

Report: Inside Government MFL Conference 2019

Words: Crista Hazell (ALL Council Member)

A whole day MFL conference which was held again at the National Congress Centre. This was a secondary focused conference. There were many speakers including politicians, one of the three exam boards as well as the Languages Pedagogy Review lead, the National Centre for Excellence in Language Pedagogy lead and practising classroom teachers who shared a wealth of strategies and experiences alongside details of their impact upon learners with reference to engagement, progression and results. There was a wonderful mix of interested parties from a range of backgrounds sharing knowledge on languages, languages education and ways of moving forward.

Jane Harvey, President of the Association for Language Learning warmly greeted all attendees in the room and spoke about the Association for Language Learning highlighting the work the Association does in speaking up for and raising the profile of the importance of languages not only as a life skill for every young person in the UK but also in trade and for international relations. Jane encouraged all attendees in the room to join local branches to develop personal learning networks and to further their knowledge, skills and understanding through attending and contributing to local ALL CPD events across the UK and also at Language World 2020, in Manchester on 13 and 14 March. Jane also highlighted projects such as Elapse (Embedding Languages Across Primary and Secondary Education) to support primary and secondary transition and CLIL resources that members can become involved with.

Jane then introduced the Minister of State for Education to the stage who spoke of his concerns for language learning in the United Kingdom and responded to numerous questions from language teachers in the room.

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Ministerial Address: The Next Steps in Supporting Outstanding MFL Teaching. Information was provided from the Government that the Ebacc will continue to be a focus for the DfE and there was positive impact of the Ebacc's introduction regarding uptake in MFL from 40% to 46% although it was acknowledged that this was far short of the Government's own target of 90%. There was mention of the continued decline in languages uptake specifically in German amongst the questions asked by passionate yet concerned languages teachers which could be explained due to funding, severe grading and a relentless focus on STEM subjects. When asked if there would be a government support package akin to the STEM focus the answer was no and the Ebacc approach will continue. Likewise there would be no additional funding specifically for MFL in schools but it was hoped that the work of the National Centre for Excellence in Language Pedagogy would raise the profile of languages within schools.

Tonia Antoniazzi MP, Vice-Chair, All Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages: Outlining The National Recovery Programme for Languages – The APPG Perspective

Tonia brought her enthusiasm, passion and warmth to the stage and wowed teachers with her perspective and heartfelt positivity for language teaching in every school and for every learner. As a former languages teacher and leader, she enthused the room with her drive for the languages recovery programme and her reasons for making this a reality. She challenged teachers to familiarise themselves with the Languages Recovery Programme outlining its mission:

- To explore the educational, skills-related, employment, competitive and cultural benefits of learning and using languages throughout the UK
- To provide a parliamentary forum for information exchange and consultation regarding languages and learning languages
- To encourage and support policies and action improving the uptake of languages in schools, higher and further education, within the workplace and in the community

Tonia requested that teachers look at the framework and spread the word of the National Languages Recovery Programme through personal learning networks, fellow teachers and through the MFLTwitterati (thanking Joe Dale for creating this supportive and forward-thinking online network). Tonia shared the five objectives of the programme which are:

Objective 1: Schools - develop and implement an inclusive language policy from 5 – 18 with clear pathways to qualifications in a wide range of languages

Objective 2: Further & Higher Education - protect and expand language courses in colleges and universities – both at degree level and in Institution-Wide Language Programmes and introduce language accreditation into the Apprenticeship Programme

Objective 3: Business - business and government to work together on role modelling in schools and on language and cultural skills training for exporters.

Objective 4: Government - ensure the machinery of government reflects and is accountable for the strategy on languages.

Objective 5: Society - challenge the view that English is enough and encourage more young people, parents and employers to recognise the value of languages skills

Teachers in the room welcomed this heartily.

Ian Bauckham, CBE, (CEO of Tenax Schools Trust and Chair – Review of Modern Foreign Language Pedagogy in Key Stage 3 & 4, Teaching Schools Council): Improving Pupil Attainment in Modern Foreign Languages Through Effective Teaching Practices

This keynote address was well received by all in the room with Ian sharing his commitment to languages and increased uptake through more positive learner experiences and increased attainment.

