

Title: Teaching the Whole Russian Language Class: Diverse Learners, Activity Design, and Classroom Interaction

Author: Lynne deBenedette, Brown University

Abstract:

In the early 21st century, U.S. universities have seen an increase in provisions for academic and other student support services, including advising, access to academic tutoring and mental health support. This increase is meant to assist a population of more diverse learners, encompassing a broader range of backgrounds, previous preparation, learning styles and abilities. At the same time, many universities now also have dedicated centers for learning and teaching for instructors, which offer help with syllabus design, teaching strategies, classroom management and assessment. These welcome developments reflect efforts to give better assistance to learners of different profiles, and to their instructors. However, an instructor's day-to-day decisions about specific teaching materials, classroom (and human relations) management, and assessment of learners' work can become complicated in a class with highly diverse learning issues and styles. Teaching strategies and materials that benefit some students may increase difficulty for others. Even in a language course using some amount of blended learning, in which some delivery of course content and student preparation take place online outside of class, there may still be a substantial face-to-face component, and instructors may find themselves facing an even larger range of learner types and needs than previously.

The paper will consider specific activity and task types for classroom learning in introductory and intermediate Russian courses, along with the classroom and human management that accompany them. Examples will show how the activities have been adapted or adjusted to work with different learners in classes that have included students with multiple preferred strategies, and some with diagnosed learning issues. Further examples will discuss the connections between homework tasks and the in-class group and pair work that follows, again noting how activities and tasks, and the teacher-fronted components of them, have been adjusted to work with the diverse group of students.