2 The facilitative learner mindset

REFLECTION TASK 1

Think about your learners. What are the characteristics of those who you would refer to as proactive? What do they do? How do they think about themselves and their learning? In what ways do they differ from learners who are more passive and less self-directed?

Whether a learner engages with the language learning opportunities available depends not only on the nature of those opportunities (e.g. whether they are seen as interesting or useful) but also on several other factors that are either *internal* to the learner (such as personal characteristics, often labelled as intrapersonal factors) or which concern their *social relationships* with others (interpersonal factors). Such internal and social factors can make a real difference in facilitating learner engagement, in the sense that they can either constitute fertile conditions for initiating a learner's willingness to engage in language learning within and beyond the classroom, or, alternatively, they can cancel out even our best efforts to create an engaging learning environment.

> *We are creatures of both brains and hearts, and when both are engaged, compelling learning erupts.*
> (VanDeWeghe 2009: 24)

Chapters 2–4 of this book address these intrapersonal and interpersonal factors in terms of three main pillars that can be seen to support engaged learner behaviour: the learner's *psychological state*, their *relationship to the teacher* and their *relationship with their peers*. In this chapter, we start with the learners themselves and reflect on the kinds of beliefs and feelings – both regarding themselves as human beings in general and language learners in particular – which may give them the sense that taking engaged action is worthwhile. For example, if a learner does not think that they are very good at learning a language, it is going to be an uphill struggle to get them engaged with the classroom tasks and materials. From their point of view, why should they bother? Obviously, such a negative frame of mind needs to be challenged: we need our students to believe that it *is* possible to improve, that they *have* the means to do so and that their sustained perseverance over time *will* reap rewards and lead them towards personally meaningful goals.

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Rationale

'Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right'. This famous saying has been quoted hundreds of time, with good reason. It speaks to a truth about the significance of what we believe when facing a task: essentially, that our belief in our own abilities in respect to an activity will facilitate or inhibit engagement. In other words, this sense of competence – and more generally, of self-image – is *defining* for engagement. This explains why the notion of 'I can' is at the heart of a multitude of motivational theories, most notably in Deci and Ryan's (1985; Ryan and Deci 2017) famous Self-Determination Theory (represented by the key component 'need for competence'), Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory and Dweck's (2006) Theory of Mindsets. In order to be willing to engage, learners first need to feel they can cope with whatever tasks they face, that they can affect the outcomes and that they can successfully achieve goals. These facets make up a crucial dimension of an overall *facilitative mindset* – which is the term we have chosen to refer to the sum of all the relevant learner-internal factors – and they need to be complemented by strategies of how to seek support and how to manage upcoming challenges.

The second central dimension of a facilitative mindset is related to what Deci and Ryan (1985) call the 'need for autonomy', which refers to the learners' sense that they are in charge, that is, that they can affect their own learning and hold a degree of responsibility for its outcomes. Accordingly, educational psychologists agree on the principle that for optimal effectiveness, learners need to be convinced that they are not just passive recipients of teacher input but that they have 'agency' and can proactively shape their learning opportunities and processes (e.g. Reeve and Tseng 2011). Indeed, while we can do our best to encourage learners to become engaged, the final decision whether to act or not will always rest with the individual.

REFLECTION TASK 2

Think of an aspect of your job or a hobby where you feel very confident. Reflect on where that sense of competence comes from. What contributes to your feeling that you can do something? How does feeling confident affect your behaviour? Think also about how much freedom you have in your work and how that affects your motivation.

> *Believing we are capable of doing something or achieving a certain objective is a vital element of being willing and able to take control of and responsibility for our actions.*
>
> (Williams et al. 2015: 45)

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Principles for a Facilitative Mindset

We have argued above that in order to get learners into a facilitative state of mind, we need to help them to develop a broad sense of competence and autonomy. Also, we need to prepare them for the long haul, developing sufficient learning stamina and persistence in their engagement, given that language learning is a marathon, not a sprint. How can we accomplish these goals in actual practice? In the following, we first explore five principles that facilitate learners' readiness and willingness to engage, and then we move on to suggest five concrete teacher actions which can support the enacting of these principles. As will become clear, the five principles – promoting a sense of competence, a growth mindset, ownership, proactiveness and grit in the learners – are related to each other, representing various facets of a positive, facilitative frame of mind.

Principle 1: Promote a Sense of Competence

'Yes, you can!' and 'I can do it!' are phrases that have become frequently used in all kinds of contexts, as they capture well the motivational power of believing that one can succeed. This sense of positive self-belief is exactly what we would like to engender in our learners: we want them to feel able to manage a task – be that a specific classroom activity or more broadly defined, the mastery of a foreign language. We have already emphasised the general significance of this principle on the previous pages, so let us here specifically highlight what is arguably the most useful concept in this respect: *self-efficacy*. This has been defined as an individual's beliefs about whether they feel that they can successfully complete a specific task in a specific context (Bandura 1997); that is, it is how learners would respond to the question, 'Do I feel as if I could manage this task in this particular situation and under this set of conditions?' Research over the past three decades has produced ample evidence that self-efficacy is likely to determine what tasks learners select to engage with, as well as their ongoing commitment to persisting and completing the task.

