Foreign Language Learning Difficulties and Teaching Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Beginning foreign language (FL) courses in high school often have high numbers of learning disabled and at-risk students, perhaps because many students who are considered to be college bound begin foreign language study in middle school. This paper examines FL difficulties as well as effective strategies that others have used to conquer these challenges. Research indicates that LD students and at-risk students both have FL learning difficulties, due to deficiencies in their native languages. Research suggests that teachers should use multi-sensory approaches; however, they should also explicitly teach phonology/orthography and grammar, as these may be necessary for LD and at-risk students to understand and use the target language.

INTRODUCTION

When I first began teaching Spanish nine years ago, I soon found that the methods that worked well with the more advanced classes were completely unsuccessful with the beginners. I looked into the students' files, and discovered that my beginning class had very high numbers of at-risk students and students with learning disabilities (LD) and attention deficit disorders (ADD/ADHD), whereas the second year and honors classes had few or none of those.

Soon the politics behind the discrepancy became clear to me. In the San Francisco Bay Area, many parents in middle and high-income areas expect their children to go to a university. The freshmen students in my second year and honors courses had taken Spanish in middle school, with a plan to meet or exceed minimum foreign language (FL) requirements by the time they needed to apply to college. However, the LD and at-risk students had been placed in resource classes, intervention programs, and non-academic electives in middle school. When they reached high school, they found that if they wanted to get on the "college track" like their peers, they needed to enroll in a beginning FL class. For me, this meant that the low academic achievers, those with auditory or visual processing difficulties, those with attention deficit disorders, and those with little or no exposure to FL were all placed in the same class.

I clearly needed different strategies to teach these students, because they were not passing the course using traditional methods. This paper came about because I wanted to find concrete research on the difficulties that learning disabled and at-risk students face in learning a foreign language, as well as effective teaching strategies to help students conquer these challenges.

Statement of Problem

In recent years many universities have raised their entrance requirements to include a minimum of two years of a FL. Furthermore, high-ranking universities encourage students to take four, five, or even six years of a FL. This means that the students who are non-native speakers of Spanish and who want to reach such lofty language heights as AP Spanish Language or AP Spanish Literature must begin studying in middle school or earlier. In middle and high-income areas in California, school districts are increasingly feeling parental pressure to offer Spanish as a FL elective at the middle school and even elementary levels, so that when those children get to high school, they can enroll in a second or third year level course.

Sadly, LD and at-risk students often do not choose FL as their elective in middle school. Instead, they often have a resource class during that period, or they are encouraged to choose non-academic electives. However, when they get to high school, they often face FL requirements for graduation. They face further requirements if their eventual goal is a post secondary education, because the UC system and other 4-year universities require at least two years of FL study. Therefore, many first and second year FL classes have high numbers of LD and at-risk students, compared to other levels of FL study.

Many teachers do not feel qualified to meet the challenge of teaching increasing numbers of LD and at-risk students. As a result, these students have traditionally been underserved, often failing or dropping out because teachers continue to use traditional methods that are successful in their higher-level classes, but are completely irrelevant with these types of learners. Schwartz explains,

> For the student unencumbered by a learning disability, foreign language study is indeed an enriching and rewarding experience. For the learning disabled student, however, it can

be an unbelievably stressful and humiliating experience, the opposite of what is intended (1997, introduction).

Beginning FL teachers have a responsibility to change this phenomenon by making the content accessible, understandable, and relevant. LD and at-risk students need alternative strategies and assessments in order to be successful in a beginning FL classes in high school, and go on to pursue their goals of high school and post-secondary graduations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this paper is to examine the research on the causes of difficulty of second language acquisition for at-risk students and those with learning disabilities, and to review the research on the methods and strategies that teachers can use to help these students learn the basic concepts in a high school FL course.

Research Question

This paper attempts to discover why some students are unsuccessful in FL classes and what teachers can do to help them. To achieve this, a number of issues must be investigated. First, FL pedagogies have changed throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, and it must be examined whether or not popular methods actually help or hinder students with FL difficulties. Since the research behind FL difficulties is vast and varied, I hope to be able to review and summarize the root causes of differences in ability to learn a FL, so that teachers can better identify the reasons why students are struggling in their classes. Finally, and most importantly for me as a teacher, I hope to find specific teaching strategies that will improve content retention, increase communicative abilities, lower anxiety, and improve organizational skills, so as to ensure academic success for all fully-included LD and at-risk students.

THEORETICAL RATIONALE

Numerous explanations have been proposed and debated concerning why some students do not perform well in FL courses. Researchers trying to get to the root of this problem have studied listening problems, native language differences, cognitive variables (such as language aptitude, individual differences, brain function, and pedagogical tasks assigned), and affective variables (such as anxiety, motivation, and personality).

In 1964, Pimsleur and his colleagues were the first to question why some students performed well in other classes but did not perform well in FL class. They proposed that it was not a lack of motivation or intelligence, but rather they had problems with an "auditory ability," defined as the ability to deal with sounds and sound-symbol learning (Schwartz, 1997).

In 1971 Linkage's studies proposed that students' problems in FL classes were not due to lack of motivation, effort or anxiety, but rather a learning disability similar to dyslexia. He proposed that students' learning disabilities had to be addressed though specific educational measures in the classroom (Schwartz, 1997).

Cummins (1979) studied problems of English language acquisition. After studying bilingual education classes, he concluded that a student's competence in a second language depended on his or her level of first language ability. Following his lead into the 1980s, psychologists Ganschow and Sparks further proposed that students' FL learning difficulties were not a result of learning disabilities, but instead were directly related to problems with learning in their native language (Ganschow, Sparks& Javorsky, 1998). They formulated the "Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis," which theorized that FL difficulties stem from deficiencies in one or more linguistic codes (phonological, semantic, and syntactic) in the

student's native language system. These deficiencies result in mild to extreme problems with oral and written language (Sparks, 2006).

In the 1980s, researchers began to develop theories around the idea that all students, not just those diagnosed as LD, learn in a multitude of different ways, which require teachers to use a variety of different instructional methods. Dunn and Dunn were the first to design a multi-sensory approach to education. They identified a comprehensive battery of elements that effect learning, and identified *auditory*, *visual*, and *kinesthetic* modalities as the most important sensory channels for education (Guild and Garger, 1985). Soon after, Gardner (1983, 1993) labeled seven different areas of the brain, which correlated to distinct intelligences: *linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, body-kinesthetic, interpersonal*, and *intrapersonal*. (He later added *naturalistic* intelligence.) His ideas were groundbreaking because they said that people processed information in different ways, and that students could learn better if teachers taught to their intelligences.

In recent years, some researchers have proposed the existence of an explicit "foreign language learning disability," which prohibits some students from being able to be successful in language classes. However, Sparks (2006) refutes the existence of a separate foreign language learning disability. His research has shown that all types of learners can be successful in language classes, given the right stimuli and assessments.

To date there is no consensus among researchers about why some students exhibit problems in FL learning. This paper reviews the research of the most widely studied variables, and the primary solutions that leading researchers and classroom teachers have proposed.

Assumptions

First, I assume that all students can learn other languages. Second, I assume that they should learn another language in order to be fully functional in our global society.

I assume that anyone could experience learning problems in FL classes, not only LD students. Importantly, LD students and poor language learners demonstrate similar problems in cognitive ability, achievement, aptitude, and performance (Sparks & Javorsky, 1999). Thus, the research on teaching strategies to help LD students learn a FL may apply to other students as well.

Some researchers have used the words "learning disabled," "learning differences" and "learning difficulties" interchangeably. However, "learning disabilities" is legally sanctioned, whereas "learning differences" and "learning difficulties" are not. While most of what they recommend is applicable to any struggling student, it must be noted that only those students classified as "learning disabled" qualify for entitlements, such as allowances for poor grammar and spelling, and substitutions and waivers for course requirements (Sparks & Javorsky, 1999).

While the specific strategies described in this literature review may be generalizable for helping LD and at-risk students, they may not be needed in every beginning FL classroom. Not every area offers FL in middle school, and the lack thereof may result in a more broad mix of students in high school beginning FL classes.

Finally, since I am interested in teaching Spanish as a FL, I only researched studies about FL teaching strategies, and did not compare or extensively review the literature on English Language Development, even though students' difficulties with language acquisition may be similar. The solutions offered in that literature may indeed be insightful for teaching FL, so a review of ELD teaching strategies could be a topic for further research.

Background and Need

At the April 1992 Foreign Language and Learning and Learning Disabilities

Conference, the following issues emerged:

- Increasing numbers of LD students \are now entering colleges and universities.

- Most students are expected to study a FL in elementary, junior high, and/or high school.

- Many universities expect FL proficiency upon entry or prior to graduation.

- Recent findings show that most students with LD have difficulties in FL classes.

- Under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, colleges and universities are not obligated to waive FL requirements for LD students, nor are they required to provide course substitutions. Those that do provide waivers or substitutions do so on a voluntary basis. (Barr, 1993)

Since that conference in 1992, the problems that LD students face in having to meet or exceed FL requirements have only increased. However, despite the pressure, very little research has been done to address their needs. Instead, research shifted from trying to find solutions to trying to identify a specific "foreign language learning disability." Sparks (2006) negated the existence of such a disability, because difficulties in FL acquisition rise from deficiencies in other areas. Regardless of the outcome of that debate, there is a need for more research into teaching strategies, so that students with FL difficulties do not want or need to waive FL entrance requirements in the first place. However, many teachers do not have adequate training to help LD students, or access to such curricula.

> We are seeing special needs children in increasing numbers, yet most FL teachers are ill-prepared to fulfill those needs. While they may have received some instruction in attending to diverse learning styles, most pre-service FL teacher curricula provide little or no preparation in the area of special education...Consequently, FL teachers are urgently seeking assistance and guides to resources that will enable them to work with this new and changing student population (Le Loup, 1997, p.1).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This first section of this paper explains the historical shifts in FL methodologies. Reading the history of the diverse FL teaching methods helps us to understand the political and social reasons behind the methods that are currently in vogue, and can help us make informed choices about which methodologies may be best for our particular students and communities.

The literature about FL difficulties centers around cognitive problems and affective problems. Therefore, the second and third sections summarize the major research and offer suggestions for teachers as to how to help students overcome difficulties in those areas. The fourth section discusses research about other compensatory strategies for FL teachers, such as helping students manage stress, planning their time, and organizing their materials.

Nationally recognized FL methodologies

Teachers and districts cannot simply adopt new textbooks and follow state frameworks unquestioningly; they must understand how and why we have arrived at the current situation. They must ask themselves if the methods that are publicized now are really relevant for their community and/or their students, or if they are simply continuing social trends. They must have the background knowledge of what has been tried before in order to decide what method or combination of methods are best employed to meet the goals of all their students.

The Direct Translation Movement

Since the time of Erasmus (1466-1536) "classic" FL instruction consisted of lessons in Greek and Latin. When the U.S. was in its' infancy, the primary goal of FL instruction was to directly translate texts into English, for the purposes of philosophical discussion as well as religious and political indoctrination over minority groups. More "foreign languages" were offered in public schools as more people immigrated from Italy, Spain, France and Germany,

but teachers continued to use the same translation technique well into the 20th century.

