Harmer's Describing Learners

(Please answer in **full sentences** and **in your own words**)

1) How do learners differ? (Find at least 6 important differences)

2) Which learning style(s) do you think you are? Why?

3) What are some things that teachers can do to help motivate their students?

Describing learners

A Age

The age of our students is a major factor in our decisions about how and what to teach. People of different ages have different needs, competences and cognitive skills; we might expect children of primary age to acquire much of a foreign language through play, for example, whereas for adults we can reasonably expect a greater use of abstract thought.

One of the most common beliefs about age and language learning is that young children learn faster and more effectively than any other age group. Most people can think of examples which appear to bear this out – as when children move to a new country and appear to pick up a new language with remarkable ease. However, as we shall see, this is not always true of children in that situation, and the story of child language facility may be something of a myth.

It is certainly true that children who learn a new language early have a facility with the pronunciation which is sometimes denied older learners. Lynne Cameron suggests that children 'reproduce the accent of their teachers with deadly accuracy' (2003: 111). Carol Read recounts how she hears a young student of hers saying *Listen. Quiet now. Attention, please!* in such a perfect imitation of the teacher that 'the thought of parody passes through my head' (2003: 7).

Apart from pronunciation ability, however, it appears that older children (that is children from about the age of 12) 'seem to be far better learners than younger ones in most aspects of acquisition, pronunciation excluded' (Yu, 2006: 53). Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada, reviewing the literature on the subject, point to the various studies showing that older children and adolescents make more progress than younger learners (2006: 67–74).

The relative superiority of older children as language learners (especially in formal educational settings) may have something to do with their increased cognitive abilities, which allow them to benefit from more abstract approaches to language teaching. It may also have something to do with the way younger children are taught. Lynne Cameron, quoted above, suggests that teachers of young learners need to be especially alert and adaptive in their response to tasks and have to be able to adjust activities on the spot.

It is not being suggested that young children cannot acquire second languages successfully. As we have already said, many of them achieve significant competence, especially in bilingual situations. But in learning situations, teenagers are often more effective learners. Yet English is increasingly being taught at younger and younger ages. This may have great benefits in terms of citizenship, democracy, tolerance and multiculturalism, for example (Read 2003), but especially when there is ineffective transfer of skills and methodology from primary to secondary school, early learning does not always appear to offer the substantial success often claimed for it.

Nor is it true that older learners are necessarily ineffective language learners. Research has shown that they 'can reach high levels of proficiency in their second language' (Lightbown

and Spada 2006: 73). They may have greater difficulty in approximating native speaker pronunciation than children do, but sometimes this is a deliberate (or even subconscious) retention of their cultural and linguistic identity.

In what follows we will consider students at different ages as if all the members of each age group are the same. Yet each student is an individual with different experiences both in and outside the classroom. Comments here about young children, teenagers and adults can only be generalisations. Much also depends upon individual learner differences and upon motivation (see Section D below).

A1 Young children

Young children, especially those up to the ages of nine or ten, learn differently from older children, adolescents and adults in the following ways:

- They respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words.
- They often learn indirectly rather than directly – that is they take in information from all sides, learning from everything around them rather than only focusing on the precise topic they are being taught.
- Their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear and, crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with.
- They find abstract concepts such as grammar rules difficult to grasp.
- They generally display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them.
- They have a need for individual attention and approval from the teacher.
- They are keen to talk about themselves and respond well to learning that uses themselves and their own lives as main topics in the classroom.
- They have a limited attention span; unless activities are extremely engaging, they can get easily bored, losing interest after ten minutes or so.

It is important, when discussing young learners, to take account of changes which take place within this varied and varying age span. Gül Keskil and Pasa Tevfik Cephe, for example, note that 'while pupils who are 10 and 11 years old like games, puzzles and songs most, those who are 12 and 13 years old like activities built around dialogues, question-and-answer activities and matching exercises most' (2001: 61).

Various theorists have described the way that children develop and the various ages and stages they go through. Piaget suggested that children start at the *sensori-motor stage*, and then proceed through the *intuitive stage* and the *concrete-operational stage* before finally reaching the *formal operational stage* where abstraction becomes increasingly possible. Leo Vygotsky (see page 59) emphasised the place of social interaction in development and the role of a 'knower' providing 'scaffolding' to help a child who has entered the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) where they are ready to learn new things. Both Erik Erikson and Abraham Maslow saw development as being closely bound up in the child's confidence and self-esteem, while Reuven Feuerstein suggested that children's cognitive structures are infinitely modifiable with the help of a modifier – much like Vygotsky's knower.

But however we describe the way children develop (and though there are significant differences between, say, a four year old and a nine year old), we can make some recommendations about younger learners in general, that is children up to about ten and eleven.

In the first place, good teachers at this level need to provide a rich diet of learning experiences which encourage their students to get information from a variety of sources. They need to work with their students individually and in groups, developing good and affective relationships (see page 100). They need to plan a range of activities for a given time period, and be flexible enough to move on to the next exercise when they see their students getting bored.

Teachers of young learners need to spend time understanding how their students think and operate. They need to be able to pick up on their students' current interests so that they can use them to motivate the children. And they need good oral skills in English since speaking and listening are the skills which will be used most of all at this age. The teacher's pronunciation really matters here, too, precisely because, as we have said, children imitate it so well.

All of this reminds us that once a decision has been taken to teach English to younger learners, there is a need for highly skilled and dedicated teaching. This may well be the most difficult (but rewarding) age to teach, but when teachers do it well (and the conditions are right), there is no reason why students should not defy some of the research results we mentioned above and be highly successful learners – provided, of course, that this success is followed up as they move to a new school or grade.

We can also draw some conclusions about what a classroom for young children should look like and what might be going on in it. First of all, we will want the classroom to be bright and colourful, with windows the children can see out of, and with enough room for different activities to be taking place. We might expect the students to be working in groups in different parts of the classroom, changing their activity every ten minutes or so. 'We are obviously,' Susan Halliwell writes, 'not talking about classrooms where children spend all their time sitting still in rows or talking only to the teacher' (1992: 18). Because children love discovering things, and because they respond well to being asked to use their imagination, they may well be involved in puzzle-like activities, in making things, in drawing things, in games, in physical movement or in songs. A good primary classroom mixes play and learning in an atmosphere of cheerful and supportive harmony.

A2 Adolescents

It is strange that, despite their relative success as language learners, adolescents are often seen as problem students. Yet with their greater ability for abstract thought and their passionate commitment to what they are doing once they are engaged, adolescents may well be the most exciting students of all. Most of them understand the need for learning and, with the right goals, can be responsible enough to do what is asked of them.

It is perfectly true that there are times when things don't seem to go very well. Adolescence is bound up, after all, with a pronounced search for identity and a need for self-esteem; adolescents need to feel good about themselves and valued. All of this is reflected in the secondary student who convincingly argued that a good teacher 'is someone who knows our names' (Harmer 2007: 26). But it's not just teachers, of course; teenage students often have an acute need for peer approval, too (or, at the very least, are extremely vulnerable to the negative judgements of their own age group).

We will discuss how teachers can ensure successful learning (preventing indiscipline, but acting effectively if it occurs) in Chapter 9, but we should not become too preoccupied with the issue of disruptive behaviour, for while we will all remember unsatisfactory classes, we will also look back with pleasure on those groups and lessons which were successful. There is almost nothing more exciting than a class of involved young people at this age pursuing a learning goal with enthusiasm. Our job, therefore, must be to provoke student engagement with material which is relevant and involving. At the same time, we need to do what we can to bolster our students' self-esteem, and be conscious, always, of their need for identity.

