Alternative Second Language Curricula for Learners With Disabilities: Two Case Studies

ZSUZSANNA ABRAMS
University of Texas
Germanic Studies
1 University Station
E. P. Schock 3.102
Austin, TX 78712
Email: zsabrams@mail.utexas.edu

According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (2005), students with disabilities often must demonstrate failure in order to qualify for academic accommodations. For students with disabilities, this failure may be life-altering. The present article argues that alternative curricula (modified teaching and assessment plans) should be considered for learners with disabilities to help make their foreign language (L2) learning experience not only possible but also successful. This argument is framed in Allwright's (2005) exploratory practice model and draws on data from the case studies of 2 learners with disabilities studying German: one student with dysgraphia (a language-specific cognitive disability) and the other with progressive familial quadriplegia (a severe physical disability). Their case studies aim to further language teachers' and program administrators' understanding of how learners with disabilities experience L2 learning. This article also aims to continue the professional discourse on considering alternative curricula as successful—and feasible—alternatives to requiring serial failure from students with disabilities.

LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CAN BE a frustrating and discouraging process for any learner, and it can be especially difficult for students with disabilities. Many of these disabilities manifest themselves in language-related areas such as reading, written expression, auditory or verbal processing, or memory (Evarrs & Knotek, 2006; McNamara, 1998). Their impact can be life-altering for some students. Although some institutions allow students with disabilities to waive the foreign language (L2) requirement or substitute it with other courses, others require that all students learn an L2. Sometimes this requirement is fulfilled with extraordinary difficulty, as was the case for two learners of German at a large American public university: Scott[1] has a language-specific cognitive disability (dysgraphia) and Jake has a physical disability (pro-

gressive familial quadriplegia). Their disabilities prevented them from succeeding in traditional L2 classes. Based on their case studies, using Allwright's (2005) exploratory practice research framework, this article argues that alternative curricular plans—modified teaching and assessment plans—should be implemented for learners with disabilities to help provide them with a successful and enjoyable L2 learning experience.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Compared to other areas of research in second language acquisition (SLA), there is a dearth of literature pertaining to disabilities that affect students' L2 learning.[2] The available research focuses on five areas in particular: (a) learning disabilities and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; Ganschow, Philips, & Schneider, 2001; Prevatt, Proctor, Swartz, & Canto, 2003; Sparks, Javorsky, & Philips, 2005); (b) L2 anxiety (Horwitz, 1988, 1995, 2001; Horwitz, Horwitz,

& Cope, 1986; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément, 1997); (c) the assessment of disabilities in the L2 context for establishing or modifying college requirements (Sparks, Javorsky, & Ganschow, 2005; Sparks, Javorsky, & Philips, 2004); (d) treatments for ameliorating learning disabilities in the L2 classroom (Policastro, 1993; Sparks, Ganschow, Artzer, & Patton, 1997); and (e) innovative ways of restructuring L2 instruction to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities (Arries, 1994, 1999; Wöske, 2001).[3] Although this is not an extensive body of research, at least some cognitive and psychological disorders have been acknowledged in the L2 corpus as playing a significant role in L2 learning processes and outcomes. Physical and health-related disorders, however, have not been dealt with in L2-based research. This article aims to contribute to the discussion of learning disabilities and introduce the consideration for physical disabilities into the SLA professional discourse.

Cognitive Learning Disabilities

According to the University of Texas's Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, the term *cognitive learning disability* refers to disorders "in one or more of the central nervous system processes involved in perceiving, understanding, and/or using concepts through verbal (spoken or written) language or nonverbal means." The most frequent definition of cognitive learning disabilities (LDs) is based on a discrepancy between a student's potential and his or her actual achievement (Sparks, Philips, Ganschow, & Javorsky, 1999).[4] McNamara (1998) offers three additional diagnostic criteria: (a) students have at least average intellectual capacity; (b) students are not mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, or from a culture so different as to interfere with typical learning processes in a given context; and (c) students' difficulties arise from some type of dysfunction of the central nervous system.

Learning disabilities specific to L2 learning include problems with receptive (decoding: listening and speaking) or productive (encoding: speaking and writing) processing (Arries, 1999; Norrix, Plante, & Vance, 2005; see Appendix A for details). These LDs may lead to lower accuracy in "auditory processing, phonological decoding or sound–symbol translation" (Norrix et al., 2005, pp. 22–23) and are often interrelated with memory functions, such as those that aid vocabulary acquisition (Jarrold, Baddeley, Hewes, Leeke, & Phillips, 2004).

The online resource *LD Online* lists three prominent language-related disabilities: dyslexia,[5] dysgraphia, and other auditory and visual processing disorders. *Dyslexia* refers to the inability to process sounds (auditory dyslexia) or written text (visual dyslexia), primarily in comprehension but also in production (Smith, 1998). Furthermore, dyslexia

> is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language . . . Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.[6]

In L2 learning, dyslexia can interfere with comprehending a dialogue or instructions to tasks and can limit effective integrative reading strategies (simultaneous top-down and bottom-up processing). Another language-specific disorder is *dysgraphia*, a learning disability that is related to dyslexia and manifests in written production

> Dysgraphia . . . causes a person's writing to be distorted or incorrect. . . . [S/he may] make inappropriately sized and spaced letters, or write wrong or misspelled words, despite thorough instruction. . . . In addition to poor handwriting, dysgraphia is characterized by wrong or odd spelling, and production of words that are not correct (i.e., using 'boy' for 'child').[7]

Dysgraphia may limit one's ability to recall and write letters or words (Jones, 1999) or to make sense of grammatical structures, significantly reducing learners' abilities to complete L2 writing tasks, which often make up a substantial component of L2 courses and increase in volume as a learner's proficiency increases. These disorders can make it difficult for learners to learn or use grammatical structures or implement morphological and semantic relationships and can limit learners' abilities to store, retrieve, or produce language information, especially under time pressure. The University of Texas's SSD outlines several potential difficulties faced by learners with cognitive and related disabilities (see Appendix A; Office of the Dean of Students, University of Texas, online resource, 2006). Sometimes cognitive disabilities are accompanied by or lead to affective disorders, as students with LDs struggle with the increasing demands of their courses. In spite of this growing body of research on L2-related LDs, little of it has become a conscious part of L2 teacher training or curricular planning. Even more limited is the discipline's awareness of physical disabilities and how they may affect L2 learning.

Physical Disabilities

According to McNamara (1998), the term "learning disabilities" does not include physical disabilities. Studies on LDs similarly exclude discussions about how students with physical impairments (e.g., deafness, blindness, or motor–developmental disabilities that limit communication) learn an L2 and what accommodations learners with such impairments may need. The available literature on this topic is extremely limited. A search of the Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts database returned a single theoretical article from 1974 by Kennedy that related to language acquisition and physical disabilities. This article explored how a deaf and blind child (who neither heard nor saw others communicate) could develop an awareness of language. Although the specific focus of her article may have limited relevance to college students with physical disabilities learning an L2, Kennedy draws the reader's attention to an essential question that can help practitioners with designing a curriculum for physically disabled individuals: Through which mode will this individual communicate? She posited that instructors should "stress the function of language with particular attention to those situations which occur naturally with a high level of meaningfulness" for the individual, emphasizing the notion that we should teach students the type of language that they are likely to use to communicate in real life (Kennedy, 1974, p. 100). Identifying how students with physical disabilities learn an L2 or how they can be accommodated effectively remains an open and urgent task.

