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DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING
A primer for heritage and mixed classes

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Overview
This chapter presents an introduction to differentiated teaching (DT) for instructors of Spanish in heritage language (HL) classes as well as in mixed classes, i.e. classes that enroll HL learners (HLLs) and second language learners (L2Ls). By way of making the case for a differentiated approach, the first section will examine the shortcomings of one-size-fits-all teaching in classes that enroll HLLs. The overarching principles and strategies of DT will be presented thereafter, followed by a discussion of their application to HL and mixed classes. Eight tools of DT are then detailed and, finally, formative assessment, a key component of DT, is discussed.

For purposes of this discussion, we will assume Guadalupe Valdés’ (2001) definition of the term heritage language learner: “a language student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (p. 38). At the same time, we will address issues stemming from “broad definitions” of HLLs, which focus on affiliation, rather than linguistic proficiency (Polinsky & Kagan 2007). To that end, we will use Hornberger and Wang’s (2008) broad definition of HLLs as individuals who “have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language and who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs (heritage language learners) of that HL (heritage language) and HC (heritage culture)” (p. 27). Inherent in the broad definition is the notion of ethnic identity, which according to He (2006) is “the centerpiece rather than the background of HL development” (p. 7; see also Potowski 2012).

In terms of the central point of this chapter, effective teaching of HLLs – be it in an HL or mixed class – must contend with sensitive issues of affect stemming from the broad definition, as well as complex linguistic and learning issues related to the narrow definition. As we explain in the next section, one-size-fits-all approaches are limited in their ability to attend to these imperatives.

Why differentiate?
Traditionally, foreign language teaching has been one-size-fits-all, in the sense that for any given class or instructional unit, the content, process, product, and pacing of instruction is likely to be uniform for all students, and in many cases, fixed and predetermined by the syllabus. Such an
approach assumes that learners have roughly similar knowledge of the target language, and that
teachers have an understanding of what their learners’ language needs consist of. These views
are largely true with regard to L2Ls, especially at the lower levels of instruction. For example,
we can predict that upon completing a first course in Spanish, L2Ls are likely to be acquainted
with the terms *preterit* and *imperfect* and know their basic conjugational properties, though they
may still struggle to use these forms with accuracy in spontaneous conversation.

This is not to suggest that L2Ls are all alike; far from it. They differ with regard to important
attributes such as aptitudes, motivation, learning profile, etc. It is to say, however, that L2Ls
with similar learning histories are roughly similar to each other with regard to what they know
about specific points of instruction and what they can do with those points of instruction under
well-defined conditions, such as when engaging in task-based instruction.

A strikingly different situation holds with HLLs. Their knowledge and abilities in the HL
are not a function of coursework, but rather of life experiences, which can vary significantly
from one learner to another. As a general rule, HLLs’ proficiency increases in direct proportion
to the quantity and quality of exposure to their HL. As such, a HLL who makes exclusive use
of her HL at home, has spent time in her country of origin, and who consumes media in the
HL, is likely to have a higher level of proficiency than an HLL who grew up speaking both
the HL and English at home, who has not travelled to her country of origin, and who makes
very limited use of HL media.

Though these two hypothetical learners present very different linguistic profiles, it would
not be unusual for them to end up in the same HL class. Many departments offer only one
HL course, leaving little alternative but to place them together. This situation gives rise to
the type of diversity challenges associated with teaching HLLs, which can be vastly more
complex than depicted in our simplified example. The crucial point here is that one-size-
fit-all approaches are a poor fit for HL classes, by virtue of the range of proficiencies these
students present.

They are also a poor fit for mixed classes, for similar reasons. In departments with no HL
classes, both hypothetical HLLs may find themselves in an intermediate Spanish class alongside
L2Ls. Such classes must contend with a double layer of diversity, one layer stemming from dif-
ferences between HLLs and L2Ls, and the other from differences among HLLs.

Table 23.1 compares the relative abilities of typical HLLs and L2Ls with regard to the target
language.

