

1

Approaches to learning and teaching Modern Foreign Languages

This series of books is the result of close collaboration between Cambridge University Press and Cambridge Assessment International Education, both departments of the University of Cambridge. The books are intended as a companion guide for teachers, to supplement your learning and provide you with extra resources for the lessons you are planning. Their focus is deliberately not syllabus-specific, although occasional reference has been made to programmes and qualifications. We want to invite you to set aside for a while assessment objectives and grading, and take the opportunity instead to look in more depth at how you teach your subject and how you motivate and engage with your students.

The themes presented in these books are informed by evidence-based research into what works to improve students' learning and pedagogical best practices. To ensure that these books are first and foremost practical resources, we have chosen not to include too many academic references, but we have provided some suggestions for further reading.

We have further enhanced the books by asking the authors to create accompanying lesson ideas. These are described in the text and can be found in a dedicated space online. We hope the books will become a dynamic and valid representation of what is happening now in learning and teaching in the context in which you work.

Our organisations also offer a wide range of professional development opportunities for teachers. These range from syllabus- and topic-specific workshops and large-scale conferences to suites of accredited qualifications for teachers and school leaders. Our aim is to provide you with valuable support, to build communities and networks, and to help you both enrich your own teaching methodology and evaluate its impact on your students.

Each of the books in this series follows a similar structure. In the third chapter, we have asked our authors to consider the essential elements of their subject, the main concepts that might be covered in a school curriculum, and why these are important. The next chapters give you a brief guide on how to interpret a syllabus or subject guide, and how to plan a programme of study. The authors will encourage you to think too about what is not contained in a syllabus and how you can pass on your own passion for the subject you teach.

Introduction to the series by the editors

The main body of the text takes you through those aspects of learning and teaching which are widely recognised as important. We would like to stress that there is no single recipe for excellent teaching, and that different schools, operating in different countries and cultures, will have strong traditions that should be respected. There is a growing consensus, however, about some important practices and approaches that need to be adopted if students are going to fulfil their potential and be prepared for modern life.

In the common introduction to each of these chapters, we look at what the research says and the benefits and challenges of particular approaches. Each author then focuses on how to translate theory into practice in the context of their subject, offering practical lesson ideas and teacher tips. These chapters are not mutually exclusive but can be read independently of each other and in whichever order suits you best. They form a coherent whole but are presented in such a way that you can dip into the book when and where it is most convenient for you to do so.

The final two chapters are common to all the books in this series and are not written by the subject authors. After the subject context chapters, we include guidance on how to reflect on your teaching and some avenues you might explore to develop your own professional learning. Schools and educational organisations are increasingly interested in the impact that classroom practice has on student outcomes. We have therefore included an exploration of this topic and some practical advice on how to evaluate the success of the learning opportunities you are providing for your students.

We hope you find these books accessible and useful. We have tried to make them conversational in tone so you feel we are sharing good practice rather than directing it. Above all, we hope that the books will inspire you and enable you to think in more depth about how you teach and how your students learn.

Paul Ellis and Lauren Harris

Series Editors

2

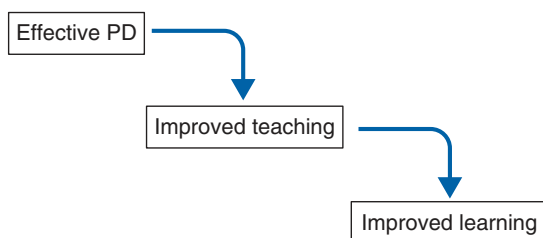
Purpose and context

Purpose and context

International research into educational effectiveness tells us that student achievement is influenced most by what teachers do in classrooms. In a world of rankings and league tables we tend to notice performance, not preparation, yet the product of education is more than just examinations and certification. Education is also about the formation of effective learning habits that are crucial for success within and beyond the taught curriculum.

The purpose of this series of books is to inspire you as a teacher to reflect on your practice, try new approaches and better understand how to help your students learn. We aim to help you develop your teaching so that your students are prepared for the next level of their education as well as life in the modern world.

