1   The learner

1.1   Attending to the learner

BACKGROUND

A group of learners in a classroom with a teacher comprises a learning community. The human element – both verbal and non-verbal, visible and barely perceptible – shapes human interaction qualitatively and may perhaps furnish the key to what happens (the processes) and what eventuates (the outcomes).

Approaches to language teaching that draw on an understanding of humanistic psychology highlight the importance to learning of the affective learning environment. It has been said that one can't teach a language – the best one can do is to make the conditions right for others to learn. Part of these 'right conditions' involves how the teacher relates to – or attends to – the learners.

TASK OBJECTIVE

In this lesson you will be paying very close attention to the teacher's attending behaviour towards the learners – that is, the way a teacher acknowledges, through verbal or non-verbal means, the presence, contribution, and needs of individual learners. There are many facets to attending behaviour. One of the more obvious of these is using students' names. Others are eye contact, touch, facial expression, etc.

PROCEDURE

BEFORE THE LESSON

1. Arrange to observe a lesson.
2. Make yourself familiar with the sample diagram opposite. Be aware that you will probably have to modify it or draw up a new one to reflect the seating arrangements in the classroom. Each box should represent a student. You may want to go into the room early to start doing this, or you may be able to ask the teacher to prepare one for you.

1.1 Attending to the learner

DURING THE LESSON

1. Make sure you are seated in a position where you are able to observe when and how the teacher attends to individuals – by names, gesture, stance, facing them or not, eye contact, verbal prompts, etc.
2. For a portion of the lesson (decide yourself how much of the lesson you wish to devote to the collection of data), keep a record of every time the teacher attends: mark the appropriate box (perhaps with a dot) each time the teacher attends to a particular person.
3. As the teacher's use of names allows you to identify the learners, name each box on your diagram.
4. As far as you are able, try also to make a note (see list below) of the actual attending strategy used by the teacher. Some likely ones are listed. You may like to add others as you observe. It may help to use an abbreviation code. Sometimes strategies overlap or are combined: you may like to indicate this, for example, smile/eye contact (over-lap); name + smile (combined).
5. Note on your diagram, too, whether the students are male or female and any other distinguishing characteristics, such as a difference in age, nationality.
6. You may wish to record some field notes on student response to the teacher's attending strategies, for example, when the teacher looks at a student to discourage talking, or to encourage a response.

Seating arrangements

Wu F ●	M	F	Matilda ● ● F	M	M	F
M						F
M						Julio M ●●●●
F						F
F						F
M						M

Attending strategies

name (N)

nod (↓)

smile (⌣)

eye contact (⊙)

reprimanding look (⌢)

touch (T)

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1 The learner

AFTER THE LESSON

1. Share the data with the classroom teacher and together consider your impressions.
2. Do any patterns emerge? Were some students named or attended to more often than others?
3. Is there any 'pattern within the pattern'? For example:

   – Is the sex of the student relevant to the distribution of teacher attention?
   – Does the seating arrangement lend itself to a particular spread of teacher attention?
   – Is there a category of student that is attended to more or less than the others?
   – Do weaker or stronger students tend to 'disappear'?
   – What general conclusions can you draw about attending behaviour?

4. Focus on the use of names. Try to recall how these were used: for what purpose and to what effect? Speaking generally, what purposes can be served through the use of names? What means can teachers use to help them recall names?
5. Now consider the range of attending strategies used by the teacher. What others are possible? What comment would you make on a teacher's having a range of attending strategies? Are these conscious or subconscious behaviours in a teacher? Perhaps share the list of attending strategies noted with the classroom teacher and discuss whether these were consciously used.
6. Did you happen to notice anything about the students' own attending behaviours towards other students? How important is this? What might the teacher's role be in this regard? Is this in any way connected to their language learning agenda?

REFLECTION

Using the lesson as a mirror of your own attending skills, what comment can you make about your own teaching behaviour? What have you learned from this observation that you could apply to your own teaching?

1.2   Learner motivation

BACKGROUND

What motivates learners? Why do people sometimes put so much effort and energy into learning another language? In trying to understand the motivation that drives language learning, major studies have in the past tended to divide motivation into two broad categories: instrumental and integrative (see, for example, Gardner and Lambert 1972).

Broadly, *instrumental* motivation refers to wanting to learn a language because it will be useful for certain 'instrumental' and practical goals, such as getting a job, reading foreign newspapers or texts, passing an exam or obtaining a promotion. This category also includes more negative factors such as fear of failure. *Integrative* motivation, on the other hand, refers to wanting to learn a language for reasons of understanding, relating to or communicating with the people of the culture who speak it.

