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ABSTRACT

As an alternative to waiving foreign language requirements for students with learning disabilities or learning problems, a policy of inclusion in foreign language programs is proposed, based on research suggesting that alternative language teaching methods can be effective with these populations. The rationale for such a policy and the theoretical and research basis for corresponding teaching methods are outlined, focusing on the use of multisensory structured language teaching techniques, and an approach adopted in one high school French program is described. The program's linguistic components include: distribution of audio tapes of the course; dialogues including colloquial language use, some generated by the students themselves; use of a textbook; tactic/kinesthetic reinforcement through writing exercises; daily phonology drills and syntax practice; phonetic transcription exercises; repetition and review; reduction in the amount of material taught; and a variety of student assessment methods. Cultural components include: the history of the language; current events; taped immigrant interviews; and geography. Logistical and organizational considerations in creating and implementing such a curriculum are discussed briefly. Contains 13 references. (MSE)

A Policy of Inclusion: Alternative Foreign Language Curriculum for High-Risk and Learning Disabled Students

by

Lorin Pritikin

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Introduction

As a consequence of our increasingly multicultural and multilingual society, there is a growing trend in the United States towards more emphasis on foreign language (FL) learning before college (Sparks and Ganschow 1992). Additionally, public schools and universities often require their students to demonstrate competency in FL course work prior to graduation (Ganschow, Meyer, and Roeger 1989; Ganshow and Sparks 1987). While many view this as a positive trend, it must be acknowledged that this requirement often presents difficulties for students who may be learning disabled (LD) or high-risk (HR)--i.e. a student who may not have a diagnosis of learning disability but who has had repeated difficulty in successfully completing a beginning foreign language course.

Why do some students who perform well in other classes such as math and science perform very poorly or even fail foreign language (FL) classes? There have been numerous hypotheses for this phenomenon. While some theories have discussed motivational and attitudinal factors, others have focused more specifically on language learning issues. The explanation that I have used in my work with high-risk and learning disabled FL learners is the one offered by Richard Sparks and Lenore Ganschow, two noted reading and learning disabilities specialists who have done extensive research in foreign language learning. In 1986, they presented detailed case studies of college students who experienced FL learning difficulties (Ganschow and Sparks, 1986) and proposed that "**students' FL learning difficulties were related to their problems with native language learning (e.g. problems with reading, spelling, writing, and oral language.)**" (Ganshchow, Sparks, and Javorsky 1998).

A major premise underlying their more than a decade of research in learning disabilities and foreign language learning is the hypothesis that "the primary causal factors in successful or unsuccessful FL learning are linguistic; that is, students who exhibit FL learning problems have overt or subtle **native** language learning differences that affect their learning of a foreign language" (Ganschow, Sparks, and Javorsky 1998). They do not believe that there is "a discrete entity such as a 'foreign language learning disability'" (Sparks and Ganschow 1995a).

As a result of difficulties created by FL graduation requirements, students are often accommodated by the mechanism of a waiver (at the post-secondary level, some schools allow course substitutions). Rather than include high school LD or HR students in the FL program, schools often exclude them, citing their inability to learn foreign language at all. This paper will discuss a rationale for including all high school

students in a foreign language program and will discuss the design of alternative FL curricula. This rationale is drawn from research findings which conclude that LD and HR students *can* learn a foreign language; however, they must be taught with methodologies that facilitate their success. At times, the methodologies that are most beneficial to LD and at-risk FL learners are in direct contrast with those currently used in the traditional foreign language classroom.

Rationale for Alternative FL Curriculum

Traditional FL Options for LD and HR Students. The school in which I teach, Francis W. Parker School, is like many high schools in the United States; it has a foreign language graduation requirement. Parker has recently increased its high school foreign language graduation requirement from two to three years. As is the case in many high schools, this requirement has presented considerable difficulty to an increasing number of our HR and LD students. Over my ten years of teaching at Parker, my foreign language colleagues and I were continually dissatisfied with the options available to LD and HR students. Some students were automatically given a waiver of their FL graduation requirement, particularly if they had been diagnosed as LD. Many of the FL teachers did not view this option as beneficial because it completely excluded these students from a valuable part of their educational program. If a student had not been diagnosed with LD but was identified as high-risk, the student's options included: a) repeating a FL course; b) beginning the study of a different FL; or c) evaluation on a Pass/Fail option. None of these alternatives appeared to address the underlying language learning issues. Often, the proverbial light bulb did not turn on when a student was directed to spend an entire year attempting to re-learn what they had just failed to learn, nor did it turn on when a student was directed to apply heretofore unsuccessful strategies for learning one foreign language to a different foreign language. While the wisdom in these alternatives was clearly lacking, my school did not have more appropriate options to offer to these students.

