

**Principles of  
Effective Practice  
for  
High Quality  
Foreign Language  
Instruction**

**Teaching and Learning  
K-12  
Authentic Instruction  
Communication**

**Principle 1:** As much as possible, language learning should emulate authentic language use. (Heidi Byrnes)

**Discussion:** Second language learning is no longer limited to an academic elite. Instead, it is intended to reach all learners. Therefore, in the age of communication, second language instruction seeks to enable learners to use the language in the ways all of us use our first languages, to communicate with others.

This use orientation, the ability to perform communicative tasks in and with the language rather than merely to be informed about it, means that students should encounter authentic models throughout their instruction, in listening and in reading. In turn, they should engage in real-life tasks through speaking and writing.

An emphasis on authentic language use has two aspects:

- the non-linguistic aspect, through which learners engage in tasks that could well take place in real life. For example, telling another person what she is currently wearing is hardly ever an authentic task; but planning what one might wear to a certain event and talking about it is.
- the linguistic aspect, through which classroom language is not overly simplified and thereby impoverished. While teachers would tailor their language to respect the learners' abilities, much like a caretaker considers a child's native language abilities, they would not artificially avoid the use of past tense forms in telling a story just because those forms "had not yet been covered." Instead, the communicative situation "story-telling" itself becomes the reason for using past tense, thereby allowing learners to make the connection between a communicative function and the language forms that are used to express that function.

**Summary:** Only through continuous authentic use, from the beginning of instruction, can the multiple and complex connections between communicative function and formal manifestation gradually be internalized by learners. Instead of supporting language learning by supposedly making things simpler, a reduction of language might actually end up restricting the data from which the learners can create their hypotheses about how the language really works. By making authentic use central to the instructional process, one can reasonably expect that learners will, ultimately, be able to handle authentic second language communicative situations.

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Omaggio, A.C. (1986). *Teaching Language in Context: Proficiency-Oriented Instruction*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

**Principle 2. The goal of language learning is performance with language rather than knowledge about language. (Myriam Met)**

**Teaching and Learning  
K-12  
Meaning**

**Discussion:** The purpose of language is to communicate meaning. Because in real life language is used to accomplish real-life purposes, the ability to use language for these purposes (requesting, explaining, persuading, describing) is the goal of language instruction. To accomplish these purposes, students need to acquire knowledge of the language: its lexicon, its syntax, and the relationships between meaning and language. But knowledge of the elements of language and how they are put together is insufficient. Learners must be able to put their knowledge to use; they need to interpret the meanings of others and express their own meanings *using* the knowledge they have acquired.

Like trends in other disciplines, this view of foreign language learning places the emphasis on *doing*, rather than *knowing about*. It recognizes that there is a role for the learning of skills and sub-skills, but this role is always defined within the larger context of skills integration at the *performance* level. For example, students learn the forms of verbs in the past tense not as an end in itself, but as a means to describe past events that have meaning for them. Similarly, new vocabulary is acquired in order to converse or write on a given topic. This approach stands in contrast to past practices in which grammar was taught in isolation or students memorized lists of vocabulary words that subsequently appeared on tests.

What students know about language might not always equate with their ability to demonstrate their knowledge. Students may “know” more than they can “do.” “Doing” calls for integration of knowledge in various domains (such as vocabulary, syntax, morphology, intonation patterns, cultural meanings, and associations) with processes for understanding what others say or communicating one’s own meanings (whether orally or in writing). For example, in reading foreign texts for meaning, learners must know the orthographic symbols of the language, the sound/symbol correspondences, the meanings of words, the meanings conveyed by word order and morphology (e.g., endings on verbs), and so on. This knowledge is integrated with reading strategies such as calling upon background knowledge (which can be topical, linguistic, or cultural), using contextual clues to deduce the meanings of unknown words, monitoring comprehension, hypothesizing (predicting information in the text), and testing hypotheses by comparing predictions with evidence in the text.

