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**We Teach Languages Episode 124: Teaching Languages to Students with Disabilities with Cheyenne Staten and Julie Glosson**

 [0:00] [background music]

**Announcer**:  [0:00] This is, "We Teach Languages," a podcast about language teaching from the diverse perspectives of teachers.

**Stacey Johnson**:  [0:12] I'm Stacey Johnson, and I'm here today with Cheyenne Staten and Julie Glosson at the TFLTA conference. I just got out of your session about IEPs and 504s for language learners and was just super inspired by your message. I was hoping that we could jump right into it with maybe you could introduce yourself, what you do, what work you do in the world, and why this is a topic that you presented on today.

**Dr. Julie Glosson**:  [0:42] I'll start. I'm Julie Glosson. I teach language at Union University, specifically Spanish, but I also deal with foreign language pedagogy. I've been at Union since 1995.

**Stacey**:  [0:56] Yeah. I was at Union in 1995 too, and you were my Spanish professor. [laughs]

**Dr. Glosson**:  [1:00] I know. I remember.

**Stacey**:  [1:02] The thing is, Julie, I might edit this out of the podcast later, but you look exactly the same.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [1:07] I don't think you should edit that out.

[1:09] [laughter]

**Dr. Glosson**:  [1:09] Not true.

**Stacey**:  [1:11] You are exactly the same.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [1:13] I'm glad that the illusion has continued.

[1:15] [laughter]

**Stacey**:  [1:15] You still have that same joyful attitude ‑‑ joyful, playful attitude ‑‑ that I remember from class also.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [1:22] Well, thank you.

[1:23] [laughter]

**Dr. Glosson**:  [1:23] Since you were in my classroom, I started supervising student teachers in Spanish, and then in French, and then we added ESL.

[1:34] Then a few years ago, Union transitioned to the internship program. Basically, our students do an Internship I and an Internship II ‑‑ I in the fall, II in the spring. I is part‑time. II is full‑time teaching. It gives them access to the students year‑round.

**Stacey**:  [1:50] Awesome.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [1:51] Cheyenne is a student in the education track at Union for Spanish and for special ed. This year, she is completing her internship in special ed, but last year, she had the opportunity to work with me in a program at Union for learners with intellectual disabilities.

**Stacey**:  [2:13] That was your internship ‑‑ was working in this Union program?

**Cheyenne Staten**:  [2:16] That was actually just a case study that we did. It happened to go along with my Spanish Teaching Methods course the first semester, and then my capstone project for second semester. Currently, I'm interning with special ed.

**Stacey**:  [2:31] You started your presentation by talking through IEP and 504. We have such a diverse audience. I'm not sure everyone is going to be aware of what those terms mean or what they entail for teachers, so I was hoping, Cheyenne, that you could walk us through what is an IEP, what is a 504, and what does it mean for a teacher?

**Cheyenne**:  [2:49] Sure. In the United States, of course, we operate under IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Under IDEA, every student who is identified for special education, which means they have a diagnosed disability and we've also proven that their disability adversely impacts their ability to access the general ed curriculum.

[3:11] They are given an individualized education plan that outlines how their disability impacts their ability to access that curriculum as well as the accommodations and modifications that are being prescribed for every area of their education and how we can best serve them.

[3:27] In the IEP or the 504, which is very similar to the IEP but addresses those topics a little bit differently and is not addressed as often as the IEP...The 504 is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. They come from two different laws, but they address a lot of the same needs in very similar ways.

**Stacey**:  [3:46] Why might a student have a 504 instead of IEP?

**Dr. Glosson**:  [3:56] A 504 basically means that the student can complete the work, the content, but that the delivery or the assignment might have to be not necessarily diminished in any way but maybe you just go about it in a different way.

[4:08] For example, an assignment might be you might have an extended deadline. You might have to split the assignment into three parts for the student to complete it. You might have to provide the student with verbal directions as well as written directions. It's still the same assignment. You just deliver it in a variety of ways.

**Stacey**:  [4:28] Whereas an individual education plan might actually deal with the content?

**Dr. Glosson**:  [4:33] Correct. You modify the actual content so that the learner can access what the learner is able to access.