The work of Ganschow and Sparks and that of Zoltan Dornyei, a Hungarian researcher in motivational factors affecting foreign language learning, served as the basis for the development of an alternative FL curriculum that addressed the language learning issues (i.e. native language and foreign language) and special needs of HR and LD high school students at Francis W. Parker School.

Current Research: Sparks, Ganschow, et al.

Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis (LCDH). The purpose of an alternative course was to provide a direct, skills-based approach to FL learning to HR and LD students. I used the work of Ganschow and Sparks and their Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis (LCDH) to design an alternative to the traditional natural, communicative-competence based FL program. A recent article in the *Journal of Learning Disabilities* (Ganschow, Sparks, and Javorsky 1998) reviews a decade of research on the LCDH, the basis of much of their work. This hypotheses is derived

from native language research. The premise of LCDH is that "native language components--phonological/orthographic, syntactic, and semantic--provide the basic foundation for FL learning...the focus of LCDH is on language variables in FL learning because FL learning is the learning of *language"* (Ganschow, Sparks, and Javorsky, 1998). While their early work focused on the difficulties that students with learning disabilities have with learning a foreign language, these researchers began to find that "large numbers of students *without* LD exhibited FL learning difficulties." (Ganschow, Sparks, and Javorsky 1998) Therefore, they changed the original term from *deficits* to *difficulties* "to reflect the notion of a continuum of difficulties with FL learning that ranges from mild to severe" (Ganschow, Sparks, and Javorsky 1998).

"Cracking the Code": Multisensory Structured Language (MSL) Instruction. Sparks, Ganschow, et al., have written about "a population of at-risk, non-LD FL students who have significant FL learning issues" (Sparks and Ganschow, 1993). These at-risk, non-LD students and their LD counterparts "have problems with the phonological code--the ability to break down and put together the sounds of the language and relate them to the appropriate letters/letter combinations" (Ganschow et al 1991, 1992; Sparks et al 1991; Sparks, Ganschow, and Pohlman 1989).

Due to the speculation of Ganshow and Sparks that "the majority of FL underachievers have the most difficulty with the phonological/orthographic aspects of FL learning" (Ganshow, Sparks, and Javorsky 1998), I designed the course to include continual development of phonemic awareness. Again, using the research findings of Ganshow and Sparks that "good FL learners have been found to exhibit significantly stronger native oral and written language skills than poor FL learners" (Ganshow, Sparks and Javorsky, 1998), I began working with an LD specialist to adapt multisensory structured language (MSL) teaching methodologies and learning strategies for HR and LD students in the learning of French.

We adapted MSL strategies that help students "crack the language code" (Myer et al 1989; Ganschow, Sparks, and Javorsky 1998). Such strategies are multisensory because they teach through "simultaneous auditory, visual, and tactile/kinesthetic presentations" (Sparks, Ganschow, 1993). Many of these strategies are adapted from those already in use for the teaching of reading and spelling of English to at-risk language learners. The Orton-Gillingham approach and the Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing Program (LiPS) are two multisensory approaches that have been successfully adapted for LD and HR foreign language learners.

Sparks, Ganschow, and their colleagues speculated that MSL approaches to teaching a FL might benefit LD and at-risk, non-LD students because they have been proven to benefit those who have difficulty learning native literacy skills. These researchers wrote: "an MSL approach is appealing for several reasons: 1) phonology and syntax are taught directly and explicitly in a systematic, step-by-step fashion; 2) only a small amount of material is presented at one time; 3) material is thoroughly mastered before new material is introduced; and 4) a multisensory approach is used" (Sparks, Ganschow, et al 1992). The results of a recently completed longitudinal study showed

that the use of such methodologies "is effective in helping at-risk learners become as proficient as not-at-risk FL learners in reading, writing, spelling, and listening to a foreign language after two years of study" (Sparks, Artzer, et al 1998).