Students’ competence—their knowledge in each of the domains described above—may exceed their ability to perform, that is, to integrate their knowledge and skills to derive meaning from the text. Similarly, students’ knowledge of the elements of language is usually greater than their ability to produce fluent, comprehensible, and accurate utterances. This means, for example, that students may have memorized vocabulary lists and know the endings for a given verb in several tenses, but may still have difficulty extemporaneously producing fluent, coherent, accurate utterances, particularly in the early stages of language development.

**Summary:** Because performance is the ultimate goal of instruction, instructional time must be provided for students to practice using what they know. While development of skills continues to be an important element in foreign language learning, skill-using activities should be the primary focus. In the effective foreign language classroom, skill development takes place within the context of communicative language practice (performance) rather than in isolation.

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**Principle 3: Language learning is not additively sequential but is recursive and paced differently at various stages of acquisition.**

(Rebecca Oxford)

**Discussion:** Language learning rates are different within a given student and across students for several reasons, including developmental factors, native language, universal patterns, exposure to input, and affective influences.

**Teaching and Learning  
K-12  
Developmental  
Theory**

**Developmental Factors**

Teachers cannot expect any given student to learn at the very same rate throughout his or her language learning career (Brown 1987; Krashen, Long, and Scarcella 1979; Scarcella and Oxford 1992). As we know from the research, adults learn some things faster, particularly syntactic aspects of the language, which require abstract reasoning skills. Children are far more able to develop nativelike pronunciation and fluency. Moreover, at more advanced stages of language learning, children move far more rapidly than adults. Thus, if native English speakers study Spanish intensively for four years in childhood and French for four years intensively in college, they will probably experience far greater progress overall in Spanish than in French due largely to the differing rates of acquisition in some key areas of skill development.

Errors are one developmental factor. *Errors are a natural, predictable, understandable part of language development.* In fact, careful observation of a learner's errors is often the key to understanding the learner's progress, as shown in Principle 4.

**Errors**

Not every error should be corrected. At least in the early stages of learning a new language, the only errors that are worth correcting are those that impede communication or cause the learner to lose face in a social situation. Later on, as the learner becomes more advanced in language development, greater accuracy is expected. At that point, more error correction might be valuable depending on the learner's goals and needs.

Errors should be distinguished from mistakes, which are trivial, momentary slips (caused by inattention, anxiety, or tiredness) that do not reflect the language learner's developmental state. Occasional or even frequent mistakes might be nothing to worry about. However, if a particular student makes constant mistakes, some emotional, physical, or cognitive difficulties might need to be addressed.

**Native Language**

Clearly, native language background affects how quickly students learn a given language. A student who comes from China and is enrolled in a Spanish class needs to learn a whole new writing and sound system. An English-speaking student would find learning Spanish much easier because



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the English speaker would have to learn only a few new sounds, and the writing system is virtually the same with the exception of a few diacritical and punctuation marks.

### Regular but Nonlinear Patterns of Language Learning

Language learning is not random. Many researchers view language learning as occurring in somewhat similar but very general patterns across different languages (Scarcella and Oxford 1992).

One general pattern deals with core rules versus peripheral rules. *Core rules—such as rules governing movements of elements within sentences and rules about interpreting pronoun references—are normally acquired earlier than peripheral rules.* An example of a simple, ordinary, unexceptional, core-rule sentence is “I want the book.” *Peripheral rules are exceptions to standard rules and are therefore called “marked” rules.* An example of a peripheral rule—a specialized rule or exception—is the placement of the preposition in the colloquial sentence, “I want the paper that I can write on.” Usually a sentence does not end in a preposition such as “on” so this sentence, with its subordinate clause, “that I can write on,” follows a peripheral rule.

Another general pattern relates to absolutes versus tendencies. For instance, an absolute is the fact that *all* languages that have verb-subject-object word order also have prepositions. Tendencies, on the other hand, occur when there is a high probability or tendency but there are also exceptions; for example, most languages with subject-object-verb word order have prepositions, but there are exceptions such as Farsi (Persian). *Absolutes are acquired by language learners before tendencies.*

Evidence suggests that students learn core rules and absolutes more quickly than peripheral rules and tendencies. Thus, even for the very same person at the very same age, some aspects of the language will be gained more quickly than others. The aspects that are developed more slowly will have to be covered more thoroughly and students will need review at various points. It is very likely that certain students, most notably the intuitive ones who are constantly seeking out the underlying structure of the language and developing conscious hypotheses, will have less trouble with exceptions and difficult aspects of the language than do more sequential, concrete learners who want greater regularity. For a more detailed discussion of learning styles, see *Principle 7*.