As the previous sections outlined, different types of disabilities (e.g., learning, affective) can affect L2 learning. These disabilities may present alone or concurrently: An individual with a learning disorder also may have or develop an affective disorder (Brinton, Fujiki, & Robinson, 2005). Although many disabilities do not preclude learning an L2, students often require some kind of assistance with learning, such as extended time for exams. Some individuals, however, may need more significant accommodations. The two case studies described herein illustrate these diverse needs for accommodation.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND THE STUDY

As mentioned earlier, this article presents two case studies to examine the feasibility of alternative curricula for students with disabilities. Given the study's focus on pedagogical practice and a collaborative approach to research, exploratory practice (Allwright, 2005) seemed to be the best suited conceptual framework because it is founded on "mutuality" (p. 357) and because it promotes understanding instead of problem solving. Case study methodology, in turn, seems ideal for such an investigation because it allows an examination of "phenomena in context" using data from multiple sources from multiple participants who represent multiple perspectives of an issue (Nunan, 1992, p. 75). Case study research is also process oriented and thus can help foster development in real-life pedagogical practice.

The two participants were students at a large American public university; their disabilities significantly affected their experiences learning German and even the college career of one of them. These students were not able to waive the L2 requirement due to college policy and were unable to complete traditional L2 classes with typical accommodations (e.g., extended exam time, notetakers). Thus, in collaboration with the two participants and their advisors at SSD, in my capacity as the director of the lower division language program, I devised an individualized plan of study for each student. The idea for the present article arose from these students' ensuing successes and difficulties with learning German. We hoped that a systematic, empirical examination of their experiences would help students, teachers, and L2 program administrators understand how alternative teaching and assessment plans can help students with disabilities and what the limitations of such plans may be.

The data for this article are comprised in part of semiguided interviews with the students: Scott's was audiotaped; Jake's was conducted over email (because he cannot speak). Both interviews covered the same basic life experience questions (see Appendix B) but at the same time allowed the interviewees to add content not anticipated by the interviewer. Further interviews were conducted with these students' advisors and the SSD director. Additionally, records of a telephone conversation with an academic counselor in the dean's office in the College of Liberal Arts (COLA) provided further information on the decision-making process from an administrative standpoint. I transcribed the interviews and coded them for emerging themes, topics of conversation, perceptions of disability, and ways of describing learning experiences the students had. A variety of documents supplemented the interviews:

1. written communication between SSD, the students, and COLA;

2. statements from the dean's office outlining the L2 requirements in COLA;

3. homework assignments;

4. email communication between the students and me and between the counselors at SSD and me;

5. information pamphlets provided by SSD;

6. observation notes from concurrent "traditional" classrooms.

These documentary and observational data were used to provide additional information pertaining to the students' narratives, which are discussed in the next section.

SCOTT

Initial Experiences With German

The motivation behind this study was a request from an undergraduate student, Scott, who contacted our department to ask for modification of his fourth-semester German language course, the last course he had to take in order to be able to graduate with a bachelor's degree in economics. It speaks to the heart of the matter that Scott had quit college this one course shy of graduation 4 years earlier in 2001.

When Scott was 5 years old, his parents noticed his lagging gross motor skills, and he was diagnosed with dysgraphia. He began a daily regimen of professional tutoring on phonics, spelling, handwriting, and basic reading skills. The tutoring continued throughout Scott's childhood, but his parents never told him that he had an LD. He struggled throughout high school with English assignments and took German in a modified class, with other students who had learning difficulties. He earned a B in first-year German and a low C the second year, even though, according to Scott, "the course was really easy" and tests often consisted of the teacher showing the students a few pictures to label (e.g., a picture of a dog). The course went on Scott's record as a regular language course, to reduce the stigma for students with disabilities. Being protected by his parents and school, Scott first learned that he had an LD while he was filling out forms for college admission: His verbal intelligence quotient (IQ) was significantly lower than his nonverbal IQ.

In spite of his dysgraphia, Scott succeeded at his studies in college. He often earned As on English essays because—as he stated in his interview—his ideas were well considered and

carefully presented. These papers did not come easy for him, however. He spent numerous hours reviewing his work (e.g., with the help of dictionaries) and visiting the university's writing center to get help with syntax, spelling, and organization. Although in spoken interactions he is highly articulate and can present complex opinions about a wide range of topics, Scott felt that "something gets lost between [his] head and the paper." This "problem" was exacerbated in German, where extensive outside help was not available, and it also led to a decision that almost cost Scott his college degree.

Having declared economics as his major (in the COLA), Scott was required to take four semesters of a foreign language. As he had already taken German in high school "because, quite frankly, the German teacher had a reputation of being really easy," he decided to continue studying it. Scott reported that he did not apply originally to have his L2 requirement waived because he "liked the cultural information, to meet new people." His enthusiasm, however, was not enough, and Scott struggled to earn a C in first-semester German. His disability resulted in many missed points on exams where he could not reproduce the required grammatical patterns or spell key vocabulary.

His frequent classroom participation helped him earn a passing grade (minimum 70% at our institution), but just barely. Whereas his peers often completed homework assignments right before class, he had to spend hours on any task and felt more and more discouraged in class as well. He tried taking second-semester German, but halfway through the semester, he realized that he would not be able to pass, so he dropped the course. He tried it again in the summer and was once more earning weak grades. However, undergraduates are only allowed one late drop during their career, so he had to "tough it out" in the summer course, as he stated. Scott failed the course, and his grade point average plummeted with a 5-credit-hour F. He attempted the course a third time in the fall and earned a barely passing 70% again. Scott began taking German III in the spring semester of 2001 and received a failing grade. He took it again that summer, and with very frequent visits to his instructor's office hours, earned 70% once more, saved by his in-class participation, as the support letter his instructor wrote for his ensuing appeal demonstrates:

Despite [recommended] accommodations Scott had major difficulties in the class. He performed especially bad on exams, where he was consistently one of the worst students. His average exam grade amounted to a mere 65%. Scott's hand-in homework earned him a

grade of 77% and he was unable to surpass this grade despite the fact that he was not constrained by time in completing the assignments. The fact that he earned an overall C (72.6%) in the course is thanks to his high marks for class participation. (support letter by K. H., Scott's instructor, as part of Scott's application for reconsideration, Summer 2001)

In addition to struggling in class, Scott had to read this report about his performance. As his counselor stated in our interview, many students with LDs end up developing serious anxiety problems (or even disorders) because the L2 classes place tremendous pressure on them, especially in those areas that are problematic for these students. Such reports, one of the requirements at our institution as part of a student's appeal for course substitution, can further undermine students' self-perception and confidence.

Most colleges at our university allow course substitutions for students with disabilities, such as a sequence of culture courses (taught in English, all pertaining to the same culture) that allows students to develop an in-depth understanding of that culture. Courses are never waived, and substitutions are made only after students meet "stringent criteria" (M. Gerhardt, SSD counselor, interview, December 14, 2005):

1. diagnosis with a language-related learning disability; testing in the last 3 years;
2. connection to SSD to establish a working relationship with a counselor;
3. attempts with an L2 course with accommodations (determined based upon test results from licensed clinicians in the community); and
4. a letter from the L2 instructor stating that the student works exceptionally hard but is still not earning a passing grade and will most likely fail at the next level.