MSL Approaches: Direct Instruction. Sometimes the words "natural approach" and "indirect approach" are interchanged to discuss a method of instruction that "emphasizes listening to and understanding messages in the FL...natural approaches de-emphasize the teaching of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in favor of communicative competence. Thus, their impact has been to use *indirect* instruction as a way to teach specific language skills" (Sparks, Ganschow, et al, 1992). Students who are taught in this way are being taught to "learn a second language in much the same way as they learn their first--i.e. listening precedes speaking which precedes reading and writing" (Sparks, Ganschow et al 1991).

Foreign language educators in recent years have favored an *indirect* approach to FL learning. However, "although at-risk learners can communicate well enough in their native language...they apparently have not fully mastered the phonological and syntactic structure of their native language. FL teaching methodologies that do not directly teach the phonology and syntax of the FL, and rely on the student to 'intuit' the structure of the new language, may not be beneficial for at-risk learners" (Sparks and Ganschow, 1993). Findings of a study by Sparks, Ganschow, and colleagues, suggested that "both non-LD at-risk learners and students with LD share similar deficits in phonological coding" (Sparks et al 1992a, b).

Direct approaches to teaching FL "emphasize skill development. In a direct approach, students are explicitly taught not only vocabulary (semantics) and grammar (syntax) of the new language but also its sound symbol system (phonology)" (Sparks, Ganschow, et al, 1992). In their research over the past six years, Sparks, Ganschow and their colleagues have indicated that "at -risk FL learners , like students with native LD, have relative difficulties with one or more of the language codes--phonology, syntax, semantics" (Sparks, Ganschow, et al 1992). This is referred to as their Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis (LCDH) mentioned earlier. As a result, "students who lack 'phonemic awareness...have not been able to grasp intuitively that spoken words are composed of sound segments, and they generally have difficulties with listening comprehension as well" (Sparks, Ganschow, et al 1991). With a multisensory, structured, direct approach to FL instruction, students are provided with "additional forms of input which are always directed to learning the structure of language" (Sparks et al 1992a, b).

In a 1993 study of MSL instruction provided to at-risk FL learners, Sparks and Ganschow concluded that "to become proficient in the study of a FL one needs an intact native language base. Any weak component--and here we have specifically examined the phonological code--will negatively impact on the acquisition and development of that language" (Sparks and Ganschow 1993). Their most recent study compared the effectiveness of MSL instruction and traditional instruction of Spanish for at-risk and not-at-risk high school FL students. The results revealed that "on

measures of oral and written foreign language proficiency, the MSL and not-at-risk groups scored significantly higher than at-risk groups instructed using traditional methods. After two years of study, no differences were found between the MSL group and the not-at-risk group" (Sparks, Ganschow, Artzer et al 1998).

Studies in Language and Culture: Curriculum Design

Cultural and Linguistic Components. The course I developed, Studies in Language and Culture: French, is currently a two-year program (I am appealing to my school's Administration to expand the course to a three-year program, thus allowing students enrolled in this program to fulfill their FL graduation requirement, avoiding a waiver of the third year). It is a course with both a cultural and linguistic component.

Linguistic Components

Audio Cues. Students receive an audio tape of the course (which includes repetition exercises of the sound-symbol system--i.e. the French alphabet, sounds corresponding to combination of letters, and of all dialogues). The inclusion of an audio tape reinforces oral/aural work done in class and allows the student to work outside of class with an audio cue. This is particularly helpful for students who have auditory processing deficits.

Use of Dialogues. Students practice colloquial usage of language through the use of the dialogue. There are 14 dialogues on various subjects including greetings, eating out, finding a hotel, getting lost, asking directions, etc. I am able to complete the 14 dialogues in the two-year program. Students use the tapes and practice dialogues in class. I video tape the students so that they can see and hear themselves using the language. Students are not required to memorize any material because many of them require a written cue for retention purposes; however, they must familiarize themselves with the "scripts" so that they are not simply reading the dialogues.

