Extension Ideas

Psychologist Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligence offers one kind of explanation for learner differences. According to Gardner, there are eight different types of intelligences:

• Linguistic: Sensitivity to spoken and written language, the ability to learn languages.
• Logical-mathematical: Capacity to analyze problems logically, carry out mathematical operations.
• Visual-spatial: Able to recognize and use the patterns of wide space and more confined areas.
• Musical: Skill in the performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns.
• Bodily-kinesthetic: Potential to use one’s whole body or parts of the body to solve problems.
• Interpersonal: Capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people.
• Intrapersonal: Capacity to understand oneself, to appreciate one’s feelings, fears and motivations.
• Naturalistic: Able to recognize, categorize and draw upon certain features of the environment.

Some key principles are:
1. Individuals should be encouraged to use their preferred intelligences in learning.
2. Instructional activities should appeal to different forms of intelligence.
3. Assessment of learning should measure multiple forms of intelligence.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
<td>Teacher response to differences in learners; teacher variation in teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible for individuals or small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning centers; stations</td>
<td>Areas of a classroom that are set up for specific purposes, such reading or working with objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognition</td>
<td>The knowledge and self-awareness a learner has of one’s own language learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Psychological factors that determine how much effort learners are willing to apply to accomplish or learn something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality traits</td>
<td>Particular qualities in someone’s character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficiency level</td>
<td>The level of a learner’s language ability. How much language the learner knows and can use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-access room, area</td>
<td>A room or area of a room where materials are available for students to choose and use by themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy instruction</td>
<td>Teaches students about learning strategies and how and when to use them; helps students identify personally effective strategies, and encourages them to make strategic behaviors a systematic part of their learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now start the video. Listen to the introduction. Complete the guided observation and reflection tasks for each of the video segments. The next part of the manual is for trainees and is available on separate pages for ease of copying.
Focus on the Learner

Module 11, Individual Learner Differences

Introduction, Expanded Narrative

The learners in any classroom are both similar and different. An understanding of such similarities and differences help teachers determine what to teach and how to teach it. In a private school class of Russian students studying English, for example, the similarities might be that all the students speak the same language, they are all around the same age, they are all literate in their own language, and they come from the same socio-economic background. However, some of them may be girls, some boys. Some may like school and some may not; some may find learning a language easy, some will find it difficult. Some may feel happy most of the time, some unhappy. And some of the students may have special needs, such as hearing difficulties, poor eyesight, or difficulty sitting still.

These are some factors that lead to learning differences:

- Age.
- Socio-economic status.
- Gender.
- Preferred learning styles and strengths.
- Personality traits.
- Educational background.
- Cognitive ability.
- Language proficiency level.
- Cognitive development stage.
- Motivation.
- Educational background.
- Language proficiency level.
- Cognitive development stage.
- Motivation.

There has been a long history of research about some of the factors listed above. One direction for this research has been to try to understand cognition. This research has led to:

- A better understanding of the stages of cognitive development.
- The development of Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.) tests.
- Attempts to categorize different learning styles.
- The theory that there are different kinds of human cognition that can be classified, as in multiple intelligences.

Another research direction has looked at motivation, in an attempt to figure out what makes learners want to learn. A third direction has been in the area of age-related learning differences, which has led to suggestions for age-appropriate teaching techniques.

Module Focus

The focus in Module 11 is on how teachers can vary teaching approaches and techniques to help facilitate learning for a wide variety of students and student needs. This variation can include:

- Input using different types of language: formal, informal, academic, social, etc.
- Input with a wide variety of content, which might depend on the purpose of the activity. For example, the content might be related to social needs (“party talk”), survival needs (how to read a bus schedule), academic needs (vocabulary needed to pass a standardized test), etc.
- Different media of delivery (e.g., textbooks, audio tape, the Internet, etc.).
- A variety of different tasks using the same input, which focus both on different language skills and on the integration of those skills, either together or at different time.
- Using learning strategies at both the macro level (telling students what they will be doing and why), and the micro level (techniques for learning vocabulary items) to facilitate learning.
- The creation of procedures which allow students to take some responsibility for their own learning.
- The use of different group sizes for different kinds of tasks, from whole class to small group to pair activities.
Module 11: Individual Learner Differences

Video Segment #1, Observation Guide
[Read before viewing.]

