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Individual Differences, L2 Development, and Language Program Administration: From Theory to Application

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Chapter 10

Second Language Learning as Perceived by Students with Disabilities

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As language program directors (LPDs) consider theoretically grounded decision-making processes in program design, they will undoubtedly be guided by current scholarship from the fields of second language (L2) instruction and acquisition research, which has recently focused on individual student differences as a primary source of inquiry and understanding. Emerging research in measures and testing of individual student differences for language learning provides a useful framework for discussing constructs and measurements (Bessant, 2012). Emerging theoretical models of disability, however, suggest that a primary concern with individual impairment is only one aspect of an examination of student differences in the classroom (Swain, French, & Cameron, 2005). As student populations in L2 classes continue to diversify and as increasing numbers of college students with disabilities matriculate with prior experience in L2 learning, LPDs and L2 instructors are seeking pedagogical resources to address the needs and enhance the learning experiences of people with disabilities.

Classifying disability as an impairment or as a problem of the individual to be remedied with therapies or "special help" is known as the medical model of disability (Matthews, 2009). Within this traditional framework, the public needs of people with disabilities are typically perceived as extra ordinary requests that remain outside the mainstream. In architectural and urban planning, for instance, "building regulations tend to treat designing for disabled people as an 'add-on' rather than integral to good building design" (Imrie, 2004, p. 279). One hazard of this philosophy of disability-as-impairment is that it highlights specific and individual anomalies, such as ambulatory deficiency, while overlooking the truly diverse, changing, and overlapping needs of a given population. An urban planner focused on impairment might consider the needs of wheelchair users, for example, while failing to integrate the needs of those without mobility deficiencies (Imrie, 1996). In the college classroom, the medical model might focus primarily on students with learning disabilities while overlooking those with diverse or multiple disabilities, including anxiety disorders, low vision, or chronic illness.

Despite an ongoing and welcome shift away from the focus on individual impairment, the routines and habits formed by the medical model outlook remain pervasive in American higher education, even finding their way into educational materials that explicitly seek to move beyond them. For instance, in

their *Teacher's Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction*, a popular L2 teaching methods textbook, Shrum and Glisan (2010) acknowledge the growing importance of teaching students with disabilities by including a forward thinking section titled "The Inclusive Classroom: Accommodating Learners with Disabilities." Yet, consider the medical perspective evident in their guiding definition of disability: "A disability is a mental or physical impairment that limits a major life activity—for example, caring for oneself, performing a manual task, hearing, walking, speaking, thinking, and so forth" (p. 358). This deficit-driven orientation to disability comes directly from the language of federal laws guiding K-12 special education practices. Though these laws govern a well-intended framework for determining a student's eligibility for support services, using the medical definition of disability as a starting point in a pedagogy textbook implicitly encourages many L2 teachers to equate disability with "special" students and to focus on retrofitted accommodations to meet their needs.

In contrast to the medical model, a social model of disability has emerged. This model asserts that the disability or handicap experienced by any individual is the result of a combination of individual differences and the design of the environment (Oliver, 2004; Shakespeare, 2010). When individuals encounter barriers to access in public spaces, the social model invites a re-evaluation and a restructuring of the design of the space. Following this concept of disability, professional focus is concentrated not on the individual, but rather on the inadequacies and deficiencies of the space, the environment, the program, or the pedagogy. Rather than single out specific individuals for their uncommon needs, adherents to the social model anticipate those needs and design the environment with them in mind.

At the postsecondary level, the social model invites colleges and universities to reconsider classroom instruction so that it actively encourages the inclusion of diverse students, including persons with disabilities (Challis, 2006). Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) is one important framework based on the social model that assists instructors in designing inclusive pedagogy while minimizing the need for special accommodations and retrofitted changes to the learning environment (Scott, McGuire, & Foley, 2003). Moreover, pedagogies informed by UDI not only reduce the time instructors spend designing accommodations for individual students, but they also benefit other diverse students in the class (Krastel, 2008). Within United States postsecondary L2 classes, the adoption of the social model is particularly vital for two reasons. First, because satisfactory completion of an L2 sequence is a graduation requirement at many colleges and universities, barriers to learning in L2 classes thus become barriers to a college degree. Effective, inclusive design is therefore paramount for providing all students with the opportunity to meet standard graduation requirements. Second, a typical L2 course's dynamic, fast-paced, and participatory structure and the unique student obligations required for success may pose significant barriers for many students with disabilities whose traditional coping strategies prove less effective in a course taught in an active format in the target language.

Skinner and Smith (2011) and Kleinert, Cloyd, Rego, and Gibson (2007) are among the growing corps of researchers who study inclusive strategies for the L2 classroom. Focusing solely on students with learning disabilities, Skinner

and Smith discuss several well-researched strategies that have proven effective, including small class size, frequent review and repetition, multisensory and highly structured instruction, and attention to the affective aspects of L2 learning such as classroom climate. Kleinert et al., who note that the distinctiveness of L2 classes may actually present an equalizing opportunity for students with disabilities, list several other steps toward inclusion: assigning read-aloud paragraphs before class to allow students extra practice time, using explicit scoring rubrics for assignments, modeling think-alouds for students in class, and using total physical response. For students with dyslexia, Schneider and Crombie (2004) offer a comparable list of practices based on the social model.

