The quiet revolution:

transformational languages research by teaching school alliances

Foreword by **Sir Jim Rose** and **Kathryn Board OBE**
Edited and with an introduction by **Richard Churches**

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The Languages Support Programme, funded by the DfE from January 2012 to March 2013, was set up with the explicit aim of enabling a selection of the newly created teaching school alliances to share their best practice in languages teaching or to develop practice across and beyond the schools in their alliances. One of our core beliefs was that practitioners working with children in schools every day were best placed to know what works and what does not, to explore ways of improving the teaching and learning of languages and to share them with other practitioners. By focusing on the teaching and learning of languages, we hoped also to be able to contribute more widely to sustainable, collaborative school working practices by supporting the development of a cadre of confident and reflective practitioners with sound subject knowledge, able to provide school-based leadership across phases and beyond the geographical constraints of their own school setting.

The inclusion of an action research element into our programme of work with teaching schools across the country was an important facet of a complex programme including a wide range of secondary and primary schools in many different settings and circumstances. Practitioners were free to choose the specific area they wished to focus on but were supported by us in defining the topic for research purposes and at various points in the implementation phase. A total of 29 schools out of the 34 teaching school alliances participating in the programme took part in this action research and we are delighted to be able to present the results of their work in this report. The issues which practitioners have chosen to explore relate directly to some of the concerns raised by Ofsted in their 2011 report on languages, including improving understanding of language structure, extended writing skills, the use of authentic materials and finding ways to get pupils to speak spontaneously in the target language.

Of particular note, in the accounts from the schools, is the enthusiasm and appetite for learning the target language shown by the pupils irrespective of their socio-economic circumstances. The fact that some primary schools in the alliances have already begun to teach a modern language successfully starting in Key Stage 1 testifies to the importance that they attach to the subject. From the standpoint of the pupils, continuity of high-quality language teaching starting as early as possible and sustained within and across key stages has obvious benefits which an alliance structure is well placed to secure.

We are sure that teachers across the country will be fascinated and inspired by the valuable research carried out by their peers and will want to try the approaches with their own pupils.

It has been an enormous privilege for our Languages Education team to have the opportunity to work with so many dedicated and experienced teachers of languages, all totally committed to improving the learning experience of their pupils and to developing themselves as reflective practitioners. We are grateful to them for their willingness to share their research as widely as possible and to the leadership teams within the teaching school alliances for endorsing and supporting the many school-based projects which have formed part of the Languages Support Programme for the past year. We believe that the action research projects featured in this report have initiated a new way of working which will continue beyond the availability of DfE funding.

Sir Jim Rose
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Introduction

New evidence about the significance of language learning

It is increasingly clear that language learning has a unique role in human learning generally. Recent evidence from neuroscience clearly shows that learning a second language changes the structure of the brain, even in adult learners. For example, in a study of conscripts to the interpreter academy of the Swedish military, Johan Mårtensson and colleagues (2012)[1] showed that foreign language learning in adults results in growth in language-related areas of the brain. These changes include increases in cortical thickness and hippocampal volume. Famously, similar changes in hippocampal volume happen in brains of London taxi drivers (Wollett et al., 2009).[2] For taxi drivers this is probably the result of the high memory demands of learning all of London's streets and having to access this in a variety of ways at will and under pressure. The relentless exercising of the relationship between working and long-term memory that this requires is arguably a requirement similar to the challenge of becoming able to use remembered language vocabulary spontaneously, grammatically and in fluent extended writing. Stein and colleagues (2012)[3] also found brain structure changes in English-speaking exchange students following five months abroad learning German, with changes in brain structure occurring regardless of the learners' final level of proficiency.

It is equally obvious to all of us who have ever begun to learn a new language that the process of learning a second language is one of the most challenging. This is true both in relation to memory demands and in relation to the affective-emotional climate that we find ourselves in when struggling to make ourselves understood for the first time in a particular context. Many of the research reports included in this present publication have sought to tackle both of these elements head-on by exploring ways to make pedagogy effective. In doing this, they offer a glimpse into the future and the potential that exploring effective language teaching could have for all areas of pedagogy.

The teacher-researcher revolution, teaching schools and the search for high-impact pedagogy

At the same time, there is a quiet yet profound revolution occurring in many of England's schools today. In part fuelled by well over a decade of focus on attainment, it is also the result of teachers and school leaders beginning to grasp the potential of the increased autonomy and clear and strong accountability that now characterise the English education system. Nowhere is this new spirit of dynamic professionalism clearer than in many of the teaching schools and teaching school alliances. At the heart of this change is a renewed and vigorous interest in research and an emerging forensic and deeply collaborative approach to improving learning (illustrated in this report, for example, by the extraordinary attention to detail in the work of Rachel Hawkes, Jane Driver and Lynne Gibbons).

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[1] Mårtensson, J., Eriksson, J., Bodammer, N.C., Lindgren, M., Johansson, M., Nyberg, L. and Lövdén, M. (2012) 'Growth of language-related brain areas after foreign language learning', *NeuroImage*: 63, 1: 240.

[2] Woollett, K., Spiers, H.J. and Maguire, E.A. (2009) 'Talent in the taxi: a model system for exploring expertise', *Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society B Biological Sciences*, 364, 1522: 1407-16.

[3] Stein, M., Federspiel, A., Koenig, T., Wirth, M., Strik, W., Wiest, R., Brandeis, D. and Dierks, T. (2012) 'Structural plasticity in the language system related to increased second language proficiency', *Cortex*, 48: 458-465.

However, this interest goes beyond the investigation of theory or context and has far more in common with the sort of pragmatic research and development that takes place in the commercial sector and in areas such as product development. This new spirit of enquiry cares less about theory and is far more concerned about outcomes. It asks one question:

How do we get the children to learn this at this moment and in this subject?

It looks to identify 'what works' in relation to learning, attainment and progress, and particularly those things that can easily be transferred to other teachers by the teachers who have researched and developed the approaches themselves. In this respect, it has much more in common with the pedagogy of the Far East and approaches such as lesson study in Japan.[4] Indeed, some of the research projects such as the one led by Claudia Hibberd (which improved boys' extended writing through an innovative approach to grouping in the classroom) are now moving forward into a lesson-study structure as a means of spreading and sharing the effective practice identified. Having visited and directly worked with the schools and teachers represented in this publication I have found it impossible not to be inspired by the work that they have done and are continuing to do: in particular, the relentless questioning of their own practice that they have engaged in and their universal desire to share their learning, help other teachers and develop the technology of teaching.

The reports in this publication

The reports, written by the teachers themselves, tell the story of their research in their own words, in a deliberately first-person style. The 28 reports cover seven themes, although there is overlap between many of the areas:

- Grammar, writing and reading

- Memorisation and pronunciation improvement using body language and gesture in the classroom

- Motivation to learn a language, intercultural understanding, authentic materials and activity

- Special educational needs and less able learners

- Spontaneous talking strategies as the gateway to attainment

- Talk in the classroom, understanding the barriers to speaking

- Leadership of Modern Foreign Languages and whole-school approaches.

In particular, effective strategies for managing talk in the classroom frequently emerge as the gateway to attainment in listening and writing. Teachers were required to submit research proposals with clearly defined research questions and methods. The extent of evidence collection in many cases has been impressive (such as hours of video evidence collected by Sophie Lynch); evidence has included questionnaires, interviews, lesson observation, focus groups and the collection and scrutiny of classroom film clips.

Richard Churches, Principal Adviser for Research and Evidence Based Practice, CfBT Education Trust

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[4] For discussion, see Burghes, D. and Robinson, D. (2010) *Lesson study: enhancing mathematics teaching and learning*. Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

Theme 1
Grammar, writing and reading

1.1   Improving boys' writing skills at Key Stage 3 – how structured group work with mixed-ability and mixed-gender seating improves boys' attainment in grammar and extended writing – Claudia Hibberd

1.2   An analytical approach to improving GCSE reading skills – Lorraine George

1.3   How non-specialist primary school teachers can use stories and extended texts to enhance teacher and pupil confidence in reading and writing skills – Jane Cross

1.4   An exploration of difficulties experienced by students in writing at Key Stage 4 – Helen Vander Woerd

1.5   A mixed skills approach to reading and writing improves confidence – Fiona Colley

1.6   The benefits of reflective practice in identifying and addressing differences between boys' and girls' approaches to Modern Foreign Languages in Year 7, in order to enhance grammatical knowledge, writing and reading – Sue Trusler

1.1 Improving boys' writing skills at Key Stage 3 – how structured group work with mixed-ability and mixed-gender seating improves boys' attainment in grammar and extended writing

Claudia Hibberd, Brooke Weston Academy, Northamptonshire
Brooke Weston Academy Teaching School Alliance

Overview

In the past, our GCSE results for writing and speaking have resulted in an even distribution between boys and girls. The recent shift towards the EBacc and the increased uptake of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) at GCSE have resulted in a wider range of attainment in the classroom. Instead of teaching the middle/top ability range, we are now encouraging weaker students also to gain their GCSE in a language, be it Spanish, German or French. In the past few years, we have started to notice that a significant gender gap has begun to arise in French; less so in German and Spanish. If there are true differences between the attainments of boys and girls, this begs an important question:

How can teachers tackle this gap and specifically, how can we encourage boys to produce longer and more detailed pieces of work, in both a spoken and a written context?

The aims of this research project, therefore, were to:

- test out new intervention strategies to improve the skills required in writing and speaking

- measure their impact in a summative assessment

- create intervention strategies to improve boys' performance.

Context

Brooke Weston is a high-achieving secondary academy in Northamptonshire with an ethos of high expectation and the results to match. Students and staff work from 08.15 to 17.00 hours with a term structure of eight weeks on, two weeks off and a month-long summer break. Students and staff eat, work and learn alongside each other. For example, there is no staff room or playtimes and the emphasis is on fostering mutual respect in a safe and caring environment. Its success has meant that Brooke Weston is the model for sister academies in Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire. As Brooke Weston has gained Teaching School status, the school is now equipped with video rooms, allowing both new and experienced teachers to film themselves in the classroom.

I am interested in gender divide and plan to focus my MA in Leadership and Learning on this subject. I am convinced that differences in gender are caused by nurture and not nature and that we can do something about improving boys' communication skills in MFL and even the wider curriculum.

Methodology

The main starting point was the regular filming and analysis of lessons. In the allocated classroom three cameras and sound recorders were installed.

A range of methods was trialled and tested; the first was to change the seating plan from similar-ability tables to boy-girl. In the class there were 23 students: 10 boys and 13 girls. When the ability of the students was compared, the girls were clearly stronger. When their progress towards target grade was compared, none of the boys were overachieving their target grade: six were on target and four were under target. Of the 13 girls, three were over target, nine were on target and one was under target. This group has been challenging for me in terms of moving the underachievers forward, the main issue arising when it comes to the active production of work and not merely the passive skills such as reading and listening.

Figure 1.1.1: **Each student's aspirational and minimum target grade**

Girl 1	A	B		Boy 1	A	B
Girl 2	A	B		Boy 2	A	B
Girl 3	A	B		Boy 3	B	C
Girl 4	B	C		Boy 4	B	C
Girl 5	B	C		Boy 5	C	C
Girl 6	B	C		Boy 6	C	C
Girl 7	B	C		Boy 7	C	C
Girl 8	C	C		Boy 8	C	C
Girl 9	C	D		Boy 9	C	D
Girl 10	C	D		Boy 10	C	D
Girl 11	C	D				
Girl 12	C	E				
Girl 13	C	E				

For the first few lessons, I kept the ability range similar, just mixing students by gender. Thus, I paired Girl 1 with Boy 1 etc. I found this helped the underachievers, both female and male, for the mid-range and high-ability students. In those groups, the 'buddy system' allowed a good dialogue for learning and many conversations about the lessons, as can be seen on camera when watching the films. I found that the lower-ability boys, whom I intended to make the most difference to, were still drifting and easily distracted. Whilst completing work, there was still no real communication with their work buddy. Consequently, I changed the seating arrangement to mix high and low ability together whilst retaining the gender divide.

Figure 1.1.2: **Second seating plan by mixed gender and mixed ability**

Girl 4 / Boy 8	**Boy 9 / Girl 3**
Boy 4 / Girl 9 — Boy 5 / Girl 8	Boy 2 / Girl 11 — Boy 3 / Girl 10
Girl 5	**Boy 1 / Girl 12**
Girl 6 / Boy 7 — Girl 7 / Boy 6	Girl 1 / Girl 13 — Girl 2 / Boy 10
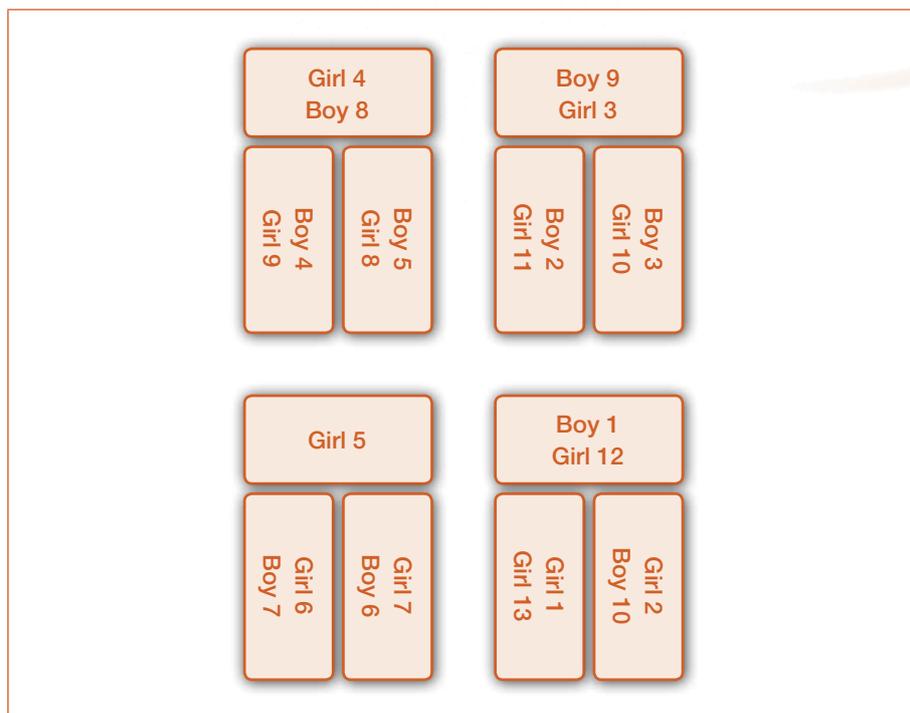
During carousel activities a range of tasks was offered to the class. These ranged from listening gap fills to vocabulary work using the dictionaries and group tasks on speaking. The wide range of exercises and pace of the lesson made a noticeable difference and the top-end students were pushing their buddies and double-checking on work more frequently. Another positive finding has been the amount of subject-specific language the students are actively applying in order to help each other. For example, I more frequently heard conversations where students have used terminology such as 'auxiliary' or 'past participle' when advising each other. Both the increased awareness and the ownership of their lesson were great success factors.

Student questionnaires and interviews

Students were frequently asked about their experiences and results. Students initially disliked being moved away from friends and out of their comfort zone but soon settled into their new roles as buddy. However, they understood that this was done to promote writing and speaking skills, so they saw the reasoning behind it.

As this particular class has been rather challenging in the past I was surprised to see how readily they cooperated and responded to this experiment. Students responded best when given short snappy tasks and the times for the tasks were projected on the board, giving them a limit of 15 minutes to read instructions, complete a set exercise and then move on.

" …students enjoyed the structure and clarity of grammar, and the 'beat the clock' mentality…"

When asked about which stations in the carousel helped them most (and which they enjoyed most) they responded that they found a variety of tasks interesting. Filling in grammar tables was – surprisingly – at the top: students enjoyed the structure and clarity of grammar and the 'beat the clock' mentality; it created something exciting that also gave them increased ownership of their language acquisition. The grammar awareness also gave them the power to express their learnt words and phrases in different contexts.

Teacher observations

Watching myself on film was a bewildering experience at first; it was strange yet informative to watch myself, not as a person but as a professional. The first thing I observed was how attentive the students were and how they were all focused on me; and the second, how passive my low-ability boys were. As I continued to reduce the time that I spent teaching from the front and gave the class more independence, their ownership increased greatly.

The differentiation of all tasks as well as ensuring a lot of timed pair and group work was helpful. In every lesson I ensured that students engaged in a mix of grammar work (my special focus for that unit was the future tense, so various tasks on *werden* were included). Also I ensured that a maximum of different skills were regularly included, such as reading, listening, speaking and writing – although passive, listening and reading help develop confidence with writing tasks as the students have seen the language used in context.

Key findings

When assessed without prior announcement at the end of the eighth lesson, students began to include tenses automatically and most had improved on their previous performance, which had been a termly, announced assessment. Students produced a larger variety in terms of grammar structures and wider range of vocabulary. They also had wider variation of texts between them, avoiding a sense of sameness and increased their innovation and passion for the subject. For the girls there has also been continuity improvement for all. Particularly the lower-attaining have benefitted most from the intervention. For the boys a clearer gap is noticeable. All boys have improved, but the lower and middle end the most.

Figure 1.1.3: **Boys' attainment before and after the intervention**
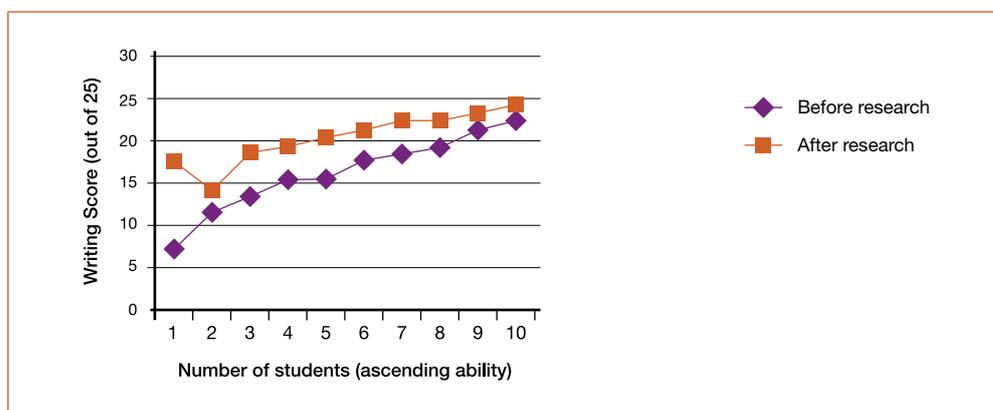
Figure 1.1.4: **Girls' attainment before and after the intervention**
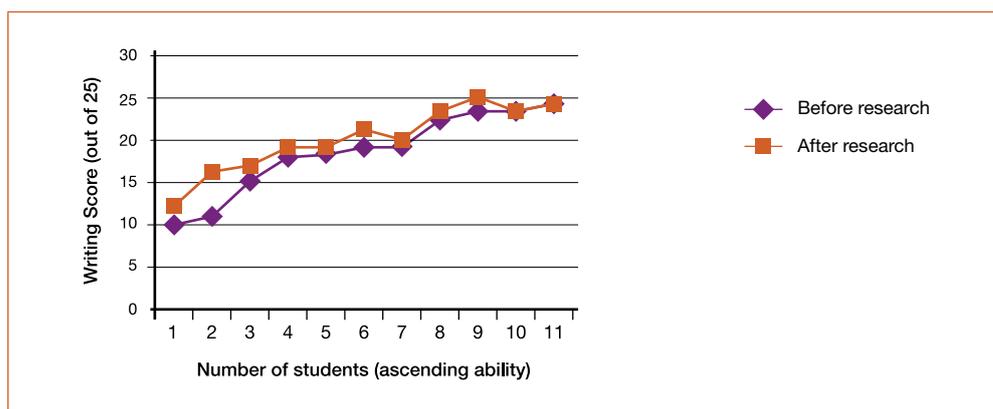
Figure 1.1.5: **Boys' and girls' attainment (all groups) before and after the intervention**
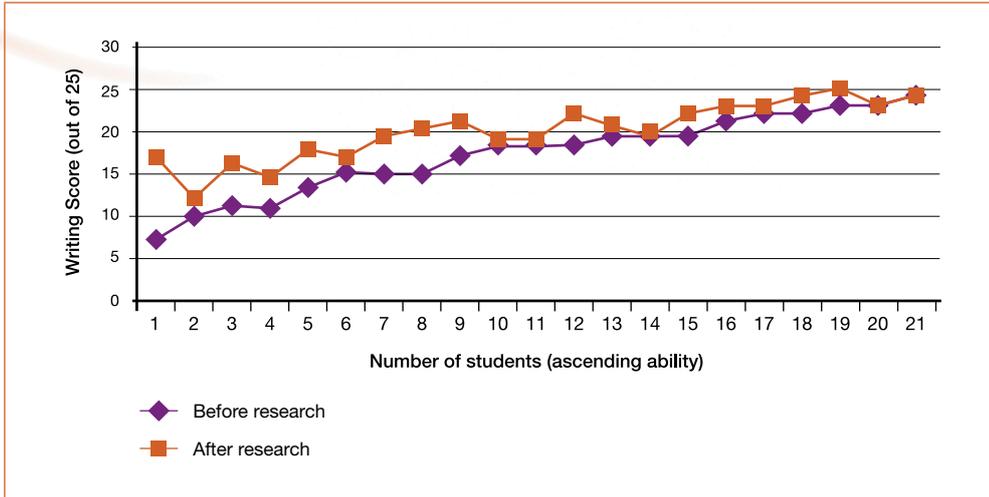
Reflections

Despite the fact that the students were kept blind to the exact purpose of the research task, there have been improvements on various levels. The working atmosphere in my classroom has improved; it seems as if I have somehow gained students' trust in a manner which I had not before. For example, they now come and see me outside of lessons to ask for clarification, pay more attention to their homework and stay on more after school. Secondly, as a teacher, I have learnt to see my voice, body and body language as a tool and I can use this to help trainee teachers, NQTs and fellow Modern Foreign Language colleagues. Thirdly, I have increased the time I get to spend with students and their sense of responsibility has increased. Some of my stronger buddies see themselves almost as a substitute teacher, emulating my vocabulary and passing knowledge on for me. As a result, top-end students feel more involved and have a greater sense of purpose to work independently.

I would recommend that as much time as possible is given to students themselves in lessons – although this needs to operate in a highly structured manner. Clear seating arrangements, clear time deadlines and a variety of tasks which demand different skills, are the ground on which students are able to take ownership of their language acquisition and begin experimenting. Surprisingly, there was no need to play games such as battleships or bingo at the end of lessons; instead, five to seven minutes were spent on feedback and evaluation. This seemed enough to make them feel important and to get some honest student-teacher dialogue.

I have noticed that boys become reluctant to express an idea if they are unsure, so rather than adopting a 'going for it' attitude they hesitate. If, however, their confidence is boosted by increased vocabulary and grammar awareness and a multitude of reading and listening samples, they seem encouraged to produce more language themselves.

1.2 An analytical approach to improving GCSE reading skills

Lorraine George, George Spencer Academy, Nottingham
George Spencer Academy and Technology College Teaching School Alliance

Overview

> **"Creative ways of testing vocabulary that do not impact upon valuable classroom time and encouraging independence and enjoyment in reading are also high on the agenda."**

Choosing to undertake a research project on reading skills was prompted by our students' relatively poor performance in this skill compared with the other three skills tested at GCSE. We decided to focus on French as the language to be investigated, as this is the language that our students have had most exposure to – students from feeder primary schools are taught French and all students learn French exclusively in Year 7. Improvement in levels of literacy is a whole-school focus and the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) faculty is committed to improving GCSE results overall. Currently, our students' results in the reading paper are frequently lower than their target grades predict.

The research had the following main aims:

- To identify the Key Stage 4 (KS4) French results pattern in the reading paper over the past two years (since the introduction of the new GCSE), compared with grades attained in the listening, speaking and writing units

- To identify KS4 students' perceptions of their major difficulties after having recently sat their GCSE French reading paper, by asking them to identify the areas that they felt could have helped them to improve their reading results

- To enable teachers to make changes in this area of pedagogy and make success in the GCSE French reading paper more achievable; and then extend these measures in order to develop a departmental strategy to improve reading results across all languages.

Context

George Spencer Academy is a mixed 11–18 school in Stapleford, Nottingham. It is a teaching school and an Employment Based Initial Teacher Training (EBITT) provider for trainee teachers, as well as being designated as a National Support and Advanced Consultant School. It was rated Outstanding by Ofsted in 2010.

Literacy is currently a whole-school focus and has informed our recent continuing professional development sessions. All students study French in Year 7 and take up a second language in Year 8 – either Spanish or German, depending on the half-year in which they are enrolled. As part of the George Spencer model ('Spencer Time') the majority of our students sit their Language GCSE (OCR board) in one year and are encouraged to do so in Year 10, in order to avoid the lapse of one year, were they to do it in Year 11. We do have a very small number of students who opt to study a language in Year 11, and indeed some who take up a second language in Year 11. These students would complete this year with members of a Year 10 class. Languages are not compulsory at George Spencer Academy but students are encouraged to choose a Languages GCSE because of the EBacc qualification. 65% of students sat a Languages GCSE in the summer of 2012.

I carried out this project with the collaboration both of students and of MFL colleagues. The research ran in parallel with our department's crucial role as leader of a funded Languages Development Project, funded by CfBT Education Trust, which, in collaboration with our schools alliance, aims to improve reading in MFL with a focus on achievement as well as greater independence and enjoyment in this skill area. This action research also ties into the research component of our staff appraisal that focuses on raising attainment.

Methodology

Secondary research was undertaken in order to identify French GCSE reading results over the last two years, and qualitative methods were used to ascertain opinions of students by means of a student questionnaire. As the majority of students at George Spencer Academy complete their languages GCSE in Year 10, I was able to capitalise on the unique position of being able to question students who were still on roll about their perceptions of their own achievements in their recent French GCSE. The ability to perform a 'linguistic inquest' into the results from the previous year and then use this information to inform teaching in order to accelerate learning in this area for future cohorts was invaluable. I therefore decided to:

- analyse the recent KS4 French GCSE results data available, to ascertain student achievement in the reading unit in comparison with the other three skills assessed

- issue questionnaires to the 2011/12 KS4 French student cohort – those who had just completed their GCSE – in order to have recent 'student voice' feedback that would show:

  a) the skills that they felt had been most useful
  b) how often they perceived they were 'exposed' to these skills.

I managed to collate useable responses from 30 students out of the cohort of 44, which included both male and female students, and I ensured that a mixed ability of candidates was represented from the least to the most able (E – A*). Students were given time to re-read the reading paper that they sat, in order to re-familiarise themselves with the content and I was present while they filled in the questionnaire in order to ensure reliability of responses by clarifying the terms used.

The questionnaire focused not only on students' attitudes and reactions to reading in the target language, but also on reading per se, as the importance of reading in general has been seen to impact upon so many areas of attainment. Students were asked to respond to questions that related to their frequency of reading in general, their perceived strength as readers, what they read for pleasure and what they would like to read in the target language.

Key findings

Our students do read. 74% indicated that they read at least a few times a week over and above what they had to read for school-based reasons. However, eight students read only a few times per month or less. 93% of students considered themselves to be at least 'confident' readers of English, with novels and magazines being the reading materials most popular. Only 40% of students felt that the reading texts studied during their French GCSE were at least 'enjoyable', which gives food for thought.

Despite only 66% of our students receiving a C grade or above in the reading paper (compared with listening 79%, speaking 77% and writing 66%), only 14% of students questioned felt that the reading paper was the most difficult. Therefore it is clear that student perception of this paper as being one of the 'easier' skills is misjudged, as their weaknesses with regard to the demands of this paper were not particularly evident in their assessment of the examination requirements as a whole. The vast majority cited the speaking (48%) and the listening (38%) papers as being the most challenging. Reasons given were 'nerves' and 'having to think on your feet' for the former and their inability to 'go back and listen again' and the 'speed of the tape' for the latter. Clearly in these two areas, the students felt less in control of the situation and are perhaps led into a false sense of security with the reading paper, where they have the chance to re-read the questions and can control the speed and order of the questions attempted.

The following bar charts illustrate students' responses to the skills they most valued in preparation for the reading paper and the frequency of which they felt they were practised.

Figure 1.2.1: **Valued skills and student perception of use**
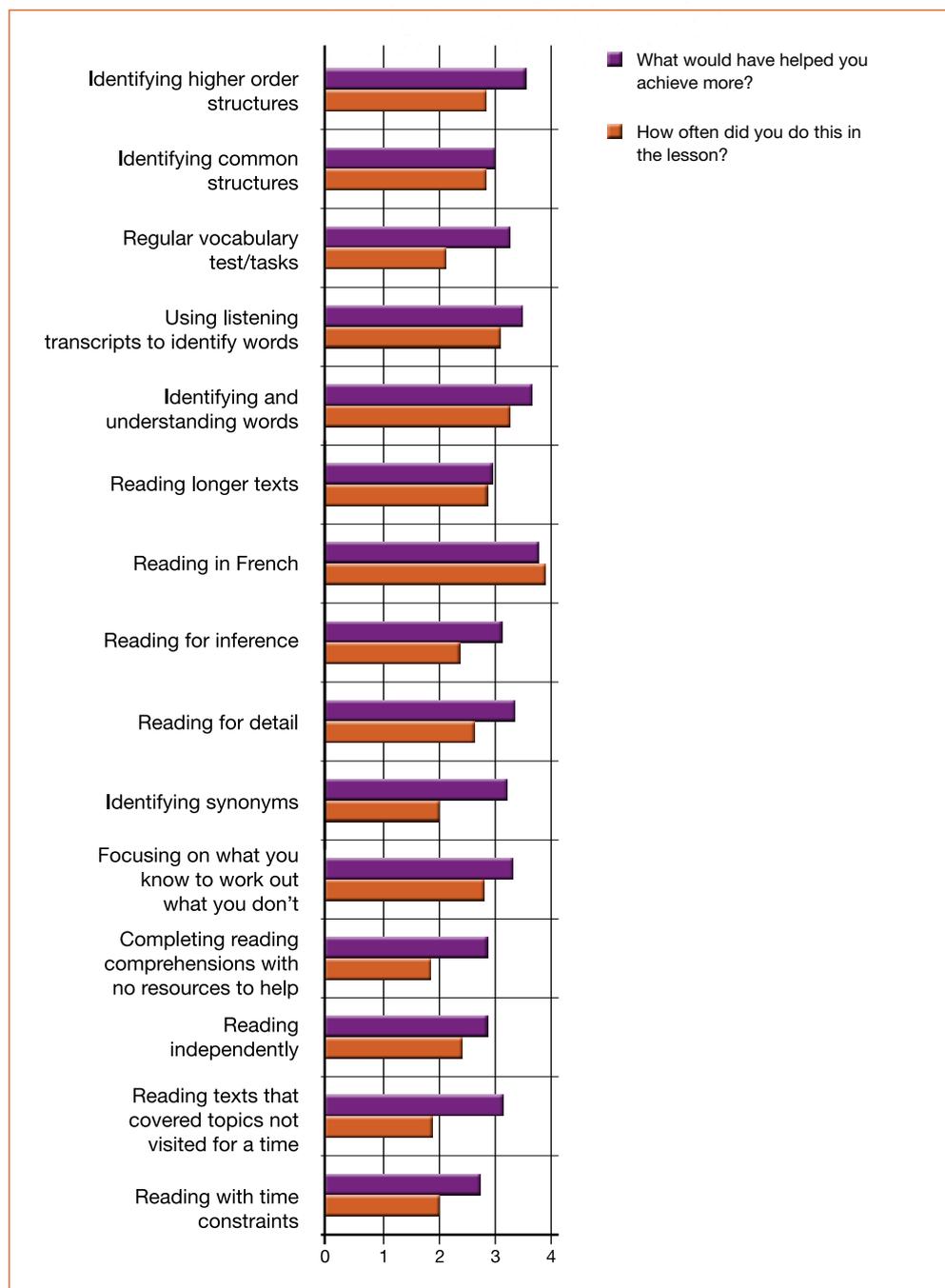
Clearly, the lack of frequency in practice of each skill is a factor, according to the students. This can be explained by the rate at which teachers are forced to cover the requirements of the GCSE specification due to the one academic year timescale. The need to prepare for and produce controlled assessments that are worthy of submission for both the speaking and writing components dictates much of the teaching and learning time throughout the course.

Encouragingly, students did feel that they often read in French. However, reading with time constraints, completing reading comprehensions without resources for support, and reading for inference – all of which are skills that candidates must successfully employ, especially to achieve the highest grades – were perceived to be lacking. Vocabulary tests and tasks and knowledge of synonyms also stand out as areas for consideration. Reading texts that covered topics not visited for a time is clearly another aspect that the students felt had impacted on their results and again this is an area that can suffer under the pressure of time. Surprisingly, when asked what they would like to read in the target language, students suggested French literature/fiction, newspapers, short stories and translations of popular English language books.

Reflections

The findings have been extremely valuable and informative and I would encourage the use of 'student voice', as the issues that were raised by those questioned have linked into the findings and focus of our current CfBT development project. Our one-year GCSE course puts added pressure on teaching staff and students to cover, in breadth and depth, the content of the specification in comparison with a two-year course, as well as restricting our ability to build in time to cover purely cultural and untested elements. As a department, we are currently looking into ways of addressing these results and implementing strategies within the time constraints under which we currently operate.

We are looking into extending the use of authentic reading materials and ways of exploiting these effectively. Creative ways of testing vocabulary that do not impact upon valuable classroom time and encouraging independence and enjoyment in reading are also high on the agenda. I shall be monitoring our successes in all of the above and documenting my findings as part of my school appraisal. My research in this instance will be to identify and evaluate the impact of the interventions that we make with regard to improving reading skills in GCSE French.

1.3 How non-specialist primary school teachers can use stories and extended texts to enhance teacher and pupil confidence in reading and writing skills

Jane Cross, St Stephen's Church of England Primary School, Bath
Saltford Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This project is about finding a methodology that will enhance confidence to both learn and teach reading and writing in French at primary level. Identifying skills and resources that can be easily transferrable to non-specialist teachers was also an important feature.

Our school has previously used story-making as a literacy methodology, where the children learn a story by heart, internalise the language structure and repeat and adapt for other writing. This has been very successful and we wondered if a similar approach could be used for Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). The project had the following main aims:

- To boost the confidence of non-specialist language teachers

- To provide a methodology that could be transferred to a range of lesson input

- To internalise language structure and be able to innovate from that

- To use this as a starting point to read and write simple sentences in French.

Context

St Stephen's is a large, mixed primary school situated near the centre of Bath. French is taught as our main Modern Foreign Language, mainly in Years 3 to 6. The infant department does some French, albeit infrequently, and holds a French-themed week in the summer term. Hitherto the teaching of MFL in Key Stage 2 (KS2) has been sporadic and patchy, although there has been interest in French and Spanish after-school clubs. When I took on the MFL coordinator role in 2008 I found that staff confidence to teach was low, even when staff had GCSE qualifications or above. Finding time to teach French was an issue and lessons were infrequent. The scheme we had agreed to work from was supportive with good ideas and resources, but still needed time to plan and implement and I felt there was a general lack of purpose or structure to the teaching (including my own).

Methodology

In September 2012, as a starting point for the project, I wanted to assess the children's level of confidence, and so devised a questionnaire where they were asked to grade their enjoyment and confidence levels in learning French, and in reading and writing simple sentences. The children were asked to grade their responses from 1 to 6, where 1 was dreadful and 6 was excellent. The children were also asked to give written comments on what they thought helped them to learn French and any other comments they would like to make. In October I arranged for available KS2 staff to attend a 'Story-making in French' course run by the International Learning and Research Centre in Bristol, which I and two other members of staff had already attended.

The course provided staff with a methodology for learning stories and was structured so that they would learn at least two stories themselves. How this would fit into MFL requirements was discussed. We then agreed that the whole key stage would learn the story *Jacques le Gourmand* as a starting point and that further lessons and activities would stem from that. Resources, games and follow-up work were developed from there.

The stories were taught in a broadly similar fashion: nouns important to the story were taught by games and repetitive activities. These included:

- hiding the object to be learnt for a child to find, with the class saying the name of the object increasingly loudly to give clues to the child trying to find it

- the game 'What is missing?' – which proved popular, as did saying the words in different accents, loudly, quietly, shyly etc.

- only repeating the word if the right one is said for the picture

- repeating the story several times with the children joining in the words and phrases they could recognise; actions were included to provide a kinaesthetic approach to the learning

- a story map, produced as an aide memoire – this was considered a vital part of the learning process, and important words were included at this stage

- the children then creating their own story map, consolidating their learning and practising the story

- the story being repeated, but with the teacher leading less and less as the confidence of the children grew

- once the story had been thoroughly internalised, introducing a different set of vocabulary so that the children could adapt and innovate, using the same language structures as the first story.

Once the children were secure with the pronunciation, the story was written and writing activities introduced. These included:

- looking at a printed text and examining which letters were not pronounced

- looking at the effect of accents on the 'e' sound

- arranging the story into the correct order

- a game where a pile of sentences from the story are shared between the group. Each child reads one but has to improvise if his sentence says *que tu triches* ('you are cheating'). The group have to guess who is cheating. This was very popular.

- bingo and variations of this game.

Written activities included:

- filling in gaps and letter blends within words

- rearranging words

- playing 'hangman' with French words.

Verbal feedback from the staff was collected. In December the same questionnaire was circulated to the children to assess any changes in confidence and attitude to learning French.

Key findings

The questionnaires were analysed by year group, although the results were fairly similar in September across the key stage. There was a broad spread of attitudes to French and in the main children felt less confident about reading and writing French than they did learning French in general. Their confidence in learning French drops as the children get older. Where responses require a written answer, word clouds have been created.

This Year 3 graph shows there has been a much more positive response in their general attitude to French, as well as their general confidence. Their confidence in reading French has improved a little. Their confidence in writing French has not increased significantly but as these children are so young it is perhaps not appropriate for them to be writing much French at this stage.

Figure 1.3.1: **Year 3 attitudes to French before the intervention**
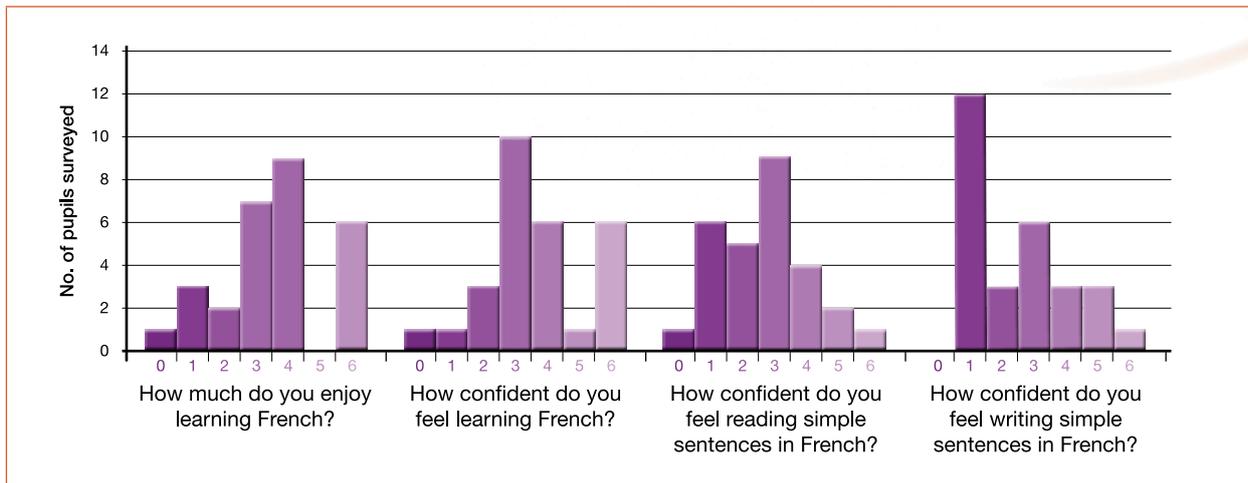
Figure 1.3.2: **Year 3 attitudes to French after the intervention**
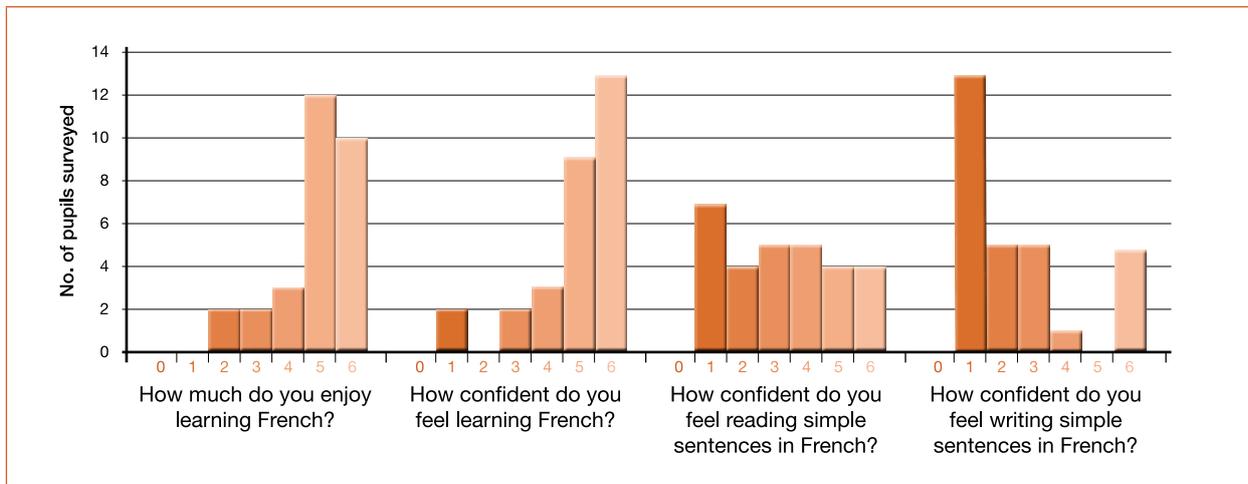
From their written answers, it is clear that the children have been learning French by singing songs with actions, as well as pictures and posters, and that the children have enjoyed this approach. Their written responses are summarised in the following word cloud, which helps to pick out common answers.