> *Self-efficacy can lead to more engagement and, subsequently, to more learning and better achievement; however, the relations also flow back to self-efficacy over time. Accordingly, the more a student is engaged, and especially the more they learn and the better they perform, the higher their self-efficacy.*
>
> (Linnenbrink and Pintrich 2003: 123)

Broadly speaking, there are four important ways through which learners can increase their self-efficacy: (a) having experiences of success themselves; (b) getting positive, constructive and encouraging feedback from significant others; (c) observing others succeed who are similar in competences to themselves; and (d) evaluating their own emotional states and their responses to experiences (see Bandura 1977).

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Success: Perhaps one of the most effective ways for learners to develop a sense of competence is for them to experience success. We all know the expression 'success breeds success' but the point to stress here is that in order to boost confidence, success needs to be *genuine* and needs to be *earned*. There are no gains to a person's sense of competence from easy success that requires little effort; however, having to work for something and then witnessing the rewards of one's efforts is perhaps the most valuable experience learners can have.

> *The feeling of competence results when a person takes on and, in his or her own view, meets optimal challenges. Being able to do something that is trivially easy does not lead to perceived competence, for the feeling of being effective occurs only when one has worked towards accomplishment ... One does not have to be best or first, or to get an 'A', to feel competent: one need only take on a meaningful personal challenge and give it one's best.*
>
> (Deci and Flaste 1995: 66)

Feedback and scaffolding: Feedback is a well-known educational tool with both motivational and instructional power. It can emphasise two different aspects of someone's performance: what has *already* been achieved and what is *yet* to be achieved. From an engagement perspective, the first type particularly – usually termed *'progress feedback'* – is relevant: positive progress feedback (affirmative formative feedback) makes progress toward the target feel real and achievable and thus fuels subsequent efforts. Self-efficacy is particularly enhanced if this kind of feedback is also combined with conscious 'scaffolding' efforts by the teacher, including breaking down tasks into more manageable sub-segments, providing structure which is gradually removed, demonstrating ways of completing tasks, offering detailed instructions and guidance, getting learners to work together in collaborative support groups, and generally being available and approachable to turn to if guidance or encouragement is needed.

Role modelling and 'vicarious learning': Bandura (1997) has emphasised that *role models* are able to exert considerable positive motivational influence on one's learning: 'seeing or visualizing people similar to oneself perform successfully typically raises efficacy beliefs in observers that they themselves possess the capabilities to master comparable activities' (p. 87). Indeed, observing others and learning through their experiences – which is usually termed *'vicarious learning'* – is a well-known form of indirect learning that has the capacity to strengthen one's belief that a task is doable. Within the context of SLA, *'near peer role models'* – that is, role models similar to the learner in terms of age, profession, status, etc. – have been demonstrated to have particular motivational potential (Dörnyei and Murphey 2003; Murphey and Arao 2001), as their success is more easily transferable to the learner's own situation when there are perceived similarities between themselves and the role model.

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Emotional regulation: Another important source of information for learners about their sense of competence is their emotions. If learners are happy on task, feel energised and experience a sense of enjoyment and pride while working, they are likely to translate this into a sense of efficacy. These positive feelings can naturally stem from many of the instructional design features discussed in later chapters, as well as from enabling a sense of autonomy in learners. In contrast, a learner's sense of competence can – obviously – be shaken by feeling anxious, worried or embarrassed in class. This suggests that the facilitative state of mind is not just a thinking state but also a *feeling* state.

> *Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.*
>
> (often attributed to Aristotle)

Principle 2: Foster a Growth Mindset

REFLECTION TASK 3

Do you believe that all of your learners can improve their language learning skills? Are there some learners who you view really as 'hopeless cases'? Is language learning ability something that only language-talented people can succeed at? The beliefs underlying your answers represent your mindset about language learning and will affect how you teach and your expectations of learners.

American psychologist Carol Dweck (2006) has made an intriguing proposal concerning one's core perception of abilities: she suggests that people can be placed on a continuum between two extremes, one involving the belief that a person is born with fixed amounts of abilities such as intelligence, and that these amounts cannot be changed (i.e. the 'fixed mindset'), with the other extreme representing the view that everyone can develop their potential further and 'grow' their intelligences or change their personal traits (i.e. the 'growth mindset'). This dichotomy plays a vital role in all aspects of education and, accordingly, Dweck's theory of mindsets has become prominent in educational psychology.

> *If we were to carry on assuming that some children are born 'intelligent', while others simply do not have the 'brain-power' required to master difficult ideas in physics or history, say, then the options for change, no matter how pressing that change is felt to be, will be limited. If, on the other hand, intelligence is seen itself as learnable, then a whole different set of educational possibilities become thinkable.*
>
> (Lucas and Claxton 2010: 8)

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Applying the mindset theory to language learning, holding a fixed mindset means that someone believes that one's ability to learn a language is by and large fixed – it is something you either have or you do not. This can be seen, for example, in the way people talk about individuals having a 'natural talent' for languages or someone not being a 'languages person'. In contrast, a person with a growth mindset would believe that language learning abilities can always be enhanced through strategic efforts and that everyone can improve on their base level of abilities. This is not to say everyone will reach the same ultimate level of proficiency, but it is to say that everyone can improve on their current levels, given the will, opportunities and right kinds of strategic approaches. It should be immediately apparent how important it is for our learners to hold a growth mindset and to believe in their potential to improve, and the good news is that past research has shown that it is possible to retrain unproductive mindsets: there is a way to move learners from fixed to growth!