The common goal of these varying strategies is not to concentrate on individual impairment, but to recognize the wide range of diverse learning needs and experiences of the students. Acknowledging those needs and experiences will help LPDs and instructors foster a more inclusive learning environment. But just what are those diverse needs? While researchers have explored the perceptions and experiences of students with learning disabilities—for example, Javorsky, Sparks, and Ganschow (1992) and Ganschow, Philips, and Schneider (2000)— little focus has been placed on students with other forms of disability who also enroll in postsecondary L2 courses. Through a series of three complementary empirical studies, the authors of this chapter explore the language learning environment on one college campus from the perspectives of students with a range of documented disabilities. Across this complementary series of studies, the perceptions of students with disabilities reveal supports for and barriers to various parts of the curriculum, including instruction, assessment, and the physical learning environment.

Method

Across the three studies, the purpose of the research was to situate the examination of individual student differences within a social model of disability. Each study gathered student perceptions of effective L2 classrooms and potential barriers to learning, with a focus on identifying environmental aspects that were limiting student learning.

Longwood University, the site for the research, is a residential, state-supported, four-year institution in rural central Virginia, enrolling approximately 4,200 undergraduates in three colleges: Arts and Sciences, Education and Human Services, and Business and Economics. With the exception of students granted a waiver for the L2 requirement, all students earning a degree must pass an L2 course at the intermediate level or higher. Most students who complete a placement test during freshmen orientation enter the L2 sequence through one of the beginning-level courses. Seventy percent of students place in a level below the required course, and thus spend at least two semesters in the sequence. In any given semester, approximately 750 students (18 percent of the undergraduate student body) are enrolled in general education classes in French, German, or Spanish.

For each of the studies, students with disabilities were defined as students who had registered with the university's Office of Disability Resources (ODR). As

such, these students had self-identified to the ODR and provided documentation of the disability meeting current professional documentation standards put forth by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD). Five percent of the Longwood student body is registered with the ODR. The participants across studies reflect a range of cognitive, psychological, and physical disabilities similar to national incidence figures and distribution (Raue & Lewis, 2011). The two primary research questions addressed were:

1. What do students with disabilities perceive as important features of an effective L2 classroom?
2. Which barriers to learning have students with disabilities experienced in L2 classrooms?

Secondary research questions, when present, are identified within each study's description.

Study 1: Student Focus Groups

Focus group interviews have been described as "a way of listening to people and learning from them" (Morgan, 1997, p. 9). By gathering a relatively homogeneous group of participants and asking them to reflect on a particular experience, focus group methodology is recommended as a way to attain and describe exploratory data, enhancing understanding in a little researched area (Krueger & Casey, 2009). A secondary research question in the student focus groups included the following: What are the important features of an effective L2 classroom and the barriers to learning identified by students with disabilities and students without disclosed disabilities?

Participants

The study consisted of 19 student participants, with a purposive sampling used to identify students for the study (Krueger & Casey, 2009). All focus group members had completed at least one L2 course at the university. In addition, roughly half of the participants were students with disabilities including cognitive, psychological, and physical disabilities. Two focus groups were formed from the 19 participants. Group 1 consisted of eight students with disabilities. Group 2 was comprised of 11 students without disclosed disabilities. Group size was within the recommended parameters to promote rich data and effective group interaction (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Procedures

Each focus group session lasted approximately 1.5 hours and followed an established agenda including welcoming participants and completing consent forms and a demographics questionnaire. A semi structured interview protocol guided the subsequent conversation and consisted of an introduction, an icebreaker question, questions focused on L2 experiences, and a closing (Lederman, 1990). For Group 1, the group comprised of students with disabilities, an additional question was included in the protocol specifically prompting conversation around disability-based accommodations that positively affect L2 learning.

Three project staff members were present for each of the sessions. One staff member primarily served as group facilitator, one focused on group observation, and one served as group note taker. The group note taker recorded discussion points on a flip chart for visual representation of the interview, allowing an ongoing member check of comments. These assigned roles allowed the researchers to gather a range of verbal and nonverbal data throughout the session (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Both sessions were audio recorded.

Analysis

Following each focus group session, an analysis process was undertaken to ensure accuracy of the data collected. Each researcher's notes and observations were compiled and organized in relation to the interview protocol. Audio recordings were transcribed. Project staff independently reviewed the data from both sessions and began to identify similarities, contrasts, and themes within and between the group sessions. Memo writing was used as potential codes and their relationships were identified (Merriam, 1998). Following an independent review of data, the researchers met to discuss the identified themes. Focus group protocol questions were used as an organizational framework for analysis, and themes were discussed and refined through an iterative process of reviewing notes and data, discussing and clarifying themes, and reaching consensus.

To enhance reliability and validity of the analysis, a summary of key themes was developed. A member check was conducted by sharing the themes with student participants and asking for feedback on accuracy and comprehensiveness of the summary. A peer review was also conducted as the findings were shared in a meeting with all instructors teaching in the modern languages program to discuss results and data interpretations.