In addition to using already-scripted dialogues, students write their own on a variety of topics. Students are issued a Berlitz phrase book and dictionary, which includes a pronunciation guide for all entries. The book is organized into sections which include useful expressions for all kinds of situations. Chapters include Hotel, Eating Out, Relaxing, Traveling Around, Making Friends, Shopping Guide, Telephone, Doctor, Souvenirs, and Bank. Students enjoy composing original dialogues using phrases that can easily be found in the phrase book. In this way, students become exposed to the target language, its syntax, and its sounds.

While the students are not generating their own French, they are becoming more familiar with how the language is put together, by using sentences already constructed. Using the phrase book develops a sense of confidence; they become to feel that they could use the phrase book to communicate with French-speaking people if they were to take a trip. Prior to the Studies course, many students who had been waived of their FL graduation requirement would rarely have have been able to

experience this confidence. Rather, their exclusion from a FL program would have conveyed that they were unable to learn or use a foreign language.

Writing and Reading: the Use of a Text. There is good news and bad news with regard to my text for the course. The good news: I discovered that the perfect text for my course had already been written (*Le Phénomène du Langage--Cahier Français*, Florian, D., Gray, M., Longman, 1989) and I did not have to undertake the daunting project of writing a text myself. The bad news: it went out of print after only one year of use in the Studies course. However, I have been able to attain publisher permission to reproduce small quantities of the book each year (the course is now in its fourth year).

Spanish has a regular and relatively easy phonetic structure. I would surmise that it is for this reason that all of the research I have read on the adaptation of MSL approaches to teaching FL have cited Spanish as the foreign language used. While some FL educators may question the use of French as the target language for a course designed for students with phonemic discrimination difficulties (because French does not have a regular phonetic structure like Spanish), I can only speculate that the authors of *Le Phénomène du Langage* used French because students will find similar complexities in the phonetic structure of English. Just as all of my at-risk FL students, who are native English speakers, can recognize certain sight words without "sounding them out" such as the words ending in "ight--sight, light, night", they can learn to see French spelling and see letters but learn (through review and repetition) not to pronounce them--e.g. the "ent" ending of the third person plural conjugations: ils mangent, ils chantent, ils parlent.

The text is designed as a self-contained introduction to the French language, assuming no previous preparation (it can be used in conjunction with its predecessor, *The Phenomenon of Language--Tabula Latina*). As explained in the book's "Preface to the Teacher" section, "it is not simply the first 12 chapters of a typical first-year French program, nor does the sequence of materials always follow that of traditional texts." The main objectives of the text are:

1. "To give the student an opportunity to get a 'feel' for French and how French works;"

2. To help the student grasp certain basic grammar concepts through the medium of a foreign language;"

3. "To help the student become aware of the process that is language;"

4. "To help the student develop good language study habits--especially a method of dealing with language studies, with vocabulary acquisition, and with how to go about learning a language in general;"

5. "To help the student generalize what has been learned about French and apply the knowledge to English and to other foreign languages" (Florian and Gray, *Le Phénomène du Langage*, Longman, 1989).

The text highlights similarities and differences between French and English. Students complete written exercises that reinforce the use of cognates, the syntax of the new language, adjective placement and agreement, and regular and irregular verb conjugations. Again, it is important to note that the scope and sequence of the material has been significantly modified from a traditional program. The amount of spontaneous language that the Studies students can generate is considerably less than students in a traditional program. In the written language, they spend more time re-working components in the target language that have already been provided to them, rather than compose English-to-French sentences on their own. However, by the end of the second year of the Studies program, students are able to write short descriptive paragraphs. In the spoken language, students spend more time engaged in simple yes/no question and answer drills than on free-form, spontaneous conversation.

Tactical/Kinesthetic Reinforcement. I often have students write sounds and words on small, dry-wipe boards. In this way, they show me their written transcription of sound and they receive immediate reinforcement or correction. They are simultaneously saying and writing the words. In this way, "syntax becomes very real and concrete for students with language learning difficulties...and by introducing the graphemes and their corresponding foreign language phonemes through multiple modalities, students are not restricted to one form of input (i.e. auditory as in a 'natural' communication approach), and can 'see' sounds and words by writing them, a request often made by students having difficulty in a foreign language classroom" (Sparks, Ganschow et al 1991; Ganschow and Sparks 1986).

