

CHAPTER TWO

Fostering an Inclusive Language Classroom

In this chapter, we are going to focus on the learner as an individual. This is because we think that the first task of a language teacher would be to know the learner! We will look at some of the ways in which learners differ from each other and are unique. We will investigate some of the differences they might have in terms of strengths for language learning, and also consider specific learning differences that they may bring to the language classroom. We will also focus on some of the general characteristics of adolescent language learners. We will explore, for example, how to motivate them to engage in the language learning process. In looking at the learner in both general and individual terms, we are following the lead of psychology which, as a discipline, also aims to understand both the general principles of the human mind and the uniqueness of the individual (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

Two key ideas running through this chapter are inclusivity and differentiation. How can we have a classroom or learning context where, on the one hand, the language learner feels included and keen to invest in learning, but where, on the other hand, their individual differences and needs are catered for?

Inclusivity and Differentiation

In education, the notion of ‘inclusion’ first emerged in the area of special needs but has since evolved to emphasise the importance of providing education that caters for all students. According to UNESCO (2009), in order to ensure that instruction is inclusive, the teacher may need to make modifications to teaching

content, instruction, approaches, and strategies. We looked at some of the ways in which students may feel included and part of a supportive

Inclusion

‘A process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all . . . through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education.’

(UNESCO 2009, pp. 8–9)

classroom environment in Chapter 1. An inclusive classroom will allow for differentiation, that is, it will make space for, and even celebrate, the ways in which students are different from each other. In a paper highlighting practices which centre on flexibility and differentiation, Liu et al. (2017, p. 386) describe a school which had the following ethos:

‘Being Different, Belonging Together’

This ethos emphasises an important idea, that is, that inclusivity caters for difference. There is a tension perhaps, between, on the one hand, ensuring equal opportunity and social inclusion for all learners (Leung, 2016) and, on the other hand, valuing and accommodating the needs of the individual (Spada, 2007).

What are some of the ways in which learners may differ from each other in the language classroom? They may differ in terms of aptitude for language learning and motivation or interest in learning an additional language. They may come from different linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, and from different socio-economic backgrounds. They may have specific learning differences, for example, special physical or learning needs. We will explore some of these differences in this chapter, with the aim of investigating how the language classroom may be inclusive of the richness and diversity that these learners bring to the language learning context.

There is one thing that the adolescent learners we focus on in this book have in common, and that is not a point of difference, this is age. We have already mentioned elsewhere how adolescence is an optimal age for language learning (see Chapter 1)! This is because the adolescent learner is faster at learning, has better memory and has developed metalinguistic awareness, or the ability to see and reflect on patterns and characteristics of language (see Chapter 5). All these abilities are important for language learning, as we will see in the next section, on language aptitude.

Language Aptitude

The idea that language learners differ in the ability they have to learn another or additional language is one that has, historically, been unpopular, if not controversial. One of the reasons for this is

Aptitude

Aptitude is a learner’s inherent ability for language learning. It consists of several components and is not considered part of general intelligence.

(Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2008)

that it is obvious that everyone, unless they have a disability, has the ability to learn language, if we consider learning a first language as evidence of this. Another perhaps no less important reason is that predictions about success and failure can be self-fulfilling. In other words, students can tend to live up to the expectations that teachers have of them. We discuss elsewhere in this book the importance of teacher expectations on learner achievement (see Chapter 1). Nonetheless, the notion of language aptitude has continued to interest researchers, and there is convincing evidence that the language learning abilities that the learner brings to the classroom are important in facilitating language learning. This is considered all the more important given the differences that there may be for the learner between the experience of learning a first language and that of learning an additional language. The second or foreign language learner may have far less exposure to the language they are learning than they had to their first language(s) (see Chapter 3). Research suggests that it is exactly in this context, where the input is impoverished, that language aptitude is important (Wei, 2018). There is evidence to suggest that higher language aptitude can help the learner to make better use of the input they are exposed to, and so make greater progress in language acquisition. However, it is important to understand that lower language aptitude does not predict failure. Aptitude is only one of the individual difference factors that is believed to help account for learner success. We will discuss other important factors such as motivation elsewhere in this chapter.

The term ‘language aptitude’ can be misleading because it suggests that there is AN ability, and that this ability predicts success in language learning. However, ‘language aptitude’ refers to a cluster of cognitive factors that researchers believe are related to success in learning a foreign or second language (Dörnyei, 2005). The three main components of language aptitude are:

- 1 *Language analytic ability*. This refers to the ability to see patterns and regularities in language and to develop an understanding of how language ‘works’. It underlines the learning of the grammatical structures of a language.
- 2 *Phonemic encoding ability*. This relates to the ability to associate symbols and sounds. It is associated with the ability to decode aural language and to express oneself orally.

3. *Memory*. Of all the components of language aptitude, understanding about memory is the one that has changed the most over time. Current thinking refers to ‘working memory’ as being important for language learning. Working memory is a complicated construct that is involved in the storage and processing of information (Miyake & Friedman, 1998).