Herbert Puchta and Michael Schratz see problems with teenagers as resulting, in part, from '... the teacher's failure to build bridges between what they want and have to teach and their students' worlds of thought and experience' (1993: 4). They advocate linking language teaching far more closely to the students' everyday interests through, in particular, the use of 'humanistic' teaching (see Chapter 3D). Thus, as we shall see in some of the examples in Chapters 16–20, material has to be designed at the students' level, with topics which they can react to. They must be encouraged to respond to texts and situations with their own thoughts and experiences, rather than just by answering questions and doing abstract learning activities. We must give them tasks which they are able to do, rather than risk humiliating them.

We have come some way from the teaching of young children. We can ask teenagers to address learning issues directly in a way that younger learners might not appreciate. We are able to discuss abstract issues with them. Indeed, part of our job is to provoke intellectual activity by helping them to be aware of contrasting ideas and concepts which they can resolve for themselves – though still with our guidance. There are many ways of studying language (see Chapters 12–15) and practising language skills (see Chapters 16–20), and most of these are appropriate for teenagers.

A3 Adult learners

Adult language learners are notable for a number of special characteristics:

- They can engage with abstract thought. This suggests that we do not have to rely exclusively on activities such as games and songs – though these may be appropriate for some students.
- They have a whole range of life experiences to draw on.
- They have expectations about the learning process, and they already have their own set patterns of learning.
- Adults tend, on the whole, to be more disciplined than other age groups, and, crucially, they are often prepared to struggle on despite boredom.
- They come into classrooms with a rich range of experiences which allow teachers to use a wide range of activities with them.
- Unlike young children and teenagers, they often have a clear understanding of why they are learning and what they want to get out of it. As we shall see in Section D below, motivation is a critical factor in successful learning, and knowing what you want to achieve is an important part of this. Many adults are able to sustain a level of motivation (see D2) by holding on to a distant goal in a way that teenagers find more difficult.

However, adults are never entirely problem-free learners, and they have a number of characteristics which can sometimes make learning and teaching problematic.

- They can be critical of teaching methods. Their previous learning experiences may have predisposed them to one particular methodological style which makes them uncomfortable with unfamiliar teaching patterns. Conversely, they may be hostile to certain teaching and learning activities which replicate the teaching they received earlier in their educational careers.
- They may have experienced failure or criticism at school which makes them anxious and under-confident about learning a language.
- Many older adults worry that their intellectual powers may be diminishing with age. They are concerned to keep their creative powers alive, to maintain a 'sense of generativity' (Williams and Burden 1997: 32). However, as Alan Rogers points out, this generativity is directly related to how much learning has been going on in adult life before they come to a new learning experience (1996: 54).

Good teachers of adults take all of these factors into account. They are aware that their students will often be prepared to stick with an activity for longer than younger learners (though too much boredom can obviously have a disastrous effect on motivation). As well as involving their students in more indirect learning through reading, listening and communicative speaking and writing, they also allow them to use their intellects to learn consciously where this is appropriate. They encourage their students to use their own life experience in the learning process, too.

As teachers of adults we should recognise the need to minimise the bad effects of past learning experiences. We can diminish the fear of failure by offering activities which are achievable and by paying special attention to the level of challenge presented by exercises. We need to listen to students' concerns, too, and, in many cases, modify what we do to suit their learning tastes.

B Learner differences

The moment we realise that a class is composed of individuals (rather than being some kind of unified whole), we have to start thinking about how to respond to these students individually so that while we may frequently teach the group as a whole, we will also, in different ways, pay attention to the different identities we are faced with.

We will discuss differentiation in relation to mixed ability in Chapter 7C. In this section, however, we will look at the various ways researchers have tried to identify individual needs and behaviour profiles.

B1 Aptitude and intelligence

Some students are better at learning languages than others. At least that is the generally held view, and in the 1950s and 1960s it crystallised around the belief that it was possible to predict a student's future progress on the basis of linguistic aptitude tests. But it soon became clear that such tests were flawed in a number of ways. They didn't appear to measure anything other than general intellectual ability even though they ostensibly looked for linguistic talents. Furthermore, they favoured analytic-type learners over their more 'holistic' counterparts, so the tests were especially suited to people who have little trouble doing grammar-focused tasks. Those with a

more 'general' view of things – whose analytical abilities are not so highly developed, and who receive and use language in a more message-oriented way – appeared to be at a disadvantage. In fact, analytic aptitude is probably not the critical factor in success. Peter Skehan, for example, believes that what distinguishes exceptional students from the rest is that they have unusual memories, particularly for the retention of things that they hear (1998: 234).

Another damning criticism of traditional aptitude tests is that while they may discriminate between the most and the least 'intelligent' students, they are less effective at distinguishing between the majority of students who fall between these two extremes. What they do accomplish is to influence the way in which both teachers and students behave. It has been suggested that students who score badly on aptitude tests will become demotivated and that this will then contribute to precisely the failure that the test predicted. Moreover, teachers who know that particular students have achieved high scores will be tempted to treat those students differently from students whose score was low. Aptitude tests end up being self-fulfilling prophecies whereas it would be much better for both teacher and students to be optimistic about all of the people in the class.

It is possible that people have different aptitudes for different kinds of study. However, if we consider aptitude and intelligence for learning language in general, our own experience of people we know who speak two or more languages can only support the view that 'learners with a wide variety of intellectual abilities can be successful language learners. This is especially true if the emphasis is on oral communication skills rather than metalinguistic knowledge' (Lightbown and Spada 2006: 185).

B2 Good learner characteristics

Another line of enquiry has been to try to tease out what a 'good learner' is. If we can narrow down a number of characteristics that all good learners share, then we can, perhaps, cultivate these characteristics in all our students.

Neil Naiman and his colleagues included a tolerance of ambiguity as a feature of good learning, together with factors such as positive task orientation (being prepared to approach tasks in a positive fashion), ego involvement (where success is important for a student's self-image), high aspirations, goal orientation and perseverance (Naiman *et al* 1978).

Joan Rubin and Irene Thompson listed no fewer than 14 good learner characteristics, among which learning to live with uncertainty (much like the tolerance of ambiguity mentioned above) is a notable factor (Rubin and Thompson 1982). But the Rubin and Thompson version of a good learner also mentions students who can find their own way (without always having to be guided by the teacher through learning tasks), who are creative, who make intelligent guesses, who make their own opportunities for practice, who make errors work for them not against them, and who use contextual clues.

Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada summarise the main consensus about good learner characteristics (see Figure 1). As they point out, the characteristics can be classified in several categories (motivation, intellectual abilities, learning preferences), and some, such as 'willing to make mistakes', can be 'considered a personality characteristic' (Lightbown and Spada 2006: 54). In other words, this wish list cuts across a number of learner variables.

Much of what various people have said about good learners is based on cultural assumptions which underpin much current teaching practice in western-influenced methodologies.

In these cultures we appreciate self-reliant students and promote learner autonomy as a main goal (see Chapter 23). We tend to see the tolerance of ambiguity as a goal of student development, wishing to wean our students away from a need for things to be always cut and dried. We encourage students to read texts for general understanding without stopping to look up all the words they do not understand; we ask students to speak communicatively even when they have difficulty because of words they don't know or can't pronounce, and we involve students in creative writing (see Chapter 19, B3). In all these endeavours we expect our students to aspire beyond their current language level.

Rate each of the following characteristics on a scale of 1–5. Use 1 to indicate a characteristic that you think is 'very important' and 5 to indicate a characteristic that you consider 'not at all important' in predicting success in second language learning.