> *A fixed mindset may impede learning but a growth mindset can function as a powerful resource, influencing learner motivation, the setting of goals, and how learners respond to setbacks and 'failures' that are an essential part of language learning.*
>
> (Williams et al. 2015: 71)

METHODS THAT CAN PROMOTE A GROWTH MINDSET

Gershon (2016) provides a series of activities and tasks which can be used to promote a growth mindset with learners. Adapting his overarching framework, below is an outline of key areas and ways we can focus on developing a growth mindset in our learners:

- Getting the language right – thinking about how we talk about abilities, mistakes, talent, and effort.
- Changing how students perceive mistakes – welcoming mistakes.
- Targeted student effort – effort with direction and purpose.
- Giving the right kind of feedback.
- Thinking about thinking – discussing strategies and how learners think about language learning.
- Creating a challenge culture – challenge is not risk but a chance for growth.
- Focusing on processes of learning, not products of learning.

Principle 3: Promote Learners' Sense of Ownership and Control

The well-known 'theory of planned behaviour' in social psychology (Ajzen 1988) contains the concept of *perceived behavioural control*, which concerns the individual's beliefs about the presence of primarily external factors that may support or hinder their performance. If a sense of control

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is perceived to be low, this will hinder engagement, because people will feel that the outcome is not completely under their control (e.g. in a business venture because of corruption in the system, or in an exam because of hot weather making it hard to concentrate). In this sense, perceived behavioural control is similar to self-efficacy, in that both refer to the presence or absence of constraints to perform an activity in a given situation, with self-efficacy referring to internal capabilities, whereas perceived behavioural control concerning primarily external ones (although see Ajzen (2002), which suggests that in reality the two types of factor often overlap).

In accordance with Ajzen's theory, engagement will only take place if students feel some degree of control and ownership of their learning. Of course, the notion of 'ownership' can be conceptually rather slippery, yet we believe it is intuitively recognisable to most teachers. Ownership is typically thought of in relation to a person and an object; however, people can also feel ownership towards non-material things, such as ideas, topics or hobbies. When we 'own' something, we tend to have strong emotions about it and this can exert a potentially powerful effect on how we behave and respond towards the object of our ownership. In language education, we want learners to feel ownership towards their learning and the language itself. In other words, we want learners to step up and 'own' their language learning.

Having a growth mindset and a sense of competence are key components contributing to learners having a sense of control, and so is a third established notion in motivation research: *learner attributions* (Weiner 1992). Attributions concern the various explanations that learners give to explain their past successes and especially their past failures. Such explanations are highly subjective: what one person perceives of as a failure for themselves might be seen by another learner as a great achievement. It has been found that future willingness to engage with tasks is improved by a learner making 'healthy' attributions, that is, concentrating on factors contributing to their failures that they can influence and change. That is, future engagement will occur if students feel they have some control over their learning outcomes, which is not the case if they attribute their failures to fixed or unchangeable factors such as insufficient ability. For example, after failing a test, one can offer the healthy attribution of 'I didn't work hard enough' (which can be changed) or unhealthy ones, such as 'The test was too difficult' or 'I'm no good at it'.

REFLECTION TASK 4

Think about your own attributions. If a class does not go well, what are some of the reasons you give for why this is the case? Which of the reasons are something you can change? How does this motivate you to approach teaching in the future? How do you feel when things out of your control derail your teaching?

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> *Students with low perceived control believe that academic outcomes are beyond their control, attributing performance to uncontrollable factors such as course difficulty, unfair professors, bad luck, etc. For these low-perceived-control students, a psychological profile emerges involving low expectations, negative affect, de-motivation, and poor performance, despite the presence of highly effective instruction. Simply put, vulnerable, failure-prone students are most 'at risk' and in need of enriched educational opportunities such as effective instruction, but are unlikely to derive the academic benefits that normally accrue in such learning conditions.*
>
> (Haynes, Perry, Stupnisky and Daniels 2009: 230)

Principle 4: Develop Proactive Learners

Proactive personalities are increasingly becoming the focus of a body of research in organisational psychology, as they are seen as critical assets in the contemporary world of work: proactive people can make the most of resources, take the initiative, seek out opportunities for action and are usually more willing to make changes to their environments in order to create better working or study conditions (e.g. Fuller and Marler 2009). In a similar vein, it has been found that proactive learners tend to be more engaged, more open to learning, more willing to speak up and connect with others; all of which in turn lead to more positive outcomes (Wang, Zhang, Thomas, Lu and Spitzmueller 2017). They self-initiate action, take control and make things happen.

The point we would like to make here is that being proactive is not simply a personality feature. Although some people may appear to be more naturally enterprising and dynamic than others, it is also dependent on the environment. In order to be proactive, people need to feel safe and supported so that their self-initiated actions are not seen as risks. This means that in a classroom setting where teachers are open to and appreciative of learners speaking up and taking action, learners can become more proactive in taking ownership and control of their learning (Parker and Wu 2014). In other words, proactive personalities are not something people either are or are not, as learners can feel more empowered and consequently become more proactive, given the right supportive conditions. Chapters 3 and 4 will focus on such conditions in terms of teacher–student relations and the peer group climate.

REFLECTION TASK 5

Can you think of somebody who you would describe as a proactive personality? What is it that characterises them as proactive? Do you recognise any of your learners as proactive? What kind of situations do they flourish in? What kind of support do they need from you as their teacher?

