Conclusion

We have made, we hope, a strong argument throughout this book for the value of teaching languages to adolescents. We, ourselves, learnt at least one foreign language as adolescents, and for us, these experiences contributed to shaping the professional directions that our lives took! Having recounted the stories and expertise of the teachers in this book, we add below brief accounts of our own adolescent experiences of learning languages (we think that it is largely coincidental that we all learnt French!). As you read about our language learning experiences and the reasons we give for our success, see if you can recognise some of the themes that run through this book.

I started learning French and Latin at High School when I was 13. They quickly became my favourite subjects. Looking back, I think that I had quite an analytical mind as I enjoyed working out the structure and grammar of these languages, however my French teacher never seemed hundred per cent happy with my accent. But, more importantly, I had teachers who believed in me and had high expectations of my ability to achieve. My French teacher was unusual perhaps, for the times, because he gave us opportunities to speak French, and, realising that I could, was very empowering. Although it seemed impossible at the time, I dreamed of going to France!
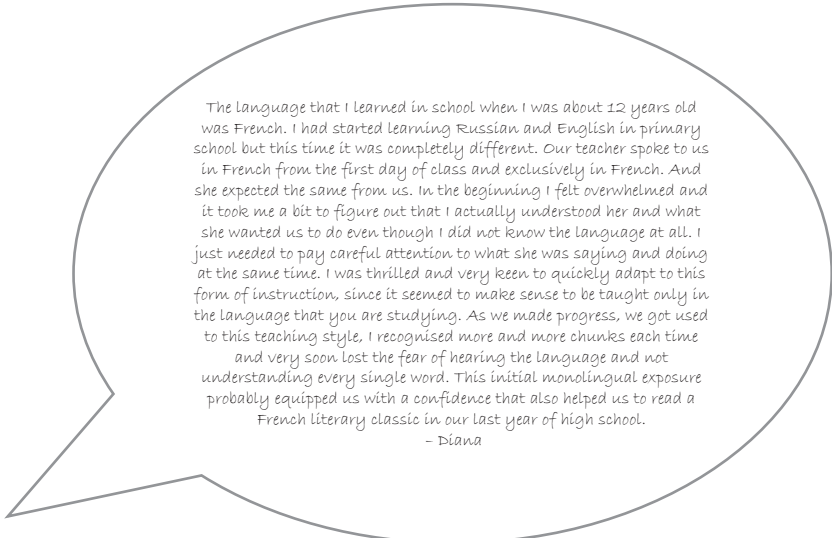– Rosemary

Rosemary highlights how her teachers had high expectations for her achievement, an example of how a classroom needs to provide *environmental challenge*, along with, of course, *support* (Shernoff et al., 2017). She also refers to the importance of having opportunities to speak French, that is, produce *output*, and to how motivating the experience of success was for her. She had an image of an

'*ideal L2 self*' (Dörnyei, 2005), that is, that one day she would speak French in France. This was very motivating for her. Interestingly, in terms of *language aptitude*, she seems to think that she may have had good '*language analytic ability*' because she enjoyed seeing the patterns in languages (an example of how adolescents develop metalinguistic awareness). At the same time, she did not feel so confident in her ability to 'sound' French. However, she still made good progress! (Here and below, we italicise some of the main terms and concepts we have written about elsewhere.)

> I learnt French at High School. In our last 2 years of school. I had a very enthusiastic teacher, Beverly, who keenly tried out the latest methods in language teaching at the time – we did oral pair work, we listened to audio recordings of French, she invited her French speaker friends so we could try talking and listening to a native speaker. Her approach to learning included implicit learning of how French worked: she would give us sentences and we had to work out the meaning and the grammar. When my family moved to another country in my final year, my experience was totally different. On my first day in French, the students were writing a text dictated by the teacher and my homework consisted of long word lists to be memorised. Next day they wrote two paragraphs, carefully written with correct grammar. I had no formal grammar, no idea of what past historic or subjunctive were but I could write stories pages long (with many errors). The combination of my two experiences meant that in the end I was able to write stories that were both long and correct!
> – Jenefer

Jenefer recounts two very different experiences, in two different schools with two different teachers. Her first teacher, Beverly, gave her lots of opportunities to hear language *input* and to produce language *output* in interaction with classmates. There was less of a *focus on form* and the approach was *inductive*, that is, they had to work grammar patterns out for themselves. The second school was a shock because the approach was so different. This time, the primary emphasis seemed to be on the teaching of *language formS* (Long, 1991), that is, on the *explicit* teaching of vocabulary and grammar. Being creative with language and using it *communicatively* was less important than writing accurately. Nevertheless, it is very interesting to note that Jenefer's overall conclusion is that each approach had some merit and contributed to her learning. We will return, below, to the notion of how ideas about successful language teaching have changed and evolved over time.