A good language learner:

a is a willing and accurate guesser	1	2	3	4	5
b tries to get a message across even if specific language knowledge is lacking	1	2	3	4	5
c is willing to make mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
d constantly looks for patterns in the language	1	2	3	4	5
e practises as often as possible	1	2	3	4	5
f analyses his or her own speech and the speech of others	1	2	3	4	5
g attends to whether his or her performance meets the standards he or she has learned	1	2	3	4	5
h enjoys grammar exercises	1	2	3	4	5
i begins learning in childhood	1	2	3	4	5
j has an above-average IQ	1	2	3	4	5
k has good academic skills	1	2	3	4	5
l has a good self-image and lots of confidence	1	2	3	4	5

FIGURE 1: Good learner characteristics (Lightbown and Spada 2006: 55)

Different cultures value different learning behaviours, however. Our insistence upon one kind of 'good learner' profile may encourage us to demand that students should act in class in certain ways, whatever their learning background. When we espouse some of the techniques mentioned above, we risk imposing a methodology on our students that is inimical to their culture. Yet it is precisely because this is not perhaps in the best interests of the students that we discussed context-sensitive methodology in Chapter 4B. Furthermore, some students may not enjoy grammar exercises, but this does not mean they are doomed to learning failure.

There is nothing wrong with trying to describe good language learning behaviour. Nevertheless, we need to recognise that some of our assumptions are heavily culture-bound and that students can be successful even if they do not follow these characteristics to the letter.

B3 Learner styles and strategies

A preoccupation with learner personalities and styles has been a major factor in psycholinguistic research. Are there different kinds of learner? Are there different kinds of behaviour in a group? How can we tailor our teaching to match the personalities in front of us?

The methodologist Tony Wright described four different learner styles within a group (1987: 117–118). The 'enthusiast' looks to the teacher as a point of reference and is concerned with the goals of the learning group. The 'oracular' also focuses on the teacher but is more oriented towards the satisfaction of personal goals. The 'participator' tends to concentrate on group goals and group solidarity, whereas the 'rebel', while referring to the learning group for his or her point of reference, is mainly concerned with the satisfaction of his or her own goals.

Keith Willing, working with adult students in Australia, suggested four learner categories:

- **Convergers:** these are students who are by nature solitary, prefer to avoid groups, and who are independent and confident in their own abilities. Most importantly they are analytic and can impose their own structures on learning. They tend to be cool and pragmatic.
- **Conformists:** these are students who prefer to emphasise learning 'about language' over learning to use it. They tend to be dependent on those in authority and are perfectly happy to work in non-communicative classrooms, doing what they are told. A classroom of conformists is one which prefers to see well-organised teachers.
- **Concrete learners:** though they are like conformists, they also enjoy the social aspects of learning and like to learn from direct experience. They are interested in language use and language as communication rather than language as a system. They enjoy games and groupwork in class.
- **Communicative learners:** these are language use oriented. They are comfortable out of class and show a degree of confidence and a willingness to take risks which their colleagues may lack. They are much more interested in social interaction with other speakers of the language than they are with analysis of how the language works. They are perfectly happy to operate without the guidance of a teacher

FIGURE 2: Learning styles based on Willing (1987)

Wright and Willing's categorisations are just two of a large number of descriptions that different researchers have come up with to try to explain different learner styles and strategies. Frank Coffield, David Moseley, Elaine Hall and Kathryn Ecclestone, in an extensive study of the literature available, identify an extremely large list of opposed styles which different theorists have advocated (see Figure 3). But while this may be of considerable interest to theorists, they 'advise against pedagogical intervention based solely on any of the learning style instruments' (Coffield *et al* 2004: 140).

convergers versus **divergers**	**initiators** versus **reasoners**
verbalisers versus **imagers**	**intuitionists** versus **analysts**
holists versus **serialists**	**extroverts** versus **introverts**
deep versus **surface learning**	**sensing** versus **intuition**
activists versus **reflectors**	**thinking** versus **feeling**
pragmatists versus **theorists**	**judging** versus **perceiving**
adaptors versus **innovators**	**left brainers** versus **right brainers**
assimilators versus **explorers**	**meaning-directed** versus **undirected**
field dependent versus **field independent**	**theorists** versus **humanitarians**
globalists versus **analysts**	**activists** versus **theorists**
assimilators versus **accommodators**	**pragmatists** versus **reflectors**
imaginative versus **analytic learners**	**organisers** versus **innovators**
non-committers versus **plungers**	**lefts/analytics/inductives/successive**
common-sense versus **dynamic learners**	**processors** versus **rights/globals/**
concrete versus **abstract learners**	**deductives/simultaneous processors**
random versus **sequential learners**	**executives/hierarchics/conservatives**
	versus **legislatives/anarchics/liberals**

FIGURE 3: Different learner descriptions (from Coffield *et al* 2004: 136)

Coffield and his colleagues have two main reasons for their scepticism. The first is that there are so many different models available (as the list in Figure 3 shows) that it is almost impossible to choose between them. This is a big worry, especially since there is no kind of consensus among researchers about what they are looking at and what they have identified. Secondly, some of the more popular methods, Coffield *et al* suggest, are driven by commercial interests which have identified themselves with particular models. This is not to suggest that there is anything intrinsically wrong with commercial interests, but rather to introduce a note of caution into our evaluation of different learner style descriptions.

It may sound as if, therefore, there is no point in reading about different learner styles at all – or trying to incorporate them into our teaching. But that is not the case. We should do as much as we can to understand the individual differences within a group. We should try to find descriptions that chime with our own perceptions, and we should endeavour to teach individuals as well as groups.

B4 Individual variations

If some people are better at some things than others – better at analysing, for example – this would indicate that there are differences in the ways individual brains work. It also suggests that people respond differently to the same stimuli. How might such variation determine the ways in which individual students learn most readily? How might it affect the ways in which we teach? There are two models in particular which have tried to account for such perceived individual variation, and which teachers have attempted to use for the benefit of their learners.

- **Neuro-Linguistic Programming:** according to practitioners of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), we use a number of 'primary representational systems' to experience the world. These systems are described in the acronym 'VAKOG' which stands for *Visual* (we look and see), *Auditory* (we hear and listen), *Kinaesthetic* (we feel externally, internally

or through movement), *Olfactory* (we smell things) and *Gustatory* (we taste things).

Most people, while using all these systems to experience the world, nevertheless have one 'preferred primary system' (Revell and Norman 1997: 31). Some people are particularly stimulated by music when their preferred primary system is auditory, whereas others, whose primary preferred system is visual, respond most powerfully to images. An extension of this is when a visual person 'sees' music, or has a strong sense of different colours for different sounds. The VAKOG formulation, while somewhat problematic in the distinctions it attempts to make, offers a framework to analyse different student responses to stimuli and environments.

NLP gives teachers the chance to offer students activities which suit their primary preferred systems. According to Radislav Millrood, it shows how teachers can operate in the *C-Zone* – the zone of congruence, where teachers and students interact affectively – rather than in the *R-Zone* – the zone of student resistance, where students do not appreciate how the teacher tries to make them behave (Millrood 2004). NLP practitioners also use techniques such as 'three-position thinking' (Baker and Rinvolucri 2005a) to get teachers and students to see things from other people's points of view so that they can be more effective communicators and interactors.