The two populations of learners do not just differ with regard to what they know about
and can do with the target language; they also differ with respect to their level of readiness to
take part in the hypothetical intermediate-level mixed class described earlier. Having taken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HL learners</th>
<th>L2 learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Can understand and do a lot in the target language</td>
<td>Know a lot about the target language (e.g. grammatical terminology and rules)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Can handle with relative ease real-life tasks in the target language in spontaneous situations</td>
<td>Can handle with relative ease the kind of pedagogical activities that are common in L2 classes; are used to monitoring their language in controlled tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Can speak and understand the target language fairly well</td>
<td>Can read and write the target language relatively well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Focus on content when using authentic materials in a formal setting</td>
<td>Focus on form when using authentic materials in a formal setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23.1 Comparison of relative abilities of typical HL and L2 learners
Differentiated teaching

introductory Spanish, intermediate L2Ls are better prepared than HLLs by virtue of their superior knowledge of grammatical terminology and the routines of foreign language teaching, as well as their capabilities in reading and writing. Furthermore, as noted in row 4 of Table 23.1, HLLs differ from L2Ls with regard to how they approach task-based pedagogical interventions. Research by Julio Torres (2013) indicates that HLLs focus primarily on content and meaning, processing the input in the task as authentic content rather than directing their attention to establishing new form-meaning connections. L2Ls, on the other hand, are more focused on form (see also Gass & Lewis 2007). Taken together, these differences put HLLs at a significant disadvantage in traditional language classes, where reading and writing skills are privileged over conversational skills, knowledge of grammatical terminology is assumed, and learners are expected to focus on form-meaning connections.

It is important to note that all departments with HLLs – regardless of whether or not they have an HL track – have mixed classes and must therefore contend with the differences depicted in Table 23.1. Departments without an HL track contend with these differences in all of their courses, while departments with separate tracks for HLLs and L2Ls contend with them at the point in the curriculum where the two tracks join together, which in most cases happens somewhere beyond the beginning levels of instruction and includes content courses such as those offered in the major. Thus, in an upper-division Spanish linguistics class, HLLs will likely lag behind L2Ls with regard to their knowledge of grammatical terminology and rules, while in a literature class, HLLs will likely excel in oral discussions but struggle with reading and writing, relative to their L2L counterparts.

Beyond the strictly linguistic, HLLs and L2Ls also differ in terms of their needs and goals with regard to the target language. As noted earlier in the context of discussing Hornberger and Wang’s (2008) broad definition, HLLs study their HL and culture to understand themselves and to connect with other speakers of the language, particularly relatives and friends in the U.S. and abroad (Carreira & Kagan 2011). In addition, as so eloquently described below, they grapple with rejection and other challenges of navigating two different languages and cultures:

In school I was labeled Mexican, but to the Mexicans, I am an American ... It’s this weird duality in which you are stuck in the middle. Latinos are often told that they are not Americans but also that they are not connected to their heritage. You take pride in both cultures and learn to deal with the rejection. You may never be fully embraced by either side. That’s why you seek out other people like yourself. Socializing with people who share a common experience helps you deal with this experience.

Carreira & Beeman 2014: 88

These are scenarios L2Ls are unlikely to encounter, and from the point of view of mixed classes, means that instructors must simultaneously manage two different – if not opposing – sets of socio-affective needs and goals with regard to the target language, as illustrated in Table 23.2. Clearly, this imperative is incompatible with one-size-fits-all instruction.

Thus, teaching HLLs, be it in HL or mixed classes, involves attending to two general areas of instruction: the linguistic and the socio-affective. A third area, mentioned in point 4, Table 23.1, concerns learning approaches, and targets the differences between HLLs and L2Ls with regard to how they tackle task-based pedagogical interactions, where HLLs tend to focus on content, L2Ls on form. HLLs’ lack of focus on form requires a proactive approach to ensure form-focused objectives are clear.

To further complicate matters, HL and mixed classes must sometimes contend with an additional population of learners, namely native speakers. By this we mean learners who grew up in a

361
Spanish-speaking country and arrive in the U.S. in late puberty or beyond with age-appropriate skills in Spanish. Valdés (2006) describes the situation as follows:

More recently, secondary school Spanish teachers have faced an even more difficult situation. Their enrollment includes traditional FL students (anglophone monolingual students), second- and third-generation bilingual Latinos and Chicanos who are largely English-dominant, and newly arrived Latino students who speak little or no English and who have been schooled to a greater or lesser degree in Spanish in their home countries.