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The issue of proactiveness is sometimes discussed under the rubric of 'agency' in the literature, referring to an individual's will and capacity to act (Gao 2010). This body of literature has produced suggestions not unlike the ones presented earlier: for learners to feel agentic, they need to perceive that they have a sense of influence to be able to actively shape their learning experiences and to manage their affective responses (Bown 2009). Cleary and Zimmerman (2012) argue that in order for agentic engagement to happen, learners need to possess both the 'will' and the 'skill' to engage, both of which can be developed through self-regulated learning approaches. Self-regulated learning is typically defined as 'self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals' (Zimmerman and Cleary 2009: 247). It involves being aware of one's own strengths and weaknesses, being able to set appropriate goals, having a knowledge of strategies to direct and affect learning, and being able to evaluate one's own sense of progress through feedback loops based on one's own performance. The emphasis is on learners feeling able to control, direct and regulate their own learning.

> *Student involvement in self-regulated learning is closely tied to students' efficacy beliefs about their capability to perform classroom tasks and to their beliefs that these classroom tasks are interesting and worth learning. At the same time, these motivational beliefs are not sufficient for successful academic performance; self-regulated learning components seem to be more directly implicated in performance. Students need to have both the 'will' and the 'skill' to be successful in classrooms.*
>
> (Pintrich and De Groot 1990: 38)

Principle 5: Develop Gritty Learners

> *To be gritty is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. To be gritty is to hold fast to an interesting and purposeful goal. To be gritty is to invest, day after week after year, in challenging practice. To be gritty is to fall down seven times, and rise eight.*
>
> (Duckworth 2016: 275)

Many people compare the long-term endeavour of learning a foreign language to running a marathon. In such an extended process, actual gains and progress can be hard to detect and there are plenty of opportunities for knock-backs along the way. There is no short cut or express route to the mastery of a foreign language, and it is not hard to see why learners can get disheartened along the way. This being the case, we need to prepare students for the long haul mentally: we need them to develop language learning *grit*. Duckworth (2016) has made popular the notion of 'grit' and its value in education. It is a combination of passion,

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perseverance, resilience and optimism in pursuing long-term goals. It does not merely concern working hard, as it is also about having the stamina and determination to stick the course all the way to the end, even in the face of adversity.

> *Many of us, it seems, quit what we start far too early and far too often. Even more than the effort a gritty person puts in on a single day, what matters is that they wake up the next day, and the next, ready to get on that treadmill and keep going.*
>
> (Duckworth 2016: 50)

Thankfully, grit can be learnt and developed. Many of the factors that we have already discussed above contribute to grit, but a key component that has not been highlighted yet is the learner's *self-control.* This factor is particularly vital in the current age of multiple digital, online and other forms of distractions, because it involves the capability to effectively manage one's attention, emotions and behaviours in order to keep on task when faced with diverting temptations. Many will be familiar with the famous marshmallow study in which children were offered one marshmallow now or two marshmallows if they could wait 15 minutes (Baumeister and Tierney 2011; Mischel 2014). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the children who could delay gratification and use strategies to resist the temptation of the immediate reward were more academically successful in the long term.

Self-control can be effectively enhanced by developing positive behavioural patterns and habits which reduce the need for effortful control. In this way we do not deplete our limited stock of willpower (Baumeister and Tierney 2011), and the same purpose is achieved if temptation is simply removed from the learners' immediate environment so that no effort is required to resist them. Learners can also be encouraged to develop 'if-then' plans in their minds (Hattie and Yates 2014), which are specific statements in which the learner gives themselves a strategy such as, 'if my phone rings, then I will tell whoever it is that I have to work until 5 pm and that they should call me back after that'. Formulating such concrete, clear plans to deal with possible distracting scenarios has proved to be an extremely effective tool in managing distractions (see e.g. Gollwitzer and Oettingen 2012).

> *Self-control is crucial for the successful pursuit of long-term goals. It is equally essential for developing the self-restraint and empathy needed to build caring and mutually supportive relationships. It can help people avoid becoming entrapped early in life, dropping out of school, becoming impervious to consequences, or getting stuck in jobs they hate.*
>
> (Mischel 2014: 6)

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Teacher Actions

The principles outlined above summarise the 'big picture' that we wish to aim for in order to generate an optimal mindset in our learners that will facilitate their engagement with learning opportunities within and beyond the classroom. Although the previous discussions have already presented a few practical considerations, the emphasis was on describing the general nature of the different concepts involved. Now we shall turn to five specific action areas that are intended to support the development of these principles in our learners.

Action 1: Think and Act Like a Coach

This first action point – *thinking and acting like a coach* – underlies many of the other actions proposed throughout the book, so let us try to explain what we mean by this in some detail. To start with, what do we mean by 'coaching' and in what way is it relevant to language education? The contemporary use of 'coaching' goes beyond the traditional practice of a sports coach, as it has been extended to apply to a specific way of facilitating learning and development in general. However, because it is related to the promotion of individual performance – that is, coaches are concerned with helping learners/trainees to *do* rather than *know* something – the term still retains a flavour of its traditional association with skill-based activities such as sports and music (Barber and Foord 2014). Such a skill-centred perspective is not alien to language education in the sense that the primary aim for most learners is to be able to communicate in, rather than know about, the target language.