- **MI theory:** MI stands for Multiple Intelligences, a concept introduced by the Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner. In his book *Frames of Mind*, he suggested that we do not possess a single intelligence, but a range of 'intelligences' (Gardner 1983). He listed seven of these: Musical/rhythmical, Verbal/linguistic, Visual/spatial, Bodily/kinaesthetic, Logical/mathematical, Intrapersonal and Interpersonal. All people have all of these intelligences, he said, but in each person one (or more) of them is more pronounced. This allowed him to predict that a typical occupation (or 'end state') for people with a strength in logical/mathematical intelligence is that of the scientist, whereas a typical end state for people with strengths in visual/spatial intelligence might well be that of the navigator. The athlete might be the typical end state for people who are strong in bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence, and so on. Gardner has since added an eighth intelligence which he calls Naturalistic intelligence (Gardner 1993) to account for the ability to recognise and classify patterns in nature; Daniel Goleman has added a ninth 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman 1995). This includes the ability to empathise, control impulse and self-motivate.

  If we accept that different intelligences predominate in different people, it suggests that the same learning task may not be appropriate for all of our students. While people with a strong logical/mathematical intelligence might respond well to a complex grammar explanation, a different student might need the comfort of diagrams and physical demonstration because their strength is in the visual/spatial area. Other students who have a strong interpersonal intelligence may require a more interactive climate if their learning is to be effective. Rosie Tanner (2001) has produced a chart (see Figure 4) to show what kind of activities might be suitable for people with special strengths in the different intelligences.

Armed with this information, teachers can see whether they have given their class a variety of activities to help the various types of learner described here. Although we cannot teach directly to each individual student in our class all of the time, we can ensure that we sometimes give opportunities for visualisation, for students to work on their own, for sharing and comparing and for physical movement. By keeping our eye on different individuals, we can direct them to learning activities which are best suited to their own proclivities.

Teaching Intelligently: Language Skills Activities Chart

Skill Intelligence	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Grammar	Vocabulary	Literature
Bodily Kinesthetic	Listeners listen to three sections of a tape in three different places then form groups to collaborate on their answers to a task	Learners re-order a cut-up jumbled reading text.	Learners write stories in groups by writing the first sentence of a story on a piece of paper and passing it to another learner for communication.	Learners play a game where they obtain information from various places in the classroom and report back.	Learners play a board game with counters and dice to practice tenses.	Learners label objects in the classroom with names.	Learners create a similar scene to one they have read about and act it out (e.g. a conflict, a line you were let down).
Interpersonal	Learners check the answers to a listening task in pairs or groups before listening a second time.	Learners discuss answers to questions on a text in groups.	Learners write a dialogue in pairs.	Learners read problem-page letters and discuss responses.	Learners do a "find someone who…" activity related to a grammar point (e.g. present perfect: find someone who has been to Spain).	Learners test each other's vocabulary.	In groups, learners discuss their preferences for characters in a book.
Intrapersonal	Learners think individually about how they might have reacted, compared with someone on a video they have seen.	Learners reflect on characters in a text and how similar or different they are to them.	Learners write learning diaries.	Learners record a speech or talk on a cassette.	Learners complete sentences about themselves, practicing a grammar point (e.g., complete the sentence 'I am as … as …' five times).	Learners make their own vocabulary booklet which contains words they think are important to learn.	Learners write a diary for a few days in the life of a character in a book.
Linguistic	Learners write a letter after listening to a text.	Learners answer true/false questions about a text.	Learners write a short story.	In groups, learners discuss statements about a controversial topic.	The teacher provides a written worksheet on a grammar point.	Learners make mind maps of related words.	Learners rewrite part of a book as a film script, with instructions for the director and actors.
Logical-Mathematical	Learners listen to three pieces of text and decide what the correct sequence is.	Learners compare two characters or opinions in a text.	Learners write steps in a process, (e.g., a recipe).	Learners in a group each have a picture. They discuss and re-order them, without showing them, to create a story.	Learners learn grammar inductively, i.e., they work out how a grammar rule works by using discovery activities.	Learners discuss how many words they can think of related to another word (e.g., photograph, photographer).	Learners re-order a jumbled version of events in a chapter of a novel they have read.
Musical	Learners complete gaps in the lyrics of a pop song.	Learners listen to music extracts and decide how they relate to a text they have read.	Learners write the lyrics to an existing melody about a text or topic they have been dealing with in class.	Learners listen to a musical video clip (with the TV covered up) and discuss which images might accompany the music.	Learners create a mnemonic or rhyme to help them remember a grammar point.	Learners decide which new words they would like to learn from a pop song.	Learners find a piece of appropriate music to accompany a passage from a book.
Naturalist	Learners listen to sound inside and outside the classroom and discuss what they have heard.	Learners work with a text on environmental issues.	Learners write a text describing a natural scene.	Learners discuss an environmental issue.	Learners do an activity associated with nature (e.g., walk by the sea and write a story in the past tense about it).	Learners make a mind map with a work related to nature (e.g. bird, tree).	Learners read descriptions of nature in a novel and then write their own.
Spatial	Learners complete a chart or diagram while listening.	Learners predict the contents of a text using an accompanying picture or photo.	Learners make a collage with illustrations and text about a place in their country.	In pairs learners discover the differences between two pictures without showing them to each other.	The teacher illustrates a grammar point with a series of pictures (e.g. daily activities to show present simple).	Learners cut out a picture from a magazine and label it.	Learners draw a cartoon version of a story.

B5 What to do about individual differences

Faced with the different descriptions of learner types and styles which have been listed here, it may seem that the teacher's task is overwhelmingly complex. We want to satisfy the many different students in front of us, teaching to their individual strengths with activities designed to produce the best results for each of them, yet we also want to address our teaching to the group as a whole.

Our task as teachers will be greatly helped if we can establish who the different students in our classes are and recognise how they are different. We can do this through observation or, as in the following two examples, through more formal devices. For example, we might ask students what their learning preferences are in questionnaires with items (perhaps in the students' first language) such as the following:

When answering comprehension questions about reading passages I prefer to work

a on my own. ❑
b with another student. ❑
c with a group of students. ❑

Or we might try to find out which preferred sensory system our students respond to. Revell and Norman suggest the activity shown in Figure 5.

THE LEAD VAK TEST:
READ AND IMAGINE

Follow each instruction in your mind and give yourself a mark:
0 = impossible 1 = difficult 2 = OK 3 = easy

___ SEE a kangaroo
___ SEE your front door
___ SEE your toothbrush
___ SEE a friend's face
___ SEE a plate of food
___ SEE a TV show …
___ WATCH the TV scene change

___ HEAR a song
___ HEAR rain
___ HEAR a fire alarm
___ HEAR a friend's voice
___ HEAR your own voice
___ HEAR birds singing …
___ HEAR the birdsong change to a call of alarm

___ FEEL excited
___ FEEL yourself swimming
___ FEEL grass under your feet
___ FEEL a cat* on your lap
___ FEEL hot
___ FEEL your fingers on a piano keyboard
___ FEEL your fingers playing a few notes

When you've done the test:
- Add up your scores for each sense: SEE ___ HEAR ___ FEEL
- Does the highest score correspond with what you think your preferred lead system is? How did you fare when it came to changing the scenes slightly in the last one of each section?
- Think of ways to enhance the systems you don't find so easy.

FIGURE 5: 'The Lead VAK Test' from *In Your Hands* by J Revell and S Norman (Saffire Press)

C Language levels

Students are generally described in three levels, *beginner*, *intermediate* and *advanced*, and these categories are further qualified by talking about *real beginners* and *false beginners*. Between beginner and intermediate we often class students as *elementary*. The intermediate level itself is often sub-divided into *lower intermediate* and *upper intermediate* and even *mid-intermediate*. One version of different levels, therefore, has the progression shown in Figure 7.