Working Memory

A temporary memory storage system that processes and rehearses information (Baddeley, 2003).

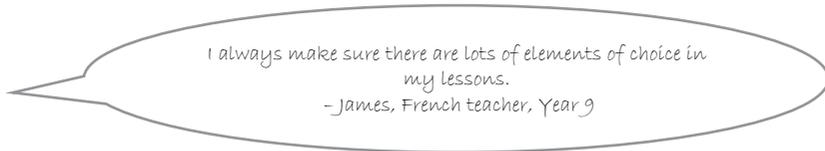
An example is when someone looks up an address and remembers it, often repeating it verbally, until they have written it down, after which it will probably exit working memory.

We mention elsewhere in this book the importance of noticing or attention (see Chapter 5). The learner, especially the beginner learner, has to work hard to make sense of the language input that they receive. They need to both store and process information and because much information is new rather than familiar, memory capacity is stretched to the full. Those learners who have greater capacity to store and process information in working memory are believed to be more successful language learners. This is because they have an advantage in making use of the input they receive, particularly the aural input, or input that they hear. With a better working memory capacity, they are better able to process this information that is temporary (unlike written input), and which they hear under a time constraint.

Language aptitude is not an ‘all or nothing thing’. It is quite possible to be strong in one or more components and weak in another or others. It is also important to emphasise that weaker language aptitude does not mean that a student will not be able to learn an additional language. In a class of learners, it is likely that there is quite a wide range of language aptitude profiles. That is, there may well be learners who vary considerably in terms of the strengths they might have in different components of language aptitude. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the teacher will know in what areas of aptitude individual students have particular strengths or weaknesses. One of the reasons for this is that testing for language aptitude is highly specialised and usually done for research rather than for instructional purposes. It is even doubtful that ‘aptitude’ testing would benefit either the teacher or the learner. An experienced teacher will usually have some understanding of the particular

strengths of individual students, and it is arguable whether aptitude testing would contribute in any way to this knowledge. For example, we will see in a later section of this chapter how Jessica knows that Emily, a student with learning difficulties, has problems with French grammar, but has a ‘good ear’, and that this has helped her develop a good French accent.

The question remains then of how the teacher can best cater to the different aptitude strengths and weaknesses of the students they have in their class. Research has suggested that giving learners explicit information about the language they are learning, including grammar rules and explanations, is important because it tends to even out differences that there might be for learners in terms of aptitude (Erlam, 2005). In other words, it tends to ‘level the playing field’ and provide the type of instruction that all learners can benefit from. Another principle that is important in catering for the range of individual needs that there may be in the language classroom is to make sure that there is variety. In particular, it is important to have tasks that vary in modality. Some students, for example, will find it easier to learn through what they hear or through auditory channels, whereas others will find it easier to process information visually. Other learners may enjoy learning kinaesthetically, for example, singing action songs or being involved in role plays/drama. These different ways of processing information can help learners with different aptitude strengths learn in a way that is likely to advantage them more.

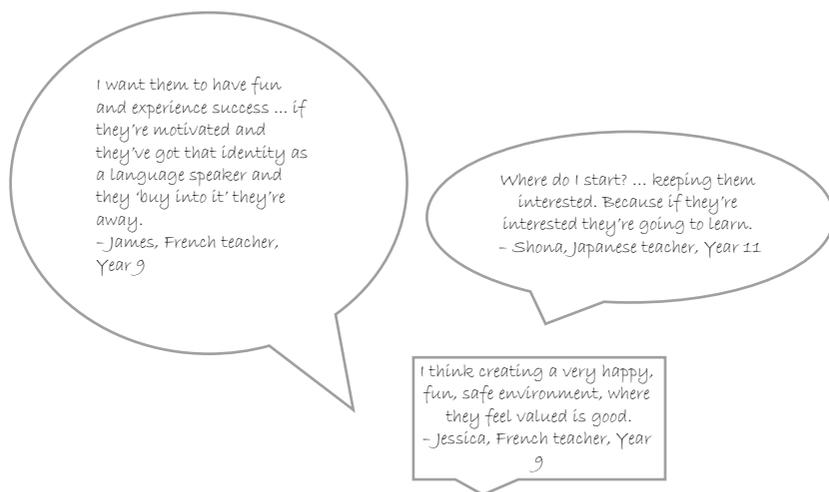


The teacher needs to consider not only the different ways of learning that students bring to the classroom in relation to their strengths and needs, but also their interests and preferences. We will consider the importance of student motivation and interest in learning in the next section.

Motivation

We asked teachers in some of the classes that we observed the following question: What, for you, are the challenges of teaching adolescents?

Here are some of the answers that we received:



Teachers cannot change the language aptitude profiles that characterise the learners they have in their classroom, but they can do a lot to make learning a fun and motivating experience. In fact, it is hard to overestimate the importance of motivation in accounting for success in the language classroom.

