Multiple Realities
of the Classroom

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"Foreign language is for all,"[1] the motto uniting foreign language associations, publications, and instructors in the beginning of the twenty-first century, is indeed both democratic in its intent and memorable in its delivery. However, the realities of the classroom denote the real situation within school systems, buildings, and classrooms where foreign language instruction is actually being conducted. Upon opening the door to our classroom, we immediately detect the ethnic diversity of the student population. The representation of one ethnic culture over others varies in this nation according to the location of our classroom. After spending some time in this room, however, we note further diversity: students with special needs, unfocused learners, highly motivated learners, and even heritage speakers. All these learners require our attention to their needs. The information in this chapter (1) identifies these learners who, as agents of change, reflect the global make-up of today's classroom, (2) notes the varied challenges they offer, and (3) addresses what can and must be done in the classroom to accommodate them.

With the diversity of our population noted, we turn our focus to the instructor. Here, the question may be one of qualification and/or recognized certification in the field of instruction. Shortages of teachers in the

critical field of foreign language instruction have in some districts led to the employment of a "warm body" who assumes the role of instructor until a qualified teacher appears in the human resources office. In many instances the course is simply canceled for want of an instructor. Accordingly, the overcrowding of classes staffed by qualified personnel yields less than perfect conditions for students and teacher alike. To combat these growing shortages, changes in certification and in the recruitment of teachers are reflected in new state initiatives, such as those in Maryland and Virginia. In Maryland, the state is allowing retired teachers to return to teaching while maintaining their retirement checks. In Virginia many school districts are signing on new teachers as they complete student teaching in their schools. Cash bonuses for signing early are sometimes offered in such cases. Throughout the nation placement services and human resources departments are looking to the Internet to advertise openings and to link candidates to these openings. Teachers across the nation and around the world can readily inquire about jobs in any area. Teleconferencing, in turn, is a cost effective and timely way to interview such teacher candidates. More than ever schools are awakening to the reality of shortages in staff which now include foreign language teachers.

As we settle in to observe our classroom, aware of the makeup of its population and the qualifications of its instructor, we must now consider the scheduling pattern being used in that particular school. District decisions on program emphases and administrative decisions on the scheduling of classes quite often dictate the instructional format of classrooms. As more and more schools and systems, especially those along the east coast, move away from the traditional fifty- to fifty-five-minute daily classes which were in place for the first three-quarters of this century, a myriad of designs is being implemented. Block scheduling, whether realized as the 4 x 4 block, alternating A/B, or any of a number of hybrids of these scheduling patterns, is increasingly becoming the norm.[2] Participants at recent National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Language meetings have had block scheduling issues featured prominently on their agendas. The issues surrounding the use of block scheduling and its implementation, coupled with the changes in classroom instructional styles and activities, must be addressed when looking at the total picture of today's classroom.

Just as the students, teaching staff, and scheduling practices have changed the face of today's foreign language classroom, so have curricular issues. With the advent of national standards for nine of the most com-

monly taught languages in this nation, districts are rushing to revise and in many cases rewrite curriculum guides to align with the new standards. In those areas where new scheduling procedures are being implemented, strategies and activities are also being redesigned. Similarly, the new focus of the ACTFL K–12 performance guidelines is generating renewed interest in the proficiency movement and its impact on curriculum development. The revised guidelines address assessment of foreign language acquisition at each K–12 level. These guidelines are the subject of many discussions, publications, and conference themes. In turn, meaningful staff development long desired by most instructors has now become a necessity in educating teachers in these new methods, ideas, and guidelines.

Technology may or may not be included in the foreign language curriculum or in the foreign language classroom. However, more and more teachers are requesting information on how to integrate technology effectively into their lessons. Teachers are also being required as part of the certification process to demonstrate a working knowledge of the hardware and the software programs associated with general word processing and classroom management skills, as well as programs specific to their disciplines. More likely than not, students will be limited in their access to technology — partly due to the lack of hardware in the room, the software available to them, or the capacity of network servers. Technological advances continue to be tied to budgetary factors as well as to the availability of appropriate training on their use in teaching. Changes here will be due in part to Title II funds addressing "High Standards in the Classroom" and "Technology for Education" in the "Education Excellence for All Children Act."