**Stacey**:  [4:40] That makes sense. OK. Could you go over the things that you showed us in the presentation, what they mean for the language teachers?

**Cheyenne**:  [4:49] Yes. Our presentation, we had a couple different components of it. The first part that we went over was our process, how we went about accommodating for our learners when we did a case study where we modified Spanish Level 1 courses for two students with intellectual disabilities.

[5:07] The process that we went about was thinking critically about the skills needed to master the content as well as participate in the activities in the foreign language classroom, and then determining what kind of abilities the students are lacking, and then how to bridge that gap between what's needed and what they maybe don't have or don't have enough of through research, and then in designing those accommodations and modifications.

[5:32] We really encouraged World Language teachers to not just do their own research but also to collaborate with the Special Education teacher as well as the student, where reasonable or applicable.

**Stacey**:  [5:44] What might that collaboration look like? If I go to the Special Education teacher or to the student, what kinds of questions should I ask?

**Cheyenne**:  [5:51] That's a great question. You certainly start with, what is the student's disability?

[5:57] Where are there deficit areas? How can I make this activity that I see the student is struggling with more accessible to them?

[6:04] What are some accommodations and modifications that worked for them in other classes? Can I see their psych eval?

[6:10] Can I see what cognitive abilities they do have deficits in? Can you help me understand the psych eval because all I see are numbers and figures that don't make sense to me?

**Stacey**:  [6:19] You actually mentioned fluid reasoning skills, which was a term I hadn't heard before. Could you explain what that is?

**Cheyenne**:  [6:26] Fluid reasoning, in a nutshell, this isn't going to be entirely perfectly accurate, because it's very...there's a lot involved in it. In terms of language, it is applying principles in generalized ways.

[6:39] Being able to say, "Oh, well, when I walk into this airport, baggage is in this area, so I can walk into another airport and probably find baggage in the same area." Or, "Oh, when I had to make subjects and verbs agree here, I have to do it over here."

[6:56] What a lot of students who have fluid reasoning deficits run into is not being able to take that principle that they learned in one discrete setting and apply it to another. It's very difficult for them, and a lot of times, to make that transition from one area to another without being explicitly told this applies in this situation, and this situation, and this situation.

**Stacey**:  [7:18] To me, the terminology I would use is the deductive reasoning. To be able to apply principles in specific language, concrete language settings. They're not able to do that.

**Cheyenne**:  [7:30] That's exactly what it is, is inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning. Being able to generalize those rules that they've been taught, which comes specifically, when talking about language, a lot of times has to do with grammar and grammar instruction.

[7:46] One of the things that we talked about, there's a huge push right now for comprehensible input. I'm not at all knocking that in this presentation, but a lot of times, students who have low fluid reasoning are less equipped to take input and take it as far as other learners can because they have low fluid reasoning.

**Stacey**:  [8:03] They don't automatically make that leap. That, because I've heard these three things said this way, example number four would also be said that way.

**Cheyenne**:  [8:10] Exactly.

**Stacey**:  [8:11] For people who are using comprehensible input, and not using explicit grammar, it might mean that some of our learners who have lower fluid reasoning are actually going to have to experience every single articulation of a particular structure multiple times before they can acquire them individually. They're never going to be generalizing those principles on their own.

**Cheyenne**:  [8:38] Exactly.

**Stacey**:  [8:39] What could I do as a teacher to help that along? Or is there anything I can do?

**Cheyenne**:  [8:42] There are a lot of things you can do in that situation. Number one, one of the things we talked about in our presentation, was triaging the skills.

[8:51] Determining what is essential for this learner to know. Did they absolutely have to know every little nuance and every little exception to the rules? All the irregular conjugations, do they have to know that?

**Stacey**:  [9:02] Gosh. I really hope not!

[9:04] [laughter]

**Stacey**:  [9:04] I feel that really deeply for my current students who don't need IEP's.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [9:08] I was going to say again, if you go back to the ACTFL pyramid of skills and what it means to be a novice, and an intermediate learner, there's nothing on that chart at all that says you have to know all the rules about all the tenses.

**Stacey**:  [9:23] Thank goodness.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [9:24] You have to just be able to use the language.