Results

Results of the two focus groups suggest that all students—those with diagnosed disabilities as well as those without—appreciated a varied and interactive style of instruction. Participants in both groups indicated that the use of realia and multimedia (such as YouTube clips, feature films, and music videos) were important features in an effective L2 classroom. Both groups also highlighted the importance of hands-on activities, including journal writing, interviewing, and extended projects such as imagining, writing, and filming a commercial. Other areas common to the two groups included the importance of multimodal activities, humor, and the study of culture and literature.

Students with disabilities, however, emphasized particular instructor qualities that students without diagnosed disabilities did not mention. Instructors who provided individualized attention and who promoted a low affective filter were viewed by students with disabilities as a valuable feature of an effective L2 classroom. Students specifically mentioned encouraging, confidence-boosting instructors who permit small errors and give clear expectations as an integral part of good L2 instruction. Students with disabilities also described helpful adaptations made by instructors, particularly with oral tests. For example, being allowed to take the spoken component of tests in a one-to-one setting with the instructor, having

the opportunity to write questions before responding to verbal prompts, and listening to a recording multiple times were all mentioned as useful strategies.

In terms of perceived barriers to L2 learning, both groups of students noted a similar frustration in managing the online workbook accompanying published textbooks, as well as a common anxiety about studying abroad. Yet, the students with disabilities mentioned other barriers that students without disabilities did not address: the pace of learning in a study abroad environment, the demands of

Table 10-1 Results of Student Focus Groups (Study 1)

Topic	Responses unique to students with disabilities	Responses unique to students without disabilities	Responses common to both groups
1. What are the characteristics of the best FL courses you've taken?	a. Importance of instructor qualities: • provided individual attention • encouraged students • allowed small errors • was organized • gave the student confidence • gave clear expectations		a. Multisensory activities in class b. Hands-on exercises • reading • interviewing • making commercials • writing journals c. Humor d. Culture and literature e. Multimedia • feature films • music videos • YouTube
2. Discuss your preferences for speaking and listening assessments	a. Individual interview between student and instructor b. Opportunity to write the questions before responding c. Listening to recording multiple times before responding d. Study-abroad with immersion	a. Speaking tests with partners, but with individual grades	
3. Discuss perceived barriers to learning in FL courses	a. Pace of the standard study-abroad experience b. Oral production, when pronunciation is difficult in English c. Assigned homework that is not reviewed in class	a. Amount of nightly work for an intensive 5-credit class b. Oral exams where the focus is on memory c. Working in groups with students who "don't care"	a. Online workbook b. Study-abroad anxiety

oral production if a disability affected verbal communication in the L1, and the instructor habit of assigning homework that was not specifically reviewed in class.

Study 2: Individual Interviews

Study 2 was a subsequent project comprised of individual semi structured interviews with seven students with disclosed disabilities to probe student experiences in L2 learning environments. Using individual interview methodology as a follow-up to focus group findings has been recommended as an effective approach to developing a more in-depth examination of an emerging area of study (Isherwood, Barger-Anderson, Merhaut, Badgett, & Katsafanas, 2011). The data presented here are part of a larger set of interview questions that also tapped perceptions of university students with disabilities regarding elements of the ACTFL *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (Hildebrandt, Scott, & Edwards, 2011).

Participants

Seven college students with diverse cognitive and physical disabilities and registered with the ODR were interviewed. Participation was voluntary and each student received a $25 stipend as an incentive for participation. Diagnosed disabilities included attention-deficit disorder (ADD) (2), autism spectrum (Asperger's syndrome) (1), cerebral palsy (1), learning disability (LD) (4), psychological disability (1), and visual impairment (1). Three students had more than one documented disability diagnosis. Self-reported demographic data indicated that students were traditional college age (18–22), predominantly Caucasian (86 percent), and 57 percent female. Each participant had completed high school L2 requirements and had taken between one and six semesters of Longwood University L2 coursework.

Procedures

A semistructured interview protocol developed for the study was used to guide each session in line with the overarching research questions. Interview topics included areas related to L2 learning at the secondary and postsecondary level. The interview protocol was constructed around the following topics: perceptions of learning L2s, differences between studying L2s in high school and college, classroom atmosphere and community, connection with instructor, group work, and advice for new L2 instructors. The initial protocol was reviewed and refined by the authors and three senior modern languages program faculty. After revisions for protocol clarity and overall organization, the second author on this study conducted each interview, which lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to facilitate data analysis.

Analysis

The complete transcripts were read by the second author and a full-time project coordinator. Initial themes were identified, and codes were developed, revised, and refined through an iterative review process between the two researchers until consensus was reached. To further triangulate the analysis and minimize the possibility of bias, the first and third authors reviewed the resulting codes, definitions, and examples for clarity and goodness of fit. Codes and definitions were further refined.

Results

The results showed several themes related to barriers to L2 learning in the college classroom, including accommodations, anxiety, classroom environment, group work, target language use, assessments, and professor characteristics.

The topic of accommodations prompted some discomfort among the participants. Some students were uneasy asking for accommodations, preferring to minimize the attention drawn to themselves and their disability. One student remarked, "I still go into it [*talking with faculty*] kinda fearing that there might be issues." Others indicated logistical challenges related to accommodations that impeded their ability to perform well. For example, taking a test in a quiet setting away from the classroom prohibited students from asking the instructor questions that they might otherwise be able to ask were they taking the test with the rest of the class.