Emphasising a coaching mindset in education, including SLA, usually means that we see learners as *active architects* of their own learning rather than passive recipients of teaching; as Beere and Broughton (2013: 228/1738) concisely sum up the essence of coaching, 'It is the powerful process of *supporting* someone to move forward towards their goal' (our emphasis). The support, as these authors emphasise, is a highly solution-focused process and is in many ways more performance-specific than the related notions of mentoring or counselling.

It needs to be underlined that adopting a coaching mindset and thus placing the onus of learning onto the learner does *not* mean abdicating our teaching role; quite the opposite: in a coaching situation learners need the crucial support of their teachers but in ways which foster their *own* capacity and ability to self-direct their learning efforts. As already discussed in Chapter 1, the available opportunities to engage with the L2 are ubiquitous nowadays and stretch well beyond the classroom or educational institution. If learners wish to make notable progress, they need to be able to recognise such wider L2 learning opportunities, and to know how to self-regulate their learning in these contexts – a good language coach enables them to achieve just that. Of course, for many

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teachers, such a coaching mindset may simply be part of good instructional practice; however, we have found in our own teaching that it can be useful to actively remind ourselves of what it means to think like a coach, in order to ensure that we really *are* seeking to help learners take ownership of their learning and be their own agents directing their learning.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN A TEACHING AND A COACHING FOCUS

Traditional teaching focus	A coaching focus
Responsibility for learning rests with teacher	Responsibility for learning rests with learner
Talking *to* the learners	Dialogue *with* learners
Learners depend wholly on teacher for learning direction	Learners know in what ways the teacher can help them to learn
Teacher tells learner what to do	Teacher guides and challenges learners to set their own direction
Emphasis on what teacher does for learners	Emphasis on actions learners take themselves
Teacher asks questions to evaluate knowledge	Teacher asks question to prompt thinking
Focus on linguistic gains	Focus on the development of a facilitative L2 learning mindset

(based on Barber and Foord 2014)

An important dimension of coaching is that coaches reflect not only on the learners' linguistic performance but also on their psychological state of mind (Barber and Foord 2014), which is key to this chapter centred around a facilitative mindset. Indeed, coaches strive to empower learners with the skills to promote their own linguistic performance by establishing effective self-regulatory practices, setting personally meaningful and realistic goals and fostering the optimal mental state for successful engagement. It is worth reiterating this central maxim in a slightly different way: thinking and acting as a coach means working with learners not only towards their desired language-related outcomes, but also towards generating the kinds of facilitative psychological states that have been outlined in the five principles above. It means therefore thinking of the learner as a person with psychological needs and drives that can be supported through teaching and interaction.

This is a major departure from the traditional teacher role, which tends to be confined to finding effective ways of providing knowledge input and facilitating its intake. For example, teachers often question whether developing more motivated learners in general is part of their job description or whether they should only focus on achieving short-term performance targets; in contrast, coaches *know* that generating motivation is a central aspect of their job, and, indeed, some form of 'visionary training' is a natural part of the coaching plan of virtually all Olympic

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athletes. In terms of a sporting analogy, a traditional trainer would focus on polishing the technique of the athlete, whereas a coach offers a broader service by also developing the winning mindset in the athlete.

To summarise, thinking like a coach means putting learners in the director's chair. It emphasises that learners should be doing the thinking and the role of the coaches is only to prompt and guide them by asking thoughtful and open questions, listening actively to their responses, respecting their reflections and, as a result, adapting the teaching approach to the uniqueness of the learners' values and goals (see e.g. Downey 2014). There is no single way to coach well, given that much depends on the individuals involved and the context of the particular coach–learner partnership.

> *In practice, coaching is a discussion, or series of discussions or structured conversations, which:*
> - *Are highly motivating for the coachee.*
> - *Use skilful questioning to identify issues.*
> - *Facilitate learning and commitment from the coachee.*
> - *Encourage the coachee to take responsibility for their actions and outcomes.*
> - *Give choice about the content and direction of the discussion.*
> - *Allow creative solutions to problems to emerge.*
> - *Lead to clear targets and definite commitment by the coachee to agreed courses of action.*
> - *Promote personal and professional development.*
>
> (Beere and Broughton 2013: 236/1738)

The most popular contemporary model in coaching is arguably the GROW model (Whitmore 2017): learners need to be supported by the coach in setting their goals (G); reflecting on what the current reality (R) looks like; exploring the options (O) for achieving the goals and desired future outcomes; and then planning what learners will (W) do in concrete terms to keep moving forward towards their goal. (See the panel below for a summary of these four aspects as four simple questions.) GROW involves learners setting their own immediate and long-term goals and developing a metacognitive awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as gaining an understanding of the nature of tasks they face and the contexts they are in, in order to know how to evaluate their options. They need to know how to learn and have to be familiar with possible strategies and pathways forward, and they need to repeatedly evaluate their effectiveness along the way and adjust as required. Of course, all these elements are reminiscent of characteristics of self-regulatory learning in general, but we find that the coaching metaphor adds coherence and a certain amount of tangibility to them.

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THE GROW MODEL SUMMARISED IN FOUR QUESTIONS

1. What are your **G**oals?
2. What is the **R**eality?
3. What are your **O**ptions?
4. What **W**ill you do?

REFLECTION TASK 6

In the light of the previous discussion, to what extent do you feel you already think like a coach in how you interact with and guide your learners? Are there any areas where you could further improve? (Of course, a coach's answer to this last question would always be yes…) Do you have opportunities to use questions more to guide learners? Do you feel there are limitations to a coaching mindset for your practice?