Once these conditions are met and if the experts at SSD determine that the case deserves special consideration, SSD submits a recommendation to the individual college that the student be permitted to substitute the language course with an alternate culture course. SSD determined that Scott had met these criteria and submitted a letter to the Dean of Student Affairs in the College of Humanities on October 8, 2001: "the Speech and Hearing Clinic concluded that learning a foreign language would be 'extremely difficult' for Scott. (His performance on the aptitude test fell only at the 10th percentile.) The evaluator specifically recommended that he be approved for a course substitution" (A. Joseph-West, Scott's SSD counselor, interview, December 14, 2005).

However, Scott's appeal was turned down by the Dean of Liberal Arts, citing college policy: All students who want to earn a bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts must complete the L2 requirements, absolutely no exceptions. This policy was still in place at the time the article was written, as an academic advisor in COLA reconfirmed during a telephone call in May 2006 (the no-exemption/no-exception policy is being currently reviewed by the new Dean of Liberal Arts). Thus, even having fulfilled all his other course requirements, Scott would have had to stay in school during the Fall 2001 semester only for fourth-semester German, his final degree requirement. In his words, he felt "demoralized" and left school instead, one course shy of graduation.

Scott's Alternative Curriculum

After working for $3^1/_2$ years, Scott—at his parents' prompting—decided to return to school. As Scott explained during the interview, having studied for 5 years and having spent so much money on his education, he did not want it to be a waste. He decided to appeal the L2 requirement again, but registered for fourth-semester German just in case his appeal was turned down; he also registered for two other courses to improve his grade point average. His appeal was turned down in the following email from an academic advisor in the dean's office (COLA) on September 8, 2005:

Dear Scott,

Consider this your formal notification that your appeal to substitute or waive the requirement for 4th semester German has been denied.
really [sic] enjoyed listening to you, and I am happier having met you. If there [sic] anything else I might be able to help you what [sic] that's less consequential, please at least ask. I hope you have a very good semester. You can pull a C in [fourth-semester German]. Good luck.

Scott has a supportive family. His aunt, who is an attorney, had earlier attended our institution and studied German with the current undergraduate advisor in the German department. Scott's aunt contacted this professor and asked if our department could work with Scott. The professor forwarded the email to me and asked how we could help Scott graduate in December 2005. In the meantime, Scott's course instructor received a letter from SSD on September 8, 2005, outlining the types of accommodations they recommended to help Scott learn German:

1. A copy of the class notes from a volunteer in the class using carbonless paper provided by SSD and

assistance from the professor anonymously request-ing a volunteer; 2. Twice the allotted time for taking tests and completing work in class unless speed is the factor being tested; 3. Test location with access to a computer essay exams [sic].

However, because these accommodations had not sufficed in the past, Scott was worried that they might not help now either, after a nearly 4-year hiatus from German. Thus, Scott, his counselor at SSD, his course instructor, and I designed a plan of study for him via email that we felt matched his strengths and allowed him to succeed at learning German. Success for Scott meant earning at least a D[8] so that he could graduate.

Our fourth-semester German courses take a communicative approach to language learning, with an underlying focus on language use in culturally appropriate, authentic situations (both in spoken and written contexts). Students have weekly readings in German, in-class discussions and debates, regular take-home essay assignments of two to three pages (increasing in length as the semester progresses), and grammar activities that pertain to the course readings. The grade distri-bution as listed on the syllabus was 30% for three 50-minute tests, 20% for three take-home text re-action and analysis essays, 20% for regular in-class quizzes, and 30% for in-class activities and home-work. Our team altered some of these require-ments to fit Scott's abilities and came up with the following plan of study (from an email from me to the rest of the team written September 7, 2005):

1. You must attend class every day (Monday, Wednesday, Friday);

2. You will not need to show up for exams, nor take them (because issues of time constraints and focus on grammar/analysis are exactly Scott's problems);

3. You must complete your regular homework assignments and participate in class;

4. You must write the text reaction papers and turn them in [to your instructor] (these essays are written without time limitations, at home, with the use of resources)—these, unlike for other stu-dents, will be graded with an emphasis on content and ideas, with a reduced emphasis on grammat-ical accuracy.

In addition to the course participation, you will also need to do the following:

1. Meet with me once every three weeks, when you turn in a portfolio consisting of the following items:

a. Daily journal entries, about what you are learning in German, what interests you, what was new today (one paragraph per entry);

b. Summaries and analyses of online German newspaper articles, IN ENGLISH (describe what the article was about, what new information you learned, what you found unexpected, interesting and why);

c. Attend and bring evidence of attending at least one tutorial session each week (during these sessions, you can work on your homework, essays, speaking skills, reading, etc.).

Your examination grades will be replaced by the results of this portfolio.

To summarize, Scott's alternative plan required him to complete two regular course elements (text reaction papers and in-class activities and participation). In lieu of the timed exams and quizzes, however, Scott was assigned extensive weekly reading requirements in German, with En-glish responses and in an untimed setting, an ex-tensive writing assignment (where he could use dictionaries, grammar resources, and his text-books to ensure proper spelling and grammar), and mandatory weekly tutorial sessions with grad-uate instructors[9] to review vocabulary and gram-mar. These assignments let us know that he was learning the same linguistic and cultural infor-mation as his classmates,[10] but the format of the assignments was revised in consideration of his abilities and disabilities. Scott felt that his assign-ments required more time commitment from him than if he had taken the chapter exams: "I was doing more German work than I would've done just for an exam." Scott's instructional team ex-changed regular updates via email to ensure his successful progress.

Learning Outcomes and Evaluation of Scott's Alternative Curriculum

Scott did well with the alternative curriculum. He missed only one class period and turned in his assignments regularly, earning a grade of B on homework. Although he found it difficult to write the text reaction papers, he completed each of them with some help during tutorial sessions and earned an A−. He also attended and prepared thoroughly for all meetings with me, which were held during my office hours. At these meetings, we discussed his readings and his journal entries, as well as his progress in the course. Scott's jour-nal entries at the beginning of the course were short and used mostly safe, routinized phrases. By the end of the course, however, he was more

creative and often incorporated into his entries cultural and linguistic information from the articles he read. He noted the progress too and commented on it during our postsemester interview: "I really liked trying out new things when they weren't held against me. I definitely did things I wouldn't have if grammar was everything." Two typical journal entries illustrate this development. (Scott's journal entries were written in German; I am providing the English translations. Dates were translated from German to English, as well. An asterisk indicates incorrect German grammar/lexicon/pragmatics.)

