

# **Language World, Newcastle, 2015**

**Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 9.35 to 10.15**

## **‘Language across the curriculum’**

***Peter Downes***

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by the Association of School and College Leaders  
and funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation*

# **Why are we teaching languages in schools ?**

**What outcomes do we want from MFL in the UK education system?**

- \* A number of specialist linguist graduates *but in a range of languages.***
- \* Graduates in other specialisms with a good level of functional competence in one or more languages.**
- \* All young people leaving school/college having had a good experience of learning a language or languages and feeling positive about languages, even if they are not taking them further.**
- \* All young people having had an MFL experience which has taught them how to learn other languages when they might need them.**

**What does/should learning a language add to the whole curriculum experience of a pupil?**

## **ICU and KAL**

**The whole school/college cohort with a positive attitude towards others who speak different languages – inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.**

**The whole school cohort aware of the importance of good communication, of the power of language (good and bad). This to be acquired through English and through MFL.**

**So, what should we be teaching at the various levels in the system?**

**Secondary schools should aim to offer pupils a *choice* of FL1 in KS3, provided the starting cohort is large enough to produce viable groups in KS4 and, hopefully in KS5, with the possibility of FL2 for some pupils in Year 8 or 9.**

**Aim for KS4 is that all pupils should continue with at least one FL, with some doing two.**

# **A possible model for a 6 form entry secondary school**

***Year 7 :*** Two classes each of, say, French,  
Spanish, German

***Year 8 (or 9?)*** More able pupils start FL2 with  
option of Japanese, Mandarin, Russian

***Years 10/11:*** All pupils continue with one FL, some  
continue with two

***Years 12/13:*** viable sets in 3 or 4 languages

***So, what is the best use of the time allocated for  
languages in the primary school?***

## **Implementing Foreign Languages in the primary curriculum from September 2014**

***What does the national curriculum guidance say?***

**‘Teaching should be of any modern or ancient foreign language . . .’**

**‘Pupils should be taught to ... listen attentively, explore the patterns and sounds of language, engage in conversations, develop accurate pronunciation, read carefully, broaden their vocabulary, understand basic grammar’**

**‘should lay the foundations for further foreign language teaching at Key Stage 3’**

**‘... should focus on enabling pupils to make substantial progress in one language’**

**Does ‘*substantial progress in one language*’  
= teaching the same language for all four years of KS2?**

**If so, there are four major problems:**

- a. there are not yet enough specialist linguists in primary schools to sustain a high quality four-year course in one language.**
- b. Transition from primary to secondary is highly problematic. Secondary schools receive pupils from many primary schools (at least 5, usually many more).**
- c. If there is to be continuity in a *specific* language, all primary schools would have to teach the same language.**
- d. The language chosen would almost certainly be French (or Spanish) and 21st century UK needs to encourage foreign language diversity.**

**There is an alternative approach which has been developed, trialled, evaluated and is now attracting increasing interest**

## **‘Discovering Language’**

*A multi-lingual ‘Language Awareness’ programme*

### **Key features:**

- a. Pupils experience a *range* of languages, learning basic vocabulary and grammar, making progress over several months**
- b. They are taught by the class teacher, using materials specially devised for non- or ‘semi-specialists’**
- c. This flexible approach can be fitted more easily into the primary school curriculum**



## **An alternative to the 'one language all through' model**

***Years 3, 4 and 5:*** Use the 'Discovering Language' approach to give pupils the experience of a *range of languages* and develop an understanding of '*how language works*', for example:

***Year 3:*** 'Investigating Languages' and Spanish or French or Italian

***Year 4:*** German and Latin

***Year 5:*** Any two from Japanese/Russian/Mandarin/Punjabi

***Year 6:*** choose one language for the year and make 'substantial progress', building on the foundations acquired in Years 3, 4 and 5, for example;

**French or Spanish (whichever was not taken in Year 3)**

## **Outcomes for pupils:**

- Pupils learn how different languages ‘work’
- Pupils learn to listen carefully to different sound patterns and intonation
- \* Pupils become multi-culturally more aware
- Pupils enjoy learning and, later on, are more inclined to continue with languages
- Pupils acquire language learning foundation skills which they can apply in secondary school, *whichever language(s) they learn there*

## **Outcomes for primary schools**

- Easier to manage (especially with mixed-age classes)
- Teachers enjoy trying out new languages for themselves and learning *with* their pupils
- Brings languages out of the ‘specialist box’

