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Second Edition

Teaching Languages in the Primary School

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CHAPTER 2

WHAT DOES LANGUAGE LEARNING OFFER A PRIMARY SCHOOL?

Chapter objectives

- To explore the nature of language learning at the primary stage.
- To suggest ways in which language learning can benefit children.
- To suggest ways in which teaching a language can benefit a school.
- To make links between Primary Framework English and language learning.
- To make links between approaches to English as an additional language (EAL) and approaches to language teaching.

Teachers' standards			
A teacher must:			
1		Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils	
	b	set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions	
2		Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils	

	b	be aware of pupils' capabilities and their prior knowledge, and plan teaching to build on these
8		Fulfil wider professional responsibilities
	a	make a positive contribution to the wider life and ethos of the school

Source: DfE, 2013a

Introductory vignette

I think for some children it's deeply motivating – they enjoy it because it's different. Whether it's because that's to do with the kind of lessons they are, because they're very oral and there's music and there's lots of games and so they see it as fun, it's nice that the whole school does it and the whole school is doing it together. We played some French music in assembly recently and they all noticed that it was French and enjoyed that. (Headteacher, 2005, in Hood, 2006: 6)

Comment

The headteacher quoted above introduced language learning into her school because, when she interviewed for teachers to cover the new planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) arrangements in 2005, she found that a language teacher was one of the two best teachers she saw. She was primarily interested in appointing people who could add value to the school. Because this was her approach, she considered languages to be an integral part of the curriculum from that point on. She had a real sense that language learning could impact the whole curriculum and the school experience of the children and, because the subject was given equal status with the rest of the curriculum and was well taught, it did.

Initial reflection point

Consider the two brief lesson scenarios that follow. Clearly there are differences, but what are they and do they matter?

Teacher A reads the class a simple story in another language about a boy who wants pizza for tea. The boy finds the ingredients in the supermarket.

There is a lot of repetition of the phrases for 'Here is …' and 'I like …'. Back at home, his mother asks him to unpack the bag and she checks he has all the ingredients – 'Do you have ...?' He replies using 'Here is …' again. When the teacher reads it for the second time and pauses slightly at certain points, the class gradually starts to join in with the names of the ingredients, if they are not too hard, and the key phrases. By the end of the second reading, the children are all able to say, 'Yes, here it is!' and 'I like …'. The teacher then makes a three-ingredient pizza using a large card 'base' and chooses which three by asking the class to vote for their favourite ingredients. Individual children then create their own four-, five- or six-ingredient toppings by adding other items. If they have forgotten the word for an item or if they want an extra item not in the story, they ask for it in the foreign language.

Teacher B has selected the key vocabulary for the pizza ingredients and teaches them to the class using flashcards and asking the children to repeat each of the words several times, using different tones or speeds or emotions to give variety. The teacher plays some flashcard games – for example, using a noughts and crosses grid on the board with the flashcards turned away and children in teams competing to guess the right item and make a line of three. The teacher then adds the phrase for 'I would like' and plays pizza bingo with the class. Afterwards the class practises the word set again in pairs, asking for certain items from each other.

Comment

You could see something like both of these approaches in primary language classrooms all over England. The point of comparing and contrasting them is not to decide which is better, but isolate what the children get from each 'lesson' and whether or not that meets your objectives as a languages teacher. In deciding what they get from each approach, we need to think about the immediate learning and the more invisible acquisition that may be occurring. We also need to consider both immediate and longer-term motivation.

〰️   **Follow-up reflection**

In which of the two lesson scenarios above would children be most motivated and in which would they remember more words? Would either approach lead to a greater longer-term motivation and would either embed language in their minds more strongly if used regularly?

Comment

There are still no 'right' answers to these questions, but you may have formed a strong view and this might reflect a personal standpoint (for example, a memory of successful language lessons when you were younger) or a deep knowledge of how primary children learn. This chapter, and indeed the whole book, seeks to offer a range of interpretations of how language learning might look, viewed from the standpoint of the children, the teachers and the school.

Some important ways of looking at the issue involve thinking about the purpose of language learning. What is language learning *for*? What type of language do we have in mind? Is the focus on learning the language, learning about the language or learning via the language? What about culture? What is culture? Is it (to echo a previous series of course books) a matter of onions, sausages or castanets, or something deeper?

The teacher's objectives and how they shape what language learning can offer

We can start this dialogue by asking what appears to be a very basic question. When you, as the teacher, walk into the classroom to start a language lesson, what are your objectives? We can paraphrase and widen this by asking , 'What do you intend to do? What do you intend the children to know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson? Why are you doing this?'

There are some very different possible answers to this set of questions that relate to the summary at the end of the comment section above. For example, on the one hand, you may see language learning as equipping children to survive in an authentic context, such as a visit to a target-language-speaking country. Perhaps they will link with a class they have been writing to, even stay a couple of nights with a family there. If so, you may have an agenda that is about teaching and practising functional language around topics such as greeting, eating, exchanging essential personal information, expressing preferences and simple emotions. On the other hand, that may not be a likely scenario just yet and you may instead feel that, to start the process of language learning, you need to address some basic vocabulary areas, such as numbers, colours, families, food/drink and favourite leisure time activities.