Firstly, what does the research literature tell us about motivation and the adolescent? A general principle about motivation is that it is not static; it changes over time. Research suggests there is a decline in motivation for academic learning that extends over the school years, but that, interestingly, it picks up again around secondary school (at approximately 14+ years). Adolescent girls will be more motivated than boys, and this is even more likely to be the case for the language classroom (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009). Motivation will not only change over time, it will also vary according to the individual. Motivation for learning a particular language will also depend on the social context (Vötter & Treter, 2009). Factors that will influence motivation include, amongst others, the image that the target

Motivation

Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from within an individual, while extrinsic motivation is imposed on the individual by external influences. Intrinsic motivation is more powerful for language learning.

(Dörnyei, 2005)

language culture and country has. Not surprisingly, a positive image will increase interest in learning the language (Riemer, 2010; Salomo, 2014). Researchers found that, for learning German, the pleasure of learning a language, feeling positive about German as a language and having friends/relatives in German-speaking countries were all intrinsic motivators. On the other hand, being obliged to learn German by a parent or parents, or for a job, were examples of extrinsic motivation (Riemer, 2010; Salomo, 2014); less effective because learners had a sense of ‘having to’ learn rather than ‘wanting to’.

A leading researcher in the area of motivation for language learning, Zoltan Dörnyei (2005), believes that the image that the language learner has of him/herself speaking the language in the future is very important. This is called the ‘ideal L2 self’ and is an example of an intrinsic type of motivation. The ideal L2 self is one of the best predictor variables of how much energy and effort learners are willing to put into learning a language (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). However, some learners in the foreign language learning contexts we have been describing may not have made an active choice to learn an additional language. In other words, they may have been required to study a language because of school policy or timetabling/subject choice pressures. For these learners the motivation may be extrinsic and may not come from any image that they have of themselves as future speakers of the language. However, even though they may not, initially, have high levels of motivation, it is possible that they may develop the incentive to engage with language learning (Dörnyei, 2009). This will be more likely if the language learning experience is enjoyable and one at which they experience success.

Researchers in the field of education (Deci & Ryan, 1985), as well as in the field of language learning (Dörnyei, 1994, 2009; Noels, 2001), have recognised the impact on motivation of the learning experience itself, such as the teacher, the curriculum, learning materials, and one’s peer group. It is not surprising that there is a relationship between learners’ classroom experiences and their ongoing willingness to persevere in learning. In the language classroom, these positive experiences

Motivation and the Self

In education, the ideal self is a useful concept. It refers to the ‘characteristics that someone would ideally like to possess. It includes our hopes, aspirations, and wishes’.

(Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2013, p. 22)

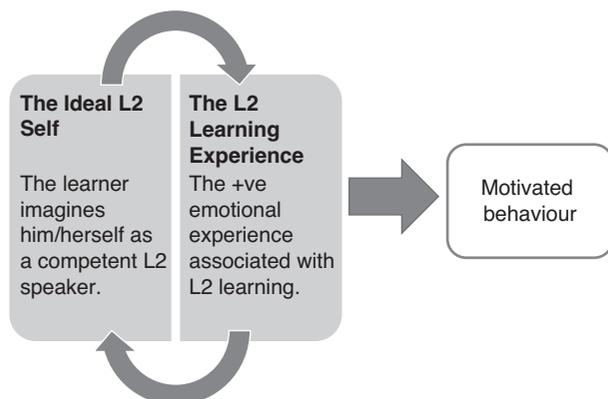


Figure 2.1 Motivation and the language learner

of learning will help learners establish images of themselves as language users (Kormos, Kiddle, & Csizér, 2011). In other words, there is a link between students' positive experiences of language learning in the classroom and their ability to imagine themselves as competent L2 speakers (i.e. the ideal L2 self). These have a reciprocal relationship with each other and are both important in accounting for ongoing motivation for the language learner to persist with and invest effort in learning. We can see this depicted in Figure 2.1.

The teacher, therefore, has a lot of responsibility to ensure that language learning is an enjoyable experience for the learner!

A concept that is related to that of motivation and that has interested researchers working in education is that of engagement.

Engagement

Engagement is a term that is often used to describe the degree to which students are involved in a task or activity. It has been defined as a 'state of heightened attention and involvement' (Philp & Duchesne, 2016, p. 3). Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) describe three types of engagement: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive (see Figure 2.2). Behavioural engagement draws on the notion of participation: the extent to which the student makes an effort in academic tasks/class activities and persists to complete these. Emotional engagement is determined by students' reactions to school, the curriculum, the teacher, and their peers. These reactions can, of course, be both negative and positive. Key to cognitive

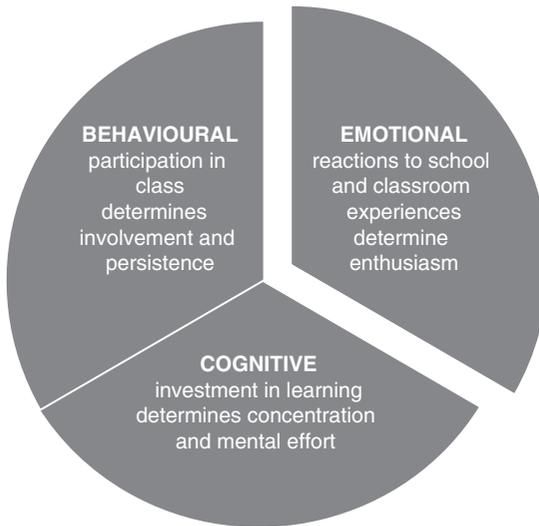


Figure 2.2 Engagement and the classroom learner

engagement is the idea of investment, that is, the willingness on the part of the student to put in the sustained level of attention required to complete classroom work and master difficult skills.

