

Developing Approaches to Enhancing the Orientation and Success of Language Learning in Higher Education

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Abstract

One of the constant challenges for all teachers is to improve ways of bringing learners into the subject and the particular modes of learning in ways that enhance their success. Both the literature and experience tell us that those studying a second language have some distinct and characteristic needs that are often not met. These have been described within a set of characteristics associated with the 'good language learner' and have been identified and studied in numerous research studies in the field of second language acquisition over the last thirty years (Ehrmann/Oxford, 1995; Dörnyei, 2005).

There are, of course, other ways of characterising learners and their approaches to learning. One that has been developed and extensively trialled is the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI). Through a large evidence base this instrument has been demonstrated to be a robust indicator for assessing the relevant categories related to learning dispositions that can be developed to enhance capacity for learning. This inventory and its seven dimensions of learning power were developed and described in 2004 (Deakin Crick et al., 2004) and have been in constant use since.

When the seven dimensions of learning power within ELLI are considered alongside the characteristics of the good language learner there appears to be a degree of correlation. The focus of this paper is thus to explore the correspondence between these seven dimensions and the characteristics of the so-called 'good language learner' (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Naiman et al, 1978). This paper considers the implications of the outcomes of this study particularly for empowering the new language learner.

Keywords: Learner Autonomy, Reflection, Second Language Learning, supporting individual differences, Good Language Learner

1. Introduction

This paper describes an attempt to develop a tool grounded in research and useful to students beginning their learning journey in a second language. Whilst the theory of second language acquisition and learning develops becoming increasingly fine grained, the practical tools that students and their teachers have at their disposal to learn a second language are very thin on the ground. Through an exploration of two independently developed sets of concepts and ideas about learning this paper proposes a simple model that is intended to provide most

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effective support to second language learners, particularly at their early stages of taking up this challenge. The model does not intend to supersede or replace either of those it is based on. Rather, it intends to highlight the best areas to focus on for success through this initial stage of learning.

This paper is inspired by the original idea of the “Good Language Learner” studies that there are some characteristics, attitudes and strategy use of language learners that account for their success in language learning. It further integrates relevant findings and theory based constructs that Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has produced over the last thirty years.

The proposed Language Learner Support Dimensions (LLSD) are framed in a learner-centred pedagogy and they aim at the development of relevant factors to increase the efficiency in language learning.

The Language Learner Support Dimensions (LLSD) are a facilitating instrument to:

- Raise awareness of the factors that (positively or negatively) influence language learning
- Enable and document progress and development
- Empower students to take control of their learning process

Language learning is a very complex process as clearly stated by H.D.Brown:

“Learning a second language is a long and complex undertaking. Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the first language into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual, and emotional response are necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language.” Brown, 2007, p.1.

While language learning materials – included the OU ones – deal with specific linguistic, cultural, and social aspects of a concrete language, other relevant aspects, such as emotion, motivation, dispositions, learner beliefs etc. are not taken enough into consideration. However the knowledge and awareness of these factors can make a difference in the experience and ability to learn a foreign language, in particular for new students.

2. What determines success in language learning?

This question can be traced back in SLA research for almost a century. Within this context the most relevant concepts have been “aptitude” and “attitude”. Many of the relevant handbooks on language learning deal with these two categories (Ellis, R. 1997, Lightbown, P.M/ Spada, N. 1999, Larsen-Freeman, D./Long, M.H.1991, Brown, H.D. 2007, Dörnyei, Z. 2005) that account for individual differences. While aptitude seems to belong to innate abilities and capacities, attitude has to do with the psychological disposition of the learners and with the social environment. A short summary of the research findings about aptitude and attitude will be briefly presented, in order to discuss their influence in second language acquisition and learning. Then the findings of the Good Language Learner (GLL) Studies will be presented.

2.1 Aptitude

In the 1920s and 1930s where the first tests to determine language learning aptitude were developed (Dörnyei, Z. 2005, 34). Until the 1970s SLA research focused on the concept of aptitude.