Figure 1.3.3: **Word cloud responses of Year 3 pupils used to analyse the qualitative results**

This Year 4 (pre-intervention) graph shows confidence tailing off when students were asked about reading and writing French in September.

Figure 1.3.4: **Year 4 attitudes to French before the intervention**
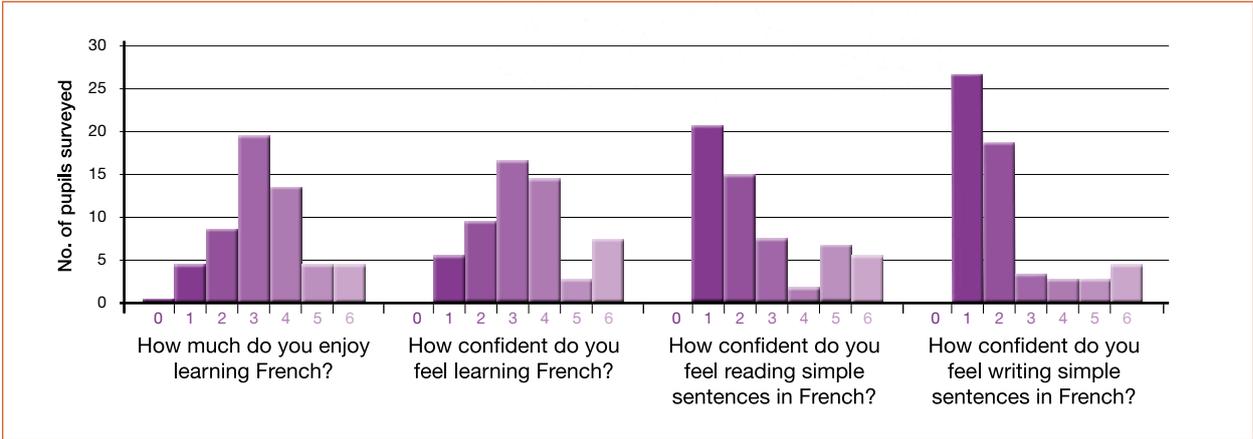
In December we can see an increase in attitude and general confidence in learning French as well as in speaking and listening. It is here that there appears to be most improvement and the use of games like bingo and learning songs seems to have caught the imagination of the children as well as the stories, as the word cloud indicates.

Figure 1.3.5: **Year 4 attitudes to French after the intervention**

Figure 1.3.6: **Word cloud responses of Year 4 pupils used to analyse the qualitative results**

Figure 1.3.7: **Word cloud responses of Year 5 pupils used to analyse the qualitative results**
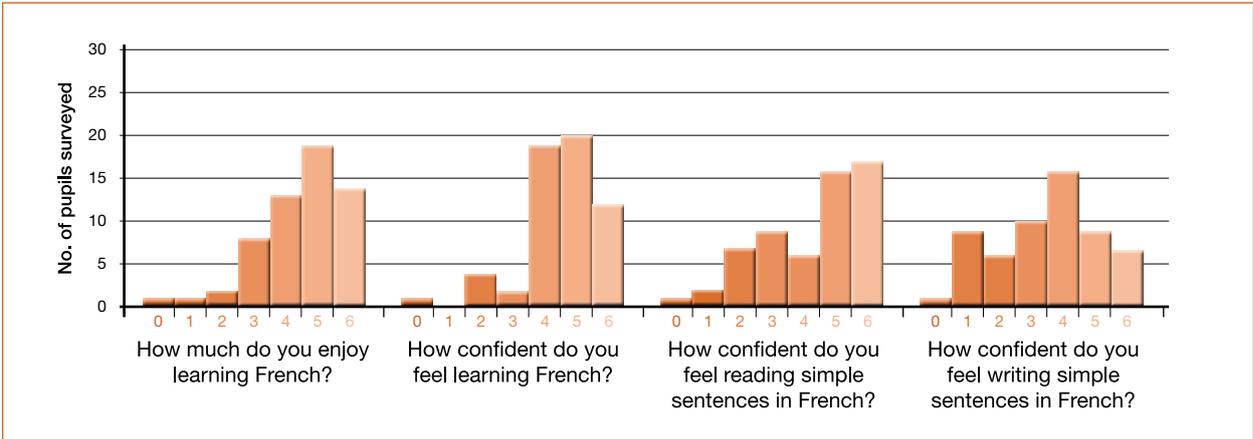
In one Year 5 class, songs, games, stories and rhymes have all helped improve their attitude and confidence.

Similar findings were found in Year 6 although confidence with writing still remained low.

Reflections

This project has had a hugely positive effect on how French is taught at St Stephen's. The teachers gave extremely good feedback after the French story-making course and this has provided the main impetus for our progress. The staff have commented how they feel empowered by learning the stories and being able to teach them to their classes. One story can provide a wealth of lesson ideas for oral and written activities and I have seen evidence of a range of planning: wall displays, whole-school story assemblies and many, many discussions of how to go further when teaching French. The fact that all the activities planned for story learning fit into the National Curriculum scheme of work has had a positive effect on staff morale too: it is not extra planning, rather it complements it. Our additional scheme of work has become more of a useful tool as well. Teachers have reported that the stories can be taught in short ten-minute bursts: having to plan a whole lesson when you are not a confident French speaker has not seemed so arduous or daunting and they feel empowered to dip in and out of the resources provided. We have ordered a range of story books in French to complement and enhance teaching at St Stephen's and I feel confident that these resources will be built upon and added to over the next few terms.

The children report an increased enthusiasm for learning French and it has been noted that the less able children respond favourably to this teaching method. Writing French remains the area of least confidence, but as the staff only began this project in October it is fair to say that it is early days and that the trend is good. I intend to repeat the questionnaire a third time in July and expect to see more dramatic results then.

"The children report an increased enthusiasm for learning French and it has been noted that the less able children respond favourably to this teaching method."

1.4 An exploration of difficulties experienced by students in writing at Key Stage 4

Helen Vander Woerd, Lampton School, Hounslow
Lampton Teaching School Alliance

Overview

The focus of this research project was writing at Key Stage 4 (KS4). This area is important to our school because the development of academic literacy is part of the school development plan and has been the focus of many INSET (in-service training) days. However, academic literacy does involve a number of different skills, and I chose to concentrate specifically on the skill of writing, due to the fact that for the current GCSE, students are expected to write and produce extended pieces of writing from memory. Furthermore, by developing good writing skills at KS4, we can help with improving the level of writing of students who take languages at KS5. This research project had three main aims:

- To identify the difficulties experienced by students in writing at KS4

- To identify the reasons for these difficulties

- To establish possible strategies for supporting and improving students' writing.

In order to achieve these aims, we asked the following questions:

- What difficulties do students have when preparing writing tasks at KS4?

- Why do students find writing difficult at KS4?

- What strategies can the department adopt in order to support and improve students' writing?

Context

Lampton School is a mixed 11–18 comprehensive school. The school was judged as Outstanding in 2008 and was subsequently named in the Ofsted publication *12 outstanding schools – excelling against the odds*. Lampton School was also one of the first 100 teaching schools. The research was undertaken by Helen Vander Woerd, a teacher of German, Spanish and Latin.

The Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) department at Lampton School offers students the opportunity to study French and German in Year 7; then in Year 8 the more able students may take up a second language of French, German or Spanish. Latin is also being offered as an extra-curricular club. For GCSE, students may choose to take French, German or Spanish. Languages are a popular choice at GCSE and in this year's Year 10 there are approximately 155 students taking languages. Languages have always been a popular choice at Lampton but since the introduction of EBacc not only has there been an increase in the number of students taking languages but also the range of ability of the students is greater. Therefore we need to ensure that each student is able to cope with the requirements of the GCSE, in particular being able to prepare and produce from memory extended pieces of writing, as the controlled assessments form a large percentage of the GCSE. Last year the department achieved 84% A*–C. However, when the results were broken down further in the exam analysis, it was highlighted that writing was an area of weakness for some students. Furthermore, as a result of EBacc there is a possibility that a higher number of students may choose to take languages at A level. Therefore improving students' writing skills at KS4 may help the transition between GCSE and A level.

Methodology

The group used for this research project was a Year 10 GCSE German group. This group consists of 19 students, of whom nine are boys and ten are girls. These are students of completely mixed ability and have been given target grades ranging from A to D.

Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected by means of questionnaires, student interviews and teacher observations. Before completing the questionnaires, students followed a sequence of lessons which led them to complete a piece of writing. This piece of writing was marked and returned to the student to redraft and then the re-draft was marked again.

Student questionnaires

Questionnaires were used as the main means of collecting data. Students completed two questionnaires. In both questionnaires most of the questions required students to give a rating between 1 and 5 but some questions asked students to justify or expand on their answers. There were also some questions that required an answer of Yes or No. The aims of the first questionnaire were as follows:

• To explore students' attitude to writing in general

• To identify what specific aspects of producing a piece of writing students found difficult

• To explore how students approached writing tasks i.e. what materials they used to help them (such as dictionaries, vocabulary sheets, verb tables, grammar exercise from class, or reading texts)

• To explore how competent students felt in areas of academic literacy connected with writing, in particular:
a) using information from reading texts to incorporate in writing tasks
b) generating ideas for writing from texts, in addition to past experience or observation
c) structuring writing so that it is clearly organised, logically developed and coherent
d) proofreading to eliminate spelling and grammatical errors.

• To ascertain if students understood what a good piece of writing looks like.

Students also completed a second questionnaire related only to marking and feedback. The aims of this questionnaire were to identify the following:

• How helpful students found colour-coded marking. As a department, instead of correcting pieces of work straight away, we highlight mistakes with different colours depending on what type of mistake it is; for example yellow for spelling, blue for verbs and green for word order, so that students have to try and correct the mistake themselves.

• How helpful student found comments given during marking.

• How much the students took on board and used the comments.

• How helpful their homework record sheet is. Every time students complete a piece of written homework, they have to record on a sheet the task title, the effort grade and one area of improvement.

Student interviews

The interviews were conducted with six students of varying abilities from within the group. During the interviews students explained their motivation for choosing German at GCSE and their perceptions of studying German GCSE so far. During the interviews, students were asked to comment on how useful particular activities had been in helping them with their writing. They were also able to further expand on what they found difficult when writing and what they used to support them with their writing.

Teacher observations

I used a sample of six books from students of varying abilities and compared the same piece
of writing. I noted down what sort of mistakes were commonly made, looked at whether the
student had used a range of structures and vocabulary and whether they had answered the task
appropriately. I then compared the first draft with the re-draft to see how much had actually changed.

Key findings

Questionnaire 1 – students' attitudes and approaches to writing

In order to explore students' attitudes to writing tasks in general, they were asked whether
they enjoyed writing tasks in German. In total 13 out of 19 students said that they did not.
When asked how difficult they found writing tasks, no student said that they found them very
difficult. Two students said that they found them difficult and four students said that they found
them neither easy or difficult. When asked to identify their weakest skill, 10 out of 19 students
identified this as listening and only five students said that it was writing.

When asked what students found difficult about writing, four out of 19 students found expressing
their ideas difficult, or very difficult. Six out of 19 students found giving enough detail difficult, or
very difficult. Two out of 19 students found getting ideas difficult or very difficult and one out of 19
students found understanding how to put sentences together difficult or very difficult.

When students were asked what they had in front of them while completing a written task for
homework, 11 out of 18 students said that they had vocabulary sheets in front of them. 12 out of
19 students said that they had dictionaries in front of them. 11 out of 19 students said that they
had reading texts in front of them from class and eight out of 19 said that they used verb tables.

When students were asked how competent they were in particular academic literacy skills
related to writing, they responded that they felt most competent with using information from
reading texts: 11 out of 19 students felt competent or very competent. However, only five
students felt competent or very competent at proofreading work.

When students were asked if they were confident about what a good piece of work looked
like, eight out of 19 students were very confident or confident, and nine students were neither
confident nor unconfident.

Questionnaire 2 – students' engagement with feedback

Nine out of 19 students felt that the colour-coding used for marking was useful or very useful but some students did comment that they were not always sure what mistake they had made.

14 out of 19 students said that they found comments useful or very useful and 16 out of the 19 said that they read them carefully or very carefully. However, only 10 out of 19 students said that these comments influenced their future work.

13 out of 19 students stated that the homework record sheet was either helpful or very helpful, saying that it clearly showed them how they needed to improve. However, some commented that they possibly did not use this sheet enough.

Interviews

During the interviews all the students stated that they had chosen German GCSE because of EBacc and because they had been told that it would help them with future university or job applications; no student mentioned an interest in languages. When students were asked to comment on whether or how particular types of class activities had helped them with their writing tasks, most students did say that games such as battleships and noughts and crosses were good ways of practising grammatical structures. However, they also commented that class games which were particularly competitive helped the structures to 'stick'. Most students stated how useful they found it to take part in activities that involved collaborative writing, such as 'consequences', explaining that it was useful to see what other people had written. They also stated that they found reading tasks useful. However, they did not always use vocabulary identified in these texts in their own writing. In fact many students said that that vocabulary books and sheets were an extremely useful resource for their writing. Some students did state that this was their main resource when producing a piece of writing. Many students also stated that they never or not always proofread their work for mistakes.

" All of the students stated that they had chosen German GCSE because of EBacc…"

Teacher observations of written work

The mistakes were quite wide-ranging; for example, some of word order and some spelling mistakes. No one type of mistake stood out. However, when examining the draft and the re-draft, some students had changed very little, other students had corrected the accuracy of the work but no student had added anything extra or improved the structures/vocabulary used in the first draft.

Reflections

It was pleasing to see that students generally had a positive attitude and were reasonably confident when tackling writing tasks, which could be seen as evidence that many of the class activities and the feedback given have helped the students. However, this research has highlighted some activities/strategies that I would never have realised students found so useful. In particular, students really like having vocabulary books, which can be used as a means of making sure that students use new vocabulary/phrases learnt in class and ensures that this important vocabulary does not get lost/forgotten within worksheets. In addition to this, students also like having an overview of the structures and vocabulary used in the unit, and find this a useful starting point for a piece of writing. Therefore, for each writing task, I have begun to create summary sheets, so that students can have an easy overview of the types of vocabulary and structures which should be used in the writing tasks, rather than always having to remember which worksheet particular structures feature in. I also need to ensure that when giving feedback to students, I give clear examples with regard to improving the structures used in their work, as I feel that some students cannot always visualise how they need to improve.

This research has also highlighted key skills that students need to develop in order to produce good written work. One particular skill is a student's ability to proofread and correct their own work; if students are not able to do this well in written homework, then this will have an effect on how they correct their work in exam conditions. Therefore, we will need to further develop this skill in class so that they can do this independently. Furthermore, when students undertake writing tasks at home they do not appear to be using all the resources available to them and therefore need further guidance in this area. Finally, students appeared to be aware of the importance of feedback and appear to be engaging in the feedback in as far as they read it, but not all students are applying it in their subsequent pieces of writing. Therefore, instead of simply getting students to identify targets for improvement in relation to previous work, I will also now begin to get students to identify a target before they start writing their new task.

" I have begun to create summary sheets, so that students can have an easy overview of the types of vocabulary and structures which should be used in the writing tasks... "

1.5 A mixed skills approach to reading and writing improves confidence

Fiona Colley, St Cuthbert's Roman Catholic Primary School, County Durham
Together To Succeed Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This research focused on how children assimilate language. This area of research is important to our school because we want to examine the learning process and ascertain the effectiveness of different strategies in teaching language skills. Confidence in using a foreign language is a significant issue within secondary education in Hartlepool. The main aim of the research was to compare the impact of discrete teaching of vocabulary and grammar with immersion in the text and discovery learning. In order to achieve this research aim, the following research questions were asked:

- What are the differences in attainment for children who have been taught grammar (e.g. parts of speech) explicitly and those who have not?

Specifically:

- Which group is more confident in their oral use of language?

- Which group shows greater understanding of the new vocabulary?

- Which group can manipulate language more self-assuredly in spoken and written form?

Context

St Cuthbert's is an average-size primary school in Hartlepool with 236 pupils on roll, plus a 52-place part-time nursery. Children live in 10 different wards within Hartlepool; more than 50% live in wards with low socio-economic status; 21% of children receive free school meals; 20 children have English as an additional language; and 19.2% of pupils are currently on the SEN register. With the loss of a Modern Foreign Languages advisory teacher for the Hartlepool area, I wanted to be part of the project to share both ideas and good practice, and to provide myself with a support network of like-minded people. The research would give me the opportunity for reflection on and evaluation of classroom practice which could then be shared with school staff.

I have been teaching French in Key Stage 2 (KS2), in my current school, for five years. Children in Years 1 and 2 have been part of the *Dinocrocs* programme, where they have been immersed in language and have not experienced explicit teaching in a foreign language. The targeted group were Year 3 children just beginning their experience of more formal teaching in KS2.

Methodology

A group of Year 3 pupils was targeted in two separate classes. These children were of similar ability in literacy, a mixture of boys and girls, and all had experience of *Dinocrocs* as their previous French teaching.

Group A were in a class where there would be less explicit teaching of new vocabulary, no use of flashcards and less use of grammatical models to aid speaking and writing.

Group B were to be shown flashcards, to play lotto games to reinforce nouns and to access more models that would assist them with speaking and writing sentences.

Targeted groups were to be observed by both the teaching assistant and the teacher with a specific focus in each lesson. Assessments were to be made of pupils' contributions to the lessons, their understanding of the work (assessed on a one-to-one basis), video recordings of oral work and examination of written work.

Teaching sequence

Both groups were taught the same lessons but with different pedagogies.

Lesson 1

Each group was introduced to the story *Je m'habille et je te croque* by reading the story and joining in with the actions.

Lesson 2

Reinforcement of vocabulary by having to orally describe an action from a charade based on the story, using a full sentence.

Lesson 3

Vocabulary was revisited in a song, *Promenons nous dans les bois*, providing actions and music as a way of learning. A game, *Quelle heure est il, Monsieur Loup?* also provided reinforcement of vocabulary in an interactive way. Children were then asked to write sentences from memory with no models available.

Lesson 4

A collaborative task of ordering the story and creating a group oral retell was then introduced.

Lessons 5 and 6

Finally, the children planned their own *Je m'habille* story to demonstrate if they could manipulate the language and adapt or extend it. Children then had the opportunity to read their own book aloud.

Teacher observations

In lesson 1, children in Group A seemed to rise to the challenge of having to make sense of new vocabulary. Not scaffolding them with flashcards and explaining everything seemed to engage them. In a lotto game with pictures of nouns but no written prompts, children in the target group could identify key nouns after hearing the noun spoken. Their memory skills from reading and joining in the story together had given them success with the more common nouns in the story.

In lesson 1, children in Group B understood the story without too much additional explanation and spontaneously joined in repeating the story without the prompting instruction *répetez*. In a lotto game these children had French nouns written next to the pictures. The target group could match key nouns after hearing the noun spoken. The less able children in Group B used the written nouns as a way to access the task – matching initial sounds of nouns.

In lesson 2, children in Group A struggled to say a sentence from the story. The basic sentence was: *'Je mets mon …, ma …, or mes …'* followed by a noun.

The two words with initial *m* sounds caused confusion and I felt the need to explain to Group A the function of each word within the sentence. This did help some children understand the role of each word and hence improved their ability to repeat the sentence with the correct structure. The class as a whole played the charade game in small groups. Nearly all the targeted group said a sentence confidently.

For Group B, I revisited all the nouns with flashcards first and added *mon*, *ma* or *mes* to the flashcards, instead of *un* or *une*. This group seemed to need more support than I had anticipated and I therefore provided a model on the board for the oral sentence. We then split into just two groups for the oral activity. With extra teaching input on the possessive pronouns and subject-verb position these children then achieved success. Nearly all the targeted group said a sentence confidently.

In lessons 1 and 2 the teaching assistant observed children's involvement in actions when the class were reading *Je m'habille*. The majority of children enjoyed actions and this did seem to engage them as they seemed to be acquiring the language. When then asked to join in, pronunciation certainly was observed to be good. Some children were occasionally reluctant to join in with actions. In some cases in the targeted group this had no impact on their learning, whilst in other cases they seemed less confident with the oral tasks.

In lesson 3 children loved the song. Standing and performing actions engaged the majority in their learning and helped pronunciation and confidence in oral tasks. A boy from the targeted group in each class was chosen as the wolf in *Quelle heure est il?* With support, these Year 3 boys said the various sentence responses to the class questions confidently.

A challenge of 'How many words/sentences can you write from the story?' proved successful and was also an informative technique of assessment. Many children in both groups could write 30 words from the story, and were often able to repeat the story structure of *Je mets mon …, ma …, or mes …* and use many different nouns.

A challenge arising from Group A (who had seen no written models except the story itself) was that they were spelling French words as they pronounced them. I went over this error in the plenary. With Group B, I showed more models of sentence structure and we practised more oral examples before the written task. This task provided valuable assessment information on those quieter children who did not seem to be assimilating the language so obviously through question and answer in class. Performing in a group was a mixed-ability task; the children in Group A had better organisational skills and benefited from being mixed with some older children. The targeted children in Group B showed success but they are the most able in the class so were often helping organise the less able pupils.

"Group A were more confident at tackling written and oral tasks as a result of the teaching methods used."

All targeted children showed some elements of success in the time given. Children in both groups could say their own lines confidently from the story and usually with some expression. They found that organising themselves to order their pictures and captions, share out the parts and ensure all knew the order of the retell was challenging. This task was assessing a greater range of skills for these Year 3 children than I had anticipated but all children did learn from each other in their mixed-ability groups and showed a range of strategies for organising themselves and presenting their stories.

The written task of producing their own *Je m'habille* book was tackled similarly in both groups with similar levels of success. Within both groups some children stuck to the model and produced a nine-frame story board showing them getting dressed to go somewhere specific (e.g. going to a football game or going out for a pizza). In both groups children experimented with new vocabulary by either using a dictionary or new class examples to extend the clothes they wore. Models of how to add adjectives to describe the colour of clothes were displayed and some children in both groups added colours correctly. One girl in Group B added different colours for each item of clothing.

Key findings

The teaching assistant who helped with weekly observations felt, as an objective observer, that Group A were more confident at tackling written and oral tasks as a result of the teaching methods used. Having discussed this, we agreed that the conclusions from the more formal assessments did not reflect this, as both targeted groups had children with confident expression in their speech and some who were confident but less expressive. Both groups had children who understood the text and showed this in their recall and manipulation of the text.

The following key findings also emerged from the detailed teaching observations by the teacher and teaching assistant. These were true for both groups:

• Different contexts within which to reinforce the story vocabulary were useful to sustain interest and enthusiasm in the text.

• Written tasks such as *'Show me what you know'* are useful in assessing quieter pupils.

• Mixed-ability tasks enable children to share their skill-set and support one another. This can lead to a greater variety of outcomes and can empower some children.

• Models on display for speech and writing are useful to help children understand the function of a word within a sentence and therefore help their memory.

• Reinforcement of oral sentences in games helps children memorise these sentences so they can become written sentences, and provides an element of fun.

• A simple visual story stimulus engaged the Year 3 children.

• Actions, music and interactive games helped most children.

• Using a simple visual story provided a structure to adapt and create their own story.

Reflections

- Not scaffolding children too much in their learning gives them the opportunity to rise to a challenge and make sense of language for themselves. In the short term, this was not shown to measurably improve their progress but a longer-term study might show stronger evidence.

- Focused assessment of a particular group gives insight into children's preferred learning styles and the effectiveness of teaching, and thus informs planning. Be prepared to depart from the lesson plan or chosen learning style to adapt to the children's needs or learning difficulties.

- The teacher needs a range of assessment strategies to hand. Written tasks, oral tasks, group tasks and video evidence can all play a part but there is also great benefit to be had from an additional observer in the classroom.

- Good lessons should provide visual, auditory and kinaesthetic experiences.

- Planning should allow for a mixture of learning settings (some of which are teacher led, some the children take responsibility for): class activities, group tasks, mixed-ability tasks and individual tasks.

- Using simple, structured stories is an effective springboard for children's own writing and performance.

- Have resources ready to reinforce new nouns with flashcards and lotto games but do not do this automatically with every group every time – only when children are struggling to remember new vocabulary or are visual learners.

1.6 The benefits of reflective practice in identifying and addressing differences between boys' and girls' approaches to Modern Foreign Languages in Year 7, in order to enhance grammatical knowledge, writing and reading

Sue Trusler, Imberhorne School, West Sussex
Millais Teaching School Alliance

Overview

Recent changes in GCSE requirements have meant that students now need to be more grammatically accurate to achieve grades of C and above, and more able to identify specific meaning from written texts. Therefore, in the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) department we have been working to improve students' grammatical knowledge and develop their reading skills. There is a considerable gender gap between the boys' and girls' A*–C results in GCSE at Imberhorne School. Alongside this, primary MFL becomes statutory from 2014, although the provision and delivery remain patchy. It is becoming increasingly important that there is a clear progression from Key Stage 2 (KS2) through to Key Stage 4 (KS4). In Year 7 at Imberhorne School there is a difference in the way boys and girls approach their Modern Foreign Language study. This raises the question of what causes this difference and what impact it has on their ability to develop accurate writing and in-depth reading skills in MFL.

Research aim:

- To find out how reflective practice can be used to identify the causes of differences between boys' and girls' approaches to MFL in Year 7.

Research questions:

- What can be learnt from other subjects?

- How can this information be used to provide strategies for improving students' performance from KS2 through to KS4?

> **" *…in the MFL department we have been working to improve students' grammatical knowledge and develop their reading skills.* "**

Context

Imberhorne School is an 11–18 mixed comprehensive (1,600 students) in East Grinstead, West Sussex. It is part of the Millais Teaching School Alliance. All students in Year 7 study two foreign languages (from French, German and Spanish) initially in mixed-ability groups. Most have done a Modern Foreign Language at primary school. The research project was undertaken by Sue Trusler, Advanced Skills Teacher and MFL Teacher.

Methodology

In order to conduct this research, a mixed-method approach was used. Two mixed-ability French groups were chosen, along with one Spanish and one German. The evidence was collected using questionnaires, student interviews, lesson observations and discussions with colleagues.

Student questionnaire and student interviews

The student questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part asked students about their Modern Foreign Language learning at primary school: which language they had learnt, how long they had spent learning it, what types of activities they had done and which they had enjoyed most. The second part of the questionnaire asked students about MFL in Year 7. In this section students were asked to rank how often they took part in particular types of activity in lessons, which skill areas they found most and least difficult and which types of activities they found most helpful and/or enjoyable. After the questionnaires, a number of students were interviewed about their current MFL learning, what they were enjoying, what they were finding hardest and why.

Lesson observations

I observed Year 7 students working in their French lessons over a number of weeks and noted the outcomes in terms of attentiveness and MFL output for different types of activities. I also observed a Year 7 mixed-ability history class and a Year 7 mixed-ability English group.

Discussions with colleagues

I conducted a number of informal interviews with colleagues (English, MFL from another secondary school and primary MFL) about any differences they had noticed between boys' and girls' approaches to work in their subject area.

Key findings

Putting together the findings from the student questionnaires, student interviews, lesson observations and colleague interviews, a number of things became clear.

In the context of our particular school and area of the country:

- Boys tend to be less good at listening to instructions.

- Boys tend to be less tidy or organised than girls and less able to use resources to look things up.

- Many boys, including the clever ones, can be very bad at organising their equipment and their work.

- Boys enjoy a challenge. They tend to enjoy team games (but you have to keep them focused on the language element).

- Girls tend to be more willing to work quietly and reflectively – they tend to be less confident working in groups outside their friendship groups.

- Boys and girls all tend to work best with people they know or who they are comfortable with, though not necessarily their friends, who can be distracting.

- Boys are generally less willing to develop their answers unless given specific instructions or rewards.

- Boys respond best to short, clearly structured tasks that repeat and build on known language but which maintain interest.

- Boys tend to be more easily distracted than girls.

- Boys tend to have a shorter concentration span. They are generally less willing to look for detail than girls and tend to be more readily satisfied with 'good enough'.

- Boys are more prone to skimming the surface – going for an obvious answer.

- In general, the boys want to practise their strengths rather than work on their weaknesses (which, interestingly, is exactly the same when it comes to their football training).

- Girls tend to be more willing to stick at things.

- Girls tend to be more motivated by a desire to please the teacher.

- Almost all the boys rated 'speaking' as their favourite skill. There was much more variation amongst the girls, with all four skills receiving at least some mention.

- More than 50% of the boys cited writing as the most difficult skill. 25% cited reading as the most difficult.

- The girls' results were more varied but only one student cited writing as the most difficult skill. Just over 50% of the girls cited reading as the most difficult skill.

- There was more variation in terms of which skill students found easiest, with all skills getting at least two or three mentions. There was no clear distinction between boys and girls in this respect.

- Boys and girls all agreed that they learnt best when they:
  - were having fun
  - were able to be active
  - had an element of choice in what they did or how they did it
  - were given an appropriate amount of time in which to complete a task
  - had a good relationship with their teacher.

- Drama and role-play activities were ranked highly for enjoyment by both girls and boys.

Based on the evidence in this study including observation of other subject areas, boys and girls can both benefit from the following approaches:

- Providing a variety of short, structured, 'fun' tasks to practise language points. Including an element of competition adds interest.

- Providing help with organisation (e.g. having clear routines in relation to what to have out on the desk, what to write in books, when and how to write/underline titles).

- Getting to know your students well, so that you can tailor activities and support to their needs.

- Planning for pair and group work, making sure that the students are with people they can work well with.

- Breaking longer tasks up into a series of shorter steps that are more manageable, then providing rewards or incentives for completion of a certain number of sections.

- Providing writing frames/outline notes to help students structure their work.

- Supporting aural instructions with visual cues or using the target language for instructions.

Reflections

Undertaking this piece of research has made me look more closely at what happens in response to the activities that I have planned for the classroom; not simply at what sort of tasks I choose, but also how I manage the lesson and what sort of additional support I offer to individual students or groups of students. On the whole, it is easier to describe the differences in behaviour than to suggest ways to tackle them; however, many of the gender differences I have noticed could be described as study skills, and I feel it is worth building study strategies into lesson planning.

Theme 2

Memorisation and pronunciation improvement using body language and gesture in the classroom

2.1 Making the most effective use of gesture in the primary Modern Foreign Languages classroom

Sophie Lynch, Belleville Primary School, Wandsworth
Belleville and Southfields Alliance

Overview

This research has focused on the use of actions to support the teaching and learning of French with children aged from 5 to 11. I began teaching French four years ago after being a class teacher for my two qualified years prior to this. I developed my teaching techniques with a language specialist from Elliott School, Putney, who supported my desire to move away from textbook teaching and make language learning fun, active and highly visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. In response to this, the children and I have used actions for learning French from day 1.

My scheme of work and teaching techniques have been developed through a combination of online resources, talking to other professionals, attending local and national training for teachers and my own ideas for lesson plans, games and resources. French lessons at Belleville are based around games and physical activities, stories, songs and rhymes to build vocabulary and develop cultural awareness and a combination of independent, pair and group work.

Actions are used consistently in all areas of learning from phonics and word level work to supporting sentence work and story-telling and I believe there is no doubt about its importance in improving confidence, memorisation, involvement and recall of vocabulary. Over time the children and I have trialled and changed some actions and reflection on these choices and amendments has also helped to develop ideas about which actions are more effective and why.

The research had the following main aims:

- To improve the fluency of the target language

- To improve the accuracy of the target language

- To improve pupil confidence in using the target language

- To share findings with other language teachers within the teaching school alliance.

In order to achieve these research aims, the following research questions were asked:

- How are actions used across language learning?

- How are the actions chosen?

- What do the children think of the use of actions to support their learning?

- Are there some actions which children are more willing to use as a kinaesthetic prompt than others?

- Which types are more effective in helping children remember?

- What is it about the gestures that children happily use themselves compared to others that they watch the teacher employ as a prompt?

- How can we create strong memory hooks – the triggers to recall language for these learners?

Context

" …120 children across four classes in Year 3 were chosen as a focus group for the project."

Belleville Primary School is a mixed state primary of approximately 780 pupils in Wandsworth, south London. It was rated Outstanding by Ofsted in 2007 and was made a teaching school in 2011. The school operates across two sites and has 28% children with English as an additional language (11% French). I was made Lead Teacher for Languages in Wandsworth in 2010 and have been a 'model' teacher for Belleville since mid-2012.

All children from Year 1 to 6 at Belleville receive an hour a week of French teaching except for French-speaking children and a small number of children with below Level 3 English fluency. Language teaching is considered an important part of the curriculum and one that plays an important role in the children's overall learning experience. Developing languages at a young age has a strong and positive impact on children's ability to access languages at Key Stage 3 and supports learning in other areas of the curriculum including literacy, drama, geography and ICT.

As part of the DfE Language Support Programme, French has also been one of the first subject foci for supporting other schools within the teaching school alliance. Children aim to achieve a level 4 by the time they reach Year 6. They enjoy French lessons and the focus children in Year 3 are achieving well (36% within expected level 2a and 44% above). I am confident that actions have played a significant part in the confidence and success with which pupils have taken on aspects of language on their journey towards fluency.

Actions working effectively as memory triggers for children are evident in every lesson. Actions for phonic sounds, words and phrases are chosen by the teacher and pupils. The action is then used every time that sound, word or phrase is used. I have also noticed that although the children respond to and replicate actions when they are first taught the word and shown the action, they are more comfortable responding to the teacher doing actions as a trigger for their memories. However, they rarely use the actions to help them remember words or phrases they are trying to retrieve later on. It is clear that some actions are easier for the children to recall and therefore more effective as a memorisation tool. Some actions that are used regularly (e.g. thumbs-up for *Ça va bien* or thumbs down for *Ça va mal*) trigger spontaneous reactions from the children but in general the actions work more effectively as a visual prompt than anything else. As a result, I wanted to look more closely at how different actions are chosen and used and, by doing so, improve their efficacy.

Methodology

In order to address the aims of the project, a mixed-method approach was used. A total of 120 children across four classes in Year 3 were chosen as a focus group for the project.

Qualitative data was collected by means of pupil questionnaires and interviews, supported by teacher observations and background reading. I have used video regularly from the beginning to record the use of actions and access their efficacy. I also use the IRIS recording system to look at my lessons and review the introduction of different actions and the response of different children (approximately four hours of 2–5 minute video examples were recorded and scrutinised).

In order to assess the efficacy of the actions used I looked at how actions are chosen and discussed their use with the children. Overall, they enjoy using them, particularly in the lower year groups and agree that they are an effective memory tool. Comments included:

'You do the action and you think of something and the word will pop up in your head.'

'It's like a copy of the word but you do it silently and you can remember it like that.'

'If you forget it you can remember it by doing the action.'

Ways in which actions are chosen by children and teacher in the classroom

Actions are used for phonics, words, phrases and sentence-level work. They are chosen in different ways.

Actions for words, phrases and sentences:

a) Some words have an action that is linked to the meaning of the word e.g. a bouncing action for 'a ball' (*un ballon*), a digging action for 'a spade' (*un seau*), a trunk waving for 'an elephant' (*un éléphant*) or the action of ringing a bell for 'school' (*l'école*).

b) Other actions are linked to a chosen characteristic of that word or a behaviour linked to it e.g. a cricket bat action for 'my brother' (*mon frère*) or hands behind head as if relaxing, for beach (*la plage*).

c) Other actions involve a series of movements which support the meaning of the phrase or word, e.g. we raise our arms in the air and smile for 'excited' (*excité*), we open our arms wide, cup our hands and tilt our heads to one side to ask the question 'How are you?' (*Comment ça va?*)

d) Some actions are linked to the shape of the mouth or the sound of the word e,g. we pull our hands out either side of our cheeks for 'Tuesday' (*mardi*) because the end sound of the word makes our face move in that way; we hold our stomachs and act as if we are feeling unwell to make the word 'blue' (*bleu*) because it sounds as if we are going to be ill!

e) Some actions employ more than one method such as using the sound and characteristic of the word along with something that links them to other relevant words, e.g. for cat and dog, which sound very similar to learners in French, we wipe an imaginary paw over our cheek, frown and drop our chin (*un chat*) whilst we smile and lift up our paws to our chin and open our mouth wide for 'dog' (*un chien*). We discuss that dogs can seem happier and bouncier than cats, who are a bit mean and moody.

f) Other actions are linked to what the word in French sounds like in a parallel meaning in English e.g. for the number 'one' (*un*) we cup a hand to our ear as if we cannot hear what someone else says. (NB For the feminine of this word (*une*) we use this same action to connect the two words but we make a round shape with our mouths to stress the vowel sound change and hold one finger by our ear as we do the action.)

g) Other actions are linked to a word in French that we know and that rhymes with the word, e.g. for 'three' (*trois*) we do an action for 'cold' as in French it rhymes with *froid*. For 'cold' we do the same action but more elaborately and the children recognise the different contexts and meanings.

h) Some actions are linked to learners in the immediate environment at the time, e.g. in some classes if there is a Sam we point to him/her and smile when we say the word *samedi* – 'Saturday'.

i) Other actions make a connection to the number of beats in the word or phrase, e.g. for 'I brush my teeth' (*Je me brosse les dents*) the children use an imaginary toothbrush and brush five times in clear movements.

Actions for phonic sounds:

j) For these we use a combination of actions agreed with the children and suggested actions from *Le manuel phonique* and *Physical French Phonics*. I have observed and discussed actions for phonics with Sue Cave (author of *Physical French Phonics*) and used this to help in personalising the actions for my school.

Key findings

From discussion with the children in Year 3, observation of recordings, trials of different actions and personal reflection several things became clear.

1. There are problems that arise with the use of some of these actions:
   • Actions selected by the teacher are not always the ones that the children would necessarily choose and therefore not always the most effective. It is important to agree on one action within a class rather than the teacher deciding or allowing everyone to use their own personal action; one should be aware that this may not necessarily be the right one for everyone.

   • It is important to ensure from the start that children make the actions clearly and encourage them to use their arms and bodies fully. Physical warm-ups can improve some children's movement and accuracy. If the actions are not done properly they often end up as a series of small, similar and unclear movements which do not trigger their memories effectively.

   • The actions need to be easy and comfortable to do physically.

   • It is important to give a clear explanation of the actions and regular rehearsal is essential.

   • Some words involve more difficult phonemes, digraphs and trigraphs that children struggle to retain unless they are broken down carefully and visible in written form, e.g. *une grenouille* (frog) or *un impermeable* (raincoat). Making the written form of all words visible once you have given the sound and action needs to be part of the process.

   • Words that are only loosely connected to meaning are difficult to retrieve and soon prove ineffective.

   • Phrases that use several actions are confusing and cannot be used at normal speed. Actions for whole sentences need to be limited to story-telling or regularly used and recognised structures such as questions and common responses.

2. Overall, the children think that using actions is helpful in remembering aspects of the language but they are happier using certain types of actions. It is important to note that older children, especially older boys, become more reticent about using actions in front of their peers. Once the word is embedded (this will be at different points for different children) the children no longer need to be encouraged to use the actions consistently.

3. Discussion with children indicates how important it is for the actions to be salient and interesting. The majority of children said that actions helped them remember. When asked 'Why do they help?' or 'What is happening when you do an action?' some found it hard to explain what they felt but some responded that doing the action created an image in their head which then triggered the sound of that word and sometimes a picture of the word itself. This adheres to the Modality theory.

4. The actions need to be relevant to the children using them and they need to be allowed to take ownership of how those actions are created and used, making them personal to them. Allow them to change and adapt the actions to suit them individually as long as they remain recognisable.