Anxiety proved to be a fertile topic among participants as they reported pressure to pass the required classes and use the target language in class regularly. Further, the amount of material covered at such a quick pace prompted anxiety, as did the perceived instructor and classmate expectations. Expectations related to proficiency levels were particularly daunting, with the spontaneity required in the L2 classroom a challenge for many. One student commented, "You might say it wrong. That can be unnerving to have someone there who really can speak it." Or as another student noted, "I got scared 'cause they were talking very quickly." Additional anxiety related to classmate perceptions of disability was noted: "I mean if you're struggling, you don't want to bring everyone else down. So, that was always something for me."

The classroom environment was a factor in student access to L2 learning. Class size ("It was a big class. There was like no room. No desk room . . .") and desk organization ("The actual layout of the class was more of a round circle . . . It felt comfortable to be able to just see everyone's reaction to something or have the professor there but not standing in front of you overlooking you.") were mentioned as influencing students' learning experiences.

Group work was a topic of discussion that yielded several different barriers to L2 learning. Equal distribution of work and time on task were raised as areas of concern. Additionally, the pace of group work was troubling to some participants, while others were put off by some students' tendency to work individually even during group activities. Participants spoke of a desire for clear direction and structure from instructors concerning group work. Group membership and selection, including clustering students of differing abilities together, were pointed to as potential barriers. Some pointed to the discomfort that others displayed with them or their disability: "I know this sounds kinda bad but I feel like since I'm in a wheelchair and have a disability that people like automatically expect me to mess up. So, it makes it even more challenging for me to get up 'cause I already feel like they're looking at me like, 'Ha! She's gonna mess up!'"

Target language use prompted much discussion among participants, with several surprised by the expectation among instructors that only the L2 be used in the class. In particular, demands on auditory processing, short-term memory,

and sustaining attention were mentioned. Feeling subject to peer scrutiny was reported to magnify barriers to L2 learning in areas such as reading, syntax, and vocabulary.

Assessment of language learning, with accommodations such as testing in a separate room with limited accessibility to the instructor, was perceived to limit successful L2 learning. Oral testing and the difficulty of spontaneous communication troubled several participants, along with the potential to have a partner of a different proficiency level who may or may not speak well and therefore influence the partner's grade.

The final potential barrier to L2 learning participants mentioned was instructor characteristics. Instructors who were not approachable ("I had one that I just couldn't talk to. I couldn't talk to the teacher. She was very unwelcoming.") and those who had perhaps unreasonably high expectations for students were most troublesome to participants, along with those who tried to cover too much material in class.

Study 3: Foreign Language Instructional Strategy Survey

The third research project was a quantitative study building on the findings of Studies 1 and 2 as well as the recent work of Leons, Herbert, and Gobo (2009) at Landmark College, a unique college setting that focuses exclusively on the learning needs of students with cognitive disabilities such as LD and ADHD. All students attending the college have a disability diagnosis. As part of a larger qualitative project, Leons et al. used Learner Reflection Sheets to gather student perceptions of instructional strategies and classroom practices reported as important to L2 learning. The intent was to "identify classroom practices that students considered to be most useful to them, or strategies that helped them be successful" (p. 50). Data were gathered four times per semester over four semesters and reflected the perceptions of 33 students with LD and/or ADHD. The six recommendations identified through the Learner Reflection Sheets included a learning environment rich in use of visuals, repetition, one-on-one teaching, multimodal teaching, games, and rhymes/recordings/songs. Given the narrow focus on students with LD and ADHD as well as the specialized nature of the Landmark campus, Leons et al. recommended that future research include a broader population of students including other at-risk or low achieving L2 learners.

Building on the work of Leons et al. (2009) and returning to the strategies and practices identified in the data and outcomes of the student focus groups (Study 1) and individual student interviews (Study 2), the purpose of the third study was to survey a broad heterogeneous population of students about their perceptions of instructional strategies and practices in the L2 environment. The secondary research questions addressed in this study were:

1. Do a broad range of students endorse these instructional practices as important or very important to successful L2 learning?
2. Do students with disabilities endorse different practices than other L2 learners?

Participants

The population of students identified for the study included all students in beginning and intermediate French, Spanish, and German classes taught in spring 2010. This population reflected all students in 23 classes including courses designated at the 101, 102, and 105 beginning language levels, and the 201 and 202 intermediate language levels. Eight different instructors taught the 23 classes.

Procedures

A survey instrument, the Foreign Language Instructional Strategy Survey (FLISS) (Scott, Edwards, & Hildebrandt, 2010), was developed. The classroom practices and strategies identified by Leons et al. (2009) from the Learner Reflection Sheets and the findings of Study 1 and Study 2 were examined concurrently. Ten classroom practices were included in the FLISS, reflecting all six success strategies identified by Leons et al. as well as four additional practices. In response to the question, "Which of the following instructional strategies are important for you as a foreign language learner?" respondents were given four options: Not important, Somewhat important, Important, and Very important.

The survey instrument was piloted with two project staff members and two instructors with expertise in L2 pedagogy to attain feedback on task clarity, question wording, and an estimate of time required for completion. Of the six original strategies identified by Leons et al., there was discussion of potential overlap in some of the items (e.g., use of visuals and multimodal teaching). Feedback resulted in the addition of concrete examples for each of the instructional practices. The final survey consisted of four questions pertaining to demographic information and the 10 instructional practices. Classroom instructors distributed paper copies of the surveys during class. All students in attendance completed and returned the survey during the class session. The 501 participants reflected an 87 percent response rate. Twenty-four of the 501 participants, or 5 percent, were students with disabilities, reflecting the same percentage of students with disabilities across campus.