At times, students arrange words on an overhead projector or "act out" a grammatical concept. For example, when they are introduced to the concept of negation with "ne" and "pas, to reinforce the position of negation, I have students personally represent each part of a sentence and physically place themselves in the proper order in front of the class. In this way, students are "learning by doing"--an integral component of an MSL approach.

Phonology and Syntax. In their work, Sparks, Ganschow and colleagues found that because students with language learning deficits and learning disabilities "have difficulty with both phonology and syntax, any full-class approach to second language learning must attempt to teach these language concepts *directly* " (Sparks, Ganschow et al 1991). Therefore, the course includes daily phonology drills with oral and written phases. Students practice at the blackboard or on their personal dry-wipe boards. I begin with the sound/symbol connection of the French alphabet, introducing vowels, nasals, consonants, and typical combination of letters. I introduce single phonemes, changing only one sound at a time (beginning with single vowel sounds, changing the initial consonants only--ba,ma,la,da) and progress to two syllables with, at most, two vowel sounds (madi, lati, bali; téni, léti). I work only with nonsense words, at first, and progress to real French words of one, two, and finally, three syllables. For multisyllabic words, I divide words into syllables to better illustrate the sound/letter connection.

Phonetic Transcription. I encourage my students to use phonetic transcriptions of real French words, to help them with pronunciation. For example, students learn about the "the rule of final consonants"--i.e. that most final consonants in French words are not pronounced, unless followed by a final "e". Therefore, when students are introduced to the vowel sounds "a" and "i", they are taught the words such as "Paris." I ask them to illustrate the pronunciation with a phonetic spelling in brackets. If they give me [Pahree], I know that they have successfully transferred the information to the pronunciation. If, on the other hand, they write [Pahrees], I know that they are pronouncing the final "s" when they should not . When students perform dialogues, I encourage them to use phonetic spellings with the authentic spellings, when necessary. I do not allow my students to use invented spelling (when they use phonetic transcriptions, they must distinguish them from authentic spelling by the use of brackets--e.g. [kahfay] vs. café. Phonetic transcriptions are used primarily for reinforcing pronunciation of words).

Repetition and Review. As most FL teachers know, repetition and review are important facilitative components of success in a traditional FL course. This is particularly true for a curriculum designed for at-risk FL learners (either with or without an LD diagnosis).

Reduction of Amount of Material Taught. In order to facilitate success and allow sufficient time for oral and written reinforcement of material, the scope of the material needs to be minimized and the pace of an alternative curriculum for at-risk FL learners needs to be slowed down. The design of my Studies course is such that it completes the text in a two-year, sequential program. If the course were expanded to a third year, the third year would be used to promote more creative and spontaneous use of the foreign language. As Sparks, Ganschow, and their colleagues explain: "a structured language approach enhances and allows 'real' communication to take place. Far from preventing 'creativity' or spontaneity,' a structured approach to second language learning allows students to develop proficiency when using the new language for communicative purposes" (Sparks, Ganschow et al 1991).

Students are expected to memorize a fraction of the vocabulary words that are introduced. I reinforce metacognitive learning, i.e. a use of "instructional approaches that emphasize awareness of the cognitive process that facilitate's one's own learning and its application to academic and work assignments. Typical metacognitive techniques include systematic rehearsal of steps or conscious selection among strategies for completing a task" (ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, 1998). Students use strategies such as color coding, to aid them in recall of information (many of the students exhibit word retrieval and sequencing difficulties) and to assist them in identifying patterns and changes: color-coded index cards are used for indexing masculine and feminine words (e.g. all masculine words are written are blue cards, all feminine words are written on yellow cards); color pencils are used for writing verb endings and silent letters (e.g. all "ent" verb endings are written with red ink and are not pronounced); and color-coded transparencies are used for verb conjugations (e.g. the stem of the verb stays the same color but the endings change).

Evaluation. Students are evaluated in a variety of ways. Class participation, quality of homework, and overall preparation are included in a student's composite evaluation. While most high school teachers would probably maintain that the majority of their students require help in establishing more effective study and organization strategies, this is particularly true for high-risk and LD foreign language students. Consequently, a major portion of a Studies student's evaluation is based upon how prepared they are for class, i.e. do they have their text, completed homework, and their notebook? I do daily checks and enter a grade of "A" in my grade book for students who are prepared and a grade of "F" for students who are not.

