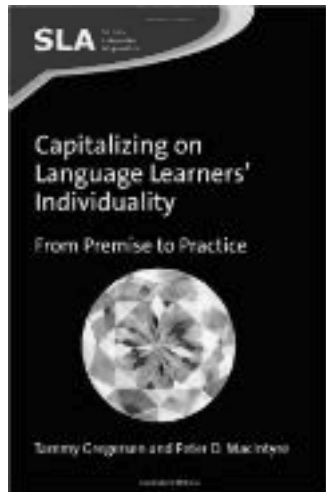


## Capitalizing on Language Learners' Individuality: From Premise to Practice

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Capitalizing on Language Learners' Individuality: From Premise to Practice		
<b>Author:</b>	Tammy Gregersen & Peter D. MacIntyre (2014)	
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Capitalizing on learners' individuality is like looking at the language learning experience through a kaleidoscope (p. xiii). It involves seeing the separate colours and patterns of individual experience, orchestrating them into a coherent picture of group experience, and maintaining this coherence through all the dynamic changes that language learning entails. Effective language teaching today is associated with providing the optimal learning experience for both the individual and the learner group at the same time—a real challenge for the language educator who wishes to satisfy these needs, but is not equipped with the necessary materials and competences yet. For all readers inclined to live up to similar modern-day demands, *Capitalizing on Language Learners' Individuality: From Premise to Practice* by Gregersen and MacIntyre will seem like a survival kit designed to offer both answers and explanations from the expanding field of individual differences (ID) research, as well as a practical inventory for making language learning a cognitively engaging and emotionally comfortable experience.

Like any survival kit, the book aims to provide treatment for various difficulties in the most necessary areas. The seven chapters are dedicated to those ID factors that are generally thought to have the strongest impact on the quality of the language learning experience: anxiety, beliefs, cognitive abilities (including aptitude, working memory, and

multiple intelligences), motivation, learning strategies, learning styles, and willingness to communicate. Each chapter is made up of two important sections: one of premises, which introduces the reader to the theoretical considerations and research approaches that best characterize the given ID factor, and one of practice, which offers a wide selection of classroom activities targeting the specific components described among the premises. As the authors emphasize, the chapters and most of the activities are applicable in any preferred order, thus giving a free hand to concentrate on one personally relevant aspect at a time.

What is it? Where does it come from? Why is this important?—These are the starting points to each premise section (p. xiv), indicating that the ensuing discussion on the given ID factor will be focused, logical, and practice-oriented. A peculiar feature of the chapters is that each starts with a little story, which demonstrates the importance of nurturing these ID variables in an intriguing and accessible way. Other than that, the premise sections smartly embed definitions, models, sources, and subcomponents into the discussion of their relevant research contexts, and manage to maintain a wide scope of inquiry without getting lost in superfluous details. As ID variables typically interact with one another in dynamic ways (p. xiii), cross-chapter references are also employed to avoid repetition as much as possible. Once the problematic questions and areas are exposed, each premise section concludes with an action plan on how to assess and capitalize on learners' individual set-up of the given variable, thus setting realistic goals and establishing direct connections between the premises and the upcoming activities.

The practice sections pursue a three-part objective: to improve learners' language skill, emotional-psychological state, as well as classroom atmosphere (p. xvii), and the activities transmit an amazing potential for achieving these aims. Each activity includes an introductory quote for sparking interest and discussion, the targeted proficiency level, and the step-by-step description of implementing the given activity, with special attention to prefacing at the beginning and de-briefing at the end. In addition to these elements, several activities include guidelines and materials for before-class preparation, and possible modifications for emergent learners, large classes, and different types of technology, such as mobile phones, Web applications, or online platforms. Task descriptions are clear, explanatory, precisely referenced and often supplemented with ideas for alternative learner-centred assessment (pp. xix-xxi), while basic language skills are integrated into the tasks in creative and subtle ways. Adding to this the diversity and the number of activities offered in each chapter (fifteen on average), it seems impossible not to find any that would suit the needs of learners and teachers in any educational context.

To get a snapshot about how the book embodies all the above described features, let us take the chapter on beliefs as an example. As a starting point to understanding the individual tones of the concept, the premise section begins with the story of the wealthy father taking his son on a trip to the country and realizing that the son's beliefs about poverty are fundamentally different from his own. After two pages on theoretical underpinnings, the chapter moves on to devising an action plan for harmonizing and capitalizing on specific teacher and learner beliefs about, for instance, the nature and difficulty of language learning, or the role of feedback. Corresponding to these

categories, the sixteen activities of the practice section offer diverse methods for sharing, assessing, and revising beliefs. Within this rich selection, the reader can find guidelines for debate tasks, role plays, poster or story sessions, group activities exploiting classroom space, or activities as simple as writing down one-minute answers to open-ended statements.

However comforting it might feel, though, to have a survival kit from which seemingly nothing is missing, thinking about life in the jungle can easily shadow our determination with some questions and worries. Does the average curriculum allow any place for these kinds of activities or do we need specialized training sessions? How much time do these activities require exactly and how many sessions should be devoted to a specific ID factor? What if a given activity is not compatible with the age or proficiency of our learner group, even though the book recommends it for all levels? Were all of these activities empirically tested? Naturally, as the efficiency of the survival kit depends on how its user applies it, the use of a guidebook also involves tailoring its content to the specific learning context so that its benefits can gradually unfold.

If I had to describe this book with a single term only, without hesitation I would write it is 'reader-friendly'. I would choose this adjective because of the clever selection of texts, research studies, and activities; the straightforward chapters, headings, visual and teaching materials; the clear, readable, coherent paragraphs; and the colourful picture of the kaleidoscope on the front cover. It would take one more minute to remember the eagerness and readiness with which the book gets down to catering language skills, affective individual dispositions, and group dynamics at the same time. I would probably erase my previous answer, and write down 'resourceful' instead. And only then would it strike me what it means to have a resourceful book for learner-centred teaching. It not only aims at empowering language educators to see the individual colours of their learners' identities, but also empowering learners to see their own and each other's competences and identities through the kaleidoscope and to cherish this vision. I would grab my eraser one last time, and proudly write: 'must-have.'

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