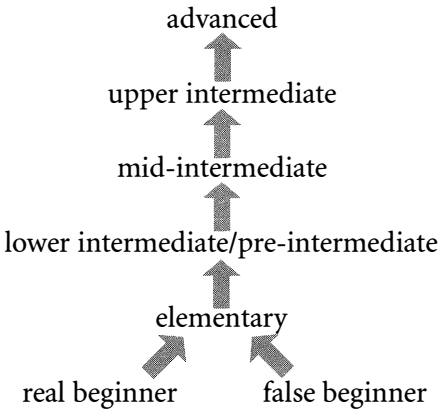


FIGURE 7: Representing different student levels

These terms are used somewhat indiscriminately, so that what one school calls intermediate is sometimes thought of as nearer elementary by others, and someone else might describe a student as advanced despite the fact that in another institution he or she would be classed as upper intermediate. Some coherence is arrived at as a result of the general consensus that exists between publishers about what levels their courses are divided into, but even here there is some variation (often depending on different views about what students at certain levels are capable of doing).

In recent years, the Council of Europe and the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) have been working to define language competency levels for learners of a number of different languages. The result of these efforts is the Common European Framework (a document setting out in detail what students 'can do' at various levels) and a series of ALTE levels ranging from A1 (roughly equivalent to elementary level) to C2 (very advanced). Figure 8 shows the different levels in sequence.

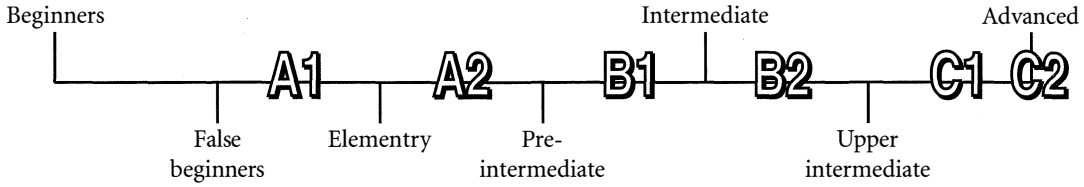


FIGURE 8: Terms for different student levels (and ALTE levels)

ALTE has produced 'can do' statements to try to show students, as well as teachers, what these levels mean, as the example in Figure 9 for the skill of writing demonstrates (A1 is at the left, C2 at the right).

Can complete basic forms and write notes including times, dates and places.	Can complete forms and write short simple letters or postcards related to personal information.	Can write letters or make notes on familiar or predicatable matters.	Can make notes while someone is talking or write a letter including non-standard questions.	Can prepare/draft professional correspondence, take reasonably accurate notes in meetings or write an essay which shows an ability to communicate.	Can write letters on any subject and full notes of meetings or seminars with good expression or accuracy.

FIGURE 9: ALTE 'Can do' statements for writing

ALTE levels and 'can do' statements (alongside the more traditional terms we have mentioned) are being used increasingly by coursebook writers and curriculum designers, not only in Europe but across much of the language-learning world (for more of the statements, see page 141). They are especially useful when translated into the students' L1 because they allow students to say what they can do, rather than having to be told by the teacher what standard they measure up against.

However, it is worth pointing out that the ALTE standards are just one way of measuring proficiency. There are also ESL standards which were developed by the TESOL organisation in the USA (see www.tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=86&DID=1556), and many exam systems have their own level descriptors. We also need to remember that students' abilities within any particular level may be varied, too (e.g. they may be much better at speaking than writing).

The level students have reached often has an effect on their motivation. For example, students who have considerable trouble understanding and producing language at beginner levels often fail to progress to higher levels; this accounts for the relatively high 'drop-out' rate of some adult beginners. Sometimes students who arrive at, say, an intermediate level, tend to suffer from the so-called 'plateau effect' because for them it is not easy to see progress in their abilities from one week to the next. This can have a very demotivating effect,

Teachers need to be sensitive to the plateau effect, taking special measures to counteract it. Such efforts may include setting achievement goals (see below) so that students have a clear learning target to aim at, explaining what still needs to be done, making sure that activities are especially engaging, and sparking the students' interest in the more subtle distinctions of language use.

Other variations in level-dependent teacher behaviour are important, too, especially in terms of both methodology and the kind of language (and the topics) which we expose our students to.

C1 Methodology

Some techniques and exercises that are suitable for beginners look less appropriate for students at higher levels, and some assumptions about advanced students' abilities are less successful when transposed, without thought, to students at lower levels. This is especially true in speaking tasks. It is quite feasible to ask advanced students to get into pairs or groups to discuss a topic of some kind without structuring the activity in any way. But when asking elementary students to have a discussion in pairs or groups, we need to be far more rigorous

in telling them exactly what they should do, and we will probably help them with some of the language they might want to use. The instructions we give may well be accompanied by a demonstration so that everyone is absolutely clear about the task, whereas at higher levels this may not be so necessary and might even seem strange and patronising (for an example of this, see *Speaking* on the DVD which accompanies Harmer 2007). At advanced levels it is easy to organise discussion – whether pre-planned or opportunistic (see page 201) – whereas for beginners this option will not be available.

At lower levels we may well want to have students repeat sentences and phrases chorally (see page 206), and we may organise controlled cue–response drills (pages 206–207). This is because students sometimes have difficulty getting their mouths round some of the sounds (and stress and intonation patterns) of English; choral repetition and drills can help them get over this and, furthermore, allow them to practise in an enjoyable and stress-free way. Advanced students, however, might feel rather surprised to be asked to practise like this.

In general, we will give students more support when they are at beginner or intermediate levels than we need to do when they are more advanced. This does not mean that we will not approach more advanced tasks with care or be precise about what we are asking students to do. But at higher levels we may well be entitled to expect that students will be more resourceful and, as a result, have less need for us to explain everything in such a careful and supportive way.

C2 Language, task and topic

We have said that students acquire language partly as a result of the comprehensible input they receive – especially from the teacher (see Chapter 6, D3). This means, of course, that we will have to adjust the language we use to the level of the students we are teaching. Experienced teachers are very good at rough-tuning their language to the level they are dealing with. Such rough-tuning involves, at beginner and elementary levels, using words and phrases that are as clear as possible, avoiding some of the more opaque idioms which the language contains. At lower levels we will do our best not to confuse our students by offering them too many different accents or varieties of English (see Chapter 1, B3), even though we will want to make sure they are exposed to more Englishes later on. We will also take special care at lower levels to moderate the speed we speak at and to make our instructions especially clear.

This preoccupation with suiting our language to the level of the students extends to what we ask them to read, listen to, write and speak about. As we shall see on page 273, there are things that students can do with authentic English – that is English not specially moderated for use by language students – but in general, we will want to get students to read and listen to things that they have a chance of understanding. Of course, it depends on how much we want them to get from a text, but we always need to bear in mind the demotivating effect of a text which students find depressingly impenetrable.

The same is true for what we get students to write and speak about. If we ask students to express a complex opinion and they do not have the language to do it, the result will be an unhappy one for both students and teacher. If we try to force students to write a complex letter when they are clearly unable to do such a thing, everyone will feel let down. We will discuss the concept of trying to ensure achievement below.

One problem with some beginner coursebook material in particular is the way in which quite complex topics are reduced to banalities because the language available at that level makes it impossible to treat them in any depth. The result is a kind of 'dumbing-down',

which sometimes makes English language learning material appear condescending and almost childish. We must do our best to avoid this, matching topics to the level, and reserving complex issues for more advanced classes.