I administer frequent quizzes to check acquisition of small amounts of information. In addition to learning vocabulary of the target language, students must also learn what I call the "lingo of language": i.e. grammar and other language-related terms such as cognate, definite and indefinite articles, conjugation, infinitive, etc. Students must be able to write definitions and give examples of such terms. In a traditional FL program, teachers often administer a short quiz on material only once and then perhaps include the material on a lengthier chapter exam. I have designed this course to include very few, lengthy exams but many short quizzes and exams, administered many times until mastery is accomplished. Pronunciation, oral proficiency, and written accuracy are all evaluated through the use of quizzes and exams. The course is a two-semester course and students take a mid-year and year-end final exam.

Cultural Components

History of Language. The text provides an overview to historical events pertaining to the development of the romance languages in general, and to French, more specifically. Students learn about the linguistic consequences of warfare and the infiltration of French and other languages into English. Topics covered by the text and addressed in class (through classroom discussion and writing of essays) include: 1) the Gallic Wars and the infusion of Latin into Gaul with the arrival of Julius Caesar; 2) the Battle of Hastings, the victory of the Normans over the English and the resulting infusion of French into the English language; and 3) the positive and negative effects of assimilation. Students learn about the borrowing nature of English and about the value of cognates when learning a foreign language. I include several units on etymology; students learn about Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, and Arabic influences on the English language.

Current Events. Students are required to maintain a *dossier* of articles related to issues of language and culture (students can use electronic databases but must include articles from actual newspapers). Students present to the class on a weekly basis on an article of their choice. They make a copy of their article for their classmates and "teach" the main points. Students enjoy being "teacher for a day." Maintaining these *dossiers* broadens students' perspectives on global issues. They feel confident about being more aware of what is happening around them. Recent topics included:

*terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria;
* the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and its affect on women;
*terrorist attacks in Paris;
*the Wye River Peace Accord;
*the Albanian Muslim and Serbian Christian conflict in Kosovo;
*the Hutu and the Tutsi conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Zaire);
*the separatist movement in Quebec;
*Proposition 227 and the dismantling of bilingual education in California;
*the English-First movement and related initiatives to establish English as our national language

Immigrant Interviews. Students are required to tape an interview of an immigrant. The interviewee may not be native English-speaking. Students receive a script of questions (see attached) but must add at least four original questions. Students listen to each other's interviews and discuss their reactions. These interviews help students gain insight into the trials and tribulations of learning a foreign language and the difficulties encountered by immigrants attempting to use English at work or in everyday situations. This activity is profoundly valuable. For many of my students, it is the first time they have thought about what it must be like for people who leave their families, their homeland, and often the comfort of their native language.

Geography. We discuss the lowly status of geography as a major discipline in the United States and the poor showing of Americans in Geography Bees. Students are required to complete a map of "Le Monde Francophone." They begin to understand the need to know about a country's location, terrain, surrounding influences, in order to be able to appreciate a culture. Students each present a 20-minute culture report on a francophone country of their choice. They must use audio-visual aids; some students bring in photo albums of family trips and talk about their personal travel experiences, others procure videos from travel agencies on places they never knew existed prior to enrolling in the Studies course.

Miscellaneous

Within the population of students having been identified as high-risk or with specific learning disabilities (SLD), students have been found "to differ significantly from one another in the patterns of learning difficulties that they represent" (Myer, Ganschow, Sparks, Kenneweg 1989). While HR and LD foreign language students may have deficits and difficulties in many different areas of learning, the "subtype" within these populations that has been focused on in the research reviewed in this paper is "a *pattern* of language/reading disorders commonly called a phonological disability" (Myer, Ganschow, Sparks, Kenneweg 1989).

Through trial and error and continual modifications, I have discovered what kinds of teaching and learning strategies work best for the Studies course. Below I have included teacher and learner information that I have found useful and that could be

invaluable to you when designing a program for students with multiple difficulties.

Assistive Technology. Some students have motor skill deficits which contribute to poor penmanship. Therefore, I allow students to use laptops in and outside of class, and on exams, when necessary. At times, this can be distracting to other students. In this context, we discuss responsible use and respect for classmates' individual needs. Students are also permitted to tape classroom lessons. This is particularly useful for students with auditory processing deficits.

