



MAXIMISING POTENTIAL

**A RESOURCE TO SUPPORT INCLUSION
IN MODERN LANGUAGES**

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**POINTS FOR
REFLECTION**

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This booklet consists of all the Points for Reflection drawn from the Maximising Potential programme published on the Modern Foreign Languages Environment (MFLE) website by Learning and Teaching Scotland and Scottish CILT in August 2007. Full details of the programme and the associated task sheets can be found here:

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/maximisingpotential>

CONTENTS

Taking account of the needs of individual learners

1. Why aren't they learning?
2. Responding to individual learning needs

Reviewing current practice

3. Key needs of all learners
4. A framework for action

Managing change

5. Starting points for development
6. Making links

WHY AREN'T THEY LEARNING?

Some pupils are learning Modern Languages happily and successfully, while others of similar ability are struggling or have become alienated. Why?

One of the characteristics of classes where learners are having fewest difficulties is the way teachers plan differentiation, or, more exactly, what they consider as the starting point for planning.

When planning differentiation, we can ask ourselves two questions:

1. Why are some pupils not learning better than they do, despite my best efforts?
2. How can I help them to learn better?

We often start with Question 2, but this may allow some basic problems to go unrecognised, and these will interfere with any measures we adopt in response to Question 2.

We really need to start with Question 1: Why aren't they learning **now**? What's stopping them?

What are 'barriers to learning'?

Some of the difficulties facing learners arise not because they **can't** learn what we want them to learn, but because they can't learn it in the **way** we want them to learn it. Sometimes we unconsciously erect barriers which make language learning seem more difficult than it needs to be.

Often, we modern language teachers do not recognise these barriers. The trouble is, if we are not aware of the barriers we can't do anything about them, we just assume that it is the language that is too difficult for them. Yet this is rarely the case. At least in the early stages, the target language and the concepts that make up our programmes of work are **not** too difficult for most learners. So what **is** the problem?

Some common barriers

Support for Learning staff working on earlier projects identified some of the more common difficulties encountered by pupils in modern languages classrooms. They rated the barriers in order of importance as regards the need to deal with them.

Here they are, in order of importance. Many pupils find these activities very difficult:

- copying accurately and/or legibly from the board
- following instructions, spoken or written
- keeping an accurate record of vocabulary, etc
- keeping up with the pace required
- concentrating for the necessary length of time.

Support staff also listed as significant barriers to learning:

- poor relationship with the teacher
- low self-esteem ('This is too hard for me. I can't do this. No point in trying.')

Isn't the language just too hard?

Modern language teachers are well aware of the situations described above, but sometimes they assume that these difficulties arise because the language being too demanding for the pupils concerned; that the **language** causes the difficulties.

What the authors of Maximising Potential have discovered through their work with schools is that cause and effect are the other way round. By putting in place measures to help pupils with the barriers identified, **their ability to cope with the target language improves**. Sometimes their use of English improves too.

How can we identify barriers we can't see?

Barriers like those listed above may be invisible to modern language teachers, but the effects they create and the behaviours that result are often very plain to see.

When learners are experiencing difficulty with the work that has been set in the Modern Languages classroom, the signs are usually quite obvious.

In listening work, pupils:

- keep losing the place on the tape
- are unsure what they have to do
- say they can't understand what is being said
- fail to complete answer sheets, guess, or get most answers wrong, etc.

In oral work, pupils:

- rarely volunteer an answer
- when you insist, can't answer or give a wrong answer
- answer yes or no, but can go no further
- appear not to have understood the question
- participate reluctantly in pair work
- may use English instead of the target language
- can't remember any of the needed words or phrases, etc.

In written work, pupils:

- fail to complete the work
- produce work that is illegible
- misspell a high proportion of words

In general pupils:

- are unable to follow directions
- behave aggressively
- are reluctant to co-operate
- express indifference
- offer passive resistance
- are easily distracted, restless
- try to distract others, etc.