Action 2: Make Learning Progress Visible

One of the most practical things we can do to empower and motivate our learners to engage is to help them *see progress*. Language learning is a slow, incremental process, and gains can be hard to detect for both teachers and learners. In order to develop a sense of competence, learners need to be able to see that they are improving and that their efforts are worthwhile. One way of achieving this is to set measureable objectives, which learners can easily identify for themselves when they have accomplished them. Some L2 teaching textbooks have done this through the use of 'can do' statements at the end of each unit, and, indeed, some version of this approach can even be adopted in every lesson, such as through exit tickets, which are quick informal student responses collected at the end of a class.

On a longer timescale, learners can also be encouraged to keep *portfolios of work* throughout the year. Some coursebooks now come with a language portfolio for students to record their progress and keep examples of their work. However, a portfolio can simply be a collection of pieces of work from the student over an extended period of time to create documentation and an archive of the student's work. It can be done physically or digitally. Through conscious reviewing of the portfolio and guided reflection on their achievements, learners can be made aware of the gains they have made throughout the year, noticing how their language work has improved in complexity, creativity, fluency and accuracy. Portfolios can also visually display just how much work learners have done.

A further effective visualisation technique for a sense of progress can be provided by the *coursebooks* themselves. At the beginning of the school year, it can be interesting to ask learners to look at the very last page or unit of the book and see how much they understand or recognise in a specific section. Assuring them that the whole class will manage to work

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on the final unit eventually, you can then return to this at the end of the year and it can serve as the ultimate evidence for learners that what before seemed impossible is now manageable.

A frequently used formative assessment technique is the use of *correction logs*, where learners categorise and keep track of things they need to work on still. Each time they get a piece of work back, they revisit the log and add corrected mistakes from their work to the relevant category in their log. It is used as a way of drawing attention to problem areas and ensuring learners engage actively with feedback. As the name suggests, correction logs typically focus on mistakes and the things going wrong in language production; however, it is important to also actively support learners in spotting strengths and building on them. In this vein, the correction log can also be used as a strengths log in which learners are encouraged to make note of things they did especially well. Having both corrections and strengths in the 'learning log' not only gives learners a more balanced view of their own competences, but it also raises their awareness of what a competence in a specific skill area is comprised of. For example, they can note their correct use of linking words to create cohesion in a text, or the appropriate use of discourse markers in an oral presentation.

Finally, another popular technique is the use of *exit tickets* (see e.g. Lemov 2015). These are a very short, quick set of written questions that invite learners to show to what extent they have managed the learning objectives for a session. Exit tickets can ask specific questions or follow a general open format, with learners being anonymous or named depending on the purpose and format. They are not a test and should not be perceived as such. Ideally, they should ensure there is at least one positive aspect or response for every learner to achieve or respond to. Essentially, exit tickets can serve a dual purpose: (1) they can help learners take stock of what they can and cannot yet do; and (2) they can provide teachers with vital information about what aspects may need more time spending on and what aspects learners enjoy / did not enjoy. They need not necessarily serve all these functions at the same time. Wilden (2017) suggests that exit tickets are especially well suited to being done digitally through online surveys or chat groups to quickly and immediately provide feedback on the learners' response to a class.

SAMPLE EXIT TICKET

- What I learnt today: _____
- How confident I feel about being able to do this:

  Not at all / Not very / Somewhat / Very / Completely
- What I still feel unsure about: _____
- What I especially enjoyed: _____

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REFLECTION TASK 7

How consciously do you draw your learners' attention to their strengths? How visible do you think the sense of progress is for learners in all your classes? How could you make both immediate and long-term progress / learning gains more visible?

Action 3: Discuss Beliefs Explicitly

When it comes to mindsets, there are many strategies you can use (as shown in other sections of this chapter) but sometimes the most direct route – that is, explicitly discussing learner mindset beliefs – can be the most effective. When we talk about 'beliefs', the first obvious question to ask is 'beliefs about what?' In this respect, Schommer's (1990) pioneering research is informative, as she linked 'belief' as a scientific term to the individual's views held about the *nature of knowledge* and *knowledge acquisition*. Within this paradigm, it is useful to make a further distinction between *explicit* and *implicit* beliefs (for a discussion, see e.g. Dörnyei and Ryan 2015). Explicit beliefs are those that we are aware of and that we can articulate reasonably effectively, and there has been a great deal written about how harmful beliefs can be changed and constructive beliefs generated through explicit and critical discussion about them and about their consequences (see e.g. Chapter 4 in Williams et al. 2015). However, for the current discussion, implicit beliefs are particularly relevant, because mindset beliefs fall under this rubric.

Being largely implicit, that is, not necessarily part of conscious awareness, mindset beliefs are usually deeply held and this makes them difficult to change. However, it is possible to help learners adopt a growth mindset little by little, and we are convinced that it is possible for everyone in the class to develop 'growth thinking'. One of the core approaches for building a growth mindset has been to move mindset beliefs from the implicit into the explicit domain. One way to do this is to teach learners about the malleability of the brain, which is a way of challenging any fixed beliefs about ability or intelligence. Dweck and colleagues (Blackwell Trzesniewski and Dweck 2007) have developed a programme, in which children are taught about how the brain is like a muscle which can be stretched, trained and strengthened. Seeing this and understanding the mechanics of why a growth mindset is justified acts as a great motivator for learners and helps them be willing to try harder and engage with tasks. Their beliefs are challenged as they can see that their brains are not fixed but have a potential to become stronger through certain types of practice and learning. In terms of resources, there are numerous videos and worksheets available online that teachers can use to introduce brain malleability, or 'neuroplasticity' as it can also be known. As Claxton, Chambers, Powell and Lucas (2011: 31) explain, we want learners to see classroom work and activities as 'being like a mind gym, with each lesson making use of the content and activities to create a pleasurably taxing mental 'workout'.