### Input

It appears that language learning is nonlinear in yet another way. Learners receive input in different amounts, at different times, under varying circumstances, and in piecemeal forms. Especially in highly communicative classrooms where abundant authentic materials are used, the stimulation students receive is not always systematic. Some highly motivated, relaxed

students can readily absorb a good bit of the input, turning it into "intake" and using it productively (Cohen 1990, Brown 1987). Other students have a harder time absorbing the language stimuli around them for various reasons, including low motivation, high anxiety, and use of the wrong sensory mode. Even in a very programmed, highly structured situation, teachers cannot count on all students taking in all of the stimuli offered at a given time. Thus, the kind and amount of input and the way this input is presented by teachers certainly affect the rate of learning of any single student and the average rate of learning of a whole group.

**Affective Factors**

Affective factors have a great influence on the rate a new language is learned (Brown 1987, Stevick 1976, Oxford 1990). Certain tasks can engender serious anxiety in students, and this emotion can slow down progress in language learning. When teachers know what to do to reduce anxiety, students can often return to a higher rate of language growth. When teachers do not know what to do, depending on the nature and severity of the problem, the students' slow-down can become more than temporary and can harm all tasks of a similar nature, all tasks within a given skill area, or the students' progress in all skills. Anxiety is thus a key affective factor related to varying rates of learning.

Motivation is also an important affective influence on learning rate. Without strong motivation, a learner is likely to "turn off" at one stage or another, thus slowing down the learning rate. Increased motivation often improves the learning rate dramatically. Because motivation is so strongly influenced by the learners' perception of success, relevance, and interest, teachers can truly affect motivation by ensuring positive feedback, relevant materials and tasks, and interesting, varied presentation. This effort pays off in higher learning rates for students.

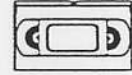
**Summary:** We have discussed various aspects of students' learning rates: developmental factors, native language, universal patterns, exposure to input, and affective influences. Teachers need to understand these issues and realize that language learning is not a steady, linear process but instead occurs in phases with occasional plateaus and roadblocks that must be passed. Many of these factors—especially input and affect—can be positively influenced by teachers in a well-planned language learning program.

**Learner Anxiety**



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**Motivation**



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# Foreign Languages Principles

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Learn Analyze



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Motivation



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Students can readily absorb a great deal of the input, but they do not seem to be learning. This is because they are not motivated. They are not interested in the language, and they are not trying to understand it. They are just going through the motions. This is why it is so important to have a good teacher who can motivate the students. The teacher should be someone who is enthusiastic about the language and who can make the learning process fun. The teacher should also be someone who is patient and who can help the students when they are having trouble. The teacher should be someone who is a good listener and who can understand the students' needs. The teacher should be someone who is a good communicator and who can help the students to express themselves. The teacher should be someone who is a good role model and who can show the students how to be successful. The teacher should be someone who is a good friend and who can be there for the students when they need it. The teacher should be someone who is a good leader and who can help the students to reach their goals. The teacher should be someone who is a good mentor and who can help the students to become independent learners. The teacher should be someone who is a good role model and who can show the students how to be successful. The teacher should be someone who is a good friend and who can be there for the students when they need it. The teacher should be someone who is a good leader and who can help the students to reach their goals. The teacher should be someone who is a good mentor and who can help the students to become independent learners.