Interpreting unwanted behaviour

Sometimes learners prefer to take avoidance strategies rather than admit to what they see as their failure. Teachers need to recognise the fact that these strategies, particularly ones which manifest themselves as misbehaviour, often mask pupils' underlying difficulties. It is important to recognise

that behaviours such as reluctance to learn, inattention, and lack of co-operation often signal the existence of low self-esteem arising from curricular barriers which could be reduced or eliminated.

Do you recognise these behaviours?

Whilst most modern language teachers do recognise these behaviours, they don't always realise that these behaviours can be the **result** rather than the **cause** of difficulties that pupils experience. We tend to say things like: 'If they would only concentrate... If they would only try harder...; If they would only pay attention... then they would do better.'

Tackling the barriers

So we have to dig deeper. **Why** are they behaving like this? If it's not the language itself, it may be the way we are teaching it. If you are seeing a lot of this behaviour, then it's worth considering as a possibility.

In all the cases the authors have observed or heard about, when curriculum development along these lines has been tackled, learning behaviour has improved, and for many pupils, that means behaviour per se has improved.

Implications

Tackling barriers doesn't solve all the behaviour problems, of course; many pupils will still struggle with physical, emotional, social and other conditions that affect motivation to learn. The best that modern language teachers can do for pupils is to ensure that the **curricular** barriers, at least, are minimised. This can have a marked effect on motivation and attention to learning. Failure to address curricular issues leaves the root cause of some difficulties unchanged. This can cause a downward spiral of depressed self-esteem, poor motivation and low attainment. Repeated failure to succeed inevitably results in disaffection and reluctance to learn.

Benefits

When we recognise the true barriers, we can devise strategies for minimising them or removing them altogether. Then more effective learning can take place.

The striking thing about these barriers is that they often seem to have little or nothing to do with language learning per se, but everything to do with the mechanics of the classroom. Could it be that some pupils do not, in fact have overwhelming difficulties with the language, but only with the difficulty **teachers** have in recognising what is hindering their pupils from learning as well as they might? The schools we have worked with show that this may well be the case; that the answer may lie in modifying the **approaches** teachers use, rather than in changing the level of language on offer.

How support staff can help

Support staff are often adept at identifying potential barriers and can provide a valuable service to modern language departments. They can provide a realistic starting point for planning differentiated strategies which can quickly improve learning, not only of pupils who were obviously struggling, but for many others, too.

Departments which work well with support staff to remove unnecessary barriers report improvements in behaviour and motivation that eventually lead to improvements in attainment.

RESPONDING TO INDIVIDUAL LEARNING NEEDS

The information stored in the accompanying grid was developed by dyslexia specialist Margaret Crombie and modern language specialist Hilary McColl in the course of working together to produce advice on modern language learning requested by the British Dyslexia Association.

The grid serves as an example of a problem solving approach to meeting the needs of learners who experience difficulties in foreign language learning. It is intended as a reference sheet in its own right, and as an introduction to Task 2. The task uses a similar approach to plan effective ways of responding to the needs of other pupils or groups of pupils who are experiencing difficulties.

The first column

Start by looking at the first column in the dyslexia grid. It contains descriptions characteristic of dyslexic learners in general. A single dyslexic learner is unlikely to experience all of these characteristics, and not all of them to the same degree, but it is important to remember that learners who experience these difficulties do not choose to do so; these are the conditions under which they work, and these provide us with a fixed starting point. The dyslexia specialist provided the bulk of the information in the first column. Note that these are examples of the most commonly experienced characteristics; more details could have been included, for example: individual learners' strengths and interests.

The second column

The second column examines the effect each of these difficulties will have on language learning for this group of learners. The modern language specialist may be aware that certain learners are struggling with these aspects of language learning, but may not be aware of the true cause of the difficulty; learners may be seen as lazy or uncooperative, for example. Assistance from the Support for Learning department can help to identify learners who are known to be dyslexic, though there may be others in the class who are mildly dyslexic but who have not been identified. Measures put in place to help dyslexic learners should help them too.