The realities of today's classroom, while common to most disciplines, offer unique challenges to the foreign language teacher. Throughout this chapter we will examine each of these realities through available research and information as well as through observations made by the authors over the past three decades. Finally, within each section we will develop the topic as it relates to real classroom situations and also offer resources that can be useful in dealing with that particular issue.

Diverse Student Populations

The reality of the classroom is that many teachers are unaware of who the diverse learners in the classroom are and what their special needs are. This section will describe the diverse learners and their behaviors in the

foreign language classroom, look at changes needed to help alleviate some of the adverse practices, and recommend changes to help improve instruction. If all students are going to have access to foreign language classes (K–12), then all teachers should recognize the needs of their students and take advantage of the many resources that are available to help these students succeed and perform well. The foreign language classroom faces challenges beginning with the population that enters its doors. As cited in an earlier volume of *NEC Reports*, " ... homogeneity has been replaced by an extreme diversity in almost all facets of the student" (Spinelli, 1996, p. 58).

In 2000, over 33% of all school-age students in the U.S. will represent ethnic groups of African-Americans, Latin-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). In addition to the ethnic groups, many of the students (ethnic and non-ethnic) are given titles such as "At-risk," "Students with Special Needs," "ESL/ESOL" (English as a Second Language/English to Speakers of Other Languages) (Spinelli, 1996; Heining-Boynton, 1994; Polloway and Patton, 1993; Baker, Wang, and Walberg, 1995). The diversity of learners in the classroom reflects the many cultures that one finds in towns and cities throughout the United States.

Ethnic Students in the Foreign Language Classroom

The faces of the diverse students in the foreign language classroom are the rich shades of color of African-American, Asian, Caribbean, European, and Hispanic heritage and many groups within the identified heritage. Each of these groups in turn brings a heritage culture to the classroom. They bring beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that can lead to positive interaction and cultural awareness. Alasuutari (1995) defines this culture as "collective subjectivity, that is, a way of life or outlook adopted by a community or social class" (p. 25).

In today's classrooms, teachers may have ten or more cultures represented. Patton, who has written on cultural diversity and gifted education, explained in an interview with Brownell and Walther-Thomas (1997) that teachers are "cultural agents" (p. 119). Their own cultures influence how they perceive students and interpret behaviors. He also noted that students are also cultural agents and bring their own perceptions of life to the classroom. Whenever these perceptions of any given situation are vastly different, misunderstandings may occur and problems may arise (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Haslinger, Kelly, and O'Lare (1996) report that at Langley Park-McCormick Elementary School in Hyattsville, Maryland, there were 25 languages spoken by children in grades 4–6. In the school of 610, students from 37 different countries were represented. The school was once plagued with high absenteeism, student apathy, social problems, and low achievement. These same students took their problems to the middle and high schools in that region when they were promoted. In order to improve conditions at the school, Langley Park-McCormick initiated a plan that included principles of caring about the diversity of students and doing something positive to alleviate problems. They began to exhibit students' work in portfolios in a new Exhibit Center in the school — a living Children's Museum (Haslinger, Kelly, & O'Lare, 1996). In the school, the teachers and students have one exhibit per quarter. The exhibits represent one of the diverse cultures in the school, such as African-American or Hispanic. According to the authors, the "Hispanic display included maracas from Ecuador, an Andean wall hanging, a Spanish flamenco doll, and Mexican worry dolls" (p. 48). These efforts of celebrating diversity, caring about students, as well as including various business leaders in projects, have made a difference in the attitudes and achievement of students. Students are now more successful and attendance is high. The presence of caring and the effort to alleviate problems help decrease the number of students who are labeled "at-risk" and maintain a positive environment for the diverse population.

At-Risk Students

"At risk" describes students who may not succeed in school due to external factors. According to Brandt (1993), the term was adopted by educators after the 1983 President's Commission Report, *A Nation at Risk*. This report stated that it was scandalous that American schools and students were mediocre. Educators and advocates of school programs responded by saying that children were coming to school from economically and socially deprived environments. Therefore, students were not always healthy, happy, secure, safe, or motivated to learn when they arrived at school.