Class Size. The ideal size for optimum learning in a traditional foreign language class has been disputed. However, I believe that many students and teachers would agree that a small class of 8-12 students is ideal for FL learning. This is particularly true for an alternative course for HR and LD students, due to the individualized attention required. Many of my students also have a diagnosis of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADDHD). Consequently, they are easily distracted and at times, distracting to others.

Frequent Auditory Checks. Due to diagnoses of ADDHD and auditory processing deficits, many of my students require frequent verbal checks during classroom activities. If I ask a question, I often ask several students what their classmates replied. Focus is a continual problem of many students. I have found that if they expect me to "check up on them," they are less likely to "zone out." It takes a few weeks for the teacher to establish this pattern of question/answer drill of all information (cultural and linguistic); however, I have found that student focus improves once this practice has been implemented with regularity.

Classroom Configuration. For reasons of student focus, I have found that it is critical to be able to have close proximity to all students. Consequently, I would never use linear rows of desks. If possible, desks or tables accommodating two students (they often work in pairs on linguistic material) should be arranged in a semi-circle so that the teacher can approach students easily during classroom exercises from the middle of the configuration of desks. Students may not be used to this kind of arrangement; however, I have found that when a student is unfocused (daydreaming, staring out a window, looking at a clock, or talking to another classmate), if I approach them physically and at times, touch their arm gently, they will "come back" to the lesson. Through this soft touch, they become aware that I am aware that they have "left."

Clear Desks; No Distractions. Students must have clear workspace. They must leave all backpacks and materials for other classes on the floor or somewhere else in the room. They are only permitted to have the Studies materials on their desk. Whether students come into the course with a diagnosis of ADDHD or not, I have found that many of them will find ways to loose focus by playing with all kinds of gadgets, such as pens, jewelry, calculators, electronic dictionaries, beepers, cell phones and backpacks (zipper compartments are particularly attractive--which is why the backpacks are not allowed anywhere near the students).!

Organization Aids. I insist on assignment notebooks (I teach a cross graded section of grades 9-12 but I require this even of seniors)! In addition, I write all assignments on the board (if possible, have students physically write down homework assignments and check to see that this is done before they leave each class). While students are informed that they need a notebook for my class during the first week of school, many stuff their papers into the bottom of their backpacks or in between the pages of their text. I keep 59 cent pocket folders on hand for students who resist organization at all costs! I try to establish more effective organization strategies that will benefit them in all of their classes. While I have found that this is an ongoing battle with students in the traditional program, it is particularly an uphill battle with many students in the Studies course.

Politics of Program. There are many misconceptions about foreign language learning and about learning disabilities among students, their parents, educators, and administrators. One need not be an LD specialist or a FL teacher in order to comprehend the current research findings that support alternatives to FL waivers and to traditional FL programs for high-risk and LD students. Perhaps, you will find your greatest challenge in educating these various constituencies about the benefits of alternative foreign language curricula and about the benefits of inclusion in a foreign language program. If you design an alternative FL program, you must undertake the following if it is going to be successful:

*Inform parents of HR and LD students about the benefits of inclusion and about the detrimental effects of exclusion from the FL class room;

*Motivate LD and HR students by stressing what they *can* accomplish in a FL course;

*Educate fellow FL colleagues about the current research findings which support the use of MSL instruction and a direct approach for the teaching of foreign language to HR and LD students;

*Provide research findings supporting the rationale of alternative FL curricula to administrators. Use student testimonials to explain the emotional and academic costs of exclusion of HR and LD students from a FL program and to underscore the benefits of inclusion; this kind of cost/benefit analysis is particularly effective as an educational piece in the marketing of an alternative FL program.

Foreign language educators around the country will continue to be faced with the challenges of including students with learning difficulties in their programs. Their mandate will be to meet the needs of *all* of their students; some will accompllish this through accommodation in the traditional program, while others will develop alternative programs like mine. My hope is that information about programs like the Studies in Language and Culture course will be available and accessible to as many teachers as possible, so that replication of this kind of program will be possible; students and teachers alike will benefit greatly.

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