Ian commenced sharing his 'Big Picture' at the position of languages across the UK highlighting:

- Take up at GCSE despite EBacc
- Two-year KS3
- Take up at A Level at historic low
- Decline at university level
- Particular problems: German; boys; disadvantaged
- Cost to the economy
- Supply pipeline of new teachers

Then sharing the reasons why this is happening revisiting known issues experienced by languages teachers practising in schools:

- Low appreciation of need – English dominance
- Exam specifications and their impact on teaching
- Issues with grading and perceived or actual difficulty
- School level anxiety about performance tables
- Issues with curriculum and pedagogy
- Low levels of self-efficacy (see Ofsted's [KS3: The Wasted Years](#))

Ian referred to the pedagogy and practice of MFL teaching being critical and the 15 recommendations to follow in the [Pedagogy Review](#) (November 2016); and shared with attendees how languages are learned to ensure that core language teaching is clearly planned, systematic and features three key areas: Phonics Teaching, Vocabulary Teaching and Grammar Teaching through carefully constructed meaningful practice throughout lessons so that language is produced by learners and is clearly understood in order that it can be manipulated by learners. The appropriacy of the MFL curriculum was raised in the hope that schools could carefully develop and construct the most appropriate model for learners in their schools within the

UK highlighting the need to clearly define curriculum content ensuring that foundational knowledge is carefully constructed and sequenced so that language learning was progressive. The curriculum would be built upon clear foundational knowledge which was relevant and appropriate so that learners are able to accurately and confidently use and manipulate language; through seeing and saying vocabulary correctly as a result of clear phonics teaching where the grapheme and phoneme link are understood by learners and applied like vocabulary and grammar across the range of languages skills to develop sentence construction with confidence and based upon secure knowledge.

Ian shared his belief that that we are now starting to see:

- Greater clarity on importance of addressing the MFL 'problem'
- Strong support from government via the EBacc expectation
- Strong alignment between Ofsted EIF and MFL Pedagogy Review
- DfE working to increase pipeline of MFL teachers
- DfE and Ofqual considering the challenge on exams and grading
- National Centre for Excellence in MFL Pedagogy (NCELP) at University of York, and network of lead schools and hubs.

Judith Rowland-Jones (Head of Curriculum: Languages, AQA): Reflections on 2019 GCSE MFL Exams

Judith started her keynote by congratulating MFL teachers for preparing students well for the 2019 assessments, acknowledging that colleagues had worked hard on this.

- It was recognised that tier of entry was more accurate this year having an impact on achievement, but this should still remain a focus for teachers.
- Grade boundaries are set after all scripts are marked using a careful mix of statistics and expert judgement considering prior attainment to ensure a good distribution of marks which is overseen by Ofqual. These can go up as well as down based on students' performance in the paper.

Teachers should be aware that:

- In listening and reading papers in both tiers that papers are not progressively harder than they are 'constructed in peaks and troughs' so in the event of a challenging question for the students to continue as there will be easier ones beyond that question.
- In listening and reading papers that distractors are used to challenge and 'differentiate between students of different abilities' resulting in differentiation by task
- 1/3 of the higher tier marks are grade 6 & 7 then 1/3 at grades 8 & 9 then the remaining 1/3 grades 4 & 5 from the foundation tier paper overlap
- Distractors at grade 9 are 'deliberately strong' and 'only a very small percentage of candidate should be getting these marks'.

Listening – what went well in 2019

- Well prepared students at both tiers with little evidence of students not understanding tasks
- French listening at both tiers was more accessible in 2019 reflected in marks
- Far fewer non-attempted questions in 2019
- More students are aware of which language to answer section B.

Areas of focus for 2020 exams

- There were some surprisingly unknown items of vocabulary, particularly KS3 vocab (See examiners reports for further details)
- Some students did not read the introductory rubric carefully which would have helped them in their answers
- Some students included extra information in their answers which negated or contradicted the key idea

- Some answers lacked the precision to score the marks, particularly at Higher tier
- Some students used letters which were not in the list of possible answers, e.g. in multiple choice, using D when the choice was A, B or C
- Some students who changed their single letter answer did not do so clearly by writing their final answer alongside their crossed-out answer.