> The language that I learned in school when I was about 12 years old was French. I had started learning Russian and English in primary school but this time it was completely different. Our teacher spoke to us in French from the first day of class and exclusively in French. And she expected the same from us. In the beginning I felt overwhelmed and it took me a bit to figure out that I actually understood her and what she wanted us to do even though I did not know the language at all. I just needed to pay careful attention to what she was saying and doing at the same time. I was thrilled and very keen to quickly adapt to this form of instruction, since it seemed to make sense to be taught only in the language that you are studying. As we made progress, we got used to this teaching style, I recognised more and more chunks each time and very soon lost the fear of hearing the language and not understanding every single word. This initial monolingual exposure probably equipped us with a confidence that also helped us to read a French literary classic in our last year of high school.
> – Diana

Diana had a teacher whose approach seems to be the most progressive of the three, in that she realised just how powerful it is to expose learners to large amounts of language *input*. She literally submerged the learners in the language, at the same time obviously being able to ensure that students could understand what they heard. Notice that Diana mentions how she needed to *attend* very carefully to this input and work to decipher it. This is a very good example of Krashen's (1985) Input + 1, that is, language that is within the learner's reach but which they have to work at to understand. Diana mentions the insecurity that she initially felt (something that adolescents often struggle with), but this approach also helped her overcome this, not least because she realised how much progress she was making, and she was also able to see the reason for why the teacher taught as she did.

Changes in Approaches to Language Teaching

Our respective language learning experiences (about which we give only brief information here) represent, to some extent, different approaches to language teaching. These approaches are reflective of certain time periods and sets of beliefs about language learning that characterised those time periods. The way that beliefs about what constitutes effective language teaching have changed is highlighted in a conversation Rosemary had with a friend. Lee described the experience of her 12-year-old son, Ben, beginning to learn another language; in this case, it was French again! What was

interesting about this conversation was that the boy's mother, Lee, described, with an element of mistrust, how different the modern methods of teaching seemed to be. Different, that was, to her experience of learning back in the 1970s. She spoke with some enthusiasm of the memories of the series of books she had: one for grammar, one for vocabulary, another for reading, and so on. This conversation with Lee highlights, indeed, just how much language teaching has changed and how potentially confusing and, perhaps, even worrying that can be for parents and for non-experts. The reason for this, of course, is that understanding about learning another language, that is, the field of second language acquisition (SLA) has grown enormously during recent times. With that understanding has come a growing awareness of what effective language teaching should 'look like' in terms of classroom practice. This understanding is informed by a huge research literature in the field of second language learning and teaching. In writing this book, we drew, of course, on this research evidence. We were helped enormously by one document, written by an eminent scholar in the field, Distinguished Professor Rod Ellis.

In 2005, the Ministry of Education in New Zealand asked Ellis to write a synthesis from the research literature of theory and factors underlying the effective instruction of foreign languages in the classroom context. This report, entitled, *Instructed Second Language Acquisition: A Literature Review*, coincided with the development of a new curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), and informed the professional development of language teachers (Erlam, 2008). Ellis (2005) came up with ten principles, which he gleaned from a very extensive research literature investigating what makes for effective language teaching in classroom contexts. We list them in Table 8.1. Ellis was very careful to say that teachers needed to see these principles as provisional and to try them out in their own teaching contexts. We would endorse that. Good teachers are continually trying out and modifying understanding about language teaching in relation to their own learners and classroom contexts. Ellis's ten principles informed the writing of this book and our view of what successful language teaching would 'look like' in the language classroom. As you read them, see if you can make links to themes that you have encountered in other chapters.

If we look at these principles, which represent common understanding from second language acquisition literature about what constitutes effective language teaching/learning, we can see how they might account for some of the differences between the experiences that adolescent language learners may have today, and those their parents and/or their grandparents may have had. We present a number of scenarios below of an activity as it might have played out in a 'conventional' classroom

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Table 8.1 Principles of instructed second language acquisition (SLA)

1. Instruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence.
2. Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning.
3. Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form.
4. Instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge.
5. Instruction needs to take into account learners' 'built-in syllabus'.
6. Successful instructed language learning requires extensive L2 input.
7. Successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output.
8. The opportunity to interact in the L2 is central to developing L2 proficiency.
9. Instruction needs to take account of individual differences in learners.
10. In assessing learners' L2 proficiency it is important to examine free as well as controlled production.

(Ellis, 2005)

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and of how it might be taught, as informed by understanding of good principles of language teaching and learning. As you read each scenario, see if you can identify how what we describe in the more progressive classroom may constitute 'language teaching' practice which could lead to opportunities for learning. Then you might like to read our comment and see how we establish links with the themes that we have written about in this book (we put key words in italics).