Educators, researchers, and policy makers began to collaborate in 1983 after the report to address the issues of students in schools and why they were considered mediocre. A few of the factors that emerged were poverty, poor conditions at home, single-parent homes, and students alone in homes after school. Brandt (1993) maintains that, in order to succeed in

school, students require "… supportive adults so necessary for mental and moral development in their growing years" (p. 3). When students do not have adults in the home to help with homework or with whom to discuss problems they are having, they turn to friends, other adults, or simply stay silent. The at-risk factors for students intensified in the 1990s due to drug use, child abuse, student crimes against one another, and a host of social and economic problems in the home and the communities (U.S. Department of Education, 1993–1994; Students at risk, 1992–1993).

Sometimes, students in the at-risk category display a variety of particular behavior patterns. Teachers may see aggressive student behavior, lethargy, mood swings, boredom, or sleepiness in class. Sometimes teachers are confronted with all these behaviors at the same time in one classroom. According to Sagor (1996), for every adverse condition in a classroom, there is a need to change it and plan for a desired outcome. To change the adverse condition, one should plan strategic intervention. Sagor believes that to change the behavior is to build resiliency in the students. The intent of the teacher should be to change the students' "feelings from failure, alienation, uselessness" (p. 38) to one of competence in working in a group and being successful. The interventions should include brainstorming with other teachers and visualizing constructive practices through webbing and graphic displays that help teachers and students organize their thoughts. Next, teachers should develop strategies and an assessment plan to make sure the strategies and activities are accomplishing desired outcomes (Sagor, 1996).

Even though there are few studies on at-risk students in the foreign language classroom, many foreign language educators agree that a caring environment, meaningful activities, and student-centered instruction that work for at-risk and special-need students in other content areas are usually acceptable practices in foreign language classrooms.

Students with Special Needs

Marcos (1998) cited two classifications for children with special needs: those with learning disabilities and those with giftedness. At first glance, it appears to be two extreme labels of students which might determine what educational formula will treat the "condition." However, in reading recent research and studies, these titles for students become more complex in prescribing treatments, due in part to the political issues and federal laws that surround them. A learning disability (LD) should be

based on criteria that show "a severe discrepancy" between achievement and intellectual capabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 1975). These discrepancies differ from state to state and are a result of changes in regulations that occurred in 1977. These changes allowed states to determine their own criteria for classifying LD students. Tomasi and Weinberg (1999) reported that New York State has classified a learning disabled student as

> A pupil with a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which manifests itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.... [A disability] includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, neurological impairment, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasis. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage ... (State Education of the University of New York, 1987, p. 23, cited in Tomasi & Weinberg, 1999).

Even though this is New York State's definition of a learning disability, it paints a picture of what LD students may bring to a foreign language classroom — special needs in learning. These needs are part of the multiple realities of the classroom. Every state in the US must implement PL 94-142 (1977), later titled and modified as the "Individuals with Disabilities Act" (1990) (IDEA PL 101-476). All these acts require special-education classes to accommodate the needs of LD students in all school districts. However, in 1994, the regulations were further clarified and modified to require the mainstreaming of LD students into regular classrooms (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1994). The inclusive concept has had a major impact on foreign language classrooms since 1994.

The diversity of learners in the classrooms of 2000 is still generating continual educational discussions. These discussions include topics on the inclusion of LD students and gifted students in the same classroom. Since LD students comprise a wide range of deficiencies, there should be a variety of strategies to meet their needs (Sparks, Ganschow, Pohlman, Artzer, & Skinner, 1992).

Foreign language educators meet annually to look for solutions to problems that confront teachers in the classroom. One of the questions asked in these discussions is, What should the teacher do for the students with special needs (LD, speech disorders, emotional disturbance, reading disorders, visual impairment, academically gifted, ...)? According to

Baker, Wang, and Walberg, (1994–95), "The effects of inclusion are positive and worthwhile, but they are huge. To reduce the gap between special and regular students requires both inclusion of special needs students and effective educational methods for *all* students" (p. 34).

Gardner (1993) believes there are seven intelligences for human beings which indicate their strength and potential. Teachers should be creative in their instructional practices by addressing these various intelligences and helping all learners to be successful. These intelligences are verbal, logical, visual, kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.[3] Teachers who incorporate the principles of these intelligences create a positive environment for most learners.

