

New MFL teachers meet to celebrate their success and share good practice

Learning from the Classroom Conference, held at Newcastle University, June 13 2013.

Report by Alexis Katakaidis and Ángeles Guillén Porras

Have you heard of TeachMeet, informal CPD sessions where inspirational teachers share their ideas in nano (2 minutes) and micro (7 minutes) presentations and where your coffee break is invigorating even if you haven't your dose of caffeine because it's spent with colleagues who love their job? Thanks to the snappy pace of presentations, TeachMeets are like a garden of ideas - practical ones, which you can take away and immediately use in your classroom or ones that offer an important look on current policies in education.

There are many reasons why TeachMeets have become so popular but are they a recent phenomenon? Actually, not really! As Mr René Koglbauer, one of the guest speakers, informed us we in the North East can be proud that this year has been the tenth time that the MFL department of the secondary PGCE supported by ALL (don't understand the abbreviations? google them!) has organised an annual celebration of new teachers' good practice, being one of the first to come up with the original concept of the straight-to-the-point presentations.

Over 30 new MFL teachers, colleagues from other departments of ECLS and teacher mentors gathered to commemorate the end of another successful PGCE year. The two key messages of the day were: there are teachers who are very enthusiastic about their profession and whose creativity gives reason for optimism about the future of MFL. Secondly, it is essential to network for your own professional development and because that is the only way how we can voice our opinions and influence the policies on higher level – and teachers', the experts', voice needs to be heard.

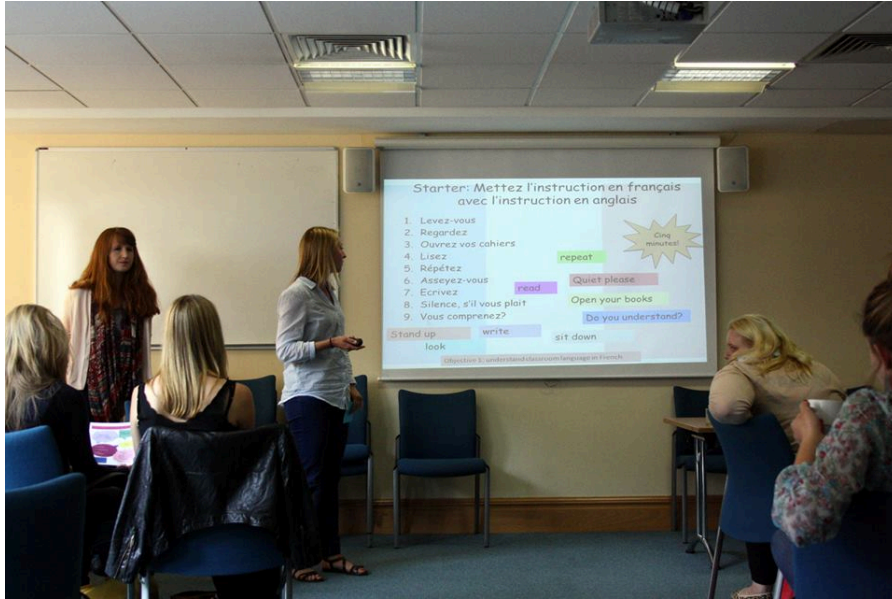
The range of topics of presentations was very wide. Here, Claire is telling us how she dedicated the two hours of her DLE (ok, I'll give you this one – Deep Learning Experience) in Year 7 to learning about the Civil Rights movement in the US. It was a part of her sequence of lessons on prejudices. Claire's pupils were astonished to hear about the violence and racism and moved by the courage of the activists. Some of the questions that followed the presentation: Was this DLE worth two hours of pupils' learning time? Were the images appropriate or were they too shocking for Y7 pupils? How can languages help to fight prejudices?