Speaking – what went well in 2019

- Marks increased in both tiers across all 3 languages
- Only a few numbers of students entered for the wrong tier
- Clear improve in the conduct of the tests particularly with timings, quality of recordings and coverage of themes
- German pronunciation has improved
- Opinions & justification were done well across all 3 languages
- Roleplays were performed as expected and students coped well with TL prompts
- Some excellent natural conversations at higher tier across all 3 languages.

Areas of focus for 2020 exams

- Students need to be trained to make good use of their preparation time for the role play and the photo card
- Remind students to read the introductory rubric in the role play carefully to ensure they understand the scenario – it will help them
- Knowledge of question words was lacking again in the role plays
- Care needs to be taken when teacher-examiners are paraphrasing in the photo card to ensure the same meaning is maintained
- In the General conversation, teacher-examiners need to tailor their questions to the interests and ability of their individual students
- Opportunities to demonstrate spontaneity should be given by teacher examiners through the use of follow up questions e.g. seeking clarification, extra detail etc.

Reading – what went well in 2019

- Papers differentiated well at both tiers across all 3 languages
- There were very few un-attempted questions which was pleasing
- Fewer instances of students answering in the wrong language in Section B
- Improvement in marks for the translations in higher tier French and German which were more accessible this year but the Spanish translation at Foundation tier proved to be slightly more challenging than in 2018
- Students had clearly practised the translation task and were more familiar with the need to adhere closely to the original text.
- There were many precise and accurate translations this year across the languages.

Areas of focus for 2020 exams

- Some issues with unclear handwriting and some unclear changes to multiple choice letters made marking difficult at times so students need to write their answers clearly
- Some students used letters which were not in the list of possible answers, e.g. in multiple choice, using D when the choice was A, B or C
- Students should be discouraged from giving additional or alternative information in their answers as this could negate the correct answer
- Students should look at examples where they are provided to guide them in their answers in terms of what is required in their answers

- Some students did not adhere closely enough to the original text in the translation, in particular ensuring tenses are translated accurately and the little words which are key to the meaning are not missed out.

Writing – what went well in 2019

- Papers in all 3 languages were well received and students handled the topics and tasks well at both tiers
- Mean marks increased at both tiers in all three languages, apart from a slight decrease at Foundation tier in German
- Translations at both tiers and in all languages discriminated well across the ability range with the full range of marks awarded
- Very few students did not attempt the translation which was pleasing
- There was some good use of the target language from the bullet points to formulate a response
- A wide variety of adjectives and ways of expressing opinions were seen
- Some excellent use of verb forms and a wide range of tenses were pleasing to see.

Areas of focus for 2020 exams

- Keep it simple in Foundation Question 1 to avoid any ambiguity
- Some students wrote far more than the suggested number of words; sometimes this disadvantaged them as they made more errors, impacting on their marks for quality of language
- Some students copied the possessive adjective from the bullet point, e.g. tu, tus rather than changing it to first person to suit the response
- Some students failed to address the specifics of the bullet point carefully e.g. Higher tier French Question 2.2 (disadvantages of your destination)
- Some students tried to write things which were grammatically too complex for them
- Make time to practise high frequency vocabulary, e.g. common verbs, connectives, prepositions.

AQA are running online webinars to discuss the above feedback and more but this will be split in to two one-hour sessions covering only two skills. This was met with some frustration by teachers in the room as this needs to be paid for, are scheduled to take place early evening and are, it was felt, an addition to teacher workload. Judith said the change reflected 2018 teacher attendees requests.

Professor Emma Marsden, Director, National Centre for Excellence for Languages Pedagogy: The National Centre for Excellence for Languages Pedagogy

Professor Marsden shared details on the purpose and reasoning for the National Languages Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP) to ensure that research linked with the language learning process and teaching in the classroom in response to the Pedagogy Review and to ensure quality curriculum design. The 9 language lead schools were shared also.

Purpose

- To improve pedagogy which helps languages development giving learners a sense of progression improving self-efficacy
- To increase intrinsic motivation to study a language at GCSE.

