2 Learners as individuals

A Warm-up

1 Picture this scenario: You start teaching a new class and find that everybody in the class has more or less the same level of language proficiency. However, after several lessons you start to notice some quite big differences in learners' levels. Some appear to have made more progress than others.

What reasons can you think of for these differences emerging?

2 The following learners all study in the same Beginners (A1) English class. How might their language backgrounds impact on their progress?

Name	Nationality	Languages spoken
Zhao	Chinese	Mandarin
Safia	Algerian	Derija (her local variety of Arabic), Modern standard Arabic and a little French from when she was at school
Sophie	French	French, German (from school) and Italian

B Learner Preferences

1 Think back to a language learning experience of your own. What things did you like doing? Were there any things that you did not like doing?

Look at the statements in the questionnaire and say the extent to which you agree or disagree with them, based on your experience.

2 Compare your preferences with other people. Did you have exactly the same responses as your partners? What can you learn from this about planning and teaching lessons?

1. I like talking in groups about things that interest us.

disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **agree**

2. I like studying grammar rules on my own.

disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **agree**

3. I like it when the teacher explains grammar rules.

disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **agree**

4. I like having my mistakes corrected.

disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **agree**

5. I like translating sentences from my language into English.

disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **agree**

6. I find it useful to review lessons when I get home.

disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **agree**

7. I find language learning apps useful for reviewing new words.

disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **agree**

8. I like playing games in class.

disagree 1 2 3 4 5 **agree**

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C Motivation

1 Think back to a learning experience of your own. Which factors drove you to make an effort? Was there anything that decreased your desire to learn?

2 Pick four items from the list below that you think are most important for promoting and maintaining motivation in a language classroom. Be ready to justify your choices.

- a favourable attitude to the target language culture and its speakers
- immediate opportunities to use the language outside class
- having a good rapport with classmates
- doing well in class and a feeling of progress
- using interesting materials/books in class
- knowing there will be regular tests and examinations
- the personality of the teacher
- liking the teacher's way of teaching
- having a specific long-term goal, e.g. work, study, travel

3 When you are ready, share your list with a partner. Look at your combined list of items and try to reduce it to four.

D Language learning strategies

1 Look at the difficulties (on the left) that these learners have with their English and in learning English. Can you think of any advice to help them?

2 Match the difficulty on the left with the most appropriate strategy used to compensate for it on the right.

Learner A

I get very nervous and anxious in English lessons …

Learner B

We learn a lot of new words but I often forget most of them …

Learner C

I worry when I have to speak English in social situations …

Learner D

Listening is really difficult for me – people speak too fast!

Learner E

I don't get to practise speaking very much …

1

… so I watch videos on the internet with subtitles.

2

… so I find information about topics and plan what I can say.

3

… so I do some deep breathing exercises before I go to class.

4

… so I arrive early to class and talk to the teacher before class starts.

5

… so I got an app on my phone and I make flash cards, which I look at a few times a week.

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3 Which learner(s) …

i … decided they needed to control their emotions?
ii … decided they needed more social interaction?
iii … realized that their learning wasn't working very well?

4 What advice would you give these learners?

a I need to improve my grammar – what can I do?
b I want to improve my vocabulary – what can I do?
c I want to improve my speaking – what can I do?

> Simply stated, language learning strategies … are purposeful mental actions … used by a learner to regulate his or her second or foreign language learning.
>
> Rebecca Oxford, 2018

E Learner training

Learner training refers to the training given to learners to help them use strategies to become more effective in their learning and to be able to make the most of learning opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom.

1 Look at the coursebook you are using for TP. Does it provide any learner training? For example, is there a section in each unit that gives learning advice, or are there any questionnaires or other forms of guidance at the beginning of the book? If so, does the material present individual strategies, or several strategies together that share the same goal?

2 Look at the activities you will use in your next teaching practice lesson.

i Are there any opportunities to give advice to your learners on how to maximize their learning?
ii Which strategies do you think would help your class the most?
iii How could you present the strategies?

KEY WORDS FOR TEACHERS

Check you know the meanings of these terms.

- *learning strategies*
- *learner training*
- *learner autonomy*
- *learner preferences*

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REFLECTION

Answer the questions.

1 From what you already know about the learners you are teaching, how similar or different are they, with regards to the things we have discussed in this unit?
2 What other individual factors might contribute to diversity in the classroom?
3 What practical things can a teacher do to make everyone feel equally valued and included in lessons?
4 Look at the quote from Bonny Norton. What are the advantages of teachers 'understanding the histories and lived experiences' of their learners? How might they attempt to do this?

> It is only by understanding the histories and lived experiences of language learners that the language teacher can create conditions that will facilitate social interaction both in the classroom and in the wider community, and help learners claim the right to speak.
>
> Bonny Norton, 2013

References

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