In the past, it was considered that learners with integrative motivation were more successful than learners with the 'lesser' drive of instrumental motivation. More recent studies (e.g. Giles and Byrne 1982) have cast doubt on this assumption. It is now believed that the categories of instrumental/integrative are not quite as distinct as may have been previously depicted: a learner's motivation may contain a blend of elements from both categories. It is also now believed that the former correlation between integrative–success and instrumental–less success is in fact quite facile and fails to reflect the true complexity of motivation.

What has emerged is that whatever the basis of the motivation of the learner, its level (high/low) has an impact on expected learner roles. Highly motivated learners are more likely to synchronise their roles willingly with the teacher's role; and are more likely to co-operate with the teacher in the various processes involved in classroom learning (Wright 1987).

TASK OBJECTIVE

This task will encourage you to consider learners from the point of view of their individual motivation for learning.

PROCEDURE

BEFORE THE LESSON

1. Arrange to observe a class of learners whom you know well. This ideally might be your own class being taught by someone else.

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1 The learner

2. Make yourself familiar with the chart below.
3. Choose a range of about five students whom you consider you know well enough to comment on their motivation for learning. Consider their reasons for wanting to learn the language. Comment in the column marked *Motivation* whether you consider it to be high or low or otherwise make a relevant comment.

DURING THE LESSON

1. Consider these students' behaviour/role in class and the degree to which they synchronise and co-operate with the teacher. For example, consider a student's:

   – response to the teacher;
   – involvement in tasks;
   – willingness to ask when uncertain;
   – tolerance of other students, etc.

2. There is room in the far right column for any further comments. You may, for example, wish to consider whether the motivation might be described as instrumental, integrative or a blend of these.

Student's name	Motivation	Learning behaviour	Comment

1.2 Learner motivation

AFTER THE LESSON

1. Consider the data you have collected. Comment on any linkage between Columns 2 and 3.
2. As it is so easy to make assumptions, you may wish to confirm your understanding of the students' motivations by interviewing them.
3. How important is it that a teacher knows their students well enough to understand the various motivations for learning the language?

    What means/methods might a teacher deploy in order to obtain this information? Which of these strategies do you use in your own teaching situation?
4. We now recognise that the distinctions of integrative and instrumental motivation are not as broad and clear as was once believed. Nevertheless, the following task may be beneficial.

    Link the following factors to either integrative or instrumental motivation. Or, if you wish, create an alternative scheme of classification.

    – Low degree of ethnocentrism
    – Wanting to obtain work in the target language
    – Planning to use the language for travel
    – Cultural value attached to learning another language
    – Having a close relationship with someone who speaks the target language
    – A love of culture, travel and contact with other people
    – Needs related to current or future study or work
    – A wish to 'be more like' people who speak the target language

    You may like to add any other motivations that you are aware of through your contact with language learning situations.
5. Consider your own attempts to learn another language. How would you define your motivation? How successful were you? To what extent do you link your success rate with your motivation? Or, to what extent do you think your success or otherwise affected your motivation?

REFLECTION

This task has involved you in actively considering various motivations that affect students in their learning a language. In what way might this experience affect you when you resume a teaching role with this (or another) group of students?

1.3   The learner as doer

BACKGROUND

It is commonly recognised that active learning allows learning to be both more personal and more memorable and for these reasons, is more effective. Learners who are 'engaged' by the lesson – by the teacher, the materials, the tasks, the activities – are more likely to have that learning make an impact on them. Teachers, therefore, often incorporate tasks in their teaching that require learners to *do* something in the lesson, for example, with the language or with each other.

TASK OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this observation is to allow you to become sensitive to the fact that 'learning by doing' embraces a large range of activities, and to analyse these activities as being *cognitive* (thinking), *affective* (feeling) and *physical*.

PROCEDURE

BEFORE THE LESSON

1. Arrange to observe a lesson. Prepare yourself for the 'nature of doing' by considering the sorts of things that teachers typically ask students to do. For example, tasks may involve:
   – thinking;
   – feeling;
   – acting;
   – moving about;
   – prioritising, ranking, making judgements;
   – negotiating, interacting with others;
   – consulting other sources of information.
2. Make yourself familiar with the chart opposite.