Research we have recently conducted reveals that this is a widespread phenomenon in both high school and post-secondary contexts and presents considerable challenges to teachers (Carreira 2017).

A three-way comparison of native speakers, HLLs, and L2Ls is offered in Table 23.3.

Before delving into what all of this means from the point of view of managing instruction, the next section presents an overview of the principles and general strategies of DT. In this discussion we will focus primarily on readiness-based differentiation, i.e. differentiation based on language needs, though we will also address interest-based and affective-based strategies.
Differentiated teaching: principles and strategies

Predicated on the notion that teaching should be responsive to student differences and reach out to learners at their own level of readiness, DT offers language teachers a way to deal with the challenges that arise in heritage and mixed classes. DT falls under the umbrella of “teaching in multilevel classrooms,” a term that covers many different teaching situations, all of which involve learners that differ from each other in pedagogically significant ways (for an overview of this topic, see Berry & Williams 1992; Hess 2001; Shank & Terrill 1995). Tomlinson (2003) summarizes the foundational principles of DT as follows:

In differentiated classrooms, teachers begin where students are, not the front of a curriculum guide. They accept and build upon the premise that learners differ in important ways . . . In differentiated classrooms, teachers provide specific ways for each individual to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible, without assuming one student’s roadmap for learning is identical to anyone else.

In terms of general strategies, teachers can modify four elements of the curriculum: (1) the content or material; (2) the process or activities through which students acquire and practice the material; (3) the product, that is, how students demonstrate mastery of the material; and (4) the pacing, or the rate at which students progress through learning. Differentiation can also take place according to students’ interest, level of readiness, and learning profile.

Regarding content, in a foreign language class this can be anything from vocabulary, to grammar, to a higher order skill such as acquiring a new linguistic register or learning how to analyze a work of literature. Process can also vary significantly, from mechanical activities narrowly focused on accuracy to open-ended ones aimed at increasing communicative competence. As to product, this can range from taking a test, to writing an essay, giving an oral presentation, working on a project, putting together a portfolio, etc. In other words, whatever serves as the basis for students to demonstrate mastery of the material and instructors to assign grades. Lastly, in foreign language classes pacing is largely controlled by the instructor, as determined by the syllabus.

Given limitations of space, and because this chapter is intended as an introduction to DT, the discussion that follows will focus on varying process and pacing, by student interest, readiness, and learning profile. Our rationale for leaving out product stems from the fact that this is already a fairly familiar topic to foreign language teachers, who are well versed in a variety of options, such as those mentioned earlier. A very different reason underlies our decision to largely stay away from discussing content, namely that this is a particularly difficult variable by which to differentiate instruction, and thus is inappropriate for an overview such as this. Varying content is difficult because it involves adjusting the topics included in a syllabus in accordance with prior student knowledge on an individual basis. This is perilous because any kind of miscalculation can result in individual students not being prepared for the next level of instruction. That being said, one relatively straightforward way to vary content is by having students choose different topics for a project or presentation. Later in this chapter, the discussion of learning contracts will briefly address another way to vary content.

In keeping with these considerations, in the next section we describe eight tools of DT and discuss applications for HL and mixed classes.
Tools of differentiated teaching

DT offers many tools that prove particularly helpful in navigating the issues of diversity that arise in HL and mixed classes. The eight tools featured below serve as examples of how teachers can take activities that are low-tech and straightforward and apply them in ways that establish a differentiated classroom and instantiate the principles of DT. High-tech counterparts of these tools include clickers and an ever-increasing choice of apps and platforms that allow teachers to connect with their students and differentiate instruction. In all cases, the goal remains the same: Getting to know students’ strengths and weaknesses and responding to them in strategic ways, believing that with targeted feedback and scaffolding, most students can succeed in meeting most of the learning goals. In other words, a growth mindset is established (Dweck 2006), a principle that can guide and underpin the use of both low-tech tools and any high-tech alternatives.

We begin with flexible grouping, a tool of central importance to DT, and return to it in the discussion of the remaining tools.

Flexible grouping

Flexible grouping is grouping that is not static, but rather changes as needed to maximize learning. Students may work with a partner, in small groups (homogeneous or heterogeneous), in a teacher-led group for a mini-lesson, or with the whole class, depending on the situation and as needed to deal with language and socio-affective issues, as well as to address differences between HLLs and L2Ls in the context of task-based interventions.