D Motivation

It is accepted for most fields of learning that motivation is essential to success: that we have to want to do something to succeed at it. Without such motivation we will almost certainly fail to make the necessary effort. We need, therefore, to develop our understanding of motivation – what it means, where it comes from and how it can be sustained.

D1 Defining motivation

At its most basic level, motivation is some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something. In his discussion of motivation, Douglas Brown includes the need for ego enhancement as a prime motivator. This is the need 'for the self to be known and to be approved of by others' (Brown 2007: 169). This, presumably, is what causes people to spend hours in the gym! Such a view of motivation also accounts for our need for exploration ('the other side of the mountain').

Marion Williams and Robert Burden suggest that motivation is a 'state of cognitive arousal' which provokes a 'decision to act', as a result of which there is 'sustained intellectual and/or physical effort' so that the person can achieve some 'previously set goal' (Williams and Burden 1997: 120). They go on to point out that the strength of that motivation will depend on how much value the individual places on the outcome he or she wishes to achieve. Adults may have clearly defined or vague goals. Children's goals, on the other hand, are often more amorphous and less easy to describe, but they can still be very powerful.

In discussions of motivation an accepted distinction is made between *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivation, that is motivation which comes from 'outside' and from 'inside'.

Extrinsic motivation is the result of any number of outside factors, for example the need to pass an exam, the hope of financial reward or the possibility of future travel. Intrinsic motivation, by contrast, comes from within the individual. Thus a person might be motivated by the enjoyment of the learning process itself or by a desire to make themselves feel better.

Most researchers and methodologists have come to the view that intrinsic motivation produces better results than its extrinsic counterpart (but see page 104). Even where the original reason for taking up a language course, for example, is extrinsic, the chances of success will be greatly enhanced if the students come to love the learning process.

D2 External sources of motivation

The motivation that brings students to the task of learning English can be affected and influenced by the attitude of a number of people. It is worth considering what and who these are since they form part of the environment from which the student engages with the learning process.

- **The goal:** one of the strongest outside sources of motivation is the goal which students perceive themselves to be learning for. Frequently this is provided by a forthcoming exam, and in this respect it is no surprise to note that teachers often find their exam classes more

committed than other groups who do not have something definite to work towards.

However, students may have other less well-defined goals, too, such as a general desire to be able to converse in English, to be able to use English to get a better job or to understand English-language websites, etc.

Some students, of course, may not have any real English-learning goals at all. This is especially true for younger learners. In such situations they may acquire their attitude to (and motivation for) learning English from other sources.

- **The society we live in:** outside any classroom there are attitudes to language learning and the English language in particular. How important is the learning of English considered to be in the society the student lives in? In a school situation, for example, is the language learning part of the curriculum of high or low status? If school students were offered the choice of two languages to learn, which one would they choose and why? Are the cultural images associated with English positive or negative?

  All these views of language learning will affect the student's attitude to the language being studied, and the nature and strength of this attitude will, in its turn, have a profound effect on the degree of motivation the student brings to class and whether or not that motivation continues. Even where adult students have made their own decision to come to a class to study English, they will bring with them attitudes from the society they live in, developed over years, whether these attitudes are thoroughly positive or somewhat negative.

- **The people around us:** in addition to the culture of the world around them, students' attitudes to language learning will be greatly influenced by the people who are close to them. The attitude of parents and older siblings will be crucial. Do they approve of language learning, for example, or do they think that maths and reading are what count, and clearly show that they are more concerned with those subjects than with the student's success in English?

  The attitude of a student's peers is also crucial: if they are critical of the subject or activity, a student may well lose any enthusiasm they once had for learning English. If peers are enthusiastic about learning English, however, there is a much greater chance that the same student may feel more motivated to learn the subject.

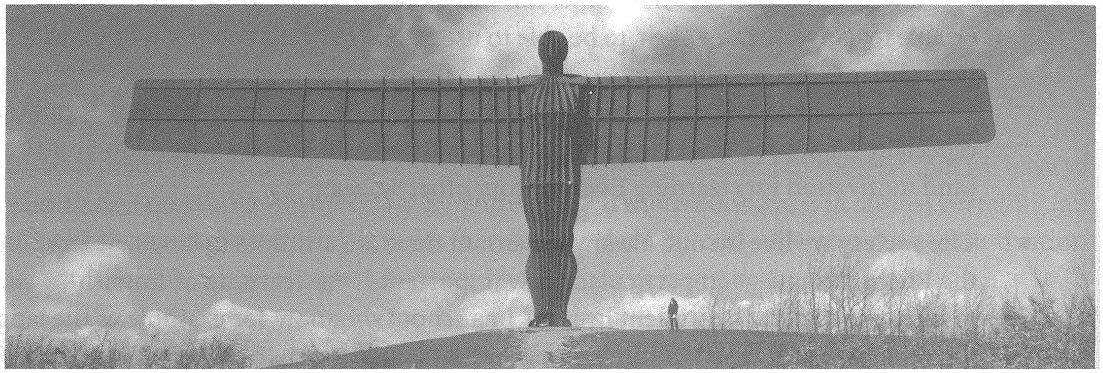
- **Curiosity:** we should not underestimate a student's natural curiosity. At the beginning of a term or semester, most students have at least a mild interest in who their new teacher is and what it will be like to be in his or her lessons. When students start English for the first time, most are interested (to some extent) to see what it is like. This initial motivation is precious. Without it, getting a class off the ground and building rapport will be that much more difficult.

Even when teachers find themselves facing a class of motivated students, they cannot relax. For it is what happens next that really counts. Sustaining students' motivation is one area where we can make a real difference – and for that we need a motivation angel.

D3 The motivation angel

In the north-east of England, outside the city of Gateshead, stands a remarkable statue by Antony Gormley, the 20-metre-high *Angel of the North*. It can be seen from the motorway, from the nearby train line and for miles around. It is, by common consent, a work of uplifting beauty

and inspires almost all who see it, whatever their religion or even if they have none at all.



The *Angel of the North* provides us with a satisfying metaphor to deal with the greatest difficulty teachers face in terms of motivation. For as Alan Rodgers wrote many years ago, '... we forget that initial motivation to learn may be weak and die; alternatively it can be increased and directed into new channels' (Rogers 1996: 61). In other words, we can have a powerful effect on how or even whether students remain motivated after whatever initial enthusiasm they brought to the course has dissipated. We have the ability, as well, to gradually create motivation in students where, initially, there is none. This is not to say that it is a teacher's sole responsibility to build and nurture motivation. On the contrary, students need to play their part, too. But insofar as we can have a positive effect, we need to be able to build our own 'motivation angel' to keep students engaged and involved as lesson succeeds lesson, as week succeeds week.

The angel needs to be built on the solid base of the extrinsic motivation which the students bring with them to class (see Figure 10). And on this base we will build our statue in five distinct stages.

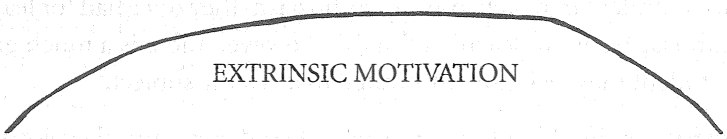


FIGURE 10: The motivation base

- **Affect:** affect, as we said on page 58, is concerned with students' feelings, and here we as teachers can have a dramatic effect. In the words of some eleven-year-old students I interviewed, 'a good teacher is someone who asks the people who don't always put their hands up' and 'a good teacher is someone who knows our names' (Harmer 2007: 26). In other words, students are far more likely to stay motivated over a period of time if they think that the teacher cares about them. This can be done by building good teacher–student rapport (see Chapter 6C), which in turn is dependent on listening to students' views and attempts with respect, and intervening (i.e. for correction) in an appropriate and constructive way.