This book will encourage you to examine the processes of learning and teaching, not just the outcomes. We will explore a variety of teaching strategies to enable you to select which is most appropriate for your students and the context in which you teach. When you are making your choice, involve your students: all the ideas presented in this book will work best if you engage your students, listen to what they have to say, and consistently evaluate their needs.



Cognitive psychologists, coaches and sports writers have noted how the aggregation of small changes can lead to success at the highest level. As teachers, we can help our students make marginal gains by guiding them in their learning, encouraging them to think and talk about how they are learning, and giving them the tools to monitor their success. If you take care of the learning, the performance will take care of itself.

When approaching an activity for the first time, or revisiting an area of learning, ask yourself if your students know how to:

- approach a new task and plan which strategies they will use
- monitor their progress and adapt their approach if necessary
- look back and reflect on how well they did and what they might do differently next time.

2

Approaches to learning and teaching Modern Foreign Languages

Effective students understand that learning is an active process. We need to challenge and stretch our students and enable them to interrogate, analyse and evaluate what they see and hear. Consider whether your students:

- challenge assumptions and ask questions
- try new ideas and take intellectual risks
- devise strategies to overcome any barriers to their learning that they encounter.

As we discuss in Chapter 6 **Active learning** and Chapter 8 **Metacognition**, it is our role as teachers to encourage these practices with our students so that they become established routines. We can help students review their own progress as well as getting a snapshot ourselves of how far they are progressing by using some of the methods we explore in Chapter 7 on **Assessment for Learning**.

Students often view the subject lessons they are attending as separate from each other, but they can gain a great deal if we encourage them to take a more holistic appreciation of what they are learning. This requires not only understanding how various concepts in a subject fit together, but also how to make connections between different areas of knowledge and how to transfer skills from one discipline to another. As our students successfully integrate disciplinary knowledge, they are better able to solve complex problems, generate new ideas and interpret the world around them.

In order for students to construct an understanding of the world and their significance in it, we need to lead students into thinking habitually about why a topic is important on a personal, local and global scale. Do they realise the implications of what they are learning and what they do with their knowledge and skills, not only for themselves but also for their neighbours and the wider world? To what extent can they recognise and express their own perspective as well as the perspectives of others? We will consider how to foster local and global awareness, as well as personal and social responsibility, in Chapter 11 on **Global thinking**.

As part of the learning process, some students will discover barriers to their learning: we need to recognise these and help students to overcome them. Even students who regularly meet success face their own challenges. We have all experienced barriers to our own learning at some point in our lives and should be able as teachers to empathise and share our own methods for dealing with these.

Purpose and context

In Chapter 9 **Inclusive education** we discuss how to make learning accessible for everyone and how to ensure that all students receive the instruction and support they need to succeed as students.

Alongside a greater understanding of what works in education and why, we (as teachers) can also seek to improve how we teach and expand the tools we have at our disposal. For this reason, we have included Chapter 10 **Teaching with digital technologies**, discussing what this means for our classrooms and for us as teachers. Institutes of higher education and employers want to work with students who are effective communicators and who are information literate. Technology brings both advantages and challenges and we invite you to reflect on how to use it appropriately.

This book has been written to help you think harder about the impact of your teaching on your students' learning. It is up to you to set an example for your students and to provide them with opportunities to celebrate success, learn from failure and, ultimately, to succeed.

We hope you will share what you gain from this book with other teachers and that you will be inspired by the ideas that are presented here. We hope that you will encourage your school leaders to foster a positive environment that allows both you and your students to meet with success and to learn from mistakes when success is not immediate. We hope too that this book can help in the creation and continuation of a culture where learning and teaching are valued and through which we can discover together what works best for each and every one of our students.

3

The nature of the subject

The nature of the subject

What are we talking about?

