLA problems through being named as myths. The authors take this dual approach because they believe that considering theory as myth makes research “real [and] allows [them] to present the information as an answer to a series of classroom-related issues” (p. vii). Structuring the content as such allows the authors to reach many areas of SLA within one book.

Each chapter consists of three sections, which discuss the myth from different angles. The sections titled “In the Real World” open by giving real-life examples of the myth in question. “What the Research Says” sections present empirical research and theory addressing the myth; well-known research such as Reid’s questionnaire on learning styles (1987) and Gardner and Lambert’s socio-educational theory of motivation (1972) is discussed. The third section of each chapter, “What We Can Do,” includes practical tips for classroom teachers on how to handle SLA issues with their students.

While this book supplies potential answers to myths, readers looking for definitive and quick true or false answers may be disappointed. Each chapter includes upward of twenty sources related to the topic at hand; this compiles a useful collection for seasoned readers but could be overwhelming to novices. Most chapters also include a summary chart, which organizes the researchers’ names and main points of their work into a concise table. Such charts may help to act as reference aids for those beginning to familiarize themselves with the content, but the literature is can be both copious and succinct, requiring additional research to be done in order to fully explore an area. This approach, however, does encourage readers to think critically about the theoretical and empirical literature instead of providing a clear-cut response.

Overall, Brown and Larson-Hall’s volume serves as a constructive starting point for those entering the SLA field as ESL, EFL, or LOTE educators, and as an introductory text for non-

specialists. The logical organization of the book allows novices to explore various concepts in academic and real-world lenses. The wide range of research literature included allows the novice reader to use the book as a review of the field, while at the same time providing specialists a valuable source of references from which they can delve deeper into SLA. In sum, this book stands as a valuable informational resource for ESL, EFL, and LOTE teachers as well as those in other areas who have SLA environments in their classroom.

References

- Gardner, D., & Lambert, W. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.
- Reid, J. M. (1987). The learning style preferences of ESL students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21, 87–111.

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