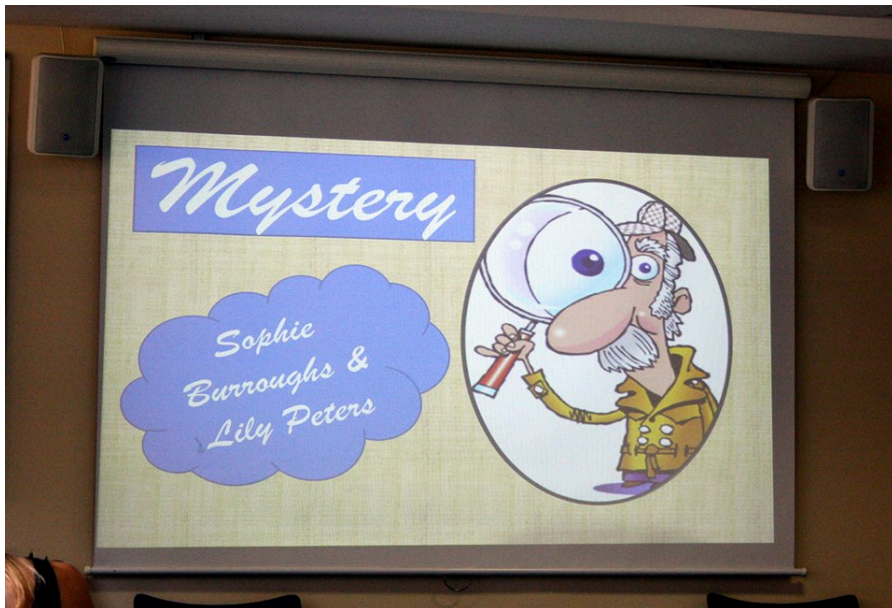
Mr Koglbauer spoke about the big picture in MFL. Here he is discussing what is the place of fun (or the f* word) in learning languages. Can learning French be fun and is it desirable?



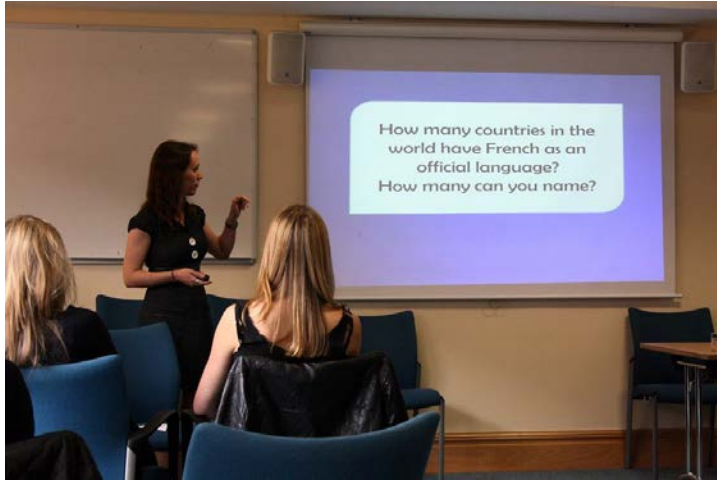
Very interesting presentation by Jude and Katie on the use of TL. Our guest speaker, Mr Koglbauer, told us the target language has been the focus of MFL teachers in classrooms in England for over twenty years now. We know it is important that teachers speak it and essential that pupils do. However this is still not a common thing and TL continues to be an important issue in MFL pedagogy. Jude and Katie both worked in schools where there was not a consistent TL policy across the MFL department. They took the challenge of speaking one whole lesson in French. As a result the pupils were more motivated – and the teachers too!



Sophie and Lily spoke about one of the common challenges of teachers in general - how can we stretch the most able pupils? In MFL we also ask how we can demonstrate to the most able pupils that languages are cognitively demanding and require logical thinking equally as does maths or science. Sophie and Lily engaged all pupils through a mystery lesson where pupils had to work out through a challenging text in TL to find an answer to the mystery question.



How many countries have French as their official language? Pupils guess: Five, miss. Six? No, it is thirty-two. Rosie is showing us in her impressive presentation how you can use geography in French lessons to expand pupils' horizons and engage the disengaged.



Kay has spent her long placement in Utrecht in the Netherlands teaching German. We all know the Dutch mostly speak impeccable English - without English, it would be very difficult for them to find a job. But how about their German? It seems that in terms of learning other foreign languages the Dutch students are not any better than the English ones who are often nonsensically said to have a lack of linguistic talent.

