

# A Focus on the Language Learner

## About this Unit

In this Unit you will examine the set of general principles of language learning which underpin ALL-based curricula while reflecting on your own teaching practices and discussing strategies which enable successful learning to take place.

## Intended Outcomes

At the end of this Unit you will:

- have further developed understandings of ways in which beliefs about language learning influence classroom practice
- have gained knowledge about the Eight Principles of Language Learning and their methodological implications for language teaching
- have developed awareness of the teaching practices and strategies you use, and the reasons why.

# The Eight Principles of Language Learning

*Learners learn a language best when:*

- ① they are treated as individuals with their own needs and interests
- ② they are provided with opportunities to participate in communicative use of the target language in a wide range of activities
- ③ they are exposed to communicative data which is comprehensible and relevant to their own needs and interests
- ④ they focus deliberately on various language forms, skills, and strategies in order to support the process of language acquisition
- ⑤ they are exposed to sociocultural data and direct experience of the culture(s) embedded within the target language
- ⑥ they become aware of the role and nature of language and of culture
- ⑦ they are provided with appropriate feedback about their progress
- ⑧ they are provided with opportunities to manage their own learning.

## Some Classroom Strategies

To which of the eight principles does each of the following teaching/learning strategies relate?

- \_\_\_\_\_ • provide places to visit, people to meet, and activities which arouse curiosity, excite the emotions, and stimulate thinking
- \_\_\_\_\_ • be explicit about learning goals and objectives and the best means of achieving them
- \_\_\_\_\_ • encourage learners to work together to discover new language patterns and conventions
- \_\_\_\_\_ • encourage quality interaction between the learner, the teacher, the materials, and the learning environment
- \_\_\_\_\_ • provide opportunities for learners to find answers to their own questions and pursue their own interests, e.g. through learning centres
- \_\_\_\_\_ • provide a variety of language stimuli from a range of sources
- \_\_\_\_\_ • provide experiences of various cultures and encourage guided reflection about them, in order to build up learners' cultural sensitivity
- \_\_\_\_\_ • create an atmosphere where learners are using and working with the target language and culture
- \_\_\_\_\_ • appeal to learners' imagination and creativity
- \_\_\_\_\_ • use the target language community
- \_\_\_\_\_ • encourage learners to take part in peer assessment

(Adapted from focusing activity, *ALL Inservice Facilitators' Handbook 2:1*, p.6.)



# From Theory to Practice

List the classroom strategies which promote language learning under each principle.

1. **The learner-centred principle** implies a need to:
2. **The active-involvement principle** implies a need to:
3. **The immersion principle** implies a need to:
4. **The focusing principle** implies a need to:
5. **The sociocultural principle** implies a need to:
6. **The awareness principle** implies a need to:
7. **The assessment principle** implies a need to:
8. **The responsibility principle** implies a need to:

## Implications of the Eight Principles for Teaching/Learning Practice

Tick the classroom strategies in the list below which you employ. (Indicate the extent to which you use each one, for example with a single tick for those you use every now and then, a double tick for those you use sometimes, and a triple-tick for those you use often.)

**1 The learner centred principle implies a need to:**

- cater for the whole learner (i.e. his or her intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development) when determining both the content and the processes of learning
- appeal to learners' imagination and creativity (through simulation, games, stories, songs, play, dramatic activities, visuals, etc.)
- create an atmosphere of trust to encourage learners to take risks
- provide opportunities for pair work and group work to develop learners' social skills
- employ a variety of teaching strategies to cater for differences in learning style
- allow time for mastery, repetition, and association, allowing learners to observe, discover, experiment, practise, discuss, and share
- provide opportunities for learners to find answers to their own questions and pursue their own interests, e.g. through learning centres (see Book 3, of the *ALL Guidelines*)

**2 The active involvement principle implies a need to:**

- value and promote genuine communication
- provide a variety of activities using a range of spoken and written communicative data appropriate to the learner's development, e.g. information and opinion gap activities, problem solving activities, songs, games, stories, role-play, projects, excursions
- encourage and promote the active involvement of all learners in exploring, investigation, reflecting, communicating, and self-discovery
- provide related and recycled experiences to support conceptual development. Learners need places to visit, people to meet, and activities which arouse curiosity, excite the emotions, and stimulate thinking
- encourage quality interaction between the learner, the teacher, the materials, and the learning environment.

**3 The immersion principle implies a need to:**

- create an atmosphere where learners are using and working with the target language and culture
- develop learning activities appropriate to the context of the learners
- provide a variety of language stimuli from a range of sources, e.g. teacher talk, other classroom talk, audio- and videotapes of talk, written and printed information, realia (see Book 3, pp. 22-8, of the *ALL Guidelines*)
- foster learning from others who have different experiences and knowledge
- keep a 'talking about' approach to a minimum.

**4 The focusing principle implies a need to:**

- practise vocabulary, structures, skills, and strategies to support and encourage the use of the target language in activities, using learning routines, games, art work, music, etc.
- encourage learners to work together to discover new language patterns and conventions.

- 5 **The sociocultural principle implies a need to:**
  - create an atmosphere where the target language is learned and used in an appropriate sociocultural context, and provide sociocultural information which is relevant to learners, e.g. through the use of the target language community, penfriends, audio- and videotapes, authentic documents.
- 6 **The awareness principle implies a need to:**
  - make explicit to learners the general features and role(s) of language and culture
  - provide experiences of various cultures and encourage guided reflection about them in order to build up learners' cultural sensitivity.
7. **The assessment principle implies a need to:**
  - support further learning through feed back
  - encourage learners to become involved in the assessment process, e.g. through self-assessment, and peer assessment.
- 8 **The responsibility principle implies a need to:**
  - be explicit about learning goals and objectives and the best means of achieving them
  - foster the development of cognitive processing skills, learning-how-to-learn skills, and social interaction skills.

(Pocket ALL, Vale et al. pp. 30-31)

Which strategies do you never or rarely use which you would like to make greater use of?

Are there other strategies which you use which are not listed here?

Are there learning principles which you tend to neglect? Why do you think this might be? What action might you take to address this situation?