Analysis

Responses from the survey were compiled. Items rated as important or very important were combined to attain a measure of strategies considered valuable to L2 learning. Descriptive statistics were examined for total responses as well as group responses for students with and without disclosed disabilities. T-tests were performed to examine group differences between students with and without disclosed disabilities.

Results

Results of the survey (see Figure 10-1) indicated that over 75 percent of students with disabilities rated the following instructional strategies as important or very important features of an effective L2 classroom: (1) use of visuals (e.g., pictures with new vocabulary, published materials, manipulatives such as stuffed animals

or tableware), 96 percent; (2) repetition (e.g., repetition of oral questions, repetition of sounds, grammar drills), 92 percent; (3) one-to-one teaching, 79 percent; (4) multimodal teaching (e.g., PowerPoint slides, pair work, online activities), 96 percent and (5) learning memory strategies (e.g., mnemonics, flashcards), 92 percent. The strategy least endorsed as important by students with disabilities was rhymes/songs, with only 33 percent indicating it as a useful instructional strategy.

Students without disclosed disabilities endorsed some of these same instructional strategies. Similar to students with disabilities, over 75 percent endorsed: (1) use of visuals, 82 percent; (2) repetition, 93 percent and (3) learning memory strategies, 87 percent. Students without disclosed disabilities also included use of humor (75 percent) as an effective strategy (vs. 67 percent of students with disabilities). Use of rhymes/songs was again the least endorsed approach (35 percent).

When differences were examined across the group responses, four strategies emerged with significantly different group ratings. Use of visuals, one-to-one teaching, and multimodal teaching were rated as important strategies by a significantly higher ($p < .01$) number of students with disclosed disabilities. Active project work (e.g., journaling, making a commercial) was also rated as important by a significantly greater percentage of students with disabilities ($p < .05$).

Figure 10-1 Percent of Students With and Without Disabilities Rating Instructional Strategies as Important or Very Important in an L2 Classroom
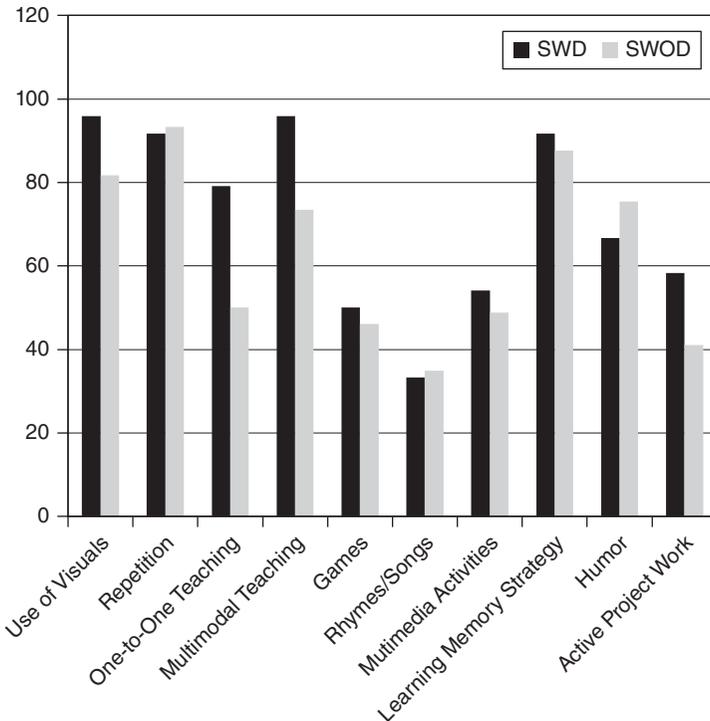
Discussion

Returning to the original research questions—"What do students with disabilities perceive as important features of an L2 classroom?" and "What have they experienced as barriers to learning?"—the following factors emerged across two or more studies: classroom environment, instructor qualities, accommodations, multimodal teaching, and group work.

Classroom Environment

Instructors sometimes overlook the role of physical aspects of the classroom environment in promoting learning. Student insights into the importance of small class size are not surprising, but may take on particular importance for students with disabilities. Similar to the findings of Skinner and Smith (2011), a smaller student–teacher ratio allows students easier access to the instructor and the one-to-one interaction reported as desirable by students with disabilities across the studies conducted.

In the studies on this particular campus involving students with a variety of disabilities, a desk arrangement that allows students to view each other as well as the instructor was identified as setting the stage for class communication and interaction. While face-to-face student interaction is commonly recognized in promoting communicative instruction (Kleinert et al., 2007), this class arrangement may also intrinsically support students with various disabilities. For example, being able to see as well as hear someone speaking in class is a natural form of multimodal instruction. Students can access visual cues from facial expressions and body language in addition to hearing speech, while those who are hard of hearing may benefit from the added input of lip reading. Students with ADD may benefit from the added stimulus of seeing the speaker, and those with slow processing speed or low auditory working memory are provided additional input to interpret and gain meaning from conversation.

