

**‘Language World’, London
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**‘Discovering Language’
*A multi-lingual Language
Awareness programme
for primary schools***

**A possible solution to the
UK language teaching dilemma?**

The UK foreign languages dilemma

Learning a foreign language is unpopular in the UK:

- Massive drop-out at 14+ when language learning becomes optional**
- Languages seen as difficult and results are poor**
- Schools need to achieve good results for their 'league table' position**
- English seen as 'world language', so why bother?**

Languages in the primary school are still not compulsory

If MFL were compulsory, which language would be taught?

The UK foreign languages dilemma (continued)

Pupils move from primary to secondary at 11. Parents can 'choose' a school so secondary schools receive pupils from many primary schools.

Impossible to plan a coherent programme round the teaching of ONE Language through from 7+ unless every primary school teaches the same language

UK's commercial need is for foreign language diversity.

Native speakers of English no longer all need to speak French (the traditional first foreign language)

So, an alternative approach is being trialled and developed . . .

‘Discovering Language’

A multi-lingual Language Awareness programme for primary schools

Aims:

- Pupils learn how different languages ‘work’
- Pupils learn to listen carefully
- Pupils become multi-culturally more aware
- Pupils acquire language learning foundation skills which they can apply in secondary school, *whichever language(s) they learn there*

In Years 3 to 6, pupils learn the basics of up to 6 languages using a 'Language Awareness approach'

Which languages?

It does not matter provided they come from a range of language 'families'

French

German

Latin

Japanese

Spanish

Punjabi

Why Latin?

Clear structure, provides roots for English vocabulary, has strong historical and cultural value, different pattern of learning

Essential criteria for good teaching materials for younger pupils

Focus on children of their age in their own context

Everyday language for immediate communication

**Attractive presentation through Power point, video and
all text supplied with sound link**

**Full support materials for teachers who may not be
Language specialists: ideas for games, role play,
cultural background information**

**Even within a limited syllabus, showing progression, links
between speech and writing and highlighting
distinctive features**

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

Evaluation findings, January 2011

Phase 3 re-contacted the original pilot pupils (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 opted for a language at The end of Year 9, (but not statistically significant and distorted by option choice patterns)

Teacher opinions...

All the secondary teachers were enthusiastic about the effect of Primary DL on their pupils

'I want them to be curious about cultures and about language and about the idea that lots of different people speak lots of different things. And if they've had an experience of that, it's really good.'

'You need to be opening these children's minds and hearts to Different cultures, different languages and alphabets ... minds open to the fact that they are accessible'.

'The DL programme is really good ... it was all about raising awareness of language and different cultures which is really important in this area because it's not very culturally diverse.'

'I think it's the only way it can be done realistically... it can only help what we are doing. I'm a bit worried that anything else will make things worse at our end.'

‘Language Awareness’ – what is it?

Explicit knowledge about language; conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use.

A wider definition for schools:

Knowledge about:

- **the basic structures of language**
- **the link between speech and writing**
- **language in its cultural context**
- **language and geography**
- **language and history**
- **language and society**

Teaching 'language awareness' to younger pupils

- **put spoken and written language into the wider context of communication**
- **explain the range of world languages, why there are so many and how they change and develop**
- **encourage careful observation and develop listening skills**
- **increase understanding of how human beings develop language skills, both as mother tongue and as 2nd/ 3rd (or more) languages**

Arguing the case for 'Discovering Language'

One language 'all through', the traditional assumption, is no longer relevant in a multi-lingual, multi-cultural society

**'Discovering Language' develops
Inter-Cultural Understanding
Knowledge About Language,
Oracy and literacy**

'Discovering Language' gives pupils the foundation to tackle linear language learning effectively in secondary school, with a better understanding of how to learn a language

Enables secondary schools to offer a wider range of languages meeting the language needs of the 21st century

The challenges !

A. Within the Discovering Language project

The need to identify or develop accessible materials in a wider range of languages : Mandarin, Arabic, Russian, African and Indian languages

The need to develop a more detailed syllabus for primary school Language Awareness, with examples of activities and explicit links to the languages to be taught within the four year programme.

More challenges !

B. Within the wider educational and political context

Establishing a coherent national languages strategy at a time when a new government is ‘stepping back’ from curriculum control and curtailing the influence of local authorities

Initial Teacher Training and Professional Development for existing teachers to

- **Increase understanding of ‘language awareness’**
- **Develop generic language teaching skills without requiring high level specific linguistic skills**

Persuading parents and pupils that languages and Language Awareness are an essential part of a whole education for the 21st century, not just something speakers of English can’t do!

A way forward ?

Working within a primary cluster, and consulting with secondary school(s) linked to the cluster, investigate how it might be possible to put *Discovering Language* into practice

**Evaluate the available materials
(see leaflet and web-site for recommendations)**

Consult your LA Languages Adviser (if any!)

**If you need further help, contact the ASCL
Project Director (see leaflet for contact details)**

Visit www.ascl.org.uk/discoveringlanguage