5. Actions need to be regularly rehearsed and clearly introduced. The reasoning behind them needs to be made clear to children. It is vital that all children understand why an action is being used for a specific sound, word or phrase and how the action is carried out.

6. It is important that teachers are open to changing some actions over time if they do not work.

7. Some classes use different actions for the same thing (*samedi / fermier*) either because that word is linked to a characteristic of a person or a specific class or because these particular children have unanimously agreed upon an action they like for a specific word or phrase.

Actions are easier to use and recall when they:

a) are fun – either because the children enjoy seeing their teacher doing it as it is humorous (e.g. for chocolate we wipe our faces as if they are covered (*le chocolat*), or because they enjoy doing it with their peers, and when doing *le cochon* we make a pig nose with a closed fist held up to our face)

b) relate to their peers in some way, e.g. *samedi*

c) have an emotional connection (e.g. for 'mother' we place a hand over our heart (*la mère*) – this action also highlights the strength to be had from using recognised actions from original American Sign Language)

d) have clear links to meaning, specifically ones that have personal or close relevance to children themselves

e) combine visual and phonological characteristics in order to make it more memorable and easier to recall

f) have a relevant rhythm

g) are created in discussion with the children and are relevant to them, their environment or their class.

Reflections

Aspects of learning that are active and social are likely to be more memorable. Using actions makes language learning more interesting, salient and most importantly, effective – as long as the actions are carefully created. Children have a range of learning styles, and the use of actions needs to support this and be supported with visual and phonological prompts, so that strong memory hooks are created that stay in their working memory and pass securely and accurately into their long-term memory.

It is important to let the children develop their own actions. They will retain and re-use these actions with greater accuracy and understanding when they begin to add personal touches and develop them with expression.

I am now planning to repeat some of this research in mini control groups to compare teaching with actions and teaching without.

Summary

Gesture is an explicit, visual memory hook. It acts as a trigger for recording and recalling information. If you get children moving and excited, their working memory will be stimulated and these triggers will begin the critical process of embedding learning as long-term memorised knowledge.

In order to get children using actions more consistently as a kinaesthetic tool, the actions need to support good pronunciation, be easy and fun to do, relevant, rhythmic, clearly linked to meaning and well-rehearsed. It is also essential that the children are involved in the creation process so that they can place the learning where and how it suits them best in their working memory.

2.2 An investigation into the extent that French language improvement sessions (incorporating 'phonics actions') help primary teachers gain confidence regarding their spoken language and pronunciation

Alison Machin and **Nigel Machin**, Penrice Community College, Cornwall Peninsula Teaching School Partnership

Overview

This research project was in the area of increasing the confidence of generalist primary teachers in speaking French and improving their pronunciation. We discovered that the main concern they have about taking on the teaching of languages at Key Stage 2, in order to fulfil new curriculum proposals, is a general lack of confidence in using the spoken language in the classroom. Teachers believe that their lack of confidence stems from a fear that they may not pronounce the language correctly and thus pass on misconceptions to children at an early stage of their development.

This area of research is important to the work of Penrice because we hope that in transferring to the college in Year 7 children will no longer face the challenge of re-learning language that can sometimes be embedded incorrectly in the early years. Specifically we aimed to encourage primary teachers to look at how French-speaking children acquired skills in pronouncing their own language through use of the phonics system.

The main aims of the research were:

- To improve generalist primary teacher confidence in spoken French

- To improve the pronunciation skills of teachers through the use of French phonics

- To consider what learning a language may offer to supporting other curriculum areas in the primary phase

- To discover how Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) PGCE trainees in our teaching school perceive this approach and how this may be of benefit to other providers.

In order to achieve these research aims, the following research questions were addressed:

• Do primary teachers actively use spontaneous language more during the school day?

• Are teachers more able to pronounce previously unseen vocabulary or structures by applying the techniques they have learnt?

• Do teachers feel generally more confident about teaching French in their schools?

• Are teachers able to make express links to the primary curriculum?

Context

Penrice Community College is the largest mixed 11–16 comprehensive in Cornwall, drawing students from the St Austell area. The college was rated as Outstanding in 2011. We are an International School, a long-established training school and now a teaching school with a clear focus on CPD. The research has been undertaken by Nigel Machin, Vice Principal (Curriculum and Modern Foreign Languages) and Alison Machin, Project Leader.

Our personal interest in assisting primary teachers to deliver languages successfully stems from the school's long-standing status as a Specialist Language College. In view of the Government's announcement of its intention to make language learning compulsory for all pupils from age 7 to 11 from 2014, we feel that we should be helping primary teachers to embrace what can be for them a new and often challenging curriculum subject. An environmental factor affecting teacher capability to teach languages in Cornwall is that we are a largely rural county with a large number of small primary schools. This can be a challenge for a primary teacher who may perhaps be the only teacher in the school with the necessary skills to provide language teaching, and therefore the need for CPD is great.

The French improvement course

Teachers were invited from both from local primary schools and from the wider community, by email. 12 primary teachers attended the course, all of whom were teaching some French in their schools, although with very differing models of delivery. Sessions ran weekly throughout the autumn term 2012 between 4.30 and 6.30pm. Teachers also followed a series of 'directed time' tasks, providing a course of 30 hours in total. Course design was based on Module 1 of the 'French upskilling specification',[5] modified and re-developed to incorporate a clear focus on pronunciation. Motivational activities with express links to the primary curriculum and the Primary Framework for Languages were included in the course.

As a national teaching school with a firm focus on teacher training and development we were also interested to discover the views of secondary PGCE trainees specialising in MFL on how they perceived the usefulness of such training for primary teachers in our school. Trainees observed our 'experience days' sessions at Penrice where teachers participating in the language improvement course worked with their own classes of Years 5 and 6 along with our Year 10 MFL leaders.

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[5] CILT (2009) Language Upskilling Specification overview, available at **http://upskilling.primarylanguages.org.uk/**

Methodology

In order to address the main aims of the project, a mixed-method approach was used, including both quantitative and qualitative data. Primary data was obtained through a questionnaire to participants and in order to provide validity and reliability, triangulation was used. The supporting research method aimed to evaluate teacher confidence and pronunciation through classroom observations of willing participants. Observations took an informal approach with the course trainer in the role of a 'participant observer'. It was felt that this approach would offer further confidence to the teacher and it was stressed that the observations were in no way judgmental. Results were analysed and used to validate responses made in the questionnaire. Informal interviews with PGCE trainees in the college yielded further data to inform our research.

Ethical guidelines in accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA)[6] were strictly adhered to throughout. Teachers and schools involved in the observation part of the project are referred to as A, B, C.

Key findings

1. Pronunciation

Three questions sought to discover the depth at which the improvement sessions were successful in improving teacher pronunciation. Results can be seen in the charts below.

Figure 2.2.1: **Teacher perceptions of pronunciation improvement**
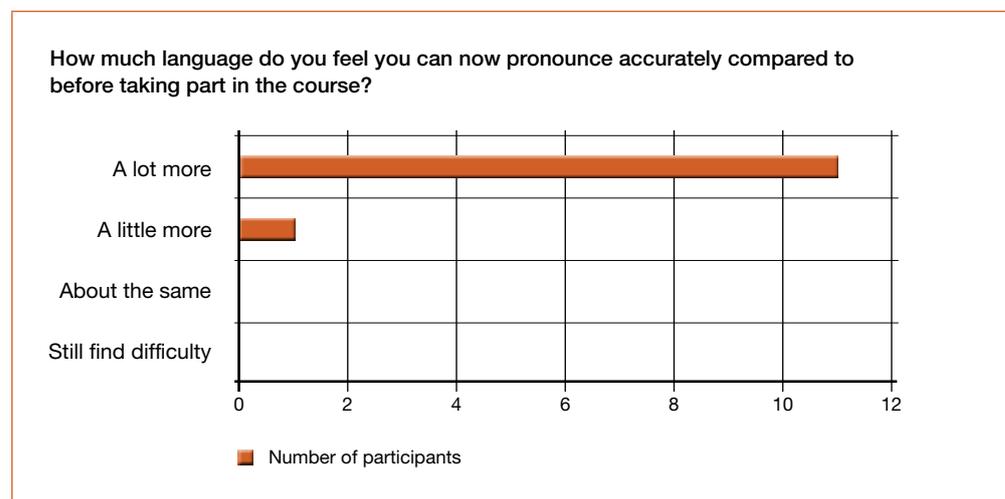
This positive finding demonstrates the importance of the course focus on pronunciation. Adult learners need the opportunity to hear the sounds of words in order to say them correctly. They are vital elements for reading, writing, speaking and listening comprehension and when teachers feel secure in pronouncing language correctly this leads to a great increase in general confidence.

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[6] BERA (2011) *Ethical guidelines for educational research.* London: BERA.

Le manuel phonique[7] was used to assist teachers in revising sounds with great success. In qualitative data accompanying this question one teacher described how she had owned a copy of *Le manuel phonique* for some time but had never used it as it was 'all in French'. On being shown how the techniques could be used she adopted the phonic approach for her own pronunciation practice. Teachers enjoyed using the actions accompanying each sound and commented that children 'felt at home' when they passed on the activities as the method was already familiar to them.

Figure 2.2.2: **Teacher perception of the approach used**
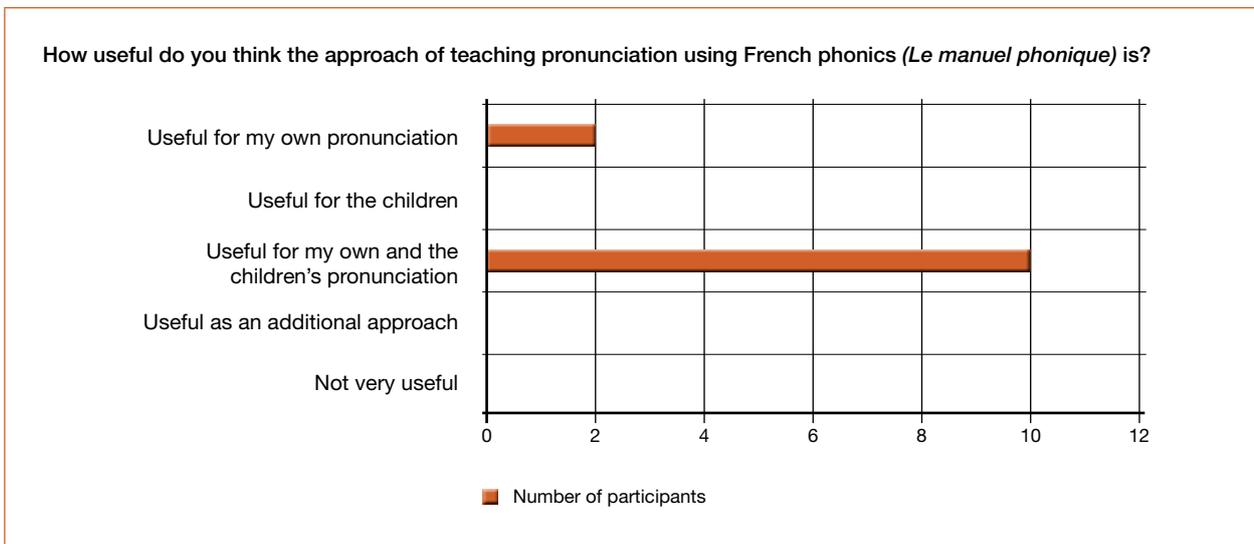
Teachers had specifically wished to feel able to read a story in French to their pupils without the help of a specialist.

Figure 2.2.3: **Improvements in teacher reading confidence**
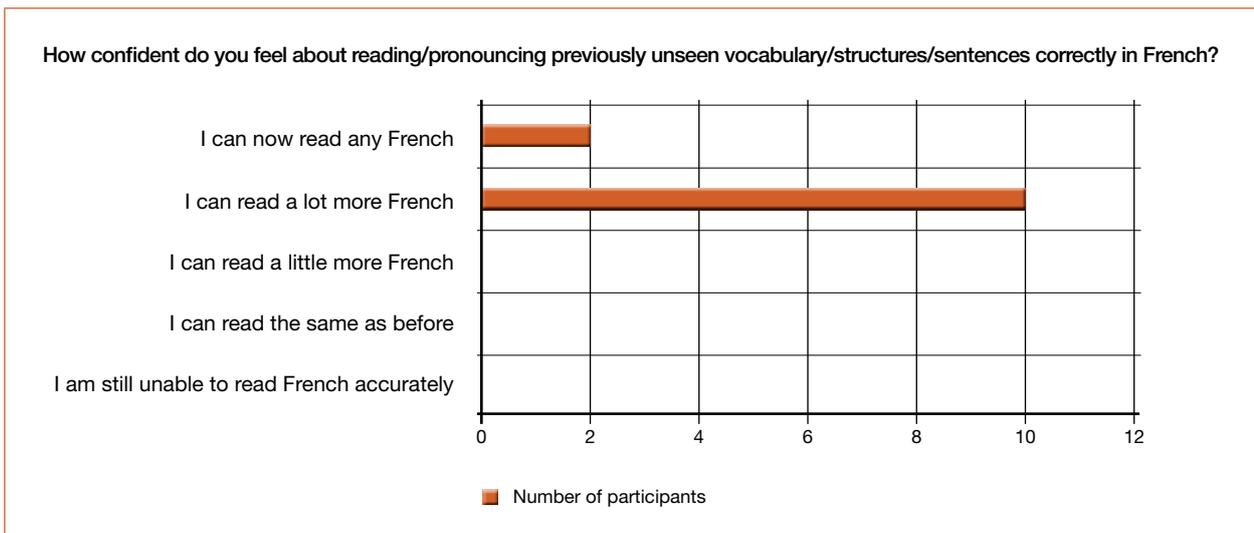
[7] Molzan, J. and Lloyd, S. (2001) *Le manuel phonique*. Jolly Learning Ltd.

This additional result provides evidence of teachers' greater strength in their ability to pronounce sounds correctly. Later in the course they were encouraged to put into practice what they had learnt about pronunciation by being confronted with reading the dual-language book *En marchant dans le jungle*. In applying the rules learnt teachers had little hesitation in their reading and accurate pronunciation was noted. Qualitative data attached to this question identified the ability to do this as a major step forward for some teachers: 'I wanted to link this book to my topic on habitats but was unsure of some pronunciation so had avoided reading it before.' (Teacher B). Teacher B was then observed reading the book to the children confidently and with accuracy.

2. Use of spontaneous language

Figure 2.2.4: **Increased integration of language within the school day**

What language do you now integrate into the school day compared to before taking part in the course?
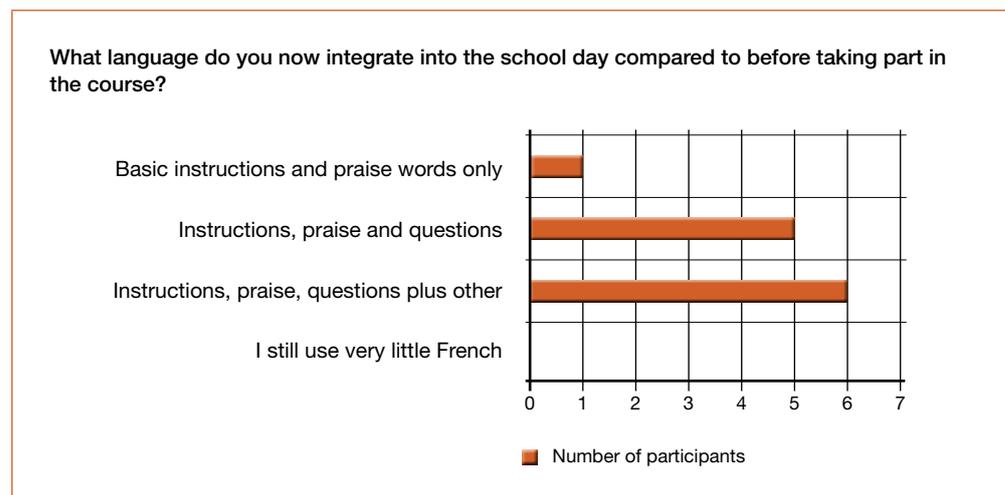
Teachers were encouraged throughout the course to incorporate more everyday language into the classroom. Focused activities introduced a range of praise words, classroom instructions and general questioning techniques. Results of the questionnaire showed that although generally teachers are using more spontaneous language this can be hindered in some schools by timetabling constraints. In three schools course participants were being used to deliver French to all classes during a set time to 'cover PPA (planning, preparation and assessment) time'. Teacher B was observed delivering sessions to several classes in this way; language is only spoken within that set slot of time and fails to be integrated into the school day. Conversely other teachers replied that language was used readily throughout the day at registration times and as 10-minute bursts. This model was observed both in schools A and C where teachers participating in the course were also seen to be conversing to each other in the language. This spontaneous talk had been developed via a social network group and also via text message, where teachers from schools A and C discussed the directed tasks and a range of other unrelated subjects. This finding demonstrates that peer support has significant effects on motivation and confidence.

3. Benefits of learning another language to other curriculum areas

All 12 teachers responded that they thought learning another language can have a 'great deal of benefit to literacy skills', bearing out theories of language learning which argue that language learning aids general cognition. Qualitative data revealed that teachers felt their extensive knowledge of the primary curriculum was valued during the course. Use of the phonic approach was applauded by members of the MFL department who now aim to build upon this work during the transition period.

4. Teacher confidence

Results from a questionnaire at the beginning of the course had shown a variety of opinions regarding teachers' confidence. This could be attributed to the fact that most of the participants did not at that point know each other and some inhibition in such situations is unavoidable. However, due to the large number of energising and kinaesthetic activities to encourage spontaneous language, barriers were quickly broken down and a general surge in confidence was observed. The results at the end of the nine-week course were very encouraging:

Figure 2.2.5: **Improved overall confidence**

How confident do you feel generally about teaching French since participating in the course?
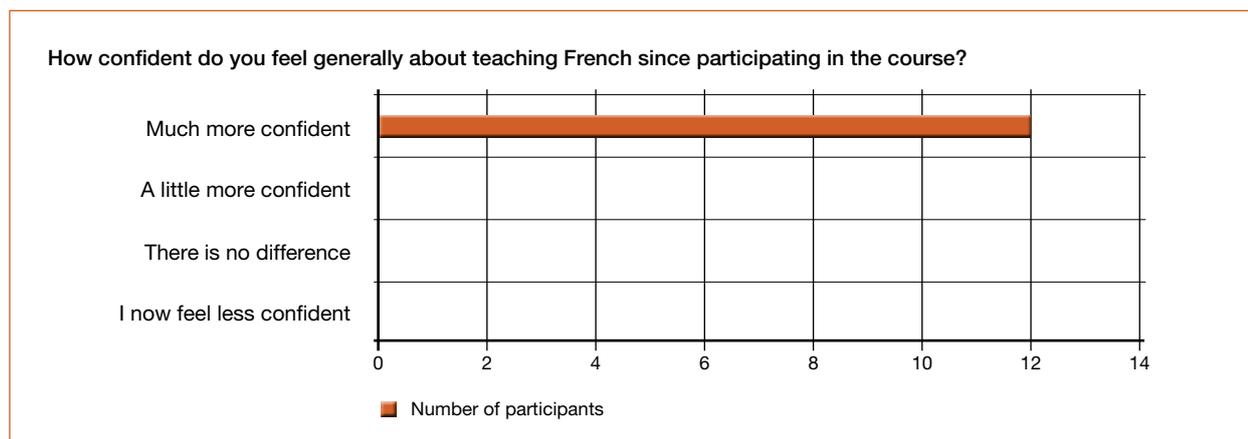
These findings were validated by classroom observations of three participants who were seen to deliver their sessions with a great deal of confidence. Contributory factors could be that these three teachers already have an excellent rapport with the pupils to whom they teach French, and that they are good all-round primary teachers. However, we would argue that this could be a sound indication of what others are also achieving.

5. Views of MFL PGCE trainees in our school

With approximately 30 trainee teachers passing through the college annually, we felt it was important to consider how MFL trainees perceive such a project in our school. Feedback from five PGCE trainees highlighted the following points:

• They felt that the strong links between the two phases are extremely useful to aid transition. Although there is some provision during their training for observing the primary phase, they felt that children's early development of second language learning is vital and could be given far greater focus both during training and for established MFL teachers.

• The use of phonics was applauded and MFL trainees were keen to develop this as an approach in Years 7 and 8 in French as well as in Spanish and German.

• All five trainees expressed interest in exploring the primary curriculum further in order to 'build upon what children already know' and were keen for further discussion with primary teachers and to observe Year 5/6 Literacy.

Reflections

The results of our main two research questions, concerning building primary generalist teacher confidence and pronunciation, are extremely encouraging. We are very proud of the rapport achieved with teachers from a number of schools and especially pleased that the course has enabled them to take ownership of their own further development. An additional outcome is that several teachers have plans to cascade their new skills to colleagues in their schools.

We believe that courses in teacher language improvement need to be structured in a way that can both aid teachers' own understanding of the language and also offer ways in which they can develop similar pronunciation techniques in their own pupils. We aim to build upon the success of the course in three main ways:

- A 'language buddy' system has been put in place where teachers have a direct link to specific members of the MFL Faculty, who will be on hand to answer teachers' questions and offer advice as and when necessary.

- Course participants will make an 'exchange' visit to each other's schools with the purpose of sharing good practice and developing further ideas and resources.

"…courses in teacher language improvement need to be structured in a way that can both aid teachers' own understanding of the language and also offer ways in which they can develop similar pronunciation techniques in their own pupils."

- At participants' request, a further improvement course will be developed based on Module 2 (CfBT Education Trust) to be arranged for autumn 2013.

Should other providers wish to replicate such a project in their schools we would suggest that the following points may be useful:

- Course structure and content. Teachers need to be taught as adult learners in an informal setting through a variety of confidence-building and motivational techniques. Content should not only build teacher language but also offer methodology that can be directly transferred to the classroom.

- The phonic approach. This approach can have two purposes: it both reassures the teacher of their own pronunciation and offers a new methodology for classroom practice.

- Express links to the primary curriculum. The building of sound relationships between the two phases is critical. In developing such a course providers should explore with primary teachers how links can be made to literacy and other primary curriculum areas.

- Working together. Primary teachers should be encouraged to work together to build confidence. We strongly recommend a model in which a group of teachers from one school participates in courses such as this, as this seems to increase motivation, leading to a great deal of spontaneous talk in the language on a daily basis.

Theme 3

Motivation to learn a language, intercultural understanding, authentic materials and activity

3.1 Improving pupils' experiences of language teaching through better intercultural understanding

Philippa Moore, **Janet Kanabahita**, **Sarah Rayner**, **Louise Millward** and **Michelle Collier**, Windhill Primary School, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire
Bishop's Stortford Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This research focuses on broadening children's real experiences of the wider world. The questions we asked were as follows:

- If children are given opportunities to explore and find out about the culture of the country of the language they are learning, does this improve their language learning experiences?

- If children are given the chance to apply their language skills to real-life situations, does this enthuse and inspire a love of learning a language and motivate them to have a positive approach to learning a language?

Context

Windhill Primary School is committed to developing a coherent, progressive, challenging and engaging language learning journey for young people, developing both their linguistic skills and their understanding of other cultures. Windhill Primary has a rather different profile from many other schools in Bishop's Stortford:

- 30% free school meals

- 26% bilingual children

- 25 languages spoken

- 36.2% ethnic minority

- above national average SEN.

Windhill School is a multilingual school and the school's ethos is one which celebrates internationalism. Teaching languages in context is one of many initiatives that the school is working on to raise its status as a school that prepares its pupils for a global society. Key aspects of language learning provision at Windhill Primary School include:

- language teaching from age 5

- specialist language teacher to support class teachers

- language teaching embedded in everyday school life and across the curriculum

- language working walls (in development)

- language clubs

- language assemblies.

This holistic approach to the teaching of languages at Windhill combines specialist language teaching with a whole-school approach in everyday school life and across the curriculum. Language learning is embedded within authentic contexts and is a cornerstone of language teaching. The children at Windhill seem to have a very positive attitude to learning languages. The impact of this approach on the pupils' enjoyment of learning a language has spring-boarded the research project – to find out the extent of its impact and to make decisions about future approaches to language learning and the appreciation of other cultures.

Focus and starting point for research project

Year 5 and Year 6 pupils' attitudes and opinions were collected after immersion in real-life experiences.

Year 5 pupils were offered real-life language experiences by having direct links for two terms with Pierre Trudeau Elementary School in Montreal, Canada. Pupils communicated with pupils in Canada via Skype and collaborated through a closed Facebook page. They have emailed their 'buddies' and made a film about Bishop's Stortford to share with the Canadian pupils on YouTube. More cross-curricular work about Canada was accessed through this venture.

Year 6 pupils were offered real-life language experiences through:

- a school residential trip to Paris

- older Canadian students visiting and working with them in school, sharing information about their culture.

Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected by means of pupil questionnaires and interviews. Teachers' observations were sought in order to monitor change in the pupils' attitudes to the learning of French and their motivation to find out about other cultures.

Two separate questionnaires were distributed: one to Year 5s and the other to Year 6s. Some questions were quantitative and answers rated out of 10, others were multiple choice. The questions rated out of 10 were averaged-out for the purposes of graphing the information. Some questions were designed to be more qualitative and encouraged pupils to give reasons for their attitudes – pupils' comments have been recorded as evidence.

Interviews by Year 6 pupils were sought before the residential trip and were recorded on iPod Touches. Teachers were asked to comment on the children's general enthusiasm for directly engaging with pupils in another country and to log any spontaneous comments made by children.

Key findings

Figure 3.1.1: **Year 6 questionnaire – impact of French residential trip**

Was going to France on a school journey better than going on a school journey in the UK?

Does going on a school trip abroad change your enthusiasm for learning another language?
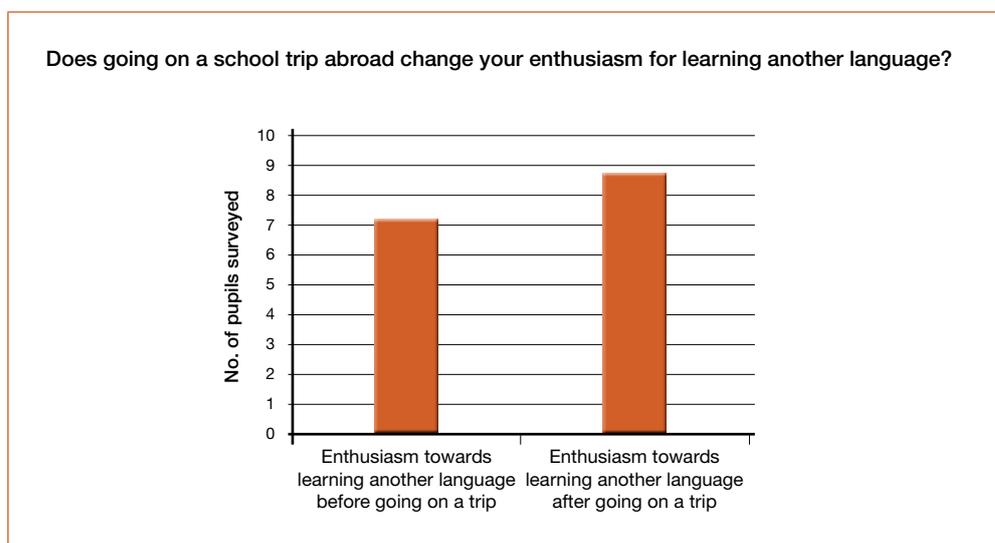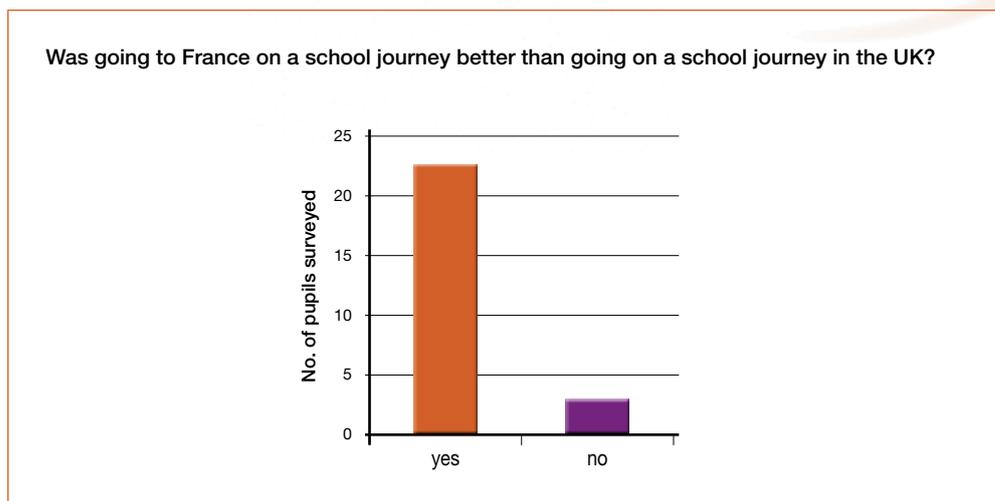
Comments on (1) why going to France on a residential trip was better than the UK and (2) explanations of the change in enthusiasm towards learning another language were as follows:

Positive

(1)   'To see what life is like in different countries.' 'See famous landmarks.' 'Opportunity to learn more languages.' 'Places we hadn't been before.' 'Different.' 'Great chance of trying out a new language to a native speaker.' 'Witness a different culture.' 'I have never been there before.' 'Learn a new language.' 'Learning about it is normal but going to it is so much better.' 'Exciting.' 'Saw Paris.' 'Wanted to go up the Eiffel Tower.'

(2)   'It makes me want to continue to learn French into secondary school.' 'Able to try out the language.' 'I know what France is like.' My enthusiasm has grown; I definitely know that I want to travel.' 'Hearing people speaking it has made me more excited to learn it.' 'Want to learn more about French and even more about France.' 'I am willing to learn more for communication.'

Negative

'Homesick.' 'We stayed on site where most people spoke English.' 'I didn't think there was any point in using it.' 'I was already learning French.'

Figure 3.1.2: **Year 6 questionnaire – impact of Canadian students' visit**

Did meeting the Canadians make you want to learn French even more?

Did meeting the Canadians make you want to go to Canada?

No. of pupils surveyed (y-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25)

yes — approximately 23
no — approximately 3
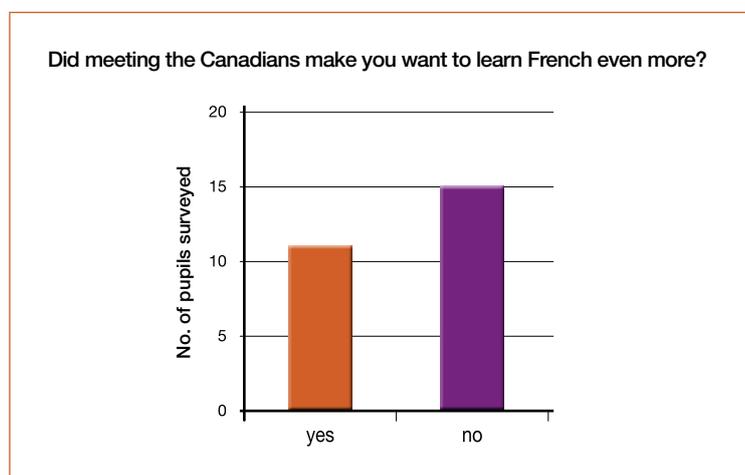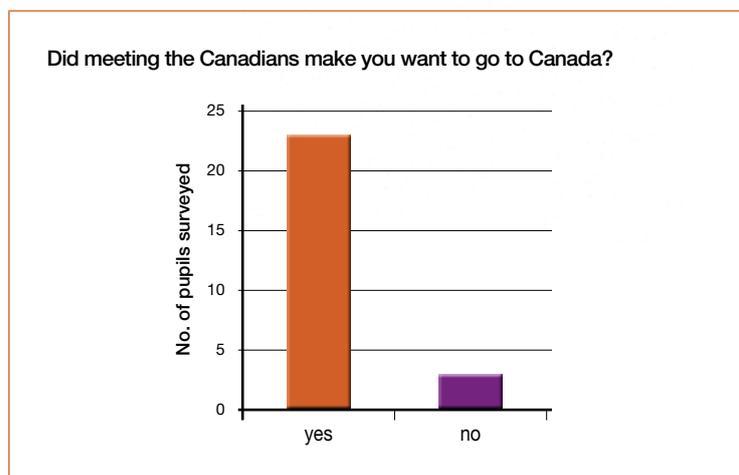
Comments on the impact of meeting the Canadian students, on learning French and enthusiasm for visiting Canada:

Positive
'They told us about their country.' 'I want to see where they live. It's made me want to go more.' 'Not because they speak French… because I would want to visit all the nice places.' 'To explore their culture.' 'Get to speak French to them as well as English.'

Negative
'French is boring to learn.' 'It's cold over there.'

Figure 3.1.3: **Year 5 questionnaire – impact of Canadian link pupils in Montreal**

What did the link with Canada inspire you to want to do?

No. of pupils surveyed (y-axis: 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16)

To travel — approximately 5
To learn a language — approximately 14

What was the best bit about the link with Canada?
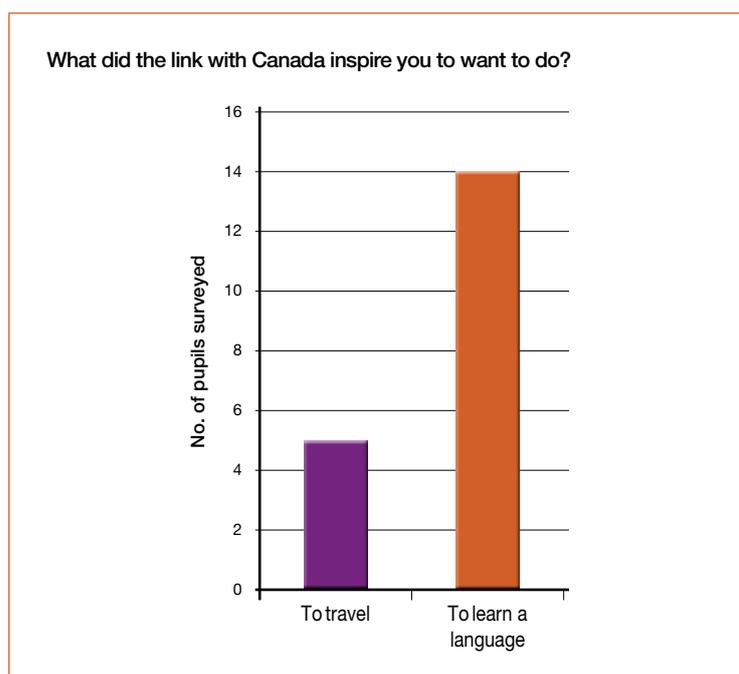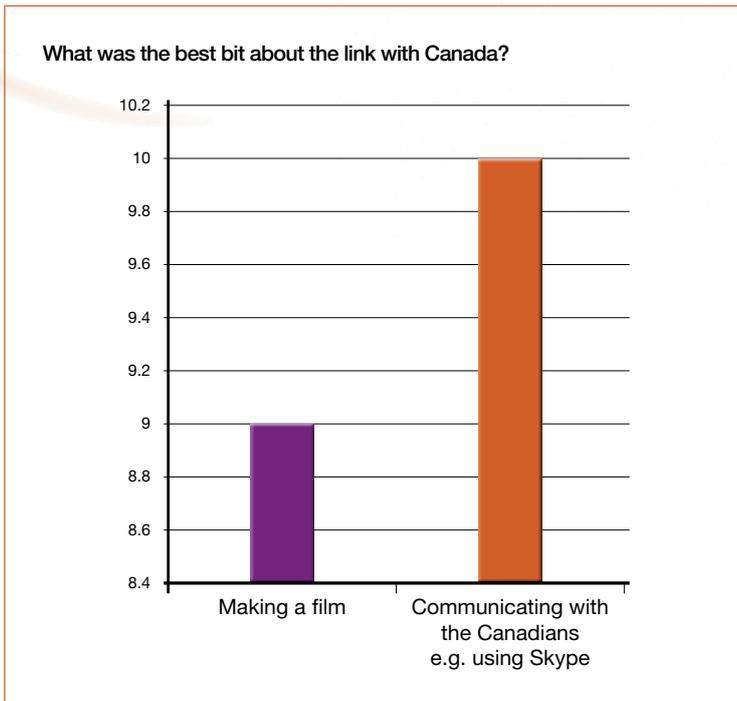
Comments on the impact of links with the Canadian school:

Positive

- All the children surveyed wanted to carry on having links with Canada.

- All children enjoyed having a link with Canada.

- All children surveyed wanted to experience links with other countries.

- Making a film to share with the Canadians gave purpose to the children's learning.

Negative

- Nothing negative was reported.

General comments included the following:

'…could learn about different cultures.' '… exciting to use Skype.' 'Skype can help you learn about other places.' '… can learn more educational things about other countries.' '... It's soooo fun.' '… it connected to our French… it was fun.' 'I like the maths linked to Canada.' 'It was fun having a link to other children in another part of the world.' 'We connected to our French lessons.' 'Firstly, I didn't know Skype existed. Secondly, I really enjoyed meeting people in Canada.' 'It taught me what they do.' 'We found out that they did not wear uniform.' 'It taught me more about Canada.' 'It made me notice that we didn't have maple trees!' 'I had never Skyped before!'

" …an overwhelmingly positive impact on attitudes to learning a language and motivation to engage with new cultures."

Reflections

Windhill School learnt a great deal from the research project. Our 'next steps' plans are as follows:

- Year 6 French residential trip – there was genuine enthusiasm about going abroad for the annual school trip but there was not a significant change in enthusiasm for learning the language as a result of the experience. Most comments related to the positive experiences of immersion in the culture.

School action – as a result of this, the school has looked into another venue in France which more actively supports immersion in the language and French culture.

- Year 6 Canadian students' visit – this made a significant impact with regard to the pupils wanting to visit Canada, but less impact with regard to pupils being motivated to learn French. This was probably due to the fact that the Canadians conversed in English and there was no need to use French at all.

School action – to host more French-speaking students.

- Year 5 impact of Canadian link pupils in Montreal – an overwhelming, overall positive impact on attitudes to learning a language and motivation to engage with new cultures. The direct link with Canada really motivated all pupils, causing a frisson of excitement for learning in the classroom. Direct links through Skyping were cited as exciting and served as a window to a 'far-away' country. The communication served as a real-life opportunity to explore linked learning in other areas of the curriculum; the children obviously were enthused by this and this made the learning long-lasting e.g. one teacher reported that the children's excellent knowledge of temperature difference was directly linked to this experience.

School action – as a result of the children's overwhelmingly positive response to the continuation with the links with Canada, the school is undertaking to sustain these links. If possible, more classes will be involved with a link to the Canadian school in Montreal.

All children in Years 5 and 6 were given the opportunity to comment on next steps, and the main findings were that we should:

- establish more links with other countries

- continue the links with Canada

- set up more language clubs

- have a 'Foreign Language Week'

- set up exchanges with foreign students

- use Skyping and email to communicate with children in other countries

- use more games in our language lessons

- learn other languages – possibly Spanish

- have more French lessons.

This project has shown that:

• immersing pupils in real-life situations where there are direct links to pupils in other countries significantly enthuses them and inspires a love of learning a language, motivating them to have a positive approach towards language learning.

• being given opportunities to explore and find out about the culture of the country of the language they are learning unquestionably improves children's language learning experiences.

3.2 Developing intercultural understanding using authentic materials

Colin Humphrey, George Abbot School, Guildford
George Abbot School Teaching School Alliance

Overview

George Abbot School has been working in partnership with local primary schools for a number of years now (for example, producing cross-curricular materials for French and Spanish in 2011/12 to share more widely via our website). Our involvement with this CfBT research project fitted in well with our development plan, with developing intercultural understanding being identified as a focus for 2012/13. We welcomed two new members to our established working group, one each from the two secondary schools involved (see below).

Aims of the research were:

• To develop effective materials and activities for intercultural understanding in Key Stage 2 (KS2) and Key Stage 3 (KS3)

• To identify features of effective practice in delivering intercultural understanding

• To use this understanding to inform subsequent development of intercultural understanding materials in years 2 and 3 of this project.

Research questions investigated were as follows:

• In what ways can teachers exploit authentic materials to develop language skills and intercultural understanding simultaneously? (Authentic materials include photographs, web materials [such as websites, graphs, notices, more extended reading texts], documents from abroad etc.)

• What are the obstacles and difficulties in simultaneously developing language skills and intercultural understanding?

• How can these obstacles be overcome?

• What are the features of effective intercultural understanding materials at KS2 and KS3?

• What are the features of effective pedagogy in delivering intercultural understanding in KS2 and KS3?