In the area of language, for example, HLLs can often engage with authentic materials with little or no scaffolding, while L2Ls usually need prior vocabulary and grammatical instruction. Accordingly, instructors may want to separate the two populations to provide L2Ls with pathways into the material in a teacher-led mini-lesson as a way to prepare them to work alongside HLLs. This is particularly important for activities that involve spontaneous language, such as watching a movie and then discussing it, i.e. both authentic material and unplanned interaction, where HLLs will have the advantage. L2Ls have the advantage when it comes to grammatical terminology and rules, and in order to work alongside L2Ls in task-based interactions, HLLs need to have special instruction on these topics and, in general, have their attention focused on form. This can be accomplished in a mini-lesson for HLLs. In terms of affective issues, flexible grouping can address HLLs’ need to socialize with other HLLs in order to deal with the challenges of navigating two cultures and languages, including rejection, as described in an earlier quote by a Latino student.

From the point of view of classroom management, teacher-led mini-lessons require instructors to find a way to engage learners that are not part of the teacher-led group. Learning agendas, anchoring activities, and centers, discussed next, make this possible.

Learning agendas and anchoring activities

Akin to a to-do list, a learning agenda is a list of exercises or activities to be completed by students within a set period of time. Learning agendas support flexible grouping by providing purposeful work for students that are not part of a mini-lesson. Equally important, agendas transfer some control over the pace of learning to students, rather than leaving this entirely under the control of the instructor, as happens in one-size-fits-all classes.
Differentiated teaching

Creating a learning agenda can be as simple as bundling together all homework assignments for a unit of study, rather than assigning them in a piecemeal fashion, from one day to the next. This process makes it possible for students to pace themselves as needed, moving quickly through accessible activities and slowing down with more challenging ones in order to seek help and avail themselves of additional resources, including those found in learning centers (see next subsection).

Agendas can also be created using anchoring activities. These are multi-step projects or assignments that students work on over a period of time, individually or in small groups, and can be as varied as reading journals, class presentations, or research projects. Anchoring activities that build in student choice (e.g. with regard to topic or product) also make it possible to differentiate by student interest and affective needs.

Learning centers

A center is a space, either physical or virtual, offering a variety of activities and materials for students to work on independently or with other students, reviewing and expanding the material presented in the class. Learning centers make it possible to differentiate process by providing any number of additional resources. For example, in the area of language, extra practice exercises can be included that target salient grammatical points or skills needed by each population of learners (e.g. accent and orthography for HLLs and general vocabulary for L2Ls). To help HLLs make form-meaning connections, centers can provide practice with grammatical terminology and rules. For L2Ls, centers can provide scaffolding activities that support engagement with authentic materials, such as previewing key vocabulary. Old exams and samples of student work can help both groups understand expectations and develop a sense of assessment criteria from models. Virtual centers can also provide computer-graded exercises and links to instructional resources, as well as links to authentic materials that can help address HLLs’ affective needs. For example, they can be directed to literature written by U.S. Latinos.

Like agendas, learning centers support flexible grouping by providing purposeful work for students that are not part of a mini-lesson. They can also address students’ particular interests or needs and make it possible for learners with common interests/needs to work together, such as collaborating on a project or practicing accentuation.

The “Know, Want to learn, Learned” (KWL) chart

The KWL chart involves answering the following three questions: What do we know? What do we want to learn? What have we learned? (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short 2013; Ogle 1986). At the beginning of a unit of study, learners use the first two questions to take stock of what they already know about a given instructional topic and identify their particular learning needs and goals. At the end of the unit, they use the third question to evaluate what has been learned and identify what still needs to be learned. Designed to help students reflect on their learning process, these questions foster learner independence, an essential component of DT. The KWL chart can also be used by teachers to differentiate instruction, if answers are used to create unique pathways for different students, as opposed to merely creating an overall synthesis of the most common class responses.