**Principle 4: Language develops in a series of approximations toward native-like norms. Language learning is *not* the accumulation of perfectly mastered elements of grammar and vocabulary. Thus, learner errors are unavoidable. (Heidi Bymes)**

**Discussion:** An important insight about the highly complex tasks of learning a language is that learners do not reproduce perfectly the models they encounter. Instead, they attain the ability to perform in the language over a long period of time by following a developmental path that takes them through increasingly successful approximations of the kind of performance that characterizes native speakers. In these successive stages they will not merely give back what they have been taught. They will not simply accumulate an ever-growing repertoire of perfect grammar and vocabulary. Instead, they will engage in a creative construction of how they think the new language works, shifting their hypotheses as they receive more instruction. Ideally, this readjustment continues until the learner-constructed grammar and the output that it supports are identical to those of native speakers.

Learners will generally first attend to high-frequency forms that are particularly easily perceived and do not pose unusual learning difficulties. In these cases they can approximate the target language norm quite quickly. When extraordinary processing demands occur, including working with less frequently encountered elements and with forms that are particularly distant from the native language (sometimes also particularly close though not identical forms), native-like performance will not be attained until much later in the instructional sequence.

Such "interlanguage phenomena" have, in the past, been referred to as flawed or erroneous language and have often been attributed to learners' insufficient aptitude for language learning, or, even worse, their inadequate engagement in the process of learning another language. However, if we take seriously the nature of language learning and the role of the learner, then we must also think quite differently of flawed performance. Errors are not the blatant disregard of the norms of the language and they do not necessarily signal that students are not applying themselves adequately to the task. They are, instead, indicators of the road learners are travelling in order to reach the desired language norm.

This assessment clearly indicates that not all errors are equal. Some are characteristic of first attempts to deal with the overwhelming multiplicity of forms in the second language. Others indicate that a learner already has a significant part of the road behind him and is well on the way to appropriate and acceptable language use, which, incidentally, may still not be flawless. Of course, teachers will continue to be charged with providing an acquisition-rich environment for their learners, and that includes correct authentic language use. However, that requirement does not justify an insistence that learners should perfectly master, after first introduction, all the aspects of grammar and vocabulary that were formally presented.

## Teaching and Learning K-12 Developmental Theory

### Approximating the Performance of Native Speakers

### Errors

# Foreign Languages Principles

It can be said that second language learners, particularly those who are encouraged to use their language abilities in authentic contexts, constantly juggle the demands of both fluency and accuracy. They will weight these differently at different times, over the entire acquisitional sequence, but also with different tasks at the same level of ability. In some instances, being accurate is more important than being fluent. At other times, fluency in terms of the communicated message is of paramount concern and accuracy is secondary.

**Summary:** Communicative language teaching recognizes that learners traverse successive stages of language learning as they learn to juggle the demands of conveying their messages in the forms of the new language. Teachers are aware of the unavailability of errors, and therefore provide a supportive environment for learners to learn and grow while they become increasingly adept at the use of the second language.

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**Principle 5. Language proficiency involves both comprehension and production. Comprehension abilities tend to precede and exceed productive abilities. (Myriam Met)**

**Discussion:** Language is best learned when students are helped to construct their own representations of the language—its meanings and how it works. Such representations are facilitated by matching language with experience. Language learners match language with experience through *comprehensible input* (Krashen 1982). Input is made comprehensible through concrete materials, visuals, and body language, and by tying language to the students' background knowledge. For example, students might better infer the meanings of a target language conversation between a sales clerk and customer than between two astrophysicists because background knowledge about what sales clerks and customers talk about helps students make assumptions about what is being said. By understanding what is heard or read, learners internalize the meanings of words and begin to generate hypotheses about the way the language works and the cultural determinants of how language is used. Thus, *comprehension* is a key element in language acquisition, and through internalization of what is understood, language gradually becomes available for producing messages.

Comprehensible input by itself is insufficient for language use. Learners also need frequent and sustained opportunities for *output*, that is, opportunities to speak and write the language as well. It is through such productive activities that learners begin to test out the accuracy of the hypotheses they have generated. Interaction with others helps learners to determine whether their communication is effective; whether they are being understood; and whether they need to rephrase or otherwise repair their communication. Such interaction with others, the *negotiation of meaning*, in which each partner works to understand the other and be understood, is critical to the continued growth of language abilities.