Context

George Abbot School is an 11–18 comprehensive school in Guildford, within 25 miles of London. It has an excellent academic reputation both within the county and nationally and is heavily oversubscribed. Its pupil intake is comprehensive, both socially and academically; nonetheless, 3.8% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Our research project was undertaken with (a) two Year 8 German classes (middle-ability and low-ability, focusing on shops and products) and (b) a Year 7 German mixed-ability class and a Year 9 French upper-ability class (comparing UK and Austrian schools).

Kings College is an 11–18 comprehensive school situated on the western edge of Guildford. Its pupil intake is fully comprehensive. It is situated in an area of considerable deprivation, with 22% of the school population registered for free school meals and 33% of the pupils on the SEN register. Kings has recently become a partner with George Abbot School in order to drive up standards and develop sustainable leadership. The intercultural understanding activity was based on personal information and hobbies, and was used with two Year 8 Spanish classes, one mixed-ability, one upper-ability.

Tillingbourne Primary is a larger-than-average junior school with good facilities, located in a village on the outskirts of Guildford. The pupils (around 360, mainly of white British descent, with an almost equal number of girls and boys) come from a variety of social backgrounds, drawn from a wide catchment area covering several small villages. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average; however, the percentage of pupils with special educational needs is in line with the national average. Attainment is in line or better than national expectations. Our research project was undertaken with two Year 6 mixed-ability classes, and involved comparing UK and French schools.

Worplesdon Primary is an oversubscribed two-form-entry primary school with 417 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The school has a broadly average proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, including pupils who are supported by School Action Plus or have a statement of special educational needs. These pupils have a range of differing needs. The school has gained several awards, including the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award and the International School Award. Our research project was undertaken with three Year 5 groups, each containing 20 pupils (mixed-ability) and focused on comparing UK and French schools.

Methodology

After a helpful continuing professional development session on intercultural understanding from a local KS2 Modern Foreign Languages consultant, five teachers from four schools identified activities they could deliver based on the scheme of work they were following later that term. Teachers devised both the lesson activity and found or created any necessary accompanying materials. These included:

• smartboard materials

• internet video examples

• authentic materials from a partner school

• a Spanish internet blog.

Teachers delivered the activities at the end of November or early December and asked pupils to complete a survey to indicate their evaluation of the lesson. Teachers also completed a survey, either in writing or in conversation with the coordinating Specialist Leader of Education (SLE). The findings of both evaluation tools were then used to:

• refine the materials/activities devised

• identify good practice and useful strategies to share more widely (see below)

• help devise further materials in the spring and summer terms, which will eventually be shared via the school's teaching school alliance website.

For example, a Year 8 German lesson took the following form:

1. Starter: (a) revise shop names (with pictures) to recall the theme; (b) identify shopping brands common to the UK and Germany and those found only in one country

2. Use Google maps and 'street view' to show a shopping street from Leipzig with some of the brands on display

3. Show photos of shops, then revise names of shops – pupils see pictures only, and recall the shop name

4. Learn or revise names of products in different shops

5. Listening quiz (in target language) … In which shop can you buy product x?

6. Quiz for recall of vocabulary.

Key findings

The chief finding is that intercultural understanding work is entirely feasible and is enjoyed by the pupils. Their comments in the pupil surveys were overwhelmingly positive in terms of interest and enjoyment. At the same time, all teachers involved felt that preparation time was considerable, and would not be sustainable if intercultural understanding were to feature on a highly regular basis. Ways around this might include pooling work where there was sufficient opportunity for teamwork (e.g. larger Intercultural understanding departments at KS3, larger primary teams in KS2 or via local authority networks if available, e.g. a Surrey KS2 network that runs in 2012/13); or the use of a suitably briefed foreign language assistant or teaching assistant if available.

Many of the usual considerations in lesson planning apply to delivering intercultural understanding. These include:

- There should be a clear, limited and achievable learning objective.

- There should be a range of activities to suit different learners and to ensure variety of activity.

- Ideally, lessons should be 'chunked' into shorter, pacy activities to engage pupils (although this depended in part on the topic chosen, as some activities involved research and reading, including dictionary use to assist with comprehension).

- Activities could include games/quizzes; it might be wise if focusing on intercultural understanding for a substantial time (e.g. 30 minutes – 1 hour) to have one activity requiring a reading or 'writing' focus (e.g. completing a table, doing a cloze exercise) to alleviate the concentration burden of a predominantly oral – aural lesson.

- The language demands of the tasks must be planned clearly, e.g. what language should be used productively and whether this needs teaching or revising; or what language might prove a comprehension obstacle and so would need teaching in advance in order to overcome this obstacle.

- Planning for differentiation should be included.

Planning elements that were less familiar to us included:

- extra planning and resourcing (e.g. visual resources) to enable minimal use of English in the activities

- how to ensure that pupil learning was active, when the learning objective was a more 'passive' one of understanding.

"Ideally, lessons should be 'chunked' into shorter, pacy activities to engage pupils..."

Reflections

Our involvement in the project was a little late and the scope of our experience somewhat limited as a result. We anticipate that in our subsequent work we will need to develop a clearer understanding of:

- progression in intercultural understanding; how we can ensure that, over a school year, later activities extend pupils' understanding more than early activities

- how best to select intercultural understanding topics and materials. There is a balance to be found between (a) ensuring that pupils find what is presented to them as personally relevant and interesting, and (b) presenting things that are outside of pupils' experience such that new learning takes place. It was felt that 'personalising' materials in some way partly responded to this concern (e.g. focusing on a personal story of a foreign child's daily routine, rather than a more technical comparison of school timetables; video examples and blogs would be effective in this respect). Nonetheless, pupils responded well to materials that we tried which did not appear to do this.

- how we can effectively dovetail intercultural understanding work with the parallel need to ensure progression in language learning. Whilst the group felt that this was possible, they also felt that it might require substantial additional planning. For practical purposes, we would recommend a discrete focus either on intercultural understanding objectives or on language learning objectives. This could take the form of one lesson focusing on developing cultural awareness, with lessons before and after retaining a 'usual' language-learning focus; thus there might be one or two intercultural understanding lessons within a particular theme of work. Or there might be part of a lesson where the primary objective is intercultural understanding, and the remainder of the lesson focuses on developing language skills in the 'normal' way. One could have the intercultural understanding component as an initial lesson activity (e.g. both to contextualise the lesson and to aid motivation and interest) with relevant language points being developed in the remainder of the lesson.

- how we might exploit more systematically the opportunities that intercultural understanding provides to develop thinking skills (e.g. Personal Learning and Thinking Skills). This will be a focus for us in activities we develop later in our project.

We now plan to develop and trial further activities over the coming year, to refine them as appropriate and to make them available via the George Abbot Teaching School website.

3.3   Using authentic materials to improve reading and enhance engagement with language learning

David Spence, Bristol Metropolitan Academy, Bristol
Cabot Learning Federation

Overview

Our project had the following broad aims:

1. The key driver behind the project was to develop student progress and uptake in Modern Foreign Languages. We have a 4–19 vision for education in the Cabot Learning Federation, and our aim is to ensure that prior knowledge is enhanced and any gaps are addressed, looking at key transition points, i.e. from Key Stage 2 to 3, Key Stage 3 to 4 and Key Stage 4 to post-16 and into further education.

2. We were very keen to address a key finding from the Ofsted report *Modern languages: Achievement and challenge 2007-2010* which was published in January 2011. This indicated that:

'In over half of the schools visited … reading was not taught beyond exercises in course books or previous examination papers and teachers made insufficient use of … authentic material … to develop students' speaking, listening, writing, knowledge about language, language learning strategies and intercultural awareness.'

In the audit that we conducted within our wider teaching school alliance, this was considered an area of high priority for all the participating schools.

Context

The project was led by David Spence, Specialist Leader of Education for the Cabot Learning Federation group of Academies in the Bristol area. There were originally six participating academies, of which five remained committed to the project in its entirety. They were:

• Hans Price Academy in Weston-super-Mare, represented by Corinne Vicarage

• Bradley Stoke Community School, represented by Jennie Browne

• King's Oak Academy, represented by Sabrina Marie-Anais

• John Cabot Academy, represented by Jess Tomico

• Bristol Metropolitan Academy, represented by David Spence.

There was an acknowledgement that too few of us are willing to expose Key Stage 3 students in particular to more difficult and challenging texts. Also, Year 9 is the year in which there is the most disengagement from Modern Foreign Languages, hence the decision to aim the project at this age group.

Methodology

The audit carried out revealed that reading using authentic materials was an area of priority across the board. The INSET (in-service training) that David Spence attended, run by the Professional Development Consortium for Modern Foreign Languages, was a further inspiration for the choice of reading as our action research project. In response to this, the following questions were addressed in the research:

• What impact does the teaching of comprehension strategies for reading have on learners' ability to gain a global understanding of a passage?

• What impact does the teaching of comprehension strategies have on learners' level of confidence and self-efficacy for reading and listening?

• What impact does the teaching of sound-spelling rules have on learners' ability to understand reading passages?

• Does teaching a range of comprehension strategies for listening and reading enable learners to use a wider range of such strategies?

As a true partnership we used to the full the face-to-face opportunities to collaborate effectively and develop resources, or amend existing ones. We used our first meeting as a group to agree a range of strategies that we felt were critical to be able to evaluate the success of this methodology. We knew that, of all the strategies identified, there is a real tendency for students to over-use the use of cognates as their sole strategy to help them unlock and decode texts.

Key findings

Findings have been overwhelmingly positive. Engagement has been good and the material has provided an extra cultural dimension for which there is often not enough time in the curriculum, certainly not in the typical textbook-driven approach. In terms of learning, we have seen evidence of an impact, not least concerning identification of opinions, connectives, decoding meaning based on context. The approach to sounding out words, particularly in French, has also been beneficial. We also recognise that there is something to be learnt regarding trusting students more and allowing them to work in different groupings. Many students surprised themselves by how much they could do, using other stimuli such as headlines and pictures as directed by the teacher. If the content of the article is suitable for the group in question, there is no discernible variance between the engagement of boys and girls. Looking ahead, we feel we could do more to make the texts more interactive, even adding sound and more colour, and build them into mini-units where there is also an opportunity for speaking work.

Reflections

We now want to involve more teachers within the remit of the project. We have the opportunity to do this via our Federation Network Nights which are scheduled to take place once a term. This is a forum of best practice where all the departments within the Cabot Learning Federation meet up. As students become more trained in and confident with the key strategies, we may choose to allow for a more self-access approach which may appeal to gifted and talented students. Edmodo might be an effective forum to explore the idea of greater interactivity. There is the issue of difficulty of access versus authenticity. If a text has to be adapted very considerably, clearly the risk will be that the authenticity is lost. The scaffolding and teaching process then becomes really critical and this, I feel, is an area we will have to explore further, as well as how to differentiate within a group so that all are sufficiently supported and challenged. We recognise that the texts have taken a long time to create, even if the worth is obvious. I know many of my colleagues have been surprised at how positive students have been and are now fully committed to looking to embed reading opportunities into their schemes of learning.

"Many students surprised themselves by how much they could do, using other stimuli such as headlines and pictures as directed by the teacher."

3.4 Familiarity breeds content – how secondary schools can ease the transition for primary school students, with particular reference to speaking in Modern Foreign Languages

Neil Brown, Stanchester Academy, Somerset
The Partnership Teaching School

Overview

This research project took as its starting point the observation that secondary schools seem to receive students with speaking as their best skill and produce students with speaking as their worst or least confident skill. The project aimed therefore, to answer the question:

'What can secondary schools learn from primary schools regarding the learning of speaking skills in Modern Foreign Languages?'

and specifically:

- What role does environment play?

- How do physiological factors inhibit students' speaking skills at secondary level?

- To what extent does the method of teaching used in other subjects contribute to students' confidence in speaking?

Context

Stanchester Academy is a semi-rural mixed comprehensive school with approximately 900 students aged 11–16 on roll. The Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) department comprises one full-time member of staff, two staff on 0.8 contracts and one Graduate Teacher Programme student. Stanchester students learn French from Year 7 to Year 9, some students learn Spanish or German in Year 9, and students then choose either French, Spanish, German or no foreign language at Year 10.

The school's improvement plan aims to increase the uptake of MFL in Key Stage 4 and to make available a wider choice of languages throughout the school.

Methodology

We chose to concentrate on two key aspects of MFL teaching namely *confidence and engagement*. We asked the question *How can we maintain students' confidence and maintain a high level of engagement?* Our first task was to ask the students how they felt that we could maintain their confidence while at the same time practising their spoken French.

Primary transition – speaking

We devised a questionnaire which would be accessible to Year 6 and Year 7 students. Whilst this was useful, we found that it only confirmed some self-evident truths, namely that it is indeed intimidating to speak in French in front of a large number of your peers and that speaking tasks should be relevant. Students are at a difficult developmental stage, often concerned about their self-image and keen to maintain themselves in obscurity. Clearly, this is at odds with whole-group speaking tasks. We needed to devise some techniques to overcome this barrier.

Students' clear preference for 'relevant' tasks presented us with a concern about how we model the language that we wish the students to perform. A cursory look at existing materials showed that listening tasks were either expensive, boring, irrelevant or a mixture of all three. Many either model the lexical items we want students to pick up on or the grammatical items, but usually not both.

When we distilled the elements of our task, therefore, we discovered that we had two key obstacles to overcome:

- To discover a way that students can speak (and that we as teachers can assess them), but where they do not have to do this in front of the whole class

- To devise a method that we can model language to students in a relevant, engaging way which encompasses the grammar and lexical items that we want students to learn.

Reducing the threat

Clearly, pair work could be one way of reducing the threat of speaking in front of 28 of one's peers but experience shows, and classroom practice confirms, that this can be ineffective and often difficult to assess. We chose, therefore, to experiment with 'talking tins' (see below) which would enable the students to work in pairs, review their work and then allow us to assess their work afterwards.

Talking tins

Talking tins are simple and inexpensive electronic devices that enable students to record a minute of conversation and then replay it, correcting their own work, spotting mistakes and learning from them.

We then found that if we numbered them and recorded the pairs to whom we had given the tins, we could take them back and assess and 'level' them (according to the National Curriculum) after the students had left the class. Anecdotally, it was clear that the students found this method engaging and less threatening than the previous method of getting students to speak in front of one another. Student voice would subsequently confirm this.

I also looked at other schools that had outstanding practice. One school, often held up as an example of excellent practice in MFL by Ofsted, had stopped spending money on textbooks and used their budget to acquire 'props' which would enable students to 'act' and 'be someone else'. Inspired by this, I spent £4 buying two huge inflatable microphones from eBay, behind which students can 'hide' when they are speaking in front of the class. Anecdotally, again, it has become clear that students who previously did not want to speak in front of the class now actively ask for the microphone and are prepared to speak in the target language when hiding behind the prop.

The school in question had also used wigs and other props in encouraging transition students to speak in the target language. Our experiments with inflatable microphones would appear to confirm this approach, and we intend to continue with the purchase of props as a means of encouraging speaking.

Engaging language modelling

As previously mentioned, it is difficult to find texts which deal with the lexical and grammatical items that we wish to model for students. The CDs that are available are often dull and lack engagement or relevance. We therefore wanted to find a method of modelling language in an engaging and relevant way, which also dealt with the grammar and vocabulary we wanted to teach.

I had been experimenting with applications on my iPad and a colleague recommended PuppetPals as a likely application for MFL. This application enables the teacher to record a brief puppet show with photos or characters from its own database and to use the teacher's own language as the dialogue.

The implications for MFL are as follows:

- Engaging and fun resources

- Modelling of the *exact* language required

- Use of voices familiar to the students

- Very little preparation time

- Very little expenditure (the application costs £1.99).

Research indicates that students are engaged by using up-to-date and leading-edge technologies. PuppetPals employs very traditional language modelling techniques and merges them with up-to-date technology which is within current students' vernacular. The myriad of characters available and the fact that you can import your own photos means that a different PuppetPals show is available as required and students always appear to find these fun and interesting.

Student feedback suggests that the familiarity of voice and the engaging nature of the video helps focus and understanding of the language modelled.

…groups found themselves emboldened by the use of inflatable microphones, wigs, false spectacles or hats.

Engaging modelling for the non-specialist teacher

Primary schools may not, of course, have specialist linguists able or confident enough to model language for students. We therefore experimented with *Go! Animate* which is an online cartoon creation program.

Physical environment

Some best practice models for MFL have often asserted that tables should be in groups of four students, similar to the arrangement in many primary classrooms. This has the dual benefit of facilitating group discussion and offering a familiar environment to primary transition students.

I therefore rearranged my secondary classroom to reflect the arrangement of a primary school classroom to discover whether familiarity would breed contentment among my Year 7 students.

Student voice suggests that Year 7 students are more comfortable in such an environment and this is pedagogically preferable. An additional benefit has been an improvement in my own teaching practice in classes further up the school.

Figure 3.4.1: **The teaching workflow approach used in this research**
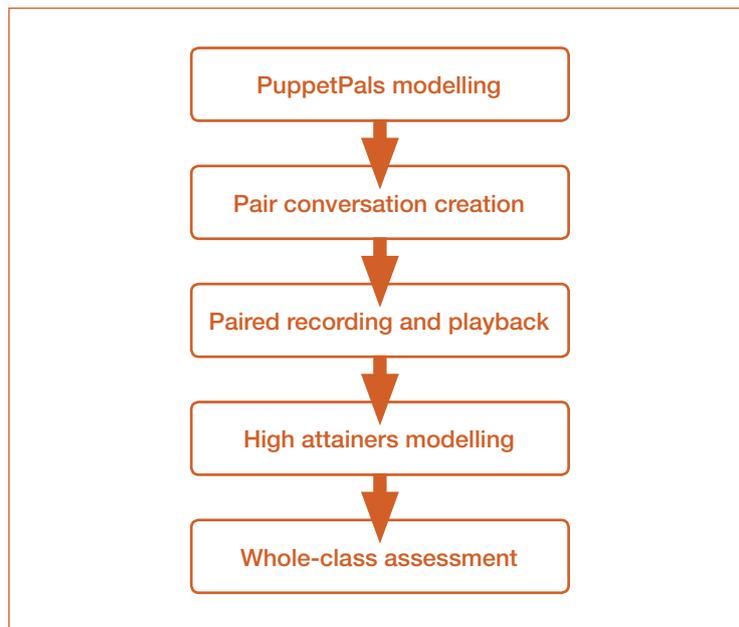
The most successful lessons followed a similar pattern to the one shown above.

Key findings

Findings can be broken down into four broad categories. It is important to acknowledge, in the first instance, that the findings, while affirming, were not entirely surprising.

Reducing the threatening nature of spoken French remains the cornerstone of a successful transition from KS2 to KS3 in our subject area. By its nature, transition can have a negative effect on students' self-confidence and consequently on their spoken French. It follows, therefore, that any strategy to reduce anxiety will act to improve a student's speaking level. Such strategies are outlined below:

1. Hiding

Props that enable students to 'become' another person, or to 'hide behind' another identity proved an exceptionally successful aid in the classroom. Students in both KS2 and KS3 groups found themselves emboldened by the use of inflatable microphones, wigs, false spectacles or hats.

2. Reduced group size for speaking activities

A prominent fear voiced by Year 7 students – and echoed in my own memory of learning French among 29 of my peers – was that of speaking in front of the class. The inexpensive 'Talking Tin' devices alleviated this fear almost entirely, allowing the students to speak in front of only one person, make mistakes and re-record, assess their work themselves, and finally to be assessed accurately by the classroom teacher.

3. Familiar environment

As secondary practitioners we inherit students who are familiar with a particular classroom environment and it is perverse to add to their anxiety by changing this. Mirroring the seating arrangement from their primary school classroom enabled me to mitigate any additional anxiety.

4. Familiar and engaging materials

It is hard to overstate the level of engagement produced by the PuppetPals cartoons mentioned above. They had the twin benefits of using familiar faces and voices for the students and producing the exact grammar and vocabulary we wanted to teach. For an investment of less than £2.00 this is a vital piece of software for MFL classrooms.

Reflection

The process of analysing current practice using a KS2 pupil's viewpoint has informed KS2 planning in the following ways:

- Age is not necessarily a determinant of approach. A technique that helps a pupil learn in KS2 can be adopted in KS3 and vice versa.

- Familiarity is a very useful feature.

Transition between primary and secondary school is full of unfamiliar experiences for students, many of which contribute to a lack of confidence. Providing familiar materials, environment and aural resources can mitigate this and aid spoken French. As mentioned above, neither of these observations is unexpected, merely affirming and underlining. Nonetheless, when taken as a whole, this project has had a significant effect on the planning of our scheme of work for Year 7. It is our intention to use more of our limited and precious budget on the purchase of props and other engaging and anxiety-reducing items, where previously we would have bought more traditional items such as textbooks and the like.

Similarly, our approach to Year 7 classroom management will reflect the learning practices inherited from primary school. It is clear that in a comfortable environment students are more able to produce spoken French than perhaps we had imagined. The strategies and approach outlined above will enable us to maximise spoken French with our Year 7 students.

Theme 4

Special educational needs and less able learners

4.1 What is the impact of Modern Foreign Languages on engagement and communication of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) pupils in Key Stage 2?

Kirsty Kelly, Springwood School, Salford
Cultivus Teaching School Alliance

Overview

The research project took the form of an enquiry into Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) teaching and learning in a Special Education setting; looking to see if there had been an impact on the communication of our pupils diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and to further research the different teaching strategies and resources that might help in this area. As a school, we are working towards becoming communication friendly, and developing MFL as an inclusive communication tool for all our pupils is an important part of the subject development. Also, as MFL subject leader, it is important for me to ensure MFL meets the needs of all learners across the school; the progress and engagement of pupils in all groups within the school is an important part of the school improvement plan.

The research had the following primary aims:

- To investigate the impact that MFL has on the engagement and communication of ASD learners

- To identify teaching methods and resources which have specific impact on ASD pupils' engagement with MFL.

In order to carry out this research the following questions were asked:

- Are there specific teaching methods which have an impact on ASD pupils' engagement in MFL?

- Does MFL have an impact on communication of ASD pupils?

- What MFL resources have the most impact on ASD pupils' response?

Context

Springwood School serves the whole of the Salford local authority, being the provider for children with complex and challenging special educational needs in their primary years (aged 2–11). The school has been in existence for 11 years, being an amalgamation of three previous special schools in the local area. There are currently 165 pupils on roll (120 boys and 45 girls). The current breakdown of the school population is:

• 16% PMLD (profound and multiple learning disabilities)

• 33% ASD (autism spectrum disorders)

• 42% SLD (specific learning difficulties)

• 9% MLD (moderate learning difficulties)

> *" Springwood is committed to MFL teaching as an inclusive approach to learning for all our pupils, no matter what their special educational needs. "*

The school is structured with an Early Years department, PMLD and ASD discrete provision, and Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2) classes that have children with a range of special educational needs.

The research was carried out by Kirsty Kelly, a Key Stage 2 class teacher and MFL subject leader since September 2011. MFL was taught previously in KS2 by a Foreign Languages Assistant (FLA) but the funding for this was stopped in July 2011.

Springwood is committed to MFL teaching as an inclusive approach to learning for all our pupils, no matter what their special educational needs. At the beginning of our journey into teaching MFL some members of staff were uncertain of their own skills and subject knowledge and also about how they could plan and deliver to the highly diverse population of our school. Throughout the research project these issues will be part of the backdrop to the findings and the reflections that can be made.

Methodology

Pedagogy of MFL at Springwood

French is part of school life from Nursery to Year 6 at Springwood through a variety of different approaches. In Early Years and KS1, the children experience greetings and different songs, stories told with puppets and sensory intercultural activities for a 5–10 minute daily parcel. In KS2, there are similar daily parcels for greetings, often at the start of the afternoon session and then a longer 30–45 minute lesson based on a half-term theme following the school curriculum map and our schemes of work, which have been written to best meet the needs of our children. The subject leader gives each year group a resource pack for each half-term's theme containing stories, flashcards, song words, activities and sensory resources such as bean bags, dressing-up clothes and role-play toys.

In order to address all the research questions a range of different methods was used:

Interviews with pupils

The practitioner interviewed two Year 6 pupils and three Year 5 pupils with an ASD diagnosis about their enjoyment and engagement with MFL in school. These children are familiar with the adult carrying out the interviews and were done in an informal setting and the children had symbol questions as a visual aid to help them understand what was being asked. The interviews were carried out on a 1:1 basis.

Figure 4.1.1: **Examples of how some of the pupil voice questions were presented to the children participating in the interviews**

The symbols are used throughout the school as a communication method.

Qualitative anecdotal evidence from teaching

Over a six-month period the research practitioner taught MFL in three different classes in KS2, so has a lot of evidence to bring to the project about observations made in teaching MFL to different pupils in school.

Lesson observations

The subject leader made regular lesson observations in several Year 5 and Year 6 classes, and also observed some MFL teaching and learning across the rest of KS2. Both daily parcels and longer lessons were observed and notes were taken, with the focus being the research questions mentioned above.

Anecdotal evidence from other colleagues

Other teaching colleagues regularly drop in to offer anecdotes about how the children in their classes are engaging with and enjoying MFL and these are noted and placed in the MFL Evidence File along with photographs of children participating in MFL activities, Record of Achievement records and some pieces of children's work.

Key findings

The key findings from the research about the different teaching resources and strategies used are as follows.

Daily parcels

It was seen that the repetition of this daily parcel each day appeals to the ASD learner both from observed and anecdotal evidence of children learning the routine. Some children were seen to come in from the lunch-time play-time and sit asking for the 'Bonjour' song knowing that this is part of their afternoon routine and starting to sing the words before the music starts. It seems that this knowledge of the routine enhanced the children's engagement with the subject as they are comfortable with the familiar activities and can concentrate on what is being taught.

Songs

Songs are an important part of our teaching strategies and simple repetitive songs are proving to be a great learning tool for all of our children. They are inclusive and our non-verbal children are able to listen to the songs while others can copy and repeat the songs they hear. Some teachers use visual prompts of symbols and signs on the whiteboard to help engage pupils and this was seen to definitely help some ASD learners who were able to follow the symbols they were used to and make associations with the language they were hearing, and began to give the target language some meaning. An elective mute Year 5 child who had chosen not to verbally communicate with adults in school for several years but communicated by talking to another child would join in with his peers when singing French songs, something he would not do when the singing was in English.

Objects of reference

Objects of reference are a key communication tool which are used across school in all curriculum areas and are beginning to be used in MFL teaching, especially in PMLD and ASD classes but also with our MLD and SLD pupils. These are a sensory tool that mean children make an instant connection between new vocabulary and an object to give meaning to the word they are hearing.

Puppets

Each class in school has an MFL puppet to which they have given a French name and which is used in the teaching of MFL. The puppet, like the object of reference, provides a connection for our pupils between an object and the learning that is going to take place. One non-verbal autistic Year 6 child with Down's Syndrome struggles to concentrate for any length of time and will often become distracted even during a daily parcel. When sharing greetings the child would not communicate in response to 'Bonjour' even if it was being signed as well. However, when a puppet was used to say 'Bonjour' the child would make eye contact, move over to feel the puppet gently and make noises to echo what had been said.

Using native French speakers (video/sound examples)

The pupil voice feedback from the interviews showed that our children liked seeing children who lived in different countries speaking French because they thought they were learning it to speak to these French children. For under-confident staff, using native speakers reassured them about pronunciation and provided a learning tool for them before they taught the children.

Stories

Our Year 5 and 6 children are fascinated when they are read simple French stories and hugely proud when they can pick out key vocabulary they have learnt. Those children with a real interest in written language love looking at the books and identifying French words they have learnt or cognates as they can tell staff what they think the word means as it looks similar.

Reflections

On reflection, it is possible to conclude that the research project has to a certain extent answered some of the research questions but has also raised many more which could provide the basis for further research. When looking at how French is taught across the school it was clear that it was having the biggest impact when teachers were using strategies that they use across the curriculum to teach other subjects. Teaching to meet the many different needs of our learners has to come first and the question of what needs to be taught should always be quickly followed with *How can we deliver this?* Resources such as puppets and songs are used across the curriculum so our pupils are tuned in to learning through these methods. It would be valuable for staff to meet and share good practice in MFL, as although there is a commitment from staff, confidence is still low and sharing success stories can act as a motivation to try things in a different way.

The benefits of MFL learning has been seen throughout the school, not through how many words of French they can say, read or write but through the acquisition of language-learning skills; and this raises the most important question in the face of criticism when introducing MFL in a special educational setting: *Why should our children not learn a foreign language?*

4.2   Investigating the use of interactive e-books with less able pupils

Karen Hall, Millais School, West Sussex
Millais Teaching School Alliance

Overview

A perceived ambivalence and lack of
motivation amongst some learners in
my bottom set Year 9 French group
provided the catalyst for this research
project. I wanted to explore more
creative ways of engaging the class,
as I felt this would in turn impact on
their progress. I believed the area of
e-learning would appeal to the group
as they enjoyed sessions in the multi-
media suite, a fact borne out by an online questionnaire I conducted with them before
beginning the project: 71.4% said they enjoyed using ICT at school; 100% said they
used ICT at home, either every day (57.1%) or most days (42.9%).

My school had begun working with Digilog-it prior to this project and has an interest in
exploring the potential of this type of technology. My aim, therefore, was to avail of the
digilog concept and devise an interactive e-book to use with my Year 9 group which
would be piloted over a period of six to eight lessons. Furthermore, it was envisaged
that pupils would be able to access their own personalised e-book at home via the
school's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

The research questions underpinning this project were:

• Does the use of interactive e-books have a positive effect on less able pupils, in
  relation to a) attitude or b) progress?

• What lessons can be learnt from implementing interactive e-books with less able
  learners?

• How useful are interactive e-books in the Modern Foreign Languages classroom?

Context

Millais School is a girls' comprehensive school (11–16) in Horsham, West Sussex. In 1996 it was designated a Language College and in 2011 it became a teaching school. It was rated Outstanding by Ofsted in 2010.

The class I chose to work with was a bottom set Year 9 French group. Of the 15 pupils in the group, 11 are flagged as having special educational needs (five are School Action Plus; four are School Action; two are Monitored). On the whole, the group does not present any serious behavioural issues. I emphasised the fact that they were the first pupils in the school to use the *digilogs* in this way as I envisaged that this would make them feel special and help boost their confidence.

Prior to this project Digilog-it had collaborated with Millais School to produce a GCSE Revision Guide, which took the form of a static e-book. The challenge in my case was to design the content and layout, making it as engaging and interactive as possible, which Digilog-it would then embed within the *digilog*.

The *digilog* is a digital educational resource. What distinguishes this application from a regular pdf file or static e-book is that it can integrate multimedia and each user can save a copy which they can then individualise. Thus it was possible to include self-marking activities and quizzes, links to YouTube, Powerpoints, listening activities from the textbook and from the web, pop-up documents, videos and interactive games (some of which were embedded within the e-book whilst others linked to various websites and external documents). Furthermore, conventional reading and writing activities could be enlivened by pupils inserting their own pictures to illustrate their response. The *digilog* uses a page-turn with a 3D effect that adds to the book-like impression.

Methodology

My focus for the project was the near future tense as I felt that this was a discrete topic which was measurable and achievable in the timescale involved and which did not deviate too far from the scheme of work. As regards developing language skills, the *digilog* could provide reading, writing and listening practice. The project culminated in a written piece about a real or imagined future holiday to which pupils could insert their own graphics to illustrate their work. This allowed me to formally assess whether the learning outcomes for the project had been met.

❝Perhaps the biggest advantage identified by the pupils was having the licence to work at their own pace and they responded well to this increase in autonomy.❞

Logistically, I needed to negotiate seven consecutive lessons with ICT access. Three of the lessons took place in the Learning Resource Centre where the touchscreen monitors greatly enhanced the paper-like reading experience. After the initial explanation of the different functions and layout of the *digilog* pupils worked through various activities at their own pace until midway through lesson 5 when I instructed all pupils to begin working on the preparatory activities for the writing task; this was to ensure sufficient time was allocated for its completion. Differentiation was therefore by outcome and by task, with my role being that of facilitator. At the end of each lesson pupils uploaded the latest version of their *digilog* to Millais' VLE which safeguarded against work being lost and greatly facilitated the monitoring of pupil progress.
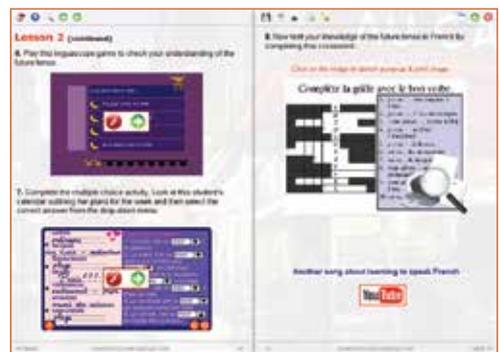
Regrettably, due to technical complications pupils were not able to access their *digilog* at home which did adversely affect the sense of continuity, as I had hoped the e-books could serve as a bridge between school and home and be used to set meaningful homework. Conversely, it made it easier to gauge their productivity in class.

A mixed-method approach was used to collect evidence. In addition to the e-books themselves, which included the formally assessed written piece on future holidays, the other tools employed for data collection were my own log of the process, feedback from the target language and individual interviews with a selection of pupils on completion of the project, as well as pre- and post-project online questionnaires which all pupils completed.

Key findings

Motivation

The fact that they were the first – and currently the only – pupils in the school to have used the technology in this way undoubtedly contributed to a more positive culture. Triangulation of method (my log, feedback from the target language, pupil interviews and questionnaires) supports the thesis that pupils were engaged and motivated by the interactive e-books and that the most popular activities were those that involved writing about themselves and inserting graphics to illustrate their response. As one pupil said, 'the writing project on holidays and the other writing bit where you insert the pictures were the best bits.'

Perhaps the biggest advantage identified by the pupils was having the licence to work at their own pace and they responded well to this increase in autonomy, demonstrating an interest in logging on and continuing from where they left off the previous lesson without much prompting.

Figure 4.2.1: **Pupil perceptions of change in pace**

Did you like being able to work at your own pace?
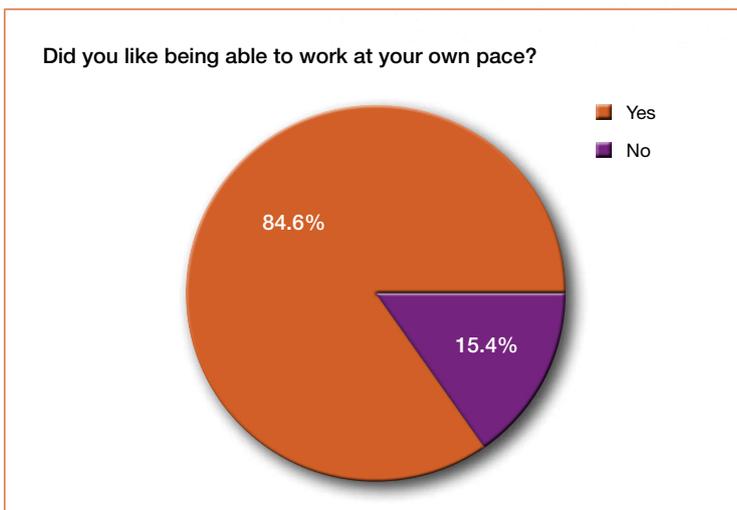
The teaching assistant, who is very familiar with the group and supports several of the students in three of their five fortnightly French lessons, noted that rather than simply stopping and waiting for help when they got stuck, as was normally the case, the students now worked better and were more likely to stay on-task and try to work things out themselves while they waited for help.

There was a sense of frustration that they were unable to access their e-book at home and I believe the project would have gained further momentum had they been able to do so. In response to an open question in the online questionnaire asking how the e-books could be improved for future users some pupils replied: 'Make it easy to get on at home without crashing' and 'We couldn't do it at home.'

Technology

For Digilog-it this was a new enterprise and they were very willing to experiment with what was possible, working around problems to find the best solution. The result was very engaging and visually appealing. Another positive feature of the *digilog* is that it can contain a lot of information but by structuring it in such a way that this can be accessed via pop-ups or web-style 'links' to jump to particular lessons or extra resources, the content does not appear overwhelming and is generally easy to navigate. Although a few pupils found it challenging at times to locate the information they needed ('it was better than book work but it did cause problems'), the majority could orient themselves with relative ease. However, as some types of fundamental activities could not be supported by the software (e.g. drag and drop) the workable alternative involved more writing than I had anticipated, which was far from ideal for this group (much more time-consuming and leading to a multitude of written inaccuracies). This would undoubtedly be less of an issue with a higher-ability group.

With regard to pupils' ICT skills, these varied widely in terms of confidence and competence. Given the nature of the group, some pupils felt overwhelmed at the start but, interestingly, using the medium of ICT in French was rated highly by 85.7% of pupils in the post-project questionnaire data and only 14.3% of pupils did not think ICT helped them make progress in French.

Learning

Differentiating the work by outcome and by task worked very well. The more able pupils in the group clearly enjoyed being able to work at a relatively faster pace and the self-marking aspects of the e-book greatly facilitated this.

I felt the majority of the students put more effort and time into the writing task than they would otherwise have done and over three-quarters successfully adapted the model by substituting words and phrases and were able to use the resource sheets in the e-book to try to extend their response. However, the teaching assistant and I both agreed that a weaker set such as these would have benefited from more teacher reinforcement and whole-class teaching – particularly during the initial stage of presenting new structures – in order to optimise their progress.

Reflections

Exploiting the potential of new technologies is a key component of 21st-century pedagogy. Consequently, there is most certainly a place for interactive e-books in the Modern Foreign Languages classroom; they constitute a useful and stimulating vehicle for drawing together a wide variety of resources on a particular topic and, furthermore, they were found to be very effective in promoting pupil autonomy, differentiation and creativity. As with most new technologies, it is a case of using e-books as one of a range of tools to optimise pupil learning. They are probably not the most effective medium for presenting new language, particularly with a less able group, but are valuable at the reinforcement stage and also for creative work. The *digilog* in its present form could be used by other Year 9 groups in the future, and perhaps other *digilogs* could be created on different topics (with potentially a greater emphasis on

> **"Exploiting the potential of new technologies is a key component of 21st century pedagogy."**

project work for more able sets). Being able to access their personalised e-book at home would greatly enhance the learning experience and would harness its potential as a tool for active, independent learning, particularly for more able sets. The *digilog* presents exciting possibilities for cross-curricular work and could also be employed for extra-curricular purposes such as school enrichment day activities. The novelty factor was key to the *digilog's* success as was the fact that pupils can personalise their work which in turn produces more active and engaged learners. As one pupil succinctly put it, *'you have to use your brain a lot'*.

Theme 5

Spontaneous talking strategies as the gateway to attainment

5.1 The development of spontaneous target language talk, through a focus on forming and using questions

Lynne Gibbons, Dallam School, Cumbria
South Lakes Federation Teaching Alliance

Overview

Within the context of a wider project to extend and improve target language spontaneous talk by GCSE pupils, this research project examined the impact of a specific focus on developing the mastery of question forms and their use. The hypothesis is that pupils may gain greater confidence to talk, rather than 'do speaking', in their foreign language if they are better able to use questions to sustain and develop conversations of genuine interest to them. The central point of interest is the ability to ask, rather than to answer, questions and to do so for a spontaneous purpose rather than as a response to a teacher's prompt.

A second focus of enquiry was to evaluate any gains perceived by PGCE trainees as a result of their being directly involved in planning and delivering aspects of practitioner research at an early stage of their training.

The aims of the research were thus:

- To measure and evaluate the type, frequency and confidence of spontaneous target-language utterances by pupils before and after a series of focused learning activities

- To enable teachers and PGCE trainees to better analyse the pupil language needed to extend spontaneous talk

- To enable teachers and PGCE trainees to better analyse the effectiveness of a focused sequence of skills-based lessons

- To evaluate the learning of PGCE trainees due to their participation in action research.

Context

The South Lakes Federation is a teaching school alliance involving eight secondary schools, a Further Education college and a special school in rural Cumbria. Within this group, four schools formed a Languages Development Group to complete a two-year development programme funded by the Department for Education under the management of CfBT Education Trust. These schools are Queen Katherine and Kirkbie Kendal Schools (both in Kendal), Queen Elizabeth School (in Kirkby Lonsdale) and Dallam School (in Milnthorpe).

The starting point was a shared wish to further improve the outcomes in speaking assessments at GCSE both *per se* and as a preparation for Key Stage 5 study. Three of the schools prepared and shared a range of 15 strategies to develop speaking skills at GCSE level. These were translated into French, Spanish and German and used, for the purposes of this project, in one selected GCSE class in all four schools over a period of eight weeks.

In addition, a Spanish class at Dallam School undertook six lessons (see below) that focused on asking questions to sustain and develop meaningful conversation. The focus of the research was on the improvements in proficiency and especially confidence and participation made by this class after this sustained focus on a specific skill.