(Spring, 2007)

The *Grammar Translation Method* of the early 20th century focused on memorization of verb paradigms, grammar rules, and vocabulary. Exercises translate disconnected sentences from the FL into the mother tongue, and vice versa. Pronunciation practice is minimal (Mora, 2002). In the 1980s as communicative approaches became popular, teachers derided this "old-fashioned" method. However, many characteristics of this method have been central to FL teaching and are still valid today (Bowen, 2007a; Kennedy 2007).

The *Reading Method* was similar to the traditional Grammar/Translation method, except it emphasized direct translations of literary works as the highest priority. Grammar was taught only as necessary for reading comprehension. Teachers paid minimal attention to pronunciation or conversational skills. (Kennedy, 2007; Mora, 2002). The Total Physical Response Storytelling Method has characteristics derived from the Reading Method.

The Full Immersion Movement

During and after World War II there was a pressing need to train military personnel quickly and effectively in FL skills, especially speaking. Teachers began moving away from direct translation and grammar, and began speaking only the target language in the classroom. In the postwar years, the civilian version was called the *Audio-Lingual Approach*. It featured memorization of dialogues, listening and speaking drills, and emphasis on pronunciation. Skills were sequenced in the order of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Use of the mother tongue by the teacher was permitted, but discouraged among and by the students (Mora, 2002). Audio-lingualism was in vogue in the 1960s but died out in the 70s after Chomsky's famous attack on behaviorism in language learning (Bowen, 2007b).

The *Direct Method* also focused on speaking, and required that all instruction be conducted in the target language with NO translation. Teachers presented a narrative and then asked a series of questions in the FL. Advanced students read literature for comprehension, but they did not analyze them grammatically (Kennedy, 2007; Mora, 2002). Immersion programs today, especially at lower grades where the emphasis is on speaking, have roots in this method.

Content-Based Instruction was another full immersion method that became popular in the 1960s and is still used today, especially in bi-lingual elementary schools. Curricula are organized by topics or subjects (i.e. history, science), rather than by grammar or vocabulary (Bowden, 2007c; Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989; Kennedy, 2007). Teachers use cooperative learning strategies like information gathering, organizing, analyzing, inferring, predicting, and estimating (Curtain, 1995; Met, 1991). Supporters claim that CBI develops a wider range of discourse skills than does traditional language instruction, because students activate prior knowledge and then negotiate meaning (Curtain, 1995; Lightbrown & Spada, 1993; Met, 1991). Opponents claim that CBI is not functional in high school, where the academic content of other classes may not lend itself to culturally relevant FL discussion topics.

The Feel-Good Movement

FL teaching in the 1970s emphasized the importance of a positive learning environment and caring teachers. Methods encouraged more authentic discourse in real situations.

In *Suggestopedia*, the learning environment was relaxed, subdued, with low lighting and soft music. Students chose a name and character in the FL and imagined being that person. Students relaxed and listened while dialogues were presented accompanied by music.

Students later practiced dialogues during an "activation" phase (Kennedy, 2007). This method popularized the idea that students could create their own situational dialogues.

The Silent Way was based on the premise that the teacher should not speak, in order to encourage learners to produce as much language as possible on their own (Bowen, 2007d). This method introduced the idea of using objects to demonstrate meaning, which is considered essential today. It also introduced the idea of problem solving as a necessary for communication.

The Community Language Learning Method encouraged students to determine what is to be learned, with the role of the teacher as supporter and facilitator. The learner moved from a stage of total dependence on the teacher to autonomy, passing through five developmental stages along the way (Curran, 1976; Maley, 2007). This method introduced the notion that teacher attitude and classroom environments have significant impacts on learning.

The Communicative Movement

Until the 1980s, direct teaching of sound-symbols and grammatical rule systems of a FL was an integral part of most teaching methodologies. Then Krashen (1981) popularized the *Natural Communication* or *Whole Language Approach*, which is based on the theory that language acquisition occurs only when students receive comprehensible input. Students learn a language as a child would: by listening first, and then producing the language orally. After absorbing the teacher's demonstration using manipulatives, students use the language to express their own ideas, feelings, attitudes, desires and needs. Students do communication activities in pairs or groups, with little emphasis on form. The teacher's role is to facilitate, then to monitor, and then to provide feedback on the linguistic performance of the learners (Bowen, 2007d; Kennedy, 2007).

As a result of Krashen's publicity, many FL educators moved away from direct instruction. Now, teachers are mandated to use communicative approaches under the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (2007).   Proponents of his approach claim that this method works because students absorb language naturally and are not forced to learn grammatical structures out of context. Opponents claim that this approach is too teacher-centered at the outset, and students have difficulty communicating if they are not directly taught the grammatical structures to do so.

The *Functional-Notional Approach* came out of the whole language movement. It focused on communicating using five distinct functions of language: personal, interpersonal, directive, referential, and imaginative (Finocchiaro, 1983). Although this method was not widely used, teachers began encouraging students to read, write, and speak about topics using all functions.

The Lexical Approach developed many of the fundamental principles advanced by proponents of the Communicative Approach, but required teaching chunks of language in real contexts rather than lists of words. Activities include extensive listening and reading in the target language, comparisons between English and the FL (chunk by chunk, not word by word), summarizing, guessing meanings, noticing patterns, and using dictionaries (Lewis, 1993; Moudraia, 2001).

The Multi-Sensory Movement

In 1978, Dunn and Dunn proposed differentiating instruction for individual learners. In the decades that followed, methodologies focused on differentiated instruction based on learning styles, multi-sensory modalities, and multiple intelligences.

Total Physical Response (TPR) has been popular since the 1990s. It is based on the theory that the memory is enhanced through association with physical movement. It is closely associated to the Natural Approach, teaching FL like one would teach children, such as responding physically to commands, such as "Pick it up" and "Put it down". (Bowen, 2007e) Supporters of this method claim that TPR activities, when integrated with other activities, can be motivating and linguistically purposeful. The problems with this approach are short lessons, reliance on the command form, need for small class size for movement, and questionable relationship to real world activities.

Multiple Intelligence Methods have stemmed from Gardner's (1983, 1993) hypothesis that there are nine intellectual variables associated with human performance. These are: Verbal/Linguistic; Mathematical/Logical; Musical; Visual/Spatial; Body/Kinesthetic; Interpersonal; Intrapersonal; Naturalist and Existential. The theory is supported by the contention that the frontal cerebral cortex is made of thousands of modular units responsible for our conscious thinking, remembering and behaving (Gazzanaga, 1992). Class periods are designed around a particular concept, and then all students participate in multiple games and activities, so that students with a variety of intelligences can understand the same concept. The difficulties lie in the short duration of the lessons and the potential lack of connection to real world concepts.

Project Based Learning models stemmed from research by the Buck Institute in the 1990s. FL becomes meaningful as students conduct in-depth investigations of real-world topics and significant issues. Elements of a good project include: a question or issue that is rich, real and relevant to the students' lives; real world use of technology; student-directed learning; collaboration with peers; multi-disciplinary components; more than 3 weeks time

frame; and a specific outcome (BIE, 2007). Difficulties that teachers may encounter with the method are structuring group work, the long time period dedicated to a project, and lack of sufficient technology in some schools.

The Hybrid Movement

In the new millennium, FL methodologies have focused on the integration of various methods so that students use a multiple senses, intelligences, and technologies during class. Students are encouraged to communicate, but there is also an element of direct grammar and lexical instruction to give them a solid foundation in the basic tenets of the target language. Communicative activities, texts, and assessments try to have real-world applications.

Cognitive Methods of language teaching are based on meaningful acquisition of grammar structures followed by meaningful practice. In *Task-Based Learning* (TBL), activities reflect a real life problem or experience, while learners focus on meaning; they are free to use any language they want. Learners may find it difficult to come to terms with the apparent randomness of TBL, but if TBL is integrated with a systematic approach to grammar and lexis, the outcome can be a comprehensive approach that can be adapted to meet the needs of all learners (Bowen, 2007f).

The Total Physical Response Storytelling Method (TPRS) is becoming increasingly popular in high schools. TPRS is modeled after TPR, but includes short, funny stories to utilize and expand vocabulary. First, the teacher goes through the vocabulary and has the students perform a hand sign (TPR) as the teacher says the word. The teacher tells the story, retelling it several times but adding more description each time. The students work with a partner to retell the story and then compose their own stories. This method allows students to use the target language very quickly, using specific constructs. Drawbacks to this method are

that it is very repetitious, does not explicitly teach grammatical structures, and the initial introduction is heavily teacher centered (Gross, 2007).

The Focus-on-Form Approach is a middle ground between the traditional grammar approach and the communicative approach. It maintains that grammar as important, but heterogeneous; a Focus-On-Form pedagogy mixes explicit and implicit techniques depending on the grammar item and the communicative task (Blyth, 1998).

Inter-hemispheric Foreign Language Learning is a new method entirely based on brain research. Traditional FL learning, which focuses on learning vocabulary and grammar, mainly activates the left hemisphere. Inter-hemispheric learning, however, also stimulates the right hemisphere and enhances interaction between both hemispheres. The method uses speaking with rhythm and TPR, relaxation with mental visualization, partner conversation, traditional teaching using textbooks, writing sketches, and role-playing (Schiffler, 2002). As brain research becomes more publicized, FL teachers are beginning to design activities that use both sides of the brain.

Implications of these historical changes

After all these swings in FL teaching, researchers, teachers, agencies, and politicians still cannot agree on a single best way to teach a FL. No comparative study has consistently demonstrated the superiority of one particular method over another for all students, all teachers, and all settings. Although communicative activities are all the rage right now, research has failed to demonstrate that natural methods are more effective than any other method. Rather, studies indicate that multi-sensory, direct teaching of sound-symbols and grammatical rules is essential for LD and at-risk students in FL classes (Ganschow, Sparks, & Javorsky, 1998; McIntyre & Pickering, 1995). Understanding the FL research set forth in

the next sections can help FL teachers avoid following trends and instead choose the methods that best serve the needs of their particular students.

Research focused on cognitive variables

When trying to identify the reasons why some students have FL difficulties, psychologists researched cognitive variables.   The term "cognitive variables" refers to the mental processes by which a person acquires knowledge and understanding through <u>thoughts</u>, <u>experiences</u>, and <u>senses</u>.

Brain Function

Students who begin studying a FL in high school have a more difficult time, even if they are not LD or considered at risk. This is because research shows that a two year old has twice as many synapses or connections as an adult brain, and if a child does not learn the skills of a second language during that sensitive period, the synapses will be lost. After age 10, children have fixed their speech habits, and they are difficult to change or adapt to new sounds. However, new research shows that the amount of time spent studying a FL may be more influential on brain development than the age at which one begins to acquire it (Chugani, 1996; Clyne, 1983; Krashen, 1976, as cited in Kennedy 2006).

In order for high school beginners to overcome these deficiencies, Kennedy suggests using the natural approach outlined by Krashen (1981), which maintains that beginning FL learners should be taught a new language in the same manner that they acquired their first (by observing, listening, and understanding before speaking, reading, and writing). Emotion, experiences, and learning meaningful information strengthen useful connections and result in cortical pyramidal cell branching (Kennedy, 2006).