Scenario 1

The students are working through a unit on clothing. As part of this they have been learning the vocabulary and language to talk about clothes they might wear.

In the conventional classroom	In the more progressive classroom
They describe to each other the clothes that they are wearing or talk/write about clothes in pictures they are given.	They have a fashion parade at the end of their unit on clothing, as a teacher describes in East (2012). They describe, in the target language, what their classmates are wearing as they walk down the fashion runway.

Our comment: Students in the progressive classroom may have to *push their output* to be able to use the type of language that the fashion world uses for describing clothes. Their language use will be more *meaningful* and *authentic* in

that it relates to the way language is used in the real world. This task might be more *motivating*.

Scenario 2

The students are working on a unit that focuses on animals. They are also learning to make comparisons such as X is shorter than Y, and so on.

In the conventional classroom

Students do exercises to practise comparisons. Later, they write a description of different animals. The teacher puts these descriptions on the wall, or pastes them into a book.

In the more progressive classroom

One teacher, Elizabeth, gave her students riddles where they had to work out what animal she was describing. In these riddles she made comparisons (e.g. I am smaller than an elephant but bigger than a dog). She then got the students to notice the comparative forms in the target language and she explained them. When her students had worked to solve a number of her riddles, she got them to write riddles for each other. They had to check that they used the comparative forms correctly before they could read these out in class and get their classmates to guess them (Erlam, 2013).

Our comment: Elizabeth first gave her students lots of aural language *input*, before she got them to produce language *output*. She introduced the language focus (comparatives) in a *meaningful* context, and got students to *notice* these before giving *explicit instruction* about them. Then she got students to produce written *output*. They had to *pay attention* to the comparative forms to make sure they were correct. Finally, when the riddles were ready to be read out, students had to listen (they got additional *input* from listening to each other) in order to work out the riddles.

Scenario 3

Beginner learners have been learning numbers and months; they are able to say when their birthday is.

In the conventional classroom

They have to tell a classmate when their birthday is.

In the more progressive classroom

One teacher of Samoan, Eleanor, told the class that they were going to conduct a survey to find out what was the most popular month for birthdays. Each student had to ask every other student in the class when their birthday was, and to keep a record of this information, so that they could establish the month with most birthdays. At the end of the lesson the class worked together to make a graph to depict what they had established (see Figure 8.1) – that May had the most birthdays!

Our comment: Students in Eleanor's class were likely to be *motivated* to have a real purpose to ask their peers about their birthdays. In completing this task, the students had a lot of opportunity to *interact* with each other and to develop *fluency* in Samoan as they *practised* the same language forms over and over again. Most importantly, they were using the language to *communicate* with each other and to find out something they didn't know (when each other's birthdays were).

Scenario 4

The class topic has been 'parties' and the teacher would like the students to use the language and vocabulary they have encountered.

In the conventional classroom	In the more progressive classroom
Students act out a role play of their 'party' experience that the teacher has given them.	A teacher of Japanese put students into pairs or small groups to plan a party together. They had to discuss and agree on the type of music and food they would like, when and where it would be held, etc.

Our comment: This task allowed students the *autonomy* to use their own language and to decide what sort of party they wanted! It also allowed them to *push their language output*, to ask each other or the teacher for words and expressions they might not know. As they *interacted* in the target language together, they would have had opportunities to learn (e.g. *negotiate meaning*
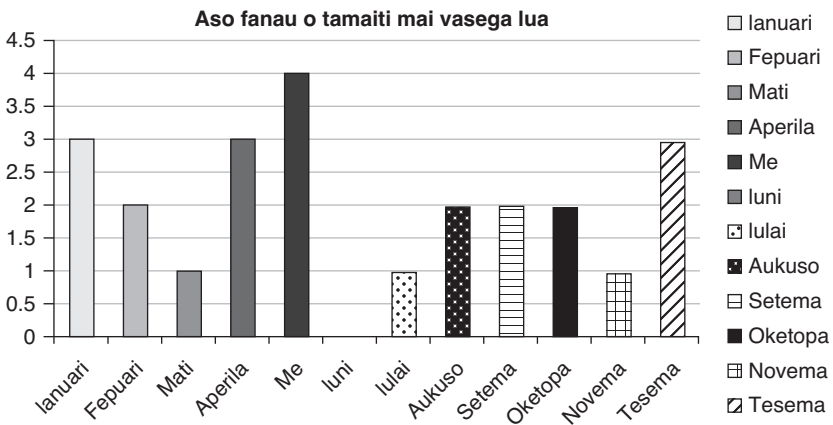

Figure 8.1 Birthdays of the children in the class

together, give each other *corrective feedback* etc.) that they might not have had in just acting out a scripted role play.