Journal Entry 1

> Monday, September 26
> Heute bin ich früh aufgestanden, und ich war sehr müde. Ich war müde von der Wochenendereise*.[11] Ich habe viel Spaβ an der Reise gehabt*. Heute haben wir in* Deutschunterricht den Film "Good-Bye Lenin" diskutiert. Wir haben der* Hauptrolle Alex diskutiert. Dann haben wir die Prüfung am Mittwoch überblickt*.
>
> *Today I woke up early, and I was very tired. I was tired from the weekend trip. I had much fun at this trip. Today in German class we discussed the film "Good-Bye Lenin." We discussed the main role Alex. After we reviewed what was going to be on the test on Wednesday.*

Journal Entry 2

> Thursday, November 24
> Heute ist Erntdankfest und meine ganze Familie sind* aus Austin gefahren um bei meiner Omas Hause* zu versammeln*. Meine Mutter, meine Schwester und meine Tante, mein Bruder und seine Frau sind aus Austin gefahren. Meine Groβmutter hat Mittagessen vorbereitet. Wir hatten einen Truthahn mit Fülling und Soβe, Süβkartoffeln, grüne Bohnen, Reis, Brötchen, und Kranbeeresoβe gehabt. Der Truthahn war sehr gut, und nicht trocken. Mein Onkel hat den Truthahn geschnizt*, und wir haben alle bei einem groβen Tisch gegessen. Für* Nachtisch hatten wir Kürbiskuchen und Pekanusskuchen gegessen. Es war ein besonderer* Tag!
>
> *Today is Thanksgiving and my entire family came from Austin to collect at my grandmother's house. My mother, my sister and my aunt, my brother and his wife drove from Austin. My grandmother prepared lunch. We had a turkey with filling and sauce, sweetpotatoes,*

> *green beans, rice, rolls and cranberry sauce. The turkey was very good, and not dry. My uncle cut the turkey, and we all ate at a big table. For dessert we ate pumpkin pie and pecan pie. It was a special day!*

The second entry was not only longer but also displayed more complex ideas and sentences. Scott made several grammatical and lexical mistakes, but many of the lexical items and expressions he used were original and did not belong to the basic set student essays are frequently peppered with, and with which Scott also filled his entries at the beginning of the semester: "I am very tired" or "I slept and did homework all weekend." Based on his in-class performance on spoken tasks, on his essays and written homework, which he could complete at his own pace, his grade for the course was a B+. The quality of his text reaction papers, his reading assignments, and his journal entries, as well as his participation at tutorial sessions, raised his grade to an A−. It is important to reiterate that the quality of Scott's work was equal to that of his peers; only the format of his assignments was modified to match his abilities and unique challenges.

When asked about the strengths and the weaknesses of his alternative curriculum, Scott made the following observations in his interview (December 13, 2005):

Strengths

> Ample opportunities for one-on-one meetings, allowed him to ask questions when he felt overwhelmed by homework because the rules did not make sense or when he could not figure out how to complete his assignments. Working closely with tutors and his instructor, he was able to get the appropriate language practice.
> Unlimited time for take-home essays, with use of resources, such as a dictionary, grammar references, textbooks, and class notes. (Nota bene: The essays were take-home for all students, and all students had access to the same resources.)
> Daily exposure to German due to journal entries, class attendance, and tutorial sessions: "I couldn't help but learn German because I had to do it every day."
> Teaching staff (course instructor, tutors, etc.) was very accessible; nobody made him "feel like [he] was a hindrance."

Weaknesses

> Essay assignments remained a difficult and very time-consuming endeavor.
> Classroom learning was still a challenge; he felt that he would have "held up" the class if he "interrupted with questions when other people got it and [he] didn't." As a result, Scott still did not ask any questions in class.

Recommendations for Future Alternative Curricula

Even more emphasis on oral production: "I'd like to learn more how to get my point across verbally, even though it is more spontaneous and more difficult."

Separate class for students with disabilities: "I'd feel more comfortable being with other students who are also going slowly."

At the same time that Scott reentered our program, another student, Jake, who required accommodations due to a physical disability, was just beginning his studies. Using Scott's alternative curriculum as a model, we devised a plan for Jake.

JAKE

Initial Experiences With College German

Jake was 12 years old at the time of the onset of his progressive disorder—familial spastic quadriplegia—an inherited disorder affecting all four limbs, leading to severe and progressive spasticity, often accompanied by other neurological symptoms (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2006). He is in a wheelchair, cannot speak, and has limited mobility in both hands. He uses a small writing pad on his lap to communicate, but writing takes him a long time, so he abbreviates his messages. He can communicate via a computer, but typing is challenging. He cannot use both a dictionary and a textbook at the same time because he cannot move his head to switch from one to the other. Jake cannot use flashcards or online resources without assistance, due to his limited vision and manual mobility. Despite a dearth of research on how physical disabilities affect L2 learning, Jake's case demonstrates that this issue merits attention.

At the time he entered our program, Jake was an undeclared major within the COLA.[12] Similarly to Scott, Jake was not allowed to substitute culture courses for the L2 requirement in the COLA. Because he had taken 2 years of German in high school, during which he was expected to attend class and German club meetings, he decided to continue with German in college, as well. He was also personally interested in Germany: "The culture and region of Germany interests me greatly, and I plan to one day visit and maybe even spend a portion of my life there . . . . Secondly, my interest most likely stems from the fact that my mother is German, and was actually born there, moving to the States in her early childhood."

Jake contacted SSD when he was first admitted to our university. When he wanted to begin studying German, his counselor at SSD sent us a letter to offer guidance for accommodations: extended time on exams and arrangements for peer notetakers. In addition to the letter from SSD, Jake took the initiative and contacted his course instructor by email the day before classes began (August 31, 2005):

Dr. [instructor's name],

Hello, my name is [Jake]. I attend UT and am enrolled in your German 1 class, which begins tomorrow. I am disabled and will therefore need a notetaker, preferably one of my classmates who is reliable, attends every class, and takes good notes. I will ask your help in finding this person on the first day of class, if you don't mind. I would also like for the person to sit next to me. I am in a wheelchair and will need assistance getting my materials out of my backpack, which hangs on the back of my chair. I also cannot speak. I communicate with a pen and a pad, so if I needed to make a comment during class, my notetaker could voice it. This may present difficulties, since this is a class on learning another language, but just because I cannot speak does not exempt me, I already checked. I'm taking German because I am part German, plus I took it in high school. I am emailing you just so we are on the same page and we can be aware of what I am able to do or not able to do, and what will be expected from me in order to obtain my credits. Thank you for your time.

Based on observations of 12 classes at both first- and second-year lower division classes during the Fall 2005 semester, I noted that 10–35% of class time required some kind of physical activity by the students; they had to go to the blackboard or act out skits and dialogues. In addition, about 30–90% of class time was spent on partner or small-group work in which students had to interview each other, read texts together, and present the information to their peers or write collaborative essays. Consequently, classes also required some kind of oral output by students at least 30% of the time and anywhere from 20–90% of class time was spent on tasks that required writing or note-taking (many tasks integrated written and oral skills). The classes also relied heavily on visual information presented on the blackboard, on overhead projectors, and on handouts. These data have clear implications for Jake's ability to learn effectively in traditional classrooms, as his responses to the interview questions reveal: "The difficulties I encountered in the traditional classroom setting[13] were numerous and included being overwhelmed by the fast pace of things, the teacher and students not being able to give me adequate attention, and my disability making it hard for me to participate in some of the activities and assignments" (email interview, December 23, 2005). Jake was unable to participate in traditional L2 classes in a way that

would have been a meaningful learning experience for him.

Jake's Alternative Curriculum

Because Jake would like to live in Germany at some point, his primary learning interests were understanding what people say or write to him and being able to respond in writing. These are the skills he uses in his first language (L1) communication, as well. Because Jake came to us at the beginning of his German coursework, we were able to design a plan of study for him without any significant negative impact on his grade point average. However, because we were unfamiliar with his specific language learning needs, our original plan had to be readjusted during the course of the semester.