The first issue regarding language aptitude is the question whether language aptitude for the first and the second language are somehow related or not, and whether there are significant differences in language aptitude among people learning a second language. To the first question, there was a common assumption that every individual - given a normal intelligence and social environment - is equally capable of learning his or her first language, and differences in aptitude for language would appear later, when learning a second language. This assumption has been seriously questioned by a long and thorough longitudinal study, the so called Bristol Language Project (Wells 1981, 1985), which studied 125 children born between 1969 and 1972 from all range of social classes. The most important findings of this study were that there was very considerable variation between children in rate of language development: the study demonstrated that although everyone learns a language, not all language speakers progress at the same rate, there were clear individual differences. Another very significant outcome of this project was the high correlation between aptitude for L1 and L2, when the same children were studied about twelve years later when they learned a second language.

This study brought new perspectives into the field of aptitude research. Until then the main studies had been developed in the fifties and sixties within the area of second language

acquisition. The main idea at that point was that people differ in the extent to which they possess a natural ability for learning a second language, but not for their first language. Several studies in the fifties drew from this approach and developed tests to measure the language aptitude. One of the first linguists to study this category was Carroll (1965) who identified some factors to be relevant for language aptitude:

- The capacity to analyse incoming sound in a way that they can be retained (Phonemic coding ability)
- The capacity to make associations between verbal material (Associative memory)
- The capacity to infer structure from a corpus of language material and make generalizations about how other linguistic material would work (Inductive language learning ability).
- The capacity to see the grammatical functions of words in sentences (Grammatical sensitivity)

Based on this factors Carroll and Sapon (1959) published one of the best known tests on language aptitude:

The Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), that consists of five subtests: number learning, phonetic script, spelling clues, words in sentences and paired associates. Another similar test was developed few years later by Pimsleur (1966)³.

These tests proved to be able to predict with high validity coefficients in language success, and there were many studies related to these indicators, where a high score in aptitude coincided with more rapid progress in student's achievement in language learning.

There were, however, some critiques regarding the validity of these aptitude tests. One of the most significant positions was described by Krashen within his theoretical frame of the difference between learning and acquisition. According to Krashen the aptitude tests were designed to measure language learning and not language acquisition (Krashen and Terrell, 1983), because achievement in foreign language classes is usually measured by grammar type tests that involve heavy use of conscious grammar rules, and thus require a conscious

³*Pimsleur's Language Aptitude Battery (1966) consists of six parts that cover the three components of language aptitude according to this author: verbal intelligence, motivation and auditory ability.*

awareness of languages (p.39). As a consequence of this approach Krashen formulated the hypothesis that aptitude relates to learning and attitude to acquisition.

So attractive and symmetrical this hypothesis might be, there is some empirical evidence that seems to be against it. As a study carried out by Reves (1982) reveals. Reves examined the effects of aptitude in formal and informal contexts and the findings were that aptitude had a stronger correlation with informal contexts than with formal contexts. As Skehan also points out (1998) aptitude actually should be far more important in informal settings, where the language situation is less structured and more challenging, than in formal settings, where the input has been organized and has been more accessible.

Skehan, (1986, 1989) revised and elaborated Carroll's four factors into three main categories: auditory ability; linguistic ability; memory ability. The first corresponds more or less to Carroll's phonemic coding ability, the linguistic ability draws together Carroll's grammatical sensitivity and inductive language learning ability, arguing that Carroll's subtests are working 'within the area of a general analytic ability' (Skehan, 1998, p.201) and the memory ability is more elaborated in Skehan. He takes into account the different aspects within the memory, such as coding, storage and retrieval of material and he has stressed the importance of this last aspect, the retrieval ability, to be relevant to aptitude tests.

What these more recent developments in the field of aptitude research have shown is how different aspects of aptitude may affect different aspects of language learning. For example phonemic coding ability seems to be particularly important at beginning levels of language learning, in order to get a comprehensible input of the language, whereas language analytic ability plays a major role for processing the information received from the phonemic coding stage, and memory has to do with how words can be retrieved efficiently in real conversational time.

But at the end, aptitude seems to merely predict the rate at which a language first or second is learned, there are however other factors, such as attitude, that can affect in a more dramatic way language learning.. The findings of the study on Good Language Learners carried out by Naiman et al. 1978 confirmed findings of previous studies that: "attitude and motivation were in many instances the best overall predictors of success in second language learning" (Naiman et al. 1978, p. 66). In particular motivation can compensate for aptitude deficiencies (Griffiths, 2008). It has also been shown (Feuerstein, Klein, and Tannenbaum, 1991) that aptitude can be increased through teaching students to use more effective metacognitive and

cognitive strategies. That means that aptitude is a dynamic, shifting indicator of the upper limit of learner's potential ability (Griffiths, 2008).