Modern Foreign Languages are three words that thrill. We're talking about something new, something exotic. We're talking code. We're talking mystery. We're trying to make sense of what we experience through different words. Modern Foreign Languages give us new windows onto the world, new tools, new ways of communicating, a new means of being us.

Modern Foreign Languages are evolving, flexible, something to play with. There are no boundaries to how much we can learn about them or how we can use them. We can create and innovate. We can invent phrases in contexts that have never previously existed. We can transform through speaking and writing how we see and describe what is around us.

In this book, we are going to talk with passion about Modern Foreign Languages and about how to develop that passion in our students. We are going to introduce you to ideas and approaches to help you confirm your love of languages, to reconnect with the subject you chose to teach, and to pass this onto the next generation.

What are we focusing on?

This book is about the learning and teaching of languages that are living and spoken today. It is about learning and teaching languages that are not native to your students and not normally used as the language of instruction. Depending on where you live, this might simply be any of the 6000-plus languages in the world!

We will be focusing on Modern Foreign Languages that are commonly taught in schools, but the approaches we will be looking at could also be applied to the teaching of other languages. The language you are teaching is most likely to be that of a nearby country or a language that is considered useful for commerce. Alternatively, it may be important for cultural or historic reasons.

3

Approaches to learning and teaching Modern Foreign Languages

We are not, however, looking at the teaching of English here. There's another book in this series specifically about that: *Approaches to Learning and Teaching English as a Second Language*.

Why study Modern Foreign Languages?

We've just given you a few ideas, but before we go any further, it is time for you to have a think. Take a moment or two to write down your initial reflections on each of these two questions:

- 1 *What inspired you to study another language?*
- 2 *What inspires your students to study another language?*

Did your answers to the first question differ much from your answers to the second question? If so, why do you think that was? Was your answer: 'Because they have to'?

Now let's consider a third question:

- 3 *Why do some students not study another language?*

Did your answers to the third question make you think of other questions? How do you feel about students in your school who choose not to, or who are not allowed to, start or continue their study of another language? What reasons – good or bad – might there be?

Teacher Tip

Ask your colleagues and your students the same questions, especially when decisions are being made in your school about curriculum options or which examination subjects to take.

Many people choose to study another language because someone else inspired them to do so. A family member or friend may have encouraged them or, quite likely, it will have been their teacher. A colleague told me that the main reason he chose to study languages

The nature of the subject

was because a teacher once provided constructive comments on an essay he wrote that were longer than the essay itself! The attitude of a teacher can make such a difference to the attitude of a student.

You can broaden your prospects of employment if you know another language. You might be able to work in another country or negotiate more easily with foreign business partners. When gaining qualifications that lead to eventual employment, you may want to study through another language or access materials only available in that language. This is often true of those with an interest in science, but it might also be, for example, a musicologist researching the context of a foreign composer.

Other people choose to study languages because it broadens their horizons. If you can communicate in another language, you can access a wider variety of materials and situations. This might be for leisure purposes to help with your basic needs when visiting a country where that language is spoken. It might be for cultural purposes so that you can, for example, read literature or understand lyrics in another language.

Some people choose to study another language simply because they discover they are good at it. Other people become linguists because it sets them apart, particularly in countries where few people continue their study of languages to a high level. Still others like the intellectual and cognitive challenge. There are also some people who seek to reinvent themselves and assume a different personality when communicating in another language.

Various studies suggest that learning languages is good for your brain and for your memory. It can boost your capacity to switch your attention fluently between projects and ideas; it can help you see new and different ways of doing things; and it can enable you to find nuances in what you or others are saying. It can make your brain more malleable and might even contribute to your chances of delaying the onset of dementia later in life.

If you consider any list of what are sometimes referred to as 21st-century skills, you will notice that linguists are particularly well disposed to ticking the vast majority of them. We are open-minded, collaborative and literate in a variety of ways. Linguists are also more likely to be tolerant and understanding, able to see other perspectives, and inclined to bring people together. Linguists usually have a positive attitude to other countries and cultures and are able to integrate.