

The Spirituality of Second Language Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

Parallels between the reconstruction of self in Alcoholics Anonymous and the reconstruction of self in second language acquisition are drawn out and examined in three areas: ego deflation, identification at depth, and mutual assistance. These spiritual principles are shown to be theoretically and empirically supported in SLA literature and research. From these principles, learner strategies for dealing with affective factors that facilitate SLA and promote the formation of a new linguistic and cultural identity are outlined for immediate classroom implementation.

AN AWAKENING

The psychologist William James described it as a “vast change in feeling and outlook that develops slowly over a period of time.” Robinson-Stuart & Nocon (1996: 432) describe it as “a process that penetrates deeply into one’s patterns of thinking, feeling, acting, being in the world, relating to where one is, and who one meets.” Socioculturalists argue that “it does not exist within people but is constructed between them in interaction” (Pavlenko & Lantolf 2000: 171). Still others refer to it as a profound alteration in their reaction to life that could not have been brought about by themselves alone. According to Pavlenko’s analysis of the hermeneutic research in SLA, its first stage involves the loss of all perspective, frame of reference, and inner voice. Its’ second stage of recovery involves the subsequent appropriation of other voices, the emergence of a new voice (often first in writing), a reconstruction of the past from the new perspective, and a continuous growth into new positions and subjectivities (Pavlenko & Lantolf 2000: 162). This is the process of the creation of a new identity that is just as essential to acquiring a second language as it is to recovering from alcoholism.