2.2 Attitude

The importance of attitude and the willingness to learn has been a repeatedly stressed in pedagogical theories, so for example Miller and Dollard (1941) in their interpretation of social learning stated that learning takes place when the learner wants something (motivation), notices something (perception), does something (responding), and receives something (the receiving aspect). If any component is missing, learning will not take place. That means, if motivation were set to zero, learning would be disrupted.

This general pedagogical statement, would also apply for language learning. If we compare what has been said about language learning aptitude with this characteristics of attitude and motivation there are some significant differences: while aptitude seems to be a "surplus" in ability to learn a language, that means, the ability to learn it quickly, easily, efficiently, a sort of extra-gift that some learners might have (assumed that everyone has the basic ability to learn a language), the attitude and motivational component seems to be something much more basic and fundamental, then without it no learning can happen. Having said that, the fundamental questions arise: What is it motivation? Where does attitude come from? Is it a personal decision?

2.3 Motivation

Motivation involves the attitudes and affective states that influence the degree of effort that learners make to learn, in our case, a second language. We can not introduce the subject of motivation and attitudes without mentioning the work of Krashen. One important elements of Krashen's theory is the 'affective filter hypothesis'. According to this author the 'affective filter' is an imaginary barrier which prevents learners from acquiring language from the available input. Krashen's hypothesis states that performers with optimal attitudes have a lower affective filter. 'A low filter means that the performer is more 'open' to the input, and that the input strikes 'deeper' (...) Thus, having the right attitudes may do two things for second language acquirers: it will encourage them to try to get more input, to interact with speakers of the target language with confidence, and also to be more receptive to the input they get'. Krashen and Terrell (1983, p.38). Even though Krashen's affective filter hypothesis has received criticism for being "untestable" (McLaughlin, 1978) the filter metaphor he uses is still valuable for explanation purposes.

Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) have been among the most relevant researchers within the field of attitudes and motivation in SLA. They drew on the work of Mowrer (1959) on individual development which emphasizes the importance of identification with a valued person. Gardner and Lambert developed this idea considering how people could want to identify with not only particular individuals but also foreign people and culture. 'We see a very similar developmental sequence in the case of learning a foreign language which is incidentally easier to study because the learning process unfolds more slowly. The learner, we argue, must be willing to identify with members of another ethnolinguistic group and to take on very subtle aspects of their behaviour, including their distinctive style of speech and their language.' (Gardner and Lambert, 1972, p.135) The attitudes toward foreigners were probably formed under the influence of parents, the home environment and the native culture. According to the authors there are various types of motivation:

Integrative motivation.

This type of motivation influenced by the views of Mowrer, according to this orientation some learners may want to learn a second language because they are interested in the people and culture represented by the target language group. A learner is integratively motivated when he or she wishes to identify with another ethnolinguistic group.

Instrumental motivation is on the contrary when the learner make efforts to learn a second language for some functional reasons, for example to pass an exam, to get a better job or to get a place at the University. Instrumental motivation can be – according to Gardner and Lambert – as effective as integrative motivation, although for the long run is integrative motivation much better to achieve success in mastering a second language.

The Gardner and Lambert theory produced an enormous amount of research (Skehan, 1989). Some studies were carried out in bilingual settings i.e. in Canada, some in the USA and some in Philippines to measure how attitudes to learning French or English influenced the achievement in learning the target language. The findings showed that some evidence supported the position of Gardner and Lambert, especially in the bilingual context in Canada. These studies also contributed to relevant development of measurement techniques for language learning motivation.

Other types of motivation that have been identified are intrinsic versus extrinsic, i.e. when the motives for learning come from the own interest of the learner or from outside, similar to the instrumental motivation.

The source of motivation can also be the success experienced by the learners, this is the so called resultative hypothesis: those learners who do well experience reward, and are encouraged to try harder, while learners who do not do so well are discouraged by their lack of success, and, as a result, lack persistence. Motivation would be a consequence rather than a cause of success. This resultative hypothesis was formulated by Hermann (1980) to explain the results from a study on German children learning English, where the grade of achievement correlated with a more positive attitude towards the target culture.