The findings of a number of studies on animals suggest that teachers can make a difference in brain development. "Recent findings indicate that the specialized functions of specific regions of the brain are not fixed at birth but are shaped by experience and learning" (Genesee, 2000, p.2). Brain studies also have implications for FL teachers. First, Genesee's (2002) findings suggest that learning styles may not be a matter of personal preference, but may actually be hardwired in the brain, and therefore cannot be ignored in curriculum planning. Second, effective teaching should include a focus on both parts and wholes (i.e. alphabet and vocabulary), because the brain naturally links local neural activity to circuits that are related to different experiential domains. Third, learning can proceed from simple to complex and vice versa, so skills shouldn't be taught in isolation (i.e. vocabulary should be embedded in real-world contexts). Fourth, students need time and practice to consolidate new skills and knowledge.

Foreign Language Aptitude

Traditional dictionary definitions say that aptitude is a natural tendency or inclination; an ability, capacity, or talent; a quickness to learn or understand. However, it is difficult to define and measure FL aptitude. Some researchers define operational FL learning aptitude as the ability to develop four aspects of communicative competence: grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. A commonly accepted definition is that language aptitude is based on a student's score on a diagnostic language aptitude test.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Carroll and Sapon conducted studies on FL aptitude. According to them, language-learning aptitude <u>does not</u> refer to whether or not an individual can or cannot learn a FL. Instead, it refers to the prediction of <u>how well</u> an individual can learn a FL in a given amount of time under given circumstances. The tests they created are the most

commonly used FL aptitude instrument for placing high school and college students in FL programs, selecting students for FL study, and determining if a FL waiver or course substitution would be applicable. (Carroll and Sapon, 2002). Second Language Testing, Inc. produces these tests, and they are available for purchase at http://www.2lti.com.

The Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) is based on the theory that students need four abilities to learn a FL. To test these abilities, the MLAT uses a "fake" FL and English grammar. First, the MLAT tests *phonemic coding ability*, the perception of distinct sounds, symbols associated with that sound, and the ability to retain that association. Second, it tests *grammatical sensitivity,* the ability to recognize the grammatical function of a word or phrase in a sentence without explicit training in grammar. Third, it tests *rote learning ability*, making associations between words and their meanings, and later applies the memory of the meanings to a FL situation. Fourth, it tests *inductive learning ability*, inferring rules governing the structure of language (Stansfield, 1989).

Pimsleur (2004) also conducted studies on FL aptitude and published his own aptitude test, the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB). Pimsleur's test was directed at students in grades 7-12, so he included GPA as an indication of achievement as well as motivation in his factors. In addition, a verbal ability factor indicated how well a student would be able to handle the mechanics of learning a language, and an auditory factor indicated how well a student would be able to listen to and produce phrases in a FL.

When determining if a student is having difficulties in a FL class, Sparks (2006) cautions against relying entirely on FL aptitude tests. He also cautions that the MLAT should not be compared to a student's IQ score. A LD is usually determined if there is a discrepancy between his or her potential (IQ) compared to his or her success in academic

classes; however, a discrepancy does not necessarily indicate a LD because IQ and MLAT scores are measuring aptitude-aptitude, not aptitude-achievement. Second, a high IQ score but low MLAT score could be a reflection of the student's poor native language learning skills (reading, writing, math), and are not necessarily indicative of a LD either. Third, even if a student does score low on the MLAT, Sparks claims that it is inappropriate to identify students as being unable to pass FL courses or become proficient in a FL, because there is no empirical evidence to show that these students cannot pass a FL course. Fourth, the MLAT was created over 50 years ago, and still has not been completely updated, so Sparks claims the appropriateness of the test's norms is debatable.

In the new millennium, a term indicating a new type of disability has appeared in both the learning disabilities and FL literature, called the Foreign Language Learning Disability (FLLD). Based on the idea that students could be classified as LD due to low language aptitude, this term is under hot debate. Students are required to have a diagnosis of LD to petition for course substitutions, so some are trying to get this classification in order to waive out of taking FL classes.

The FLLD debate has raised some interesting ethical issues. On one hand, some researchers, educators, and students, question whether is it ethical to use the MLAT to determine whether a FLLD exists (and a course requirement waiver should be granted) if it is the only diagnostic tool used. Some also question whether the MLAT should be used at all, because a student trying to get out of taking a FL class could intentionally fail the test. On the other hand, others claim students should not be forced to take and fail a FL course one or more times before waivers are granted; they say the MLAT should be used as a diagnostic

tool for granting course waivers before students have to go through a humiliating experience.

(Reed and Stansfield, 2002)

Many researchers (Gajar, Reer, Hu, Reed, Stansfield, as cited in Sparks, 2006) defend the

concept of a FLLD. Reed and Stansfield (2002) feel that the notion of FLLD is defensible:

> Clearly the case has been made that there is a special cognitive basis to the language aptitude construct, and therefore a special foreign language learning disability almost certainly does exist….While there are certainly questions about the validity of using a language aptitude test (for determining a FLLD), so too are there serious doubts about omitting such a measure. Thus there is clear need for related research and for dissemination of the results (p. 7).

However, Sparks, Ganschow, and their colleagues have discontinued the use of the

term FLLD. "Professionals, parents, and legal advocates seem to have assumed

automatically that students classified as LD inevitably will have problems learning a FL, and

others assume that students with foreign language learning problems must have a LD"

(Sparks, 2006, p.546). Their studies have shown that these assumptions have no foundation.

First, they showed that anyone could have FL problems, not just those diagnosed as

LD. "Studies have shown consistently that students classified as having LD enrolled in FL

courses do not exhibit cognitive and academic achievement differences (e.g., in reading,

writing, vocabulary, spelling) when compared to poor FL learners not classified as having

LD" (Sparks, 2006, p. 546). Instead, they found that large numbers of at-risk students had

great FL difficulties and/or were failing courses, even though they were not diagnosed as LD.

(Sparks, Philips, Ganschow, Javorsky, 1999).

Second, they claimed that when non-LD students start exhibiting FL difficulties, they

should not automatically be classified as FLLD. Rather, they may be exhibiting problems

resulting from native language deficiencies, and should be evaluated and supported in those

areas. Sparks (2006) maintains that even if a student scores low on a FL aptitude test that

does not mean that he or she couldn't pass a FL course, if he or she is offered English support simultaneously. Even certain discrepancies should not be considered evidence of a FLLD, such as a high IQ with low GPA, a high IQ score but low MLAT score, or high grades in other classes but a low grade in FL classes.

Third, they showed that students who are *already* classified as LD may not ever develop FL problems. For example, studies found that there was no IQ difference between LD students who were not able to pass a FL course and those who were able to pass. In fact, many LD students passed FL courses, some with little or no difficulty (Sparks, 2006).

Therefore, Sparks and colleagues suggest that counselors should not allow students to waiver out of taking a FL class based on a so-called FLLD. Students with FL problems who are not diagnosed as LD should be tested for native language deficiencies instead. Students who are already diagnosed with a LD should enroll in and attempt to complete FL courses (but they should be encouraged to make use of modifications if they qualify). Overall, students with below average phonological-orthographic processing skills in English may find it difficult, but not impossible, to pass a beginning FL class (Sparks, Philips, Ganschow, & Javorsky, 1999). However, Downey (1992) cautions that students who exhibit severe deficits in vocabulary, syntax, and memory, in addition to phonological processing problems will probably not be successful beyond the second semester of FL in spite of modifications.

Native Language Research

Cummins (1979) theorized that bilingualism could <u>only</u> be achieved on the basis of adequately developed first language skills. The "Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis" proposed that a learner's competence in a second language is partly dependent on the level of competence already achieved in the first language.

Based on Cummins' early research, Ganschow, Sparks and Javorsky (1998) proposed the "Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis" (LCDH), which said that skills in a student's native language provide the foundation for FL learning. If students exhibit deficiencies in one, several, or all language components, they will have FL difficulties. Their research has implications not only for students with a specific LD, but also provides an explanation for the low performance of at-risk students, many of whom have low reading and writing skills in their native language.

To prove their hypothesis, Ganschow, Sparks and their colleagues conducted a series of studies on college and high school students who were low risk, high-risk, and LD students. They measured reading, writing, spelling, and vocabulary skills in English, as well as scores on the MLAT. Results showed that a student's FL aptitude score on the MLAT is generally commensurate with his or her native language achievement skills. Successful FL students had much stronger skills in word recognition and sequencing in their native language than unsuccessful students. (However, the successful students did not necessarily have better comprehension of meanings.) In fact, Ganschow and Sparks showed that LD students and high-risk students with no LD both have similar native language and FL aptitude difficulties (Ganschow & Sparks, 1991; Sparks, Ganschow, et al., 1992; Sparks, 2006).

Specifically applicable to my interest in how students perform in beginning Spanish classes were two studies that Sparks and his colleagues conducted to determine the best predictors of grades in first year FL classes. In both studies, students' eighth grade English grade and their score on the MLAT were the best predictors of FL success (Sparks, Ganschow, and Patton, 1995).

Other researchers have also found strong connections between native language achievement and FL proficiency. Dufva and Voeten (1999) found that one way to promote FL learning is diagnosing native language deficiencies early. Gelderner (et. al, 2007) found evidence to support a transfer hypothesis, which predicts that a student's native language reading comprehension has a strong effect on his/her reading comprehension in the FL. Skehan (1986) found that the MLAT indeed gives the most accurate prediction of FL aptitude, especially a strong foundation in English structure and syntax. Outside the classroom, Skehan also found a strong relationship between family background (i.e. parents' education, literacy in the home, written language ability) and FL aptitude.

As the U.S. Hispanic population has increased, the focus of language research has shifted away from FL classes towards English Language Development programs, but the results of those studies are equally valuable for teachers of FL. Olshtain (1990) found that academic proficiency in the first language and attitude about learning both contributed to success in learning English. A similar study was conducted on the native language proficiency of 4,700 Spanish-speaking, limited-English-proficient (LEP) students in grades K-7. Their success rates in acquiring English proficiency in 4 years found that English acquisition is strongly related to native-language proficiency (Stern and Fischer, 1989). Overall, all of the current research supports the notion that native language abilities weigh significantly in a student's potential to learn a second language.

Specific native language problems in FL classes

Language problems may present themselves at any level of language. Levels are shown here like an upside-down pyramid, from smallest to largest chucks of language. However, proficiency in these areas does not occur rigidly from bottom to top.

Thinking about language (Meta-linguistics)
Language in chunks (Discourse)
Words put in sentences (Syntax)
Word Meanings (Semantics)
Word Bits (Morphemes)
Sounds (Phonemes)

Sounds in words (Phonemes)

Sounds within words comprise the most microscopic level of language. Words consist of arbitrary sounds called phonemes bound together in a variety of blends. English has by far the most number of phonemes, excluding tonal Chinese languages. Most researchers agree that there are around 44 phonemes in English; by contrast, Spanish has only 28 phonemes (Tritton, 1991).

