



THE VIEW ON... BRINGING TOGETHER PRACTICE

In this feature teachers of different languages in different contexts share their thoughts and strategies on their professional practice. ALL supports all language teachers and we hope to build bridges between professionals.

Working with the de-colonising agenda

Rachel Wright

My language learning and teaching experiences have taken place almost entirely in the multicultural, multilingual context of London. Today I am head of languages in an extremely diverse West-London girls' comprehensive school where every classroom is packed with polyglots, bilingual people and people with backgrounds all over the world. I am passionate about celebrating and promoting language diversity and multilingualism as an end in itself, but also about this being part of a wider mission to champion marginalised voices and challenge unequal distribution of power. I also firmly believe that we must harness the linguistic power and passion of our young multilingual communities in order to reverse the decline of the study of languages at GCSE, A-level and in higher education in the UK.

We found there were resources which 'represented' global communities, but also perpetuated negative stereotypes – e.g. images of poverty and rural life. We have replaced these with positive and inspiring images and narratives from the global south.

In my school we teach European languages, but our students' knowledge is much more diverse. I have long been aware of a Euro-centricity in the UK curriculum and, like many other teachers in recent years, have begun to learn how to address this in a practical way. In May 2021 I attended a fantastic session at the Language World conference by Lisa Panford and Melina Irvine (see *ALL for equity*). I shared the notions they explored with my department and we began a process of reflection and review, to try to build a decolonised curriculum for ourselves. Since September 2021, we have been actively working to implement our work in the department, and across the school. A huge part of this process involved looking at current resources through a critical decolonisation lens.

A key message from Panford and Irvine was that **diversity is not enough**.

Algunos famosos de México



Hola, me llamo Moctezuma. Estoy muy bien porque estoy feliz. Soy de Tenochtitlan y vivo en un gran palacio. Soy un emperador azteca y soy muy famoso. Tengo veintiséis años y vivo con un leopardo.

Hola, me llamo Lupita Nyong'o. Soy mexicana, pero soy keniana también. Mi padre es de Kenia. Actualmente, vivo en Los Ángeles en los Estados Unidos. Estoy muy bien porque estoy alegre. Hablo inglés, español y swahili. ¡Tengo un Oscar! Soy actriz de «Pantera Negra».



Hola, me llamo Frida Kahlo. Estoy bien porque estoy contenta pero estoy ocupada. Vivo con mis amigos en México. Soy una pintora muy famosa. Tengo veinte años. Me interesa la historia mexicana.

Hola, me llamo Raúl Jiménez. Tengo veinticinco años. Soy mexicano pero vivo en Inglaterra con mi familia. Hablo español. Soy jugador de fútbol. Me encanta el fútbol. Estoy muy feliz porque soy muy activo.



We have ensured that when personal description etc. is introduced, we present *'I have braided hair'/'I wear a headscarf'* alongside other, more traditional, language so that everybody in the room is reflected straight away in the content of the lesson. We are considering avoiding the question *'Where are you from?'* entirely as it can be problematic, and even traumatic. We take the same approach to gender-inclusive language, and consistently include a range of family structures in our resources.

Events in the school calendar can be a great opportunity to push the decolonisation agenda further: for European Day of Languages (EDoL) 2021 we showcased our multilingual staff with a YouTube video (below), and our assemblies and MFL lessons explored the multilingual and multicultural nature of Europe now – and over centuries! – for example, the huge impact of the Moorish Empire on Spanish culture and language, and the incorporation of some Arabic words into French slang.

We created a mini-project for year 7 French called 'Qui je suis' (Who I am). Students wrote a poem using the structure 'je suis' (I am) with a range of language they chose themselves. We found this a really positive, enjoyable and empowering approach.

Stephen Spender Trust, an educational charity with a focus on translation outreach activity (another ALL SIG member) provided workshops on translating a French graphic novel. These sessions empowered our students to see themselves as real linguists – which they absolutely are! They often need to interpret or translate practically for family members, and they are experts in 'code-switching' multiple times a day.

My EDoL assembly this year 2 showcased these polyglot superstars. My multicultural, multilingual students inspire me every single day!

Staff languages video : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9J-Elzv-O0U>

A longer version of this feature is available in LT Extra:

<https://www.all-languages.org.uk/research-practice/languages-today/>

This European Day of Languages we will be **exploring** and **celebrating** the **multilingual** and **multicultural** nature of Europe.

Europe is a truly global continent with an incredible cultural and linguistic diversity and it **always has been**! In this assembly we will begin to explore this and you will continue this in your MFL lessons this week.

SPAIN

Between the years 711 and 1492 there was a Muslim-ruled Empire which included the majority of present-day Spain and some of France. Arabic has had a huge influence on the Spanish language – 4000 words come from Arabic!

La Alhambra Palace, Granada, Spain

The Arabic alphabet is divided into "solar" and "lunar" letters. When Spanish began to incorporate Arabic words, the article of evolved to -a in Arabic words that began with solar letters

Arabic	Spanish (English)
al-ayt	ocete (cell)
al-ayn	anin (nun)
al-sukkar	azúcar (sugar)