Motivation and positive attitudes in learning a second language seem to be always related with the attitudes towards the cultural components of the target language and specially to the speakers of the target language and not only determined by intrinsic learning factors. So if we try to address the question formulated above about where the positive attitude and motivation come from, the different factors that might influence the development of attitudes towards other cultures and speakers of other languages have to be considered. One of the most influential factors within this context seems to be the parents. Several studies – among them also Gardner (1960) - have produced relevant evidence about how the parental views towards the culture and speakers of the language the children were learning clearly influenced and affected the children's views, in the way that children adapted the parent's position.

Other factors that seem to play a role influencing learners attitude are peers and teachers. Teachers are actually considered by some researchers as even more important than parents in influencing the outcome of instructed second language learning (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991). Also the learning situation and the ethnicity have been proved to determine learners' attitude towards the target language.

3. The Good Language Learner Studies

The Good Language Learner (GLL) Studies represent an area of second language acquisition research that deals with attitude shown by successful learners as well as with the strategies used by them. These studies were developed in the 1970s and 1980s (Rubin 1975, Stern 1975, Naiman 1978). The starting point for these studies was the obvious difference between good and poor learners in second language. Rubin and Stern determined a list of qualities held by good learners. Rubin's method was based on observation. A summary of her findings are: Good Language Learners (GLLs) are willing and accurate guessers, they have a drive to communicate, they focus on communication, i.e. they are willing to appear foolish, to make mistakes in order to communicate, they also focus on form, looking for patterns in the

language, they use every opportunity to practice (pronunciation, making up sentences, initiate conversation), GLLs monitor their language (learn from their mistakes), and they pay attention to meaning. According to Rubin's research, attitude and strategies were more important than aptitude.

Stern (1975) found similar features that mark out good language learning. He also highlighted other aspects: A personal learning style [that includes], an active approach to learning, a tolerant approach to the target language and empathy with its speakers, strategies of experimentation and planning, self-monitoring, developing the target language more and more as a separate reference system and learning to think in it.

Some years later Naiman, Fröhling, Stern and Todesco confirmed these characteristics through their research and added some interesting insights about the role of personality, cognitive style and attitudes. Naiman et al. (1978) used questionnaires and interviews for their large scale survey and identified a personality characteristic that proved to be more significant for success in language learning was tolerance of ambiguity.

The good language learner studies continued through the 1980s and 1990s with the development of learning strategies research (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; O'Malley and Chamot 1990; Oxford, 1990). A large number of empirical studies have been carried out around these GLL strategies with the main focus on how language learners can become more effective. The GLL studies have shown that the characteristics of good learners in languages presupposes an 'individual development plan which is self-determined' (Grenfell & Harris, 39): active seek information etc. Also the use of learning strategies implies an active approach to language learning, and has been closely linked to self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975) and learner autonomy.

More recent research on GLL has taken into account the importance of the social component for Good Language Learners. Norton and Toohey argue that concepts such as communities of practice and social integration are crucial for successful language learning. (Norton and Toohey, 2001)

To summarize, the Good Language [Learner] studies have shown the characteristics of good language learners are a mixture of attitude and aptitude, and that self-awareness plays a crucial role. The focus of this paper is to explore the correspondence of the ELLI dimensions and the characteristics of the GLL.

4. The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI)

Developed at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom ELLI describes seven bi-polar dimensions of learning power - described in outline below and fully in (Deakin Crick et al., 2004). These dimensions were derived through analysis of responses to an inventory of statements relating to approaches to learning. These statements were collated from a number of expert practitioner contributions. Individuals that respond to the inventory statements, which are delivered through an online interface, are provided a summary chart plotting their current learning profile and providing a basis for reflection. ELLI is designed to be mediated through a mentor. This mentor facilitates an individual or group's reflection on their approaches to learning and will assist in the determination and planning of appropriate interventions as a response. A large number of individuals, in a number of countries globally, have now used ELLI. This inventory has been trialled (Small and Deakin Crick, 2008) and used in research in several UK HE institutions, (Edwards, 2011).