The third column

The third column suggests measures which the language specialist can incorporate into classroom practice that will help dyslexic learners and others. It is always best, if possible, to develop teaching and learning approaches that will also benefit the rest of the class, and that are sustainable beyond the lifetime of project. Staffing and time are valuable resources, but scarce.

The fourth column

Despite all that Modern Language teachers can do, however, some additional help may be needed in order to allow them to carry out plans detailed in the third column. These additional support needs go into the fourth column. They can include:

- support for the Modern Language teacher (for example, to create a set of help sheets for the class, or ICT training in some application that SfL recommend as likely to be helpful)
- support for a learner or group of learners to bring them up to speed on a particular skill (for example, dictionary skills or working with others)
- an additional measure agreed with the learner(s) (for example, spending extra time working at home)

- arrangements agreed with the school timetabler (for example, to allow teachers to work co-operatively, or to facilitate access to the ICT suite).

Use this illustration as a model when you move on to Task 2, but be flexible. None of the examples in this grid will exactly parallel your own situation. The grid that **you** produce will be a unique document designed to respond to the needs of the specific pupils you have targeted.

Remember that gifted and talented learners can have additional support needs too, and these can be identified and planned for in the same way.

Maximising Potential: Unit 2 – Dyslexia Grid

CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSLEXIC LEARNERS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING

| Factors to take into account Characteristics of dyslexic learners which will affect learning | Effect on foreign language learning Learners may have difficulties with the following | Strategies Incorporating these strategies into normal classroom practice may help | Additional support Examples of additional support which may be needed |
|--|---|---|---|
| Phonological processing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor grasp of sound/symbol correspondence Lack of awareness of individual sounds within words | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pronunciation, even of frequently encountered words Recognising familiar words & phrases and confusion of similar sounding words Reading, especially if asked to read aloud | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early introduction to phonic system of the new language Introduce new material in a multisensory way - show it, listen to it, look at it, hear it, say it, write it, etc. Ask student to read aloud only if s/he volunteers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use practice cards for reinforcement Provide tapes to accompany printed materials Use Language Master/PALE Pair student with a good reader |
| Memory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working memory is limited; if overloaded, information may be lost There may be inaccurate representations in long-term memory | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remembering and carrying out instructions (in either language) Remembering recently learned vocabulary Repeating multi-syllable words May know the answer but be unable to 'get it out'! | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present new information in bite-sized chunks Set limited but realistic targets Make use of additional channels of learning - music, actions, graphics Allow extra time for recall | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide materials for further revision at home or with additional support |
| Auditory discrimination / perception <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsure of the sound which has been heard Difficulty in perceiving the difference between similar sounds Difficulty in knowing where a spoken word ends and a new word begins | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing whether a sound is being pronounced correctly (e.g. repeating after the teacher) Ability to recognise the difference between two words containing similar sounds in either language Listening tasks Answering oral questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide text to accompany sound. When speaking to dyslexic students, exaggerate word separation at first, then let them hear it as it would be spoken normally | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If student has a choice of language, opt for one which is phonically similar to home language - e.g. Italian or Spanish may be better for English-speaking student than French. |
| Sequencing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting things in order: e.g. alphabet, word order in sentences or letter order in words, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessing words from dictionary Ordering days in a week, months in a year, numerical data, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide frequent practice using variety of strategies - rhyme, rhythm, games, songs, etc. Have lists/diagrams etc. on the wall for reference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make use of technical aids, such as foreign language spelling and word checker Encourage the use of mnemonic strategies |