Students with reduced *phonological awareness* have difficulty detecting differences in language sounds. Students with reduced *phonemic awareness* have difficulty understanding that words consist of individual language sounds and have problems with decoding. There is data to suggest that at least 20 percent of the children in the U.S. have difficulty with these processes. Often identified under the general term "dyslexic," these children are at high risk for delays in reading, writing, and spelling. Levine (2002) warns that they may also have trouble with attention controls, perhaps due to mental exhaustion from trying to constantly guess at meanings.

FL teachers should explicitly teach phonology (how to recognize phonemes, decode words, and encode) in the students' native language before FL instruction begins. They

should be teaching the sound system of the target language through visual, kinesthetic, and tactile input and practice (Sparks, Ganschow, & Javorsky, 1998).

To develop overall phonetic awareness in Spanish, Hodge (1998) suggests that teachers should: introduce the Spanish alphabet, practice the relationship between the sounds and letters, develop phonological and phonemic awareness of every sound blend, vowel, and diphthong, show the spelling rules (i.e. ca-co-cu-que-qui spellings for the hard "c" sound), encourage students to sound out words, and teach syllabication rules. Teachers should also present families of sounds (for example, in Spanish, words ending "-ción"), teach rhymes that strengthen sound appreciation, and use pictures to reinforce word meanings.

Students having difficulty spelling should write vowels in red pen and consonants in black pen, which helps them see letters in their heads after they hear them. Word processing programs with FL spell-check features can provide accommodations in spelling and writing. Additionally, dyslexic students who have difficulty writing using a pen and paper may find that when they type, they remember how to spell words based on the kinesthetic sequence of their fingers (Hodge, 1998; Levine, 2002; Wanderman, 1997).

Word Bits (Morphemes)

Morphemes are word bits that can be a whole word or parts of a word, such as prefixes, word roots, suffixes, and parts of compound words. Studies have shown that students with a strong sense of the meanings of within words can race ahead in amassing vocabulary because they can break down many new words and understand their meaning based on their previous understanding of the morphemes. Understanding word bits can also give clues that aid in accurate spelling. Students who are morphologically unaware, however, are more likely to rely on rote memory for spelling. Levine (2002) claims that children need to be educated

explicitly about morphemes and given exercises to make them consciously aware of how morphemes work in words. By extension, explanations of Latin root meanings, Latin prefixes and suffixes, and cognate words would benefit these students in FL classes.

Word Meanings (Semantics)

Semantics is the knowledge or study of word meanings, which in turn provide access to critical knowledge. Successful students understand shades of meanings, and are adept at comparing words to other words, comparing words that are opposites, comparing words that are similar but not quite the same, and comparing synonyms (Levine, 2002).

In high school, there is a deluge of new terminologies that students are expected to learn in all classes, so students who have difficulty with semantics may begin to fall behind. Teachers should be alert for students who consistently fail vocabulary tests and resist attempts to study vocabulary words. Teachers should teach students to learn new words by comparing new terms to words they already know. Crossword puzzles, word games, semantic maps, and graphic organizers can help improve comprehension (Levine, 2002).

Words in Sentences (Syntax)

Syntax refers to the effects of word order on meaning. Some students are comfortable with language laws or grammar rules, while others can never quite grasp the reasons behind it or how to use it correctly. Students who find grammar rules confusing may fumble and show signs of frustration when they need to compose thoughts in a correct sentence format. They may use a phrase or single word instead of a complete sentence. When sentences are used, grammatical errors abound, tenses are wrong, there is poor agreement between subject and verb, and words are used in the wrong order (Levine, 2002).   FL teachers should be alert for students who continually respond with a single word when asked to speak or write a

complete sentence. In a beginning FL class, these students may have difficulty with understanding the connections between pronouns and verb conjugations, irregular verb conjugations, and noun/adjective agreement. To help improve comprehension of an entire sentence, FL teachers should include jokes, puns, riddles, and absurdities, and explain them. Ganschow, Sparks, and Javorsky (1998) found that both students identified as LD and at-risk students have difficulty with syntax, so explaining specific grammatical and syntactical rules in English is essential in FL classes.

Language in Chunks (Discourse)

Discourse takes in all language that goes beyond the boundaries of sentences; it incorporates all the other language levels. Discourse could take the form of paragraphs, textbook passages, articles, novels, encyclopedias, and more. Understanding discourse requires active working memory as well as language capacity. Successful students are able to present information that goes beyond simple phrases and sentences while speaking or writing; they are able to organize their thoughts with introductions, topic sentences, sequencing, and conclusions.

Students having problems with discourse may experience difficulties in classes with lots of teacher talking (like Content Based Instruction) and story reading (like TPRS). Behaviors that may appear to be related to attention deficit disorders may actually be a result of language deficits; students may be tuning out because the language is so hard for them to understand. In these cases, ADD/ADHD drugs may improve behavior for a while, but will not solve the underlying problem. "The drug is like a Band-Aid; it covers up the underlying language problem partially and often temporarily," claims Levine (2002, p.124).

These students might be able to better demonstrate knowledge in a FL class with PBL

assessments, because discourse is most readily developed in areas of high personal interest

(Levine, 2002). Also, studies show that ADHD/ADD learners, having weak auditory skills,

should view FL videos with captioning or listen to audiotapes with scripts. Scripts and

captions are also beneficial for dyslexic learners to strengthen reading comprehension

(Garza, 1991, as cited in Hodge, 1998).

Thinking About Language (Meta-linguistics)

The term meta-linguistic awareness refers to a person's ability to not just understand and

communicate, but also to be able to reflect on language and how it works. Successful

students are insightful with regard to the inner workings of the language system. These

students are usually very successful in FL classes. Levine (2002) claims that there is no

isolated meta-linguistic dysfunction, but rather dysfunctions at one or more other language

levels that cause problems in language thinking.

"Concrete" vs. "Abstract" language

Teachers should be alert for differences in students' abilities to handle concrete versus

abstract language. Concrete language has meaning that comes directly from our senses

(things we can picture, feel, smell, or hear), whereas abstract language cannot be deciphered

by the senses and resists visualization. Some students who are adept at using concrete

language function well in classes that use visual cues (like TPR, TPRS, Direct Method, or

Natural Approach). However, those same students may experience difficulties in classes that

focus on abstract language, such as talking about scientific theory in a Content-Based FL

class. For students who are experiencing problems with mounting levels of abstract

terminology in those type of FL classes, students should create a personal dictionary of tough

abstract terms, such as "irony", "symbolism," etc. (Levine, 2002).

"Basic" vs. "Higher" language

Similarly, students who pass introductory language classes may have difficulty with higher order language as topics become more complex. Generally, students with higher language capacities in their native language have an easier time learning a FL, even at the introductory levels (Levine, 2002). Basic language usage forms the basis for many introductory FL classes, with an emphasis on practical and direct communication (i.e. using colors, dates, weather, food, etc.). However, as topics become more complex, teachers should be aware of students having difficulty with higher language. This may be observed when communication is more abstract and symbolic, more technical, more densely packed with information, more inferential, more ambiguous, and more opinionated (i.e. historical topics, cultural topics, poetry and literature).

Levine (2002) suggests that children who are exhibiting difficulties with higher language capacities need to keep reading and writing actively in their native language. They need opportunities to talk about intellectual issues at length, read and discuss newspapers and magazines, and minimize or eliminate non-verbal activities like television and computer games. FL teachers should encourage these students to write and write in the FL as much as possible, but minimize FL videos or Internet grammar and vocabulary practices.

"Receptive" vs. "Expressive" Language

Receptive language comprises a child's *understanding* of communication (spoken or written). *Expressive language* is language *production*, the means of translating thoughts into words, sentences, and extended messages (Levine, 2002). In their native language, some students speak better than they understand, and others understand better than they speak. The same strengths and weaknesses carry over when they begin to study a FL.

Students who have trouble with expressive language often appear to be absorbing the material, but they are not contributing to class discussions. Teachers of full-immersion or communicative style classes should alert students a day in advance regarding the topic, so they can go home and think about how they want to respond (Levine, 2002). These students could also benefit from teachers allowing them to prepare and teach a lesson, or prepare memorized dialogues. This type of student could be more successful in a class that relied on project assessments, and classes that help develop storytelling abilities through memorized dialogues, like the TPRS.

Conversely, students who are better at talking than they are at understanding need to become more accurate listeners. They need to be encouraged to read and engage in other language-soaked experiences in their native language. Levine (2002) suggests they listen to native language stories on tape/CD. He also suggests that adolescents should have limits placed on TV watching, which, in excess, may aggravate a dysfunction of receptive language by making the child too dependent on verbal cues for meaning. In FL classes, receptively challenged students may have difficulties in classes that rely heavily on listening exercises and language labs (Audio-Lingual method, Reading Method). These students should supplement class activities by practicing their listening skills at home, such as listening to music in the FL.

Alternative FL methodologies for language deficiencies

The "Orton-Gillingham Method" was found to be successful in teaching English to students who have difficulties with phonology and syntax. Ganschow, Sparks, and Javorsky (1998) asked two teachers who had used the method to adapt it for teaching Spanish to students with FL difficulties. The teachers used a structured, multi-sensory approach to

"cracking" the language code. Students simultaneously heard, saw, and wrote

sounds/symbols and were directly taught rules for word endings, word order, subject-verb

agreement, and declensions. The teachers used careful sequencing of materials, controlled

pacing, board drills, flashcards, and integration of reading, spelling and writing.

Schneider (1996) used the Orton-Gillingham principles and Sparks' and Ganschow's

research to develop her own teaching methodology for beginning students of German. She

uses "multi-sensory, structured, meta-cognitive language instruction" (MSML) to address at-

risk students' weaknesses in recognizing linguistic rules and structure patterns. With each

new unit, the students proceed through three steps: phonology/orthography training (using

drill cards to listen to and pronounce phonemes); grammar training (using colored and white

cards to practice inflectional rules, sentence structure patterns, and tenses); and

vocabulary/morphology training (making vocabulary cards to categorize vocabulary into

systematic chunks). Her methods seem applicable in any other beginning level FL class.

After several years of applying those following multi-sensory, direct instruction

approaches in FL classes, Sparks, Ganschow, and Javorsky (1998) conducted follow-up

studies to determine their effectiveness. The findings of four studies indicate that direct

teaching of the sound-symbol system of the FL significantly improves both the FL aptitude

on the MLAT and the native language sound-symbol performance of at-risk learners. This

method is also effective in helping at-risk learners become as proficient as low-risk FL

students in reading, writing, spelling, and listening to a FL after two years of study.

Learning Style Differences

Based on the concept that all people process, store, and recall information in complex

and different ways, the idea of individualized "learning styles" originated in the 1970s and

has gained popularity in recent years. Nearly all researchers agree that learning styles do exist, but they examine them from different perspectives and use a multitude of definitions. The categories of learning styles are by no means comprehensive however, because not only are they interdependent of each other, no finite number of dimensions could ever encompass the totality of individual student differences. Still, the majority of teachers believe that it is appropriate to take learning styles into account and that tailoring instruction to individual styles enables students to learn more easily and effectively (Stahl, 1999).

> In order to enable the most learners possible to learn as much as they can, we need to give them…the opportunity to learn in their preferred styles, rather than always outside of them, which can happen in the interests of keeping classrooms paced to the majority or to a standard curriculum. This in no way excludes good teachers and well-constructed syllabi; in fact, they are even more important than ever for the majority of learners. It is expert teachers with flexible but clear syllabi who can most systematically provide for the individual differences among their students (Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003, p.324).