Dallam School is this year co-providing the University of Cumbria's PGCE Modern Languages course, with 25 trainees working in the school before and between practice placements. Due to our interest in developing teacher training provision in Modern Languages, four 'first placement' trainees have been engaged in the planning, delivery and analysis of pupil outcomes through this research project. The lessons learnt from this experience and their evaluations will be used in the development of our provision of School Direct training with both CfBT Education Trust and the University of Cumbria.

The Spontaneous Talk project was led by Julie Scattergood, Head of Modern Foreign Languages at Queen Katherine School, and the Additional Questions teaching was led by Colin Bradshaw, Head of Modern Foreign Languages at Dallam School.

The action research was developed and reported, with their support, by Lynne Gibbons, Professional Mentor at Dallam School. The involvement of the PGCE trainees was planned by Lynne Gibbons and developed in the classroom by Colin Bradshaw, with analysis and evaluation moderated by Anne Dareys, Modern Foreign Languages Course Leader at the University of Cumbria.

Methodology

A. Baseline scaled survey of pupils' attitudes to speaking activities in the classroom, with open questions to elicit opinions on enjoyment and confidence. This was completed by 138 pupils in schools. It surveyed:

    • attitudes to being either interrupted or corrected by the teacher

    • pupils' confidence in speaking in front of the class or a partner

    • opinions on the most helpful activities for building confidence in speaking.

B. Baseline scaled survey at Dallam on level of confidence in asking and answering questions in conversation with teachers and peers; the survey was repeated at the end of the project. This survey elicited:

    • pupils' confidence in putting spontaneous questions to the teacher in the target language

    • pupils' confidence in putting spontaneous questions to each other in the target language

    • pupils' relative confidence in asking and answering questions.

C. Baseline assessment by observation; the PGCE researchers measured and recorded:

    • the range and number of question words known by pupils

    • the number of questions they could ask in two minutes (with no preparation)

    • the range and coherence of interviews between pupils

    • pupils' confidence in asking questions in a range of contexts.

D. Trainees and teachers discussed and analysed the language structures needed by pupils to progress.

E. Over a half-term period all classes used a new speaking activity each week. These included, as examples:

    • guided discussion of slowly-revealed pictures

    • discussion to agree on choices to watch from TV schedule

    • sentence building with scaffolded prompts

    • songs, raps and rhymes.

F. The Dallam group had one additional activity each week on asking questions (see below). PGCE trainees in the classroom took whole-class measurements, as above, and each observed a focus group closely to evaluate the range and quality of conversations.

G.   The initial assessment surveys and observation activities were repeated at the end of the project at Dallam School, to enable progress to be estimated.

H.   The PGCE students completed an open-ended qualitative evaluation (written individually) on their own learning from the project, which was analysed by Dallam School staff.

The six-lesson scheme of work (mentioned in F above) focused on developing skills in asking questions. This comprised a baseline and outcome assessment lesson and four others. These were originally designed in French on a mixed-topic basis but were implemented in Spanish with adaptations to suit the topic of holidays. This demonstrated that the strategies can be used across the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) curriculum. Each lesson was planned to be structured and progressive within itself, as was the overall sequence. Whilst the majority of pupil time was devoted to group speaking tasks, these were carefully prepared by previous speaking tasks and structured to ensure pupils attained the objectives with progressively less support. The minimal teacher intervention in the activities required a maximum of teacher preparation beforehand, it must be said. Three examples of lessons are provided in more detail here. The schemes of work are available on request by email to **l.gibbons@dallam.eu** (French) or **c.bradshaw@dallam.eu** (Spanish).

The assessment and evaluation lessons (1 and 6) have four phases:

• Check knowledge of question words by mini-whiteboard activity to show range known by class and number known by individuals.

• Check confidence and spontaneity by pairs task, to count how many different question forms each partner can produce orally in two minutes.

• Pupils evaluate their own confidence by RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating on mini-whiteboards and their ability to cope with a progressive sequence of five tasks, from a single question ('Could you ask for directions in town?') to asking their own series of open questions ('Could you ask an exchange partner all about his/her family?') to asking precise, detailed questions in a formal context ('Could you act as a translator for a police officer investigating a crime?')

• Teacher/PGCE students evaluate range and accuracy of questions asked in open topic chain-interviews of five minutes each.

Lesson 2 focuses on the grammatical technique of using questions to form answers: inversion of verbs, matching inverted verbs to answer forms (… *es-tu > je suis, vas-tu > je vais*), giving questions after the answers at speed, and then creating formal questions to match a set of details about a job interviewee: *Depuis 10 ans < Depuis quand habitez-vous en Angleterre ? …Je suis comptable < Quel est votre métier ?*

The interview is then practised with notes of the answers and finally performed with no written prompts.

Lesson 3 focuses on extending answers by asking supplementary questions.

Lesson 4 aims at the transfer of questions between topics, using the appropriate style.

- As a starter listening task, pupils identify the context from hearing a question: *Vous fermez à quelle heure ? > au restaurant* or *à la piscine* or *au magasin*.

The point that questions are transferable is made clear by feedback.

- Pupils match one set of similar questions to different contexts, then create other sets of questions for the same contexts.

This allows for a focus on grammar points (e.g. inversion after *pourquoi*):

Gare : Pourquoi le train est-il en retard ?

Lycée : Pourquoi n'as-tu pas fait tes devoirs ?

Maison : Pourquoi dois-je faire la vaisselle ?

Magasin : Pourquoi le vélo bleu est-il plus cher ?

Clinique : Pourquoi fumez-vous tant de cigarettes ?

- Practice for pairs with specific challenge: Pupil A writes down context (*en boîte de nuit*), Pupil B writes down question word (*Comment ?*) then A wins points for each question he/ she can ask relevant to the situation: *Comment t'appelles-tu ? Comment s'appelle ton amie ? Comment vas-tu rentrer chez toi ? Comment est-ce que je peux te contacter ?*

- Free practice: one third of pupils have cards to define their context (*à la banque, en classe, chez le médecin*). Others in pairs move around 'places', at each one competing to ask the greater number of correct questions: the 'place' holder can adjudicate and award points.

- Performance task: pairs write any 10 question words on mini-whiteboards, then collaborate to create a dialogue in which all are used. Erase from boards to practise and perform.

Lesson 5 deals with questions for inference and deduction, using a crime scene context and the 'Alibi' game with which many will be familiar.

Lesson 6 repeats lesson 1, with collaborating trainees / foreign language assistants (FLAs) to help with measurements and evaluation.

Key findings

- The level of **confidence in target language speaking** at the beginning of the project differed a great deal according to the size of the audience, with four out of five pupils fairly or very confident in speaking in pairs or groups, but just under half happy to do so in front of the whole class.

- Responses to the survey on **confidence in asking questions** showed a largely consistent difference across the schools. Pupils' confidence levels in answering questions was higher (four in five confident) than in asking them (one in three confident). This justifies the focus on building competence in asking questions in order to increase confidence in spontaneous talk.

- At the end of the project, pupils' responses at Dallam to the same questions showed:
  1. The proportion agreeing strongly that they were confident in answering questions from peers had risen from four in five to almost 100%.

  2. The proportion agreeing that they could ask their teacher many questions did not increase. Indeed fewer agreed strongly with this. This may reflect the higher level of challenge adopted in the lessons.

  3. There was a 50% increase in the level of confidence about asking questions to peers.

- The teacher's assessment of competence was that pupils were able to ask and use at least 50% more questions to sustain a conversation than prior to the intervention. The average rose from eight to 14 questions, and the higher ability group from 15 to 24 questions.

- The assessment of pupils' ability to cope with target language questioning in more complex contexts was particularly interesting, with the greatest gains being made in the more challenging situations. The doubling in levels of confidence (23% to 47%) in questioning about holidays may have been expected as this was the focus topic during the intervention; however, there was an even greater increase in confidence regarding other topics, suggesting that the transferability of questions had indeed been internalised and practised by pupils. Whilst girls remained more confident than boys, the gains were very similar.

MFL PGCE students' observations

The MFL PGCE students involved in the action research reported as follows:

- They were impressed by the use of the target language by the teacher and pupils throughout the project, in comparison with other classes observed.

- Nevertheless, they were surprised at how difficult pupils initially found it to recall question words, to spot opportunities for questions and then to formulate them.

- Pupils were often hesitant in forming questions due to attempting to translate the auxiliary 'Do?' from English; and repeated work on moving from 1st to 2nd person of verbs and question forms in the 3rd person was needed.

- The pupils made clear progress in sustaining conversation through asking questions.

- The more able pupils were more focused on extending their answers in conversation whereas the less able pupils seemed to gain more fluency by asking questions.

- The trainees in the classroom were at times confused between trying to assess pupils' skills and trying to improve them.

- In terms of the trainee teachers' own learning, the following comment is typical:

'I have learnt a lot during these weeks. It is amazing how much you can learn by observing and helping some students with their work. I have learnt how important the speaking part of the subject is. Since I come from a different background, when I was a student the main part of the subject was reading and writing and the teacher rarely spoke in English (our second language) or we did not have this kind of conversation among us in the target language, which now I consider essential.'

The assessment of pupils' ability to cope with target language questioning in more complex contexts was particularly interesting, with the greatest gains being made in the more challenging situations.

Reflections

- From the pupils' attainment records we can see that even the most able can make significant progress given a sustained focus on one skill; therefore future targets will be set higher for speaking and the tested strategies will be adopted across other languages and classes. Other projects focusing on particular aspects of skills over a period of weeks may prove more effective than a topic-based course.

- From the pupils' feedback we understood that they lack confidence in asking questions rather than answering them: this creates a block to developing sustained target language talk. There is clearly a great deal to be gained by exposing pupils to more challenging contexts in which to practise the known question forms.

- From the outcomes of the class which trialled an additional focus and work on the use of questions in conversation, we conclude that this was time well spent, particularly as pupils realised the transferability of this skill across topics. Future planning will ensure that more time is spent on the question forms of verbs and encouraging pupils to respond to each other with further questions.

- The evaluations presented by the PGCE students suggest that a specific focus such as this can be an effective tool for trainee teachers to improve their skills in assessment and analysis. However, it would be advisable to distinguish clearly between the requirements of observation and intervention.

- Obviously, this evidence is anecdotal but the trainees will be leading a discussion of their involvement at a PGCE training day in January 2013, so their learning will be disseminated to the cohort of 25 trainee MFL teachers at the University of Cumbria. It will also impact on the planning of a new School Direct PGCE programme for Adventure Learning Schools, led by Dallam School, as we will include Action Research at an early stage of training in future.

" ...even the most able can make significant progress given a sustained focus on one skill... "

5.2 Developing spontaneous speech: common effective strategies across two different contexts (selective and non-selective)

Sharon White and **Victoria Brennan**, Cheadle Hulme High School and Altrincham Grammar School for Boys, Cheshire
Altrincham Grammar School for Girls Alliance for Learning

Overview

Our aim was to improve Year 9 pupils' ability to speak spontaneously in the target language, through the increased use of pair work or group work activities. In order to achieve our research aims, the following questions were used:

- Exactly what do we mean by 'spontaneous'?

- What is the current level of pupil use of spontaneous language?

- What were we going to do in order to increase pupil resilience and the frequency of spontaneous utterances?

National observations from Ofsted that informed the approach

Ofsted report (2011):

- Lack of creativity and spontaneity

- Limited speaking opportunities for learners resulting in lack of spontaneity. Most speaking takes place through role-plays preparing for exams.

- Reluctance on the part of teachers in using the target language in class is a major reason why learners' speaking and listening skills are underdeveloped.

Ofsted report (2008):

- Across all phases speaking is the least well-developed of all the skills. Students' inability to be able to say what they want in a new language has a negative impact on their confidence and enthusiasm.

Context

Cheadle Hulme High School and Altrincham Grammar School for Boys are both schools within the Altrincham Girls' Grammar School Teaching Alliance. Both are Specialist Language Colleges with strong languages departments, and we decided to work in partnership as we share a common interest in actively developing pupils' ability to use the target language more creatively.

Altrincham Grammar School for Boys (AGSB) is an 11–18 selective school in Trafford. The school has an excellent reputation and was granted Language College Status in 2003. The Modern Languages Department offers French, German and Spanish from Year 7 and Chinese from Year 8. Pupils study an accelerated Year 7 course in half a year, allowing them the opportunity to study a second in Year 7. All pupils study two Modern Languages up to Year 9, when they start the GCSE course. A significant number become dual linguists, choosing two languages at GCSE. Uptake at A level is very pleasing.

A specialist Language College since 1997, Cheadle Hulme High School (CHHS) is an 11–16 mixed comprehensive school, introducing a new sixth form in September 2013. Officially recognised as Outstanding by Ofsted in September 2011, CHHS offers an accelerated languages curriculum from Year 7, with pupils receiving five hours of language learning each week. By Year 8, pupils follow a GCSE Foundation course, leading to GCSE in Year 9 or 10. Subsequently, AS French is an option at Key Stage 4, or alternatively, pupils are keen to continue their language studies with *ab initio* German, Spanish or Italian GCSE.

A primary focus within the department has been to promote 'oracy preceding literacy' by developing the opportunities for spontaneous talk within Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) classrooms and beyond. After considering factors affecting pupils' spontaneous use of target language at CHHS and AGSB, coupled with pupil voice feedback, we wanted to see if increasing pair and group work within our classroom routines would impact upon confidence and, in turn, inspire and generate greater unpredictable talk in the classroom.

Methodology

Several methods were used to capture both qualitative and quantitative data:

- Baseline observations

- Pupil questionnaires

- Staff questionnaires

- Dissemination of findings to staff, pupils and across schools

- Creation of resources and implementation of strategies / increased pair work/group work

- Cross-school observations.

Pedagogy

We increased pair and group speaking activities to incorporate the following types of 'game' and competitive activity, which allowed for unpredictable elements, described by pupils as 'fun and engaging'.

1. What's your alibi?

Pupils are given a set of five questions and must prepare identical answers in pairs. They are not permitted to write anything down, but should discuss in target language what they think their answers should be. Pupils are then interviewed by their classmates individually. Once the first person has been interviewed, it is then their partner's turn and both sets of answers must match. However, the teacher begins to ask additional, unplanned questions in order to make pupils respond spontaneously and to say something unpredictable. As a result, once pupils know this is a sure way of trying to catch their classmate out, they themselves start to ask unplanned questions, thus producing pupil-to-pupil unpredicted questions and answers.

2. What's my story?

Pupils are shown a photograph and must pretend to be one of the characters in the picture. Strategies such as hot-seating, where a pupil is interviewed by the class about who they are and why they are there, or creating a 'tableau vivant', where pupils act out the scene in the picture, both allow for creativity and spontaneity, to which pupils have the opportunity to respond.

3. Let's get talking

This features a coloured laminated grid with several different sections for key language, such as organising your ideas, introducing an opinion, connectives, referring to the past, talking in the past, in the present, in the future, and asking a question. A pupil has the task of handing these out each lesson. Starter activities provided the ideal moment to set the tone for the type of talk expected during the lesson.

4. Guess who?

A 'whodunnit?' style activity, where pupils are given a set of four people pictures, four places and four possible murder weapons (ranging from furniture or classroom items to random items such as a fish). Without telling pupils anything about any of the pictures, you model a suggested response:

'A mon avis c'était Monsieur Natation (picture of a man swimming), *dans la maison* (picture of a house and garden) *avec le dictionnaire.'*

Pupils then create their own responses based on the pictures they see. Once they are used to the activity and depending on ability, pupils can then be asked to elaborate, to give as much detail as they can per picture. The above response may then become far more detailed:

'Je pense que c'était Marc, qui adore faire de la natation le weekend, s'il fait beau. Il était chez son copain, qui s'appelle Pascal, où ils travaillaient dans le jardin jusqu'à midi. Il avait un dictionnaire dans son sac parce qu'il voulait faire ses devoirs après avoir fait du jardinage. Pourtant il l'a utilisé pour tuer le victime !'

5. Use a prop

For example, place a piece of paper under a desk and, once found, pretend it is a letter or message from one pupil to another. The class guess what it says and why it has been sent.

'Oh, regardez ! J'ai trouvé un message de quelqu'un dans la classe. Le message commence avec : 'Ce soir je vais…' – qu'est-ce que vous pensez ? Quel est le message ?'

Pupils then suggest how they think the message would continue, what it might be about, who it might be from, etc.

6. The silent treatment

It is important to establish this as a target language activity. The teacher stands at the front of the class and remains silent. After a minute or so, pupils begin to come up with questions to ask, to try to ascertain what the problem is, or to ask if the lesson can start. A simple gesture, such as a shrug of the shoulders, encourages pupils to suggest why it would be a good idea to start the lesson or to suggest activities they would rather do instead!

4. Exploit unpredictable events

A pupil arrives slightly late to the lesson, but before allowing them to give a reason, ask the rest of the class to explain what they think that pupil could possibly have been doing… There will be lots of very unpredictable suggestions!

Key findings

Phase 1

The baseline questionnaires from staff showed a varied understanding of what spontaneous speech is. Spontaneous talk, defined as pupils using target language of their own free will to interact with others in and beyond the classroom, requires the teacher to plan steps towards achieving this ideal.

In order to progress along this continuum, we discovered that certain key factors needed to be present in the classroom routine:

- The teacher's use of target language was of paramount importance in providing the model to inspire pupils. The most successful spontaneous talk occurred in classrooms where the teacher used the target language consistently and had built confidence and trust amongst pupils.

- Clear routines and expectations for generating talk were present, for example in lessons where pupils were allowed to speak freely, without putting their hands up. Initial observations within departments showed how teacher control sometimes stifled pupils who wanted to speak freely in the target language.

- Use of gestures by the teacher, which pupils had clearly become used to, assisted in keeping pupils talking without the teacher's voice interrupting.

- The baseline measurement gauged occasional use of spontaneous target language, which tended to be one simple word or a short phrase, or 'off the cuff' responses to utterances by pupils that had been instigated by a teacher question. This was particularly true in classrooms where the routines outlined above were not yet fully established.

Pupils were asked how comfortable they were speaking the target language in front of the whole class. At AGSB, 49.2% were either fairly or very confident. When then asked how confident they were speaking the target language in pairs or groups, we were astounded at the response. The picture changed dramatically, 81.1% said they were either fairly confident or very confident.

At CHHS, in mixed sex classes, 32% were either fairly or very confident speaking in front of the whole class. However, very similarly to AGSB, 88% said they were either fairly confident or very confident working in pairs or groups. This reinforced the impression that pair work and group work were key to the success of the project. Survey results were fed back to the pupils and staff prior to the start of the project.

During the baseline observations, pupils responded to teacher questions and increasingly to each other's utterances in the target language. However, a focal point for this project was to push those boundaries and to develop more pupil-to-pupil unpredictable questions and responses that do not involve teacher input, but instead encourage independent manipulation of the language for their own purposes.

"…pupils are increasing in confidence and beginning to respond to each other far more regularly, manipulating language structures they know for their own purposes."

Phase 2

Staff planned and prepared a greater number of speaking activities to exploit opportunities for pair work, group work and spontaneous speech. These activities, some of which are detailed in the methodology, varied greatly from simple pictures that would encourage talk at the start of a lesson to sentence building or conversations.

Along the continuum towards successful production of unpredictable spontaneous talk, and in classrooms where the above routines had been established, pupils were taught to extend their language for agreeing and disagreeing with each other. They were then encouraged to use these tools throughout lessons, for both lesson activities and 'planned' classroom chat, in pairs and groups as well as in whole-class activities. This was a key starting point from which pupils could spontaneously respond to each other more frequently.

Phase 3

Cross-school observations took place after about half a term of working on the project, and whilst this was a short timescale, the impact was great. In all lessons observed, pupil engagement and enjoyment levels were very high indeed. Pupils were clearly used to speaking the target language spontaneously during the activities planned by the teacher. Ideas were also shared and feedback given to staff, who found this very useful and insightful.

Our measurements, whilst not finite as the work is continuing, showed that pupils are increasing in confidence and beginning to respond to each other far more regularly, manipulating language structures they know for their own purposes. For example, in a mixed-sex Year 9 French lesson, one pupil was asked what she had just done during the lunch break. This was an unpredictable question as far as the pupil was concerned and she proceeded to describe what she had been eating in the canteen. Another pupil interrupted her final words with, *'Mais non, ce n'est pas vrai, Madame! Elle était dans la cour, où elle regardait Jonny, qui jouait au foot! A mon avis, elle adore Jonny!'* There then followed a few further contributions, in French, from other pupils corroborating this story.

There were also observations, within a mixed-sex German class, of pupils asking spontaneous unpredicted questions of other pupils, inspired by an 'alibi' type activity. The boys in particular in this class seemed to be motivated by this type of activity and were asking the majority of the unpredicted questions. It was clear to see that pupils' spontaneous use of the target language has increased and changed, from the way it is being used and how often. In addition, more creative and challenging activities were engaging boys more readily.

At AGSB, lessons have seen an increased amount of spontaneous talk between pupils, particularly one Year 9 German class, where pupils were keen to correct and add to what their peers had to say. Pupils are even beginning to ask each other more questions spontaneously and keeping each other on their toes. The French groups who have used the 'Let's get talking' grid as a starting or extension point use a wider range of spontaneous language more confidently and the influence of this has been noticed in their written work and impacting on other skill areas. This has also now been introduced into some Year 10 and 11 lessons. Strategies and resources have been shared across our two different schools.

Reflections

There are many different possible approaches to encouraging spontaneous talk in the MFL classroom. If opportunities to generate spontaneous talk are capitalised upon, pupils grasp the chance to speak. Pupils soon wanted to give more detail in their responses than was initially asked for. The fact that the two schools are from different contexts has really enriched the experience for those involved.

Next steps

The project will be taken forward at a dissemination day, to which other schools will be invited. There remains great potential for both departments to further develop common strategies across other year groups. As with any such project, we now aim to continue our pupils' development along the continuum, moving from spontaneous language production on familiar topics to spontaneous dialogues on a greater range of unpredictable topics.

5.3 The Talking Toolbox: a means of sustaining speaking activities

Lesley Welsh, Manor College of Technology, County Durham
Together To Succeed Teaching School Alliance

Overview

The research project aimed to develop two of our key focus areas in language teaching – speaking skills and Year 9. As a group of language teachers in the town, we noticed that speaking was significantly affecting the performance of our pupils at GCSE, especially since the introduction of the new controlled assessments for GCSE, and that pupils began to be much more reluctant to speak during Year 9. We hoped that by completing this project, pupils' confidence, accuracy and engagement would all improve when participating in speaking work.

Our research aims were:

- To find out more about pupils' attitudes to speaking

- To discover if a structured series of 'speaking lessons' can change pupils' attitudes

- To discover if the 'speaking lessons' can improve pupils' performance and confidence when speaking French.

Our key research questions were:

- How do pupils feel about speaking at the start and end of the project?

- Do speaking lessons provide pupils with the tools they perceive they need to feel more confident about speaking?

- Have the speaking lessons improved pupil performance?

Context

Manor College of Technology is a larger-than-average school which serves an area of social and economic deprivation in the north east of England. Pupils are of white British backgrounds and Hartlepool's community is largely monocultural, with little exposure to any 'foreign' influences. Many of our pupils are unlikely to travel abroad for holidays and some rarely travel out of the town. The town does not have a great history of language learning and in 2005/06 the local authority had one of the lowest entries for language GCSEs in the whole of England and Wales.

The project was undertaken by Lesley Welsh, Assistant Headteacher and Curriculum Leader for Modern Foreign Languages at Manor College, in collaboration with two other neighbouring secondary schools. There is a strong history of collaboration between schools in the town as we work together to overcome the challenges of language teaching in the area.

Since the introduction of the new GCSE, speaking accounts for 30% of the final GCSE grade and pupils are required to prepare two controlled assessments in which they speak for four to six minutes on a known topic. However, the temptation for pupils to memorise massive chunks of language, without having internalised key phrases which they can transfer between topics and use from memory, has meant that pupils have not been succeeding in these as we would have hoped. In addition, spontaneous speaking is awarded more marks, and conversation should be as natural as possible. We hoped that pupils becoming more adept at speaking using the Talking Toolbox would be more confident in the controlled assessments. In addition, Year 9 is the year in which we sometimes struggle to motivate our pupils, especially those who are able to choose whether or not to study MFL in the future. We hoped that the more stimulating contexts included in the Talking Toolbox, plus the ability to 'argue' with friends, would lead to better pupil engagement in the subject. The Talking Toolbox is a collection of engaging (in some cases hand-drawn), paper-based resources which pupils have access to that help them remember a range of language whilst being spontaneous (e.g. connectives).

Methodology

During our initial brainstorming of ideas for the Talking Toolbox project, we presumed as a group of teachers that pupils would be 'anti' speaking as we had all been faced with groups who were not willing to speak aloud. We also wanted to ascertain what activities pupils would find most engaging, in order to include these in our lessons. To that end we devised a survey which asked pupils to rate their favourite and least favourite activities, to comment on why they did or did not enjoy French and to note anything that would help them to make more progress. The survey was carried out across a range of classes in the schools participating in the project.

In response to the possible survey results, we worked as a group of teachers to devise a series of 'speaking' lessons which would be supported by a poster resource featuring different components of language. The poster features, amongst others, key verbs (building blocks), connectives (cement), adjectives (the 'gloss') and 'cutting remarks' which would enable pupils to be more spontaneous and interested when speaking. We opted for a series of culturally relevant or motivating topics including Christmas, Valentine's Day and *Galette des Rois*, then devised lesson plans and all the associated resources to deliver with pupils. An example follows.

The Talking Toolbox Christmas lesson

By the end of the lesson, pupils

- MUST: be able to use key phrases from the Talking Toolbox with a partner

- SHOULD: be able to reorder popular toys in French

- COULD: be able to give an opinion about the spirit of Christmas!

Outline Plan

- Pupils match up presents, vocabulary and pictures using target language (e.g. *Je crois que le numéro un, c'est le Beanie Baby*)

- With 'Fabrice poster' as support (see photograph), pupils work in pairs to reorder a list of the most popular presents into the correct order (e.g. *Je crois que c'est Tamagochi – mais non, t'es fou, toi !* etc)

- Pupils watch a French video online and reorder their cards

- Pupils read a text from 1jour1actu.com to find key phrases on Christmas

- Pupils work in small groups to give their opinion about Christmas (e.g. *Qu'est-ce que tu veux comme cadeau ? Le Noël pour toi, c'est plutôt une fête religieuse, une fête de famille ou tout simplement les cadeaux ?*)

- Pupils reflect on their learning and understanding, making notes on a 'Plenary Christmas Tree'

In addition to this mini scheme of work devoted to speaking, our first lesson was a stand-alone lesson based solely on rules for better pronunciation, as we believed in our initial planning that one thing which would prevent pupils from fully engaging with speaking work was their reticence to pronounce new words. In this lesson pupils devised a series of pronunciation rules using French numbers and then used this knowledge to deal with an unknown text which they read aloud in smaller groups. Teachers asked pupils to give their initial reflections on the Talking Toolbox project by making written comments at the end of the lesson and all teachers who have delivered the lessons were asked to evaluate and reflect on them.

Key findings

Our findings from the Year 9 survey were extremely interesting and have brought home vividly the false perceptions we can have as teachers. We firmly believed that our pupils would highlight speaking as their least favourite activity, given the experiences we were having in lessons and in the controlled assessments throughout the GCSE course. However, we were astonished to discover that this was not the case. Our survey found that writing longer paragraphs, practice assessments and grammar were the least favourite activities, with writing being the worst.

Nevertheless, we decided to pursue the angle we had chosen for the project, sensing that an improvement in the ability to come up with language from an internalised body of language would be of benefit to pupils whether they were speaking or writing from memory. To that end, an additional research question would therefore be posed, specifically: can pupils create a bridge between what they have talked about and what they are writing about? Our survey findings also showed that pupils rated songs, group and pair work as their favourite things, so we included elements of these in our lessons, with a large emphasis on group work.

In carrying out the Talking Toolbox lessons, we have found that it is possible to sustain a whole lesson of speaking activities and that, far from not enjoying speaking, pupils do enjoy it if they feel they have the language required to communicate, rather than being paralysed in a bizarre state where they can only repeat, parrot-fashion, chunks of language which they have been taught by their teacher. Pupils who participated in the first lessons said: 'I feel that I have understood how to pronounce the French words … I am a bit more confident with speaking aloud', 'I know more about the sounds the words make' and 'I am able to talk in medium-sized groups with more confidence.' Pupils told their teacher that they liked the fact that they did not have to do much writing in the lesson, and they said they were much more comfortable reading aloud in their group of four rather than in front of the whole class. Teachers noted that the pronunciation lesson 'seems to be a simple but effective strategy to get them to use words they know (numbers) and apply them to other contexts' and that the other lessons were enjoyable for pupils.

"Our findings from the Year 9 survey were extremely interesting and have brought home vividly the false perceptions we can have as teachers."

Reflections

Overall the development of the Talking Toolbox project has been extremely rewarding and has uncovered many different aspects that we can continue to develop:

1. As teachers, whilst we might presume that we really *know* what our pupils like and dislike, and how they feel, we do not fully know unless we ask them. This project has certainly underlined to us how useful student voice is and we intend to use it more often.

2. We need to seek pedagogy which can build bridges for pupils between the spoken and written word. Pupils can feel passionate when speaking or writing about real topics and they need real language in order to do this, which they can then internalise, reuse and, importantly, transfer between topics. Continual reference to the phrases of the Talking Toolbox across a variety of topics and themes can support teachers and pupils in this.

As we move forward, we intend to pursue the Talking Toolbox project. A further three lessons are being trialled with pupils and at the end of the current academic year pupils will reflect on the difference it has made to their overall level, and feeling, of competence in both spoken and written language. We intend to include some Talking Toolbox lessons throughout our Years 10 and 11 schemes of work to continue to promote spontaneous talk with pupils and to develop their confidence.

5.4   Classroom talk from the beginning

Rachel Hawkes, Comberton Village College, Cambridge
Cambridge Area Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This research project is part of a wider body of work exploring the role of target language oral interaction in the secondary languages classroom. A further example can be found on pages 129-138. It builds on previous research at Comberton Village College and in other local schools, as well as adding to the national picture of languages pedagogy in terms of target language use in the foreign languages classroom. The aim of this project in particular was to probe the question as to the optimum quantity and quality of teacher target language use with beginner learners. A further aim was to explore the inter-connection between 'taught' and 'incidental' language, that is to say the teaching and learning of the language of the curriculum or scheme of work and the spontaneous language that can arise during the course of a lesson. Finally, the study hoped to provide some (albeit tentative) recommendations for classroom practice in terms of oral interaction. To achieve these research aims, the following questions were posed:

• Is it possible to use 100% teacher target language with beginner classes?

• What specific strategies enable maximum teacher target language use with novice learners?

• How can teachers maximise the opportunities for language acquisition through their classroom talk?

• How should teachers perceive the relationship between 'taught' language and 'incidental' language?

• How might these perceptions inform planning?

Context

Comberton Village College is a mixed 11–18 comprehensive school and one of the first teaching schools in the country. It was also designated as one of seven Lead Schools for Languages nationally. This research project was undertaken by Dr Rachel Hawkes, Assistant Principal and Director of Languages and International Development at Comberton. It is a continuation of previous work on target language classroom talk conducted over a period of more than 10 years in a variety of local secondary schools. The work has produced several outcomes to date, including a bank of spontaneous talk resources, two Linked Up project reports, several conference presentations, a published journal article, and a PhD thesis.

The focus for this study was one teacher and one class of novice German learners. This teacher has been working on developing target language with classes for several years. This year, having previously always used some English at the start with beginner classes, she decided to try to do 100% target language with this beginner German class in Year 8, which had already been learning Spanish for one year. Her rationale was to try to probe the extent to which 100% target language is optimum. This teacher had no fixed conception about the desirability of 100% and indeed, had a hunch that the ideal might not be 100%. She wanted to take the extreme position to test out the hypothesis.

Methodology

The methodology was entirely qualitative in orientation. It involved the video-recording of five full lessons over a period of the first six weeks of German learning for the Year 8 class. The lessons were then transcribed and episodes of classroom talk selected for detailed textual analysis. The selection was made with reference to the research questions, and episodes were chosen which: exemplified teacher talk strategies, shed light on the integration of curriculum and spontaneous language, and included students' unplanned use of the target language. The analysis by the researcher focused on one or more of these three key elements. It is presented in a simple prose format, including a sentence contextualising the lesson extract, the transcription itself, and finally the analysis. An example follows.

Context	
This is the second observed lesson with the theme of 'Countries'. The class is one month into learning German. This lesson takes place four weeks after the first lesson observation. In this example, the teacher is revising key questions and answers: *Wie heisst du? Wie schreibt man das?* along with the alphabet. The two questions are on the board.	
Transcription	
Teacher: *OK, die Klasse. Das ist die Frage* (points to the slide with names on it and the question *Wie heisst du* as the title) – *aber was ist die Antwort? Das ist die Frage – was ist die Antwort? I…I… Student*	Teacher: OK, class. That is the question (points to the slide with names on it and the question *Wie heisst du?* as the title) – but what is the answer? That is the question – what is the answer? I..I…
Student: *Ich heisse*	Student: I am called
Teacher: *Ja, ,Wie heisst du?' ,Ich heisse…' Und ,Wie schreibt man das?' Das ist die Frage, das ist die Frage, aber was ist die Antwort?*	Teacher: Yes. 'What are you called?' 'I am called…' And 'How do you spell that?' That is the question, that is the question, but what is the answer?
Student: *Man schreibt das…?*	Student: You spell it…?
Teacher: *Super. Also die Klasse: ,Man schreibt das…'*	Teacher: Great. So class 'You spell it…'
Students: *Man schreibt das…*	Students: You spell it
Teacher: *Was ist eine Frage? Also, das ist eine Frage, und das ist eine Frage. Was ist eine Frage?*	Teacher: What is a question? Well, that is a question and that is a question. What is a question?
Student: Question	Student: Question
Teacher: *Genau. Ja, also ,ich heisse' ist eine Antwort. Was ist eine Antwort?*	Teacher: Exactly. Yes, so 'I'm called' is an answer. What is an answer?
Student: Phrase	Student: Phrase
Teacher: *Nicht genau, gut Idee. , Ich heisse…?'*	Teacher: Not exactly, good idea. 'I am called…?'
Student: Answer	Student: Answer

This is the first time the teacher has explicitly introduced the class to the words *Frage* and *Antwort*. It is interesting, as often it is the category words that are missed out when learners are taught examples of questions and answers. When using the target language for the sole means of communication, these category words are crucial as they recur so often (other examples from German would be words such as *Ausnahme* (exception), *Sportart* (type of sport), *Möglichkeit* (possibility), *Grund* (reason)).

The method for introducing the words focuses on a moment in the lesson where there are plenty of examples of both questions and answers, so students are in no doubt as to the meaning. When a student gives a word meaning in English, the teacher ensures that all have heard it but doesn't write English herself on the board. The responsibility is the students'.

This excerpt is also a useful example of the interweaving of 'extra-curricular' learning moments within the main fabric of the lesson, the content of this lesson being the basic personal questions.

Key findings

Evidence from the classroom talk in these few lessons enabled the identification of some key strategies that maximised the use and understanding of target language with these beginner learners. These strategies are:

- the combination of a lot of mime and gesture to support the teacher talk

- the continual checking with students that the meaning is clear (and if necessary, following up with remedial strategies if it is not)

- the frequent use of examples to make explanations very concrete and 'in the moment'

- the use of written scaffolding and modelling to support the oral examples

- the routine of taking one student's English translation orally (ensuring that it is heard by all but not repeating it as the teacher) and then only writing up the German word, expecting students to record in writing both the English and the German themselves in a space for incidental language in their exercise books

- the teacher's thoughtful planning and judgement about which key language to spend time 'drip-feeding' into whole-class interaction (the selection based on the necessity or usefulness to the students of those words (e.g. 'question' and 'answer' but also high-frequency words such as 'almost' or 'quickly')

- the use of students to model and scaffold question/sentence formation for other students in the whole-class interaction.

Further findings shed light on the question as to the relationship between 'taught' and 'incidental' language, and led to the following conclusions:

1. The difference between introducing language through teacher-led classroom talk and in a more routine presentation (Powerpoint presentation) is that the focus is on the words that are actually needed at a given moment to make meaning and be understood. In lesson 1, the students needed to know the meaning of *Heft* and **Kuli** because they were being instructed to do something with them. When language is introduced outside of real communication, in a more formal practice situation, the motivation for getting the meaning is non-communicative, i.e. students are only motivated by getting the answer right and receiving words of praise from their teacher.

2. As well as specific vocabulary presentation through this teacher talk, there was also evidence of drip-feeding a question form that surfaced in spontaneous student talk in a subsequent lesson. The teacher used *Was ist…?* questions frequently in the early lessons, and in lessons 3 and 4 there were examples of students asking unsolicited questions using *Was ist…?* This is evidence that student spontaneous target language question-forming can be promoted through teacher-led classroom talk.

3. The teacher talk in these lessons demonstrates how it is possible to give students access to target language input that is ahead of their current level of production, but not beyond their understanding. This is widely understood to be the essential pre-requisite for language acquisition. By referring to contexts that students can immediately relate to (e.g. a moment in a previous lesson or ongoing problems that the teacher is having with classroom technology) the teacher makes sure there is a concrete point of reference so that students understand the message.

4. The strategy the teacher adopts of writing up only the German version of words that arise in the talk is effective in stimulating students to think for themselves and therefore to ask spontaneous questions. There is evidence that independent thinking and noticing is going on in the classroom.

Reflections

It is early days in the learning journey of this class, but the most exciting aspect of this teacher's 100% target language approach is the light shed on the interrelationship between 'taught' language and 'incidental' language, and in fact how much learning comes from the latter, particularly at the very initial stages. Research into second language acquisition makes a distinction between formal learning and acquisition, and these lessons really show that a) both can happen simultaneously in a secondary foreign languages classroom and b) how potentially positive the outcomes are if we do blend both together in the way we see in these lessons.

The project's methodology has also confirmed findings from previous research into oral interaction concerning the value of classroom observation, transcription and detailed textual or 'microgenetic' analysis.

" …teacher talk in these lessons demonstrates how it is possible to give students access to target language input that is ahead of their current level of production, but not beyond their understanding."

5.5 Exploiting all opportunities to increase student target language talk

Jane Driver, Hinchingbrooke School, Cambridgeshire
Cambridge Area Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This research project is part of the same wider body of work exploring the role of target language oral interaction in the secondary languages classroom that is also presented on pages 124-128.

The aim of this project in particular was to assess the effects of increased target language use by the teacher and student in the classroom, and to assess whether this affected the students' motivation and achievement. A further aim was to explore the connection between 'on-task' and 'off-task' speech, 'on-task' speech being that used when conducting curricular exercises and 'off-task' being incidental speech that occurs in the classroom which does not form part of a formal task. Finally, the study hoped to provide some (albeit tentative) recommendations for classroom practice in terms of oral interaction. To achieve these research aims, the following questions were posed:

- Is it possible to use 100% teacher target language with Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) classes?

- What specific strategies enable teachers to stay in the target language?

- How can teachers maximise the opportunities for language acquisition through their classroom talk?

- What is the link between use of target language by teachers and motivation for languages with students?

- To what extent is it possible to increase students' off-task target language talk in the classroom?

- Is there a link between use of target language in off-task talk and overall achievement and motivation for language learning?

Context

Hinchingbrooke School is a mixed 11–18 comprehensive school, the largest comprehensive school in Cambridgeshire. It was rated Good in its last Ofsted inspection. This research project was undertaken by Jane Driver, Head of Languages, who has a strong interest in the use of target language in MFL lessons.

The focus for this study was one teacher and one class of Year 11 German learners. When the teacher took over this class at the beginning of Year 10, it was clear that they had not previously been taught consistently using the target language and initially there was some student resistance to it, but as the year progressed, that resistance diminished and was replaced by enthusiasm and a curiosity about the meanings of target language phrases. In the summer term of Year 10, the emphasis shifted to include not only exchanges between teacher and student, but also student-to-student talk. Students were 'fed' some useful phrases which, once taught, they were obliged to use. This year, having previously always allowed the use of English for most off-task student talk, it was decided to attempt to increase the amount of target language talk between students and within student-teacher talk. The rationale was to try to probe the extent to which 100% target language student and teacher talk is possible and to build a model to embed within the department's curriculum.

Methodology

The methodology was qualitative and involved the video-recording of a lesson at the end of the first term of Year 11 as well as a simple student questionnaire and two student interviews. The lesson was then transcribed and episodes of classroom talk selected for analysis. The selection was made with reference to the research questions, and extracts were chosen which exemplified teacher talk strategies and student spontaneity in the target language. The researcher's analysis focused on one or more of these key elements. It is presented in simple prose, including a short description of the extract context, the transcription itself, and finally a short analysis.