The KWL chart also facilitates strategic grouping. Answers can be used to inform either homogeneous or heterogeneous groups, facilitating collaboration among learners with common
interests and needs, or opportunities for mutual support when these are complimentary (see Table 23.1). For example, in a unit on contemporary Mexican literature, learners that indicate they would like to know more about a particular author can be grouped together in a homogeneous group. Heterogeneous HLL/L2L dyads can be created in a unit on the past tense when, for example, HLLs indicate they have trouble writing past tense verbs and L2Ls indicate that using them in conversation is challenging. Each group can be assigned the more difficult task: HLLs a written task and L2Ls an oral task, with each group relying on the other for help.

**The text-to-self connection**

The text-to-self connection engages learners in making personal connections with a text through prompts that encourage multiple interpretations and personal perspectives. For example:

1. Copy a sentence from the text that caught your attention.
   Explain the personal relevance of this sentence to you.
2. I agree/disagree with _______________ (name of a character/point of view) because . . .

The text-to-self connection is particularly good at targeting the kinds of social and affective issues that come up when teaching HLLs. As noted earlier, these learners grapple with the challenges of balancing two languages and cultures and seek out other HLLs as a coping mechanism. This speaks to the importance of creating a space for HLLs to address issues of belonging, be it in HL or mixed classes.

Accordingly, the information collected from the text-to-self connection can serve to identify socio-affective issues of relevance to HLLs, which can form the basis for grouping learners and inform class assignments that are responsive to students’ interests. In a mixed class, the text-to-self connection can also help identify topics of common interest to HLLs and L2Ls that can form the basis of class discussions.

Variations on the text-to-self connection include a text-to-world connection, where learners compare an aspect of a text to some real-world event, either current or historical, and the text-to-text connection, where learners compare two texts along some issue of personal relevance. The text-to-text connection supports genre chaining: the use of interrelated texts to cover a specific topic at increasingly advanced registers and levels of complexity. For example, learners may start a unit on immigration with a relatively accessible text, such as a personal letter, and work their way up to something relatively inaccessible, such as a formal essay, by way of watching a documentary and reading a newspaper article and short story. As students progress through these texts, they develop the linguistic resources and content knowledge needed to discuss immigration in a variety of situations and a range of contexts (Martínez 2010).

**Learning contracts**

Learning contracts are similar to agendas in that they call for students to work on their own. However, contracts offer an extra degree of independence in that they allow students to select their tasks from a list of teacher-generated activities which can focus on students’ readiness, needs, interests, and approaches to learning. Well-drafted contracts provide explicit information on the skills to be acquired, the conditions and rules that students must adhere to while at work, the expected outcomes, and the consequences of completing or not completing the specified work.
Learning contracts can serve any number of purposes. For example, they can be used with service learning and internships to promote purposeful learning and create conditions of accountability. Another valuable application involves using them with native speakers for varying content. Unlike HLLs and L2Ls, native speakers are proficient enough in Spanish that the typical language topics of foreign language classes are not relevant to them. However, this does not mean that they don’t stand to benefit from continuing their study of Spanish. What they need is language-arts instruction that is age appropriate for native speakers (Potowski & Carreira 2004). Contracts make this possible. In particular, at the high school level, research indicates that newly arrived students often feel disconnected from school and lack access to age-appropriate content matter instruction (i.e. math, social sciences, etc.) because of their limited command of English (Fry 2002; Valdés 2001; Velez 1989). This situation puts them at risk of dropping out of school and reduces their chances of attending college. Learning contracts can alleviate this problem by linking the learning of Spanish and the learning of content topics from critical areas of the high school curriculum while these students are still learning English.

At the college level, learning contracts make it possible for learners, including native speakers, who are significantly more advanced than their peers to further develop age appropriate skills in Spanish, such as professional language. To this end, a learning contract for a student that wants to make professional use of Spanish might include a service learning component and a project researching the vocabulary of the field, job opportunities in the field, interviewing a professional, and preparing a CV, all in Spanish.

Exit cards

An exit card is a prompt that students respond to in writing on a 3 x 5 index card at the end of a lesson and turn in on the way out. Examples of prompts are: (1) describe an “Aha!” moment from today’s lesson; (2) formulate a question about a point that remains unclear to you and describe one or two strategies that you will use to answer this question; (3) briefly discuss a contribution that you or another student made to a group activity; (4) describe two “big ideas” and two secondary ideas worth knowing from this unit; (5) explain how you see today’s lesson connected to your everyday life.