Unit 2 -- Characteristics of dyslexic learners and implications for modern language teaching (*continued*)

| Factors to take into account Characteristics of dyslexic learners which will affect learning | Effect on foreign language learning Learners may have difficulties with the following | Strategies Incorporating these strategies into normal classroom practice may help | Additional support Examples of additional support which may be needed |
|---|--|---|---|
| Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handwriting may be painfully slow and the result inaccurate and difficult to read | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copying from the board Committing to paper what can be produced orally Spelling may follow English phonic code ('mother tongue interference') | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit the amount of writing required for class work, but do not eliminate it Avoid assessing written work if very poor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accept assessments in forms other than writing - taped, word processed, etc. Provide photocopied notes with tapes which can be used for practice at home |
| Speed of processing information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tendency to be slower in responding to incoming information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responding to information or instructions given verbally in either language Responding to a continuous flow of information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slow down speed of presentation to allow extra time for processing information Be prepared to allow student extra time to answer questions and to complete work. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply for extra time and other special arrangements for external examinations |
| Difficulty with directionality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tendency to confuse left/right, up/down, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following and giving directions Responding accurately to instructions which rely on prepositions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide pictures, arrows, etc. as well as text Give visual clues when speaking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pair student with another who has no difficulties in this area and who can help |
| Grammar and syntax <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor understanding of grammar and syntax in first language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forming accurate sentences Rules of grammar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach rules and reinforce daily Use diagrams, cards and other language building blocks, etc. to demonstrate linear sequences and patterns of language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write rules onto revision cards for students to use as reference in class and at home |
| Visual discrimination/recognition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor ability to discriminate and/or differentiate between words in and between words | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiating between similar looking words (in either language or between languages) Differentiating between accents, and therefore assigning correct pronunciation Confusion between languages, e.g. pain (bread) in French confused with the English word | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use picture cues for association Use practice cards for daily revision of common words with accents Highlight accents in colour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Language Master to aid learning of common words to help with accents and to reinforce easily confusable words |

Reproduced from Crombie, M. & McColl, H. 'Dyslexia and the Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages', Peer, L. & Reid, G. (Eds.) *Dyslexia: Successful Inclusion in the Secondary School*. London: David Fulton Publishers (2001) by kind permission of Taylor and Francis Publishers.

KEY NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS

Mary Simpson and Jenny Ure, in their study of differentiation in Scottish secondary schools some years ago concluded that there is no one strategy which is **in itself** more effective than any other

The key to success

The key to success, they found, is the extent to which the strategies used enable teachers to be responsive to the needs of individual learners. If teachers do not respond to individual needs, or are unsure how to create the conditions which allow them to do so, **no** strategy will be very effective. If teachers acknowledge the needs and finds ways of meeting them that they and their pupils are comfortable with, success is likely to follow. The wider the range of strategies teachers can employ, the more likely they are to be able to meet the needs of a wide range of learners.

Simpson and Ure point out that all pupils share certain learning needs. Their list of key requirements for successful learning, reproduced below, apply to **all** learners. Note how well these chime with the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence and with the approaches associated with the Assessment is for Learning programme.

Learners have shared needs associated with the following:

the curriculum - the need to be given appropriate levels of work; to know about what is to be learned; to be set realistic, short term targets; to have support in the acquisition of component or pre-requisite skills; etc.

cognition - the need to have explanations which are comprehensible; to have misunderstandings and misconceptions identified and rectified; to be given 'conceptual scaffolding' which will enable the organisation of detail or the elaboration of abstract concepts; to have available such strategies as concept-mapping, to assist in the development of understanding; etc.

the management of learning - the need to have support in the self-pacing or management of work; to be assisted in understanding how to work profitably in groups or teams; to be able to identify strategies for problem-solving/tackling exam questions/taking notes/highlighting key points/revising etc; to develop a strategy for asking for assistance with problems; etc.

motivational factors - the need to be motivated to learn; to expect success and progression in learning; to be confident; to expect problems to be capable of resolution; to have high but attainable goals; to recognise purpose in the learning process; to value the skills and knowledge acquired in school and to have an expectancy that these are a springboard for future learning; etc.