This lesson focused on the theme of 'Questions'. The lesson took place towards the end of the autumn term and aimed to build up and assess the students' ability to ask questions spontaneously on a variety of un-prepared topics.

Example 1

Part 1 (unplanned questions):

In this example, the teacher is setting the task and asking students to write random answers to questions (no more than three words) and then work in pairs spontaneously forming questions to fit their partner's answers.

Transcription

Teacher: *Also, em, jetzt bitte vorbereitet 3 kurze Antworten, OK? Ja, 3 kurze Antworten, zum Beispiel ‚nein', ‚ich weiss es nicht', ‚nach London', ja? Also 3 Antworten, sehr sehr kurz, 3 Wörter maximal. Also 3 Antworten, ganz schnell, schreibt das im Heft.*	Teacher: So, em, now please prepare 3 short answers, OK? Yes, 3 short answers, for example 'no', 'I don't know', 'to London', yes? So 3 answers, very, very short, 3 words maximum. So 3 answers, very quickly, write in your book.
Student: *Für diese?*	Student: For this?
Teacher: *Nein, nein, nein – neue Antworten*	Teacher: No, no, no – new answers.
Students write answers.	Students write answers.
Teacher: *Megan, hast du das geschrieben?*	Teacher: Megan, have you written it?
Student: *Ja.*	Student: Yes.
Teacher: *Ja? Molly? Harriet? Ana, ja? OK, also, bitte schön, zu zweit – zwei – zwei – zwei, Ollie kannst du bitte mit Max arbeiten? Sophie bitte mit Ben. OK, wir sind alle zu zweit, OK. Also wir werden das für die letzte 3–4 Minuten machen. Rory, was ist eine Antwort?*	Teacher: Yes? Molly? Harriet? Ana, yes? OK, so, please in pairs, two – two – two – two, Ollie, can you please work with Max? Sophie please with Ben. OK, we are all in pairs, OK. So for the last 3–4 minutes we will do... Rory, what is an answer?
Student: *Ja.*	Student: Yes.
Teacher: *‚Ja', OK, also Lewis, du musst dann Fragen für die Antwort stellen. OK? Also wir machen das zu zweit, und, zum Beispiel Lewis, wenn du 5 Fragen stellen kannst, bekommst du 5 Punkte.*	Teacher: 'Yes', OK, so Lewis, you must ask questions for the answer then. OK? So we will do that in pairs and, for example Lewis, if you can ask 5 questions, you get 5 points.
Students work in pairs asking and answering.	

Analysis

In this example, the teacher gives all instructions in the target language, but uses very simple language with a lot of repetition and lots of gestures. A slow, clear voice is also used. Students respond to the teacher's questions in the target language and it is clear that they understand what is being asked as there is no hesitation. It is clear that they are familiar with key instructional words (which have not been formally taught) such as 'prepare, question, answer, write, for example' – this is probably due to the fact that the students' lesson objectives are always presented in the target language rather than their native language and these types of words are often found in the objectives, showing that students are naturally transferring that language into different contexts. At one point a student asks for clarification of the exercise in the target language rather than the learner's native language.

Example 2

Part 2 (unplanned questions):

This example shows the plenary at the end of the lesson; it is a whole-class version of the pair work (see part 1 above) undertaken so that the teacher could gauge the success of the exercise.

Transcription

Teacher: *Gib mir eine Antwort, bitte.*	Teacher: Give me an answer, please.
Student: *Mmm, lecker.*	Student: Mmm, tasty.
Teacher: *Oh, lecker, OK. Fragen? Ollie?*	Teacher: Oh, tasty, OK. Questions? Ollie?
Ollie: *Wie findest du Schokolade?*	Ollie: How do you find chocolate?
Teacher: *Lecker! Ooops, nein, tut mir Leid!!* (teacher trips!) *Ja?*	Teacher: Tasty! Ooops, no, sorry!! (teacher trips!) Yes?
Jake: *Wie war dein Abendessen?*	Jake: How was the dinner?
Teacher: *Oh, wie war dein Abendessen? – Lecker! Ja?*	Teacher: Oh, How was the dinner? – Tasty! Yes?
Abbi: *Wie war es?*	Abbi: How was it?
Teacher: *Wie war es? – Lecker! Rory?*	Teacher: How was it? – Tasty! Rory?
Rory: *Wie war das Mittagessen?*	Rory: How was the lunch?
Teacher: *Wie war das Mittagessen? Ah, Mittagessen / Abendessen, mmm... Ja!*	Teacher: How was the lunch? Ah, lunch / dinner, mmm... Yes!
Abbi: *Wie war das Frühstück?*	Abbi: How was the breakfast?
Teacher: *Wie war das Frühstück? Ja!*	Teacher: How was the breakfast? Yes!
Student: *Wie findest du Fleisch?*	Student: How do you find meat?
Teacher: *Wie findest du Fleisch? OK, ja, lecker! Was noch?*	Teacher: How do you find meat? OK, yes, tasty! What else?
Megan: *Wie findest du Kartoffeln?*	Megan: How do you find potatoes?
Student: *Wie findest du Karrotten?*	Student: How do you find carrots?
Teacher: *Wie findest du Karrotten? Ja, OK. Eine Antwort? Noch eine Antwort?*	Teacher: How do you find carrots? Yes, OK. An answer? Another answer?
Jake: *Manchmal.*	Jake: Sometimes.
Teacher: *Manchmal, Fragen? Tom?*	Teacher: Sometimes. Questions? Tom?
Tom: *Gehst du ins Kino?*	Tom: Do you go to the cinema?

Teacher: *Gehst du ins Kino? Ja, manchmal.*	Teacher: Do you go to the cinema? Yes, sometimes.
Jake: *Magst du die Schule?*	Jake: Do you like school?
Teacher: *Magst du die Schule? Ja, manchmal. Tom?*	Teacher: Do you like school? Yes, sometimes. Tom?
Tom: *Gehst du oft schwimmen?*	Tom: Do you often go swimming?
Teacher: *Gehst du oft schwimmen? Manchmal.*	Teacher: Do you often go swimming? Sometimes.
Student: *Liebst du Sport?*	Student: Do you like sport?
Teacher: *Liebst du Sport? Manchmal. Eine Frage noch, Ollie?*	Teacher: Do you like sport? Sometimes. Another question, Ollie?
Ollie: *Wie oft spielst du Fussball?*	Ollie: How often do you play football?
Teacher: *Wie oft spielst du Fussball? Manchmal. OK, super! Also Jungs, ihr habt gewonnen.*	Teacher: How often do you play football? Sometimes. OK, super! So, boys, you have won.
Abbi: *Eine mehr?*	Abbi: One more?
Teacher: *Wir haben keine Zeit, Abbi, es ist halb vier.*	Teacher: We have no time, Abbi, it's half past three.
Klasse: *Nein!!*	Class: No!!

Analysis

This plenary exercise clearly shows the students' ability to produce a number of different types of questions spontaneously. The questions formed were all grammatically correct, some included question words (*wie? / wie oft?*), some included modal verbs (*magst du?*). The questions showed knowledge of a variety of ways to talk about opinions (*magst du? wie findest du? liebst du?*) and they also included references to the past (*wie war..?*). There was clearly a good level of spontaneity and little hesitation and students were clearly motivated, to the point that they were disappointed to find it was the end of the lesson.

Example 3

Explanation in German

This example shows a short dialogue between student and teacher about a sentence that the student has noticed has a different structure in English.

Transcription

Teacher: *OK, super, also...*	Teacher: OK, super, so...
Student: *Warum ist das nicht ,ich war gelangweilt' aber ,ich habe mich gelangweilt'.*	Student: Why is that not 'I was bored' but 'I bored myself'?
Teacher: *Weil das ein Verb ist, 'I'm bored ... I got..', ja, auf Englisch ist das anders. Auf Englisch benutzen wir ein Adjektiv, aber auf Deutsch benutzt man ein Verb, ja.*	Teacher: Because it is a verb 'I'm bored ... I got...' yes, in English it is different. In English we use an adjective, but in German we use a verb, yes.

Analysis

This example shows again the student's ability to form questions in the target language. The teacher replies in the target language and focuses on the key words 'Verb' and *'Adjektiv'* (which are also cognates). This explanation is accepted by the student. It also shows that the student is inquisitive and clearly notices the different sentence structure.

Example 4

Spontaneous conversation

This example is from the very end of the lesson as the students are packing up and putting their chairs under the table. It is a discussion with a boy whose house is by the river when there was widespread flooding.

Transcription

Student: *Es ist wie Freitag.*	Student: It's like Friday.
Teacher: *Ja, es ist ein bisschen wie Freitag. Das ist das Wetter, wegen des Wetters.*	Teacher: Yes, It is a bit like Friday. It is the weather, because of the weather.
Student: *Ja.*	Student: Yes.
Teacher: *Wie ist dein Haus?*	Teacher: How is your house?
Student: *Godmanchester.*	Student: Godmanchester.
Teacher: *Ja, aber nicht wo, wie? Gibt es viel Wasser?*	Teacher: Yes, but not where, how. Is there a lot of water?
Student: *Oh, ja.*	Student: Oh, yes.
Teacher: *Ich habe gesehen, wie hoch das Wasser ist.*	Teacher: I have seen how high the water is.
Student: *Oh, ja.*	Student: Oh, yes.
Teacher: *Hast du Angst?*	Teacher: Are you scared?
Student: *Meine Mutter ist Angst.*	Student: My mother is scared.
Teacher: *Ja.*	Teacher: Yes.

Analysis

This example shows a short spontaneous conversation at the end of the lesson. The conversation is instigated by the student and then exploited by the teacher into a longer exchange. The student misunderstands the first question: rather than answering the question 'How is your house?' he understands it as 'Where is your house?' – and it is interesting to see how the teacher responds: rather than saying 'no', she uses the positive 'yes, but...'. To emphasise the question word, she also adds context by asking if there is a lot of water (but does not use the unfamiliar word for 'flood'). This contextual clue allows the student thinking time and it is clear that he now understands. The teacher then asks if he is scared (as the water level is very high) and he responds that his mother is scared. It is interesting to note that his answer is not grammatically correct, but the message is communicated and the teacher does not correct him in this instance.

Student questionnaires

Each student was given a short questionnaire asking four questions about the target language project. The graph below shows a breakdown of the answers from the Year 11 class.

Figure 5.5.1: **Year 11 questionnaire results**
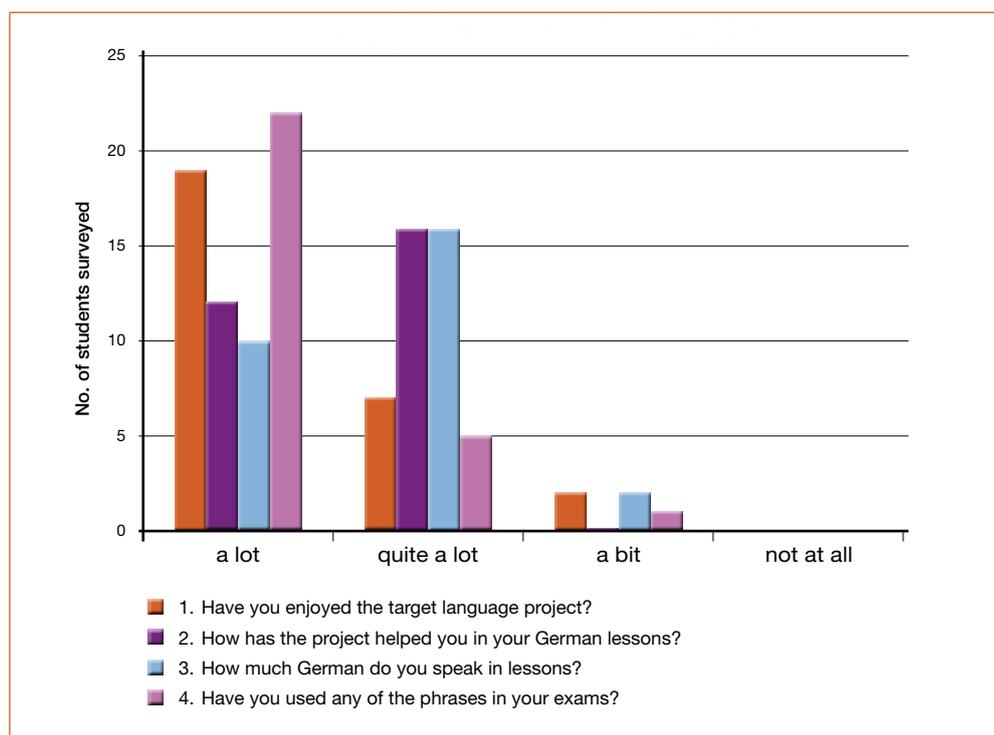
Analysis

It is clear from the results of the questionnaire that the students' perception of target language use is a positive one and that they feel it is of value to their learning. It is interesting to note that no student answered 'not at all' to any of the questions and that enjoyment and usefulness in exams were what the students felt they had gained the most.

Key findings

Evidence from the classroom talk in this lesson and the results of the student questionnaire have enabled us to identify key strategies that maximise the use and understanding of target language as well as the perceived effects of target language use on students' motivation and spontaneity. These strategies are:

- combining repetition and gesture to support teacher talk

- using short, simple instructions to ensure understanding and linking these to lesson objectives (in target language)

- using examples to elicit understanding

- encouraging students to fill gaps in each other's knowledge rather than rely on teacher translation

- equipping students with certain key phrases to encourage them to remain in the target language

- exploiting 'down-time' for real target language conversation.

The focus on use of the target language both by teachers and students has now been rolled out within the department as a whole, with Year 7 resources having a target language lesson embedded into the scheme of work each half term. Some teachers have also used some of the strategies to increase target language use with other year groups. The study above has led to the following observations:

1. During Year 10 this group was 'taught' a series of three lessons focusing on use of the target language in the classroom – two of the lessons focused on 'student-teacher talk' and the subsequent lesson focused on 'student-student talk'. Since the delivery of these lessons, students have been expected to use these phrases. It is interesting that students no longer need to refer to their vocabulary lists as this pre-taught classroom language has become embedded and available in their spontaneous repertoire. This embedding has been nurtured by the teacher by demanding the 'pre-taught' phrases in the target language and refusing to respond to those phrases in the native language. This 'equipping' of students has now been embedded in the Year 7 curriculum and has also been used successfully with other groups.

2. There is evidence that students are developing intuitive use of target language phrases and an ability to adapt previous knowledge to different contexts, albeit not always grammatically correctly. The teacher's allowance of a number of grammatical errors in spontaneous student talk allows the students a level of fluency in off-task communication and encourages them to 'have a go'.

3. The teacher in this lesson constantly repeats instructions and backs them up with gesture and physical signals; praise is used consistently. Previously the group has used a number of techniques to encourage target language talk – a technique which has been used with other groups successfully within the department (e.g. Secret Policeman – a secretly nominated student who monitors which students use the most target language during the lesson for a prize at the end; or Cards – students have a set of target language cards, each time they use one they can put it in the envelope. The student with the most phrases in the envelope at the end of the lesson wins a prize, etc.). Students are clearly at ease using the target language within their own level.

Reflections

Although it is relatively early in this research project, it is clear that there are benefits to using the target language in the classroom. In this study, the students clearly accepted that the teacher would use 100% target language and there is evidence that students are conducting an increasing percentage of student-teacher talk in the target language also. The focus group is currently the highest-achieving group within the year group, predicted 90% A-C at GCSE based on controlled assessments and mock exams to date (this shows 61% of students achieving above their target indicator).

It is evident that there are certain strategies that can be adopted to allow teachers to stay in the target language, in particular:

• careful planning and choice of words for teacher talk (focusing on cognates initially)

• use of gesture and mime

• repetition and examples

• pre-teaching key phrases and then demanding their use in lessons

• putting students' questions out to the whole class rather than simply translating for them, which forces students to go through a more complex thought process rather than simply waiting for the answer to come from the teacher. It also promotes greater student input (and empowerment) and less teacher talk.

Clearly the use of the target language has had a motivational effect on this particular group and students feel that there is a link between spontaneous talk and their achievement in exams. Encouraging students to have discussions in the target language during 'down-time' (e.g. on arrival whilst unpacking or at the end of the lesson whilst packing up) encourages them to think outside of the box and to use what they know in a real-life context.

At this early stage of the project, observation shows that students are using more target language when having off-task student-to-student discussions, but a longer-term study is needed to assess to what extent this can be increased.

5.6 An investigation into the ways in which learners can be encouraged to use more spontaneous target language in the classroom

Caroline Heylen, Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School, Kent
The Medway Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This research project was in the area of spontaneous use of target language in Year 7 across the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) department. This area is important to the school because, although there is good practice within the department, the target language is not consistently used by all learners. We hope that by developing students' confidence in speaking right from Year 7 we will see a greater desire and willingness to use the target language throughout the school, leading to better results in the speaking element of the GCSE exams. In addition, optimum target language use is a key feature on the departmental self-evaluation form, as our most recent GCSE results have highlighted a weakness in the speaking element.

This is also being addressed as part of the Department for Education Language Development Plan for the Medway Teaching School Alliance.

The research had the following main aims:

- To determine the reasons why some boys are confident to use spontaneous target language

- To identify the reasons why some boys are inhibited from using spontaneous target language

- To identify good practice across the MFL department

- To establish strategies to encourage more frequent use of target language that can be implemented across the department.

In order to achieve these aims, the following questions were asked:

- How do teachers encourage boys to use spontaneous target language in the classroom?

- What are the contributory factors that inhibit some boys from using target language?

- What can we do as a department to ensure that learners make more frequent use of the target language in the classroom?

Context

Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School (or 'the Math' as it is known locally) is a boys' grammar school with 1,180 students on roll which admits girls in the sixth form, and is regularly oversubscribed. The school became an academy in April 2011.

The school is a National Support School and the headteacher is a National Leader of Education. The school is one of the first 100 schools in the country to have been designated a national teaching school. In November 2008, it received its second consecutive Outstanding judgement from Ofsted. The research project has been undertaken by Caroline Heylen, Modern Foreign Languages teacher and Primary Languages Coordinator.

Despite the study of a language at GCSE becoming non-compulsory in 2004 'the Math' has always encouraged the uptake of a language at GCSE. In 2012 60% of boys took a GCSE in French, German or Spanish, with 44% achieving A*/A. However, the introduction of the EBacc has seen a renewed focus on the study of modern languages and boys are now required to select a language GCSE at the end of Year 9. The current cohort of Year 7 boys studies both French and Spanish with the option to drop one language in favour of Latin at the end of Year 7.

With 30% of the GCSE MFL qualification dedicated to the speaking unit, it is vitally important that boys develop the confidence and motivation needed for this element of the examination, and so by focusing on Year 7, we hope that good habits and a desire to use the target language can be fostered early on in the course of study.

Methodology

A mixed-method approach was used in order to pursue the aims of the project with both quantitative and qualitative data being collected. The data was collected by:

- observations of all the Year 7 language classes

- interviews with Year 7 language teachers

- completion of a questionnaire by Year 7 pupils

- unstructured class discussion with Year 7 pupils.

A series of observations of all Year 7 classes was undertaken to establish the level of target language being used by both teachers and pupils. Following the observations, a number of strategies were implemented with two Year 7 French classes to see if this would impact on their spontaneous use of target language. The strategies included:

- giving each boy a laminated prompt sheet with a list of useful phrases and questions to use in the classroom

- creating mixed-ability team tables: each table was allocated a French football team and we followed the fortunes of each team with the possibility of each team being able to gain extra points through good use of target language in the classroom

- continuing to give classroom instructions in French, but asking boys to explain these in English to show their understanding before starting the task.

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Year 7 MFL teachers to gain an insight into their views on the use of target language in the classroom. A series of questions was used as the basis for a conversation to establish what teachers felt might help or hinder the boys' use of target language in their classrooms.

the boys' enthusiasm for competition and the knowledge that they would be rewarded with points really encouraged them…

Questionnaires were completed by 170 Year 7 pupils. The questionnaire included a mixture of closed and open questions. The closed questions aimed to obtain information that would allow for comparison and more quantitative analysis, whilst the open questions allowed the boys to express their opinions in more detail and me to interpret the questionnaire results more clearly. Two extra questions were included that specifically related to the use of the 'prompt sheet'. Once the results from the questionnaire had been compiled, a structured discussion was held with the two Year 7 French classes to clarify points that had arisen from the questionnaire and to establish any impact that working in the 'football teams' had had on their desire to use the target language.

Key findings

Observations of Year 7 language classes

The initial observations of the Year 7 classes highlighted that use of the target language by the teachers was consistently high, with most activities being introduced and explained in the target language. The boys were therefore receiving lots of target language input. Despite this, the level of target language being spoken by the boys was relatively low and confined to responding to specific tasks. It was noted that teachers generally would explain an activity in the target language using mime and gestures to aid comprehension but would then check understanding by asking a boy to explain what had just been said in English.

Interviews with teachers

The interviews with the MFL teachers highlighted their commitment to using the target language in class whilst also recognising that 'pressure to get through material' could impact on how much target language was used, with a sense that things could be done more quickly in English. Teachers felt that the main factors preventing boys using target language in class themselves ranged from embarrassment and lack of confidence to laziness.

Implementation of strategies for two Year 7 classes

Following the introduction of the laminated prompt sheet 57% of students felt that it had definitely given them more confidence to speak in French in the lesson. They commented that the sheets were 'reassuring', '(it) makes me want to speak more', 'I can ask if I need something'. 30% of the students felt that it might have given them more confidence to speak French and 13% said it had not given them more confidence to speak French.

From the teacher's point of view, it became noticeable that as the boys began to get used to having the prompt sheets they would try to ask questions in French as a matter of course. So if they needed something such as paper or to open a window they would consult the prompt sheet. This developed further, and boys began to try to adapt the language for their own purposes. For example, a boy who wanted to sharpen his pencil used the prompt sheet to help him say: '*Est-ce que je peux sharpen mon crayon?*' Having the sheets in front of them might have gone some way to tackling the 'embarrassment and lack of confidence' identified by the teachers as something they saw preventing boys from speaking up in class.

The routine practice of getting a child to explain/translate instructions for a class task was stopped with the two Year 7 classes in the project and question 7 of the questionnaire showed no noticeable difference in response between these two classes and the rest of the Year 7 classes. For the two classes in the study, 68% of boys responded that they understood the teacher when they gave instructions in French/Spanish all the time or most of the time, with 70% of boys in the other four classes saying they understood the teacher all or most of the time. The use of the prompt sheet also allowed boys to use the target language to say if they had not understood a task, allowing this then to be repeated in the target language, rather than having recourse to English. This encouraged teacher/pupil interaction in the target language.

The introduction of teams had an important impact on the success of the prompt sheets. The boys' enthusiasm for competition and the knowledge that they would be rewarded with points really encouraged them to have a go at speaking French. The support of the prompt sheet meant that they were able to attempt most classroom interactions in French. 80% of the boys felt that knowing they would be rewarded with points was a good incentive for them to try and speak French. One of the teachers in their interview had identified 'laziness' as a reason that boys did not always use the target language, and this element of competition certainly seemed to motivate boys to take part. In relation to the small groups of mixed ability, this may have impacted on their confidence to speak out, although it was not specifically evidenced in the questionnaire; however, in the class discussions boys indicated that they liked belonging to a specific team.

Reflections

Final conclusions were as follows:

- Using the prompt sheet in combination with a rewards system encouraged the boys in the study to use more spontaneous target language in the classroom. As one boy said, 'If you are stuck then you can look for help, and instead of asking in English you can ask in French easily.'

- The scaffolding provided by the prompt sheet gradually allowed boys to begin to alter the language for their own specific needs, and so as the boys have become used to using the prompt sheet the challenge is to encourage them to adapt the language more and more for their own purposes.

- The study also indicated that there was no real need to ensure comprehension of tasks by asking boys to explain back in English what had been said, thus allowing the target language to remain more the 'language' of the classroom.

Theme 6

Talk in the classroom: understanding the barriers to speaking

6.1 The learner's perspective on using the target language, developing an informed strategy

Frances White, All Hallows Catholic College, Cheshire
Fallibroome Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This research project investigated whether students are more effective in using target language spontaneously if they have a greater understanding of why it is important. Current Ofsted foci for improvement in teaching and learning of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) highlight the need for increased use of spontaneous speech in the classroom. Therefore this project aimed to find out:

- to what extent learners appreciate the importance of using the target language; what inhibits or prevents students using target language; and what encourages or would support students to use target language more.

For the current GCSE, 30% of the final grade is based on the results of the two controlled assessment speaking tasks.

Student achievement at Key Stage 4 (KS4) for MFL at All Hallows falls below the national average. The project aimed to investigate the following question:

- How can teachers devise a strategy and actions to increase learner use of the target language?

Context

All Hallows is an 11–18 Catholic College with a specialism in Business and Enterprise with Ethics and Languages. There are approximately 1,250 students on roll and 250 in the sixth form. In 2011 it was judged by Ofsted to be Outstanding.

In Year 7 students study four nine-week language modules in French, Latin, Mandarin and Spanish or German. In Year 8 students then repeat the same four languages but at a deeper level. The faculty achieves a take-up of languages in KS4 of around 85–90% although languages are not compulsory. The number of students studying a language at A level is growing. The starting point for this project developed during a conversation with the Deputy Principal, who observed that although all college teaching staff had been fully trained using the TEEP (Teacher Effectiveness Enhancement Programme) cycle,[8] there had been no opportunity to discuss the importance of the TEEP strategy in relation to our students.

From this conversation I began to reflect on current pedagogy regarding the use of target language in the MFL classroom and began to consider whether students fully understood the importance of using the target language. Although there was considerable information available – in books, on the internet and in other sources – about sharing good practice for teaching of target language, had anyone considered what the student's perception of target language is? And could this be a barrier to their understanding of languages and their progression?

Methodology

The first step was to gather qualitative data via semi-structured interviews with students. The results of these informal conversations enabled me to decide what questions to ask the students in the Survey Monkey survey. The second stage of the methodology involved gathering qualitative data via written survey questions. The results of this were organised into graphs and pie charts to produce a visual analysis. Altogether 216 students completed the survey.

In addition to this, quantitative data was gathered via lesson observation, where a colleague observed my group and counted the instances of student use of target language. Using the results of the qualitative data and the survey results, I then created an explicit lesson about the value of using the target language.

Once I had delivered this lesson I repeated the data-gathering exercise with a colleague observing me again with my target group and counting the instances of student use of target language. In addition to this, I asked colleagues within the department to complete the student survey, writing as their answers what they thought the student answers would be. I then compared the teachers' and the students' perceptions with the results provided by the data.

Key findings

Semi-structured student interviews

Generally students are keen and motivated to learn. During the conversation the main comments were that students perceived that use of target language was mainly to provide them with a model of how words should sound when they were presented to them for the first time. Students also commented that the fact that the lesson included words in another language gave language lessons their 'USP' (unique selling point) compared with other subjects on the curriculum. Aside from this 'modelling' and uniqueness, students struggled to list additional benefits unless prompted with suggestions. Surprisingly, the students talked about their positive rather than negative attitude to target language, despite their apparent reluctance to use target language themselves.

Student questionnaires

Only 6.5% of students said that they understood almost everything that the teacher said when delivering a sequence or a whole lesson using target language. Aside from the 'USP' mentioned above, by far the most popular response (42%) regarding the best thing about being able to speak a language was that what they were learning in lessons would be helpful in the future.

Responses to the question about how students felt when using target language themselves in lessons provided interesting results, with only just over half of students (58%) feeling positive about using the language themselves and 42% of students saying that 'sounding silly' stopped them from using more target language. Interestingly 21% of students said they did not use target language because they did not think it would get them better marks.

When questioned about the link between use of target language and progress, 58% of students agreed that there was a relationship between the two, and 24% strongly agreed that there was a relationship; 15% of students did not think that there was a relationship between the use of target language and attainment.

68% of students said they would not enjoy the lesson as much if it was entirely in another language; as mentioned previously, students felt that target language was mainly useful for modelling specific words. Students' perception of the use of target language suggested that most rated speaking aloud *regularly*, even though they knew they may not be correct, as most important (33%). Conversely, 31% of students felt that the second most important aspect of target language was only using a few words each lesson but being confident that they were correct. Remembering phrases and transferring knowledge was rated the least important aspect.

Figure 6.1.1: **Student feelings about speaking in class**

How do you feel when you are saying words out loud in another language?
Tick the one that most applies to you

Observations

Observation 1 showed that students used little target language aside from the 'transactional' language of greetings or classroom routines. Students were very enthusiastic about being able to call one of their peers a 'cheat' using target language. This information inspired me to create a bank of slang, including 'put-downs' or compliments that students could use, which could act as a springboard to engage them in using more target language.

Observation 2 showed that using language that has an interest for students did improve confidence and the incidence of student use of target language; they were much more willing to engage with the target language, either with their peers or with the teacher leading the lesson. It showed an increased frequency of attempts to move their learning forward by using target language.

Explicit lesson

The explicit lesson was designed using the results of the student questionnaire, with the aim of further encouraging students to appreciate target language and the potential benefits of target language use. The lesson provided the opportunity for students to give additional information to support the basic answers that they had provided on the questionnaire. The explicit lesson also gave students a toolkit of additional 'coping' strategies. For example, it encouraged them to think about non-verbal gestures (using a mime or action for support) and it also introduced some transactional language phrases that could be re-used in other contexts (for example: 'Could you repeat that?', 'I don't understand', 'Whose turn is it?', 'I go first, you go second'). During the session, students were also asked to work collaboratively to provide their own 'preparation' skills for use in future target language lessons.

Figure 6.1.2: **Student perceptions in relation to the importance of speaking**
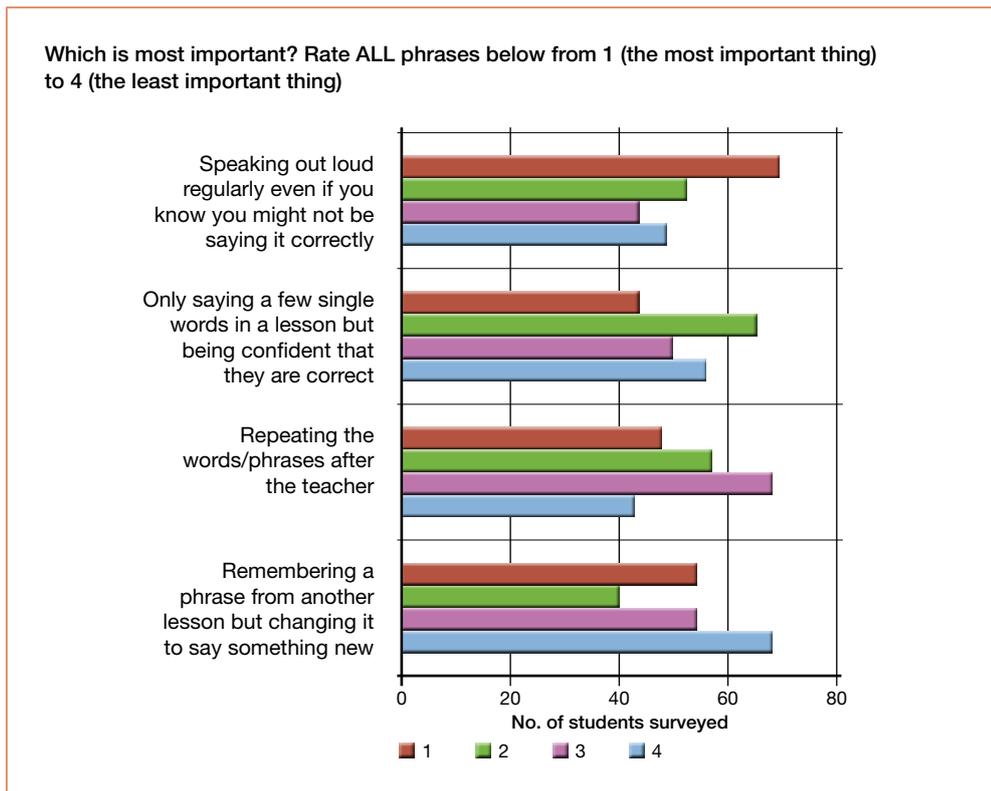
Figure 6.1.3: **Student perceptions in relation to the importance of speaking**

When you speak another language the most important thing is… ?
Rate ALL the phrases below from 1 (the most important thing) to 6 (the least important thing)

No. of students surveyed

Legend: 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6

Categories:
- You get every word in the right order and you don't miss out any words
- You try and sound as much like someone who was born in that country as you can
- You get the general idea across – even though you don't know every word
- You practise what you say over and over again
- You have to understand what someone says to you first
- You do a mime or an action at the same time to try and get someone to understand

Teachers' interpretation of student perceptions

As a faculty, when discussing our interpretations of student perception, most colleagues had a slightly more negative perception than the one that students actually provided in reality.

Reflections

The findings from this action research project are as follows:

- The results of the questionnaire suggest that most students at All Hallows are in reality 'on board' with the notion of the use of target language despite their apprehension in lessons.

- Students need to be taught that using target language in the classroom and progression in MFL are directly linked.

- Students do not have a sophisticated appreciation or understanding of why target language is so important in the classroom.

- The need for an explicit lesson on the importance of target language and the full range of its benefits has to be shared with students. At All Hallows all MFL colleagues will be delivering the explicit lesson to all classes and will review the lesson with students at different points within the academic year.

- Students need to be given the opportunity to 'buy in' to student/teacher use of target language.

- Teaching students a range of coping strategies improves student-to-student speaking, and student-to-teacher speaking improves the quantity and quality of the target language.

6.2 An exploration of the use of spontaneous target language in a Year 10 GCSE French class

Sarah Brown, Judgemeadow Community College, Leicester
Leicestershire Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This research project focused on the area of spontaneous speaking skills at Key Stage 4 (KS4), which is important to my school and to my work as an AST for the following reasons:

a) The CfBT Languages Support Programme audit (March 2012) identified students' spontaneous use of the target language as the key area for development in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) departments across Leicester City Schools.

b) We have identified this in our own department's self-evaluation form as an area that we would like to develop this year at Judgemeadow.

c) As the external pressure of exams increases at KS4, the national trend seems to be for both teachers' and students' use of the target language to decrease in Years 10 and 11.

d) Use of the target language is a key feature of the new Ofsted guidance.

The main aims of the research were:

• To raise awareness with students as to how spontaneous talk in the target language can benefit language learning

• To identify barriers which prevent students from being able to talk spontaneously in the target language

• To develop and trial strategies which could help them overcome these barriers.

Context

Judgemeadow is a large, multicultural 11–16 Specialist Language College on the outskirts of Leicester. It was rated Outstanding by Ofsted in January 2010. We have a large MFL department and offer five languages up to GCSE. All students study French in Year 7 and then choose a second language from a choice of Spanish, German, Gujarati and Panjabi in Year 8 to continue to the end of Key Stage 3 (KS3). All students study at least one language in KS4 unless they are following a more personalised pathway. We were one of the first schools in the country to introduce 'Immersion' French. In each year group, there is a French Immersion class and students in this tutor group study French during tutor time, Personal Development Curriculum (PDC) and ICT. In addition to their timetabled French lessons, the class sit their GCSE French examination in Year 9 and results to date have been excellent.

I have worked at the school for 25 years and have been a Modern Foreign Languages Advanced Skills Teacher since 2006. I teach French up to KS4 and German at KS3. I am currently leading a CfBT Education Trust project through the Rushey Mead Teaching School Alliance on 'Developing student and teacher use of the target language'.

In choosing my pilot group, I decided to give myself a challenge and focus on my set 2 Year 10 GCSE French group. I had not taught them previously and, although they had achieved good results at KS3, when I started teaching them in September I noticed they were very reticent about using the target language themselves. They also objected strongly to me using French most of the time. 'Speak in English... we don't understand what you're saying' was typical of the comments heard in the first few weeks. The group is also quite challenging in terms of behaviour. Having been attached to various 'Immersion' groups as a form tutor over the years, I am aware, specifically from one particularly skilled practitioner, how young students can be nurtured and encouraged to express themselves in French for day-to-day communication. However, how do we do this with a class of self-conscious, resistant 14-year-olds who have all come from different classes and have had varied teaching experiences at KS3?

Methodology

In order to address the aims of the project a mixed-method approach was used. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected by means of student questionnaires and interviews, supported by informal observations from other colleagues and myself.

Step 1: Revision of standard routine classroom vocabulary

At the start of term, we revised the basic classroom requests and language that they should always use in the target language. This is something we all do as a department and have found it very beneficial to sacrifice a few lessons at the beginning of each year to reinforce this vital language. The key is being consistent thereafter and having very high expectations of students in always using it.

Step 2: The questionnaire (to gain an insight into student perceptions and feelings)

The first two parts of the questionnaire addressed my first research question: *Why is spontaneous speaking an important focus of language learning?*

I wanted to get the students thinking about: a) what they understood by the phrase 'spontaneous use of the target language', and b) how trying to use French spontaneously in and outside the lesson could really help and enhance their learning. They initially found this quite difficult to answer but after some whole-class discussion they were able to come up with some good responses.

My aim was to raise their awareness that French is not just a subject on the GCSE timetable with a qualification at the end of it, but is also a language and a means of communication. As thrilling as describing how you helped your parents with the household chores last night might be, the chances of actually recounting this in real life are minimal. However, being able to think on your feet and use what French you do know to build meaningful sentences to communicate could very well come in extremely handy in real life.

Analysis of questions 3 and 4 of the questionnaire provided me with the information I needed to answer my second research question: *What factors currently prevent students at KS4 (specifically Year 10) from using the target language spontaneously?*

As we were near the beginning of the term, I asked them to think back to their previous language experience at KS3. Their responses are shown in the figures below.

Figure 6.2.1: **Perceived barriers to the use of target language**

Q3. What prevents you from using the target language more spontaneously in lessons? (Please tick all that apply)

No. of students surveyed
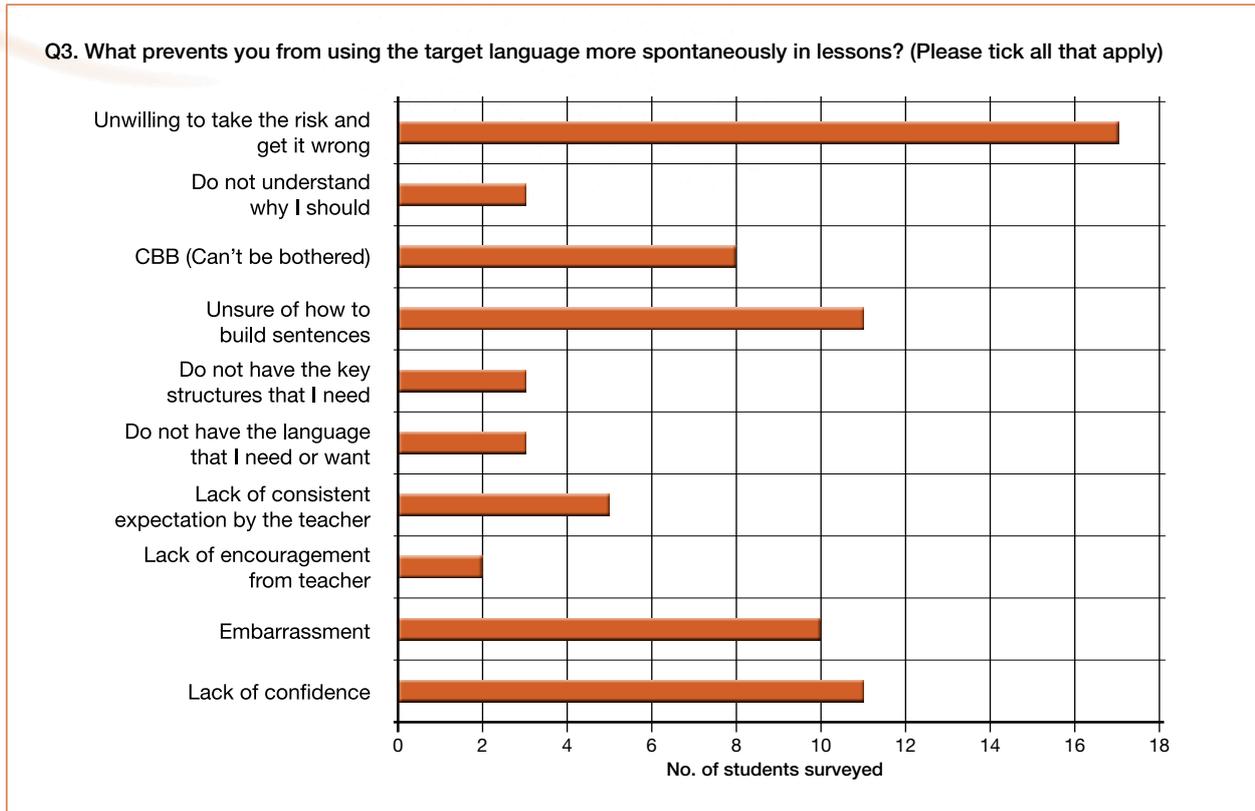
Figure 6.2.2: **Student views about what could help**

Q4. What do you think could help you to use the target language more in lessons? (Please tick all that apply)

Category	No. of students surveyed
Having a 'safe' environment in the classroom	8
Having a feeling of success and motivation	8
Having specific strategies to help you remember	1
Having specific strategies to help you listen	7
Being shown and working out how to build new sentences	5
Having a bank of key structures for support	6
Knowing some 'cool', useful language	14
High and consistent expectation by the teacher	4
Encouragement and reward from the teacher	12
Everybody else is trying (it's the norm)	14
Other (please specify)	1

No. of students surveyed (axis 0 to 18)

It was clear from their responses to question 3 that two of the main reasons why students felt they were unable to talk spontaneously in the target language were that they were unsure of how to build sentences, and that they were unwilling to take the risk and get things wrong. Responses to question 4 showed that they would feel more comfortable if everybody was trying to use the target language and it became the norm in the classroom. They also stated that they would like to know some 'cool', useful language as well as receive encouragement and reward from the teacher. This provided me with the background information I needed to try and tackle my third research question: *What strategies can be developed that can be reciprocated easily across the teaching schools alliance and further afield to encourage greater use of spontaneous talk by students?*

Step 3: The hub-and-spokes booklet

'Bringing grammar to the fore'

I felt that in order to build up students' confidence and willingness to 'have a go', I needed to integrate use of spontaneous target language paradoxically into my lessons in a more 'structured' way, at least to start with. As my starting point, I decided to provide them with a bank of key sentences and question stems with which we could 'play around', so that they would be able to produce literally hundreds of different sentences which could then be used in many different

contexts. The format I decided on was a hub-and-spokes booklet. Each page features a hub containing a key sentence or question stem and a number of blank spokes around the outside. I used each page just as a starter at the beginning of a series of lessons. Initially we did the first stem, '*J'ai*' together, and students suggested possible endings. I put the same version as a slide on my Powerpoint for the lesson and wrote on their suggestions. It also threw up some good idiomatic phrases such as *J'ai 14 ans / j'ai soif / j'ai chaud / j'ai tort / j'ai mal à la tête* etc as well as a reminder that this forms the start of many past tense phrases e.g. *j'ai joué, j'ai fait* etc.