From an affective standpoint, exit cards can give a voice to students who may not feel comfortable speaking before the class for any number of reasons. For example, in mixed classes L2Ls may feel insecure about their language skills, and HLLs may not want to bring up very personal issues. Exit cards make it possible for both learners to voice their perspectives to the instructor, who can then decide whether to bring up the issues before the class for further discussion (with or without attribution, as called for).

Exit cards also provide an objective measure by which to assign a grade for attendance and participation. One straightforward way to do this is by simply counting the number of cards submitted by each student over a grading period. Exit cards can also function as a form of formative assessment, a key element of DT discussed below.

Checks for understanding

Checks for understanding involve a question posed to the class that all students respond to with a visual sign, such as thumbs up/thumbs down, a true/false sign, or a letter (a, b, c, d) for multiple choice questions. This tool provides immediate and comprehensive feedback to instructors as to learners’ level of understanding, thereby making it possible to adjust the pacing and process of instruction as needed to ensure learning. More time could be allocated to a particular point of
instruction and more practice activities provided. Checks for understanding also support flexible grouping by serving to identify students with common needs and interests. Finally, checks for understanding promote student engagement by eliciting responses from all learners, not just those who routinely dominate class discussions. In so doing, this tool counters a common tendency by instructors and students to rely on a small number of students to answer questions.

Like exit cards, checks for understanding also facilitate formative assessment.

**Formative assessment**

Formative assessment (FA) is one of three types of assessment:

- **Diagnostic (pre-instruction)**
  - Placement tests
- **Formative (during instruction)**
  - Assessment for learning
- **Summative (post instruction)**
  - Assessment of learning

Diagnostic assessment occurs before instruction begins; in terms of language teaching, this usually takes the form of a placement instrument that is used to assign students to different levels or courses. Summative assessment, generally the most familiar to teachers, takes place after instruction has been completed, for example a chapter test or an end-of-term exam. Summative assessment is often described as “assessment of learning” in that it aims to assign a grade based on a student’s demonstrated understanding of course material.

Least understood of the assessment types is FA, which takes place throughout instruction. The description “assessment for learning” is used because when teachers engage in FA they aim to use the results more or less immediately to adjust their teaching and enhance their students’ learning. The differences between formative and summative assessment are summarized in Table 23.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Formative assessment</th>
<th>Summative assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To improve instruction and provide feedback to students</td>
<td>To measure student competency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When administered</td>
<td>Ongoing, throughout unit</td>
<td>End of unit or course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How teachers use the results</td>
<td>To check for student understanding; modify their own teaching to enhance learning</td>
<td>For grades, promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How students use the results</td>
<td>To self-monitor understanding; identify strengths and gaps in understanding</td>
<td>To monitor grades and progress toward benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How programs use the results</td>
<td>To modify the curriculum and program</td>
<td>To report to external entities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differentiated teaching

As Table 23.4 indicates, FA can be viewed from both teachers’ and students’ viewpoints. Beginning with teachers, activities that constitute FA provide information about student understanding in relation to learning objectives. We can view these activities as opportunities to gather data that illuminate whether students have grasped a particular point of instruction or not, where the difficulties lie, and, in general, whether they are progressing as expected. In addition, FA activities can be constructed to gather data on questions such as where students’ interests lie or in what ways they personally connect to class material. On the basis of the data collected, teachers can modify instruction, adjusting the pacing, process, product, or content of instruction as needed. Given that DT aims to vary instruction according to the needs of learners, FA is crucial in that it provides strategies for gauging these needs.

From the point of view of the students, FA enhances learning through activities that promote self-reflection (Black & Jones 2006; Black & William 1998; Carreira 2012). In other words, it is not just the teacher that needs to know the learners, but it is equally important for learners to know themselves. Essentially, this is accomplished by getting students to approach learning in terms of three questions: (1) Where am I going? (2) Where am I now? and (3) How can I close the gap? (Sadler 1989; Stiggins, Arter, Chapuis, & Chapuis 2007: 41). The question “Where am I going?” promotes learning by making explicit the goals of instruction, as well as making clear how all the elements of instruction, such as in-class activities or homeworks, advance those goals. For example, an activity that involves interviewing a partner could be prefaced with something like:

Remember, with this activity we are practicing the form and use of questions, which you are going to need when you conduct your interview with a family or community member for the community project. As you work on this activity, pay particular attention to the structure of questions and the orthography of question words.

