

BOOK REVIEW

Disability and World Language Learning: Inclusive Teaching for Diverse Learners
Sally S. Scott and Wade A. Edwards
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This volume deals with a much-needed topic that, unfortunately, has not attracted enough attention in the domain of language learning research: the adoption of inclusive instructional practices to address diverse students' needs. The authors' backgrounds and professional experiences perfectly embody an essential aspect in this field: it must be undertaken from an interdisciplinary approach. Sally Scott is a senior researcher of the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) with extensive experience with diverse students, including campus disability resource offices; Wade Edwards is a professor of French at Longwood University. They co-directed the Project *LINC: Learning in Inclusive Classrooms*, focused on the development and implementation of instructional techniques aimed at creating more inclusive foreign language learning environments in higher education. This project has already proved to be very fruitful (Scott and Edwards 2012, Edwards and Scott 2012, Scott, Hildebrandt and Edwards 2013), with influential results about a variety of domains, ranging from the attitudes of students with special needs towards foreign language learning, to the needs of temporary faculty members that may not be fully aware of the protocols and resources offered by their campuses to address the learning process of students with disabilities. One of its major outcomes is a website full of original and already published documents and resources that serve as an invaluable guide to build an inclusive environment in foreign language instruction. Much of their experience in this project and subsequent spin-off research is effectively integrated in this book.

The volume is structured in six chapters. The first one, “Disability, Student Diversity, and Inclusive Teaching”, describes the general principles of inclusive instruction. To begin with, the authors provide statistical data that show that student diversity is not an exception in today’s universities, but rather the most common scenario. Accordingly, the authors emphasize the importance of transforming our conception of disability. They introduce the notion of *Universal design for instruction* (UDI): inclusive teaching practices should not simply involve creating new materials tailor-made for specific students with special needs when they demand it; on the contrary, teachers should ideally create the same standard materials for all students, trying to make them maximally usable. The nine principles of UDI are then explained and illustrated with frequent situations in foreign language classrooms. It is noteworthy that one of the authors, Sally S. Scott, is a precursor of this approach (McGuire and Scott 2002, Scott, McGuire and Shaw 2003), originally inspired by the concept of universal design in Architecture and Design.

The second chapter, “Setting the Stage for an Inclusive Language Learning Classroom”, examines different aspects of the design and planning of inclusive environments before the beginning of the semester. One of them is classroom layout: the effects of features like the arrangement of desks, lighting or acoustics are sometimes neglected, even if they may pose powerful barriers not only to students with physical disabilities, but also to any of their fellows. The authors are realistic about the capacity of instructors to build canonically inclusive spaces, since they are aware that they might be assigned classrooms with many physical shortcomings that they will not be able to overcome. Anyway, they also show with a case study that a thorough reflection can easily avoid creating challenging classroom setups.

Another aspect is creating and using accessible instructional materials: tips such as providing students with materials in electronic format well in advance can have a very positive effect on the learning experience of many diverse students. The authors also highlight the need for designing an inclusive syllabus by not simply including a disability statement, but also considering a clear, not distracting format that directs attention towards the core information of the course.

Finally, they devote a section to the instructor disposition, “perhaps the most important feature of an inclusive classroom” (2019: 36). They pay special attention to the students’ perspective when teachers are not approachable enough or have wrong expectations about their performance, particularly when their special needs are not visible and might raise unfair suspicion.

The third chapter, “In the Classroom”, analyses how to implement different inclusive instructional strategies during the term. It begins with an overview of the results of a previous project focused on students’ attitudes towards a variety of instructional strategies revealing which ones are widely endorsed by learners. The authors choose three areas likely to create barriers in foreign language classrooms: the extensive use of the target language, group work and group formation and the amount and characteristics of daily assignments.

The fourth chapter, “Assessment of Student Learning”, delves into the topic of evaluation. The first section revisits the general principles of an inclusive framework for assessment. Interestingly, the authors include the distinction between *target skills* (those that teachers wish to evaluate explicitly) and *access skills* (“other non-construct information which act as a barrier to students”, 2019: 70). They also insist on the importance of preventing ‘hidden’ skills from being implicitly assessed. Three main domains are explored: the “complex and multifaceted” (2019: 75) topic of error correction, tips for designing inclusive rubrics, and mechanisms to enhance students’ self-assessment and metacognition.

The structure of the fifth chapter, “Getting Started”, is different: instead of presenting the main facets of inclusivity regarding different aspects of foreign language instruction, it is organised as a guideline that enables each reader to connect the contents and reflections analyzed in the book to the educational setting of his/her own campus. It contains practical tips and lists the steps to be followed. Particularly helpful are a self-check and a textbox proposed by the authors to evaluate one’s implementation of inclusive practices.

Finally, the sixth chapter summarises the main contents of the book. It includes a section of “Frequently Asked Questions” that manages to dispel the doubts and

concerns that some readers may still have when reconsidering their own instructional strategies.

One of the most satisfying characteristics of this volume is that the authors establish a dialogue with readers through direct questions and suggestions that turn the book into a stimulating guideline to be read along with a notebook to respond to the multiple reflections proposed about one's instructional practices and assumptions. This is already anticipated in the preface, where several thought-provoking situations are described involving diverse students' barriers commonly faced by foreign language teachers. The authors succeed in prompting readers to go beyond theoretical generalisations and to fully reconsider their instructional routine, so that they put into practice many of the ideas advanced. In addition, the book contains many insightful case studies and real student comments from previous projects and experiences that create a very vivid atmosphere. Consequently, theory and practice are harmoniously integrated. Moreover, Scott and Edwards are very realistic in their approach to inclusivity: they are fully aware that it is impossible to formulate general tips that will be useful and effective in any context. This is why they accurately show that flexibility and adaptability are two basic skills when teachers try to incorporate inclusive techniques into their courses.

A minor critique would be that the book does not include some specific guidance about how to proceed when some students claim to have special needs that do not seem plausible. In that sense, the authors sometimes adopt a very optimistic tone regarding the proper functioning of the system and it seems that they assume that students will never attempt to be granted some unlawful advantages by claiming that they have special needs. It would have been helpful to include some tips about how to check suspicious cases without generating anxiety in students that are actually diverse.

In conclusion, this book will be interesting and compelling not only for researchers specialized in the field of disability and foreign language learning, but also for many teachers that wish to adopt new inclusive strategies in their courses to foster equitable learning opportunities. Although the book focuses on university settings, many teachers from other instructional contexts will also find many useful ideas.

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