Table 1. Gardner's 7 Intelligences (Gardner, 1993)	
Intelligences	*Characteristics of students with strong intelligence traits*
verbal	expresses and processes languages well or responds readily to questions
visual	takes a concept if introduced with a visual and maps out images in the mind of how to do the task
logical	uses abstract thoughts in inductive and deductive ways, likes to reason and classify
kinesthetic	prefers to experience learning by doing, performing, role-playing
musical	uses music, rhythm, song, and tones to process learning
interpersonal	enjoys group interaction and social situations
intrapersonal	reflects on topics, takes time to process language, and examines feelings before responding

According to the literature, there is no one way to approach the seven intelligences. However, if one uses a variety of activities and multisensory approaches in teaching, one can reach most learners by encouraging their cooperativeness and addressing the particular learning difficulties that some students have in foreign language classrooms.

These instructional strategies work for students with special needs as well as for students who are gifted. The literature reveals in fact that many students who are gifted also have special needs.

Gifted Students

The term "gifted (or talented) students" is sometimes used by teachers and parents to refer to a homogeneously smart group and an ideal group of students to have in a classroom. However, in the field of gifted education, the definition of "gifted" is still being discussed, researched, and debated. According to Gagné (1998),

> *Giftedness* is formally defined as the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities (called aptitudes or gifts) in at least one ability domain to a degree that places the child or adult at least among the top 15% of his or her peers. By contrast, the term *talent* is formally defined as the superior mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) and knowledge in at least one field of human activity, to a degree that places a child's or adult's achievement within at least the upper 15% of age peers who are active in that field or fields (Gagné, 1998, p. 95).

Gagné states also that the IQ of academically gifted students is generally 125 and above and that many of the students when tested score 160–200. However, for the layperson, gifted means highly intelligent and very capable.

What the public does not always comprehend is that many of these highly intelligent students have learning disabilities. Baum, Olenchak, and Owen (1998) report that a large number of gifted students display Attention Deficit Disorders (ADD). ADD causes students to stop concentrating on the lesson, to be impulsive in behavior, and to create problems in the classroom through disruptive and unfocused behavior. On the other hand, if a child is also gifted and has no known brain disorders, that same child may be bored in the classroom and still misbehave. Many researchers in the field of the gifted believe that some gifted students do not reach their potential due to environmental conditions in the classroom. These conditions may be a noisy class, other unfocused learners misbehaving, or an ineffective curriculum. The multiple realities of the classroom reveal that the inability to reach all learners needs to be addressed. Again, Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory is cited as a possible solution to a twenty-first century crisis in the classroom. According to Baum and others, gifted or talented students may display ADD, but these disorders are not neurological or chemical deficits as in "true" ADD students.

Baum et al. (1998) state that: "…when some [gifted] hyperactive students are encouraged to learn and communicate in an area of strength (usually a non-verbal intelligence), even boring tasks are accomplished without accompanying behavioral problems" (p. 100). Therefore, advo-

cates of Gardeners' Multiple Intelligences Theory, strategies, and activities for the gifted believe that using his various modes of learning will eliminate boredom, diminish problems for hyperactive students, and create a positive atmosphere for learning for the truly gifted and talented students.

The following activities and approaches are a few recommendations that work for all students, even heritage language learners:

Music	Realia
Multi-media materials	Picture cues
TPR (Total Physical Response)	Drama
Cooperative Groups	Creative activities:
Visuals	Plays
Learning Centers	Instructional games

Heritage Language Students

In the United States, the number of immigrants increased during the 1990s due partially to their fleeing political and economic conditions in their homelands. As a result of this increase, large numbers of children whose first language is not English have entered US schools. According to Brecht and Ingold (1998) "more than 150 non-English languages are used in the United States..." (p. 1). The variety of languages in some schools lead to special classes called ESL, ESOL, or language-minority classes. The term "heritage speaker" refers to these students whose first language is not English. Many heritage speakers are new arrivals, while others were born in the United States but only the heritage language is spoken at home. The largest group of heritage speakers in US schools is Spanish-speaking students (Campbell and Peyton, 1998). These students come from all over the Spanish-speaking world; in the 1990s, large groups came mainly from Mexico, Central America, and Puerto Rico. The diversity and multiple realities of this group create a dilemma for program planners who would like to develop courses for heritage speakers. The dilemma is how to develop a curriculum for speakers whose proficiencies in speaking, reading, and writing are so varied. Pino (1997) has identified three different groups that are difficult to schedule together because of their special needs. The first group is "third or fourth generation US-born Hispanic students" (p. 4) who understand Spanish, are regular English speakers, and speak Spanish at various levels of proficiency. The second