Who (initially but this is likely to increase)

- 9 lead schools each have 4 hub schools
 - Dartford Grammar School, Dartford
 - Dixon Kings Academy, Bradford
 - Presdales School, Ware, Hertfordshire
 - Sir William Borelase's Grammar School, Marlow, Buckinghamshire

- St James' School, Exeter
- The Broxbourne School, Broxbourne Hertfordshire
- Archbishop Temple School, Preston
- Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form, Hove
- Cardinal Hume Catholic School, Gateshead.

How?

Through focusing on the Pedagogy Review findings and using NCELP Pedagogy: pupils need to gain systematic knowledge of the vocabulary, grammar, and sound and spelling systems (phonics) of their new language, and how these are used by speakers of the language. They need to reinforce this knowledge with extensive planned practice and use it in order to build the skills needed for communication. (MFL Pedagogy Review, p.3)

Professor Marsden shared NCELPs definitions of phonics, vocabulary and grammar and the importance of teaching phonics in a foreign language as well as the purpose of selecting key high frequency vocabulary including verb lexicon which allows students to develop their depth of knowledge as well as understanding and usage of grammar. The drive is to ensure clarity and confident student understanding, through practice and recall which in turn enables students to choose which verb and tense to use and when. All of this is based around significant research which Professor Marsden also shared with attendees.

The aim of the NCELP approach is to ensure careful and planned selection and sequencing of a 'scheme of work' within which there are clear phonics, vocabulary and grammar threads which will be woven through a KS3 Languages curriculum to ensure secure knowledge, progression, confidence, depth and manipulation and recall of the language being learned. It is to be expected that all resources will be available through the NCELP resource portal <https://resources/ncelp.org/>

Research papers specific to language learning will be available <https://oasis-database.org>

Sign up to the NCELP Resource Portal register using this link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeJy-sMKW_1qQQMJWxatdS_FBS2a8IMIBT_XOSoNf9nvsCb_w/viewform

Teachers used to using Dr Rachel Hawkes' method of language teaching, seen on her website and through her CPD sessions will be familiar with the NCELP pedagogy as this is a feature of much of Rachel's fantastic work which was widely acknowledged by teachers in the room. Again, this session was very well received creating excitement and anticipation for the year 7 scheme of learning currently in progress and the future of language learning.

Stephanie Liddle, Head of Modern Foreign Languages, Wyvern Academy: Improving Speaking Skills Through Creative Teaching Methods

Steph shared her work on how she has used music and poetry in her languages classroom with reluctant speakers which have had a dramatic impact upon engagement, confidence, long-term memory, participation to form powerful associations.

Using music and rhythm as an effective memory aid Steph has harnessed the power of this to aid learners store memory of powerful language and recall it. Steph has also crafted poetry and rhyme which has helped her learners to remember and recall key structures and tense formation. Some she shared are authentic, some of her own creation to aid language and vocabulary acquisition, memorisation and recall, target language phonic acquisition, developing life skills through connecting with the University of Newcastle, also using Edtech and apps for repeat practice and gamification. A wide range of interesting and well received ideas.

<https://www.genkienglish.net/learntospeakgerman/hallowiegehts.htm>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCdBFREJvKA>

Steph's final advice: Music, Poetry, "Gamification" and Technology have many advantages in the Secondary MFL classroom, but their use needs careful planning to be most effective.

- Plan, adapt and differentiate resources in advance – what are you trying to get them to achieve? Memorise chunks? Grammar?
- Listen and get to know your students
- Provide a choice of music/poetry and activity where appropriate – allow students to discover their own music and poems
- Share your most popular and effective songs and poems with others
- Keep an eye on the French / German / Spanish charts
- Encourage pupils to write their own poems, raps or songs or adapt existing ones
- Make sure that your use of "gamification" or technology is not just about the gimmick, and that it really encourages active target language production or understanding.

Juliet Park, Director, MFL Share Trust: Building Linguistic Skills

With lots to share from her classroom Juliet wasted no time in engaging everyone in the room to consider their practice, increase student engagement and not work harder but smarter with her range of fantastic ideas to build linguistic skills in all learners in our classrooms through transference of language that has a deeper but narrowing focus so that students can rise to the challenge of the speaking confidently, thoughtfully and ably.