Mr. Gerhardt, Jake's primary counselor in SSD, works with about 300 students with mobility impairments, visual impairments, and health-related disabilities (e.g., cancer or muscular dystrophy). Mr. Gerhardt often works with faculty to modify how students are taught and tested, such as helping faculty figure out how to assess students only aurally (when reading and writing are not possible). He also negotiates course substitutions for students who qualify for this accommodation in colleges outside of the liberal arts, and he emphasizes that students "do not do less work, they just do different work" (interview, December 14, 2005). Mr. Gerhardt felt that Jake could handle learning an L2 with accommodations and added that most learners with physical disabilities will "jump on learning a foreign language if it has some real-life relevance for them. If the L2 learning and assessment are realistic for them . . . if they will benefit from them" (interview, December 14, 2005). For Jake, real-life relevance means building his listening, reading, and writing skills and removing the spoken component of the course syllabus. According to Mr. Gerhardt, professors are usually willing to work with students with disabilities as long as the accommodations and alterations do not disrupt the integrity of the course and as long as its core features are maintained. These principles guided our first alternative study plan for Jake.

The regular first-semester German course focuses primarily on building vocabulary, establishing a grammatical foundation, and developing reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills through culturally contextualized activities. Forty percent of the course grade was assigned to four 50-minute chapter exams, 10% to the oral examination, 20% to brief quizzes, 25% to class participation and homework, and 5% to a reading log

(reaction statements to course readings). Assuming that Jake could do the exams with extended time (3 hours), the homework, and the reading logs, we proposed that he do weekly readings in lieu of the quizzes and the oral exam, and we reweighted the other two categories (homework: 35%; participation in tutorial sessions twice a week plus a meeting with me once a week: 25%). The reading texts were online descriptions of music, rock groups, geographical regions of Germany, and basic information about everyday life, such as hotels, universities, and cultural events. For the texts, I provided reading comprehension questions in English, which Jake was supposed to answer also in English. In addition, he was to complete all regular textbook and workbook exercises on a daily basis. With these alterations, Jake was expected to cover the material his peers were covering in 5 days each week during 3 hours of one-on-one instruction per week.

Learning Outcomes and Evaluation of Jake's Alternative Curriculum

Students in the classroom completed the first exam in about 40–45 minutes, but Jake took over 5 hours, communicating through a proctor who did not know German. Despite the greater time allowance, Jake was able to complete only two thirds of the exam and failed it. Clearly, this arrangement was not fair to Jake, nor was it a good use of SSD resources. In a few weeks it also became apparent that the reading assignments were too complex, so we selected easier ones that recycled some of the same vocabulary and content (e.g., reviews of rock groups, music CDs, and German music in general). During our sessions we read texts, reviewed vocabulary, and practiced communicative language units (extended question-and-answer routines). Jake usually responded to German questions in a mixture of English and German, such as "ich habe mit mein caregiver nach San Antonio gefahren" (*I and my caregiver drove to San Antonio*) or "mein Freund und mich schreiben oft poetry" (*My friend and I often write poetry*).[14] However, due to his slow handwriting, a complete sentence often took Jake as long as 3 minutes to compose and write. Thus, we made slow progress in our sessions, and Jake had significant difficulties with completing all of his homework.

Soon after the middle of the semester, we had to readjust his study plan again. Because we could not add anything to replace the exams (the amount of reading and writing was already overwhelming Jake), we made the distribution of the grade simpler by assigning half his grade to

homework and readings. The other half was assigned to attendance and participation at the tutorial sessions 3 hours per week, during which he worked on building his listening comprehension skills. The amount of work was manageable for Jake, and we made good progress in the first semester, completing the same amount of work that his peers did in the traditional courses. However, in the second semester, as the grammatical concepts grew more complex, along with the readings and the writing assignments, we fell considerably behind and completed only about two thirds of the course. Nevertheless, Jake had a positive experience with the alternative curriculum, as is evident through his list of strengths, shown here:

> *Strengths* (based on Jake's email interview with the researcher; all quotes are directly cited from his email)
> One-on-one meetings allowed instructors to "cater to my specific needs pertaining to my disability and the course material was directly related to my degree."
> Individualized learning plan allows me to focus on developing skills that I will actually use in Germany.
> Teaching staff (instructor, tutors, etc.) had a great attitude toward learning.

> *Weaknesses*
> Assignments took a long time to complete.

> *Recommendations for Future Alternative Curricula*
> Design alternative curricula for all students with disabilities based on "individuals' needs...[to] determine what they require."

Jake completed all four semesters of German. He picked up new vocabulary and grammar points very quickly, but his writing and reading went very slowly, so he was unable to make progress as quickly as students in the traditional classes. His peers in the traditional course began working with a second-year textbook in the third semester, but Jake did not start that until his fourth semester. However, in addition to continued work on the textbook, he wrote regular journal entries, which reflected musical themes that matched Jake's career goals and personal interests and went beyond the material covered in course textbooks. Nevertheless, it became evident that at the completion of fourth-semester German, his language skills (in the modalities he was able to use) did not meet the same standards as those of his peers in traditional German 4 courses.

In spite of Jake's positive experiences with this curriculum, this fact begs at least two questions: (a) How can alternative curricula maintain the integrity of a language program? and (b) What are the practical considerations of managing alternative curricula for multiple students with disabilities? The next section addresses these questions.

ALTERNATIVE CURRICULA: WHAT WE LEARNED

Students with LDs face a diverse array of difficulties, depending on the cause of the disability and its severity. The possible solutions to help learners with disabilities succeed at learning an L2 are similarly diverse, and alternative teaching and assessment plans must be adapted to match the specific needs of individual students. The extent of these modifications and whether to offer such plans require careful consideration. The following questions and discussions aim to help students, instructors, language program administrators, counselors in student services, and even upper level administrators in decision making. This article uses Scott's and Jake's case studies to initiate a discussion of alternative curricular plans for L2 accommodation.

Curricular adjustments can take the form of (a) more diverse and faster paced series of activities to match the shorter attention span of some students, (b) audiotaped versions of written texts, or (c) varied-level activities that match the different abilities of students (Mellor, 1992). Instructors also can adjust the weighting of written versus oral work or teach explicitly phonological–orthographic and grammatical systems of the L2 (Sparks et al., 1999). *Authentic assessment*, which links instruction and assessment explicitly to students' real-life needs, may provide effective and appropriate alternatives for learners with disabilities (McNamara, 1998; Smith, 1998); it requires, as McNamara points out, the following:

1. assessment activities that reflect real learning experiences;
2. a variety of sources for demonstrating students' learning;
3. collaboration between students and faculty for evaluating students' progress; and
4. reflection by the administrators (e.g., language program coordinators, department heads, undergraduate advisors) about the process at all stages.

McNamara's concept of authentic assessment shares several features with what Norris, Brown, Hudson, and Yoshioka (1998) described as *alternatives in assessment*. Alternatives in assessment use traditional pedagogical tools in innovative ways (e.g., by giving more weight to portfolios or self-assessments). In order to meet "the requirements of responsible decision making" (Norris

et al., 1998, p. 3) and to retain a strong level of validity and reliability, the authors suggest triangulating student performance through different sources and establishing clear criteria for evaluation prior to performing the assessment. Alternative modes of assessment must be similar in content and format to the learning activities (Shohamy, 1992) and must reflect students' abilities and disabilities.

Alternatives in assessment—or possibly alternative assessments, because the proposals made in this article may represent a radical digression from traditional L2 classroom practices—can be especially helpful for learners with disabilities who can thus demonstrate what they know and make up for areas in which they struggle. For example, a student who cannot write long essays or speak at all would be able to demonstrate his knowledge by reading extensively and responding to comprehension questions orally, recorded online, or completed during the instructor's office hours. The amount and quality of the student's work would be the same as that of other students, but the format would be unique to the student's strengths and abilities. In the next subsections, I develop this argument further by answering the two questions posed earlier regarding maintaining the integrity of a language program within alternative curricula and the practical considerations of managing multiple alternative teaching and assessment plans.