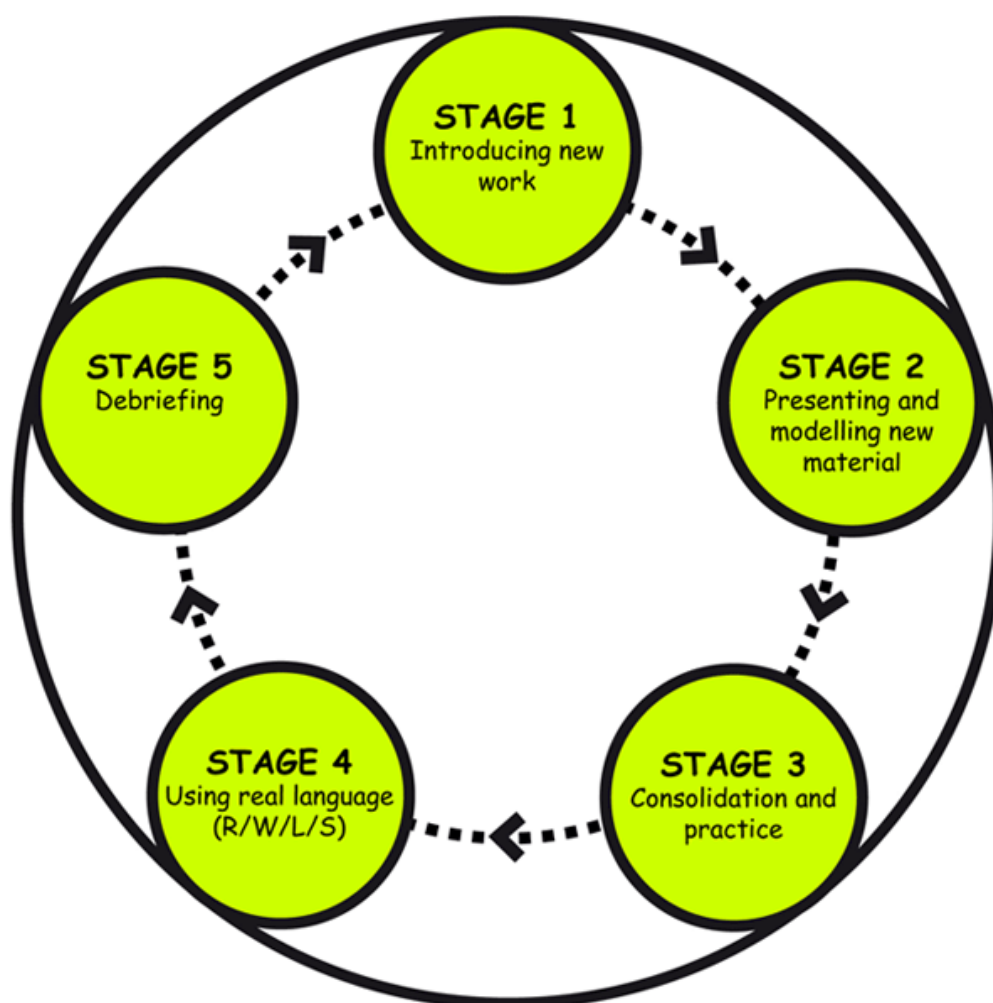
personal factors - the need to have idiosyncratic personal issues taken note of, eg times of crisis or stress; to have personal circumstances taken into account, eg lack of facilities for doing homework, lack of parental support or encouragement; to have assistance with improving personal and inter-personal skills; low self-esteem etc; to have help in dealing with peer group pressure etc.

Source Simpson, M. and Ure, J. *What's the Difference?* A study of differentiation in Scottish secondary schools. (Northern College Publications, 1994, page 85)

A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

This item of the programme proposes an outline framework which can help you to examine shared needs in the context of a teaching a unit of work. It serves as a means of auditing current provision by proposing a sequence of stages into which teaching/learning activities might be divided. Although each stage is important, not all stages will take up the same amount of time, and each stage may contain a number of internal loops as you tackle different aspects of the current theme.