Classroom overcrowding was another aspect of the physical environment that may potentially pose a barrier to learning, particularly with the highly interactive nature of L2 instruction. For example, a student in a wheelchair may have limited space for mobility within an already tight classroom space. A common activity, such as a group-mingling task, could potentially present a barrier to participation in an overcrowded classroom if movement and peer engagement are limited.

Instructor Qualities

Instructor characteristics play a substantial role in an L2 course's effectiveness, according to the students with disabilities who participated in these studies. All students recognized the worth of L2 instruction that mirrors real-world communication. For instance, instruction that required frequent interaction, student engagement, and hands-on learning was deemed valuable to most students. Yet, significantly, students with diagnosed disabilities also noted specific instructor qualities that were not mentioned by students without disabilities. Students with disabilities noted the effective instructor is one who is flexible, approachable, and attentive as well as one who creates a comfortable classroom environment,

initiates a conversation about student accommodations, and makes course expectations explicit. While flexibility and close teacher–learner relationships are important for all L2 learners (Borg, 2006), the willingness to work with individual student needs and the awareness of accommodations plays an essential role for students with disabilities. For example, students with disabilities reported a desire to work individually with an instructor who speaks slowly and deliberately, who occasionally yet predictably allows students to use the L1, and who permits students to make small errors in the L2. Preferences for these specific instructor characteristics all respond in one way or another to student anxiety surrounding the primary use of the L2 as outlined by Levine (2003). For these students, the ideal instructor is attuned to specific student needs—particularly the reluctance to work exclusively in the target language—and can interpret or manipulate classroom exercises for this particular audience. Students with disabilities—some of whom have acquired sophisticated classroom coping skills, such as circumlocution or spelling supports that prove effective only in the L1—perceive certain qualities of L2 instructors to be essential.

Accommodations

In talking about experiences with the accommodations process in L2 classrooms, students highlight once again the central role of instructor disposition. The importance of placing a disability access statement in the syllabus, inviting students to discuss learning needs, and responding to these needs with flexibility cannot be overstated. The disability access statement frequently used at Longwood University is short and posted with other inclusive resources at www.longwood.edu/projectlinc; "If you have a disability and require accommodations, please meet with the instructor early in the semester to discuss your learning needs. If you wish to request reasonable accommodations (note taking support, extended time for tests, etc.), you will need to register with the Office of Disability Resources. The office will require appropriate documentation of disability. All information will be kept confidential." Instructors may not be aware that many students with disabilities struggle with the current legal structure requiring students to request "special" accommodation. Having to disclose being "different" and ask for treatment that others may perceive as providing an unfair advantage is prohibitive to some students who sometimes choose to struggle academically rather than ask for accommodation. The requirement that students with disabilities self-disclose and request accommodations has in fact been described as an unfair burden (Loewen & Pollard, 2009), making the design of the inclusive classroom all the more significant.

The preferences of students with disabilities for appropriate learning supports that benefit many students provide an interesting affirmation of the social model of disability and trends in the field toward more inclusive instructional planning. Instructor use of an online learning management system such as Blackboard or Canvas to post class documents for all students and student use of a laptop computer for note taking were mentioned as supportive and used by many other students. As one student with a disability described, "I kinda just blend in in that situation." Logistical challenges with "special" accommodations (such as locating

a private testing space), concerns about unfair advantage, and self-consciousness about being different are all the result of the current system of retrofitting accommodations and important factors in understanding the L2 learning of individuals with disabilities (Berberi, Hamilton, & Sutherland, 2008).

Multimodal Teaching

Language instruction that incorporates a variety of modalities and methods for communicating content can be an important asset for students with disabilities (Skinner & Smith, 2011). For purposes of this series of research studies, the authors drew on the work of Leons et al. (2009) who use the term multimodal to include a variety of instructional methods "allowing a student to process language via a combination of channels or sensory pathways" (p. 51). The term also includes the use of assistive technology and group participation structures, for example, as methods providing multimodal input for the learner.

As the FLISS (Study 3) found, 96 percent of those with disabilities favored multimodal teaching, which was significantly higher than those without disabilities. Using PowerPoint presentations, storyboards, and online activities for additional sensory input can provide additional support to the traditional in-class activities of an L2 classroom, affording those with disabilities a wider variety of ways to take in and convey information being studied. Limiting access to material covered and presenting it in a single way reduces accessibility and can hinder language learning among those with disabilities. The new literacies developed by "digital natives" make the use of technology supportive to those who are surrounded by it and fluent in it (Shrum & Glisan, 2010).

Certain aspects of multimodal teaching were also mentioned as potential barriers but may be able to be converted into more effective classroom techniques. For example, in the Student Focus Groups (Study 1), the use of online workbooks for graded homework in the absence of feedback was noted as a barrier. Yet when online activities are used to provide a way to practice linguistic structures, with feedback and many opportunities to self-correct, this approach was viewed positively. PowerPoint presentations offer a visual means of communicating but can become overwhelming if they contain too much information. Providing access to those presentations via Blackboard or a similar internet-based courseware program or website can assist learners with disabilities by allowing preview of the new material, access to online or paper copy to support in-class note taking, and opportunities for review after the initial teaching is complete.