Alternative Curricula and the Integrity of a Language Program

An important consideration for designing alternative curricular plans is to maintain the quality requirements (i.e., the integrity) of the language program and at the same time make the plan meaningful for students with disabilities. These issues involve the validity and the authenticity of the alternative curriculum.

McNamara (1998), Norris et al. (1998), and Smith (1998) emphasized the need for authenticity and validity in alternatives in assessment. In order for an L2 test to meet the criterion of authenticity, it must be based on real-life language use. For students without disabilities, real-life language use means communicating receptively and productively in their L1s in written and spoken modalities; these students should, therefore, learn to use their L2s in this way as well.[15] Students with disabilities, however, may use only some forms of communication or use modifications even when communicating in their L1s. Thus, to ensure that a test is authentic for students with LDs, the way

they are taught and tested in the L2 should reflect their L1 communicative needs as well. For example, for a student who cannot write without extensive assistance (e.g., Scott), essay-grading grids could emphasize content and ideas. Alternately, as a modest accommodation, segments of exams could be left out for students with disabilities (e.g., the listening comprehension task for a deaf student), and the grade could be based on the rest of the exam only. The linguistic material for which the learner is responsible should remain the same for all students, but the format should reflect their real-life communicative needs and abilities.

Validity is equally important to consider when designing alternative curricula. Let us consider the case of a deaf student. No instructor would expect this student to complete the 10% of an exam that tests listening. It should be equally obvious that students with learning disorders, which are beyond the students' control, should not be penalized for their disability. Valid tests measure the construct they purport to measure (Norris et al., 1998). Asking students with dysgraphia, for example, to complete a grammar test will not tell the instructor whether the student knows that particular grammar point, but only that s/he cannot do it in a written format due to his/her disability. Thus, this test fails to meet the requirement of construct validity for this student.

To determine both the authenticity and validity of alternative plans of study, collaboration among the student, a disability specialist,[16] and the instructor is essential. First, the student's specific disability needs to be identified through expert testing (J. Maedgen, director of SSD, interview, December 14, 2005). Next, the L2 expert has to identify the learning objectives outlined for the course and how successful completion of these objectives is assessed for the regular student population. Finally, with the instructional team, ways in which these objectives can be assessed fairly for the student with a disability need to be identified and described in detail. Camp (1992) posed several questions that can help instructors design thoughtful authentic assessment and learning tasks:

1. What do students need to learn?
2. What tasks will they learn from most effectively?
3. How can we measure students' development over time?
4. What criteria should be used to measure progress?
5. What steps will be taken by both the instructor and the student to evaluate the effectiveness

of the learning tasks and the assessment tools? (pp. 261–262)

Answers to these questions may reveal that whereas some disabilities require very little adjustment to the course syllabus, as Scott's case illustrates, others, such as Jake, may need significant adjustments. Especially in instances when more dramatic changes are needed, it is crucial to work with an expert instructional team. From a cognitive perspective, Jake was able to learn the course material, but his progress was slower than that of his peers. Without adjustments, he would have earned a lower grade point average, possibly preventing him from being admitted to a competitive major with high qualifying requirements. Jake was very committed to learning German and had real-life needs for learning to communicate successfully in the L2, but he was limited to receptive skills and very slow written skills, to the same degree that he is limited in his English communication. Therefore, a radical—and in this case alternative (cf. Norris et al., 1998)—way of assessing his progress to his own potential was necessary. He finished his coursework and was assigned a grade after the final exam. Alternately, we could have evaluated him on the quality of his knowledge of the language material, not whether he mastered the same amount of language material as his peers. This approach would be in alignment with McNamara's (1998) questions regarding student progress and individual development: Is Jake making the most progress of which he is capable within the limitations of his disability? If the answer is yes, the grading guidelines could be readjusted to reflect this progress.

To sum up, validity and authenticity should be key guiding concepts in determining alternative curricular plans for students with disabilities. These plans require collaboration among disability and language experts to ensure that the accommodations reflect both the quality of criteria of the language course and the needs of the student with disabilities. The course grade assigned to students with disabilities should—with some exceptions as discussed in the preceding paragraph regarding Jake's situation—reflect the same quality criteria as for students who complete the course without accommodations. However, the timeframe should be adjusted as necessary to accommodate the needs of severely disabled students. As Scott's and Jake's cases illustrate, students with disabilities do not work any less diligently than their peers, and they often work much harder to meet the same course require-

ments. Thus, accommodations can and should be made to the fullest extent possible, without worries that the students are "getting away with less work." How to implement accommodations efficiently is another important consideration.

Practical Considerations of Managing Multiple Alternative Curricula

As described in this study, Scott required limited adjustments, which were manageable at the local classroom level, with only 1 additional hour each week of individualized instruction. In contrast, Jake was not able to participate in regular classes, and his entire instructional task was shifted to graduate instructors and the researcher/program director. Even with only two students, the coordination of their needs and plans was time-consuming; naturally, the larger the group of students with disabilities involved, the larger the demand of time and effort on the teaching staff. However, from a student's perspective, a few (or many) hours of our work can change the entire learning experience and even the college career of a student with disabilities. Therefore, all possible routes that allow accommodations must be explored in cases where waivers and substitutions are not allowed or are undesirable. There are several issues to consider.

Arries (1999) suggests inclusive courses that modify the curriculum for both typical students and those with disabilities. Such courses, he states, should enhance phonological processing, reduce student anxiety, and reinforce learned material through multimodal presentation and practice and through frequent reviews. Furthermore, the courses should emphasize mastery instead of completion of an entire textbook and should provide training in learning strategies and organizational skills. Inclusive courses are an interesting final objective to strive for, but many instructors do not have the resources necessary to implement them. As Arries pointed out, designing courses like this can be time-consuming and requires intense collaboration among a group of experts. In addition, issues of practicality may arise from the vast number of different types of disability a course must accommodate: Some students would thrive on oral practice and others would thrive on extended reading. An intermediary step could be alternative curricula, such as the ones Scott and Jake completed. However, that still leaves us with the issues of administration and time management.

The most simplistic answer is that in smaller language programs, the number of students with disabilities may be lower, and in larger programs, it may be high. As the size of the student population increases, however, the resources available for that program (e.g., the number of instructors) also typically increase. Although this will not always hold true, the parallels are more likely than not to exist. Thus, the responsibility and time commitment can be shared by several teachers and would help reduce the burden on any one instructor. Very large language programs often have graduate instructors whose teaching load could be modified to reduce office hours and replace one or more with a tutorial study hall hour or individual tutoring for students with disabilities. Meeting students during office hours or using computer-mediated communication also can help keep instructors' workload more manageable. In addition, the need for minor accommodations is more typical than for radically different ones; thus, alternative curricular plans are not likely to lead to unreasonable amounts of work from the instructors.