Classroom instruction needs to provide a rich environment for the internalization of meaning and opportunities for language production. Listening and reading activities clearly designed to make language understandable to students facilitate the growth of comprehension abilities, and must be carefully designed to ensure the internalization of new material. Perhaps more importantly, these activities should precede those in which students are asked to produce new material. Because in authentic communicative situations learners have little control over what is said to them (or what is written in texts), the range of what they need to be able to understand and read is great. In contrast, learners will have greater control over what they can or want to say (or write). Some students may understand a wide range of vocabulary, or understand the endings that signal the future tense, but remember only those vocabulary items important to them, or forget the endings in the future tense of the second person plural. As a result, their receptive repertoire will exceed their productive repertoire.

**Teaching and Learning  
K-12  
Developmental  
Theory**

**Input**

**Output**

**Authentic  
Communication**

Research has shown that opportunities to interact with peers (in addition to the teacher) contribute to students' productive skills. Students need to work in a variety of interactive patterns—pairs, small groups, and teacher/student groups—to test out the full range of their productive repertoire. Tasks that require a meaningful information exchange, activities in which students must interact to complete a task, and activities that most closely simulate real-life communication (authentic tasks) are well-suited to these varied interactive patterns.

Interactive tasks also allow learners to explore and develop understandings of the social dimensions of language use. Through both classroom and authentic interactions, learners come to understand cultural rules regarding what may be said to whom, when, and how. Authentic interactive tasks also place language in its social context—an important communicative tool for interpersonal purposes.

**Summary:** Communication is the ability to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning. Instruction that develops the ability to comprehend language helps students interpret meaning; meaningful, purposeful, and authentic tasks build the productive abilities that facilitate the expression of meaning; and interactive tasks build the ability to negotiate meaning.

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**Principle 6: Language is inextricably bound to culture. Language use requires an understanding of the cultural context within which communication takes place. (Jayne Osgood)**

**Teaching and Learning  
K-12  
Cultural Context**

**Discussion:** Preceding principles have suggested that language and culture are inextricably bound together. Indeed, what is the purpose of language, if not to express culture? Some might say culture is the language of a people. A sound base for effective communication will include not only linguistic competence but an ability to transmit oral communication in a correct cultural context. In fact, much of the literature suggests that cross-cultural communication requires having insight into culture and the society of its native speakers as well as manipulating the target language (Kitao 1991).

A clear understanding of the concept of culture clarifies its relationship to methodologies and pedagogies that are selected for each learning experience. An ability to weave linguistic and cultural elements into an effective teaching unit is fundamental to the success of any foreign language experience regardless of the grade level or language being taught.

Culture includes the ideas, customs, interactions, conflicts, arts, crafts, and technologies of people who claim a common identity. The effects of culture are seen in the behaviors, both intellectual and emotional, of that culture's members. Levels of intellectual and emotional involvement in the target culture are determined by the language learning experience. Inability to manipulate language hinders expression; hence, this inability presents a deeper interaction verbally.

Several curricular approaches can be used to construct a classroom environment that includes a well-woven pattern of linguistic and cultural experiences. In what is referred to as the proficiency-based curriculum, content is defined by how the language is to be used. The communicative purposes that learners will be expected to accomplish are specified. Context, function, and degree of accuracy are clearly delineated (Met 1988).

For the foreign language learner, the already existing language/culture connection is an overriding feature of native language competence. This fact is often taken for granted but it is important to note it and understand how it will permeate the foreign language learning experience. Highly individualized response patterns that are commonplace in the native language will emerge during the use of the foreign language.

Learners need instruction that helps them create this range of cultural responses in the target language. For example, students creating a dialogue to be shared with the rest of the class should be encouraged to focus on culturally authentic responses. The teacher might want to individualize instruction and coaching with students while they create such dialogues. Cooperative learning techniques can also be effective in this instance. Similarly, teachers might want to focus once a week on the rules of politeness within the target language, and reinforce that focus throughout the week's work. Examples of this focus include the use of the formal and the familiar forms of the equivalent of English "you" (*vous* versus *tu* in

**Authenticity**



French, *tu* versus *usted* in Spanish) and so forth. Reading prose, poetry, and newspapers in the target language, regardless of level, is a rich way to understand the relationship between language and culture. Lively conversations should be encouraged!