**Cheyenne**:  [9:27] Absolutely.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [9:28] Communicate.

**Cheyenne**:  [9:29] You have to think about what is absolutely essential for them to use for their own purposes as well as just to get through us having somewhat of a command of language.

[9:37] One of the things that we prioritized in our situation with our two learners was, I want them to be able to read, write, speak, and listen as soon as possible. I want them to be able to start producing as quickly as possible.

**Stacey**:  [9:50] Now, why was that a priority?

**Cheyenne**:  [9:52] For our two students, they, first of all, they were auditing this course. This was a learning experience for everyone involved.

[9:58] We didn't have state standards or a test to really work towards. Also, these two students are going into the entry‑level workforce. They both actually, they wanted to go on missions trips abroad.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [10:11] I think one of the things that Cheyenne kept in mind with these learners was, what are the practical skills that they're going to need in their future? What can we do to equip them to practically use the language?

**Stacey**:  [10:26] Yeah, I'm with you. That sounds great. What else do we need to know? I'm a teacher. I want to be really cognizant of helping all of my students succeed. What should I know?

**Dr. Glosson**:  [10:39] If you think about the phenomenon today, it's the ADHD. It's the student who has trouble paying attention. It's the student who has trouble completing their work. It's the student who doesn't come to class prepared.

[10:55] The idea is, how can we make the connection with this learner? What's going on with this student? It could be that they really didn't hear you or they were not able to pay attention, or that you're giving them too much information at one time.

[11:11] Again, it could be that they're having inference difficulties ‑‑ that deductive reasoning piece. The more that you can prepare the student, either before they come to class, or provide them tools for them to follow up with what they've just done in class, then the more successful they can be in terms of a student of the language for longer than just a few semesters.

[11:36] Because we are looking at building lifelong speakers and learners of the language, really.

**Stacey**:  [11:43] One of the things you mentioned in the presentation, Julie, was processing speed. In episode 111, we had an applied linguist, who talked about the difference between when you hear something and when your brain has actually processed it is something like a quarter of a second, typically.

[12:00] For some learners, who have delayed processing, it could be a much longer span of time.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [12:05] Right, and as teachers, we are taught to provide wait time. Then there's this prescribed three seconds, I think, but that's not enough wait time for certain students. The wait time for some learners might not be a public wait time. It might be their own, private, "OK, I'm going to answer this question in writing, or I'm going to save my..."

[12:25] You know what I mean? There might be other ways that you can informally assess certain learners because of their processing delays.

[12:34] You have to find ways to make sure that your learner is still able to acquire without falling behind or becoming frustrated, which is often the case in a classroom where you're using comprehensible input that's really not comprehensible, because by the time they comprehend, you're five miles down the road, because they have processing delays.

**Cheyenne**:  [12:56] One of the ways that we talked about in our presentation about streamlining that process of figuring out where the gap is and where to start filling it is by getting access to that full IEP and the psych evals and assessments that came along with it.

[13:12] In order for a student to be determined eligible for special ed, they had to have been assessed at one point. Odds are, they were given something like a Woodcock‑Johnson or a WISC‑R or some type of intelligence or achievement test that comes with subscores and very specific types of processing or type cognitive abilities.

[13:29] The Woodcock‑Johnson IV, which is widely used right now, especially among older learners, is based off of the Cattell‑Horn‑Carroll theories of cognitive abilities, and things like fluid reasoning, short‑term/long‑term memory, processing speed, visual processing, auditory processing, and all of those things that are very applicable to world language, your student may have a deficit in.

[13:54] Your special‑ed teacher that you should be collaborating with has access to that data and can tell you how much of a deficit ‑‑ probably an age or a grade equivalent of where they're at, and that is where your information that you can really work with comes from ‑‑ is in that paperwork that you, if you're in a public school setting, especially if the United States, where we're operating under IEPs, have the legal right to view and access.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [14:18] As for accommodations go, you might not have an IEP. You're not going to have an IEP for a student that's just a 504 accommodation, so what you might have is teacher notes from the past in the student's file, like "So‑and‑so has missed recess for the past three years."

[14:38] Then you can begin to put a picture together. "OK, why is Johnny missing recess every single day for three years that he...What's going on?" Or you could read doctors' notes. Sometimes you see, instead of a typical IEP for those learners, you can begin to see a pattern that has developed over time.