Group Work

The use of group work can promote L2 learning in a variety of ways. As discussed previously, it can provide an opportunity for additional sensory input (Leons et al., 2009). Yet observations about group work emerging from student focus group data (Study 1) and the individual student interviews (Study 2) support the observations of Gascoigne (2012) that group dynamics also have a profound influence on the L2 classroom environment. As observed by students in these research studies, the impact may be intensified with the presence of a disability. Interpersonal dynamics in particular presented obstacles at times, with some students

becoming nervous with a partner they did not know or one with a different level of proficiency. Clearly students with some forms of disability, such as Asperger's syndrome (also referred to as being on the autism spectrum), by definition have extensive difficulty reading body language, interpreting facial expressions, and understanding social cues in the native language making many of the implicit rules of group work elusive.

While clear directions and expectations can help all students overcome participation barriers related to group work, they are essential for students with a variety of disabilities. Attentive instructors, who monitor group work, ensuring equal distribution of responsibilities and clear roles, make such vital activities more enjoyable and successful for all students. Further comments on instructional group work highlighted target language use and fair grading practices. In particular, participants focused on the concern for equitable grades to reflect the amount of work contributed by each group member. That is, students in this study did not want their grade affected by a less prepared peer or for their performance to negatively influence the grade of another group member.

Limitations

As with any research, there are limitations that must be considered in interpreting the findings of this work. This series of three complementary studies was conducted on a single college campus. Small sample sizes and possible response bias are limitations inherent in the qualitative methodology used in the student focus groups (Study 1) and individual interviews (Study 2). While this cumulative set of data across studies provides important descriptive and exploratory findings in a new area of study, caution should be used in generalizing the results. Some of the barriers identified by students may be unique to the particular environment and student population. Future studies, including a cross-section of postsecondary institutions, will add weight to these findings.

Implications

As LPDs consider the effectiveness of their programs and design useful faculty training opportunities, the findings of the three studies described here highlight several critical areas that determine success in L2 learning. These areas include classroom environment, instructor qualities, accommodations, multimodal teaching, and group work. While the focus of research in these studies is on examining the learning experiences and potential barriers in the L2 environment for students with disabilities, results of the three studies also point to some common elements identified by students with and without disabilities. Though not unique to students with disabilities, these themes are worthy of mention in the context of understanding inclusive instructional design. As Krastel (2008) maintains, a classroom designed with students with disabilities in mind is a classroom that benefits a wide variety of students. In these studies, all students mentioned important elements of communicative classrooms: multimodal activities, use of multimedia

and realia, inclusion of culture and literature, and a variety of active and engaging exercises and assignments, such as those that encourage movement and interaction inside the classroom and practice outside of it. In the FLISS study, use of visuals, repetition, and learning memory strategies were strongly endorsed by all students. And finally, the use of humor in the classroom was important to many students (75 percent of students without disabilities and 67 percent of students with disabilities).

The following specific strategies can help LPDs and L2 instructors begin to formulate inclusive practices for the benefit of all L2 students:

1. LPDs and L2 instructors should recognize that increasing college classroom diversity creates ongoing opportunities to reassess and retool effective pedagogy, not only as instructors shift from one level of instruction to another, or from one institution to another, but each time a new set of students is encountered. Gregory (2008), for instance, argued that teaching is most effective when it privileges the specific student over the individual discipline. LPDs, even as they strive to impart specific disciplinary knowledge about L2 teaching, must encourage instructors to be mindful of the actual students in the classroom. Flexibility and adaptability are just as important to effective teaching as knowledge of or competency in the L2.

2. Inclusive teaching that considers the learning needs of diverse students, and of students with disabilities in particular, does not involve retrofitting standard instruction with additional supports. Rather, inclusive classrooms are designed from the outset with a variety of students in mind. As LPDs train and mentor new instructors, they might emphasize the value of the social model of disability that sees disability not as personal deficiency to be compensated for, but as a form of disconnect between the individual and the environment.

3. Students with disabilities may not always disclose their disability, and many disabilities are not visible, leaving the instructor to anticipate some individuals' classroom needs. Instructors should therefore actively seek out information about students that can help them—students and instructors alike—become aware of student needs. In the preceding studies, for example, exclusive use of the target language was identified as one area of frequent concern for students with disabilities. This is also an area that may demand significant attention from the inclusive instructor. By way of illustration, consider a student with a diagnosed, non-visible LD concerning her processing speed. In the L1, she has developed a series of unconscious phrases that allow her to buy time while she formulates an answer to a question posed by an instructor: "Now, let me think for a minute . . ." or "well, what did I read last night?" Cognizant of her learning needs, she may have become accustomed in her L1 to even more detailed and precise stalling techniques that afford her time to develop a response: "Are you talking about X?" or "Is that at the top of page X?" In a class conducted in

the L2, however, the student may lose these time-tested compensation techniques. Without these simple and effective phrases in the L2, the student may therefore encounter an entirely new barrier, one she has perhaps learned to overcome in her other classes. When the student can only giggle or shake her head in response to a question in the L2, the inclusive instructor would need to be able to distinguish a barrier caused by the target language from one caused either by a disability or by a simple lack of preparation. In these situations, is it better for the instructor to rephrase the question and wait a bit for the student to formulate a response (a barrier caused by the target language), to refrain from rephrasing and wait a longer period of time—after having elicited several other student answers as models (a barrier created by the disability)—or to wait and let the student squirm a bit (a barrier caused by the student's lack of preparation)? Is it rude or helpful to allow the entire class to pause for a single student? The instructor would have to be attuned to the individual learner to know.