**Summary:** Language teachers have known for decades about the importance of the relationship between the linguistics of a foreign language and the culture of its native speakers. Cultural involvement in a foreign language will increase as the learner progresses along a continuum of grammar into concrete use and involvement in the language. Total competence in a foreign language requires that foreign languages be taught in a culturally sensitive way, ultimately resulting in a culturally efficient, sensitive, and competent citizenry. Choices made in foreign language curricular and instructional design require attention to using the languages in today's ever-increasingly interdependent and multicultural world.

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**Principle 7: Language learning is complex. Instruction takes into account individual learning styles and rates, and also attends to teaching process strategies for successful learning. (Rebecca Oxford)**

**Discussion:** Language learning is a complex process involving students' minds, emotions, and senses. Optimal instruction in a second language (L2) requires teachers to understand many learning-related differences in their students: age, rate, and aptitude; learning styles and their related strategies; motivation; and anxiety. Optimal instruction also involves paying attention to appropriate teaching strategies that enhance learning.

**Age, Rate, and Aptitude**

Age is the most commonly mentioned determiner of success or failure in L2 learning. Research (see Scarcella and Oxford 1992) suggests that adults have some initial advantages in terms of rate of language learning. However, younger learners develop greater fluency, acquire more native-like pronunciation, and pass through the more advanced steps more quickly than older learners.

Even within a given age span, some learners move faster than others in learning a new language. This is related to motivation (based on attitude, interest, and other factors) and aptitude for language learning. Aptitude is important in understanding learner's L2 performance, but aptitude is not a singular dimension. Some learners have better language analytic ability, others are stronger at phonology and oral fluency, and still others have a more retentive memory. Few learners have very high, relatively equal aptitude in all areas. Those who do are often the "star" language learners. Researchers have begun calling for inclusion of learning styles in all full-scale L2 aptitude batteries because learning styles help explain students' strengths and weaknesses.

**Learning Styles and Their Related Strategies**

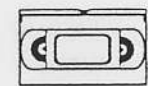
Learning styles are the general approaches students use to learn a new language or to do any complex task. The following is a list of key learning styles related to L2 development, along with the learning strategies (specific learner behaviors) that relate to those styles (Galbraith and Gardner 1988; Oxford 1990, in press a, in press b; Skehan 1989).

- *Analytic* students highlight grammatical details, dissect words and sentences, and seek precision, avoiding guessing and approximation.
- *Global* learners prefer socially interactive, communicative events that emphasize the main idea, and eschew the details and grammatical minutiae as much as possible. They like to guess and predict and are not worried if they don't know every item.

**Teaching and Learning K-12 Student Differences**



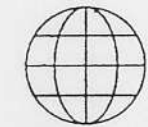
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**Analytic**  
●  
**Global**

# Foreign Languages Principles

Visual  
●  
Auditory  
●  
Hands-on

- *Visual* students love to read and obtain visual stimulation from pictures, bulletin boards, and blackboards and do not enjoy constant auditory stimulation without visual aids. These students take copious notes and often review them.
- *Auditory* students, on the other hand, can work with exceptionally large amounts of auditory stimulation and prefer not to be bombarded with visual input. They seek out conversation partners and opportunities for interaction.
- *Hands-on* (tactile and kinesthetic) students like movement, need frequent breaks, and enjoy working with tangible objects, collages, and flashcards. They often like total physical response.

Intuitive  
●  
Sequential

- *Intuitive* learners typically think in abstract, large-scale, nonsequential ways and are often bored by the concrete, step-by-step learning of highly programmed instruction. These students seek the "underlying system" of the L2 and constantly revise their understandings based on newly gained data.
- *Sequential* students prefer to have material presented in very concrete, sequential ways without much abstraction into general principles; they dislike randomness and inconsistency in lesson plans. These students frequently like memory strategies and methodical planning techniques.

