

Chapter 80

Identifying the Impact of Acquisition and Learning on Education

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ABSTRACT

Acquisition, or the opportunity to practice skills within the classroom to the point of understanding and mastery, is different than formal learning. For the purposes of this text, acquisition refers to the opportunity to practice skills and technologies appropriate to the online classroom. Learning, in this context, refers to the background material necessary for understanding online education and the metacognitive understanding of choosing one technology for an online classroom over another. Learning, although a unique part of online teacher training, works in conjunction with acquisition in order to create a well-rounded and sufficient online educator. This chapter examines the role that acquisition and learning play in education and the necessary balance of these in order to provide setup for the following chapter incorporating acquisition and learning into an online teacher training program.

INTRODUCTION

The process of language acquisition can be thought of as being like a French braid rather than as a sequential process. Like a braid, language consists of multiple strands—phonology, semantics, syntax, discourse, reading, and writing—that are picked up at various times and woven in with the other strands to create a beautiful whole. –D. Dickinson & A. McCabe (1991)

The way that individuals learn language and build literacy skills differs for each person, their lives, situations, families, and experiences. Many daily activities and tasks can impact literacy-building skills without significant attention from the language learner or the one doing the teaching (parent, adult, guardian, or teacher). When language learning and literacy building are discussed, typically the first idea that comes to mind is often the original process of literacy learning and acquisition that occurs with children

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learning their first language. However, there are many other facets to language and literacy building than just learning a primary language. There is also learning a second language, third or fourth language, simultaneously building multiple language skills, or the application of literacy building techniques to more than just reading, writing, and orally communicating. As this text has described, there are multiple types of literacy and many contexts in which various components of literacy are used which can make it necessary for a speaker to (code) switch between these voices.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with an understanding of language acquisition and learning in order to later apply these concepts to the process of improving technological literacy skills of online instructors. This chapter relies heavily on research in literacy studies in order to develop solid definitions of acquisition and learning. Also, this chapter will determine common ways in which literacy skills are learned and acquired, both formally and informally, in order to apply these concepts to the further discussion of improving technological literacy.

The concepts of acquisition and learning represent a significant portion of language learning opportunities and therefore best represent the processes that occur when one is trying to understand a new language or build new literacy skills. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce some of the general concepts relating to acquisition, learning, and education without considering the impact or transition from their original context to the application of online pedagogy. Chapter Nine of this text will parallel this chapter in structure in order to specifically discuss the application of the acquisition-learning hypothesis to online teacher training programs. Various definitions of acquisition and learning are given in this chapter and then examples are given of how these concepts are utilized in the classroom and create learning opportunities for language learning students.

The introductory quote by Dickinson and McCabe provides a very realistic simile for language acquisition in comparing it to a French braid. Human beings are so hardwired to want to communicate effectively and want others to communicate effectively with them that we rarely take the time to reflect upon the process of learning about communication and how we learned it ourselves. In that way, literacy and language acquisition is much like a French braid; it is something that becomes easy to do with time and experience, something that we rarely think about the process of when we are actually engaging in the activity itself. Unlike a regular braid, a French braid also incorporates all of the hair and continuously pulls more and more strands into the braid until all of the hair is used. As this chapter will discuss, literacy skills build in much the same way. In children learning their first language, the children use all conversations spoken to them and around them as ways in which they learn appropriate methods of communication and communicative behavior. Specific nuances of grammar are among the latest skills to be acquired in language because of their sophistication, but language corrections occurring around the child can also help to improve upon their literacy skills. All types of communication, formal and informal, occurring around an individual building their language skills helps to impact and develop their literacy understanding. Thus, it is just like weaving a French braid.

Dickinson and McCabe (1991) explain the process of language learning as primarily a theoretical understanding; "Regrettably, at the present time there is not a consensus as to how language develops" (p. 10). Likewise, Dickinson and McCabe, as well as a number of other scholars, can provide information and contextual understanding of many factors contributing to language learning and literacy skills. These include, but are not limited to: social interaction, adult-child conversations, peer conversations, routine interactions, skill and drill, rote memorization, questions and corrections, interactions with objects, book

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