  When students feel that the teacher has little interest in them (or is unprepared to make the effort to treat them with consideration), they will have little incentive to remain motivated. When the teacher is caring and helpful, however, they are much more likely to retain an interest in what is going on, and as a result, their self-esteem (an important ingredient in success) is likely to be nurtured.

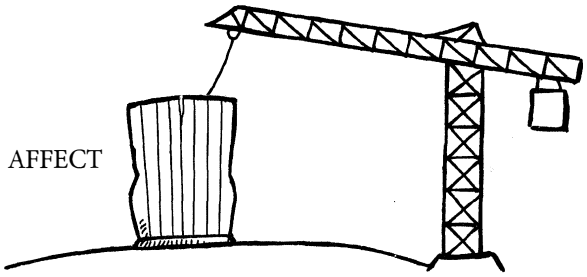


FIGURE 11: Affect

- **Achievement:** nothing motivates like success. Nothing demotivates like continual failure. It is part of the teacher's art, therefore, to try to ensure that students are successful, because the longer their success continues, the more likely they are to stay motivated to learn.

  However, success without effort does not seem to be that motivating. If everything is just too easy, students are likely to lose their respect for the task of learning. The same is true if success is too difficult to attain. What students need to feel is a real sense of achievement, which has cost them something to acquire but has not bankrupted them in the process.

  Part of a teacher's job, therefore, is to set an appropriate level of challenge for the students. This means setting tests that are not too difficult or too easy, and involving students in learning tasks they can succeed in. It also means being able to guide students towards success by showing them how to get things right next time.

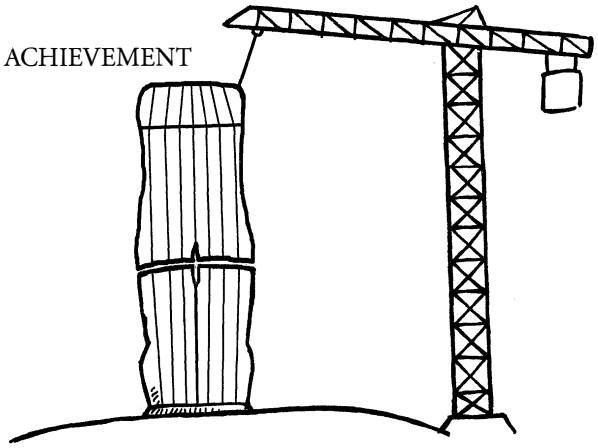


FIGURE 12: Achievement

- **Attitude:** however nice teachers are, students are unlikely to follow them willingly (and do what is asked of them) unless they have confidence in their professional abilities. Students need to believe that we know what we are doing.

  This confidence in a teacher may start the moment we walk into the classroom for the first time – because of the students' perception of our attitude to the job (see Figure 13). Aspects such as the way we dress, where we stand and the way we talk to the class all have a bearing here. Students also need to feel that we know about the subject we are teaching. Consciously or unconsciously they need to feel that we are prepared to teach English in general and that we are prepared to teach this lesson in particular. As we shall see, one

of the chief reasons (but not the only one, of course) why classes occasionally become undisciplined is because teachers do not have enough for the students to do – or seem not to be quite sure what to do next.

When students have confidence in the teacher, they are likely to remain engaged with what is going on. If they lose that confidence, it becomes difficult for them to sustain the motivation they might have started with.

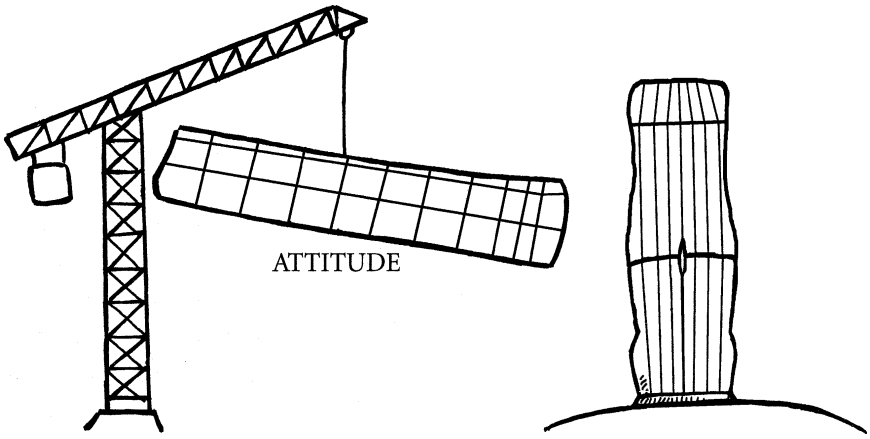


FIGURE 13: (Perceived) attitude (of the teacher)

- **Activities:** our students' motivation is far more likely to remain healthy if they are doing things they enjoy doing, and which they can see the point of. Our choice of what we ask them to do has an important role, therefore, in their continuing engagement with the learning process.

  It sometimes seems to be suggested that students only enjoy activities which involve game-like communication and other interactive tasks. However, this is not necessarily the case. Different students, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, have different styles and preferences. While some may want to sing songs and write poems, others might be much more motivated by concentrated language study and poring over reading texts.

  We need to try to match the activities (see Figure 14) we take into lessons with the students we are teaching. One way of doing this is to keep a constant eye on what they respond well to and what they feel less engaged with. Only then can we be sure that the activities we take into class have at least a chance of helping to keep students engaged with the learning process.

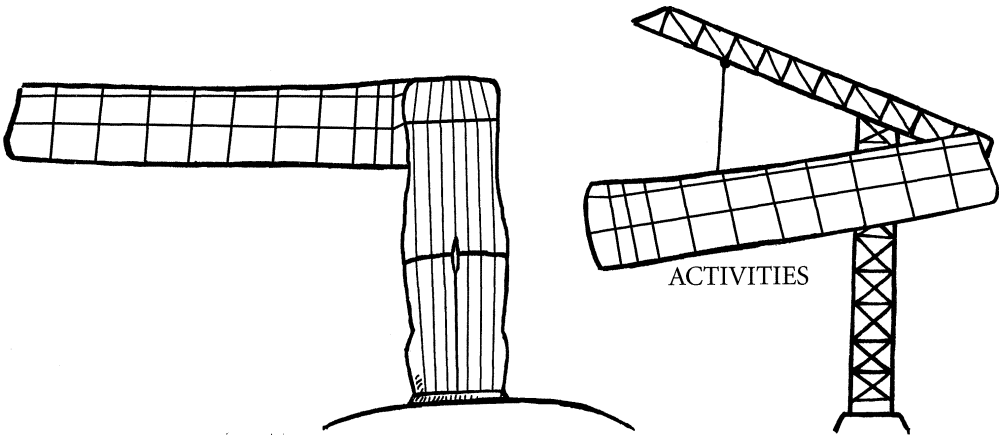


FIGURE 14: Activities

- **Agency:** *agency* is a term borrowed from social sciences (see for example Taylor 1977, Frankfurt 1988, Belz 2002). Here it is appropriated to mean something similar to the agent of a passive sentence, that is, in the words of some grammarians, the person or thing 'that does'.

  A lot of the time, in some classes, students have things done *to* them and, as a result, risk being passive recipients of whatever is being handed down. We should be equally interested, however, in things done *by* the students.