4.1 The seven dimensions of learning power

Table 1 – The list of the dimensions of learning power as described by Deakin Crick, (Deakin Crick, 2007)

dimension	main pole	contrast pole
Creativity	creativity	rule bound
Growth orientation	changing and learning	stuck and static
critical curiosity	critical curiosity	passivity
Meaning making	meaning-making	fragmentation
dependence and fragility*	dependence and fragility	resilience
relationships/interdependence	relationships/interdependence	dependence or isolation
strategic awareness	strategic awareness	robotic

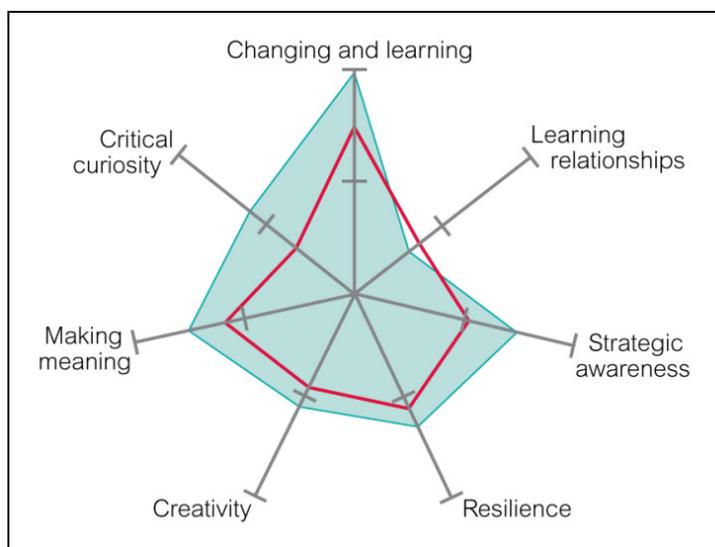
** We will refer to resilience rather than dependence and fragility. This is in line with practice in the Bristol team*

4.2 The summary profile chart

Usually, individuals complete the ELLI inventory twice. Firstly to establish an initial point of reference for reflection and discussion. Perhaps leading to some planned interventions. Then secondly, to mark a review point that elicits further reflection and discussion. A typical example profile chart shown in Figure 1. The creators point out very strongly there is no absolute scale on these plots. They cannot therefore be used to compare individuals. Also, there is no sense in which there is an ideal profile – though it is very tempting to view a full

circle as just that. In fact, it is thought that different learning environments and contexts may well require a different shape profile for greatest success.

Figure 1 Typical ELLI profile chart showing before (outline) and after (shaded) plots



Whilst ELLI does provide a framework of language, a means to reflect positively on learning and both students and their teachers report benefits, it does have two drawbacks preventing it being readily incorporated into learning and teaching strategies more widely. Firstly, with seven dimensions each with two poles, a significant investment of time and energy is needed to gain a level of familiarity sufficient to properly engage with it. Unless additional time is created for this prior to or within (already pressured) programmes of study, students find they are grappling with this and their whole new study experience in a new subject area and (often) in a new mode of study concurrently. As already reported, (Edwards, 2010), this is likely to lead to an unacceptable level of burden and stress. Secondly, the need for committed mentors places a burden on staff. Where there is scope for building this fully into a programme, these issues can be overcome with the potential to enrich both learning and teaching. Another approach is to use ELLI to inform a more targeted approach providing practical activities and guidance in a particular context. There may be scope at a later point for students to be offered the opportunity to engage further with ELLI.

5. The Language Learner Support Dimensions (LLSD)

The following dimensions should not be considered as a final product but as work in process.

5.1 Willingness to communicate (WTC)

Rubin showed in her seminal study of 1975 that the use of communication strategies was one of the main characteristics of good language learners: “The good language learner has a strong drive to communicate, or to learn from communication. He is willing to do many things to get his message across.” (Rubin, 1975, p. 46). This includes the willingness to make mistakes and even to appear foolish. She observed also that good language learners used any possible opportunity to practice and use the language. The studies of Stern (1978) and Naiman et al (1978) on Good Language Learners also agreed with this characteristic: The GLL “welcomes exposure to language use in communicative situations even beyond his level of competence” (Stern, 1978, 314-315).

In spite of this early acknowledgement of the importance of this category for language learners, it was not until the 1990s that the construct “Willingness to Communicate” was developed for second language (L2) learning. It originated in first language (L1) communication studies (McCroskey/Baer, 1985, McCroskey/Richmond 1987, 1991). MacIntyre has been the main researcher to adapt this category to L2. According to his definition, WTC is “an underlying continuum representing the predisposition toward or away from communicating, given the choice” (MacIntyre et al. 2001, p.538). This category has proved to be very complex and dependent of a number of affective and social factors, such as motivation, personality, communication anxiety, intergroup motivation etc. (MacIntyre et al, 1998). Willingness to communicate has been well established in many independent studies and its relevance for language learning stressed also by Dörnyei (2005), who writes: “Additional importance is lent to the concept by the fact that it can be seen as the ultimate goal of L2 instruction – thus, WTC is a means and end at the same time. (Dörnyei, 2005, p.210).

