

Newcastle's Newest Newly Qualified Languages Teachers Take Part in Annual *Learning from the Classroom* Event

A regular event held in irregular circumstances

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This year, as is customary, the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) cohort of outgoing PGCE students from Newcastle University (of which I was one) held its *Learning from the Classroom (LfC)* event to mark the end of the teacher training year. The joint Newcastle / ALLNE event has been held annually for around twenty years as a celebration of achievements and an opportunity to share discoveries – things that we have Learnt From the Classroom.

It took place on 11th June, one day before the official end date of the course, though, due to current circumstances, quite some time after our premature departure from the physical classroom. In attendance were the Newcastle MFL PGCE cohort; Lynne Kay, Subject Lead for PGCE MFL at Newcastle University who planned the event with Steven Fawkes, ALL Membership Officer and ALLNE Chair; Julie Hall, languages teacher at Ponteland High School; and Sue Balmer, experienced teacher – all active members of ALLNE.

A celebration of our academic and practical achievements so far, the online webinar was organised with a view to share findings and best practices across the cohort. Our session was designed in the spirit of the Association of Language Learning's (ALL) wider *LfC* initiative, which aims to encourage teachers (at all stages of their career) to undertake evidence-informed practice, combining external research with their own experience in the classroom. "*It was an insightful event on the topics covered in Master's assignments, as well as other research*" said Charlotte Finn, one of Newcastle's MFL PGCE students.

Indeed, the collaborative nature of this endeavour was one of its most positive takeaways. "*Learning from the Classroom was an opportunity to pool knowledge gained by all of us, from the wide range of schools in which we had taken our first steps in teaching,*" remarked PGCE student Lesley Alexander. Similarly, Paul Willis, another graduate, said it was "*a privilege to be part of such a long-running event which proved beneficial in sharing best practice and engaging in discussion with leaders in the field*".

The event began with congratulatory introductions from Lynne Kay, who has been instrumental in guiding us through our teacher training, and Steven Fawkes, who has also been a continual source of inspiration throughout the year at various events, as well as virtually.

Then came several evidence-informed presentations given by students on current, topical subjects in MFL teaching, including:

- strategies for motivating boys in MFL;
- how to incorporate phonics into languages teaching;

- and the unpacking of various experimental practices including
 - games,
 - filmmaking
 - metacognition in the classroom.

One graduate commented on how she found the experience of sharing ideas at this early stage in our careers empowering. *“There was a lot of confidence placed in us as trainees as the experienced colleagues were enthusiastic about our research and discussions,”* said Eleanor Conway.

After this came the “Show and Tell” session, in which we presented our top, quickfire tips based on our experience this year. This is normally delivered as a speed-dating style activity, but, owing to the current circumstances, was instead compiled as a group presentation. Ideas included a survey used to practise the near future tense; reflexive verbs and theme of marriage with Year 10; and writing strips, physical checklists stuck into book margins during a writing task to remind students of key points to include. Participants found this section of the event both useful and inclusive. Charlotte commented that she had *“taken away some new activities to try out in the NQT year”*, while Emma Clark, another graduate, said she *“thought it was a nice way to end the course, with everyone being able to show a skill or strategy and how capable we are as a cohort.”*

Final words were offered from experienced pedagogues Steven Fawkes and Julie Hall. Julie, another popular contributor to the MFL PGCE at Newcastle University, came to the webinar equipped with her top five tips for effective teaching in the NQT year, including useful insights into motivating learners, incorporating culture into lessons, and giving effective feedback. Steven had news of upcoming ALL activities and events that continue to serve as creative stimulation for the MFL community in the UK, lockdown notwithstanding.

The event was also popular for its social aspect, as Lesley highlighted. *“After weeks of working alone, what a tonic it was to share ideas and love of languages with fellow students as well as experts in the field! Setting online lessons, marking and engaging with pupils at my placement school had certainly kept me busy during the Covid lockdown. Yet, I had missed the camaraderie of university classmates and the linguistic passion we have in common,”* she said.

In the current climate, in which our high-frequency verbs include “isolate” and “distance”, *LfC 2020* was a timely, positive reminder that the support network for MFL teachers in the UK is widespread, strong and active. It will no doubt become invaluable to us as NQTs next year and as our careers progress.

Let’s close with some Guest Feedback to Lynne (the PGCE MFL lead):

Sue Balmer: *‘Thanks for inviting me. I thought your students were brilliant! Lots of good ideas and well presented. Well done you!!’*

Julie Hall: *‘I really enjoy working with your students, they are so enthusiastic and positive about teaching. I thought the event was lovely - so interesting to see what*

they have been researching and how emotional they were about the course and the support they've received. Great job!.