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> *Teach students about the brain … This is not just about teaching a few lessons. It is an area that must be revisited and built upon over time. It is about introducing and explicitly teaching students, then routinely revisiting the concept of malleable intelligence so that students realize that intelligence is not about a fixed number, a grade on a paper, or a report card. Students must understand that intelligence is constantly changing based on effort, persistence, and motivation. They will soon realize that intelligence is something that grows as you use it and languishes if you don't.*
>
> (Ricci 2017: 22)

Learners can also be prompted to discuss mindset beliefs through the use of texts, quotes, films and literature, identifying and examining role models who exemplify growth mindsets. They can look for examples of growth mindsets online or in the community, they can analyse language which reflects mindset beliefs, and they can even keep their own mindset logs (see, e.g. Ricci 2017; Williams, Puchta and Mercer in press). In these logs, they can complete statements, agree/disagree with responses in questionnaires to identify their own mindsets, and then discuss how that may be affecting their approaches to learning. It is important to note at this stage, though, that learners with a fixed mindset must not be criticised for thinking that way; rather, they should be helped to question their beliefs and look for evidence that challenges the idea that their abilities as a language learner cannot be changed.

REFLECTION TASK 8

Think about your beliefs about teaching. Here are some possible questions to think about: How much control do you feel you have over learner motivation? How do you think learners learn to write best? What do you think is the most effective way to encourage learners to speak in class? What do you believe has the strongest impact on learner attitudes to homework? What evidence do you have for the veracity of these beliefs? How could you challenge yourself about these beliefs?

> *Mindset change is not about picking up a few pointers here and there. It's about seeing things in a new way. When people … change to a growth mindset, they change from a judge-and-be-judged framework to a learn-and-help-learn framework. Their commitment is to growth, and growth takes plenty of time, effort and mutual support.*
>
> (Dweck 2006: 238)

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Action 4: Build in Choice and Voice

A key factor in promoting learners' sense of agency is enabling them to have choice and to express their voice where possible. The degree to which this can be achieved depends partly on contextual constraints, partly on the nature of the course and partly on how comfortable we, the teachers, feel with this. There are all kinds of small and non-intrusive ways we can bring in choice and allow learners to contribute. The easiest ones tend to concern the 'how' of their learning; for example, choosing between two tasks, selecting who to work with or deciding how big the group size should be. We can also ask learners how long they think they will need for a task, or we can let them choose between different output modes or formats. We can even give them a choice of tasks to do in class or at home. Essentially, any form of genuine dialogue or negotiation opens the avenue for learners to feel empowered to influence their own learning conditions, even if this is only to a small degree.

> *In principle, any practice that encourages and enables learners to take greater control of any aspect of their learning can be considered a means of promoting autonomy.*
>
> (Benson 2001: 109)

The aspect of 'what' students learn is often not readily open to discussion, as this is regulated by the curriculum. However, sometimes there may be some opportunities even in this area, for example, choosing between different texts to read or films to watch. We can also tweak tasks to enable learners to relate the content to personal interests, and in some settings, it is possible to offer them choice by doing *project work*. Projects involve concentrated work by groups of students on a particular topic or task, and, at the core, a project is all about letting learners make the decisions and putting them in an active role. Partly as a result, projects can be some of the most engaging work formats in teaching and are often the things students remember about school many years later (see e.g. Chapter 9 in Dörnyei, Henry and Muir 2016).

ESSENTIAL PROJECT DESIGN ELEMENTS

Larmer, Mergendoller and Boss (2015: 34) describe the conditions that lead to 'gold standard project-based learning', referring to seven key elements:

1. Challenging problem or question
2. Sustained inquiry
3. Authenticity
4. Student voice and choice
5. Reflection
6. Critique and revision
7. Public product

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An intriguing approach worth mentioning is what is known as the 'genius hour' (see also Chapter 6). This stems from an idea introduced at Google Inc. which allows employees to spend 20% of their time working on any project they like. The idea behind the initiative is that giving people the freedom to work on something they are passionate about and deeply interested in will increase their overall productivity. In the language classroom, such a scheme would of course only work if the learner group is sufficiently mature and cohesive (see Chapter 4), because we would in effect leave students to their own devices to use productively a certain number of teaching hours (the original idea was a 20/80 time split, but there is no reason why this time frame could not be altered). Working in groups or individually, learners select a specific question they wish to answer, set a concrete deadline for completing the exploration and then create an output to be shared in a format of their choice. As teachers, we can set class time aside for making ourselves available to guide and keep learners on track if need be, but learners are the drivers, the designers and the directors of their project.

> *If you want to prepare students for life after school, 20% Time and inquiry-driven learning is a must. Students don't need to fill in answer sheets or bubbles on a piece of paper. They need to be given time to produce something of value, to themselves and the world.*
>
> (Juliani 2015: 19)

REFLECTION TASK 9

What opportunities do you have within your setting for giving learners choice and voice in respect to how they learn and what they learn? What kind of projects could you do that will still also cover curriculum requirements?