This kind of introduction by the instructor can prove helpful in drawing HLLs’ attention to form within the larger framework of the learning goals.

The question “Where am I now?” promotes reflection in terms of what is expected for any given assignment. In addition to learning goals, the criteria required for attaining these goals need to be made explicit. In so doing, expectations and evaluation standards are clarified and transformed into classroom targets (Stiggins et al. 2007). This can be done, for instance, by analyzing an example of a good answer/essay/presentation and an example that is not so good, and compiling the elements that make up a good example into a rubric that students can follow and measure their work against.

The question “How can I close the gap?” is answered by having students formulate a learning plan for achieving the instructional goals according to rubrics or other course standards. Such a plan might involve seeking out additional practice in the learning center or using other resources, reaching out to classmates and the instructor for help, studying models of good work, and so on.

Taken together, these questions encourage students to monitor their own work and take ownership of the learning process.

How to accomplish FA

Because FA takes place during instruction, it is very closely intertwined with general instructional approaches that teachers employ on a daily basis. For this reason, almost any pedagogical activity can function as an FA instrument. What makes it formative is how a teacher uses it.
An activity that probes student understanding with the aim of varying instruction according to the results, or provides learners with tools to manage their own learning, constitutes FA. These kinds of activities can be found in most classrooms; the aim here is to make what is generally an intuitive practice into a more intentional and therefore more systematic one. This is particularly important for dealing with the many diversity issues that come up in HL and mixed classes.

Bearing these points in mind, let’s examine the following activities by way of example. As was the case with the eight strategies discussed earlier, we focus on low-tech approaches. FA can run the gamut from walking around the classroom monitoring students as they engage in group work to using an app on a smartphone that gathers student responses to specific questions and records the answers. We use the following three activities as examples of the ways in which any FA tool can be used.

**Exit cards**

Exit cards have already been mentioned as a tool of DT. They are also a form of FA, providing information that can be used in several different ways to vary instruction. For instance, an exit card that contains a prompt that reads, *Formulate a question about a point that remains unclear*, can give teachers information about what has been understood and what has not, at both the individual and whole-class level. Sample remedial actions teachers can employ on the basis of the information obtained are listed in Table 23.5.

Prompts on exit cards can also enable students to manage their own learning and help answer the three questions we posed earlier. The following prompt falls into this category:

*To write accents, you need (a) to be able to hear where the accent falls in a word, (b) know the basic rules of accentuation, and (c) practice until the process becomes automatic. Assess your abilities in each of these skills.*

In answering (a), (b), and (c), students acquire a roadmap of learning that has been broken down into manageable steps, come to an awareness of where they stand in relation to this roadmap, and develop strategies to progress forward along the road (Black & Jones 2006).

Answers to a prompt such as, *Explain how you see today’s lesson connected to your everyday life*, can be used as the basis for a class discussion or to group students. As we saw earlier, the KWL chart and text-to-self/world/text activities can also illuminate student interest in and connection to course material, which can then be used to inform classroom activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information obtained</th>
<th>Possible remedial actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most of the class shows evidence of not understanding or is struggling with the material</td>
<td>Slow down the pace of instruction for the class; provide additional instruction and opportunities for practice for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A significant number of students is not understanding</td>
<td>Give struggling students a mini-lesson while the rest of the class works on their agenda or on learning center activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A very small number of students is not understanding</td>
<td>Work with these students after class or during office hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Differentiated teaching

Checks for understanding

Checks for understanding, both high- and low-tech varieties, clearly help teachers gather immediate and direct data on student progress. Acting on this information can involve adjusting the pacing or process of instruction, with teachers taking the same kinds of remedial actions we saw in Table 23.5 and designing tasks to move students forward from their varied points of understanding once these become clear.

Quizzes/homework

Quizzes and homeworks may seem like quintessential summative assessment tools. If they are merely handed back to students, they do indeed remain grade-producing exercises. However, if teachers take time to debrief and review, quizzes and homeworks can become rich sources of information and can be adapted to serve as FA activities. By way of illustration, we provide the following examples:

• The teacher can lead the class in a debate on the merits of different answers – “What makes this answer to Question 5 good?” – thus establishing concrete criteria students can aim for.
• Effective study strategies can be identified – “Those of you who did well on Question 5, how did you prepare for this topic?”
• Teachers can also make specific connections between the material and the larger goals of instruction – “Question 5 asked about the past tense – you are going to need this information when we come to narrating in the past tense.”