The discussion around learning styles has developed around several models. These models assume that all people process information in different ways. While not specifically addressing LD students or at-risk students, these models claim that students who experience problems in any class may simply need to be taught the material in differentiated ways.

The most common models are multi-modality models (originally presented by Dunn and Dunn, 1978), multi-intelligence models (Gardner, 1983), and experiential learning model (Kolb, 2000). Sometimes personality types and attitudes are also intertwined and referred to as "learning styles" (such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and the DISC assessment); however, since they do not address cognitive processing, they are reviewed in the section on affective variables.

The multi-modality model (now referred to as the Neuro-linguistic Programming Model), claims that information is processed and retained through the senses. It asserts that

for most circumstances and most people, three of the five senses dominate in mental processing: visual thoughts (sight, mental imagery, spatial awareness); auditory thoughts (sound, speech, dialog, white noise); kinesthetic sense (bodily movement, temperature, pressure, and emotion). Within the context of FL classes, teachers present one concept in a variety of ways within a class period (i.e. to teach about foods, the students see them, touch them, make a list, say the words, etc).

Dunn and Dunn (1978) found that on average 40% of U.S. school children are visual learners, 20-30% are auditory learners, and 30-40% learn using a combination of senses (tactile/kinesthetic, visual/tactile, visual/auditory, etc.). That means that most people extract and retain more information from visual presentations than from written or spoken prose; however, most language instruction is verbal, involving predominantly lectures, conversation practices, and listening CDs. Given the preference of most students for visual input, one would expect auditory presentations in particular to be unpopular, an expectation borne out in research cited by Moody (1988, as cited in Felder, 1995), when he showed that the overwhelming majority of surveyed community college students ranked audiotapes at or near the bottom of preferred instructional modes.

> Certainly visual learners learn better if they see *and* hear words in the target language, but so do auditory learners: presenting the same material in different ways invariably has a reinforcing effect on retention. The challenge to language instructors is to devise ways of augmenting their verbal classroom presentation with non-verbal visual material—for example, showing photographs, drawings, sketches, and cartoons to reinforce presentation of vocabulary words, and using films, videotapes, and dramatizations to illustrate lessons in dialogue and pronunciation (Felder, 2005, p. 24).

Similarly, the Multiple Intelligences model argues that intelligence, as it is traditionally defined, does not adequately encompass the wide variety of abilities humans display. Gardner (1983, 1993) originally identified seven core intelligences: linguistic, logical-

mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal. In 1999 he added an eighth, the naturalistic intelligence, and indicated that investigation continues on whether there is an existential intelligence. He suggests that each individual manifests varying levels of different intelligences, and thus each person has a unique cognitive profile. The theory suggests that schools should offer individual-centered education, with curricula tailored to the needs of each child. Christison states,

> Gardner suggests that everyone has the capacity to develop all seven intelligences to a reasonably high level. This is encouraging for language educators. Success in helping our second language learners develop their intelligences--including linguistic intelligence--is a combination of the right environmental influences and quality instruction. Both of these are factors we can help control (1995, sect. *Key Points for Language Teachers and Students*)

Language teachers are encouraged under the National Framework for Foreign Language Teaching to employ multi-intelligence models because there are many facets to language, such as listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Lessons focusing on these facets can spark student attention and activate a variety of intelligences. "Because no intelligence exists by itself, language learning activities may be successful because they actively encourage the use of several intelligences," explains Christison (1995). For example, Kennedy (2008) outlines activities for F L classes:

- Activities that strengthen the *verbal* intelligence include: listening exercises; lectures; vocabulary lists; word games; mnemonic devices; metaphors and similes; summarizing; dialogs; grammar drills; oral presentations; reports; discussions; debates; reading and/or story telling (TPRS); writing; and games like Concentration, I Spy, Charades, Password, Bingo, Jeopardy, Scrabble, Debate, and Monopoly.

- Activities that strengthen the *mathematical-logical* intelligence include: word ordering; categorizing; sequencing; outlining; making grammar charts; number

activities; logic games; problem-solving; creating functional situations; hypothesizing; critical thinking; gap activities; computer games; examining statistics, and comparing/contrasting cultures.

- Activities that strengthen the *visual-spatial intelligence* are: craft and art projects; illustrating concepts; mind mapping; graphic organizers; sequence charts; puzzles; visuals (video, photos, art); video/slide projects (computer); 3D projects or models; reading/creating maps and interpreting directions.

- Activities that strengthen the *bodily-kinesthetic* intelligence are: manipulatives; flashcards; dance; acting out an event (TPR); field trips; scavenger hunts; dialogues; and movement games like board races; vocabulary fly swatters, and Simon Says.

- Activities that strengthen the *musical-rhythmic* intelligence are: listening to and/or singing songs; practicing grammar in rhythm; writing lyrics to illustrate a concept; linking familiar tunes with concepts; creating jingles to summarize concepts; playing cultural instruments.

- Activities that strengthen the *interpersonal intelligence* are: paired conversation; board games; interactive software programs; surveys and polls; letter writing/pen pals; team problem solving; jigsaw expert teams; group mind mapping and webbing; group brainstorming; peer teaching; partner or mentor interviews; and group projects.

- Activities that strengthen the *intrapersonal intelligence* are: independent study; one-on-one help; goal setting; self-monitoring; developing a family history; personalized assessment; researching own interests; journaling; learning logs; and personal reflective essays.

- Activities that strengthen *naturalist intelligence* are: describing nature; telling about traveling; identifying surroundings; experiments; photo essays; and field trips.

A third model, the Kolb Learning Styles Model and Experiential Learning Theory, has also existed for nearly forty years. Based on the theories of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget, this holistic model attempts to explain how individual learning styles fit into a continuous learning cycle. The Kolb (2000) model sets out four distinct learning styles (or preferences), which are based on a four-stage learning cycle. Ideally, the learner 'touches all the bases', (i.e., a cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting) as he moves through the cycle.

Kolb's model functions on two levels. There are four-types of learning *styles*: *diverging* (feeling and watching), *assimilating* (watching and thinking), *converging* (doing and thinking), and *accommodating* (doing and feeling). People may be on a spectrum of these styles, as they move through their learning *cycle*. The continuous learning cycle consists of four phases: *concrete experience*, *reflective observation*, *abstract conceptualization*, and *active experimentation*.

> The more opportunities students have to both participate and reflect in class, the better they will learn new material and the longer they are likely to retain it (KoIb, 1984; McCarthy 1987). Language classes in which all students are relegated to passive roles, listening to and observing the instructor and taking notes, do little to promote learning for either *active* or *reflective* learners. Language classes should therefore include a variety of active learning experiences, such as conversations, enactment of dialogues and mini-dramas, and team competitions, and reflective experiences, such as brief writing exercises and question formulation exercises (Felder, 1995, p.24).

Kolb developed a learning styles test called the Learning Styles Inventory. It can be purchased from Experiential Learning Systems, Inc. at http://www.learningfromexperience.com. It is the most common assessment in studies on FL learning and teaching, and the most recommended by researchers for use in the classroom.

With regard to students experiencing FL difficulties, Castro and Peck (2005) attempted to determine if learning styles are different between LD and non-LD students in FL classes. They administered the Kolb Learning Styles inventory to two groups of students: (a) students in regular FL classes at a major university and (b) LD students or those experiencing FL difficulties who were enrolled in a modified FL program at the same university. Results of the learning styles test revealed a distinction in learning styles between students in regular (non–LD) and modified (LD) classes. Researchers concluded that learning styles of LD versus non-LD are different. Therefore, they must play a role in the FL classroom if teachers really want to address the needs of LD students.

Castro (2006) recognizes that any student, not just LD students, may have difficulties with FL when they are not aware of their own learning styles and don't know the best strategies to use. To help all students identify their learning styles, Castro and Peck (2005) recommend administering the Kolb learning styles self-assessment in all classrooms:

> By allowing students to have access to their own way of learning and helping them to find pathways to expand their own learning modalities, we are providing them with the opportunity to play an active role in the process (Castro, 2006, p.530).

Despite the popularity of learning styles models over the last 20 years, they have been widely criticized in both psychology and education literature, not just in relation to FL teaching, but also in all content areas. Wide scientific research on in the 1980s showed that despite their popularity, learning styles self-assessment instruments were very unreliable in determining students' learning styles. Furthermore, a meta-analysis synthesized data from 39 studies (about 3,100 subjects), and found that modality instruction was shown to be one of the most inefficient methods for LD students. (Kavale, 1999). Similarly, the multiple intelligence theory has also been widely criticized (Stahl, 1999). The most common

criticisms argue that Gardner's theory is based on his own intuition rather than empirical data, that the intelligences are just other names for talents or personality types, that there are serious issues with reliability based on self-assessments, and there is a risk of excusing or discouraging students in areas in which they are weak.

Sparks (2006) illustrates various problems with learning styles models in FL classes. First, he cautions against relying entirely upon self-assessment tests as a measurement of learning styles; he points out the need to improve their validity and reliability, as well as the need to develop a battery of tests to accumulate enough information to make reasonable predictions about the most effective ways to teach students. Secondly, he claims that students' FL *aptitude* should not be confused with a preferred *style* of learning. Third, he points to overwhelming empirical evidence since the 1970s which has shown that learning styles models have a host of conceptual and empirical problems and that matching students' preferred styles with a compatible teaching method does not improve student achievement.

Furthermore, students who have a different learning style than the teacher may have difficulty absorbing the material. Teachers often present information in the way they feel most comfortable, but their styles might not fit with all students' styles:

> And just as students vary, so do teachers: in motivation, in overall aptitude, in self-efficacy as teachers, in teaching/learning style, and in preferred strategies. Self-knowledge can be as important for teachers as it is for students. A case in point is the teacher, who has worked comfortably for years teaching grammar to the students early in the program, and is suddenly faced with a strongly inductive student, who feels that the teacher is getting into his or her learning space by teaching grammar. Sometimes it helps for the teacher to understand how a genuine desire to help can become interference for a learner whose approach to learning differs from the teacher's preferences (Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003, p.324).

Therefore, many researchers suggest that teachers take their own learning styles assessment, to heighten their awareness of how their own style may affect their teaching. In

situations where students are experiencing FL difficulties, teachers may be required to use instructional methods valuable to students but not necessarily appealing or intellectually rewarding to the instructors themselves (Sadler, Plovnick, and Snope (1978, as cited in Kolb, 2005). Concerning whether teachers are capable of learning to teach in ways that are incongruous with their own learning styles, Kosower and Berman argue that "because we all engage in all of the strategies to some degree, it seems to be a matter more of willingness to learn rather than ability" (1996, p.217, as cited in Kolb, 2005).

Willingham (2005) recommends that instead trying to focus on students' preferred *learning* styles, teachers should try to find the best style for each specific type of *content*. Willingham claims that certain modalities (i.e. auditory, visual, kinesthetic methods) are better for retaining certain types of FL content. Therefore, content doesn't need to be individualized; it should be taught in such a way that all students could retain the material.

