An Interview with APPLE Lecture Guest Speaker Professor Leo van Lier

Catherine Box, Farah Akbar & Nancy Boblett

On February 10, 2012, the *TESOL/AL Web Journal* (represented by Catherine Box, Farah Akbar, and Nancy Boblett) had the pleasure of sitting down with Professor Leo van Lier, guest speaker for the 2012 APPLE Lecture Series. He was kind to take the time to answer our questions pertaining to the tremendous breadth and depth of his work: sociocultural theory and ecological approaches to language learning, scaffolding in the classroom, action-based research, and technology-assisted language learning.

Leo van Lier is professor of educational linguistics in the Graduate School of Translation, Interpretation, and Language Education at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. He is the author of several books, including *Scaffolding the academic success of adolescent English language learners (2010, with Aída Walqui); The ecology and semiotics of language learning (2004); Interaction in the language curriculum* (1996); *Introducing language awareness (1995);* and *The classroom and the language learner (1988).* He has published numerous book chapters and articles in journals such as *TESOL Quarterly, Applied Linguistics, International Journal of the Sociology of Language, The English Language Teaching Journal, Language Awareness, Le Français dans le Monde, Signos,* and *Applied Language Learning.* Professor van Lier is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Modern Language Journal* and is also on the editorial boards of a number of different journals. He is co-editor of the book *series Educational Linguistics* for Springer Publishers.

We would like to thank Professor van Lier for agreeing to be interviewed during his hectic schedule on the day of the APPLE Lectures. We would also like to thank Adrienne Wai Man Lew, Managing Editor of the Web Journal, and Daniel Mann, Program Secretary, for helping to coordinate this event. We especially appreciate Adrienne's offer to videotape the interview. Finally, we would like to thank Professor Michael Kieffer for his guidance and support while preparing for this wonderful opportunity to speak with Professor van Lier.

(From the left): Prof. van Lier, Catherine Box, Nancy Boblett, and Farah Akbar.

The Interview

Introduction

On Classroom and Action-Based Research

1. Your prolific body of work both in and on the second language classroom embraces sociocultural theory (e.g., Vygotsky, 1986), semiotics (de Saussure, 1983; Peirce, 1940) and critical theory (Bakhtin, 1981; Bourdieu, 1991; Freire, 1972). What is the common thread that connects your varied theoretical interests and approaches? **[Q1 video]**

2. You often stress the importance of connecting theory to practice, and have explored action-based research in depth (*i.e*. van Lier, 2000, 2007, 2008). Could you explain how you define *action-based research*, and share ways in which teachers/researchers may be able to engage in such research in classrooms, where there are often many competing demands for time and attention? **[Q2 video]**

On Scaffolding

3. In line with your work on language learning informed by sociocultural theory, and particularly Vygotskian theory, you often discuss the important role of scaffolding in the second language classroom. According to Walqui (2006), scaffolding in the classroom has three categories or levels: macro-scaffolding, which refers to the scaffolding at the curriculum level, scaffolding at the lesson plan level, and micro-scaffolding, which refers to the (often spontaneous) moment-by-moment scaffolding that takes place during interaction between teacher and students. In your opinion, is this last level, micro-scaffolding, teachable to novice ESL teachers? Or does it depend too heavily on the personality of the teacher, the personality of the particular group of students, and teacher/group chemistry? **[Q3 video]**

4. If micro-scaffolding is teachable, how would you do it? **[Q4 video]**

On Technology and Language Learning

5. With regards to Action-Based teaching, what specific Web 2.0 Tools or other technological tools are more malleable or suitable for language learning? What benefits do we as language teachers receive from incorporating AB teaching with CAI? (Why? Any specific examples?) **[Q5 video]**

On Theory, Research, and Practice

6. Your ecological approach to language learning encompasses aspects such as consciousness, awareness, and action. You have also talked about moral responsibility when designing language curricula (van Lier, 1996). In your opinion, what responsibility does the researcher have when exploring the classroom? To what extent does conscious-raising apply to the researcher in the greater sense of conscience-raising? **[Q6 video]**

7. Where do you see future developments in language learning theories and practices occurring? In other words, for all of us graduate students preparing to enter the field, what do you think the future holds for our research and teaching? **[Q7 video]**

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