The five stages of a possible teaching cycle:



Of these five stages, Stages 2 and 4 usually receive the most attention. The Assessment is for Learning programme focuses attention particularly on Stages 1 and 5. The stage most often ignored or glossed over is Stage 3, yet, for many Modern Language learners, this is perhaps the most important.

Stage 3 is the point at which learners need to become familiar with all aspects of the new language elements recently encountered; to experiment with new language structures; to see how these combine together and with previously learned material; and to transfer meaning, sound, gender, spelling, rules of syntax, etc. from working memory to long-term memory banks so that they can recall items accurately when required. This is a tall order.

What happens if this stage is omitted or truncated? Then learners are required to move to Stage 4 (working with texts) insecure in their knowledge of recently taught language and without having had a chance to practice manipulating the new language elements for themselves or to install them in long term memory. This results in incomplete data storage, lack of confidence, increased likelihood of failure, feelings of reluctance and demotivation and, in some cases, avoidance strategies.

If Stage 3 is well managed, with plenty of opportunities for games and single outcome game-like activities which allow pupils to manipulate language for themselves in non-threatening pair and group situations, and which allow for randomised repetition of important vocabulary and structures, then they will be ready to move on confidently to using texts for reading, writing, listening and speaking activities at Stage 4 with a much increased chance of success.

The reason most often given for underplaying Stage 3 is that there isn't time, there's too much to get through. But schools that have taken the time to develop Stage 3 have found that improved confidence and motivation at Stage 4 have actually saved time and led to more satisfying achievement. Games and certain types of game-like software can offer ways of engaging pupils in those repetitive tasks which, though essential to effective learning, can seem boring and pointless if carried out solely by means of textbook-and-jotter or worksheet tasks.

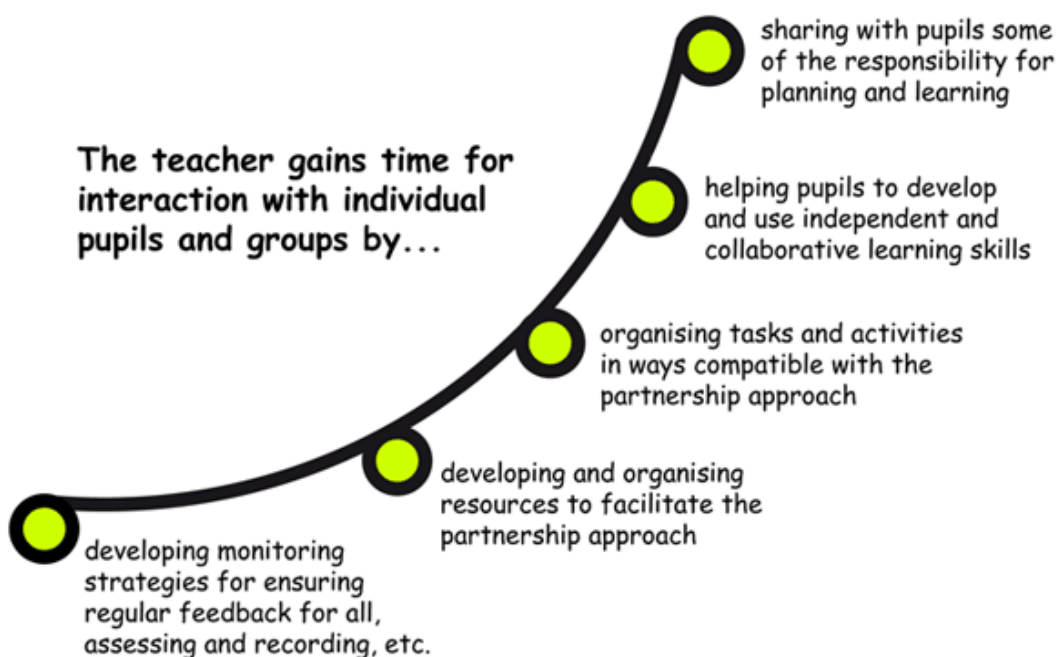
STARTING POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Managing change

So far, in this programme, the emphasis has been on observing and identifying learning needs so that we can plan strategies to accommodate them. But not all needs can be predicted in advance, and our best planning sometimes has outcomes that were not foreseen. It is the purposeful interaction between teacher and learner which provides opportunities to respond to more immediate and individual needs as they arise. This has significant implications for the way the teacher uses class time.