Castro (2006) counters that while there may be best ways to teach certain content, students in beginning FL classes may not know enough strategies to fully grasp the content if the style/modality the teacher uses does not specifically match their individual learning style. She concludes that LD students can be successful in FL classes if special attention is given to learning modalities; even if learning styles are not matched exactly, teachers should still use a wide variety of teaching techniques in a full inclusion classroom.

<center>Research Focused on Affective Variables</center>

Social psychologists studied affective variables for Fl difficulties.   The term "affective variables" refers to the emotional processes by which a person acquires knowledge through moods, feelings, and attitudes. Oxford (1994) notes:

> Researchers must re-conceptualize L2 learning strategies to include the social and affective sides of learning along with the more intellectual sides. The L2 learner is not

just a cognitive and meta-cognitive machine but rather, a whole person. In strategy training, teachers should help students develop affective and social strategies, as well as intellectually related strategies, based on their individual learning styles, current strategy use, and specific goals (p.3).

Personality

Research on personality types in FL has been based on a few models. The most widely mentioned model is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MTBI), based on Carl Jung's typology of characteristics: *extroversion-introversion*, *sensing-intuition*, *thinking-feeling*, and *judging-perceiving*. Versions of the MTBI self-test are available for free online at many websites, but the original copyrighted test may be purchased at http://www.mtbicomplete.com.

Extroverts are energized through personal interactions, whereas *introverts* are energized by solitary activities. *Sensors* are practical, factual, and need data; whereas *intuitors* look for the big picture, are aware of relationships, and notice possibilities. *Thinkers* make decisions on the basis of analysis and objectivity; whereas *feelers* make decisions on the basis of interactions, values, and feelings. *Judgers* look for closure and organization; whereas *perceivers* want to keep their options open and are not concerned with structure. According to MBTI theory, every person is a combination of these dimensions.

Ehrman and Oxford (1990) studied learning strategies and teaching approaches preferred by personality types in an intensive language program. They found that it is important for FL teachers to choose lessons that hold interest and meaning for *thinkers* and *feelers*. *Perceivers* may be more successful at FL learning with project-based learning, because their lack of need for closure helps them search for deeper meanings. *Intuitors* (who typically represent 40% of the class) prefer teaching approaches that are more complex and varied. If there is too much drill and memorization, intuitors may become bored and their performance may decline. On the other hand, *sensors* are better suited for classes based on vocabulary

and grammar. They need explicit drills, practical class material, and highly structured classes with clear goals.

> Strongly intuitive language instructors may tend to move too quickly through the basic vocabulary and rules of grammar in their eagerness to get to "the more interesting material"—grammatical complexities, nuances of translation, linguistic concepts, and cultural considerations. While the intuitive students may enjoy these topics, overemphasizing such material may result in insufficient grounding in the building blocks of the language. The sensors, in particular, may then start to fall behind and do poorly on homework and tests (Felder, 1995, p.23).

Another commonly used personality predictor is DiSC theory. DiSC is an acronym for the four "primary emotions" of personality and behavior. Identified in 1928, these are Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness. The test publishing company (www.yokainc.com) claims that the test is 98% accurate, and over 50 million people have been involved with the DISC personality system.

Jackson (2005) has recently proposed a neuropsychological model of learning in personality Known as the Learning Styles Profiler, the model argues that "sensation seeking" provides a core biological drive of curiosity, learning and exploration. A high drive to explore leads to dysfunctional learning consequences unless cognitions such as goal orientation and emotional intelligence re-express it in more complex ways to achieve more complex and functional outcomes such as high work performance. Evidence for this model is allegedly impressive but unverified by independent research.

Self-perception

Ganschow, Sparks and Javorsky (1998) and their colleagues found that students' self-perception of how they thought they could perform in a class was critical to their success in high school and college. High risk, LD, and non-LD students all expressed equally positive attitudes about wanting to learn a foreign language. However, students diagnosed as LD

perceived themselves as less capable and possessing fewer skills to master the oral and written language requirements and content of FL courses.   Low-risk high school students reported higher estimated FL grades and expressed more positive attitudes about FL than the high-risk and LD groups.

Dornyei (1994) noted that student attributions about past failures are particularly significant in FL classes, where L2 learning failure is very common. Learned helplessness refers to a resigned, pessimistic state that develops when a student wants to succeed but feels that success is impossible.   Once established, this state is very difficult to reverse. Conversely, once a strong sense of efficacy is developed through positive reinforcement from peers, teachers, and parents, a small failure may not have such a big impact.

Oxford and Nyikos (1989) studied the association between students' self-perception and their strategy choices. From a large university sample, they found that students who had a high self-perception of their ability to learn FL made better use of a variety of learning strategies in the areas of listening, reading, and speaking, but not writing. Learners with lower self-perception were able to improve their ability if they trained themselves through external suggestion or conscious effort to access and use strategies that they preferred less.

Similarly, a qualitative study by the National Capital Research Center (2000) investigated the relationship of language learning strategies use and self-efficacy of beginning level high-school students who were learning a variety of foreign languages. The report suggests that teachers should promote strategies use in the classroom as a way of increasing students' self-confidence. They recommend that (1) learning strategies should be taught explicitly in a methodological, progressive fashion; (2) strategy use should be considered part of the assessment process; (3) teachers should consider using a framework that incorporates

learning strategies into lesson design and instruction; (4) the issue of motivation should be addressed from the first day on class; (5) students should be involved in the process of assessing their work.

A qualitative study based on a small group of selected high school students in England found that a strong sense of self-efficacy is developed when students are focused on improving their own performance, rather than on doing better than their peers. The report suggests that teachers should direct students to establish their own learning goals based on what they hope to achieve in the course (not examinations). Then, learners need to be shown that some of the problems they experience can be overcome by using strategies effectively. After the modeling of selected strategies, learners need to try them out and evaluate their success so that they perceive a direct link between the strategies they used and the learning outcome (Graham, 2006).

Motivation

The last four decades have seen a considerable amount of research investigating the nature and role of motivation in FL learning. Hunter (1994) defines motivation as a student's intent to learn and suggests that it is one of the most important factors in FL success. She suggests that motivation is not generic, but rather can be learned. If it can be learned, then so it can be taught. Therefore, teachers should become skilled in the use of techniques to increase motivation.

Gardner and Lambert (1959), initiated early research studies on language motivation. Together with their colleagues and students, they grounded motivational research in a social-psychological framework. They designed instruments for measuring *integrative* and *instrumental* motivation. They identified *integrative motivation* as an interest in foreign

languages, a desire to interact with native speakers of the target language culture, and positive attitudes toward these people and their culture. In contrast, *instrumental motivation* indicated a desire to study the target language in order to achieve a pragmatic objective, such as to improve an individual's future employment opportunities.

However, the initial framework did not on establish any guidelines for classroom teachers nor focus on the FL classroom. It was not until the 1990s that researchers began to search for a more pragmatic, education-centered approach to motivation research. Gardner (2001) now stresses that the major contributor to language learning motivation is first and foremost the student, secondarily the students' background, and thirdly other factors such as the teacher.

Dornyei (1994) followed Gardner's design, but conceptualized a more pragmatic framework to study the reasons behind L2 motivation and help FL teachers instill and maintain motivation. His framework consists of three levels: the *Language Level*, the *Learner Level,* and the *Learning Situation Level*.

The *Language Level* focuses on the various aspects of why students want to learn the FL. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) found that most college students simply wanted to fulfill the FL requirement and earn good grades *(instrumental motivation).* Understandably, it was difficult for students to maintain motivation when these were their only goals. However, when students were more motivated to learn a FL for career reasons, they could maintain their motivation long-term, especially if they participated in communicative activities in class.

Hernandez (2006) found that when college students had an intrinsic desire to learn (*integrative motivation*) they correspondingly had a desire to continue studying Spanish beyond the four-semester requirement. His findings support a focus on FL classroom activities that enhance integrative motivation as a means of increasing student success. He

suggests that instructors administer a questionnaire at the beginning of the semester about their reasons for language study and about themselves. The data can then be used to provide students with classroom activities and projects that are consistent with their interests.

Furthermore, Dornyei (1994) suggests that teacher strategies should also focus on cultural aspects of the target language. For example, teachers should include a socio-cultural component in the class, such as showing films or TV, music, and having guest speakers. Teachers should develop cross-cultural awareness by focusing on cross-cultural similarities instead of only differences. They should try to find ways for students to have contact with native speakers, such as organizing field trips to the L2 community, finding pen pals for the students, and promoting exchange programs. Lastly, they should discuss they role and benefits to society that the L2 plays in the world and the local community.

The second level of the Dornyei (1994) construct is the *Learner Level*, which focuses on personality traits and emotions as motivating factors in language learning. He suggests that teachers should develop students' self-confidence by projecting the belief that they will achieve their goal; providing regular praise and reinforcement; making sure that students regularly experience a sense of achievement; counterbalancing experiences of frustration by involving students in some easier activities; and using confidence building tasks. Teachers should promote students' self-efficacy with regard to achieving learning goals by teaching students strategies for communication, information processing, and problem solving. Teachers should also tell students about their own experiences and difficulties with language learning. They should promote favorable self-perceptions by explaining that mistakes are part of learning. They can also encourage students to set attainable goals by integrating a personalized learning plan for each student. In order to function as efficient motivators, goals

should be specific, achievable, accepted by the students, and accompanied by feedback about progress (Oxford and Shearin, 1994).

The third level is the *Learning Situation Level*, made up of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations and conditions. In Dornyei's model (1994), motivations at this level can be divided into three parts: *course specific* motivational components, *teacher specific* motivational components, and *group specific* motivational components.

Course specific motivational components refer to how excited students are about the methods in which a course is taught, including the lessons, activities, and assessments. These components vary based on content, but there are aspects that can be applied generally. In any specific course, students are motivated by their level of interest, the relevance of the subject matter, their perceived likelihood of success, satisfaction with the activities, and the degree to which they can meet attainable goals (Dornyei, 1994).

The greatest problem at the course level is how to instill intrinsic motivation. Unfortunately, traditional school settings, which include teacher dominated classes, grades, tests, and competitiveness, cultivate extrinsic motivation and fail to bring the learner into the collaborative process (Brown, 1990). Several studies have confirmed that students will lose their natural interest in doing an activity if they feel they have to do it to meet an extrinsic requirement (i.e. they have to pass to graduate). For example, Sandrock (2002) found in his review of enrollment numbers in FL classes that graduation requirements cannot motivate students to take FL courses, nor do they lead to enrollment in further courses beyond the required number of years.

Desired forms of action by educational decision makers are those that can translate into fostering intrinsic motivation for students to enroll in FL courses. The best strategies for

doing that, Sandrock (2002) suggests, are creating a well-considered and varied curriculum, developing authentic assessments, and offering a variety of innovative course options.