In addition, language programs with a large number of students with disabilities should request support from upper administration. This support can be in the form of financial assistance (hiring additional staff whose main responsibility is precisely to design, implement, and coordinate alternative curricula), a course load reduction, or liaisons between an L2 and a special education department, for example. Students with disabilities should not be penalized for something that is beyond their control. Just as important as validity are the efficacy and practicality of alternative plans. If alternative curricula do not help students with disabilities but rather overburden them or if they become impractical for instructors to maintain, they must be reevaluated and redesigned even during the course of a semester, in consultation, naturally, with the instructional team and the student. As a summary, the following steps can guide the implementation of a successful alternative curricular program:

1. When a student with disabilities enrolls in a foreign language course, the instructor or the student should establish contact with the school's services for students with disabilities to set up a collaborative, instructional team.
2. The instructor, the school services, and the student should openly discuss individualized alternative curricular options (suggesting minor or major changes to the original course syllabus), going beyond typical recommendations for accommodation (e.g., extended times for exams, larger print) as best suits the individual academic needs of the student.
3. The instructor and the student, with input from counselors with the services for students with disabilities, should come up with a formal contract, establishing tasks that are equally challenging and demanding as the tasks the other students in the course are doing, but that reflect the strengths of the student with disabilities (e.g., additional writing tasks instead of speaking tasks for a student with anxiety).
4. All participants of the instructional team (the student, the instructor, a counselor with the services for students with disabilities) must monitor the student's progress to ensure that s/he is able to meet all requirements set forth by the alternative curricular plan and continues to succeed in class.
5. If any difficulties arise, the instructional team should collaboratively revise the alternative curricular plan to ensure successful student progress.

CONCLUSION

According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (2005), in order to warrant state funding or official support, students with disabilities "must fall behind for one to three years before their test scores will produce the *required degree of failure*" (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2005, homepage, emphasis mine). Similarly, Sparks et al. (1999) suggest that before an exemption is made, learners should demonstrate

serious problems with FL learning (e.g., having a record of formal tutoring in the FL; using accommodations in the FL course; taking FL courses to completion; not allowing a record of only Withdrawal grades, or no record of performance in FL courses, to be sufficient evidence for substitution or waiver if the university allows this option) . . . students with below-average phonological-orthographic processing and grammar skills do pass FL courses, although they may achieve lower course grades. (p. 562)

These statements have two important consequences for students with LDs. First, in addition to having LDs, they must contend with serial failure before they—and in order to—receive assistance. Second, directly related to this point, their disability may result in compounded academic and professional restrictions: Students who must first demonstrate a lack of success in courses in order to prove their need for accommodations will have lower grade point averages, possibly preventing

them from getting into some areas of study or into graduate and professional schools for advanced degrees. Instead of requiring such short-term and possibly long-term failure, offering adjusted or alternative curricula can change the entire college learning experience and possibly even careers of the affected students.

This study, given its qualitative nature, cannot provide definitive answers for all students with disabilities or for all L2 learning contexts. It can, however, further a dialogue on alternative curricular planning. Scott's and Jake's case studies will, hopefully, lead to further research in other settings, with other languages and students, thereby helping educators assess the progress of students with disabilities fairly and effectively in L2 classes. As a caveat, I wish to acknowledge that this study does not suggest that L2 waivers and substitutions be abandoned in all instances. That decision must be made on an individual basis by trained professionals, in collaboration with L2 practitioners. However, based on the data presented in this article, alternative curricular plans might provide a feasible solution to many students with disabilities, acknowledging their strengths and abilities, and allowing them to experience learning a foreign language positively. This finding reconfirms a conclusion reached by Sparks et al. (1999): "classification as [learning disabled] does not preclude . . . successful completion of college FL courses . . . [instead] . . . the use of accommodations in FL courses might help students classified as LD . . . to successfully pass FL courses" (p. 562). The form and the extent of possible accommodations, as well as valid and fair policies that have the students' best interests at heart, must become a topic of discussion and debate in the SLA community.

NOTES

[1] In accordance with institutional requirements, the participants are identified by code names.

[2] Although the terms "learning difficulties" and "learning disabilities" appear interchangeably in many articles, this article uses the latter for the sake of consistency. This term is used by a majority of studies on this topic, and it is also the term used by the Services for Students with Disabilities at our institution.

[3] In addition, Evarrs and Knotek (2006) offer excellent definitions of L2-related learning disabilities and an overview of the legal considerations involved in accommodating students with disabilities, particularly in the K–12 setting. Heining-Boynton (1994) discussed at-risk students (who come from a background of poverty, abuse, and violence) and offered practical guidelines—including the use of computer-assisted learning—as creative solutions to individualized instruction.

[4] Although scores from intelligence tests often are used too rigidly and determinations of disability do not take into consideration a person's overall abilities, behavior, and cultural background, the discrepancy-based definition of learning disabilities still guides accommodation determinations (SSD, personal communication).

[5] Dinklage (1971) is one of the earliest discussions available on SLA, language policy, and dyslexia.

[6] Definition provided by the International Dyslexia Association, accessed March 31, 2007, at http://www.interdys.org/servlet/compose?section_id=5&page_id=79

[7] Definition provided by the National Institute for Neurological Disorders, accessed March 31, 2007, at http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/dysgraphia/dysgraphia.htm

[8] At our institution, a minimum grade of C (70%) is required in order to progress from one German course to the next. However, a grade of D is sufficient in fourth-semester courses for satisfying the language requirement.

[9] As part of their teaching responsibilities, graduate instructors in our department hold one office hour and one tutorial hour each week. The former is intended as a resource for their own students; the latter is intended as a shared service to all students in the lower division language program and beyond.

[10] The grading criteria remained the same as for Scott's classmates (i.e., communicative ability, clarity of composition, ability to read and interpret texts, grammar, and spelling).

[11] An asterisk (*) indicates mistakes in the original German.

[12] In a later semester, Jake applied to and was admitted to the School of Journalism, which is in the School of Communication. His chances there for permitting substitution are higher, but at the time of this study,

Jake had to assume that he had to fulfill the language requirement, especially as admission to the School of Journalism is highly competitive (and requires the completion of 60 semester credits prior to admission).

[13]Here, Jake is referring to his high school experience, as well as the first 3 weeks of regular classes he attended before he began the alternative curriculum.

[14]This type of code-switching is similar to typical oral communication in the L2 classroom.

[15]Exceptions are, perhaps, ancient languages that are learned for reading purposes only.

[16]Although Sparks and Javorsky (1999) critiqued Arries (1999) for accepting "the LD classification for the students by the university's Office of Disabled Student Services" (Sparks & Javorsky, p. 571), most L2 instructors will have to rely on expert staff at these institutions barring special training in L2-related disabilities.

REFERENCES

Allwright, D. (2005). Developing principles for practitioner research: The case of exploratory practice. *Modern Language Journal, 89*, 353–366.

Arries, J. F. (1994). An experimental Spanish course for learning disabled students. *Hispania, 77*, 110–117.

Arries, J. F. (1999). Learning disabilities and foreign languages: A curriculum approach to the design of inclusive courses. *Modern Language Journal, 83*, 98–110.

Brinton, B., Fujiki, M., & Robinson, L. A. (2005). Life on a tricycle: A case study of language impairment from 4–19. *Topics in Language Disorders, 25*, 338–352.

Camp, R. (1992). Assessment in the context of schools and school change. In H. H. Marshall (Ed.), *Redefining student learning: Roots of educational change* (pp. 241–263). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Ganschow, L., Philips, L., & Schneider, E. (2001). Closing the gap: Accommodating students with language learning disabilities in college. *Topics in Language Disorders, 21*, 17–37.

Heining-Boynton, A. L. (1994). The at-risk student in the foreign language classroom. In G. Crouse (Ed.), *Central states reports* (pp. 21–38). Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company.

