



**REPORT ON THE 2014
AUTUMN RESIDENTIAL**

**FOR TEACHERS OF
MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

15 - 17 NOVEMBER 2014

HELD AT THE OXFORD BELFRY, OXFORDSHIRE

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PRESENTATIONS BY SUBJECT LEADERS

WEDNESDAY 25TH JUNE

Presentations were made on the final day of the Summer School by teacher leaders, summarising the outcomes of the teachers' group discussions. The main points they made reflected on the value of the Residential and issues currently facing the teaching of languages.

The value of the Residential

- Consistently positive attitude

MFL teachers recognise that they share responsibility for finding solutions to the problems that have arisen in their subject as a result of the lack of consistent, long-term educational policies, and have the ability to do so.

- Sharing ideas and resources

Delegates have had the luxury of being given the time and encouragement to reflect on their own practices, to celebrate their successes and to learn from others.

- Languages in a global context

MFL teachers have a vital part to play in nurturing their pupils as global citizens and also as members of a complex multi-ethnic community. Learning languages is one of the best ways of enriching the life experience of young people, of overcoming insularity and enabling them to make positive contributions to solving international issues.

Teachers' perspectives on key issues in the teaching of MFL

- Motivation

Demotivated teachers cannot hope to motivate their pupils. One way forward is to make greater use of Speakers for Schools: people from public life who can testify to ways in which a knowledge of languages has helped them in their career. Another key is provided by the MOD decision from 2018 not to allow promotion above the rank of Captain to anyone without foreign language competence.

- Comparison with other subjects

There is a perception that high grades are harder to achieve in MFL than in other subjects, and an evident discrepancy between the grade boundaries in different languages. MFL teachers will have taken heart from Ofqual's promise to rectify these anomalies by 2015.

- Numbers

MFL teachers are under constant pressure to keep class sizes economically viable, but without the possibility of small A Level classes in individual languages, fewer pupils are likely to opt to continue with them after GCSE.

- Transition

Problems can arise when the language studied at KS2 is not able to be carried on at KS3. Nevertheless the learning of *any* language unlocks curiosity about other languages and makes it easier to learn them.

- Assessment

Teachers of MFL acknowledge the new freedom to be creative in developing their own curricula, and the desirability of encouraging spontaneity, confidence and a willingness to make errors. This has yet to be reconciled with the straightjacket of assessment. What is wanted is a coherent system that enables measurement of progress through the key stages.

- Transactional language

Some pupils may be able to discuss reunification in a foreign language but not to reserve a hotel room; some the converse. There are opportunities for a parallel, less academic pathway, e.g. NVQ.

- School Leadership Team

The main aim is to win the hearts and minds of an SLT that may not appreciate the wider values of learning languages and whose thinking may be dominated by data, exam results, risk aversion and economic factors. This conference has provided an abundance of ideas for strategies to redirect these priorities.

PLENARY PANEL DISCUSSION IN RESPONSE TO SUBJECT PRESENTATIONS

WEDNESDAY 25TH JUNE

Panel members:

Bernice McCabe (Chair)	Co-Director, The Prince's Teaching Institute
René Koglbauer	President Elect Association for Language Learning
Katherine Smith	MFL Subject Specialist Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR)
Claudia Marsh	Head of MFL Cardinal Newman Catholic School

Summary of the main points raised:

Following presentations by subject leaders on the value of the conference and the main issues raised, a plenary discussion debated the following topics:

1. Teacher and pupil motivation
2. Examination and assessment
3. Extra-curricular activities
4. Main messages

The main points raised are noted below:

Teacher and pupil motivation

The principle we have kept coming back to at this Conference is that teachers need to be motivated themselves in order to motivate their pupils. What further means of achieving this double aim can you think of?

- Strategy

There needs to be a long-term strategy. No such forward thinking had been done when the government decided to make the teaching of a foreign language compulsory at KS2. As a result delivery is patchy and many secondary schools are having to come to the assistance of their primary colleagues on a local basis.

- Non-academic routes should be explored

NVQ courses which have a business focus, with the involvement of local companies and the backing of evidence from the CBI, present an attractive alternative.