In order to be available to meet individual and small group needs, the teacher has to reduce those aspects of teaching which limit freedom to respond to needs as they arise. This means finding ways of managing the classroom (learners, resources, tasks, relationships, responsibilities) which will facilitate the creation of conditions which free the teacher to work closely with groups or with individual pupils. Some of those facilitating strategies are indicated in the diagram below and taken up again in the notes that accompany the tasks in this unit.

This diagram illustrates how the teacher can gain time for interaction with individual pupils and groups.



Fear of change

Teachers are understandably afraid of 'throwing out the baby with the bathwater'. How can you know if any change you make is going to work any better than what you were doing before? Here are some ways of reducing the risk:

Take small steps

Neither you nor the pupils will be comfortable with whole-scale change. Take one step at a time, and prepare the pupils well, so that they are not upset by unexpected changes to usual practice. They need to know if your expectations have changed, and if so, why. Explain that small changes can often make a big difference to how well pupils learn, and involve them in evaluating the effectiveness of the new procedures. If they need to learn new skills (e.g. how to work in groups, engage in self- or peer- assessment, etc.) make sure that these skills are explicitly taught.

Add breadth and enrichment

Maintain the existing regime for the time being, but experiment with additions and/or alterations to one or two activities with a view to widening their sensory scope, to introducing more choice and more independent or collaborative or active learning, etc., thereby accommodating the needs of more learners.

Offer choices

First, try a range of approaches with your pupils so that you, and they, can find out which method works best for different individuals. Then, begin to offer choices, allowing pupils to choose whichever way seems to work best for them. Again, this begins to involve pupils in thinking about learning and encourages them to take on some of the responsibility. Vocabulary learning is often chosen as a vehicle for early experimentation, since it is relatively easy to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches.

Start with one unit

One tried and tested strategy is to pick out for your experiment a theme or unit of work which seems to be particularly difficult to teach successfully, and to develop just that part of your programme in line with the new ideas that you want to try. Since you selected something which was working unsatisfactorily anyway, you have nothing to lose. Also, if it works, you know that success **is** due to the change in approach, and that will give you the confidence to experiment further.

MAKING LINKS

Linking the curriculum to the learners' world

Linking, in some form or other, has cropped up in a number of places in this programme. It is an important theme because it can point to ways of enriching the programme on offer to learners. The idea of modern language learning taking place in an enclosed environment, with no links beyond the classroom door, is unthinkable – this is, after all a subject essentially concerned with the wider world – yet potential links with pupils' personal worlds are sometimes overlooked.

Think locally as well as globally

This may be because we tend to think of languages as **foreign** – something **over there**, not **right here**. The result may be to distance some learners from the subject to the extent that they find it difficult to comprehend its relevance for them. Any measures, even local ones, that bring the outside world into the modern languages classroom or take the classroom out into the world, help to counteract the feeling of detachment and contribute to a sense of relevance for the learner.

One way of expanding this aspect of the curriculum is to think in terms of ever-increasing circles whose centre is the classroom and whose outer limit is of global proportions; curricular activities can range from pinning up work or posters in the corridor outside the classroom to taking part in an expedition to study or assist a third world country.

Make comparisons

Access 2 in Modern Languages introduced the requirement for pupils to make comparisons between aspects of life in a country whose language is being studied, and learners' own communities. Such linking of what is distant, foreign and alien with what is close, familiar and comfortable is relevant and reassuring for pupils at any level, but especially to those who are struggling with language and with motivation to learn. The task sheets in this section suggest ways of building such links into programmes of work at all levels.