Another dimension of engagement, which is relevant to situations where students are working together, is the notion of social engagement. Social engagement is determined by the willingness that students have to collaborate on the task they are completing, to listen to each other, and to support and encourage each other (Lambert, Philp, & Nakamura, 2017).

Engagement is an important concept because student engagement will be key to achievement. It is also important because it is presumed to be malleable. In other words, the teacher is likely to be able to change learner engagement but less likely to be able to have a significant impact on the individual strengths and characteristics that learners bring to the classroom. The research literature suggests that there are a number of factors that impact on learner engagement. Some of these will not be surprising, because we have discussed them before, in Chapter 1. For example, teacher support and peer support can influence student engagement. Students who feel supported and cared for by their teachers and who also feel accepted by their peers are more likely to engage positively

in learning. The structure of the classroom is also an important influence on student engagement. Teachers who are clear in their expectations and who provide consistent responses to students are more likely to foster higher levels of student engagement. Supporting students to be autonomous can also impact positively on engagement. A way of doing this is to offer students choices in terms of classwork. Finally, the characteristics of the tasks and activities that students work at are also important in determining investment in learning. Authentic and challenging tasks, for example, are more likely to lead to higher engagement (Fredericks et al., 2004). What else can we find out about the types of tasks that might appeal to adolescents?



In many classrooms, it is the teacher and not the student who will determine the activities or tasks that learners undertake. Yet the characteristics of the activity/task that the teacher chooses will be crucial in determining to what extent learners are willing to persist and work at it. What are the types of topics and activities that are likely to appeal to adolescents?

Engaging Adolescents

Topics need to allow adolescents the chance to speak, write, and act as themselves. Teachers need to think about how they can 'personalise' work.

Adolescents want to test their language abilities beyond the walls of the classroom. They need authentic encounters with language and with speakers of the language. Teachers need to set up opportunities for learners to use the language to communicate, to be 'users' of the language and not just 'learners'. For example, they could use digital media to set up online exchanges (see Chapter 7).

Songs and lyrics play a major part in teenagers' lives. Narratives, in particular teen and young adult fiction, are important in that they allow learners to explore their own lives and issues relevant to them in a non-threatening way. The adolescent appreciates the freedom to either empathise with or distance themselves from the characters.

Teenagers want to be taken seriously in decision-making and negotiation of classroom procedures. They want to be involved in choosing texts and topics.

(Legutke, 2012)

Table 2.1 Aspects of lessons that students reported enjoying

They enjoyed	No. of students who referred to this aspect of the lesson
the opportunity to work or interact with others in the class	41
a particular activity or game	31
learning something	18
the opportunity to move around the class/do an activity outdoors*	14
speaking in the target language	14
winning a game/getting a prize	06
the teacher's enthusiasm	03
Total number of comments	127

* In one Chinese class, a group of young men (aged approximately 14 years) went around the school on a digital Scavenger Hunt (see Chapter 7) designed for them by their teacher.

We asked 122 adolescents in 8 different language classes, studying Japanese, French, Spanish, and Chinese, how much they enjoyed their language lessons. We got them to rate the lessons on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being 'very enjoyable' and 1 being 'really not enjoyable'. Of these students, ninety-nine rated their lessons as 4 or 5, in terms of enjoyment. We then asked them to tell us what they liked about the lesson. Students could give more than one answer to this question. We list in Table 2.1 the main reasons that students gave for enjoying these lessons.

Given the literature on the importance of friendship and peers for the adolescent (Cook et al., 2007; Wentzel et al., 2004), we should not be surprised that nearly half of the ninety-nine students taking part in our questionnaire found their lessons enjoyable because they had opportunities to interact in pairs, or work together in small groups. Some of the students who said that they liked interacting with classmates also wrote on their questionnaires that they appreciated being able to choose who they worked with. We can conclude from this data that the teachers of these classes had been able to set up classroom environments where there was trust and supportive positive relationships between students. Such a supportive environment was likely to promote opportunities for language learning. We need to point out that the teachers we observed