The National Standards for Foreign Language Teaching guides teachers to build intrinsic motivation by using communicative methods and providing meaningful instruction. Dornyei (1994) suggests that teachers should design the course based on needs analysis and involve students in the planning of the course program. They should use authentic materials that are within the students grasp, and point out the strong and weak points of textbooks. They should arouse curiosity by introducing unexpected events, changing interaction patterns, rearranging seating charts frequently, and making students move during class periods. To increase students' interest in tasks assigned, teachers should design and select varied and challenging activities, adapt tasks to student interests, play games, leave some activities open-ended, and make pair/group work and important part of the class. Tasks should match student abilities, so that students can expect to succeed if they put forth reasonable effort. To make sure that students can complete the tasks, teachers should provide detailed guidance about procedures and strategies that the task requires, make grading clear, and offer ongoing assistance. Overall, "When the educational environment provides optimal challenges, rich sources of stimulation, and a context of autonomy, then motivational offspring is likely to flourish," claim Deci and Ryan (1985, as cited in Dornyei, 1994, p.275).

Price's (1994) surveys of her 8th grade students confirmed that their enthusiasm for learning Spanish decreased dramatically once the novelty of learning Spanish had worn off and the study of grammar was introduced. Analysis of the situation revealed that interest declined when class activities were based on skills acquisition rather than skill usage. She began increasing communicative activities, de-emphasizing textbook drills, creating a need to

use the language, and preparing more interesting and meaningful activities. These strategies

resulted in improvement in all areas except vocabulary and grammar.

Similarly, if assessments focus on grammar and vocabulary instead of meaningful

communication, then they cannot tap into students' intrinsic motivation to communicate with

people from other cultures. Sandrock (2002) maintains that assessment should focus on three

modes of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational language use. In his

opinion, assessment should highlight most students' reasons for studying the language and

put grammar and vocabulary in service to meaningful communication. Dornyei (1994) also

recommends that teachers design assessments of which students can be proud, such as

projects that students can show to the school community or display in the room.

To maintain students' intrinsic motivation throughout high school, Sandrock (2002)

suggests that schools should offer more varied courses instead of sequential programs. Such

FL options could include current issues courses, debate courses, conversation courses, labs

where students develop a project focused on a particular area of interest (agriculture, arts,

finance, etc.), or internship programs where students are placed in a field where the FL is

spoken. Further exploration of these options by local school districts is needed nationwide.

Teacher specific motivation explains how teachers' behaviors and attitudes influence

students' desires to perform. Dornyei (1994) states that teachers should share their

experiences with the FL. They should be sensitive to students' needs and accept students as

complex human beings with virtues and faults. Teachers should introduce tasks as

meaningful opportunities rather than imposed demands. When students are completing tasks,

teachers should adopt the role of supportive facilitators rather than authority figures, and seek

to develop a rapport with students. As facilitators, they should allow students to choose

different ways to achieve a goal, invite students to design activities themselves, promote

peer-teaching, and design project work where students can be in charge of various tasks with

genuine authority. After students complete tasks, teachers should provide informational

rather than judgmental feedback.

Group specific motivational components refer to the ways that teachers instill motivation

of the entire class. Dornyei (1994) suggests that teachers should establish norms explicitly

from the start, explaining their importance and how they promote learning. Then teachers

must observe those norms themselves and not let any violations go unnoticed. They should

promote group cohesion by creating situations where students can get to know each other

better, go on outings together, play games, and work together in groups. They should avoid

activities that divide the group, such as creating competitive activities. He states,

> There is consistent evidence from pre-school to graduate school that the cooperative
> goal structure is more powerful in promoting intrinsic motivation,...positive attitudes
> about the subject matter, and a caring, cohesive relationship with peers and the
> teacher (p. 279).

Attitude

 "Attitude" and "motivation" tend not to be used together in psychological literature

because they are considered different branches of psychology. "Motivation" explains the

reasons for human behavior. "Attitude" is a result of social interaction and interpersonal

relationships. Bialystok (1981) found that learners' attitudes were highly influential in their

choice of language learning strategies, more so even than their scores on language aptitude

tests. Wenden (1987) argues that even if teachers training students to use more effective

strategies, it will not have any real effect unless students' negative attitudes are changed.

Teachers can help change students' attitudes by following the teaching strategies suggested

for increasing student motivation.

Anxiety

Language anxiety can be defined as the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning. Research since the 1980s has consistently shown a negative correlation between language anxiety and course grades and/or standardized proficiency tests (MacIntyre, 1994).

Krashen (1981) proposed that students learning a second language cannot not do so if they feel uncomfortable or anxious, or are judged harshly for mistakes in a FL classroom. His "Affective Filter Hypothesis" described a filter that the brain erects to block out second language input when the learning environment becomes too stressful, unpleasant, or punitive. Krashen theorized that the filter goes up in the presence of anxiety or low self-confidence. The filter goes down and the input can come through when motivation is high, when a student is self-confident, and when the learning takes place in an anxiety-free environment.

LD and at-risk students may enter a FL class with high anxiety and a high affective filter already, due to low self-perceptions of their ability in their native language and/or prior failures in FL and other classes (as discussed earlier). MacIntyre and Gardner (1989, as cited in 1994) found in their studies that students who felt anxious in a FL class learned vocabulary at a lower rate, had more difficulty with recall, and were less interpretive in their descriptions. In contrast, a study conducted of high school students found that students with lower levels of anxiety about FL learning had stronger native language skills, greater FL aptitude, and scored significantly higher on measures of FL proficiency than students with higher levels of anxiety about FL learning (Sparks, Ganschow, Artzer, Siebenhar, and Plageman, 1997).

Student anxiety may manifest in three stages: *Input*, *Processing*, and *Output*. However, sharp distinctions are difficult to make and they may meld into one another (Tobias, 1986).

The *Input Stage* is concerned with the initial representation of items in memory. Because fewer items are available for processing, anxiety at this stage has an impact on all subsequent stages, unless the missing input can be recovered. For example, difficulties may arise if the FL is spoken too quickly, or if complex sentences are used. Krashen (1981) posited that to overcome anxiety and reduce the affective filter at this level, instructional techniques must provide comprehensible input. Comprehensible input can be used in a variety of teaching methods, and has been a key part of the Total Physical Response Storytelling Method, communicative approaches, content-based instruction, and project-based learning.

The *Processing Stage* involves unseen manipulations of items taken in at the Input Stage. Tobias (1986) suggested that anxiety impairs cognitive processing on tasks that are more difficult, more heavily reliant on memory, and/or more poorly organized.   At the processing level, teachers could lower anxiety by using cooperative learning and pair work, which allow students to learn from each other and teach each other in a supportive environment. Overall, cooperative learning and pair work improve communication, lower students' anxiety level, raise their self-esteem, and improve classroom climate (Leinenweber, 1992).

The *Output Stage* involves the production of previously learned material. Performance at this stage is highly dependent on previous stages, and it is at this stage that learners are expected to demonstrate their ability to use the FL, such as on written or oral tests (Tobias, 1986). Teachers should encourage students to lower their own anxiety by practicing in private and actively putting themselves in situations where they have to participate communicatively, even if doing so is difficult at first (Oxford, 1994).

Within the aforementioned stages, six major sources of language anxiety have been identified: (1) *personal and interpersonal anxieties*; (2) *learner beliefs*; (3) *instructor beliefs*; (4) *instructor-learner interactions*; (5) *classroom procedures*; and (6) *testing* (Young, 1991).

To deal with *personal and interpersonal anxieties*, Foss and Reitzel (1988, as cited in Young, 1991) recommend that instructors ask students to verbalize any fears they have about FL learning, so students can see that they are not alone in their fears. Another method is to have certain students with high anxieties keep an anxiety graph or journal where they record their stress level after performing an activity, so that over time they can pinpoint the activities that cause them the most anxiety. To further reduce personal and interpersonal anxiety, learners may need to participate in supplemental instruction (tutoring), support groups (language club, relaxation, or self-talk).

To reduce anxieties based on *learner beliefs*, Horrowitz (1988, as cited in Young, 1991) suggests that teachers discuss with their students reasonable time commitments for language learning and reasonable language ability outcomes for the course. Students and their parents may have unreasonable expectations (such as fluency by the end of the first year of study), which teachers can dispel at the beginning of the term (Young, 1991).

To reduce anxieties related to *instructor beliefs*, teachers need to be committed to their roles as facilitators in a learner-centered environment. An instructor who presents him or herself as an authority figure and insists that all errors should be corrected may have a negative effect on learners. Teachers also should take advantage of professional learning opportunities, such as workshops, panels, and observations of other teachers (Young, 1991).

To reduce anxiety based on *teacher-student interactions*, instructors may need to reassess their error correction approach, make a conscious effort to repeatedly give positive

reinforcement, and periodically consider their attitudes about certain learners. In a survey, Young's (1991) students reported that teachers who were friendly, humorous, relaxed, patient, encouraged students to speak out, and didn't correct them harshly, were helpful in reducing anxiety in FL classes.

To decrease anxiety about *classroom procedures*, instructors can do more pair and group work, play more games, and tailor their lessons to the needs of individual learners (Young, 1991). In addition to traditional games like Jeopardy, Password, or Hangman, using language games with an emphasis on problem-solving and using practiced role-play can be effective ways to create interest, motivate students, and reduce anxiety (Saunders and Crookall, 1985, as cited in Young, 1991). Furthermore, Daly recommends that instructors not seat students alphabetically, not require individual performances in front of the class, and not call on students at random, as these may create additional anxiety for certain learners (Daly, 1991, as cited in Young, 1991).

To reduce *test-taking* anxieties, teachers should test only what they covered in class. Also, teachers should familiarize students with the type of test they will give and let students practice with that test type before the actual test is given, such as sentence writing, fill-in the blank, situational dialogues, and multiple choice (Young, 1991). Alternative assessments such as PBL can also help reduce this type of anxiety.

Additionally, teachers must be aware of anxieties that students may be feeling as a result of experiences outside the FL classroom. Anxiety levels are influenced by environmental events, so they can change daily (as compared to motivation, which may remain fairly constant or change slowly) (Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant and Mihic, 2004). Flexibility in

scheduling tests, extending time limits, and recognizing that some days a student "just can't do it" are crucial (Downey, 1992).

<div style="text-align:center">Other compensatory FL learning strategies</div>

Some students may be experiencing FL difficulties because they don't know how to learn a new language. At-risk students in particular may need extra help organizing, processing and comprehending what is read or heard, planning homework and long-term assignments, studying for tests, and determining good test-taking strategies. To ensure success in FL classes, teachers should make time for practicing study skills such as organization, time management, reading improvement, and note taking (Hodge, 1998).

Besides needing study skills strategies, at-risk learners need language learning strategies. Oxford (1994) suggests that teachers follow these general principles:

- Training about how to learn a FL should be based on students' attitudes, beliefs, and needs.

- Strategies should mesh with and support each other so that they fit the requirements of the language task, learners' goals, and learners' styles.

- Training should be integrated into other activities over a long period of time.

- Students should have plenty of time for strategy use during language classes.

- Students need explanations, handouts, brainstorming, and references for home study.

- Affective issues such as anxiety, motivation, beliefs, and interests should be addressed.

- Training should be explicit, relevant, and applicable to future tasks.

- Students should evaluate their own progress and success after using the strategies.

Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) separates strategies into two strategy orientations and six strategies groups: (1) a *direct learning* orientation,

consisting of (a) memory, (b) cognitive, and (c) linguistic deficiency compensation strategy group; and (2) an *indirect learning* orientation, consisting of (a) meta-cognitive, (b) affective, and (c) social strategy groups.

