

Leo van Lier: A scholar and teacher, a mentor and friend

Words can't do justice to the wisdom that Leo encompassed for those who were fortunate enough to have known him. This is my humble attempt at expressing my thoughts.

A scholar and teacher

In the summer of 1996, I started the TESOL program at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and Leo was my professor in a number of courses, such as Language Analysis and Classroom Observations. His book *Interaction in the Language Curriculum: Awareness, Autonomy, and Authenticity*, which became known to us as the "AAA book," had just come out. He quickly captured us with his wit, fairness, and wisdom. As a novice teacher from abroad, I was clueless about his impact on the field at the time.

In addition to drawing sentence trees in his Language Analysis class, Leo introduced us to his *Introducing Language Awareness* book, which everyone loved. By means of Leo's "Grammar Stick de Luxe," we rated native-speaker sentences on a scale in terms of what would be grammatically acceptable in what contexts: "It's ten minutes in front of eight o'clock," "There's a big meeting ongoing right now." Or: "The sporting neneks sang and 'mengalaid' through the night" (van Lier, 1995, p. 85). It was hilarious and eye-opening in that this went beyond the grammar books I had seen before, and it stuck with me. To this day, I still get giggles from my students whenever I introduce them to this exercise.

Leo's curiosity and playfulness as a teacher were contagious. He was never dismissive of our questions or suggestions, and there was never a bad idea. He supported each and every one as fully as he could. I was blessed to have him as a post-graduation mentor.

A mentor and friend

In his function as Director of the Kade Language and Technology Center, Leo taught a number of technology courses for professional development, which I was fortunate to be able to take during my days of teaching at Monterey Institute in the late 90s. His courses got me more and more interested in technology-based language teaching.

Leo enabled me to continue my post-doctoral studies by helping me flesh out my research ideas and by volunteering to teach my cross-institutional partner class for a telecollaborative project in language teacher education. Leo's mantra "Pedagogy first, curriculum second, computers last" lives on in my technology courses.

He became a friend and mentor to me, one whom I knew I could always turn to for advice. No matter how much he had on his plate at any given time, he would always be there. His counsel, wisdom, and generosity seemed endless. His support and mentorship were boundless.

Not only did he help me sort out life's challenges and opportunities, he was also a friend and role model who was a great joy to spend time with. He spoke German (among the many other languages he knew), he loved Glühwein, and he could talk endlessly

about soccer – over a glass of wine or a pint, of course. We also compared running notes on a regular basis. Whenever he got teased about occasionally getting out of his running habit, he would say: “Well, I get up in the morning and debate: Running or coffee? And the coffee pot wins these days.” One memory that comes to mind was after one of the San Francisco Marathons that we’d both run. He said to me afterwards: “Carolin, you wouldn’t believe what happened!! Right before the finish line, someone yelled: ‘Go Leo!!’ I looked up wondering ‘Who knows me here???’ and tripped. My name and bib number had been announced.” In his unassuming and modest way, Leo never took himself too seriously.

I am proud and blessed to have known Leo as a professor, colleague, scholar, mentor, and friend. I am grateful that Leo came to talk at our annual Applied Linguistics and Language Education Lecture at Teachers College a year ago, that he was able to see his loved ones – especially his new grandson Oliver – and that he was able to meet my family on the same trip. Leo’s spirit will continue to live on in all of us who have known him. Leo strived to maintain in himself, and promote in his students, the innate curiosity of kids. He showed us the importance of being open-minded and of cultivating the best in everyone. We miss him. I will always hear him chuckle, and I cheer to him with every Arsenal and Oranjes win a soccer game.

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