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Sousa, David A. (2011). *How the ELL Brain Learns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

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How differently do the neural and cognitive processes of English Language Learners (ELLs) operate from those for whom English is a first language? What specialized techniques work to facilitate both language acquisition and knowledge transfer for these students? What are some of the key political and historic issues surrounding the development of effective instruction for ELL students in the United States? With acumen and insight, David A. Sousa addresses these questions and more in this recent addition to his popular series of books on learning and the brain, a growing collection of similar works which include *How the Brain Learns*, *How the Gifted Brain Learns*, and *How the Special Needs Brain Learns*.

When one considers that K-12 educators today are under heightened pressure to squeeze equivalent achievement from a diverse distribution of student abilities and talents,

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one can easily imagine the need for this book in the series. In the movement to align pedagogy and neuroscience, Sousa's work is rapidly covering all the bases. His books serve as manuals for the application of empirically-validated strategies, meeting the needs of hopeful teachers and parents alike in almost any instructional context: home-school, classroom, or higher education settings.

The (false) presumption that the brains of all English Language Learners are similar is quickly addressed by Sousa, who provides a thorough overview of current and historical perspectives on learning and cognition relative to language in Chapter One. In fact, several sections of the book address what might be common misconceptions about ELL students (and language acquisition) by presenting results from current research literature, making this text much more than a collection of strategies. Sousa himself introduces this not just as a "how-to" but a "why-because-how-to" approach (p. 3), a distinction which may be especially relevant for readers who have no prior exposure to the world of English Language Learners.

The structure of the text is fairly straightforward and the content covers quite a bit of ground within eight well-organized chapters. The initial of these address first-language and second-language acquisition, teaching English speaking and listening, and teaching English language reading and writing. Chapters five and six deal with content-area language (language arts/social sciences and math/science, respectively). Chapter seven provides a broad overview of problems faced by English Language Learners and addresses how ELL student services might fit within a response to intervention (RtI) framework, and Chapter Eight provides a synthesis of the content of the preceding seven chapters.

Each chapter is end-capped with an array of relevant teaching tips for teachers of ELL students, providing an excellent resource for practitioners and pre-service teachers. Preview paragraphs at the end of each chapter provide the reader with comfortable transitions to upcoming new content. A glossary, references, and a more detailed resource list of organizations, websites, and assessments all appear in a terminal appendix. The overall format of the book is less graphics-heavy than one might expect for a book with such a specialized focus, but being

so heavily rooted in educational, rather than neurological research, the information being shared may not always need visual supports in order to be understood.

This formatting bears mentioning, however, because those whose understanding may profit most from this book are people who have little or no exposure to the research on English Language Learners, and a more general textbook-type format might help situate the content more clearly. And although the general premise behind this book is the application of new knowledge from the field of neuroscience to findings from educational research, this particular book presents more of an exhaustive synthesis of past intervention research on ELL students than it does a survey of recent neuroscientific research. For example, in the reference list, more than half of the literature cited is specific to educational research, with roughly a quarter of the same list being devoted to neuroscientific research. Because educational research is much more plentiful and has had a longer application with English Language Learners, this is not unexpected, but it is precisely the fusion of findings from these two fields which gives Sousa's work such a firm foothold among practitioners. The hope here is that future editions of this text would have more of a brain-specific research base from which to select relevant findings.

Additionally, although Sousa's definition of English Language Learners is universal, much of the information in the book lends itself to teachers of students whose first language may be Spanish. Sousa does not ignore the needs of students from non-Spanish-speaking backgrounds, by any means; he addresses the very real issues teachers and students might face as a when a student's first-language background is more syntactically or morphologically divergent from English syntax or morphology than that of Spanish. One excellent example of the latter is a matrix in Chapter eight which gives a list of languages by linguistic grouping and maps out the features of each which might assist or impede English language transfer. However, the numerous practical strategies in the book could be applied seamlessly to the needs of students who are native Spanish speakers and who comprise a larger portion of English Language Learners in today's classrooms.

Of particular value are the chapters on content-area teaching, specifically math and science. Sousa makes some important distinctions between academic language and conversational language, especially as these appear in math and science textbooks, and highlights the fallacy of underestimating the role language plays even in the acquisition of non-verbal knowledge. One omission here should be noted, however. This is the mention of work by Jim Cummins, whose terms Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive-Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) galvanized the study of these two concepts in second-language acquisition in education. Cummins's most critical assertion is that while BICS fluency may take only one to three years to achieve, CALP can take more than twice as long to acquire. Sousa addresses the difference between these two types of language proficiency, but does so without using either of these terms.

Nevertheless, Sousa's efforts have been very well-received by educators and non-educators equally, and the attractiveness of his writing style is immediately apparent; his words are engaging and unpretentious. That alone would make this book a good entry-level text for those wanting to learn more about how many English Language Learners acquire and enhance their emerging skills in a classroom setting. Add to this Sousa's synthetic approach (not in sense that it is artificial, but that it seamlessly integrates a wealth of research findings with targeted teaching practices), and one can see how his work has a broad appeal and why its arrival is timely.

Given its wide demand, the format of the book may be designed precisely for a larger population of readers, and if that is the case, a second (or parallel) edition might be more appropriate for its use in higher education or designed for pre-service teachers. As a teacher educator, I would be excited to use this text with my students who are unfamiliar with the issues involved in reaching English Language Learners in the classroom. All the same, the more familiar supports offered by textbooks (highlighted technical terms linked to glossary definitions, for example) would be most welcome here, and would help situate this text and maximize its utility as in-classroom support for teachers.

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