[15:00] Sometimes you might be the first one to break into, "OK, this is what I'm seeing," and you might be the one beginning to build a case for a particular learner that no one's noticed before, because things do come up in the foreign language classroom that might not be a processing difficulty in another area.

**Cheyenne**:  [15:20] That's something that we talked about in our presentation, was accommodating for learners with disabilities is not just...It should not be seen as a nuisance as much as an opportunity, because you are laying the groundwork of a language, which for a lot of foreign language teachers who are in the secondary public school setting, they're teaching high schoolers. They're teaching adolescents who haven't acquired a language in 15 or 16 years.

[15:43] You get to see those cognitive skill deficits in areas that maybe haven't been seen in 15 or 16 years. You're getting to see that groundwork laid for them, and for something that their English teacher may not be seeing, or the special ed teacher wasn't there to see, because it hasn't happened in so long.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [16:01] Another thing that was pointed out is, when you do make accommodations or changes in the way that you teach...Let's say you vary up the way that you teach. I do this all the time. I say it, and then I write it, and then I'll add it to an online place where they can go back and look at it later.

[16:19] That's sort of an umbrella that catches a lot of different learner difficulties, and helps them solve some of the dilemmas and the problems and "Oh, I didn't catch the homework. Can you tell me what it was?" It saves you time from having to go back and repeat yourself a million times.

**Stacey**:  [16:38] That's sort of a universal design approach. If I know that students might need it in these various ways, giving it that way from the start saves us all a bunch of headache down the road.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [16:49] It does, and it saves you time.

**Stacey**:  [16:50] A couple things I'm going to bring up from my own...It's funny, because I just sat on a panel about accessibility and language acquisition two weeks ago and wrote a blog post about it. I'm going to bring in a couple things from the college perspective that I've been thinking of.

[17:04] One is second‑language acquisition research in language aptitude says that maybe students have that particular combination of phonemic awareness, sound discrimination, deductive reasoning, and other different cognitive skills that make learning in a typical college classroom functional for them. We call those high‑aptitude learners.

[17:29] 80 percent of our students who go through college [laughs] classrooms are in classrooms that are not meeting their needs, to start. Then we have this entire subsection of that 80 percent whose needs are not being met.

[17:41] What if our goal was for all 100 percent [laughs] ‑‑ for not just the top 20 percent of high‑aptitude learners, but for all 100 percent ‑‑ of the students who come through college classrooms to get that multiple levels of intervention for everything that we teach so we have that umbrella approach to making sure no one's falling through the cracks. That makes sense?

**Dr. Glosson**:  [18:02] It does.

**Cheyenne**:  [18:02] I'm glad you brought up the principle of universal design for learning a few minutes ago. I feel like that's where that really comes into application, is when you take into consideration, what am I requiring of my students?

[18:14] What is the cognitive load of what I'm teaching? What skills are required? How can I make it accessible to people who maybe don't have a high fluid reasoning? Providing follow‑up instruction and explicit instruction when needed, because sometimes it is needed for certain skills. Providing things in multiple means, not just visually, but auditorily as well.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [18:37] I was going to say, too, it's difficult. I realize it's difficult to meet the needs of every learner. That's an ideal. When you reach the umbrella‑wide, you run the risk of the 20 percent that you mentioned at the top of maybe having them get a little bored.

[18:58] The challenge for us as language educators is to provide assignments that are differentiated or that you can allow the students who have the ability. For example, tell me about your ideal dorm room? Then your students who have the ability, they can really go all out. A lot of mine do. I'll get the most creative, beautiful responses.

[19:23] As an educator, I have to be careful not to hold that as the 10. Then everybody else is going to fall under that when I realize that for this particular learner, just listing five things that they could find in their dorm, that's their 10.

[19:36] I think just paying attention to the type of activities that you ask from your students where they are able to show their strengths is helpful to solve those problems of, how do I reach everyone without losing this over here?

**Stacey**:  [19:53] I love that so much. Also, earlier, you mentioned the oral proficiency interview and the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. Listing five things that would be in your typical dorm room is an amazing novice mid task. I'm really proud of my novice mids if they can do that.