  When students have agency (see Figure 15), they get to make some of the decisions about what is going on, and, as a consequence, they take some responsibility for their learning. For example, we might allow students to tell us when and if they want to be corrected in a fluency activity (Rinvolucri 1998) rather than always deciding ourselves when correction is appropriate and when it is not. We might have students tell us what words they find difficult to pronounce rather than assuming they all have the same difficulties.

  J J Wilson suggests that wherever possible students should be allowed to make decisions. He wants to give students ownership of class materials, letting them write on the board or control the CD player, for example (Wilson 2005). For Jenny de Sonneville, while the teacher may decide on broad learning outcomes, he or she should design tasks 'in which the students are empowered to take a more active role in the course design' (2005: 11). For Lesley Painter, it was allowing students to choose what homework they wanted and needed to do that was the key to motivating her students to do the tasks that were set (Painter 1999). Real agency occurs, finally, when students take responsibility for their own learning, and we can provoke them to do this in the various ways we will discuss in Chapter 23A. A student we have trained to use dictionaries effectively has the potential for agency which a student who cannot access the wealth of information in a dictionary (especially a monolingual dictionary) is cut off from.

  No one is suggesting that students should have complete control of what happens in lessons. But the more we empower them and give them agency, the more likely they are to stay motivated over a long period.

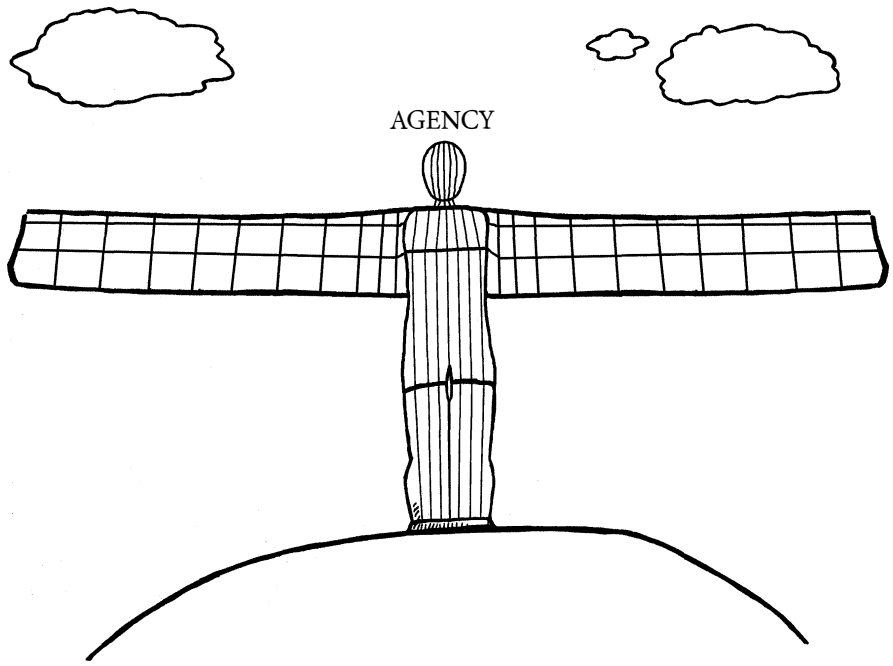


FIGURE 15: The motivation angel

Before we leave the subject of motivation (and indeed of learner description in general), we need to remember that motivation (where it comes from and what teachers can do to sustain it) may not be the same for all students and in all cultures. Judy Chen and her colleagues (based on their study of more than 160 students in Taiwan and China) observe that an assumption that motivation for Chinese students is the same as for EFL students in the USA, is 'apt to be off the mark, as is any assumption that the components of motivation are universal' (Chen *et al* 2005: 624). What their study clearly shows is that throughout Greater China there are numerous learning strategies based entirely on memorisation (2005: 625), and that the greatest motivator is success in exams based on how much students can remember. In such situations (and until and unless the exams change so that they prioritise spoken and written communication rather than memorised vocabulary and grammar), perhaps agency may not be important in the way we have described it; nor is the need for activity variety so pronounced if all students are fixated on this kind of achievement. Indeed in Taiwan many successful ex-students, Chen and her colleagues report, promote an ever-popular 'memorize a dictionary' strategy, and some students get an idiom a day sent to their mobile phones.

We have already discussed the need for context-sensitive methodology (see Chapter 4B). The study which Judy Chen and her colleagues have undertaken reminds us again that in discussions of teaching and learning strategies we need to look carefully at who the students are, where they are learning and what their aspirations are.

Learning styles – Modality Preference Inventory

http://homepages.wmich.edu/~jmcgowan/CTE344/session3/Modalityinventory.

Often (3) Sometimes (2) Seldom/Never (1)

Visual Modality
____ I remember information better if I write it down.
____ Looking at the person helps keep me focused.
____ I need a quiet place to get my work done.
____ When I take a test, I can see the textbook page in my head.
____ I need to write down directions, not just take them verbally.
____ Music or background noise distracts my attention from the task at hand.
____ I don't always get the meaning of a joke.
____ I doodle and draw pictures on the margins of my notebook pages.
____ I have trouble following lectures.
____ I react very strongly to colors.
____ **Total**

Auditory Modality
____ My papers and notebooks always seem messy.
____ When I read, I need to use my index finger to track my place on the line.
____ I do not follow written directions well.
____ If I hear something, I will remember it.
____ Writing has always been difficult for me.
____ I often misread words from the text (i.e., "them" for "then").
____ I would rather listen and learn than read and learn.
____ I'm not very good at interpreting and individual's body language.
____ Pages with small print or poor quality copies are difficult for me to read.
____ My eyes tire quickly, even though my vision check-up is always fine.
____ **Total**

Kinesthetic/Tactile Modality
____ I start a project before reading the directions.
____ I hate to sit at a desk for long periods of time.
____ I prefer first to see something done and then to do it myself.
____ I use the trial and error approach to problem-solving.
____ I like to read my textbook while riding an exercise bike.
____ I take frequent study breaks.
____ I have a difficult time giving step-by-step instructions.
____ I enjoy sports and do well at several different types of sports.
____ I use my hands when describing things.
____ I have to rewrite or type my class notes to reinforce the material.
____ **Total**

Total the score for each section. A score of 21 points or more in a modality indicates strength in that area. The highest of the 3 scores indicates the most efficient method of information intake. The second highest score indicates the modality that boosts the primary strength. For example, a score of 23 in the visual modality indicates a strong visual learner. Such a learner benefits from the text, from filmstrips, charts, graphs, etc. If the second highest score is auditory, then the individual would benefit from audiotapes, lectures, etc. If you are strong kinesthetically, then taking notes and rewriting class notes should reinforce information.

LEARNER TYPES

Note: The following are in no way concrete or absolutes!

Visual Learners tend to…

be neat and orderly
speak quickly
be good spellers
have trouble remembering instructions unless they are written down
often ask people to repeat themselves
doodle during phone conversations
often know what to say but can't think of the right words
need to have an overall picture of a project before they start
be strong, fast readers

Auditory Learners tend to…

talk to themselves while working
be easily distracted by noise
enjoy reading aloud and listening
repeat back and mimic tone and intonation
find writing difficult
be good public speakers
like music more than art
love discussions and give long descriptions
have problems with activities like jigsaws
spell better out loud than in writing

Kinesthetic Learners tend to…

speak slowly
respond to physical rewards
touch people to get attention
stand close when talking to someone
move around a lot
learn by doing
memorize by walking and seeing
gesture a lot
not sit still for a long time
not remember geography
want to act things out