Horwitz, E. K. (1988). The beliefs about language learning of beginning university foreign language students. *Modern Language Journal, 72*, 283–294.

Horwitz, E. K. (1995). Student affective reactions and the teaching and learning of foreign languages. *International Journal of Educational Research, 23*, 573–579.

Horwitz, E. K. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 21*, 112–126.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *Modern Language Journal, 70*, 125–132.

Jarrold, C., Baddeley, A. D., Hewes, A. K., Leeke, T. C., & Phillips, C. E. (2004). What links verbal short-term memory performance and vocabulary level? Evidence of changing relationships among individuals with learning disability. *Journal of Memory and Language, 50*, 134–148.

Jones, S. (1999). *Dysgraphia accommodations and modifications*. Retrieved June 11, 2006 from http://www.ldonline.org/ldbasics/whatisld

Kennedy, A. E. C. (1974). Language awareness and the deaf–blind child. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 6*, 99–102.

LD Online. Retrieved June 3, 2006, from http://www.ldonline.org/ldbasics/whatisld

MacIntyre, P. D., Noels, K. A., & Clément, R. (1997). Biases in self-ratings of second language proficiency: The role of language anxiety. *Language Learning, 47*, 265–287.

McNamara, B. E. (1998). *Learning disabilities: Appropriate practices for a diverse population*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Mellor, S. (1992). From entitlement to reality: Modern foreign languages and special educational needs. *Language Learning Journal, 5*, 14–15.

National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2006). *Keep kids learning: A new model to identify students with learning disabilities before they fail*. Retrieved June 11, 2006, from http://www.ncld.org/content/view/299/317/

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. (2005) Retrieved June 3, 2006, from http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/hereditary_spastic_paraplegia/hereditary_spastic_paraplegia.htm

Norris, J. M., Brown, J. D., Hudson, T., & Yoshioka, J. (1998). *Designing second language performance assessments*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Norrix, L. W., Plante, E., & Vance, R. (2005). Auditory-visual speech integration by adults with and without language-learning disabilities. *Journal of Communication Disorders, 39*, 22–36.

Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Office of the Dean of Students. (2006) Services for Students with Disabilities. Retrieved June 3, 2006, from http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/ld.php

Policastro, M. M. (1993). Assessing and developing metacognitive attributes in college students with learning disabilities. In S. A. Vogel & P. B. Adelman (Eds.), *Success for college students with learning disabilities* (pp. 151–176). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Prevatt, F., Proctor, B., Swartz, S. L., & Canto, A. I. (2003). Profiles of academic achievement and cognitive processing in college students with foreign language difficulties. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 16* (2), 63–77.

Shohamy, E. (1992). New modes of assessment: The connection between testing and learning. In C. R. Smith (1998). *Learning disabilities: The interaction of learner, task, and setting*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Smith, C. R. (1998). *Learning disabilities: The interaction of learner, task, and setting*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Sparks, R. L., Ganschow, L., Artzer, M., & Patton, J. (1997). Foreign language proficiency of at-risk and not-at-risk learners over 2 years of foreign language instruction: A follow-up study. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 30*, 92–98.

Sparks, R. L., Javorsky, J., & Ganschow, L. (2005). Should the Modern Language Aptitude Test be used to determine course substitutions for and waivers of the foreign language requirement? *Foreign Language Annals, 38*, 201–210.

Sparks, R. L., Javorsky, J., & Philips, L. (2004). College students classified with ADHD and the foreign language requirement. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 37*, 169–178.

Sparks, R. L., Javorsky, J., & Philips, L. (2005). Comparison of the performance of college students classified as ADHD, LD, and LD/ADHD in foreign language courses. *Language Learning, 55*, 151–177.

Sparks, R. L., Philips, L., Ganschow, L., & Javorksy, J. (1999). Comparison of students classified as LD who petitioned for or fulfilled the college foreign language requirement. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 32*, 553–565.

Wöske, H. (2001). Förderung lernschwacher Schüler im Englischunterricht [Special needs for students with disabilities in English language courses]. *Fremdsprachenunterricht, 45*, 183–188.

APPENDIX A

Consequences of Language Learning and Related Disabilities (From the University's Services for Students with Disabilities Web Site)

Study Skills:

- Inability to change from one task to another
- Difficulty organizing notes and other materials
- Difficulty completing tests and in-class assignments without additional time

Oral Language:

- Difficulty expressing ideas the person seems to understand
- Difficulty concentrating on or understanding spoken language
- Poor vocabulary; difficulty with word retrieval

Auditory processing skills:

- Problems with auditory memory
- Difficulty hearing small differences between words or speech sounds
- Difficulty learning a foreign language

Reading:

- Difficulty reading new words
- Slow reading rate—takes longer to read a test and other in-class assignments
- Poor comprehension and retention of material read

Writing:

- Problems in organization and sequencing of ideas
- Poor sentence structure
- Incorrect grammar
- Frequent and inconsistent spelling errors
- Difficulty taking notes
- Poor letter formation, spacing, capitalization, and punctuation
- Inadequate strategies for monitoring written work

Math:

- Difficulty with basic math operations
- Difficulty with aligning problems, number reversals, confusion of symbols
- Poor strategies for monitoring errors
- Difficulty with reasoning
- Difficulty reading and comprehending word problems

APPENDIX B
Guided Interview Questions

1. Why did you decide to study German?
2. How long have you been studying German?
3. What experiences, if any, have you had in traditional language learning situations? Did you enjoy learning? What aspects did you like/dislike?
4. What did you find easy to do in the traditional classrooms? What did you find difficult to do?
5. How do you view the alternate learning program you are doing right now? Do you feel that it is effective in helping you learn German? If yes, what assignments seem particularly helpful? Are there any that you would recommend changing? If yes, how?
6. For what purposes do you foresee using German? Which skills are especially important for you to develop?
7. Do you feel that your current German studies program helps you develop those skills?
8. What suggestions would you have for formalizing an alternate learning/assessment program for other students with disabilities? (That is, if you had to design a formal plan of study, what components would it have, not have, etc.?)
9. What other information do you feel might be relevant to my understanding of your learning needs?

In Memoriam: Dr. David P. Benseler

We are very sad to report the passing of Dr. David Price Benseler, who died on May 5, 2008 at the age of 68 following what is being reported as "a traumatic head injury." Dr. Benseler was a major contributor to the field and, as its editor for 14 years, to *The Modern Language Journal*, as well. During his tenure as editor, the *MLJ* underwent significant changes, both in look and content. Dr. Benseler initiated the policy of anonymous manuscript submission and review, which resulted in a substantial increase in the acceptance rate of contributions by female scholars. He also designed a new cover for the journal, introducing new fonts and color-coded issues. In addition, for the last 30 years, Dr. Benseler was responsible for compiling and editing the *MLJ*'s annual survey of doctoral degrees granted in foreign languages, literatures, cultures, linguistics, and foreign language education in the United States.

These are just a few of the ways in which Dr. Benseler helped further the field of applied linguistics. He was also a professor of German language and literatures at several institutions, including Washington State University, The Ohio State University, The United States Military Academy at West Point, and Case Western Reserve University. We would like to extend our sincerest appreciation to Dr. Benseler for his long service to the *MLJ* and the profession, and our deepest sympathies to his family. There will be a comprehensive tribute to Dr. Benseler in the next issue of the *MLJ*.