Action 5: Teach How to Learn

We have argued earlier that the 'will' and 'skill' to engage are interconnected in a learner: if they are confident that they know *how* to learn effectively, they are more likely to actively engage with the actual process of learning. Teaching to learn is a rather broad area, involving at least three types of knowledge that are beneficial for learners in developing the necessary 'skill': knowledge about (a) themselves as learners, (b) the tasks presented and (c) how to learn (Flavell 1979).

The *knowledge about oneself as a learner* requires developing skills of self-reflection and self-assessment. This is often easier said than done; one of us, Sarah, has found her tertiary-level learners resistant to the notion, and even the term, 'reflection'. However, when she applied a more structured approach with guiding questions and frameworks, and switched from

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using the term 'reflection' to 'critical evaluation' (with no sense of 'critical' being negative), the process seemed more acceptable to the students and more effective. Some scholars suggest setting up 'intentional reflective dialogues' between the learner and the teacher or learning advisor (Kato and Mynard 2016: 6), and a tool that is frequently recommended involves students keeping a learning diary or journal, which can be supported through a probing question-framework and which can be discussed with teachers and/or peers, depending on content and levels of disclosure.

> *There is a danger in students relying solely on their teacher for the evaluation of their performance. If they are never trusted to evaluate their own experience, they will not acquire the habits and skills of reflecting on their performance, and so they will not develop the ability to improve themselves. The aim must surely be to produce a student who has the confidence and skill to reflect and evaluate independently of the teacher. Give students the confidence in their ability to learn from their own experience, and when your teaching finishes, their learning continues. The student becomes a 'reflective practitioner'.*
>
> (Petty 2014: 315)

The second type of knowledge concerns the *learning tasks*. Here the main objective is to help learners to see the 'why', that is, to bring them on board about the purpose of the specific activities they are asked to participate in. For some learners, attending class is like being in the military, in that they are often told to do things without receiving any rationale or justification for the instruction. However, having clear guidelines and transparent learning objectives, accompanied by an outline of possible steps to be taken to complete the task, can notably facilitate the learning process and learner engagement.

The third type of knowledge is *how to learn* and is typically taught in classroom settings through the use of *language learning strategies*. Strategies refer to conscious actions that learners can employ to help them when learning; when we organised 'sharing sessions' amongst the learners in the past – for example, before having to prepare for an exam – they always displayed admirable creativity about the techniques they developed to make the learning process more personalised or doable. The typical approach to 'teaching' learning strategies is to take an experiential approach (see e.g. Gregersen and MacIntyre 2014; Griffiths 2013; Mercer 2005; Oxford 2017), in which students are first presented with a wide repertoire of strategies, either by the teacher or through a questionnaire (or even through the sharing sessions mentioned above). It is emphasised at this stage that there are no inherently 'good' or 'bad' strategies, but rather that every individual has to find the strategies that suit their particular needs, goals and style. Next, learners are encouraged to try out new

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strategies over a period of time, keeping records and evaluating how they felt about using them and how effective they were. Learners can then decide whether they want to adopt the strategy, or make any changes for future tasks, or try a different strategy.

> *If learners believe they have the capacity to learn the language, and assuming they are motivated and willing to take an active role in learning, then they need to know what action to take to learn that language.*
>
> (Williams et al. 2015: 121)

Summary

We started out this chapter by arguing that in order for learners to respond to our efforts of engaging them in various L2 learning opportunities within and beyond the classroom, they need to possess an optimal facilitative psychological frame of mind. In five principles, we highlighted what we see as the main facets of such a frame of mind: a sense of competence, a growth mindset, a sense of ownership and control over the learning process, confidence/willingness to be proactive and, finally, grit. We then discussed five specific action areas that can be pursued to support these principles:

- Thinking and acting like a coach, in the sense of treating the learners as partners who have the chief responsibility for accomplishing their own performance goals.
- Making the learning progress visible, so that improvement can be perceived and satisfaction and sense of competence gained.
- Discussing beliefs explicitly, in order to develop in the students healthy rather than counterproductive ways of thinking about learning.
- Building choice and learner voice into the learning process, to foster a more autonomous and active involvement on the part of the students.
- Teaching learners how to learn by raising awareness about their own learning characteristics, the nature of the learning tasks and a repertoire of effective strategies that they can choose from.

CHAPTER IN A NUTSHELL

Learners are more likely to engage with language learning if they feel competent to do so and have some ownership and control over their development and experiences.

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IF YOU WANT TO FIND OUT MORE

Beere, J. and Broughton, T. (2013). *The Perfect Teacher Coach*. Carmarthen: Independent Thinking Press. (An introduction and overview of how coaching can be incorporated in practical ways into teaching.)

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books. (This is the book which made Dweck's mindset theories popular and is a must-read for all educators to get a core understanding of the power of a growth mindset for learning.)

McCombs, B. L. and Miller, L. (2007). *Learner-Centered Classroom Practices and Assessments: Maximizing Student Motivation, Learning, and Achievement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. (This book presents a series of core principles based on research which can support learner growth and development, providing cornerstones for engagement.)

Williams, M., Mercer, S. and Ryan, S. (2015). *Exploring Psychology in Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (This book outlines many of the aspects touched on in this chapter in language learning contexts, such as beliefs, the self, agency, strategies and self-regulation.)

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