Issues of fairness

DT in general and FA in particular also address issues of fairness and access arising from institutional conditions. As noted earlier, course offerings in most language departments are limited, which results in students with very different backgrounds and levels of proficiency being placed into the same class. The question then presents itself: How do you assign a grade to students in such classes and a) maintain course standards and b) address issues of fairness?

DT and FA allow instructors to understand the range and nature of student proficiencies, and respond to the needs of all learners, particularly those who are struggling with the material. Responding can take the form of flexible grouping in which the teacher gathers together students who are having problems with a topic and reviews it. These students can be assigned extra material from the learning center to work through. Agendas allow students to complete assignments at their own pace, providing time, for instance, to meet with the instructor for extra guidance. In these and many other ways, struggling students can be supported.

For students, DT and FA encourage metacognition and independence by providing end-goal criteria in a systematic way. In addition, they preview summative assessment, thereby improving students’ chances of performing well. Exit cards, checks for understanding, items in the agenda, and activities in learning centers can all strategically target material that will appear in high-stakes summative exams, thus allowing students ample opportunities to practice and access additional resources as needed. In short, DT is about making sure learners get the help and support they need in order to succeed — and FA informs a teacher’s ability to provide that support.
For programs, information gathered from FA provides the knowledge base for effective curriculum and program design. Crucially, while offering more courses may not be an option for many programs due to any number of limitations, DT enables programs to optimize conditions in the courses that they can offer, so as to address the needs of their learners.

**Conclusion**

Today’s language departments face an unprecedented level of student diversity because of the growing presence of HLLs, and in some cases native speakers, in addition to L2Ls. Teaching these students, be it in HL or mixed classes, involves dealing with a range of issues that traditional foreign language teaching methods were not designed to address. To attend to such issues, language instruction must be learner-centered and differentiated.

The model of DT proposed here puts the focus on three areas of instruction that distinguish HLLs from L2Ls: (1) language, (2) socio-affective issues, and (3) learning approach to task-based interactions. The eight tools of DT described prove especially valuable in addressing the range of issues that come up in each of these domains. Agendas, anchoring activities, centers, the KWL chart, the text-to-self connection, exit cards, and checks for understanding all facilitate key flexible grouping strategies that underlie successful teaching in HL and mixed classes. One such strategy involves grouping learners with similar needs or interests for targeted instruction, such as in a mini-lesson. The other strategy involves grouping learners with complimentary needs and strengths for collaborative learning tasks. In mixed classes, this involves grouping HLLs and L2Ls. Lastly, contracts prove helpful for dealing with native speakers, by varying content.

Besides supporting flexible grouping, these tools make it possible for teachers and students to benefit from FA. Learner-centered approaches aim to vary instruction according to student needs, and by using the suggested tools (and by extension many others) to gather information and thereby assess current needs, instruction can be purposefully varied. In addition, FA strategies encourage students to become cognizant of learning goals and thereby develop as independent learners.

Taken together, DT and FA address challenging issues of instruction and fairness, and offer teachers a practical approach to managing classrooms that include very different types of learners.

**Notes**

1 This example speaks to a situation in which students differ from each other in pedagogically significant ways but are not at the extreme ends of the proficiency continuum. On the other hand, in institutions where students are significantly above or below a particular proficiency level, and a placement instrument is available that identifies them as such, they can be directed to either basic or more advanced language courses.

2 The three-part model of assessment presented here is commonly used in discussions aimed at teachers. It bears noting that some researchers exclude diagnostic assessment because they consider it to be a type of FA (see Hulta 2008), and instead work with a two-part model of assessment: formative and summative. However, we include pre-instructional diagnostic assessment in our model given that in the context of language teaching, it is primarily used as a placement instrument rather than as a tool to inform day-to-day teaching in the classroom. The latter approach is characteristic of diagnostic assessments used after instruction has begun in order to gauge students’ pre-existing knowledge of a chapter or unit, in which case it functions as FA.
References