Some of the many ideas Juliet shared in her blisteringly fast session:

- Reusing the same 4/5 images across photocards but with a different theme / topics / sentence start / verb to encourage students to think differently about responding to the images recycling language but also remembering a range of topic areas to include.
- 40 word writing Q giving students cues and clues to help them successfully complete 40 word written tasks by looking for key language which signposted the who, what, when, where and why.
- 90 word writing Q helping students to realise and increase the ease to which they transfer vocabulary, key structure and key tenses by creating practice tasks which use the same key vocabulary but across a range of tenses using different sentence starters to practice recall and the perception of transferability.
- Present key opinion phrases and when they can be used – all the time to improve work across all topics!
- Create opportunities for students to sort information into logical sentences and to supplement vocabulary or grammar but keeping the structure.
- 90 word modelling through translation – give students a model 90 word written piece in the target language and ask them to translate it. Present the text in English to translate into the target language to develop skills across a range of topics and themes to develop confidence and increase checking of correct sentences and components.
- Gap fill tasks to build narrative; list the conjugated verbs / opinions etc to the side and allow students to practice logically working this out.
- Peer collaboration trapdoor tasks to develop accuracy of check own and others work and spotting errors for correction.
- Verbal and written translation tasks.
- Recap Sessions – students are directed to check their work (or a peers) to find 3 connectives, 5 adverbs of frequency (in order), 3 hobbies & their verbs, 1 sentence using a past tense, 1 'si' clause triggering subjunctive on a topics e.g. technology, 1 imperfect subjunctive phrase.
- Quick tense translation of conjugated verbs – sounds easy but can students do it out of context?

- Correct translation – offer and English sentence and in the target language give a choice of three options

Jane Millington, Second in Department and French Lead, Myton School: Supporting Grammar and Vocabulary Development in Pupils

Jane took every practitioner through one of her brilliant tasks to develop grammar and vocab development using a highly unusual but engaging text on fossilised poo! Jane shared her ideas on using a range of authentic text starters which reinforce key vocab and structures, but which also develop deduction skills which aid translation skills and confidence too. The use of authentic texts in this way was highly engaging for colleagues in the room (all of whom completed the tasks as learners directed by Jane for an authentic experience) as well as in her classroom but Jane asserted that it was a vehicle to introduce and gain confidence and knowledge of a range of grammatical structures and tenses, all of which are transferable through mnemonic use (PALMWOR) for the photo card task. A great session with lots for attendees to take away and try out with their own classes.

Susanne Sahmland, Senior Lecturer in Education, Goldsmiths, University of London: Developing effective writing skills by engaging young people from KS3-KS4 in writing as creative writers

Susi shared her desire to develop language learners who can write well, with flair and creativity in terminal assessments sharing examples of learners work as well as her process in this final session. Highlighting to attendees the need to develop motivated learners who are interested, engaged and excited about writing rather than the usual generic pieces of writing we have all witness over the years. Susi highlighted how she motivates her classes by asking them to think carefully about topics using powerful imagery from vintage pictures and imagery which gives them a clear opportunity to be creative. Susi has worked with her students and expects them to write drawing in a range of topics rather than generic ones which also boosts self-esteem and confidence through being able to write in the target language about a passion or something truly cared about. Written work is completed in the target language so Susi challenged teachers to consider the question; what would you teach if you had a magic wand? Having seen how Susi uses images to teach and draw in a range of topics rather than accepting the 'standard topics and themes' perhaps seen in textbooks and programmes of study I think many teachers will change their teaching to motivate and invite students in their classes to be more creative when completing written work.

The day was highly focused and inspirational hearing MFL colleagues from a range of schools and establishments sharing their experiences and the impact of strategy. It was pleasing to have MPs, and ALL represented alongside classroom practitioners and consultants. Many teachers in attendance left with notebooks bursting with strategies and buzzing themselves with many ideas to take back to schools to share with departments from the speakers. The day was a success and I am certain that teachers and department teams across the land who attended, are acting upon the wealth of advice shared. I look forward to attending the 2020 MFL conference.

There is an Inside Government: Primary School MFL forum meeting in central London on February 5th 2020 details to be found here: www.primarymflanguages.com

There is a 15% discount available using the code MFLConf2019 using the www.insidegovernment.co.uk