On one hand, FL teachers need to explicitly teach *direct learning* skills. These involve cognitive strategies for identification, retention, storage, or retrieval of words, phrases, and other elements of the FL. On the other hand, they also need to teach students how to use *indirect strategies* to help them manage their learning. These include such activities as: needs assessment, activities planning and monitoring, and outcome evaluation. *Indirect strategies* also involve aspects that aid the learner in regulating emotions, motivation, and attitudes. These include routines for self-encouragement and the reduction of anxiety, and those that address the actions learners take in order to communicate with others, such as asking questions for clarification and cooperating with others during activities.

Rausch (2000) simplified Oxford's terminology and created a hierarchical strategies scheme based on her principles. His scheme is from indirect to direct, grouped under the headings of *management strategies, organizational strategies, and communication strategies.*

First, teachers need to help students manage their own FL learning. They should ask students to self-reflect on their learning environments (i.e. *Do I have a quiet place to study? Am I seated where you can be productive?*), prepare learning objectives (*i.e. What am I trying to learn/make/solve?*), and create learning schedules (*i.e. When is the test? When does this need to be turned in?*). They should help students focus their learning before starting (*i.e. What is the purpose of this assignment? Do I have all my materials? Where can I find resources?*). They should keep motivation high by praising students often and encouraging students to monitor their own progress (Hodge, 1998; Rausch, 2000).

Second, teachers need to explicitly teach organizational strategies. They should help students analyze language rules and apply real language. When presenting content, they should compare and contrast, transfer and translate, and combine and recombine. They should outline structures, highlight adjective agreements, and color coding verb patterns. They should integrate mind mapping, categorizing, note taking, and graphic organizers. They should encourage students to make flashcards and use mnemonic devices. Assignments outside the classroom should include repeating and reviewing, practicing patterns, employing computerized language programs, and seeking real language opportunities (Hodge, 1998; Rausch, 2000).

Third, teachers should encourage students to communicate as much as possible in the target language. They should direct unfocused students to concentrate on the main idea or specific directive; ask students to summarize or paraphrase in the FL; encourage them to ask for clarification; and work to negotiate meaning based on prior knowledge (Rausch, 2000).

Furthermore, teachers must be highly explicit with expectations for LD and at-risk students, such as expectations about class attendance, homework, and class participation (Downey, 1992). Clear marking of boundaries between the sections of lessons, the familiarity of students with the organizational practices and routines of the classroom, fair and appropriate turn-allocation procedures, repetitiveness, attention to the differing needs of individual students all influence very strongly the degree of success that will be experienced in different classrooms (Wong, 1985, as cited in Skehan, 1986).

DISCUSSION

Summary of Major Findings

In attempting to discover why some students are unsuccessful in FL classes and what teachers can do to help them, a number of issues were investigated. I needed to examine how FL pedagogies have changed throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, and how they help or hinder students with FL difficulties. I also wanted to know what were the causes of differences in ability to learn a FL. Finally, and most importantly for me as a teacher, I hoped to find specific strategies to ensure success for fully-included LD and at-risk students to improve content retention and ability, increase motivation, lower anxiety, and improve organizational and study skills.

FL methodologies have changed radically during the 20th century and into the 21st century. FL teachers have progressed through eras of direct grammar instruction and translation (when it was deemed important to be able to read Latin and Greek philosophers); to providing instruction only in the target language (when it was deemed important to speak during WWII); to holistic methods incorporating body, mind, and spirit; to focusing on communication for use in the community; to differentiating instruction to accommodate differences in intelligences, modality preferences, and learning styles. Now teachers are pulled in every direction as they are encouraged by public and private industries to use a hybrid of strategies including a "natural" approach, multi-sensory instruction, technology, projects, communicative activities, and more.   And still, no one can agree on the best method for all students.

However, upon review of the literature surrounding FL learning difficulties, a few of these methodologies stand out as beneficial for LD and at-risk students in particular. Multi-

sensory instruction emerges as essential for many students who exhibit FL problems due to a variety of reasons. Also, it is essential that at-risk students feel connected to the language by sharing their personal experiences and focusing on their own interests; project-based assessments can provide alternatives to standardized tests, and can increase their chances for success. Also, although it is currently popular to use communicative approaches and de-emphasize the structure of language, at-risk and LD students may actually need explicit instruction in phonology and grammar.

These are the major explanations for why students experience difficulties in FL classes:

- Student's FL difficulties may actually stem from English deficiencies.

- Students may be unable to identify their learning styles and/or self-determine what strategies to employ in order to be successful.

- Students who perceive themselves as less capable, possessing fewer skills, and having a negative attitude may produce low output as a result of giving up.

- Students may have low motivation due to past failures if they don't see the connection between their lives and class lessons.

- High anxiety about the class may cause students to raise an affective filter, which blocks FL input, and impairs memory, organization, and spontaneous oral production.

- Students may have inabilities to convert input into intake, because they are unclear about class norms, procedures, grading, or other expectations.

Specific steps emerge as being central to overcoming these difficulties, especially for LD and at-risk students. The choices that teachers make with regard to placement, methodologies, environment, curriculum, and assessments can all contribute to whether or not a student succeeds or fails in a beginning FL class.

Before the class begins, teachers should review the grades that students earned in their prior English classes, because that is one of the major predictors of FL success. Teachers should encourage students with low or failing English grades to take a supplementary English or Academic Strategies class alongside or before beginning a FL. At the onset of the class, students should assess their strengths and weaknesses before FL instruction begins. Teachers can do this by administering a FL aptitude test (such as the MLAT) and a learning style self-test (such as the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory).   Teachers should follow these assessments with discussions about learning differences, motivation, expectations about language ability, and assistance that will be offered throughout the year. They should also narrow their syllabus down to essential elements and clearly delineate classroom procedures.

When determining how to design their class, teachers may be overwhelmed by the multitude of methodologies proposed by textbook companies, districts and organizations. Although FL teachers are encouraged to use whole language techniques that emphasize speaking skills, and de-emphasize grammar, the review of the literature about LD and at-risk students revealed that LD students and students with low English abilities cannot absorb lessons taught entirely in the FL. Therefore, direct grammar instruction should not be eliminated entirely.

Therefore, teachers should design FL curriculum based on the needs of the school and community. They should provide meaningful content, integrate student interests, and use a variety of authentic materials that are within students' grasp. Furthermore, to help students who are experiencing FL difficulties, teachers should:

- Explicitly teach Spanish alphabet letters and sounds.

- Explicitly teach word bits, including Latin roots, prefixes and suffixes.

- Point out cognate words through puzzles, games, and readings.

- Help students produce their own sentences by explaining grammatical rules.

- Increase discourse production through projects.

- Strengthening students' overall language abilities by encouraging them to read and write in English (i.e. about culture, politics, travel, etc.).

- Alert students to the topic for discussion a day ahead, so they can prepare.

- Provide instructions on how to organize their class materials and notes.

- Create structures for input and output (i.e. how to take notes, summarize, highlight, etc.).

- Lower anxiety by adopting the role of facilitators in a student-centered environment.

- Make provisions for individual learning styles by providing alternate seating, instructional materials, and times frames for students exhibiting difficulties.

After guiding students through the material, teachers must assess students' knowledge. To ensure that LD and at-risk students can demonstrate mastery, teachers should:

- Create well-designed project assessments as supplements or alternatives to standard tests.

- Explain procedures and make grading clear at the start of a project or test.

- Offer ongoing assistance before the final grade is determined.

- Provide immediate feedback for all activities, big or small.

- Find ways to showcase student projects, not only in the classroom, but also around school, and with the parent community (i.e. posters, presentation nights, etc.).

- Offer informational feedback (i.e. rubrics so students can see how they can improve) rather than judgmental feedback (A-F grades); and

- Ask students to reflect upon their own performance.

If teachers understand FL difficulties and are well prepared to deal with them, then all students can achieve success in beginning classes, go on to complete higher-level courses, pursue university degrees, and learn to love languages in the process.

Limitations/Gaps in the Literature

The studies conducted by various researchers have been helpful in determining the problems faced by poor FL learners, and they have also suggested ways to support LD and at-risk students in a FL classroom. Teachers and organizations have also developed new methodologies that they believe will improve FL acquisition. However, these methodologies often do not correspond to the guidelines in FL textbooks, so teachers wishing to employ these methodologies are left to design their own curriculum. With the exception of largely unpublicized theses and dissertations, very little curriculum has been developed that takes specific Spanish vocabulary and outlines how it should be taught using a conglomeration of proven FL methodologies, including instructional methods for LD students.

Implications for Future Research

It is the teacher's responsibility to uphold the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), which says that not only must LD students be mainstreamed in core academic classes (of which FL is one), they must also demonstrate improvement in the subject. Teachers, therefore, have the responsibility to ensure that these students can successfully master beginning Spanish concepts and pass the class.

To do this, textbooks and supplementary materials need to be expanded and redefined to meet the needs of the growing population of LD and at-risk students taking beginning FL classes. Beginning Spanish textbooks break down content into teachable units containing vocabulary and grammar (i.e. family, home, school, transportation, self-descriptions, food,

etc.). Companies are starting to make a conscious effort to publish textbooks and

supplementary materials that emphasize listening and conversation skills, but they rarely

include other methodologies such as TPRS or detailed project designs. Teachers need a

handbook of curricula to supplement their regular beginning Spanish textbooks, one which

breaks down each unit into detailed multi-modal activities (songs, games, puzzles, stories,

etc.), technological projects (film, photo, podcasts, slide shows, internet research, etc.),

grammar instruction (TPR, close music lyrics, poems, etc.), and more.

Furthermore, more quantitative research studies are needed to determine if the

suggestions mentioned herein actually do improve the performance of LD and at-risk

students in mainstreamed classrooms, compared to using traditional methods. Comparing

final grades of LD and at-risk students in those two types of classes seems quantifiable, but

that data may be highly flawed, because grade inflation may occur if teachers base part of

their grades on participation, effort, and/or alternative assessments that are not included in

traditional classrooms. Instead, pre-test post-test studies are needed of LD and at-risk

students in classes that use the same textbooks, and who give the same final exams provided

by that textbook company. If LD and at-risk students are taught using the suggested methods

herein, can they perform at the same academic levels as their peers?

Hodge (1998) believes that the future for the at-risk FL learner is hopeful. Hynd in

Gaddes and Edgell (1994) reminds educators that the study of LD students has continued for

well over a century, but only within the past several decades have learning disabilities been

formally acknowledged through laws and regulations that require the provision of services to

them (p. vii). Schwartz (1997) is hopeful that more research will be done, more teachers will

address the issues in teaching FL learners, and more solutions will be created for the student

facing the challenge of learning a FL language and the teachers who teach them.

Overall Significance of the Literature

The explanations for why some students are unsuccessful in FL classes are varied, but

luckily, the solutions offered by researchers are generalizable to FL classes nationwide. In

the new millennium, teachers need to understand the variety of methodologies available to

them and be discerning when using popular methodologies that may not serve the rising

population of LD and at-risk students. Teachers who understand the problems that students

face in FL classes can then come together in this global society and share lesson plans and

curricula that can meet the needs of these students.

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