- Competition

The loss of compulsory status for MFL at KS4 was a big blow, and it needs a harder sell to Y11 pupils already being urged to sign up for e.g. STEM subjects. The strongest advocates for MFL will be Sixth Form pupils who have already made the choice, and former pupils who will be able to show how, in today's competition for jobs among graduates, any extra accomplishment, like a facility for languages, will give them an edge.

- Senior Leadership Team

Win over the sceptics on your school's SLT by inviting them on your next school trip, particularly if they are not linguists themselves. Having non-linguists on foreign trips, even if they are not members of the SLT, helps to create a culture in the school where MFL issues become a matter of common concern.

- Cross-curricular links

Language teachers can work with English Departments in support of school literacy targets.

- Public relations

Journalists can make negative comments, so MFL teachers have a particular responsibility to work with the media in creating positive impressions of a school's activities. This is likely to have the support of the headteacher as it will create good publicity for the school.

Examination and assessment

How, realistically, can the systems of examination and assessment be modified so that they reflect more closely and reward more accurately the aspirations of MFL teachers?

- Linear progression

MFL is a skills-based subject; like music and sport, the longer you work at it, the better you are likely to be able to do it. It is also linear in that the learning process is incremental, building on what you knew before. Therefore it may not be appropriate for modular examination.

- Rigour

There is a balance to be struck between the need to reward accuracy and the encouragement teachers must give their pupils to express themselves in the target language even, if they make mistakes in doing so. This can transform students from parrots into linguists. The figure of the 'sympathetic native speaker' has been conjured up as providing a standard to judge by, but has so far proved elusive.

- Quality assurance

The confidence that schools can place in the marking done by examiners is paramount. At the moment their reliability is frequently open to question. OCR takes quality assurance in marking very seriously. There was a suggestion that experienced teachers might be willing to use some of their non-contact time in school marking or checking scripts.

- Risk taking

OCR acknowledges that what gets tested gets taught, but is committed to 'changing the climate', wants to hear teachers' views, and is prepared to take risks.

Extra-curricular activities

It is generally agreed that language teaching in the classroom needs to be complemented by a range of related extra-curricular activities. Which of these do you think is likely to be most effective in promoting the idea that learning languages is important and can be fun – and what advice can you give about the best ways of putting them into practice?

- Opportunities:

Foreign trips and exchanges are top of the list, but anything that involves the whole school (like foreign language days) or the wider community outside the school (such as cinema or a local University) is of value. Every effort made in this direction is likely to be rewarded and may alter the relationship with your pupils; the potential pay-off is big. Even the shortest trips to Europe may be significant for children with more limited horizons.

- Constraints:

Funding: There are many sources of public funding available, and these need to be better known and more widely used. The power of pupils to raise funds for themselves should not be underestimated.

Time: Perhaps it should be made part of the job description of language teachers that they are to make themselves available to participate in related extra-curricular activities. Sharing responsibility for organization within the department – or indeed with the school's administrative staff – is a way of reducing the burden.

By way of example, delegates described more ambitious trips to Colombia and to the Crimea which they had successfully organized.

Main messages

What are the main messages that you will take away with you from your engagement with this group of passionate language teachers?

- The pleasure of hearing MFL teachers talking so positively; this needs to be the attitude nationwide.
- The need for organizations concerned with promoting MFL – such as the Association for Language Learning and the PTI – to work together.
- The responsibility of examining boards to listen to teachers and get their modes of assessment right.
- There were two final messages. Schools were encouraged:
 - to contribute to the current government consultation
 - to take advantage of the organization 'Speakers for Schools' set up by the BBC Economics Editor Robert Peston.

PUPIL PANEL DISCUSSIONS

MONDAY 23RD JUNE

The Summer School opened with a panel session made up of five pupils from three different schools studying MFL at GCSE, AS or NVQ Level. They shared their personal experiences of learning MFL and gave their views on what constitutes best teaching practice.

Four of the five students came from families with international backgrounds with parents who spoke languages other than English; three had been born abroad.