The lines at the bottom of the page provide more space in which to write extra phrases, or to add them at a later date. Students soon got the hang of what to do and in subsequent lessons were able to work on a new stem firstly in pairs and then independently, sometimes using dictionaries to come up with ever more creative and imaginative possibilities. At the same time, during, before and after lessons I insisted, obviously in a supportive and encouraging way, that if they could express themselves using a structure we had covered, then they should do so.

Step 4: The timer

Once they were showing more confidence in expressing themselves, I decided to push them a step further and introduced the timer. From the start of the lesson I timed how long we could all talk only in French. As soon as anyone said anything in English I stopped and recorded the time for that lesson. In the first few lessons of doing this we improved our time from 5.2 minutes to 16.58 minutes. In the last lesson the girl who accidently said something in English during a game then came out with '*Ce n'est pas ma faute!*' Students have responded really positively to this strategy and enjoy the extra dimension to the lesson.
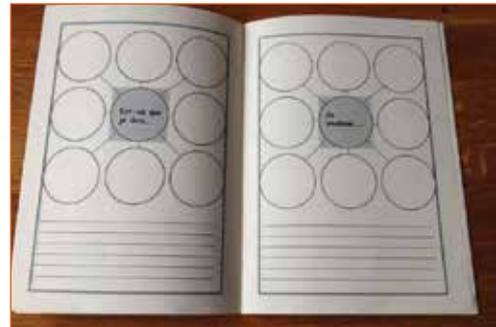
Step 5: The mat

My next step has been to buy a Union Jack mat to have at the front of my classroom. My intention is that this will be the only place in the classroom where either I or any student can speak in English. If we are not standing on the mat, we should be communicating in French. A further point to add here would be that it clearly delineates when I want to switch from the target language to English for a specific reason and also is a reminder to me not to be on it for too long!

Key findings

The evidence gathered below is based on my own observations of the class and their work, from informal observations from other colleagues and student feedback. The Head of Languages at St Paul's (another school in the teaching school alliance involved in the CfBT project) interviewed small groups of students from the class and recorded their responses.

The key finding for me from this research project is that students really enjoy speaking French for a real purpose. Secondly, raising students' awareness of the importance of using the target language spontaneously was a vital first step and seemed a motivational force in them being more willing to have a go.

" …raising students' awareness of the importance of using the target language spontaneously was a vital first step… "

Overall, the project has made a significant impact on the group in the following ways:

- Behaviour has improved as students are more engaged.

- Lessons seem more fun.

- The students are becoming far better at using the structures they now know to build sentences to express themselves. They all commented in the student interviews how helpful they have found the hub-and-spokes booklets.

- They are enthused by the challenge of seeing how long they can keep going as a class in the target language and get annoyed with anyone who spoils it.

- As trying to speak in the target language has become the 'norm', they do not worry so much about making mistakes and are happy to have a go.

- They see it as quite fun and rewarding to be able to use their French to communicate.

- Writing – I have seen an improvement in their written work as they have a better understanding of how to construct sentences. Also, because they are more motivated, they are trying harder.

- Listening – it is noticeable that they do not panic now when I speak almost totally in French. They seem happy to listen and work things out for themselves. Feedback from student interviews confirms this: 'it doesn't worry us now as we are getting used to it.'

- Reading – in the student interviews it was recorded that they are finding reading texts easier as they know more vocabulary but that they are also trying to incorporate new words they have picked up into what they say.

Reflections

In conclusion, what I have learnt from this research project is:

• To discuss openly with students the importance of using the target language spontaneously and show them how this can enhance their language learning. Once they are aware of this they seem far more receptive to having a go and getting on board.

• To provide them with some key structures and to show them how to adapt and manipulate these so they can be used in many varied contexts. After a while these start becoming second nature to them.

• To be consistent and to have high expectations of students using the target language wherever possible.

• To create that 'safe', nurturing environment within the classroom where it feels comfortable to take risks and get things wrong. Students initially often come out with 'I don't know how to say it in French!' However, with persistence and a smile you can encourage them to move away from trying to translate word for word exactly what they want to say, to using the structures they do know in a simple way to express themselves in French. If they make mistakes it doesn't matter – just correcting them in an encouraging way with some praise at the end works fine.

Next steps

• To continue to use the Union Jack mat as described earlier.

• To disseminate the hub-and-spokes booklet within the department to be used with KS4 classes.

• To translate it into different languages.

• To explore different approaches and strategies to encourage greater use of the target language by students at KS3.

6.3 Feelings of confidence and speaking skills

Hugo Gardner and **Peter Jordan**, St Marylebone Church of England School, London
St Marylebone Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This research project looked at speaking skills in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and focused in particular on Key Stage 3 (KS3) pupils' ability to respond spontaneously in the target language in a variety of situations. Pupils at all key stages regularly report that, of the four skills, speaking is their weakest, and the classroom activity in which they feel least confident. Furthermore, the ability to cope in spontaneous, unplanned situations has been given more importance in recent years with the introduction of the 'unpredictable element' of GCSE controlled assessments (introduced in 2009). Lastly, research clearly shows that pupils' ability to produce language spontaneously in spoken form, such as in part of a 'real' conversation, governs the confidence that they have in all areas of learning a foreign language. Whereas teachers often focus on a pupil's grammar, spelling or reading age, pupils judge themselves on their ability to actually speak a language. Therefore we targeted KS3 in the hope that research and its findings could aid us in raising pupil confidence, thus maintaining and improving future uptake of MFL at Key Stages 4 and 5. The research had the following main aims:

- To raise pupil confidence in using spontaneous and unplanned language in class and beyond

- To trial new speaking strategies and evaluate their success

- To spot patterns and establish common needs within the teaching school alliance in terms of speaking in the target language

- To learn strategies that can later be used to tailor our Year 9 enrichment programme to the needs of pupils

- To subsequently improve uptake of MFL at GCSE.

In order to achieve these aims, the following research questions were asked:

- How do we currently encourage pupils to engage with speaking activities in class?

- What are the barriers that inhibit pupils' speech in class?

- How do KS3 pupils rate their capacity to deal with different speaking activities?

Context

St Marylebone CE School is a state comprehensive school in central London which teaches girls aged 11–16, and has a mixed sixth form. It is one of the first teaching schools in the country and was rated Outstanding by Ofsted. This research project was undertaken by Peter Jordan and Hugo Gardner, who is the Curriculum Leader for Modern Foreign Languages.

From regular discussion with MFL teachers in our teaching alliance it became clear that raising pupil confidence in speaking was a high priority, as it was the one area in which all four schools shared a perceived weakness (other schools working on this project are: Capital City Academy, Brent; Westminster Academy; Christ Church Bentinck Primary School, Westminster; and St Vincent's RC Primary School, Westminster). Furthermore, with MFL being part of the new EBacc qualification, it was clear that achieving a higher uptake of MFL at GCSE was in all of our interests. As it was evident that pupils' fear of speaking a foreign language was the biggest single factor in discouraging their continued study of MFL at GCSE level (from student voice information and discussion amongst Year 9s who did not choose language at GCSE) we decided to tackle this perceived problem earlier in our pupils' school careers.

At St Marylebone all pupils study one language (French and Spanish on an alternating yearly rotation) in Year 7 and begin their study of a second foreign language in Year 8. Our school has a two-year KS3 programme, with Year 9 dedicated to enrichment and cross-curricular work. We hope to use any findings of this research project to improve our entire KS3 programme of study. However we focused on the Year 9 curriculum in particular, as this relatively 'free' year gives us the scope to devise our own curriculum and prepare pupils for their GCSE option choices at the end of the year. French, Spanish and German GCSE are offered to all pupils, who also have the option to study a second language.

The EBacc is the latest comparator for schools' achievement. A language GCSE is one of the five subjects that count towards the EBacc in school performance tables. As a result, this policy has renewed the focus on MFL at KS4. Despite the study of MFL at KS4 becoming non-compulsory, St Marylebone School has always encouraged GCSE Foreign Language study and in 2012 around 70% of the Year 10 cohort opted to study a language at GCSE level. However, classroom teachers felt that many more were clearly able enough to gain a passing grade of C or above in a language. Therefore we feel confident that this figure can be significantly improved if we better understand pupils' needs and instil in them the necessary confidence to choose a GCSE in a language. Furthermore, for those pupils who do opt for a language at GCSE, 30% of the qualification is dedicated to the speaking unit and it is conducted and marked by teachers. Therefore, it is imperative that we understand our pupils, to enable them to achieve their full potential.

Methodology

In order to address the aims of the project, a mixed-method approach was used. Pupils from a middle-ability set of Year 8 were chosen for the project, since it is very rare for top-set pupils to opt out of MFL at GCSE level. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected by means of pupil questionnaires and interviews, supported by the possibility of future observations by teachers in lessons. Before the nature of the research project had been settled I began the year with a series of individual interviews with eight Year 10 pupils who had chosen not to study MFL at GCSE level the previous year. Over the course of these discussions I asked them about their reasons for not choosing a language and their relative level of confidence in the four key language skills. The results of these discussions, and particularly the trends in pupils' answers regarding their lack of confidence in speaking, reassured me that we were right to focus on speaking as an area of research. Pupils' answers also guided my planning of the questionnaire which was to be used later with Year 8 pupils.

We then used departmental planning time to come together as a whole department to discuss the interviews and brainstorm our own views as teachers on the reasons for pupils' lack of confidence in speaking. The resulting list of potential 'barriers to speaking in the target language' came together as a set of questions to be put to Year 8 pupils in a survey completed using Survey Monkey.

Prior to filling in the initial Pupil Confidence questionnaire, I also set aside lesson time for discussion of the different sorts of speaking activities that we regularly tackle in class, as the questionnaire would demand some understanding of key terms and names of activities. This was done to avoid pupils responding with a non-committal answer when asked a question that they did not fully understand.

Pupil interviews

These individual interviews were free-form and informal, but designed to discover pupils' principal reasons for not choosing a language at GCSE. They were retrospective as they were interviews with Year 10 pupils who had not carried on with a language, despite having been assessed by their class teacher the previous year as being more than capable of passing a language GCSE. I took notes on their responses and used their responses to guide my creation of a questionnaire for pupils lower down on the language learning ladder.

Pupil questionnaires

The main method used to gather data was via two questionnaires which were completed by the 20 pupils in the middle-ability Year 8 Spanish class.

The questionnaire consisted of three separate sections. The first section contained 13 different statements relating to pupils' perceptions of themselves as Spanish-speakers, and required them to say how appropriate each statement was for them as a pupil. The statements were made in the first person singular form, such as 'If I think I might make a mistake I prefer not to speak' and often in the form of pairs that were intended to show whether pupils were truly considering their answers. Pupils were given five options ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. This section was devised to gauge patterns in pupils' reasons for being either willing or unwilling to speak in the target language in class.

In the second section of the questionnaire, pupils were asked to rank these activities in order of confidence (i.e. which did they feel most confident in, and which least confident). In the third section, pupils were asked to expand on their answers in an unstructured, written response to their decisions. They were asked to look at the activities where they felt least confident and expand upon this with brief reasons for this choice. The aim was to provide some qualitative data to enable me to interpret the questionnaire results more clearly.

Figure 6.3.1: **Example of pupil level data**

First Name	Surname	'I find many words difficult to pronounce correctly'	'I get embarrassed by my Spanish accent'	'I find that I often don't understand what the teacher is saying in Spanish'	'I often know the answer but don't want to put my hand up'	'If other students have their hands up I prefer to let them do the talking'	'I feel like the other people are better than me at speaking Spanish'
		Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Strongly agree
		Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
		Agree	Don't know	Agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
		Agree	Don't know	Don't know	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
		Disagree	Strongly disagree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know
		Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know
		Agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Agree	Agree	Don't know
		Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Strongly agree
		Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Don't know
		Don't know	Strongly disagree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree
		Agree	Agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
		Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree
		Disagree	Don't know	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree
		Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
		Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree
		Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
Average (Mode)		Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Don't know

The aim was to provide more support or more practice in the specific activities which pupils typically found most daunting, then reassess their confidence later in the year. However, time restrictions have meant that this has not yet been possible.

Key findings

Year 10 pupil interviews

Although pupils' responses to being asked exactly why they had not chosen a language at GCSE were many and varied, they all shared the common factor that they felt particularly uncomfortable in speaking and hugely daunted by the prospect of GCSE oral 'exams'. All pupils considered speaking to be their weakest skill (even though teacher assessment did not demonstrate this self-assessment to be correct) and often appeared quite confident in the other skills, particularly writing. Despite it being clear that speaking will remain such a spontaneous activity that pupils' progress will always seem slower in this area, the results of these interviews have certainly highlighted a need for more curriculum time to be dedicated to speaking, perhaps on a communicative level that puts less emphasis on grammar and more on communication. The findings were crucial and extremely useful in guiding the creation of the Year 8 pupil survey, as they gave us specific problems explained from a pupil's perspective and in a pupil's own words.

Year 8 pupil confidence surveys

Although patterns in pupils' perceptions of their own capabilities, strengths and weaknesses were not as clear as might be hoped, there were nonetheless some extremely interesting findings.

First of all, in response to the statement 'I often know the answer but don't want to put my hand up', the great majority agreed, suggesting to us that it is clearly a confidence issue rather than a matter of fearing an incorrect answer. Furthermore, the average response to the statement 'I don't mind making mistakes with my Spanish as long as it is clear what I am trying to say' was to agree, suggesting that it is not accuracy or vocabulary that prevents pupils from speaking, since they do not fear simple mistakes as much as one might think. 17 out of 20 pupils clearly either believed that other pupils were stronger Spanish speakers than them or were not sure, highlighting the fact that our pupils tend to undervalue their speaking ability.

When ranking the activities in which pupils feel most and least confident, it is clear that they feel most insecure when it comes to forming and asking questions for themselves, and answering unpredictable questions spontaneously. Surprisingly, however, pupils ranked performing a role-play with a partner in front of the class as the activity in which they felt least confident. This is not the impression they give in class, as they typically seem to derive real pleasure in acting out roles together. However, this response certainly suggests a need for further research on this front. The patterns that are there to be spotted certainly suggest the following recommendations and avenues of further study:

1. More curriculum time needs to be devoted to the formulation of questions and possibly also to allowing pupils to form interesting and original questions which they genuinely wish to see answered by their peers.

2. More activities in class that involve 'no hands-up' questioning, since many clearly know the answer but do not want to raise their hands.

3. More emphasis on free-form conversation and role-play, without too much insistence on flawless language and grammar.

Reflections

Recommendations suggested by our findings

1. This sort of survey, although perhaps not perfect in terms of providing 'one-size-fits-all' solutions for a whole cohort, could be extremely useful for a classroom practitioner who wishes to better understand the needs of the individuals in the class. It could also be used as a summative end-of-year piece of research, providing crucial information that could be passed on to a teacher who has never taught the class.

2. When compared with results from other schools in our teaching school alliance it is apparent that pupil confidence in different areas varies hugely. This showed us that, as stated above, this kind of survey is perhaps more useful as a way of better catering for the needs of a specific group of pupils than a larger group. However, if MFL departments within a teaching school alliance could work together to share good practice they could create resource banks that are divided into different aspects of speaking (or in fact any skill). This sort of survey could be used as a springboard for a teacher or head of department to ascertain the needs of their pupils, then request help from the teaching school alliance in meeting these needs.

"The eloquence and willingness of pupils to respond certainly shows that this kind of survey could be adapted to take into account not only pupil confidence in speaking but also their ability to tackle certain key skills…"

3. The eloquence and willingness of pupils to respond certainly shows that this kind of survey could be adapted to take into account not only pupil confidence in speaking but also their ability to tackle certain key skills, such as specific points of grammar. Then a teacher can adapt the teaching accordingly.

4. Following up on the last point, it is clear that this survey could be adapted and then used to tailor a scheme of work to the learning needs of a group or a whole cohort. For example, at St Marylebone we intend to roll the survey out to the whole of the Year 8 cohort and adapt our Year 9 enrichment scheme of work according to the results.

Our final conclusions are that this sort of pupil confidence survey is extremely useful in terms of meeting the needs of pupils and it would be interesting to widen the net by surveying the whole of a cohort. Pupils' responses have certainly highlighted a need for more focus on speaking within the KS3 curriculum, and the specific nature of the survey has even highlighted areas of speaking upon which to focus. It would be fascinating now to concentrate on the areas of least pupil confidence, such as role-plays and forming and answering questions spontaneously, and work on coping strategies in unpredictable speaking tasks. To do this we would work together as a teaching school alliance to share good practice in teaching these skills.

Ultimately, and towards the end of Year 8, we would like to revisit this same class after having focused on their needs in relation to speaking, finishing with a final survey to ascertain whether their confidence has developed. We will also use what we have learnt about types of activities and areas of low confidence to improve our Year 9 scheme of work in order to encourage maximum GCSE uptake.

6.4 Exploring pupils' views in relation to different approaches to spontaneous talk in language lessons

Fiona Rushton, Tudor Grange Academy, West Midlands, in conjunction with staff at Tudor Grange Academy, Samworth Church Academy and Light Hall School
Tudor Grange Academy Solihull Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This research project examined speaking skills. This area is important to our school and our work because pupils in our school report that they have the least confidence in carrying out this language skill at GCSE mainly due to their inability to speak spontaneously and respond to unpredictable questions that are now part of the new GCSE syllabus. In addition, all schools involved in the CfBT Education Trust Languages project 2012 identified encouraging spontaneous speech as an area of importance for development. The research had the following main aims:

- To improve the use of target language for real communication

- To evaluate the effectiveness of speaking strategies in the classroom

- To raise pupils' confidence in their ability to carry out speaking assessments.

In order to achieve these research aims, the following questions were asked:

- How do Key Stage 3 (KS3) pupils feel about spontaneous use of target language in the classroom?

- How do the strategies implemented by teachers alter pupils' perception of their ability to speak spontaneously in comparison with their usual speaking activities?

Context

Tudor Grange Academy in Solihull is a mixed 11–18 comprehensive school and one of the first teaching schools in the country. It has also been designated one of seven Lead Schools for Languages in the country. It was rated Outstanding by Ofsted in 2008.This research project has been undertaken by Fiona Rushton, Curriculum Leader for Modern Foreign Languages.

With the growing importance of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) we studied the previous years' GCSE results and found that speaking was an area for development. Improving both teacher and pupil use of the target language was also identified as a high priority amongst all the teaching alliance schools collaborating with us on the DfE Languages Project.

The EBacc is the latest comparator for schools' achievement. A language GCSE is one of the five subjects that count towards the EBacc in school performance tables. As a result, this policy has renewed the focus on Modern Foreign Languages at Key Stage 4 (KS4). Despite the study of GCSE Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) at KS4 becoming non-compulsory, Tudor Grange Academy has always encouraged the uptake of GCSE Foreign Language study. The percentage of pupils in the Year 11 cohort passing a GCSE in a Modern Foreign Language has risen by 11% each year over the last three years, meaning that in 2012 54% of the cohort passed a GCSE Modern Foreign Language and achieved an EBacc qualification. With 30% of the GCSE MFL qualification dedicated to the speaking unit and it being conducted and marked by teachers, it is imperative that we understand our pupils' needs to enable them to achieve their full potential.

French, Spanish and German are offered to all pupils and where staffing and timetabling permit, pupils have the option to study a second language. As part of our status as a Lead School for Modern Languages we have successfully worked with our teaching alliance schools in developing speaking skills over three best-practice days, culminating in a live speaking event involving KS3 pupils from all the schools involved, who have then in turn become lead learners for individual school-based speaking events. With this action research project we wanted to investigate strategies to improve spontaneous speech for real communication in the day-to-day language classroom.

Methodology

In order to address the aims of the project, a mixed-method approach was used. The top set of Year 8 was chosen for the project. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected by means of pupil questionnaires and interviews, supported by observations by teachers in lessons. Prior to filling in each questionnaire, pupils completed the relevant speaking tasks: first in the traditional planned 'partner-work and present' way and then with unpredictable elements as described below:

• During the partner-work speaking activity, pupils had the opportunity to plan and practise what they were going to say before presenting it to the class. The class then peer-assessed, tallying how many questions were successfully answered.

• Pupils completed questionnaire 1, part 1 on how confident they were in getting the answers right, whether they felt it was real, spontaneous communication and how confident they were.

• For the spontaneous speaking activity, pupils had to pull questions from an envelope and ask their partner the question on the paper; the partner had to record how many questions were successfully answered in 10 minutes.

• Pupils completed questionnaire 1, part 2, on how confident they were in getting the answers right, whether they felt it was real, spontaneous communication and how confident they were.

• Speaking strategies for coping with unpredictable language were taught over a series of lessons and then the speaking activity of pulling questions from the envelope was repeated, with partners recording how many questions were successfully answered. Pupils were encouraged to try out the coping strategies.

• Pupils completed questionnaire 2 on how confident they were in getting the answers right, how effective the coping strategies were, whether they felt it was real communication and how confident they were.

Conclusions were drawn about whether pupils found speaking spontaneously less difficult after learning strategies to cope with unpredictable language.

Pupil questionnaires and interviews

The main method used to gather data was via two questionnaires which were completed by the 30 pupils in the top-ability Year 8 French class.

The first questionnaire consisted of six questions, four of which used a scale of 1 to 5 for pupils to communicate their attitudes and feelings towards the two types of speaking activities that they had experienced. The fifth question asked them to express a straightforward choice, indicating their preference for one style of speaking activity over the other in relation to their confidence levels. The final question asked which type of speaking activity they felt would allow them to make more progress in speaking skills in French.

The second questionnaire asked pupils to rate the coping strategies taught, using a scale of 1 to 5 for how helpful they were in pupils' attempts to speak more spontaneously.

The final question asked pupils if they felt more or less confident to speak in French after being taught the coping strategies. There was opportunity for pupils to give further comments on this questionnaire for how or why the coping strategies worked or did not work and to give further details relating to their confidence levels.

After the questionnaires a sample of pupils was asked to expand on their answers in an unstructured interview. The aim was to provide some qualitative data to enable me to interpret the questionnaire results more clearly.

Teacher observations

In addition to the pupil data I wanted to observe their reactions during each type of speaking activity. While one teacher conducted the 'partner-work and present' activity, an observer was also positioned at the front of the classroom to observe behaviour and interactions. During both speaking tasks the pupils were observed by the same teachers and then the observations and the findings were compiled.

Key findings

Pupil attitudes towards the different methods of speaking activities in languages lessons

At the start of the action research, 16.6% of pupils did not feel confident about their speaking skills in French, whilst 27.7 % were indifferent and 53.3% felt quite confident or confident about speaking French. Having completed both the prepared speaking task and the unplanned (questions from an envelope) speaking task, 60% of pupils said they felt more confident to carry out the prepared speaking task; yet 53.3% of pupils felt they made more progress in speaking skills by carrying out the unplanned speaking task. Therefore, at this stage pupils were recognising that confidence in their ability to speak French did not necessarily equate to being able to – or to making progress in being able to – speak French.

Pupil perceptions towards coping strategies

Further to completing the coping strategies to help pupils to speak more spontaneously in the unplanned 'questions from an envelope' task, 80% found the gap-fillers coping strategy helpful or very helpful and additional comments referred to this being the easiest strategy to use, as it gave them time to think. 66.6% of pupils found using the question words to help in forming the answer (automatic speech) helpful or very helpful. 60% of pupils found using pre-learnt sentence starters, and identifying the tense of the question to use in the answer, helpful or very helpful. 93.3% of pupils reported feeling more confident in carrying out an unplanned speaking task having been taught some coping strategies.

Pupil interviews

All of the pupil interviews regarding their views on coping strategies were positive, and pupils reported greater confidence and ability to speak French more spontaneously if they use the coping strategies. The most common reference in interviews was to the gap-fillers coping strategy, for the same reasons given in pupil questionnaire 2: it was the easiest to use and provided thinking time for pupils to answer better.

Teacher observations

In the first lesson the teacher observed greater confidence in the pupils' ability to carry out a pre-learnt speaking task, as they had time to practise. The teacher observed that success in this type of activity was high, although the language itself was not necessarily always correct. When pupils first carried out the unplanned 'questions from an envelope' task, she noticed that most pupils panicked about not being able to answer how they wanted, or they gave up trying to answer different questions quite quickly. When the coping strategies had been taught, she observed a greater tenacity in the pupils who visibly felt more able to answer a variety of questions asked of them by their partner. Pupils were successfully answering more questions than before.

Reflections

> *" … pupils feel that they make the most progress from unplanned speaking tasks…"*

Final conclusions are that pupils feel that they make the most progress from unplanned speaking tasks (questionnaire 1), although they are less confident about these (questionnaire 1). Coping strategies help raise their confidence in carrying out unplanned activities (questionnaire 2); as one pupil said in questionnaire 2, 'learning some of these coping strategies has helped me respond quicker to more difficult questions'. Therefore carrying out unplanned speaking tasks with the use of coping strategies to boost confidence, tenacity and ability to interact, ensures that the greatest progress is made in foreign language speaking skills.

Theme 7

Leadership of Modern Foreign Languages and whole-school approaches

7.1 What is the impact of embedding links in Modern Foreign Languages and English in teaching and learning across the curriculum in Key Stage 2?

Claire Couzens, **Jim Dugmore** and **Cath Thomas**, Porter Croft Church of England Primary School, South Yorkshire
Sheffield Teaching School Alliance

Overview

Our research centred on how whole-school culture in terms of teaching, learning and behaviour has been transformed by making speech and communication the driver for all aspects of the school's pedagogy. In 2007, Porter Croft became part of the Improving Schools Programme and 'Talk for Learning' was adopted as the key strategy for improvement; it continues to underpin all teaching throughout the school.

Talk for Learning ensures that talk and communication skills retain a high profile across the whole curriculum. Pupils rehearse ideas and build oral confidence with 'Talk Partners' prior to class discussion. This allows time for the development and extension of vocabulary and ideas before undertaking any written work. Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) teachers will immediately recognise that these key strategies and methodology have extremely strong parallels with the spirit, aims and methodology of the Key Stage 2 (KS2) Modern Foreign Languages Framework and even beyond into secondary MFL teaching.

In 2008 the specialist French teacher and the Year 3/4 teacher began collaborative planning to develop cross-curricular MFL/English modules. These modules mirror and reinforce English learning objectives in terms of grammar and genres within weekly MFL lessons for the mutual benefit of teaching and learning in both languages, embedding MFL into the whole school curriculum.

We wanted to explore the impact of the whole-school approach on teaching and learning and also on the school's progress in all areas. In order to achieve our research aims, the following research questions were explored:

- What is the impact of our cross-curricular approach on pupils' language development in both English and French?

- Which teaching and learning strategies are most mutually beneficial in maximising progress in French and English lessons?

- What is the effect on pupils' confidence in speaking and listening activities within lessons? Are there any additional effects on overall development?

Context

Porter Croft Church of England Primary School is situated near the centre of Sheffield. The school has 167 pupils on roll aged 4–11 years and serves a multicultural population comprising children from 19 different ethnic backgrounds who use 24 different languages. There are high levels of special educational needs (currently 40%) and very high mobility (37.8% in 2012). Children enter Foundation 2 typically 75% below the national average in terms of literacy skills.

This initial 'language deficit' (which is mirrored in emerging informal research from the South Yorkshire area) is the basis for adopting a whole-school focus on communication. A Talk pedagogy based around oracy allows our children to experience the richness of language, supports language acquisition and then accelerates learning to ensure that high aspirations for our children are met.

Following a rapid period of school improvement, results increased from 28% combined Level 4+ in 2007 to 85% Level 4+ in 2012. Progress in English in Years 3 and 4 is consistently good or better. We now have some of the highest levels of progress rates in the city (100% in both English and mathematics in 2012) and have witnessed significant improvements in behaviour and confidence.

As part of the Talk approach, our cross-curricular MFL modules were producing encouraging results in Years 3 and 4 and in May 2012 it was decided to progress the project into Years 5 and 6 with funding from CfBT. There would clearly be greater challenges trying to support a higher level of English and we wanted to look at the impact of the project overall to inform future planning.

Methodology

Questionnaires

In order to gain insight into the impact of our cross-curricular approach, we devised a questionnaire to seek staff and pupil views on the importance of 10 strategies considered key to both teaching and learning:

- Using actions to support understanding and memorisation of language

- Using interactive whiteboard activities to support reading and writing tasks

- Using structured 'Talk Partners' to put oral rehearsal at the heart of every subject, not just English and French

- Using cognates to facilitate understanding and the acquisition of a wider vocabulary

- Using visuals to support understanding

- Using text cards to support progression in sentence building

- Making strong links in French lessons with the grammar currently being taught in English

- Performing to an audience in French (for example in assembly, to promote oral confidence)

- Making strong links in French lessons with the genre currently being taught in English.

Figure 7.1.1 – **Example from the pupil questionnaire**

2. Use whiteboard games to help us with reading and writing

| very important | important | quite important | not very important | not at all important |

3. Work with 'Talk Partners' and not just as a class

| very important | important | quite important | not very important | not at all important |

4. Use cognates in our reading and writing

| very important | important | quite important | not very important | not at all important |

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with staff and pupils from Years 5 and 6, to explore which strategies would be most significant in upper Key Stage 2 and to discuss outcomes of the project in all areas of school development.

Observations

Observations were conducted by staff and teaching assistants to explore and compare the children's oral confidence to speak and perform in each language in class and assemblies.

Key findings

- Questionnaires revealed that almost all pupils and staff ranked the 10 strategies as 'important' or 'highly important', reflecting that children and staff consider them effective ways of promoting learning.

- The high ranking of all 10 elements by pupils was initially extremely surprising, indicating that children had a much greater awareness of, and placed greater value on, learning strategies than had been anticipated. This result could be expected in discussion of these strategies in MFL teaching, but it became clear in interviews that the children value highly the Talk framework being a common factor in discussion and language building in *all* subjects. It is the consistency of the Talk approach which gives them greater confidence in oracy and literacy and also eases transition between year groups. The impact and subsequent progress clearly comes from fully embedding these MFL/Talk strategies into everyday teaching and the centrality of Talk within the school's pedagogy.

- In further analysis, questionnaire responses were ranked in order of highest score. This revealed staff and pupil views to be more diverse.

Figure 7.1.2: **Differences in staff and pupil views**
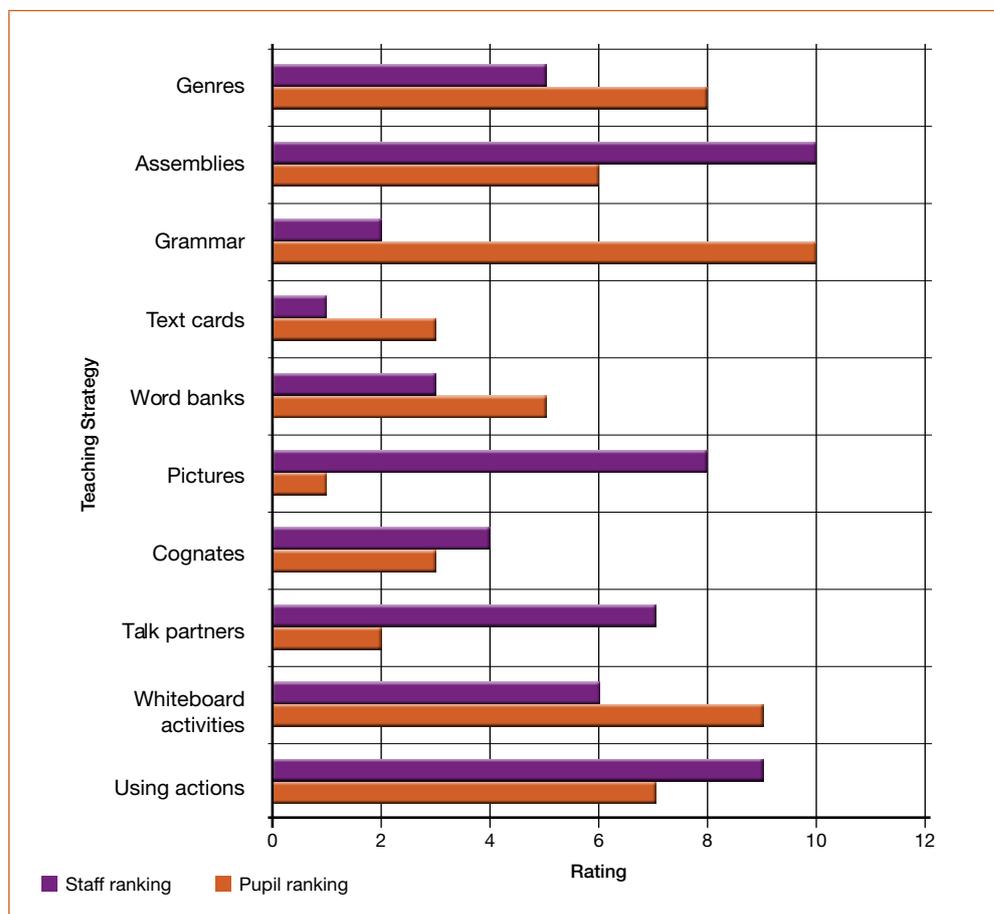
- A striking outcome was the ranking of 'Talk Partners'. Staff consider this one of the most valuable tools in language acquisition and developing oral confidence, whereas this was the area where a small number of pupils rated the strategy as 'not important' or 'not at all important'. It emerged strongly from pupil interviews that this strategy had been overlooked by children because it is so firmly established in their daily learning that they consider it 'normal'. One child asked: 'Don't all schools do it like this, then?' The French teacher observed that the children at Porter Croft show outstanding focus and motivation in French pair-work activities, clearly due to its prevalence in all subjects. We concluded that this divergence of opinion is in fact a positive result, confirming that many of our MFL/ Talk strategies are fully embedded and contribute significantly to overall progress.

- Although using text cards was not ranked highly in questionnaires, pupils clearly enjoyed the success achieved through their use. Interviews and observations indicated that the MFL framework strategy of using word banks and text cards provided useful modelling for our pupils in the construction of compound and complex sentences in grammar and in practising the mechanics of alliteration in poetry. Text cards will play an essential role in introducing the Years 5 and 6 pupils to creative 'writing' in French, without having to retain a high level of French spelling in the initial stages. This strategy could also provide valuable scaffolding into more demanding English written tasks.

- Staff rated gaining oral confidence through performance very highly. They were surprised by how many children performed more confidently in French assemblies. Indeed one child who entered school as an elective mute had taken the lead role in a French performance in assembly in Year 4. Children with English as an Additional Language were observed making an increased contribution during MFL/English lessons, with an associated rise in confidence in English performance as a result. This spills over into other areas of school life to help create greater self-confidence and self-esteem.

- It became clear that the impact of Talk goes beyond academic achievement. Embedding the MFL/Talk approach is central to an environment supportive to all our pupils. White British children and gifted and talented learners have flourished equally and made accelerated progress alongside those groups that have been identified as underperforming nationally.

- We have also seen significant social benefits. Serious incidence of bad behaviour impacting negatively on learning (quite prevalent in 2007) has been virtually eliminated and we are proud of the fact that there is no racial tension in our multicultural school. Staff feel that the centrality of talk in the curriculum teaches children to express their thoughts in meaningful discussion and to listen more carefully to others.

"…a much greater awareness of and value placed upon learning strategies by children than had been anticipated."

Reflections

- We are very encouraged by the findings of our research, which has confirmed our belief in the Talk approach and the real transformation it has brought to all aspects of school life.

- There has been a dramatic increase in literacy standards in school since the development of our MFL/English modules, which has contributed significantly to a greater awareness of common elements such as sentence structure, grammar and vocabulary, and knowledge of genres. We anticipate further progress as this strategy is rolled out more widely in Years 5 and 6 work. It was noted that planning time is key to the success of the project and that weekly reflection between the MFL teacher and school staff is invaluable to ensure tight and meaningful links in our partnership.

- The MFL teacher has observed that the outcomes of the poetry module are of a higher standard of French than would normally be achieved or indeed expected at KS2. The outcomes will be shared with secondary colleagues to ensure progress is built on in transition to Key Stage 3 (KS3).

- While there has been a dramatic increase in pupil progress, research suggests that a greater pupil awareness of how they think and learn may further deepen results.

A future challenge will be making further aspects of Talk more explicit to our pupils. This focus on metacognition will hopefully lead to further improvements.

Silverdale Language College provides an English course ('Academic English') in KS3 for pupils with weak literacy and communication skills at transition into Year 7. Discussions will be held to look at bringing elements of the two projects together for the mutual benefit of all in the teaching school alliance.

In conclusion, the following observations sum up the spirit of our achievements thus far:

'The areas of the school in which grammar for French is linked to that for English represents excellent practice.' (Visiting School Improvement Consultant)

'I have seen methodology not only for quality teaching of French, but which is immediately applicable to my literacy lessons.' (Visiting teacher observing Year 5 French lesson on complex sentence building)

'I can't imagine our school without French.' (Year 5 teaching assistant)

7.2 The development of St Paul's as a bilingual school, with support from the Department for Education and the Spanish Embassy

Linda Dupret and **Roberta Woodhouse**, St Paul's Church of England School
and Nursery, Brighton
Westdene Teaching School Alliance

Overview

This research project began in May 2011 when the headteacher was invited to the Department for Education to discuss the development of early bilingualism at St Paul's. We were asked to set up weekly Spanish lessons from Nursery to Year 6 and to introduce Spanish vocabulary to the children in art, PE and music. There would be two focus classes, Year 1 and Year 3, as these year groups would be in school for a sustained amount of time. This would enable us to build learning year on year as the children progressed through the school.

Specific training was given to all staff on INSET (in-service training) days and extra individual training was given to class teachers and teaching assistants in the focus classes through the Spanish Embassy. The project started fully in September 2011 and has been running for 18 months.

There are six schools in the project, which will gauge progress over four years. All six schools meet every six months to ascertain progress and compare practice. St Paul's is the only Spanish-teaching school; the other schools teach French (four schools) and German (one school).

The research has the following aims:

- To improve the use of the target language for real communication

- To evaluate the enjoyment of Spanish

- To evaluate how easy or hard Spanish is to learn

- To investigate if Spanish is spoken outside of the school environment

- To evaluate the use of native Spanish speakers to aid children's learning.

Context

St Paul's is a city centre school in Brighton. We have a higher-than-average intake of pupils with English as an Additional Language, and many children are already bilingual. The school was rated Outstanding by Ofsted in 2009. This research project has been undertaken by Roberta Woodhouse, Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) in one of the bilingual focus classes, and Linda Dupret, Headteacher. St Paul's has been teaching Spanish for seven years, initially to cover teachers' PPA (planning, preparation and assessment) time.