Open  
●  
Closure-oriented

- *Open* students treat L2 learning as a game rather than a set of serious tasks; they are flexible, spontaneous, fun-loving learners who do not like deadlines or a great deal of preparation. These students avoid planning strategies but prefer social, lighthearted strategies for L2 learning.
- *Closure-oriented* students are hardworking, organized, and serious, and have a strong need for clarity in deadlines and assignments. They use extensive planning and evaluation strategies.

Note that in any learner, an overlapping of styles is natural; learners approach tasks from combinations of styles that can vary according to the time of day or the subject matter, for example.

## Motivation

Students' motivation levels determine the extent of their active, personal involvement in language learning (Galbraith and Gardner 1988; Oxford, Shearin, Young, and Butler, submitted for publication). Motivation is composed of four attitudinal factors: interest in the subject, relevance to the individual, expectancy of success or failure, and outcomes or rewards. It is

also composed of three behavioral factors: the decision to be involved, persistence over time, and activity level. High motivation:

- spurs learners to interact with native speakers, which increases the amount of input received;
- leads to greater use of learning strategies;
- enhances overall effort; and
- typically leads to increased competence in the language.

Students can be motivated to learn a new language by a desire to improve their career prospects, earn higher pay, heighten their academic prestige, communicate while traveling, integrate with other cultures, promote world peace, or any number of other reasons. Teachers can strengthen learners' motivation by ensuring that instructional materials and tasks are communicative, nonthreatening, exciting, relevant, appropriately challenging, capable of stimulating successful performance, and presented according to students' favored learning styles. Moreover, teachers can help reverse any negative attitudes that might harm student motivation and can demonstrate ways that students can use the new language in their own lives.

## **Anxiety**

Anxiety is a vague fear or state of apprehension that can cause motivation and performance to plummet (Horwitz and Young 1991, Scarcella and Oxford 1992). Different language activities create anxiety for different students. Speaking in front of others is often anxiety-provoking, but for some students listening or writing is just as nerve-wracking. The classroom structure itself can be a cause of anxiety. The traditional, teacher-centered classroom can generate fear for some students, but for introverted and highly sequential students an open, fluid, communicative classroom can do the same. Culture shock is the epitome of language anxiety. Culture shock can occur when an individual is actually living in the target culture for an extended period.

Teachers can diagnose anxiety through a number of written surveys geared to the foreign language classroom (see Horwitz and Young 1991). Teachers can also often observe anxiety through student behavior, such as forgetting, arriving late to class, being careless, squirming, playing with hair or clothing, nervously touching objects, stuttering or stammering, complaining of aches and pains, withdrawing from conversation or eye contact, smiling exaggeratedly, or being excessively competitive or compliant.

### **Student Differences**

### **Diagnosing Anxiety**



# Foreign Languages Principles

## Reducing Anxiety

Teachers can reduce student anxiety through avoidance of overcorrection, intimidation, and sarcasm; use of fair testing and rewards; addressing students' learning styles; development of positive self-talk; use of laughter and cooperative group work during in-class and outside-of-class pair work; use of dialogue journals, diaries, and anxiety graphs to track feelings; establishment of realistic goals; and relaxation techniques.

## Teaching Strategies

Instruction must reflect sensitivity to the student characteristics noted above. To be most successful, it must also provide:

- abundant authentic materials to encourage communication;
- realistic, meaningful language tasks;
- interesting themes that are useful to students;
- many opportunities for practice;
- culture as a key part of language learning;
- learning strategies woven into regular class activities;
- multiple means of assessment;
- multimedia variety to tap all learning styles;
- a warm, friendly classroom climate;
- positive feedback to students;
- error correction when needed; and
- strong "scaffolding" (teacher support) at first, eventually diminished as students develop greater skills.

**Summary:** A range of individual student factors affect language learning. Each of these is important in the language classroom and has implications for teaching processes. Some of the most important factors are age, rate, aptitude, learning styles, learning strategies, motivation, and anxiety. Although some of these aspects are out of the teacher's control, others—especially stretching students' learning styles, improving learning strategies, strengthening motivation, and reducing anxiety—are possible for teachers to manipulate to a great degree. Optimal teaching of a second language demands that the teacher be aware of which factors can be influenced and enhanced in the classroom.