Motivation

- The reasons the students gave for choosing to learn a foreign language were largely to broaden their horizons, to “open doors and windows” as a preparation for life, a way of communicating with friends and gaining a better understanding of other cultures.
- They all enjoyed the variety of activities and resources used in their MFL lessons, e.g. comic strips, music, films, foreign news channels, compared to lessons in some other subjects.
- MFL requires “a big investment of time and thought” and this can be daunting for some. Many students are not aware of the value of studying languages and more could be done in schools to address this through better career information, visiting speakers and using Sixth Form MFL students to speak to younger pupils .

Teaching

- The pupils felt the best teachers used different teaching styles to match pupils’ different learning aptitudes. They enjoyed variety in their lessons e.g. using songs on YouTube to learn vocabulary. Lesson structure and expectations were also important, e.g. one day a week devoted to grammar was helpful.
- Good teachers were not judgmental but allowed them to make mistakes which encouraged fluency and spontaneity. They enjoyed entering an MFL classroom where the “culture” was immediately different; they appreciated being spoken to in the target language. They enjoyed topics which they felt made a connection to the “modern world of teenagers”. Topics should be chosen to match the interests of the class, e.g. some boys would like to learn about sport.
- Some students become disheartened by their apparent poor performance compared to their peers; the requirement to speak in class makes this very public. Teachers should always give students time to formulate their responses before being asked to answer.
- Recapping is important to help retain principles e.g. of grammar, but should be taught in different ways, not just repeated.
- A knowledge of English grammar is helpful in learning grammar in other languages.
- **Teachers should be happy and versatile, and lessons should be fun.**

Feedback

- Written comments on work should be legible, personal to the student and are most effective when followed up by a face to face comment in class to explain mistakes. In some cases marking like this in class could replace written comments and save teachers time. Peer marking is also effective.
- Feedback by email is helpful where submitted work can easily be annotated by the teacher. Teachers should make pupils aware of apps which can be used on their mobile phones, for example to make flash cards and quick tests for self-assessment.
- “Conversations” on written work are helpful with positive/negative/improvement comments, with rewards for subsequent action taken by the student in response.

Examination

- When asked to reflect on whether the examination regime made the courses hard, the response was “it’s a memory test”. These pupils would prefer assessment that encouraged and gave more credit to creativity. They appreciated the need to understand and not just learn by rote.
- MFL were not “hard” (intellectually) so much as “challenging” (in the amount of application they required); there is a need to “train the brain” to adapt to overcome cultural differences in language.
- Perhaps the most memorable comment came when asked whether MFL were seen to be difficult: ***“Learning comes after passion”***

SELECTION OF QUOTES FROM DELEGATE EVALUATIONS

"The course was able to shine a light on the areas in which we are all struggling - recruitment, retention, assessment - and how the way we can teach can alleviate this."

"There was excellent presentation of issues relating to teaching and assessment, especially the constant changing of exams and high grade boundaries compared to other subjects."

"The workshop about sharing good practice was definitely the most useful and valuable. It is just amazing how much we can learn of what goes on in other schools; it provided a great opportunity to borrow ideas from other colleagues."

"The pupil panel was superb. The students were fearless about commenting on their language-learning, and raised some excellent points on what works and what doesn't work in the classroom. Their emphasis on the teacher's passion was particularly reassuring."

"I thought the content of the course was very well-planned, with an effective balance between practical advice and more self-inspiring activities. I was reminded of how much I absolutely love learning languages and experiencing foreign cultures."

"I have been inspired to extend my own knowledge of French, Italian and Spanish and have loved the lectures which have broadened my knowledge - Great."

"It is fantastic to now be part of a network, where there are lots of high quality resources to hand and where, through our discussions, we can ultimately make a difference in shaping the future of MFL."

"The keynote speech was extremely effective in reinspiring and reminding teachers of their love of language. The workshops had a significant impact in terms of practical ideas to enhance teaching practice."

"I'm leaving the course confident on all aims and objectives - with techniques on how to address them in my school"

"Have come away from the weekend with a whole bank of new ideas for teaching and resources to buy."

"I will ensure that I and my department leave more room for free speaking without always concentrating on the academic aspect (writing/learning) of languages"

"The course made me even more convinced of the value of trips and will make more effort to embed trips as annual events for MFL students."