When students with disabilities at Longwood University were asked about their learning needs, they reported several specific factors that permitted instructors to design more effective courses. Instructors at all institutions may better anticipate individual student learning needs in a number of ways: adding a statement to the syllabus that invites students with disabilities to disclose their learning needs in a confidential setting; polling all students early in the semester about their L2 successes and struggles; and creating a class-wide discussion board devoted to the particulars of L2 learning in general rather than of learning only the L2 itself.

4. Instructors should be cognizant of inadvertent environmental barriers. For instance, do approved accommodations truly help the student, or do they unintentionally replace one barrier with another? Can access be provided through improved instructional design and benefit many learners in the classroom? Does the classroom itself—the arrangement of desks, the lighting, the size of the class or the room—create barriers to learning that can easily be removed?

5. Traditionally sound, research-based instructional practices may be experienced in different ways by different students. As LPDs train instructors to create common, "best-practices" activities—including target language ice breakers, mnemonic devices, or group projects—they might at the same time encourage novice instructors to anticipate the potential barriers these activities may cause. Pair work, for instance, may invigorate a class and allow for the participation of shier students, but it may also discourage a student with a non-disclosed, non-visible psychological disability. The inclusive instructor may want to provide very concrete instructions for this kind of activity, or may even participate in the activity herself, partnering with those students for whom peer interaction is more challenging than liberating. Group work is a

critical element in L2 pedagogy, but it can inhibit student success if not designed effectively. Instructors who recognize that social interaction can generate dissonance are thoughtful in creating groups and monitor the output of all group partners. They also assign project grades for each individual, rather than one group grade, thereby reducing anxiety related to group work among students with disabilities.

6. Finally, designing a classroom that anticipates the needs of students with disabilities will provide learning opportunities for those students without diagnosed disabilities as well. Documents in multiple formats, for instance, might initially be provided for the benefit of those students with low vision who need a format that can be easily enlarged or accessed through a screen reader, but may also benefit a student off-campus who cannot retrieve a paper document at the last minute.

Resources for LPDs

Change is underway in higher education. A social model of disability is being actively promoted by organizations of professionals in the field of postsecondary disability (e.g., AHEAD and NASPA) as well as the burgeoning academic discipline of Disability Studies. Applications of Universal Design (UD) are being explored and developed as professionals increasingly recognize aspects of the postsecondary environment that present barriers to individuals with disabilities. The nine principles of UDI (Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, 2001) are one example of a research-based framework supporting faculty across disciplines in designing inclusive college instruction.

Applications of UD are also emerging within the field of L2 instruction. The work of Berberi, Hamilton, and Sutherland (2008) in the book *Worlds Apart: Disability and Foreign Language Learning* provides a series of thought-provoking essays and accounts by faculty, some of whom have disabilities themselves, as they seek to design inclusive L2 learning environments. Edwards and Scott (2011) have examined the intersection of the ACTFL *Standards of Foreign Language Learning* and the nine Principles of UDI. Through examples and case study application, they recommend the principles be used to support L2 instructors considering the physical, sensory, social, and cognitive aspects of inclusive L2 instructional design.

The work of the authors on Project LINC (Learning in Inclusive Classrooms) has focused on gathering and developing basic information and resources for contingent instructors teaching beginning and intermediate language classes. This three-year demonstration project, funded through the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, reflects collaboration between postsecondary disability professionals and modern language faculty. The project website (www.longwood.edu/projectlinc) provides a variety of resources freely available to LPDs. Background information on UDI and disability, teaching modules on inclusive L2 instruction, and links to other resources may be used and adapted for specific audiences and training purposes.

The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE) extends the consideration of inclusive environments to study abroad. Materials available on the NCDE website (http://www.miusa.org/ncde) include a wide range of publications, tip sheets, videos, brochures, and searchable databases for students with disabilities and a variety of professionals working to promote inclusive programs and practices across a range of international exchange opportunities.

Conclusion

As the field of L2 instruction continues to recognize and grapple with individual differences in the classroom, and as researchers continue to study measures and testing of individual disability profiles, it is important to balance this inquiry with emerging theoretical models of disability. The social model of disability clearly shifts the focus from examining student deficits to considering the learning environment as a source of inadvertent barriers to diverse students.

In its Statement of Philosophy, which introduces the most recent edition of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (2006), the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages envisions "a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language" (p. 7). Such a philosophy recognizes the increasing diversity of student learners and, indeed, anticipates an awareness of new kinds of student needs in the L2 classroom. Moreover, moving away from a medical or legal model of disability that underscores a student's deficiencies and the inconvenience of retrofitting accommodations, this philosophy privileges the power of inclusive pedagogy: "Students once shut out of language courses prosper in classrooms that acknowledge that ALL students are capable of learning other languages given opportunities for quality instruction" (ACTFL, 2006, p. 18–19). Recognizing and reducing barriers to learning in the environment and proactively designing classroom instruction that benefits a variety of learners are the hallmarks of a "quality instruction" that addresses individual differences based on a social model of disability.

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