Table 2.2 Class activities/games students reported enjoying

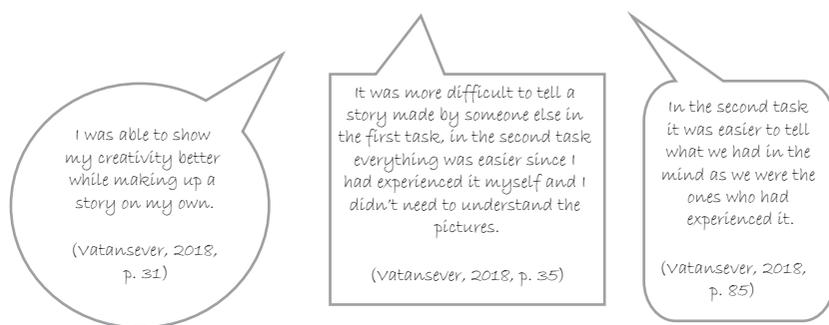
Activity	Classroom
Charades – one student had to mime a sport and others had to guess what it was	Japanese
Categorising sports – sports had to be put into categories according to whether they were individual/pair/team sports	Japanese
Giving opinions about TV programmes – students compared favourite TV programmes	Spanish
Snakes and Ladders	Spanish
An online quiz competition (see Chapter 7)	Spanish
Watching the film <i>Viva Cuba</i>	Spanish
A Scavenger Hunt	Mandarin
A 'gap-share' activity – students had to work together to complete Chinese secondary school timetables to learn about school in China	Mandarin
Interview – students interviewed each other to find out what their lives were like when they were 6 years old	French

were all very experienced, in other words, setting up supportive classroom environments, like these teachers did, may take some time to achieve.

In addition, thirty-one students also referred to specific activities that they enjoyed doing in class, and there were a further six mentions of winning a game or getting a prize as a result of doing these activities. We list in Table 2.2 some of the activities that the adolescents reported enjoying.

What stands out about many of these activities/games is that they are modelled on the sorts of activities that are part of the 'real world'. In other words, most children/adolescents will have had the opportunity to take part in a Scavenger Hunt, play Charades or Snakes and Ladders outside of the language classroom. In the classrooms we observed the teacher had adapted them and made them appropriate for use in the language classroom. These activities, used in the classroom, were 'authentic' and gave learners opportunities to use the language to communicate and be language 'users' and not just 'learners'. Other activities (e.g. giving opinions about TV programmes/talking about one's childhood) gave learners the chance to use language in a personalised way, that is, to be themselves (Legutke, 2012).

One high school teacher wanted to explore a very specific issue in her class of 16-year-old English language learners. Inspired by research she had read (Lambert et al., 2017), she set up a research project to determine whether students were more engaged when working at tasks designed by their teacher, containing fictitious ideas and events, or tasks which were related to experiences and events in their own lives. She had twelve students work in pairs to complete two tasks where they had to prepare stories to tell the rest of the class. In the first task they were given a picture story by the teacher and in the second task they were allowed to tell their own personal story. She found higher levels of engagement when students were allowed to determine the content of and tell their own stories (Vatansever, 2018). Here are some of the comments that the students in this study made.



We can perhaps summarise the topic of engagement by looking at what Fredricks et al. (2004) say about the individual needs that students bring to the classroom. They suggest that, if these individual needs are met by the classroom, engagement can be promoted. These needs, along with our comments, are listed in Table 2.3.

A language classroom that fosters a caring and supportive learning environment may have to cater for learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Liu et al. (2017) highlight how, increasingly, schools have become more diverse. In the next section, we will discuss the challenges for the teacher in establishing environments that include the multilingual learner.

The Inclusive Multilingual Language Classroom

The language classroom can be a 'safer' place for the multilingual learner whose first language(s) may be different from that of some of their

Table 2.3 Individual needs of students

	Individual needs	Comment
1	Need for relatedness – students need to feel that they ‘belong’, and that the classroom is a caring and supportive environment.	This has been a constant theme of this chapter, first introduced in Chapter 1.
2	Need for autonomy – students need to feel they ‘want to’ work at classroom tasks and activities rather than that they ‘have to’. Giving choice in the classroom is one way in which students’ need for autonomy can be satisfied.	In this chapter, we have investigated the types of tasks that students might ‘want to’ work at. In one example, students appreciated being able to choose their own stories to tell.
3	Need for competence – students need to know what they should do to achieve/succeed.	In Table 2.1 a number of students reported that a highlight of the lesson for them was that they experienced the success of learning something. Experiencing success is motivating!

classmates. This is because the multilingual learner may be at less of a disadvantage when learning a foreign or additional language than they are in other subject areas. They will, firstly, most likely already be ‘language aware’ as a result of knowing more than one language and they can draw on this knowledge. Secondly, if the teacher does not depend on the use of the first language (L1) of the majority of learners to teach the target language, the multilingual learner will not be disadvantaged if they have lower proficiency in this language.

The language classroom can be an ideal place for the multilingual learner to experience inclusion. For these students to engage academically, it is crucial that the approach to teaching and the interactions that take place in the classroom affirm their identities (Cummins, 2015). How can this happen? Firstly, students need to be encouraged to maintain their heritage linguistic identity (Liu et al., 2017). The first or heritage language and culture needs to be acknowledged (Gray, 2012), and celebrated (Liu et al., 2017). Some schools have, for example, ‘International Days/Weeks’ where students are able to share aspects of their culture and language with their peers. Teachers can also make positive cultural and contextual

references, which create resonance, or encourage students to do this themselves. The language teacher may be able to make comparisons between the target language and the learner's other language(s), or ask the student how, in their language(s), a particular meaning might be expressed.

