Teaching Languages to Adolescent Learners

Teaching languages to adolescents can be a real struggle . . . but hopefully a delight! What works? What doesn’t work? This book provides a reader-friendly overview on teaching modern languages to adolescents (Years 7–13). Each chapter takes an aspect of language teaching and learning, and explains the underlying theory of instructed language acquisition and its application through examples from real language classrooms. The book explores teachers’ practices and the reasoning behind their pedagogic choices through the voices of both the teachers themselves and their students. At the same time, it highlights the needs of the adolescent language learner and makes the case that adolescence is a prime time for language learning. Written in an accessible, engaging way, yet comprehensive in its scope, this will be essential reading for language teachers wishing to integrate cutting-edge research into their teaching.

Rosemary Erlam comes from a background of teaching French to adolescents. She has worked with in-service teachers of a range of modern foreign languages, exploring with them how they might put second language acquisition theory into practice in their classrooms. She has published widely in a range of leading international journals.

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From Theory to Practice

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Contents

List of Figures   page vi
List of Tables    vii
Preface            ix

1 The Adolescent Language Learner: Setting the Scene     1
2 Fostering an Inclusive Language Classroom       19
3 Input: Creating a Language-Rich Learning Environment  44
4 Opportunities for Language Output               64
5 Encouraging a Focus on Language Form            89
6 A Place for Practice in the Language Classroom   113
7 Digital Media in the Language Classroom         135
8 Conclusion                                        158

Appendix                168
References             169
Index                  185
Figures

1.1 Ten indicators of a positive learning environment (based on Hattie, 2012)  
1.2 Characteristics of a successful learning environment (based on Philp and Kos, 2017; commissioned by Cambridge University Press)  
1.3 Effects of goal structures on peer relationships among early adolescents (Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008)  
1.4 Summary of features of environmental complexity (adapted from Shernoff et al., 2017)  
2.1 Motivation and the language learner  
2.2 Engagement and the classroom learner  
4.1 The story of Bacinda  
4.2 Scaffolding (A summary construct of Scaffolding based on van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010)  
5.1 Worksheet from Year 11 Japanese classroom  
5.2 Student’s written version of the rule for ‘before’ sentences  
5.3 A card with the katakana symbol for ‘ku’  
5.4 Japanese classifying exercise  
5.5 Word cards and excerpt of a student’s work from classification exercise (Figure 5.4)  
5.6 Testing verb conjugations  
5.7 The ‘Before sentences’ game  
5.8 Sentence completion exercise  
5.9 Structured output/guided sentence exercise  
6.1 The processes of skill acquisition theory  
6.2 The ‘snake game’  
7.1 Enhancement level of SAMR model (Puentedura, 2006)  
7.2 Transformation level of SAMR model (Puentedura, 2006)  
7.3 Year 11 students playing a digital quiz on the topic of ‘At the Doctor’s’  
7.4 Example slide from preposition challenge  
8.1 Birthdays of the children in the class
## Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Aspects of lessons that students reported enjoying</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Class activities/games students reported enjoying</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Individual needs of students</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Implementing formative assessment in the classroom</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Digital competency subskills for the teacher (Redecker &amp; Punie, 2017, p. 16)</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Principles of instructed second language acquisition (SLA) (Ellis, 2005)</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

In our work, we are often inspired by the ways in which language teachers put second language acquisition theory into practice in their classrooms. So we decided to write a book that would showcase the brilliant work of modern language teachers across a range of instructional contexts. We chose instructional contexts that have two important features in common: they are high/secondary schools and the learners are adolescents. This is because a second main aim of this book is to highlight the needs of the adolescent language learner. We believe that adolescence is a prime time for language learning.

The book is written specifically for those involved in or interested in the teaching and learning of modern languages (also referred to as foreign languages), whether teachers, teacher-trainers, or students. In each chapter, we highlight theory relating to a specific aspect or aspects of language teaching and learning, drawing from both education and applied linguistics. We illustrate how this theory translates into good classroom practice using examples from naturalistic classroom contexts and from teachers who are very experienced. These examples are drawn from classroom observation and recordings, as well as teacher and student interviews. The students, from Years 7 to 13, ages 12 to 18, are all in high school and studying languages such as English, French, Spanish, Chinese, German, and Japanese, taught in a variety of contexts. We draw attention to how the instruction we observed is particularly suited to the needs of the adolescent language learner. We hope that you enjoy the stories of the teachers and students in this book and seeing excellent examples of theory in practice. We hope that these will inspire you as they have us, and that they will encourage you to reflect and perhaps even try out new ideas, whether you are a language teacher or learner!