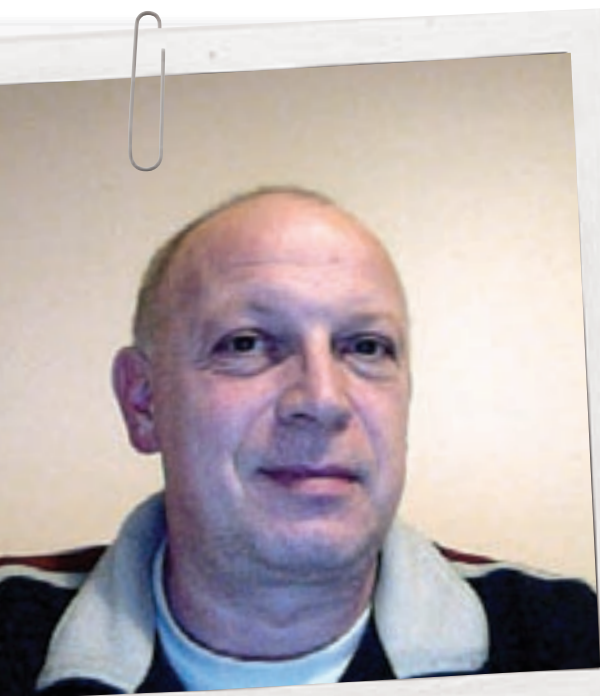


A day in the life...



Goran has transformed the way languages are taught in his school

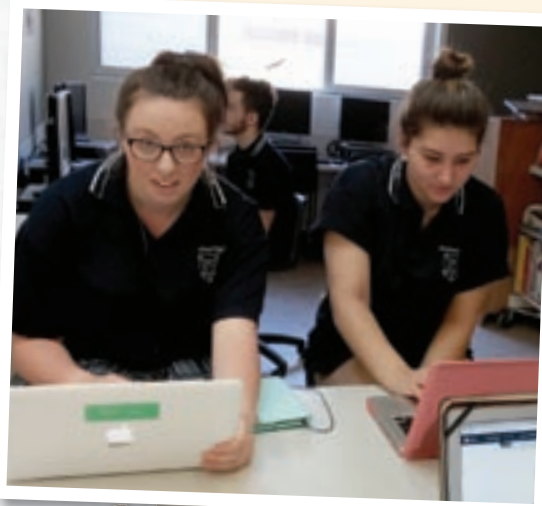
Power to the learner

Student empowerment and digital technology are central to the way **Goran Krivokapic** teaches languages

Words: Marianne Rawlins

Biography

Goran Krivokapic is a modern foreign languages teacher at Birdwood High School, Adelaide, South Australia. He employs a student-focused approach to teaching languages, which empowers the individual to learn at their own pace, facilitated by the support of the teacher, parents and the community. The approach makes the most of digital resources and self-directed learning.



Above Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning

Goran Krivokapic

Modern languages teacher

Originally from Kotor, Montenegro, Goran started teaching in 1990. "I had a few breaks in between though," he remembers. "I managed pubs in London for a few years – those were good times!" He moved to Australia in 2002 and started teaching at Birdwood High School in 2005, first teaching English Communications to Years 11 and 12, which focuses on the development of English skills, and English as a Second Language (ESL). "Then in 2008, an opportunity opened up to teach German at my school and I took it."

"We thought we had started something new but I found out that something similar was being trialled in the UK"

However, Goran soon experienced problems that made him question his decision. "The language programme wasn't achieving the results I was hoping for," he says. "There was not much support for languages from the leadership team nor from the Department for Education and it was quite depressing. By 2009 I was

ready to give up and go back to teaching English and ESL."

That all changed when a new Principal, who was willing to embrace an alternative approach to language learning, arrived at the school. "He embarked on the path to innovation, which was just what I was hoping for," says Goran.

Goran introduced what he calls a 'multilingual choice approach', in which learners have autonomy, with the aim of creating independent language learners. "I had the Principal's full support," he says.

This system holds many of the same aims and values as the Languages Futures approach, which originated as part of a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Special Initiative, 'Learning Futures', developed by Linton Village College in Cambridgeshire. Goran explains: "We thought we'd started something new but I found out that something similar was being trialled in the UK. We established a close relationship and I visited Linton Village College a few years ago."

Self-supporting

Both approaches focus on learning rather than teaching – equipping students to be autonomous language learners, supported by peers, teachers, schools, families and the wider community. The class teacher acts as the facilitator of language learning, creating the conditions for students to manage their own learning and supporting them to learn collaboratively – but the learners research what they need to learn, and use problem-solving to carry out independent, project-based work, through online learning, tailored resources and mentoring.

Goran teaches 70 students grouped into three mixed year classes: two are classes of Years 8, 9 and 10 students, the other has students from Years 8 and 9. In total they are studying ten languages: Italian, Spanish, French, German, Swedish, Greek, Japanese, Indonesian, Russian and Finnish. Digital technology is central to how



Features

“This method encourages students to start understanding what makes a language ‘work’”



Right Students at Goran's school work at their own pace and take online tests to measure their progress

this type of approach works. “We use Edmodo, an online platform that allows teachers to connect and collaborate with students, parents and each other. All the students have access to a variety of language learning websites and software.” Students work at their own pace and take online tests to gauge how they are progressing: “Students can’t fail,” says Goran. “They simply keep taking the test until they ‘get’ it.”

The system allows students to achieve a genuinely deep understanding of the languages they are learning, believes Goran. “I love this method of teaching as it actually encourages students to start understanding the underlying connections and what makes a language ‘work.’” A disadvantage is

that the approach can be laborious for the teacher. “It involves much more work, especially if you are the only language teacher at a school. But after a while you start building your resources and it does get easier.”

Languages are compulsory only up to the end of Year 8 (age 14) in South Australia, something that Goran finds disheartening. “It would take too long to vent my frustration,” he says. “My school is an exception to that rule and I couldn’t be happier with the support I receive. It’s great to have the opportunity to tell other schools about our methods.”

Schools in the UK can now learn more about this kind of approach by getting involved with ALL’s Language Futures project:

<http://languagefutures.org.uk>



Goran’s typical day...

GORAN USUALLY gets into school between 8.15am and 8.30am: “Some days we have briefings in the morning before the school’s advisory group meets, but most days I’ll just have a coffee and catch up with colleagues. School ends at 3.20pm and I finish work around 4.30pm.”

He teaches languages to Years 8, 9 and 10. “Managing the groups of students is challenging at times, particularly when I have different year groups with varying levels of ability,” he says. “The good thing about my type of teaching is that the students are taught to manage their own learning. This leaves me more time to work one-on-one and target students who need more assistance.”

Goran says he loves everything about this system of language learning: “The



students are motivated, there’s lots of laughter, humour and noise in my classes. They are engaged and enjoy learning languages, often for the first time in their schooling. Once they have reached a certain level of vocabulary acquisition, I tailor assignments to their interests. They respond exceptionally well to the independence and trust.”

He says the obstacles he faces are mainly down to workload: “The amount of work and learning I have to do is quite challenging but, at the same time rewarding, too.”