In considering all these scenarios, it is too simple to say that the traditional classroom 'had it all wrong' and that the more modern classroom is the only one that will lead to learner success. After all, some of our own language learning experiences typified approaches that were more characteristic of the traditional classroom, and yet we have all been successful in our language learning. Jenefer's story is particularly interesting because she seems to have had experiences that were very contrasting and the differences between the two classrooms she describes is one that stands out to her years later. In the first classroom, she had opportunities to hear a lot of language input, to use it in interacting with her classmates and to challenge herself to produce language output as she wrote long stories in French. If we look once again at Nation's four strands, it would seem, from what Jenefer says about what she remembers, that this first classroom learning experience incorporated strands 1, 2, and 4. Jenefer was fortunate to be able to learn this way because research has demonstrated consistently that students need to have extensive exposure to meaningful language input and opportunities to produce language output for communicative purposes. This is especially true of adolescent learners, who wants authentic encounters with the language they are learning, the chance to test their language abilities in the real world. In the second classroom, Jenefer had more opportunity

> **Nation's Four Strands**
>
> Nation (2007) argues that a well-balanced language course should consist of four roughly equal strands:
>
> 1   Meaning-focused input
> 2   Meaning-focused output
> 3   Language-focused learning
> 4   Fluency development

to learn about language form, to gain explicit knowledge of the French language and to use that knowledge to produce language output which was more accurate. Here it would seem that there was a focus on strand 3.

In conventional classrooms, language-focused learning (strand 3), characterised by an explicit focus on the language, tended to dominate, and in some classrooms was the only or main aspect of language learning that the teacher considered important. This was unfortunate as students who learnt with this approach tended to do well at translation and reading in the target language, but often had difficulty using it communicatively. However, as Jenefer concludes, there is need for some emphasis

on 'language-focused' learning. Her second classroom experience made up for an imbalance in the previous experience, where explicit attention to language form was missing. In this book, we have very much argued for balance in terms of classroom focus. The challenge for the teacher today is to ensure attention to all of Nation's four strands, and not repeat some of the mistakes that different approaches to language teaching have taken in the past, that is, to overemphasise some and/or ignore others.

In this book, we have not endorsed any one approach to language teaching. However, as Ellis (2005) concludes from his literature review, one approach is particularly helpful for teachers who want to embody the ten principles in their classroom practice. This approach is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). We refer those who would like to know more about TBLT to an excellent book, *Doing Task-Based Teaching*, by Willis & Willis (2007). Many of the lessons that we have referred to, in our book, contain examples of tasks. However, we want our readers to see beyond the notion of task, or a particular approach to teaching, and to understand principles that account for good language teaching. It would be possible for a teacher to teach a task where none or few of the principles were in evidence, and conversely for a teacher to use an activity in a classroom which would not be classified as a task and yet which embodied the principles likely to promote successful acquisition.

In reading this book, you will have noticed that there is a chapter that does not directly 'speak to' Ellis's principles. This is Chapter 7, on digital media. We have included this chapter because we are excited by how this technology may open up opportunities (or affordances, the word we use in the chapter) for language learning. In other words, digital media may be used to help teachers find ways to successfully implement principles of language learning in their classrooms. As you look back over the four scenarios we described above, you might like to think of how this technology might also have been used to enhance the learning experiences for students.

In this conclusion, we have focused on Ellis's (2005) principles and we have referred again, as we do throughout the book, to Nation's (2007) strands. Neither of these, however, are enough to account for language learning success. Ellis (2005) was the first to say that the principles are not exhaustive. One crucial dimension that is lacking is understanding about the importance of establishing the type of classroom environment where students are willing to put in the effort that they need to make in order to learn. A language teacher might be an expert in implementing an approach which 'ticks all the boxes' in terms of the principles characteristic of the effective language classroom. However, if teachers are unable

to establish positive relationships with their students and to set up inclusive and supportive learning environments, their efforts will be in vain. We have drawn from the field of education to incorporate a focus on how language teachers might do this. In particular, we have explored those features of the classroom environment that are important for adolescent language learners. Once again, we think that adolescence is a prime time for language learning!

We would like to conclude this book by paying tribute to the teachers to whom we talked, and in particular to those who allowed us inside their classrooms to observe their language teaching practice. We consider that this was a tremendous privilege and we were humbled by their hard work, their dedication, and their professional expertise. In writing this book, we are excited to share with you the wonderful ways in which we saw them implementing the theory and principles of what we, as academics, know, from the literature, account for success in language learning, in particular for the adolescent learner.