5.2 Ego permeability

This dimension refers to the role that the self, the ego plays in learning a foreign language. The studies presented by Guiora et al. (1972), Ehrman (1996) have shown how learning a new language involves to some extent an identity conflict as language learners adopt a new identity with this new language competence. This conflict can lead to inhibition, building “sets of defences to protect the ego” (Brown, 2007, 157), but a flexible, permeable ego would enable learners to lower the defences that may prevent success.

Within this dimension, the category “Tolerance of ambiguity” (TA) plays a relevant role in relation to language learning.

This category refers to the ability to tolerate uncertainty or ambiguity. Budner (1962) has defined TA as an individual tendency to view ambiguous situations as either threatening or desirable. There are other personality variables related to language learning, such as risk-taking, sensitivity to rejection, empathy, anxiety, extroversion and self-esteem (Oxford, Larsen-Freeman) however tolerance of ambiguity seems to be the main predictor of language success (Ely, 1989; Naiman et al. 1978; Larsen-Freeman Chappelle & Roberts, 1986).

Language learning in particular for real communicative use (Ely, 1989; Ehrmann, 1996) always implies uncertainty: we do not know the exact meaning of new words, we often do not understand the exact temporal reference of a L2 verb form or we feel that we are not pronouncing a L2 sound with total accuracy. Students with low TA can find very challenging to cope with this uncertainty and can develop negative feelings towards the language or their language learning.

According to M.Ehrman (1996, 1993) there are three levels in TA: Intake (letting new information in), Tolerance of Ambiguity Proper (Accepting contradictions and incomplete information) and Accommodation (Making distinctions, setting priorities, restructuring cognitive schemata) (Ehrman, 1996, p.119-120). A certain degree of tolerance of ambiguity is also necessary to be a “good guesser”, one of the main characteristics found in “Good language learners” (Rubin, 1975)

The concept of “ego boundaries” has also been studied by M.Ehrman (1993, 1996) in how it affects language learning. She distinguishes between “thin” and “thick” ego boundaries. According to her, “thin ego boundaries” are related to openness, vulnerability and tolerance to ambiguity and can create different pathways to success, whereas “thick ego boundaries”, associated to rigid, hard-driving, systematic, perfectionistic students, would not facilitate language learning.

This dimension is clearly related to some of the findings of the Good language learner studies in relation to the willingness to make mistakes, which is one important characteristic of learning a language. Mistakes can be considered as threats to one’s ego (Brown, 2007).

5.3 Strategic self-regulation

The use of Learning Strategies (LS) is one of the main characteristics of good language learners. More effective learners can be distinguished from less effective learners by the number of and range of LS, by the way they apply them and appropriateness of the LS chosen (Oxford 1990, Chamot 2001).

It is not easy to define Learning Strategies as there are very different types and also a considerable amount of studies and research in this complex field. However Carol Griffiths (2008) proposes one definition based on six essential features taking into account findings of 30 years research. According to her learning strategies are ‘Activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own learning’ (Griffiths, 2008, p.87).

Thus six essential features of LSs are:

- Actions, activities (what students do)
- Consciousness
- Chosen by learners
- Goal-oriented
- LS are used to regulate or control their learning (Self-regulation)
- Goal of LSs is facilitation of learning

Learning strategies are closely related to learner autonomy, where learners take responsibility of their own learning and they emphasize the importance of human agency: strategic behaviour involves learning decisions aimed at maximizing results.

There are different taxonomies of LSs, one of the most influential models was proposed by Rebecca Oxford (1990). She distinguishes between direct strategies, which engage with the L2 directly, such as memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, and indirect strategies, which deal with how to learn the L2, how to seek situations to practice etc. and include metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

Oxford (2011) proposes a model of learning using LS based on self-regulation (self-management, self –adjustment). According to this model, LSs are “deliberate, goal-directed attempts to manage and control efforts to learn the L2” (Oxford, 2011, p.x). This implies that learners actively and constructively use strategies to manage their own learning.