It is also possible that the multilingual learner is a heritage speaker of the language that is being taught! In this case, the challenge for the teacher will be to create learning opportunities that provide challenge for such learners. These learners may, in particular, need help with literacy; their reading and writing skills may be inferior to their ability to understand and produce spoken language. On the other hand, these students may be a valuable 'expert' resource for teachers to draw on.

In this next section, we focus on the learner who comes to the language classroom needing to learn in a different way.

Accommodating the Learner with Specific Learning Differences

Some learners may have specific differences which will have consequences for language learning. However, McColl (2005) claims that there are no 'special needs' groups of young people who should be excluded from the language classroom, although she does suggest that such a decision might be advisable in individual cases. In a survey she conducted of 4,000 adolescents attending special schools in Scotland, half were learning a foreign language and half were not. The half who were *not* learning a language had a range of difficulties: visual or hearing impairment, learning difficulties, communication disorders, and social/emotional or behavioural disorders. However, what was surprising was that those who *were* learning another language, and successfully, were represented in all these same categories. In making the case for including learners with special educational needs in the language classroom, McColl (2005) stresses that it is important that the language teacher is able to collaborate with and draw on the expertise of support specialists.

The way that we view and talk about disability is important because it will determine how we act towards those who have a disability. Judit Kormos and Anne Margaret Smith (2012) choose to use the expression 'specific learning difference' (SpLD), claiming that this is a more positive way of viewing these learners, acknowledging their individuality and the different way that they have of perceiving the world.

An Interactional View of Disabilities

This view acknowledges that the difficulties an individual may face interact with barriers in the environment. This impedes their full participation in society (Frederickson & Cline, 2002).

This perspective helps us to understand the strengths and weaknesses of learners with SpLDs and how they may be supported in their learning contexts.

Some of the types of learning differences that a teacher may come across in the classroom include: dyslexia, autism, and attention deficit or hyperactivity disorders (ADHD).

It is important for the language teacher to:

- identify if the reason a student is making slow progress is due to a learning difference;
- understand how the SpLD may affect learning processes and outcomes; and
- know how to best provide support for this learner in the classroom.

While it is likely that a student with a SpLD is also experiencing problems with their first or home language, these may be more evident when they have the opportunity to learn an additional language (Kormos & Smith, 2012). Jessica tells of how she was the first one to diagnose a SpLD in one of the students in her Year 9 French class.

[No one] ever said 'Emily has a problem with learning literacy' and I said it on day 2 ... and her mum was really thankful and as a result Emily's had heaps of academic testing and there's been huge amounts of things said about her.

Kormos & Smith (2012) describe some simple tasks that can help establish potential signs of a SpLD for teachers who are familiar with the first language(s) (L1) of their students. These include asking the learner to:

- spell words in their L1;
- read aloud in their L1 and then say what the passage they read was about;

- write in their L1 to a time limit (say ten minutes); and
- read ‘non-words’ that are similar to words in their L1 (e.g. in English words like ‘tep’ or ‘plinfer’).

In the foreign language classroom, learners with SpLDs may fall behind their peers in many areas of language learning. They may have difficulties with:

- writing, spelling, and reading;
- acquiring new vocabulary and grammar; and
- acquiring the pronunciation of new sounds and syllable patterns.

These problems with learning another language are heightened in a context where there is limited exposure to the language, which is true of many foreign language learning contexts. These learners may not face the same type or severity of problem if they have the chance to be immersed in the target language and the opportunity to use it for communication on a daily basis (Kormos & Smith, 2012). The potential consequence for these students is, perhaps not surprisingly, a lack of motivation for continuing to learn a language, a loss of confidence in their ability to do so, and reduction in self-esteem.

It is not possible, in this chapter, to deal extensively with the topic of how to help students with SpLDs. However, there are some general principles that can make a big difference to life in the language classroom for these SpLD learners. (We recommend Judit Kormos and Anne Margaret Smith’s book (2012) *Teaching Languages to Students with Specific Learning Differences*, for a very readable and much more comprehensive coverage of this topic.) Landrum and McDuffie (2010) say that accommodations are necessary to support the needs of students with educational difficulties.

Perhaps the most important principle, a constant theme in this chapter, is that the learner needs to feel included in the language classroom. Jessica mentions this with respect to the

Accommodations

Accommodations are ‘changes in the delivery of instruction, type of student performance, or method of assessment which do not significantly change the content or conceptual difficulty of the curriculum’. (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009, p. 64)

student, Emily, mentioned earlier, who had, as Jessica had established, a SpLD.

So for me I see Emily [and] all my students ... not just learning French, the classroom is a life experience and ... I want them to feel valued in my classroom. I want to try and have a personal relationship with all of them.