Gather the following information from this video segment.
1. Explain how the class is organized to work on the different activities.
2. List the four activities that students did with the song.
3. After each activity, list the skills students had to use to complete the activity. (Notice that not all of the skills are language skills.)
4. Explain the macro level strategy the teacher uses.

Reflection
[Read and answer after viewing.]

1. Is this a large class or a small one? How is the class organized to do the activities? What might be some reasons for this organization? Do you think it was effective?
2. In pairs or small groups, compare your lists of activities and skills. Add to your list if you missed some. Share your reactions to the activities with your partner or group. Do you feel that one or two of the activities were better than the others in terms of language learning? In terms of affective behaviors that might affect language learning? Talk about some of the non-language skills. What is the purpose for including such skills in the language classroom.
3. What was the macro strategy the teacher used? Talk about it in your group. Was it necessary? Why did she do this? What was the main purpose of all these activities? What might be some secondary purposes?
4. The focus of this segment was on using different skills. Can you give examples of activities you use or one of your teachers has used that requires the use of different skills, not only different language skills but other kinds of skills?

Video Segment #2, Learning Stations and Self-access Rooms
[Read before viewing.]

Another way to meet the needs of students with individual learning differences is to set up learning stations in a classroom or create an entire room for individual, independent study. Here are some reasons for self-access areas:

• Learners can have choices about what material they work with and what activities they do with that material.
• Learners can work at their own pace. If they need more time than other students, they can take it. If they work very fast, they can do more activities that interest them.
• Learners can have access to a variety of materials: spoken, written, and hands-on. They can then decide what activity they want to do with the materials.
• Learners work together in groups on something they want to do. Groups can even be formed around individual interests.
• Teachers can use the students’ self-access period to work with individual students or groups.

This segment shows one entire room designed for student self-access or self-study, and a classroom with learning stations. Gather the following information from this video segment.
1. Explain the purpose of SEAR, the self-study center, and the student projects displayed there.
2. List the self-access areas you see or hear the teacher talk about, and some of the resources available in each. Notice the differences between them.
3. Describe what students are doing.
4. Try to find one or two techniques the teacher uses to enable students to take some responsibil-
Focus on the Learner

ity for their own learning and for the learning areas.

5. Look for things that might increase learner motivation or that might make the learning more “real” to the students.

Reflection

[Read and answer after viewing.]

1. Compare your lists with others in your group. What are some of the learning areas that you saw or heard described in the self-study center? In the special areas of the classroom? What activities were learners doing? Were the areas and activities appropriate to the age of the children in each setting? Explain your answer. Discuss what kinds of areas might be appropriate for your students.

2. What has the teacher done in the first room to help students be more self-directed? In your group, brainstorm some ideas for helping your students take some responsibility for their own procedures, classroom organization, and assignment completion.

3. What are some ways to create self-access areas in a classroom? What about in your classroom?

4. There are two motivational techniques displayed in the segment and one activity that is both motivational and makes learning more “real” for the students. What are they? In your situation, is it possible to move students outside the classroom? If so, what language activities might you organize around that?

Summary Discussion

1. Look back at the focus points listed under the Module Focus. Did you see examples of each point while watching the video? What were they? Which ones, if any, do you believe you didn’t see?

2. Do you believe that there are a lot of learner differences in your classroom? Looking back at the preview activity and the points made in this module, try to create learner profiles for your students.

3. After viewing this module, do you think you will try to vary the materials and activities in your lesson plans and procedures to better serve the learner differences in your class? Why or why not? If yes, what are you most likely to try?

Now You Try It—An Action Plan

Step 1
You can read some of the articles on the topic of contextualizing language (see Module 11 Readings plus the List of Additional Readings and Resources below). Using the video, you have seen a few examples and ideas from other teachers’ classes. Now, identify a lesson or class topic from your own course that you would like to teach with a focus on (greater attention to) individual learner differences.

Step 2
Working with a partner or in groups, brainstorm possible procedures, materials, and activities that might facilitate more effective learning in your classes. Create a plan.

Step 3
Share your plan with others. Get ideas and formative feedback.

Step 4
Change your plan, as needed. Try it with your class. If you are not teaching, ask the trainer or another experienced teacher for feedback.