DURING THE LESSON

1. Observe the lesson from the point of view of what the learners actually do.
2. Use the chart to help you collect data from the lesson. Note down:
   – what the learners do;
   – what this involves;
   – what you think the teacher's purpose is.

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Add any comments in the far right column, for example, whether you would label the activity cognitive, affective, physical.

What learners do	What this involves	Teacher's purpose	Comment
Grouping words according to meaning	- Referring to dictionary - Consulting other students	- Teach reference skills - Teach two layers of meaning: denotation and connotation	Cognitive

1.3 The learner as doer

AFTER THE LESSON

1. Together with the classroom teacher, consider the balance of cognitive, affective and physical activities involved in the lesson. Discuss your views on this.
2. Considering the data you have collected, which activities in the lesson do you consider were the most valuable for the learners? Why were they valuable?
3. While we might, as teachers, encourage active involvement in the lesson, what happens when this planned learning style is incongruent or incompatible with a learner's own learning style? To what degree should a teacher compromise their preferred teaching methodology so as to cater for a learner's own preferred learning methodology?

REFLECTION

Use this lesson as a mirror of your own teaching. What balance of activities does your teaching typically involve? Has your awareness of these factors altered in any way that may influence your approach?

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1.4   Learner level

BACKGROUND

The assumption underlying this task is that no one class is ever completely homogenous in terms of level. Even if we might say that on Day One of the course, a class *appears* homogenous, by the end of the first week, patterns and gradations of levels will have begun to appear.

The notion of level is itself a complex one, related to and influenced by other differences among learners. The more we discover about language learning the more we are confronted by the diversity of contingent factors: people learn in different ways, at different rates, with different styles and exposing different strategies. There are other cases of 'anomaly' too, such as the risk-avoiding, accuracy-oriented student who might *appear* to be a higher level than the rather garrulous, risk-taking fluency or communication-oriented student who is less perturbed by a display of error.

TASK OBJECTIVE

The objective of this unit of observation is to recognise the overt signs of learner level as well as aspects of teaching that indicate that the teacher is accommodating learner level.

PROCEDURE

BEFORE THE LESSON

1. Arrange to observe a class of mixed-level students.
2. Meet with the teacher and find out some of the learners' names and their respective levels. Have the teachers grade the learners in the class on a key, for example, 1 to 5, where 1 is near the lowest in the class, and 5 the highest.
3. Ask the teacher to have the students wear name labels as you will need to be able to recognise them.
4. Make yourself familiar with the chart opposite.

DURING THE LESSON

1. Using the chart to collect your data, look for overt evidence of the students' designated levels.
2. In the far right column, record the strategies used by the teacher to accommodate learner level.

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1.4 Learner level

Student	Level	Signs of level	Teacher's strategies
Miguel	1	-Non-comprehension - Uses L1 - Looks to neighbour for help	Re-formulates directly to learner
Ingrid	5	-Response is quick and accurate	Uses student as a model of language pattern

1.4a Learner level

AFTER THE LESSON

1. Share and discuss your findings with the teacher of the class. Talk about any students whose level appears to be different from that designated in your meeting before the lesson.
2. During the lesson, you noted the teacher's strategies in responding appropriately to the level of the student. Some obvious accommodation strategies are listed here:

   – varying speed of language;
   – varying complexity of language;
   – varying length of wait time;
   – calling on stronger students for 'model' answers;
   – pairing and grouping arrangements.

   Can you add to this list?
3. Challenge is no doubt a good thing in the language classroom. If all students can do an activity easily and accurately then it is very probably below the appropriate level of difficulty for this class. In order to assess whether the level of difficulty is indeed appropriate, a teacher needs to be alert to the *indicators of challenge*. Some of these are listed overleaf. Can you add to this list?

1 The learner

Indicators of challenge
- Non-comprehension in facial expression
- Student wait time (= silence) before response
- First respondent does not offer the correct answer
- A learner looks sideways at a neighbour before starting writing

One investigator (Brown 1988) says that if indicators of challenge are present in about a quarter or a third of the class, then the level of challenge is about right. Would you agree?

4. What are some of the corresponding indicators of under-challenge or ease of lesson? Some of these are listed below. Can you add to the list?

Indicators of ease
- Student gets started quickly
- Plethora of responses to teacher's questions
- Expected time needed for tasks over-calculated

5. The question of whether to group weak students with weak and strong with strong is a vital one in teaching. There is of course no one answer that is always right. Much depends on the purpose of the group work (Austin 1990). Consider the following ways of grouping students: what outcomes might be expected in each case? Can you think of sample activities for each case?