Also important is the awareness and understanding that the teacher develops of the particular learning processes and strategies that the student with a SpLD brings to the classroom. Again, Jessica talks about Emily, demonstrating that she understands both the strengths and weaknesses that she has for language learning.

Emily's got problems with concentration and reading and writing. I want to get her to see that she's good at doing something because she is actually quite good at French, not the grammar side of things, but she's got an excellent accent and she's got a really good ear and she can learn.

In an inclusive classroom, the teacher can adjust the curriculum and teaching methods to meet the needs of all students. This may also mean that assessment requirements need to be changed to meet the needs of SpLD students. Jessica explains how she does this for a group of weaker students in her class:

For the weaker ones I've got probably about five in my class now. I just want them to enjoy learning French, that's my bottom line I want to encourage them. People like Emily I just encourage, I don't expect a lot - if they don't do well in tests I don't actually really want to give their test mark back. At the beginning of the year I did, but I thought 'I really feel wrong giving someone a test back when they got four out of twenty'. It's really disheartening when they're obviously trying their hardest.

In the dialogue shown below, we have specific examples of how Jessica accommodates Emily who, as we have seen, comes to the language classroom with specific learning differences.

Jessica is taking time out from the rest of the class to focus on Emily, making sure she is participating and actively involved in the classroom.

		translation
Teacher	Emily you're going to try really hard to concentrate for...	
T	une minute ...	One minute
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p>Jessica encourages Emily's peers to support her in her learning. Here this means giving her space to work on her own; earlier in this dialogue she had supported Amelia sharing her notes with Emily</p> </div>		
T	Oui , we want to all help Emily to become a really good ... writer, okay. No, Amelia what you're going to do is you're going to ignore her – Emily okay, and we've only got une minute.	Yes. One minute.
Emily	D'accord.	Okay
T	D'accord. We've got – on a une minute.	Okay. – we have one minute
Emily	D'accord.	Okay.
T	So Emily you're going to try really hard to add some more, write one of these questions and one of these answers, okay.	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p>Jessica breaks down the task for Emily, demanding less than she does of the stronger students.</p> </div>		

Often these students with specific learning differences will need instruction and explanations about language that are very explicit; they may be less able to notice and establish patterns in language without assistance. We mentioned earlier in this chapter that giving learners explicit information and explanations may help to even out differences that there might be for learners in terms of aptitude for learning and, also, provide the type of instruction that all can benefit from (Erlam, 2005).

A constant theme throughout this chapter has been that learners do not learn at the same pace or in the same way. We have therefore argued

for the need for differentiated instruction to ensure that the needs of all learners are met (Tomlinson, 2014). However, first the teacher needs to be able to establish what these needs might be.

Discovering the Needs of the Individual Learner

If instruction is to vary according to students' learning profiles and their readiness to learn (Tomlinson et al., 2003), the challenge for the busy teacher is to have an adequate knowledge of the student as an individual. Formative assessment is vital for establishing students' readiness for learning and needs. Teachers will gain a lot of information about students informally as they observe their performance during their completion of classroom tasks and activities. In the ideal classroom, all these

Formative Assessment

Assessment 'for learning', rather than 'of learning'. In formative assessment, teachers obtain information about learners and their progress that helps them guide what they and their students will do next.

(Green, 2014, p. 14)

observations contribute to establishing a picture of the student as an individual, and help the teacher shape their practice so that it is maximally effective (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). At the same time, teachers will also gain information about learners more formally, for example, from looking at and marking their classwork. Formative assessment involves both informal, and more formal, ways of collecting information about learners (Nation & Macalister, 2010) (see Table 2.4).

In this chapter, we have covered some of the many 'differences' that might characterise learners in a language classroom. Unfortunately, we are not able to give advice about how to deal with all the individual needs

Table 2.4 Implementing formative assessment in the classroom

Assessment Options	
More formal	Less formal
tests	observing classwork
marked class/course work	observing class participation
homework	informal conversation with teacher
presentations	learner logs
interviews	project work

that learners might have. A last ‘individual difference’ we will consider is one that Jessica identified in discussing one of her students, when we visited her classroom. This learner was very different from her peers in that she was exceptionally able.

The Gifted or Very Able Student

Jessica describes the challenge of accommodating the learner she described as ‘very gifted’.

So at the beginning of the year ... I identified that she was someone who was going to get bored very, very quickly and also was vocal about getting bored. So I wanted to make sure that I provided challenges for her.

The learning challenges that Jessica provided for this student included:

- giving her a grammar book (Jessica reports that she learnt to use a number of verb tenses, independently, from this grammar book);
- giving her opportunities to do free writing in French;
- talking to her exclusively in French;
- giving her books to read in French (e.g. *Le Petit Prince*); and
- encouraging her to sit the DELF scolaire (international exam) (she got the top mark for her region).

Jessica also identified a number of other students in her class who she described as ‘very able’. She discusses the challenge of accommodating these students.

Often it's easier to extend them with reading and writing than it is with speaking ... the good thing about all these students is that they naturally want to extend themselves so all you have to do is provide the opportunity ... I always make sure there are lots of elements of choice in my lessons so they can work at their own pace.