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**Principle 8.** The ability to perform with language is facilitated when students actively engage in meaningful, authentic, and purposeful language learning tasks. (Myriam Met)

**Teaching and Learning  
K-12  
Authentic Practice**

**Discussion:** The primary purpose of foreign language learning is to be able to use the language in the real-life situations most likely to be encountered. Authentic learning tasks are those that most closely approximate real-life situations. In real life, language is always used to convey meaning and for a purpose.

Rote or mechanical drills are usually meaningless, and often can be performed correctly even when students have no knowledge of the meanings involved. For example, a learner of English who knew that the third-person singular of past tense verbs is formed by adding -ed could correctly complete the following exercise: Mary (*to talk*) to Tom yesterday. Mary (*to phone*) Tom yesterday. Mary (*to gleep*) Tom yesterday. Further, in one sense, even the first two examples are meaningless, because students are not conveying meaning or information of their own, but rather information on topics and about people without real meaning to them.

**Drill**

Language learning tasks should require that an exchange of information be involved. Display questions, such as "Tom, what's your name? What color is your shirt? Is this a book?" are meaningless because both speaker and listener already have the information. In real life, most people would find it strange to be asked such questions. In contrast, information-gap tasks, in which one student provides information or needs it from another, are the kinds of tasks that characterize real-life communication involving the exchange of meaning. For instance, asking what color someone's shirt is can be meaningful if one is asking about a *new* shirt.

**Authentic Exchange of Information**

Language use is also purposeful. Language is used to accomplish purposes such as making requests, providing information, making suggestions, stating and defending opinions, and so on. Learners need to engage in communicative activities that require them to listen or read to understand and respond to the purposes of others; or they may speak or write to express their own purposes. For example, given a recording (video or audio) students should be given a purpose for listening and understand what they may be expected to do with the results. Students may listen to get the gist of the message, listen for specific information, listen to infer

# Foreign Languages Principles

personality characteristics of the speaker, and so on. Reading purposes are often defined by the nature of the text. Students should understand the purposes associated with text types and the tasks they are asked to perform. For example, students may read a newspaper article for specific facts (who, what, where, etc.), a purpose that may require different reading strategies from reading a train schedule to determine the destination and time of departure of a specific train. When speaking and writing, students must understand the purpose for which they are constructing their message (to persuade? to express preferences?) and consider their audience. When students are asked to perform tasks that lack purpose, or when purposes are unclear, they are less likely to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for successful foreign language performance.

## Authentic Tasks vs Drill

Authentic tasks are those that students are most like real-life situations. Mechanical verb drills are unauthentic because in real life one rarely conjugates all the forms of the verb in isolation and in a standard paradigm (I am, you are, he is, etc.) Reading and listening to contrived texts written specifically for foreign language learners are often unauthentic because the texts are rarely designed for the real-life purpose of communicating information; their purpose is to provide structured practice to language learners. Authentic writing tasks are those in which students communicate their own messages and purposes through print to an identified or imagined audience. Authentic writing almost never has as its purpose to use the conditional tense at least 12 times in 10 sentences, or to use at least half of the words on the vocabulary list in two paragraphs. Speaking tasks should parallel situations in which students might actually find themselves. In a role play in which students play the host, students may describe their home to a visiting foreign student. Pretending to be a real estate agent and describing your home in the foreign language to a potential buyer is meaningful, purposeful, but unauthentic for most K-12 learners.

Authenticity may also vary with the age and purposes of the learner. Seventh graders learning the numbers in French may not be expected to learn to spell correctly the words which represent the numerals. In real life, writing out number words is something done primarily on checks. Few 7th graders will ever write a check in French! In contrast, it is possible that older students might have this need when travelling abroad.

**Summary:** Foreign language learning is enhanced by the extent to which classroom tasks require meaning and purpose in authentic situations. It is possible for tasks to have meaning and purpose, but lack authenticity; or to have meaning but lack purpose or authenticity. While there is a role for a range of tasks in foreign language learning, the greater the attention to *all three* of these elements, the more likely it is that students will become proficient language users.

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