Ways of grouping levels	Expected outcomes	Sample activity
a) Group weak students together		
b) Group strong students together		
c) Mix the groups		

1.4b Grouping students according to level

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6. Level is only one criterion by which groups may be created. In the chart below consider other criteria, and alongside this, indicate what the expected outcome might be, and a sample activity that would be appropriate.

Criterion	Expected outcome	Appropiate activity
Own culture	'Noisy' interaction	Discussion task – topical/social/ cultural/issue

1.4c Criteria for grouping students

REFLECTION

Consider a class that you currently teach or have recently taught. How aware are you of the levels within the class? How keenly is this awareness reflected in your teaching? What aspect of your lesson most reflects this awareness? Is it possible to extend this awareness to other elements of the learning situation?

1.5   The learner as cultural being

BACKGROUND

It has become axiomatic to draw attention to the inextricable bond
between language and culture. Our awareness of the cultural dimension
in language teaching touches a number of areas. For example, we are
aware that:

— when learning a language a learner is also learning (about) a culture;
— a learner is a cultural being with a cultural perspective on the world,
  including culture-specific expectations of the classroom and learning
  processes;
— the cultural dimension of the learner has to be considered and
  respected;
— a positive attitude towards the culture of the target language is a
  favourable factor in language learning.

TASK OBJECTIVE

The objective of this observation is to render more visible the cultural
factor in the classroom and the various aspects of teaching and learning
that culture permeates.

PROCEDURE

BEFORE THE LESSON

1. Arrange to observe a lesson. Speak to the teacher in advance of the
    lesson and discuss the cultural composition of the class.
2. Make yourself familiar with the chart opposite.

DURING THE LESSON

1. While the lesson is in progress, observe what happens from the
    perspective of how culture is involved. For example, you may
    consider that the materials used reflect a certain pattern of native
    speaker behaviour; or you may consider that certain aspects of a
    topic have not been discussed and the reasons for this are cultural
    ones; you may note that the way people address and interact with
    each other is affected by cultural factors.
2. Some categories have been suggested in the chart opposite; add any
    others that are relevant. Take notes on points that are relevant to the
    issue of culture in language teaching.

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1.5 The learner as cultural being

Categories	Notes
Choice of materials	
Choice of topics	
Choice of activities	
Teaching/learning strategies	
Modes of address	
Patterns of interaction	
Seating arrangements	

1.5 The learner as cultural being

AFTER THE LESSON

1. Discuss your notes and observations from the lesson with the classroom teacher. Consider the extent to which cultural factors consciously or subconsciously affect planning and teaching.
2. To what extent should a language teacher *actively* teach the culture of the target language? Should this take the form of information about the culture or should it be at a more experiential level?
3. What ways exist for an active teaching of culture? And what ways exist for a subtle style of teaching it? Brainstorm a taxonomy of culture-teaching methodologies.
4. To what extent do you believe that 'acculturation' is a teachable concept? Do all learners of a language need to acculturate and if so, to the same extent?
5. Is the native speaker teacher of a language to be considered a cultural model of that language? If so, how are learners to differentiate among cultural, dialectal and idiolectal features of the model to which they are exposed?
6. What is the role of the non-native speaker teacher of a language in terms of the culture of that language? What special issues pertain to the teaching of culture by a non-native speaker teacher?

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1 The learner

7. The concept of 'ego permeability' is the idea that one is more able to tune into another culture if one is less rigid about one's own. It is as if the boundaries of a person's language ego need to become flexible in order to allow the language learner to move comfortably between their own language identity and that of the target language. Ingram (1981:44) defines ego permeability as 'the extent to which [a person] can modify what he [*sic*] sees as his personal characteristics (including language characteristics) to act in a different way when operating in another culture or using another language'.

    To what extent does your experience of learning or teaching a language support this?
8. In the teaching of culture, should the emphasis be on the differences that make people cultural beings or on the universals that make people human?
9. To what extent should students of, say, English as a foreign language, be encouraged to 'be' English in the behaviour and viewpoints that underpin language? Where does this place their mother tongue and mother culture? Is there ever in this situation a potential for 'cultural imperialism' (see Rogers 1982 and Alptekin 1990)?

REFLECTION

How do you see your role as a language teacher in relation to culture? How is this manifested in your teaching? Has your awareness of the cultural dimension been in any way altered by the experience of this observation? If so, how can you now take this awareness one step further?