## **Outcomes for secondary schools**

- **They can provide different languages for Year 7 pupils because they do not have to worry about language-specific continuity**
- **They know that pupils have a good foundation, have learned to listen carefully, have positive attitudes to language learning and so they can make quicker progress, *whatever language they start***
- **They don't have to stream or set in Year 7 for languages (most secondary schools do not like having to do that)**

## **How does it work in practice?**

**Flexible so that it can be adapted to the strengths, preferences and particular circumstances of each school**

### **Key factors**

**Don't aim to go too far in any one language**

**Have a sequence of lessons in one language, at least four to six months, so that pupils experience progression and linkage**

**Choose languages from several 'families' to give a range of sounds, structures, writing systems and cultures, e.g. Romance, Germanic, Eastern, Indian, African, Eastern European and don't forget Latin!**

**Choose languages for which good teaching materials are available: primary-specific, for non-specialists**

**Perhaps choose one language which is widely spoken in the class and make (careful) use of local community input.**

**and**

**Inform and involve parents**

**Share language skills and enjoyment across the school: assemblies, concerts, events**

## **What will Ofsted say when they inspect?**

**As far as curriculum is concerned, Ofsted are mainly giving their attention to the basics of literacy and numeracy.**

**In relation to FL, Ofsted will want to be convinced that the quality of teaching is good and that there is evidence of progression.**

**In the 'Discovering Language' model, there *is* progression:**

- a. Within each language module**
- b. By tackling progressively more difficult languages**
- c. In understanding of linguistic concepts**
- d. 'substantial progress' in the final language in Year 6**

# **Evaluation findings, January 2011**

**Phase 3 research team re-contacted the original pilot pupils (by now in Year 11) by questionnaire and interview, and compared them with other pupils in the same schools who had either done one language in primary or no languages. Main conclusions:**

**DL pupils more likely to enjoy learning a language at KS4**

**DL pupils more aware of the usefulness of languages in securing a university place**

**A slightly higher % of DL pupils had opted for a language at the end of Year 9, (but not statistically significant and distorted by option choice patterns)**

***An unsolicited testimonial from St. Margaret's School, Bushey, October 2013***

I have been meaning to write to you for some time. It must now be 5 years since you came to St Margaret's, talked to parents and staff and helped us get started on our own version of 'Discovering Language'.

Last summer the first cohort finished Yr 6, having tasted French, German, Spanish, Latin & Mandarin Chinese as well as some language awareness lessons. During the final term of Yr 6 my colleague who teaches most of the programme, put together a booklet which the girls use to reflect on their experience of different languages. When I observed one of their lessons I was particularly impressed with how perceptively the children were able to identify & comment on the similarities and differences between these languages. **They have embraced the programme with much enthusiasm and have become keen, curious and fearless language learners - what better preparation for MFL in secondary school could we hope for?** Despite recent developments in government policy, we shall continue with this programme and its benefits and success are recognised by the headmistress as well as staff and parents.

So thank you again for getting us started and feel free to use our success story in your efforts to promote the programme.

# **Language across the curriculum**

***What does Discovering Language bring to the total curriculum experience of younger pupils ?***

- \* It encourages careful observation and develops listening skills**
- \* It puts spoken and written language into the wider context of communication**
- \* It makes strong links with literacy and oracy**
- \* It explains the range of world languages, showing why there are so many, how they are inter-related and how history has influenced their development**
- \* It shows how language changes and develops**
- \* It increases understanding of how human beings develop language skills, both as mother tongue and as 2<sup>nd</sup>/ 3<sup>rd</sup> (or more) languages**



# **‘Discovering Language’**

**Introducing Languages in  
Primary Schools through a  
multi-lingual Language Awareness approach**

***Peter Downes***



**This project is promoted by the  
Association of School and College Leaders and  
funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation**

**[www.ascl.org.uk/discoveringlanguage](http://www.ascl.org.uk/discoveringlanguage)**

**Leaflets explaining this approach more fully are available from me here today and from the 'Discovering Language' stand in the Exhibition.**

**There you can also meet Joan Dickie, a primary languages adviser, who has prepared detailed schemes of work for each year group in KS2 and a list of recommended teaching materials from a range of publishers**

**The funding of the project allows for the provision of free seminars for clusters of schools wishing to explore this approach in more detail.**

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