5.4 Social Integration

In the 1990s there was an increasing interest in sociological and anthropological aspects of second language acquisition based on the work of Vygotsky (1978) e.g. (Kramsch, 1993, Lantolf/Pavlenko 1995). This trend in using sociocultural theories has continued until now and it has been also applied in relation to the Good Language Learner studies. Norton and Toohey have introduced the social variable to study how it influences the success in language learning. According to them (Norton/Toohey, 2001) success of good language learners is based on their access to a variety of conversations in their communities rather than on the basis of their control of linguistic forms. They stress the importance of the practice and the presence of coparticipants more experienced in the activities. They based their work on the sociocultural approach (Rogoff, 1994) that learning and development occur as people participate in the sociocultural activities of their community and they use the notion of community of practice introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991). The importance of the social context and how the communities of practice facilitate or constrains learners' access to the linguistic resources is completed with another element: the learner identity. The relevant role of identity for L2 has been mentioned in relation to the "Ego flexibility" dimension. In this social dimension, identity has also to do with relations of power between language learners and target language speakers. In this context the notion of investment (Angelil-Carter, 1997; Norton Peirce, 1995) seems to be relevant as it extends the notion of motivation: "when learners invest in an L2 they do so anticipating that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn enhance their conception of themselves and their desires for the future." (Norton/Toohey, 2001, p. 312). The willingness to participate in communities of practice of L2 learners as well as to build social interactions seems to play a very relevant role in language learning success. Norton/Toohey (2001) used for their research study Good Languages Learners and noticed that the willingness to actively participate in communities of practice and in social interaction made a difference in greater success compared with the others. Also the ability to form and reform their identity in these contexts played a relevant role.

The concept of Social Distance is also relevant for this dimension. Social distance refers to the cognitive and affective proximity of two cultures that come into contact within an individual (Brown, 2007). Within this context Schumann (1976) proposed the hypothesis that the greater the social distance between two cultures, the greater the difficulty the learner will have in learning the second language, and conversely, the smaller the social distance, the

better will be the language situation. (Brown, 2007) Based on previous research Acton (1979) developed the concept of perceived social distance, stressing the importance of how learners' perceptions form their own reality. In his studies he found that there is an optimal personal distance that typifies "good" language learners: successful language learners see themselves as maintaining some distance between their native culture and the target culture, that means, neither too close nor too distant. (Acton, 1979, Brown, 1980).

Social integration would refer to both the willingness to participate in communities of practice and the awareness of social distance.

5.5 Creativity

Creativity is, according to Stern (1975) one of the four characteristics of the native speaker's knowledge or competence, that also L2 speakers should aim "to approximate" (Stern, 1975, 305). Stern refers to the creativity of language use in relation to the concept of language competence:

"Competence is dynamic and active and not mechanical or static. We don't handle our native language in a robot-like fashion as if we had swallowed a phrase book. We constantly adjust language use to novel situations and changing circumstances. We use the language for productive thinking." (Stern, 1975, p.307).

More recent research studies have reported on the relevance of creativity for L2 (Runco, 2004; Sternberg, 2002). In particular Ottó (1998) and Albert and Kormos (2004) found a significant positive relationship between L2 and language learning success.

It is not difficult to see the link between language learning and creativity, as communicative competence often involves (role-play) situations where students need to use their imagination, and in particular within a context of communicative, learner-centred pedagogies this correlation has been evidence however more research is needed (Dörnyei, 2005) in this field.

6. How ELLI relates to the five proposed dimensions of effective language learning

When we consider the three dimensions described above we find we have the kinds of descriptions listed below. This language suggests linkages with the seven ELLI dimensions of learning power as set out below and shown in Fig. 2.

Willingness to communicate — welcomes the challenge of communicating at (or just beyond) the limit of competence; level of one’s propensity for communicating with others. This language fits well with that of all the ELLI dimensions.