[20:10] I do have some first semester students who are writing whole essays already. One more question I'm going to ask, I have had students in my classroom who did not have accommodations mandated through the student access office, but who were obviously suffering with some of the things that I'm doing in my classroom.

[20:31] Do you have advice for teachers at whatever level who are not working within an IEP system? What are some things I can start doing now to try to help students who are obviously not on the same page and I'm not reaching? Any good ideas for me?

**Dr. Glosson**:  [20:51] One of the things that I know sometimes doesn't work, and does at other times, is asking the student what's best for them. Sometimes they can articulate that very well, and other times they don't know how to tell you what's best for them. I've had success and I've also had failures with that.

[21:09] Sometimes you have to give some a pre‑assessment or an informal to find out what's going on, or just do an interview with the student. Maybe say, "OK, tell me how you studied?" I do that a lot. "Tell me how you studied for this test?" They'll say, "I failed this test and I don't know what to do. I studied for five hours." "Give me more."

**Stacey**:  [21:31] What does study mean?"

**Dr. Glosson**:  [21:32] Give me more." "Oh well, look at this. I made all these note cards." "Then what did you do?" You know what I mean? Digging a little bit, kind of being a detective on it and investigating with the learner helps me, but I'm at the college level.

**Cheyenne**:  [21:45] Something we did during our case study was when I took up their tests, I asked them, "Your name and date, all that in the paper, but then also write down how you studied and what you wished I would've done differently while we were teaching."

[21:59] My students had a range of ability of being able to articulate what they needed, what it did, especially when I gave them leading questions like, "This time, this week, we did a little bit of lecture. I gave you guys guided notes. We did an activity. Which of those things do you wish I would've done more, and which one of those things just frustrated you more than it did help you?"

[22:19] That type every time we took a quiz, which was constantly. I was constantly assessing them to make sure that I was doing right and seeing how different interventions that I have researched were actually working and were being implemented in our classroom by getting that type of constant feedback from your students.

[22:36] A lot of times ‑‑ this is something that a lot of teachers run into, especially content specialists ‑‑ we think very highly of ourselves. We are very proud of our content. We're very proud of being the expert on what we do.

[22:50] The students don't care how smart you are. They don't care how much you know. They just care that you are able to deliver it to them in a way. A lot of times, we get stuck in our ways. "Well, this works. My class is rigorous, and I want to do things like I've always done it."

**Stacey**:  [23:06] The reading work kills me.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [23:07] Me too.

**Cheyenne**:  [23:07] Yes. Sometimes, it's rigorous for them to just sit through and listen to you talk for that long. Sometimes, it's rigorous for them to learn those 10 vocabulary words. Not being afraid to ask your students, "Is this helpful, or would you rather me do this differently," is a lesson in humility and efficacy for a lot of us.

**Stacey**:  [23:28] That's wonderful. Any closing thoughts?

**Dr. Glosson**:  [23:32] Everyone can learn a language. We're humans. We were created to communicate. You just have to figure out how.

**Cheyenne**:  [23:40] It's important to consider that all of the benefits of learning a foreign language that we preach to ourselves and each other are just as important, if not doubly so, for students with disabilities whose outcomes post‑secondary are negative at best.

**Stacey**:  [23:59] That's genuinely fantastic. If learning language is such a wonderful, life‑changing benefit, why would we keep it from some of our most vulnerable citizens? Why wouldn't we empower with the same intercultural competence and love of the world that we want all of our students to have? How about that? All right. Thank you so much for taking the time.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [24:25] Oh, thank you.

**Cheyenne**:  [24:26] Thank you.

**Stacey**:  [24:27] I know you're exhausted. I really appreciate it.

**Dr. Glosson**:  [24:30] Thanks for asking.

[24:31] [background music]

**Announcer**:  [24:31] If you have questions or comments related to today's episode, we would love to hear from you. You can reach out to us multiple ways. All of them are available at our website, weteachlang.com/contact. You can also find us on Facebook and Twitter @weteachlang.

[24:49] We would like to say a very special thank you to the PEARLL Foreign Language Resource Center for partnering with us to provide transcripts and other professional development resources related to the episodes. You can learn more about PEARLL by going to pearll.nflc.umd.edu. Thanks so much for listening. Buh‑bye.

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