We have, in this chapter, considered how students differ from each other in terms of strengths and weaknesses for language learning, in specific learning needs or differences, and in the interests and preferences they might have. In this next section, we describe how one teacher implemented a very different and specific approach to dealing with individual differences.

One Approach to Catering for the Individual in the Classroom

Annabel had been concerned about how to cater for differences in terms of the pace of learning of her students. She decided to implement what she termed: a ‘flipped mastery class’ (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015).

The kids that are going fast don't feel held back by the slower ones and the slower kids feel that they have enough time to learn the content before they get moved on.
 – Annabel, Mandarin teacher, Year 10

This is how she described her approach to teaching Mandarin:

- All content was delivered to students in an online video – she described ‘content’ as ‘introduction to a new unit, new grammar, new vocabulary, new characters’.
- As students watched these videos, they had to ‘do’ something; e.g. complete a worksheet.
- Students could watch the video as many times as they liked, at their own pace, and in their own time – it was available 24/7!
- After watching the videos, students worked at a range of activities in class, individually or in pairs/groups, at their own pace.
- The teacher was available, in class, to check on students and give them help as needed.
- Before students could move to another unit, they had to complete a ‘mastery check’, e.g. write a text or give a speech, to the teacher’s satisfaction.
- If students were very slow to finish a unit, the teacher would select some activities they needed to complete and then move them on to another unit.

Annabel described these benefits for this approach to language teaching:

With flip mastery, yesterday, I was able to get around every single kid and have a chat with them one on one about where they're at and answer their questions. If I were just standing up the front, I wouldn't be able to be with the kids every day.

Summary of This Chapter

We have discussed the importance of a language classroom which is inclusive, and which also caters to the individual strengths and differences that the language learner brings to the language classroom. We have focused on some of these, whilst not being able to give advice about how to deal with all of the many ‘differences’ that might characterise learners in a language classroom. We have emphasised the importance of engaging students, providing them with activities and tasks which interest them, and motivating them to put in the sustained effort that is likely to lead to success in learning.

Key Points

- The language classroom needs to be inclusive while also valuing and accommodating difference.
- Students vary in terms of language aptitude, and the strengths and weaknesses that they bring to the language classroom.
- Having a variety of types of classroom activity can help ensure that the needs of different learners are met. Some may cater for learners who find it easier to learn through what they hear, others, for those who like to process information visually or who learn kinaesthetically.
- Motivation will account for the effort that a learner is prepared to put into engaging with and completing work in class.
- A powerful motivator is the ideal L2 self; that is, the image that the learner has of him or herself being able to one day speak the language.
- Activities and tasks, which are interesting and enjoyable, will motivate the learner. For adolescents, these are likely to involve the opportunity to interact or work with peers and/or involve opportunities for students to use the language for real purposes.
- Some learners have specific learning differences and will need teachers to accommodate these, drawing on the advice of support specialists if necessary.
- Teachers need to carefully assess and observe learners to be able to ascertain their specific learning strengths, weaknesses, and needs.

Reflection and Discussion

- 1 Reading about the components of language aptitude, do you see yourself (or another language learner you know well) being stronger in one or other of these? How might a teacher cater to these strengths?

- 2 In your own language learning experience, how powerful was the notion of the ideal L2 self?
- 3 The authors describe characteristics of topics and tasks that are likely to engage adolescents. Do you agree with them, in terms of your own experience? Why/why not?
- 4 Many of the students surveyed in this chapter enjoyed working in groups. What might teachers need to do to help ensure that students get the most out of group work in terms of learning?
- 5 In Table 2.2, the authors list a number of activities/games that students reported enjoying. Could you use these in your context? How would your students respond? What do they enjoy?
OR
How typical were these of your language learning experiences? How would you respond as a learner to these types of activities?
- 6 Discuss the sorts of individual differences described in this chapter that you have encountered in classrooms with which you are familiar. What do these students need in order to be and feel included?
- 7 Have you ever had an extremely talented learner in your classroom and how did you accommodate them?

Further Reading

Chung, K. K. H., & Lam, C. B. (2020). Cognitive linguistic skills underlying word reading and spelling difficulties in Chinese adolescents with dyslexia. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 53(1), 48–59.

This study explores difficulties in reading and spelling in both L1 and L2 for Hong Kong Chinese adolescents, in Grade 7, highlighting problems for students with dyslexia in both L1 and L2. The findings of this study highlight the importance of morphological awareness. The authors suggest that morphological awareness might play a critical role in predicting word reading and spelling across languages, both for children with dyslexia, and for those without learning difficulties.

Morphological Awareness

An understanding of how words are constructed of smaller units of meaning (or morphemes). For example, the word 'subway' consists of:

- 1 a prefix 'sub' meaning 'under'; and
- 2 the root word (morpheme) 'way'.

For Reflection and Discussion

- (a) How might knowing about studies like this one help language teachers to support students with dyslexia?
- (b) Do you agree that morphological awareness is important? Can you think of any examples from your own context?