Our practice in the teaching of Spanish was recognised as outstanding by the local authority. Due to this we were asked to be part of two longitudinal studies through London Metropolitan University and the University of Southampton. These studies lasted four years.

The most interesting, the ELLIE project (Early Language Learning in Europe) tracked pupils' progress in one class from Year 3 to Year 6 (i.e. for four years). The project was funded by the European Commission for seven schools in seven European counties. Out of the seven English schools, St Paul's was the most successful, with 27 out of 30 children reaching the equivalent of a C or D grade GCSE after the four years of Spanish teaching.

As a result our school gained a high profile in the teaching of Spanish, and the headteacher attended a five-day study conference in Warsaw in October 2010 to discuss the research findings. Through this work we were asked to be part of the DfE-funded project to support the development of Spanish teaching in schools across the local authority (four schools – three primary and one secondary).

St Paul's children continue to make outstanding progress in Spanish and we hope will achieve even higher grades over the course of the bilingual project. We are successfully working with the four schools to particularly develop classroom teacher Spanish teaching, with upskilling sessions being provided by the Spanish Embassy. We use Spanish stories and 'talk for writing' methods, as well as assessment for learning, especially with reference to transition.

"Out of the seven English schools St Paul's was the most successful, with 27 out of 30 children reaching the equivalent of a C/D grade GCSE after the four years of Spanish teaching."

Methodology

The HLTA and headteacher devised two questionnaires, one for pupils and one for teaching assistants and Spanish-speaking volunteers. The HLTA scribed the younger pupils' comments to key questions, with the older pupils completing the questionnaire themselves. Since beginning the project, we have encouraged native Spanish speakers to work or volunteer in our school. Some are here as teacher-training students from Spanish universities on the Erasmus programme supported by the Spanish government. These students complete one or two terms work here at St Paul's. Other Spanish volunteers are parents, individuals wanting work experience, PGCE students or people who show an interest in the development of Spanish language learning; they are used in classes across all key stages.

The children's questionnaires asked simple questions to ascertain:

• their enjoyment of Spanish

• if they find Spanish easy or difficult, and why

• whether they enjoy having Spanish speakers in class and how this has helped them learn

• how having twinned schools in Spain and Mexico has helped them learn about Spanish culture.

The volunteers' and teaching assistants' questionnaires asked more in-depth questions about the teaching of Spanish and how they could influence teaching.

These questionnaires relate to:

• how the volunteers/teaching assistants have enjoyed supporting Spanish in class

• whether the volunteers/teaching assistants have access to lesson plans

• how the skills of the volunteers/teaching assistants are used by the class teacher

• how the volunteers/teaching assistants would feel sharing their cultural background

• how the skills of the volunteers/teaching assistants could be used more effectively

• how the volunteers/teaching assistants feel the children benefit learning Modern Foreign Languages from an early age

• how St Paul's can make language learning more successful

• what areas the volunteers/teaching assistants think the children enjoy the most

• whether volunteers/teaching assistants would be happy to share their own personal resources

• whether the volunteers/teaching assistants felt valued.

Pupil questionnaires

The main method used to gather data was one pupil questionnaire, comprising the questions detailed below. Altogether 30 children across Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 (KS2) completed the questionnaire. Not all children answered every question.

1. How do you enjoy learning Spanish at school (songs, rhymes, games, stories, etc.)?

   • 86% of children enjoyed their Spanish lessons.

   • 49% of children told us games were their favourite way of learning.

   • 27% of children said they enjoyed learning through song, with some children commenting that they could still remember songs they were taught in Reception even though they are now in KS2.

   • The 14% negative responses were all from Year 6 pupils, which may suggest that children lose interest in language as they grow older.

2. Do you find Spanish easy to learn or hard, and why?

   • 58% of children found Spanish easy.

   • 16% of children did not have a preference either way.

   • 37% of children found Spanish hard. The main reason given was difficulty in pronunciation and understanding different accents.

   • Several comments from children who found Spanish learning easy told us they either had help from parents or Spanish-speaking friends outside of school.

3. Have you ever tried to speak Spanish outside of school? (such as with Spanish friends, at a restaurant or on holiday)

   • 66% of children said they had spoken Spanish outside of school, the majority whilst on holiday.

4. Do you enjoy having Spanish-speaking adults in class? How have they helped you learn Spanish?

   • 86% enjoy having Spanish-speaking adults in class. A notable comment was: 'because they are young, fun and like to chat'

   • 9% found the native-speaking Spanish volunteers' accents hard to understand and said they spoke too quickly.

5. We have twin schools in Spain and Mexico. Tell us what you know about these countries.

   • 100% of children knew several facts about Spain and Mexico, due to our connecting classrooms and e-twinning with our link schools in these countries.

Key findings

Children were overwhelmingly positive about their language learning experience. Games and songs were the most popular method. The use of Spanish-speaking adults had enhanced their overall learning experience. Negative comments only came from older children in Year 6, which could be due to several factors:

- These children are approaching the end of KS2 and attitudes to learning change as they prepare for secondary education.

- The class has had six years of Spanish teaching and the enthusiasm may have waned.

- The teaching methods used may be less fun and more formal.

As a result of these findings, the headteacher, Year 6 children and the Spanish teacher will review methodology for teaching within this year group.

We will also review our induction of Spanish speakers and encourage them to speak more slowly to children and emphasise their pronunciation to aid the children's learning.

Spanish volunteer questionnaires

1. How have you enjoyed supporting Spanish in class? Please give examples.

   - 100% enjoyed working across all areas.

2. Do you know what the children are learning during their timetabled Spanish lessons, and is it helpful to see lesson plans?

   - Verbal explanations were given to volunteers, but few had plans shared.

   - This is an area to address as all participants thought that having plans would be useful.

3. How is your time used in class by the class teacher? (e.g. a group, gifted and talented pupils, whole-class support, or other)

   Four main areas were highlighted:
   - Pronunciation

   - Enrichment (gifted and talented)

   - Greetings to whole class

   - Whole-class teaching.

4. Would you be happy to share your cultural background with the class?
- 100% said 'Yes'.

This is an area we have explored at St Paul's before, so an action plan and rota will be formed to enable children to have a wider opportunity to explore Spanish-speaking countries and cultures.

Please share with us your ideas as to how we could use Spanish speakers to support our pupils even more in class. Can you suggest any inspiring activities, projects or themes?

- Spanish speaking day

- Spanish role-play area

- Spanish sports day

- Spanish playground games

- Spanish board games in classrooms.

6. How do you feel the children benefit from having this opportunity to learn Spanish from an early age?

   100% responded positively; comments were:
   - Early teaching gives young children more of an awareness of their world and helps them be more understanding towards different cultures.

   - Children learn more quickly from an early age.

7. Do you have any suggestions as to how we can make the children's experience of language learning even better?

   - During wet playtimes, show Spanish cartoons/short films.

   - Extend the Spanish country project (e.g. Mexican/Spanish days).

   - Pitch Spanish lessons at a higher level.

   - Increase differentiation.

8. When supporting Spanish activities, what areas do you feel the children enjoy the most?

- 100% responded: singing and games (activities that do not involve reading/writing).

9. Do you have any resources that you would be happy to share with the class (e.g. Spanish stories or music)?

   - All volunteers responded that they would be happy to share books and DVDs. This is an area we have not explored before and will extend the request to parents and carers who may have Spanish recourses we could also share. This would increase our basic resources with no cost to the school.

10. Have you felt valued in your role at St Paul's? Please let us know how we could support you better in the future.

    - 100% positive response. A notable comment was: 'I felt valued and part of the St Paul's team.' It was suggested that we have a workshop for all volunteers to share ideas and resources at the end of term to enable us to gather more ideas to take forward.

Teaching Assistant questionnaires

1. How have you enjoyed supporting Spanish in class? Please give examples.

   - 100% of teaching assistants enjoyed supporting Spanish at St Paul's, both in class and in small groups. Areas of particular enjoyment were:

     – Puppeteering
     – Role-play
     – Teaching part of the planned lesson
     – Using Spanish greetings each day with class and in general conversation.

2. Do you know what the children are learning during their timetabled Spanish lessons, and is it helpful to see lesson plans?

   - Teaching assistants reported term plans are given to them and learning objectives shared daily before the lesson.

3. How is your time used in class by the class teacher? (e.g. gifted and talented pupils, whole-class support or other)

   - Mainly to support less able pupils, different ability grouping and sometimes whole-class support.

4. Would you be happy to share your cultural background with the class?

   - The teaching assistants were very happy to share their cultural backgrounds with their classes. This is an area that has not been shared before, so will be addressed in the action plan.

5. Please share with us your ideas as to how we could use Spanish speakers to support our pupils even more in class. Can you suggest any inspiring activities, projects or themes?

   - Teaching assistants suggested using Spanish volunteers at playtimes to teach Spanish games and to use Spanish-speaking teaching students to teach full classes in Spanish.

6. How do you feel the children benefit from having this opportunity to learn Spanish from an early age?

   - Teaching assistants felt children are natural learners of language at an early age.

7. Do you have any suggestions as to how we can make the children's experience of language learning even better?

   - Teaching assistants commented that more staff should speak Spanish every day around the school and more group/playground games should be introduced by Spanish volunteers.

8. When supporting Spanish activities, what areas do you feel the children enjoy the most?

- Teaching assistants found movement, music, songs, actions and stories were most enjoyed by the children. This was a high focus on all questionnaires.

9. Do you have any resources that you would be happy to share with the class (e.g. Spanish stories or music)?

- Teaching assistants would be happy to share music from other cultures.

10. Have you felt valued in your role at St Paul's? Please let us know how we could support you better in the future.

- All teaching assistants felt valued in their role. They commented that they would like to support more in art and PE, our focus areas.

Reflections

The Department for Education project on delivering bilingualism at St Paul's has now been in progress for eighteen months. It is very satisfying reading and analysing all the questionnaires and seeing how positively it has been received by children, staff, student teachers and volunteers. It is obvious from the children's questionnaires that games and songs are the most enjoyed method of learning Spanish. This was also reflected in all other questionnaires. This research revealed the need for St Paul's to reflect on the teaching methods used with the older classes to keep the love of learning Spanish alive.

The key developments that will form a new action plan for next year will be:

- We will review older children's learning and teaching methods.

- Spanish speakers will receive further induction on ways to support the children's learning, for example speaking slowly, pronouncing words carefully, using personal resources if appropriate, introducing Spanish playground games and to look for opportunities to share their culture with each class they support.

- The comments relating to staff using Spanish on a daily basis will be addressed by further training from the Spanish Embassy and sharing practice through upskilling with the DfE-funded project and the teaching school.

When asked to begin this project in September 2011 we were not sure how successful it would be. This range of questionnaires has totally supported the decision made by the staff and governors at St Paul's that we are enhancing and improving children's life chances by preparing them early for a global market which is constantly developing.

7.3 Investigating the impact of a whole-school language improvement programme on class teacher confidence and use of target language

Glenn Sharp, **Lucy McCorry** and **Nathan Ingleston**, Sandgate Primary School, Kent Shepway Teaching Schools

Overview

This research project, in the area of Spanish language skills, was delivered across the school by class teachers. This area is important to our school and our work because the teaching of Spanish to all children is central to our curriculum. The research had the following main aims:

- To investigate the impact of taught Spanish improvement sessions on the confidence of teachers new to the school

- To investigate the impact of taught language improvement sessions on the ability of teachers to use Spanish in the classroom

- To identify the most effective follow-up strategies to maintain confidence and consistent delivery of Spanish in the school.

In order to achieve these research aims, the following questions were asked:

- How confident do teachers feel during and following the Spanish twilight sessions?

- How effective is their use of Spanish with their classes?

- What are the most effective follow-up strategies to maintain confidence and continuous improvement?

Context

Sandgate Primary School is a two-form-entry school for approximately 420 pupils in Folkestone on the south east coast of Kent, and one of the first teaching schools in the country. It was rated Outstanding by Ofsted in 2007, since which time it has become a National Leader of Education and National Support School.

The teaching of Spanish was introduced across the whole school in September 2005 from Foundation to Year 6, with weekly timetabled lessons of at least 30 minutes a week. In November 2009, we received the Gold Standard Kent Accreditation for Primary Languages. In September 2011, we achieved the Full Standard International School Award for our outstanding development of the international dimension in the curriculum, from the British Council.

This research project has been undertaken by Glenn Sharp, Primary Languages Coordinator at Sandgate, former a Primary Languages Kent Lead Teacher and currently a Primary Languages Consultant with the Shepway Teaching Schools. Glenn's background was not in Languages as he graduated with an Honours degree in mathematics; however, he spent three years teaching English as a Foreign Language on a Greek island and in southern Spain before completing a PGCE and becoming a primary school teacher. He has been assisted by both Lucy McCorry and Nathan Ingleston, who joined the school in September 2012 and have each kept a personal learning journal of their use of Spanish in class over the autumn term.

The upskilling of new staff, as well as of existing teachers, is a priority in our school in order to keep our standards high. The passion of the Primary Languages Coordinator drives and maintains this and in the new academic year, beginning September 2012, there was a need to train seven new teachers, following a higher than usual transition of staff at the end of last year.

Methodology

In order to address the aims of the project, a mixed-method approach was used. This model has been used previously at Sandgate and has proved extremely effective. In order for new staff to develop their confidence and ability in teaching Spanish in the classroom, a plan of action was implemented. This included:

• A series of five 'Spanish for Beginners' after-school club sessions in term 1 for all new staff. All new staff were expected to attend every session; however, they were not expected to take an extra-curricular after-school club during this term. Experienced staff were also invited to attend these sessions if they felt their skills needed refreshing.

• Ongoing INSET (in-service training) for all staff, with a staff meeting dedicated to primary languages or Spanish three times per year, focusing on aspects such as our scheme of work, resources, the use of games and songs, the teaching of reading and writing in Spanish, transition and what makes an outstanding primary languages lesson.

• Demonstration lessons for all new staff in terms 2 and 4, with one more lesson in term 6 which could be either a further demonstration lesson or a team-taught lesson with the coordinator. New teachers are able to choose what teaching they would like the coordinator to model and/or demonstrate with their own class each time.

- Observations of teaching and learning in the new teacher's classes, to take place in September/October 2013, once they have had a year to develop confidence and be comprehensively trained in the delivery of Spanish.

- Ongoing coaching of new staff through informal drop-ins and chats with the coordinator throughout the year to address areas of concern, needs and to celebrate what is going well in each class.

- In addition, support from the coordinator for the more experienced teachers in the school with demonstration lessons and follow-up observations where the need arises, throughout the academic year.

Two new teachers kept a personal learning journal of their use of Spanish in class over the autumn term (terms 1 and 2), particularly in relation to the impact of the above training plan.

The 'Spanish for Beginners' sessions lasted approximately one hour each, and were held at the same time every week. The content included the Spanish alphabet, greetings, how to ask and say your name, how to ask how someone is and respond, the basic numbers, asking someone's age and responding, telling the time to the nearest hour, colours, animals, the basic verb forms 'to be' and 'to have' (using the present tense). The training methodology included active participation of teachers in games, songs and role-plays, along with plenty of oral practice to develop good pronunciation, the sharing of Spanish resources and what makes good practice; all of which were used to develop the confidence of participants and to enable them to have fun and feel a real sense of enjoyment in learning a new language.

All the participants in the five sessions, of which there were ten – seven new teachers at Sandgate, one teacher who joined last year, one experienced teaching assistant and coordinator from another school in our cluster (who is introducing Spanish in her school) – were asked to fill in a questionnaire both before and after the course to evaluate its impact on their own skills, understanding and confidence. The baseline data on new teacher language experience and qualifications was also carefully taken into consideration and is included below:

- Seven teachers were new to the school and none had previously taught primary languages.

- Five teachers were Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs).

- Two teachers had each worked for four years in their previous schools, their first schools as NQTs.

- One teacher had a Spanish GCSE qualification.

- Five teachers had a French GCSE qualification.

- One teacher had a French A level qualification.

- One teacher spoke fluent German as her father is Austrian.

- One teacher had specialised in primary languages (French) as part of his BEd degree.

Key findings

Teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of Spanish and their own confidence

At the start of the action research, the questionnaires completed by the seven new teachers at Sandgate Primary School showed:

- 86% of teachers were fairly confident at having a go at teaching Spanish, with support, although only 14% had actually learnt or used any Spanish before.

- 86% of teachers were not currently taking the register in Spanish, but wished to do so.

- 100% of teachers were not currently using simple classroom instructions in Spanish, but wished to do so.

- 100% of teachers were not currently using songs in Spanish, but wished to do so.

- 42% of teachers were not currently using rhymes in Spanish, but wished to do so.

- 86% of teachers were not currently using games in Spanish, but wished to do so.

- 58% of teachers were not currently using ICT packages in Spanish, but wished to do so.

- 72% of teachers were not currently using other language resources, but wished to do so.

- The areas that teachers listed as hoping to achieve through attending the course included: increasing confidence, developing their basic skills, finding exciting and memorable ways to learn Spanish, increasing their understanding of basic Spanish to teach in any primary year group with confidence, a broader understanding of Spanish and how to use as little English as possible in Spanish lessons, and gaining confidence and ideas in how to bring the language to life.

After the five hours of Spanish improvement sessions, which were carried out on a weekly basis in term 1, the questionnaires completed by the seven new teachers at Sandgate Primary School showed:

- 100% of teachers were much more confident at using the Spanish language with their pupils.

- 100% of teachers found the language they learnt very useful.

- 42% of teachers were often using the language they learnt with their class, whilst 29% were sometimes using the language and 29% were occasionally using the language.

- 100% of teachers were now taking a register in Spanish.

- 100% of teachers were now using songs in Spanish.

- 58% of teachers were now using rhymes in Spanish, who had not done so before.

- 58% of teachers were now using games in Spanish, who had not done so before.

- 42% of teachers were now using ICT packages in Spanish, who had not done so before.

- 28% of teachers were now using other language resources, who had not done so before.

- The areas that teachers listed as being real achievements through attending the course included: increasing confidence in basic Spanish, developing their basic skills, clearer pronunciation and understanding of Spanish phonics, learning a lot in a short amount of time, a real sense of enjoyment in using the Spanish language, a good range of practical activities to use with their class, and capability and understanding of how to use a range of resources.

- Teachers found the easiest activities to do with their class were: taking the register in Spanish, singing welcome songs, teaching greetings, and teaching the range of songs, rhymes and games.

- Teachers found the hardest activities to do with their class were role-plays and modelling or extending conversations.

- Teachers listed a range of ways in which they intended to build on this learning experience. These included: regular practice, exploring the resources available, keeping up confidence and incorporating more Spanish classroom vocabulary into their general teaching, implementing more of the strategies in class, and working with the coordinator to develop role-plays and Spanish conversation (through more modelling of lessons by the coordinator and coaching).

Findings from the two new teachers' personal learning journals of their use of Spanish in class over the autumn term (terms 1 and 2)

- Both teachers kept a record of their use of Spanish from the time that the Spanish improvement sessions began.

- The register was taken in Spanish daily and both teachers varied this with responses to a range of questions, using new phrases that they had learnt on the course.

- The confidence of teachers to deliver Spanish increased with more and more regular practice with their classes.

- Both teachers noted how the attitude of the children in their class towards Spanish was very positive and how the children were becoming more and more proactive in their own language learning, with their support.

- One teacher explored a range of Spanish resources about Christmas, taught his class a Spanish Christmas carol and played a Spanish Christmas dominoes game, enjoyed by children and teacher alike.

- One of the teachers made other cross-curricular links and used Spanish in his numeracy lessons about multiplication and division. One of these lessons was observed by teaching colleagues and graded as a really good lesson.

Reflections

The key findings demonstrate the very positive benefits and impacts of this project, which is still ongoing.

"...a very successful way of developing the confidence of teachers new to teaching Spanish and equipping them to begin to teach effective language lessons."

Each teacher observed the coordinator modelling a Spanish lesson of their own choice two weeks after these Spanish improvements sessions had finished; he included aspects of role-play within each of these lessons, as this was an area that each teacher had identified as the hardest to carry out with their classes. This will be an ongoing area for the coordinator to come back to throughout the year in his demonstration lessons, team-taught lessons and coaching with individual teachers. The ability for children to speak a language in a natural way, with flow, is a key element of empowering children in speaking a language: the more that our teachers can develop this themselves, the greater chance we have being successful as a profession.

This model is considered to be a very successful way of developing the confidence of teachers new to teaching Spanish and equipping them to begin to teach effective language lessons. Constant and consistent upskilling is, of course, always needed and needs to be planned in to build on this training and support.

The coordinators and consultants in the Shepway Teaching Schools partnership have reflected on the variety of positive benefits of this model, and the coordinator at Sandgate Primary School will be working alongside another school in the group to implement the model in this school, starting from term 4. He is very much looking forward to making a difference to this school and sharing his practice further.

7.4 A study into the role of non-specialist senior leaders with responsibility for Modern Foreign Languages in schools: investigating the specific skill-set, knowledge and understanding required to support and advance the Modern Foreign Languages department

Saskia van de Bilt, Stourport High School and Sixth Form Centre, Worcestershire
Haybridge and Stourport Teaching School Alliance

Overview

The research focused on the role and training needs of senior leaders who have responsibility for line-managing the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) department in their school. Whilst the role of a senior leader in leading the outstanding MFL department requires many generic skills of excellent leadership, the subject also raises a number of challenges that are particular to language learning. There are issues such as the use of target language, MFL pedagogy and the perceived barriers and challenges that hinder progress. This research has attempted to answer the following questions:

- What makes an outstanding MFL department?

- What is the role of senior leaders in promoting, supporting and moving the MFL department forwards?

- Are MFL specialists under-represented on senior leadership teams in secondary schools? If so, does this have a significant impact on the management, scrutiny and championing of MFL departments?

- To what extent does the use of target language in the MFL classroom cause concern or hindrance for senior leaders?

- Does lack of personal MFL knowledge cause unease among senior leaders?

- What would be the recommendations and advice given to senior leaders with responsibility for MFL?

- Are there any specific training needs for non-specialist senior leaders in order to line-manage MFL effectively and drive forward improvement?

Context

The Stourport High School and Sixth Form Centre is a mixed 11–18 comprehensive school. The Stourport High School became an academy in August 2011, was one of the first teaching schools nationally and in 2011 was designated one of seven Lead Schools for Languages in the country. It was rated Outstanding by Ofsted in 2009 and 2012.

The Stourport High School and Sixth Form Centre has a lower-than-average ability cohort on entry and a significant minority of pupils from traveller communities. It is a semi-rural school serving a very wide range of socio-economic backgrounds in a town that has suffered significant unemployment. The town still experiences challenges of very low aspiration and high youth unemployment. As a former Language College with GCSE results consistently above the national average, the Stourport High School enters around 86% of the Key Stage 4 cohort for GCSE in at least one Modern Foreign Language and 27% of the cohort are entered for GCSEs in two Modern Foreign Languages.

The subject of the research was chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, Ofsted identified the leadership and management of MFL as a focus for improvement in their 2011 report *Modern languages: Achievement and challenge 2007-2010*. Both the strategic and middle leadership of MFL are strengths at Stourport High School. The headteacher is a passionate advocate of the benefits that MFL teaching and learning can bring to all comprehensive schools. MFL plays an important role at Stourport High School in underpinning literacy skills, enriching the social, moral, spiritual and cultural education of the pupils and broadening their horizons for future employment, study and travel opportunities as well as improving teaching and learning throughout the school. Finally, the inclusion of MFL in the EBacc has provided an added impetus for encouraging more pupils to take a language at GCSE.

Methodology

The information required to answer our research questions was mostly of a qualitative nature, hence the main method of gathering information was semi-structured interviews.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted between November 2012 and January 2013 with five main-scale MFL teachers, three heads of department and five senior leaders, including two headteachers, from the following schools: Stourport High School, Wood Green Academy, South Bromsgrove High School, Holte School and Handsworth Wood Girls' School.

Surveys

In order to establish whether MFL as a subject was under-represented on senior leadership groups in secondary schools, a survey was devised to ascertain what percentage of senior leaders had originally trained and worked as MFL teachers. For each school, the survey asked how many of their staff were members of the senior leadership team, and of those, how many were MFL specialists. I collected information from 12 secondary schools, and found that of 129 senior leaders, only five had a background in MFL, representing 4%. In addition, secondary data was obtained from the Association of School and College Leaders, who had surveyed their members in 2009. At that time, 8% of their members (school and college leaders) said they had qualified and worked as MFL teachers.

Key findings

What makes an outstanding MFL department?

Most of those interviewed agreed that MFL represents specific challenges for teaching and learning. It is a subject that is comparatively teacher-centred, can lead to many pupils feeling vulnerable, and makes great demands on short-, medium- and long-term memory. MFL lessons require engaging visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning activities, clear modelling and succinct explanations, good pace and changes of activity, games, pair and group work, repetition of vocabulary, clear explanations of grammar and repeated opportunities to put learning into context.

It is important that teachers use target language and authentic resources whenever possible, and that the learning activities build on previous learning to ensure continued progress, so that pupils gain confidence in their abilities. For MFL teachers, planning and preparation of lessons can be particularly demanding. Indeed, those interviewed considered the onus of planning and preparation in MFL to be greater than for most other curriculum subjects.

Figure 7.4.1: **The MFL skills pyramid**
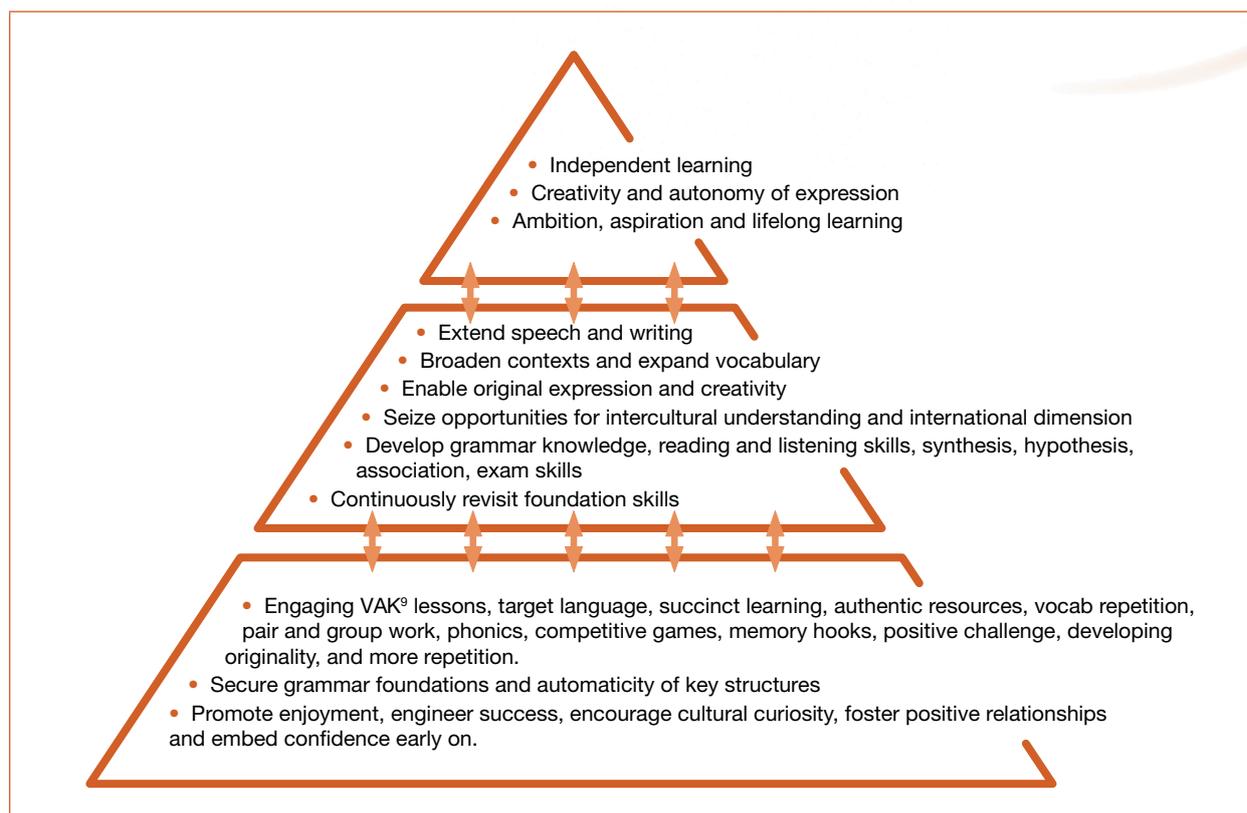
Many responses mentioned essential success criteria, such as clear vision and communication, close teamwork, dedicated staff, meticulous tracking and monitoring of assessments results and exams. However, I have picked out those which are specific to MFL as a subject. Respondents commented that outstanding MFL departments are those that:

- embrace all the opportunities for social, moral, spiritual and social education in an international context, through MFL lessons, cross-curricular projects and special events

- have a fundamental understanding of how pupils learn vocabulary, grammar and language and how they make progress over time building on prior learning

- provide excellent teaching and learning and inspiring lessons, with good use of the target language by both teachers and pupils

- hold a positive whole-school ethos that values community languages and cultural diversity, supports trips abroad and international study or work opportunities

- help to underpin literacy skills throughout the school, provide stretch and challenge for gifted and talented pupils and enrich the wider school community.

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[9] visual, auditory, kinaesthetic

What is the role of senior leaders in promoting, supporting and moving the MFL department forwards?

This question was answered swiftly and clearly. There was a high level of agreement between senior leaders and heads of department:

- To act as a sounding board, to ask questions, to enable the head of department to develop a clear vision for the department

- To ensure that appropriate staffing, resourcing and training are provided to support the head of department in their role

- To reassure and support in difficult situations, or to source support elsewhere

- To empower the head of department to lead and manage change, to have the confidence to take risks and even to fail

- To assist in providing quality assurance with lesson observations, teaching and learning judgements and interventions when necessary

- To champion the MFL department on the senior leadership team.

Are MFL specialists under-represented on senior leadership teams in secondary schools?

The survey aimed to identify what percentage of senior leaders originally trained and worked as MFL teachers. This showed that of 12 secondary schools surveyed, only five out of 129 senior leaders were originally MFL subject teachers, representing 4%. This is lower than one might expect, if all curriculum areas were distributed evenly in senior leadership teams. However, data received from the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) does not correspond with findings in the 12 schools surveyed. ASCL conducted their survey of members (school and college leaders) in 2009. At that time, 11% of their members said they had qualified and worked as MFL teachers, which would indicate that nationally, MFL is well represented on teadership teams.

To what extent does the use of target language in the MFL classroom cause concern or hindrance for senior leaders?

It was agreed by all classroom teachers, heads of department and senior leaders that target language can indeed create a concern or hindrance for non-specialist teachers observing lessons. One senior leader commented that the use of target language, particularly German, made her feel insecure, because of her lack of subject knowledge, but that she had overcome this after some years of experience.

A number of classroom teachers also felt that non-specialists were not aware enough of the difficulty of using target language successfully; that the effort of maintaining clear communication without alienating any learners or jeopardising relationships takes considerable skill and hard work. Furthermore, some classroom teachers felt that non-specialist observers did not appreciate fully the complexity of the subject and therefore could not value the progress made by pupils. This sentiment was not reflected by senior leaders, however, who commented that they perceived the level of difficulty and challenge in MFL lessons to be considerable.

Does the lack of personal MFL knowledge cause unease among senior leaders?

There was general consensus that personal achievements in MFL are not a significant factor in the competence or confidence in line-managing the department, nor for observing lessons. Nonetheless, some agreed that negative experiences might have some bearing, although it was suggested that such senior leadership team members would probably have some choice in whether to take on responsibility for line-managing MFL.

What would be the recommendations and advice given to senior leaders who take on responsibility for MFL?

- Conduct joint lesson observations whenever possible, to gain a common understanding of what Good and Outstanding look like.

- Ask the head of department to spell out their vision of the MFL department and ask them what support they need. Spend time discussing the policies and expectations of the department and find out what that should look like in everyday practice.

- Senior staff can engage with the target language during lesson observations, even if they do not speak the language. Skilful teachers using target language will check that all learners are on board using mime, gesture, modelling, English text or pupil translators.

- If as an observer you do not understand explanations or instructions in the target language, then ask a reliable pupil. If they do not understand either, then there could be an issue to discuss.

- Prepare a list of simple questions in the target language, to ask the pupils (What is your name? How are you? Do you like French? Why?). You will gain invaluable insight about pupils' attitudes from their willingness and confidence.

- If you have any worries about the language content, ask the language teacher or check with the head of department, before giving feedback.

- Visit good and outstanding MFL departments, to observe lessons, discuss policies, compare results and take a look at the learning environment.

Are there any specific training needs for non-specialist senior leaders in order to effectively line-manage MFL and drive forward improvement?
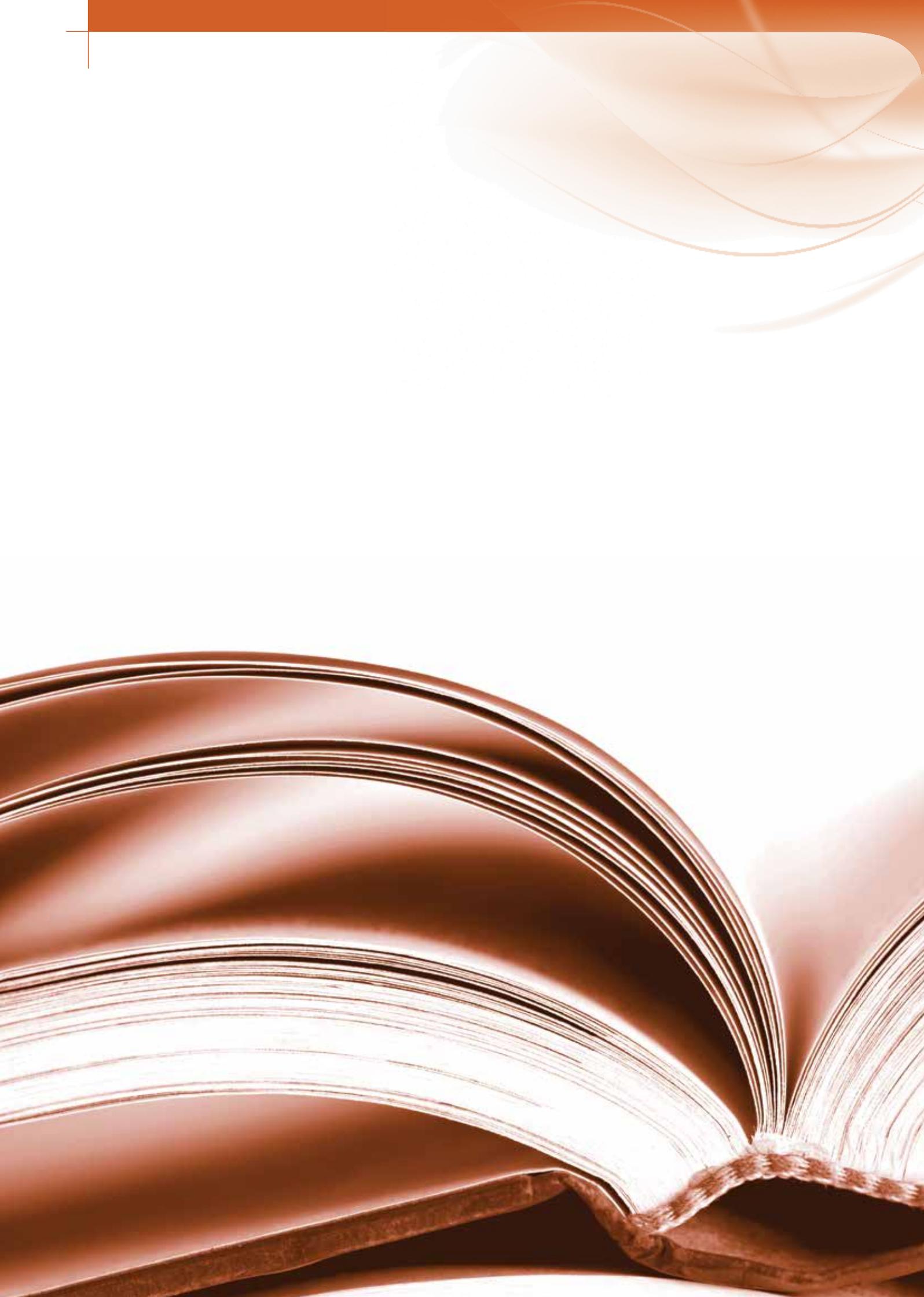
All those interviewed responded that they felt that those senior leaders with responsibility for MFL would undoubtedly benefit from participating in training to improve their skill-set, knowledge and understanding, specifically with regard to:
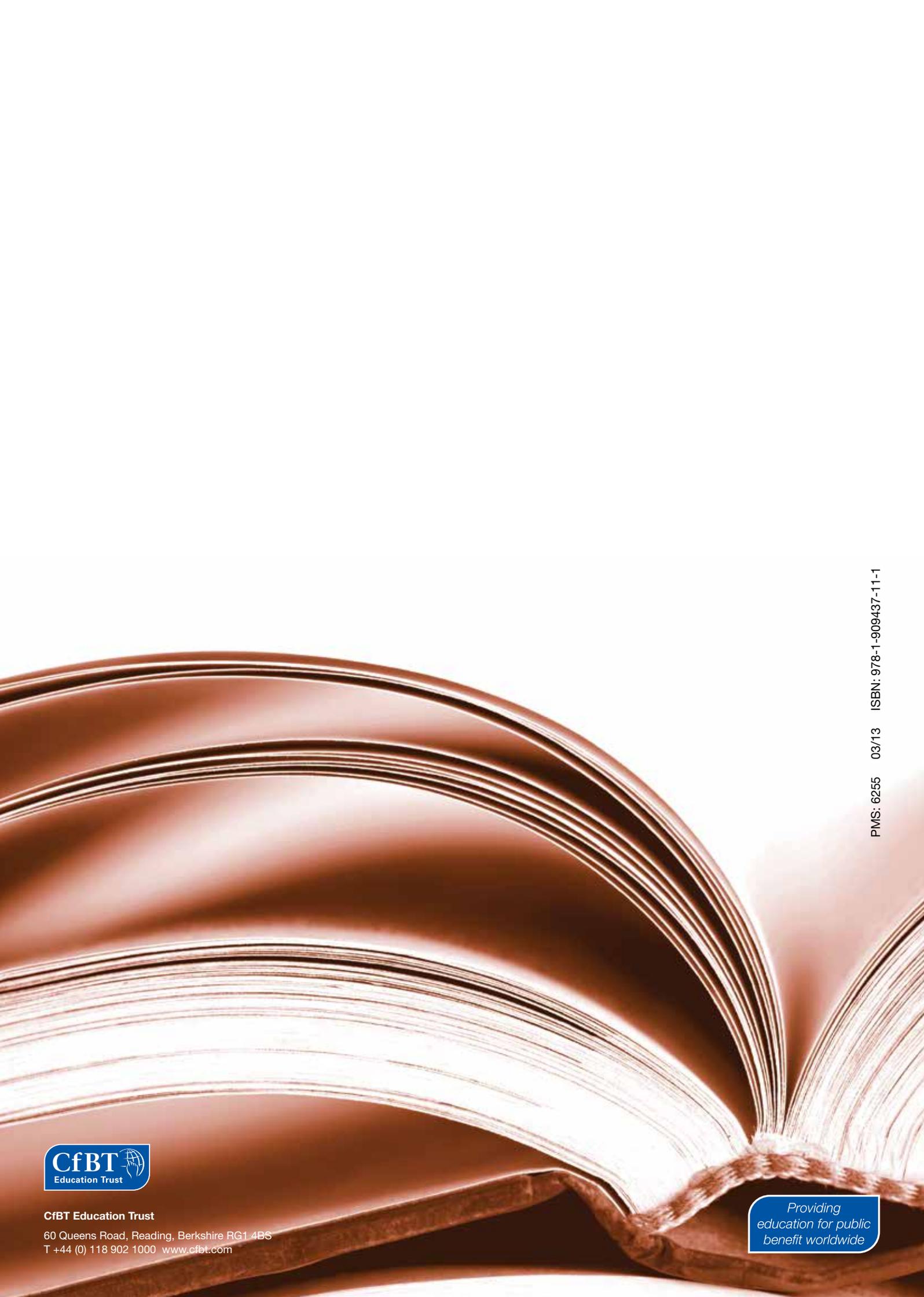
- lesson observations and MFL pedagogy

- the use of target language

- the MFL curriculum and progress over time.

Reflections

Final conclusions are that there is a need to provide high-quality and highly specialised training for non-specialist senior leaders. A senior leaders' toolkit for MFL, containing: case studies of outstanding MFL practice, sample policies, exemplar pupils' essays, Ofsted grade descriptors for MFL and exemplification of standards would also be of great benefit for senior leaders.

"…there is a need to provide high-quality and highly specialised training for non-specialist senior leaders."