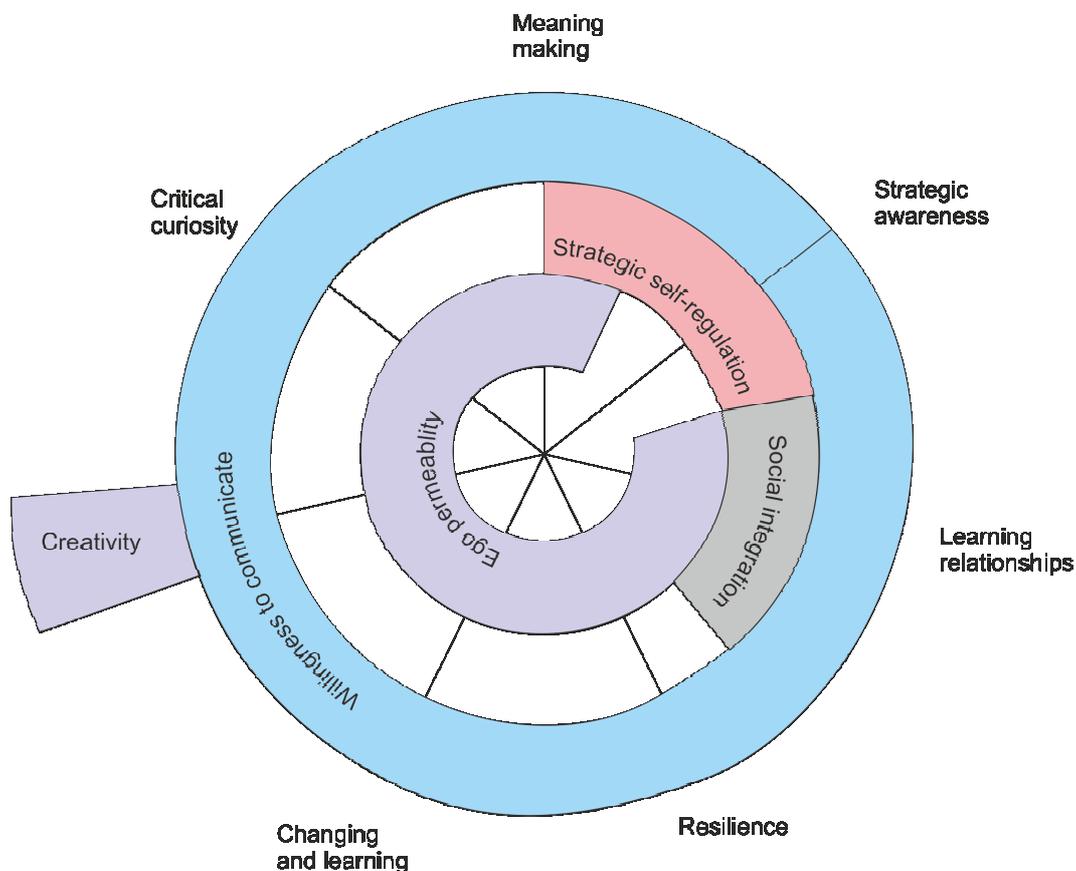
Ego permeability — adopting a new identity as gaining competence in a new language; not feeling threatened by the tensions created; prepared to make mistakes; openness. These phrases fit with the ELLI dimensions of Changing and learning, Creativity, Critical curiosity, Learning relationships, Meaning making and Resilience.

Strategic self-regulation — This dimension would seem to align with the ELLI dimension of Strategic awareness.

Social Integration — The description of Social integration above appears to correlate to the ELLI dimension of Learning relationships.

Creativity — seems to have a direct relationship with the dimension of Creativity in the ELLI framework.

Figure 2 –Possible links between the LLS and Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory dimensions



7. Conclusion

This paper makes a very preliminary attempt to set out a potential set of useful dimensions for students taking up study in a second language. It draws on the developing theory of the Good Language Learner and on the wider research in the field of second language acquisition and learning, including ideas associated with aptitude, attitude and motivation. The five Language Learner Support Dimensions (LLSD) – Willingness to communicate, Ego permeability, Strategic self-regulation, Social Integration and Creativity – emerging from this overview hold promise as the basis for an induction to undergraduate study of a second language. They are tentatively compared and aligned with those of the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI). It is of interest that the LLSD appear at first glance to map onto the dimensions of learning power, in more than one way, from one-to-one to one-to-many relationships.

The ultimate intention is to produce materials that will best enable students to orientate themselves to successful study of a second language and the next step is to develop a trial that explores the validity and the usefulness of these dimensions with students from the autumn of 2012 to the spring of 2013. It needs to be emphasised that the authors are not endeavouring to develop a replacement framework but rather to distill a range of ideas into something relatively straightforward from which students would gain valuable insights into their learning. In order that they might make the most of their opportunity to study. They would not be discouraged from exploring the full range of theories about language learning or learning more widely.

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