In both of these cases, you are very firmly in the language learning camp, with the 'doorstep intention' of presenting a specific set of vocabulary and phrases, mainly via aural/oral means and with the intention of equipping children to use them orally in structures such as dialogues. Your desired outcome is probably that they can use this body of language when they receive

certain stimuli such as simple questions. You may decide to find out if you have been successful in this by 'testing' the class orally (or perhaps in writing with older children).

Alternatively, you may feel it is still important, even in the primary context, that children start to build a grammatical awareness of the language they are learning. This might take the form of either some overt grammar or another literacy-linked aspect, such as strategy use. An example of the first could be awareness of parts of speech and their behaviour (agreement and position of adjectives in French or first-/third-person verb forms in German) and, in this case, it is possible that a lesson might be more expository with some rules being explained. The second might be accomplished more inductively, by using a 'language detectives' approach (as used by West Sussex Grid for Learning materials, 2006 and 2008). In our earlier example of the 'pizza' lessons, a third scenario might involve the use of a menu in the target language with a task centred on children trying to work out what the items are and give reasons for their choices. Clearly, if you adopt such approaches, you include learning *about* language as a major purpose.

A third scenario could have a completely different set of intentions at the threshold to the classroom. You may be using authentic texts (a story or song, for example) and think less about giving children a particular set of items for comprehension and reuse and more about their overall experience of the sounds of the language. There would probably be some inherent repetition contained within the story or song, which they would begin to catch and rehearse more informally. It might be that you want to offer the children the chance to construct meaning by looking at context (perhaps with the visuals associated with the text) and, although they will not understand the literal meaning of every word, they might laugh or feel suspense or anticipate a particular ending. You might want to deal with non-fiction and link something in the foreign language with work they are doing in mathematics, science, geography or art. You might hope that, in this way, they will experience some reinforcement (in a different form) of some of the concepts you have been dealing with at other points during the week or term. Later, you might teach them, in the foreign language, something from one of those other areas that is completely new. If you have these intentions, you are working within the approach that involves learning *in* or *through* the language.

We want to be clear that the options above are not described with a view to you choosing one of them as an approach that you will use. Of course, a single teacher might have that range of intentions, either with different classes or even with the same class, over a period of time. It is probably healthy for any subject to be tackled from different directions and in different ways across a whole primary school and even across the four years of KS2. The advocates of embedding the languages element into the whole curriculum (including ourselves) need to remember that there is a separate language curriculum based on authentic experience of life among mother-tongue

speakers of that language – in other words, 'survival' content – that children need to learn. We need to recognise that, just as the National Curriculum for English includes elements of grammar, so a foreign language curriculum lasting a minimum of four years needs that, too. All teachers of languages at primary level, however, need to consider how children learn in general and how a focus on learning *via* the language can certainly offer other sorts of gains, as research has shown (see Chapter 9). We will now look at the nature of that learning from the child's as well as the school's perspective.

What do children enjoy about language learning? What can language learning offer children?

One survey of a whole primary school where all children were learning languages from Nursery through to Y6 (and where they had all started the process at the same time), found that the most popular element of learning French was songs. This was noted by 75 per cent of the children in the school.

In Hood (2006), we explored some early impressions of language learning from focus groups in the same school. In the plenary at the Primary Languages Show 2007 (Hood, unpublished), we presented further data from that school which showed the children were able to identify the benefits of challenge, very willing to show what they knew in the form of singing authentic French songs and strongly involved in taking the language home.

So far, this chapter has not mentioned the F-word. Many people associate learning languages with the fun element and we need to address this now because fun *is* certainly something that language learning offers children and schools. Fun can emerge from a range of approaches: from lively active teaching and learning, from a real mixture of stimulating resources, from creative activities that use the language, from genuine contacts with speakers of the target language, and from games that involve problem-solving, collaboration and competition.

It is vital to distinguish the fun that emerges from having a variety of stimuli and challenge from the fun arising simply out of the games and simply out of the fact that, for many children, language learning, being so orally and game-based, is not 'real work'. That sort of fun seems to evaporate as repetition sets in, progression is more limited and challenge seems never to materialise.

When children say that something is hard and then you ask them whether 'hard' is a good or a bad thing, very many will say that it is good, because 'hard' means you are learning. Similarly, 'easy' – implying a lack of challenge and a lack of thinking – is not often held up by learners as something positive. Above all, they want work addressed to their own maturity level. This is

illustrated by a Y10 boy on work experience in a primary school who, at the end of a Year 3 lesson, approached the teacher and said, 'I wish we had done languages in primary school, because then in Year 7 we could have done some real work.'

Language learning should be active, have a large proportion of orally-based activities and relate to a range of aspects of children's lives, including their interests, social life, beliefs and learning. This should guarantee that, among different motivational qualities, it contains genuine elements of fun. In fact, fun should permeate the subject and not be a separate planning aim. Often, in the early stages, a combination of physical activity and rhythm and language can be stimulating and enjoyable. Incorporating some thinking into this type of activity is always possible, creating both fun and challenge. A Y1 boy asked his French teacher who was supply teaching one morning that was not intended to include French: 'When are we going to do the fun thing, I mean French?' This teacher believed that challenge was vital in all her activities, so this is evidence that fun can be a broad phenomenon.
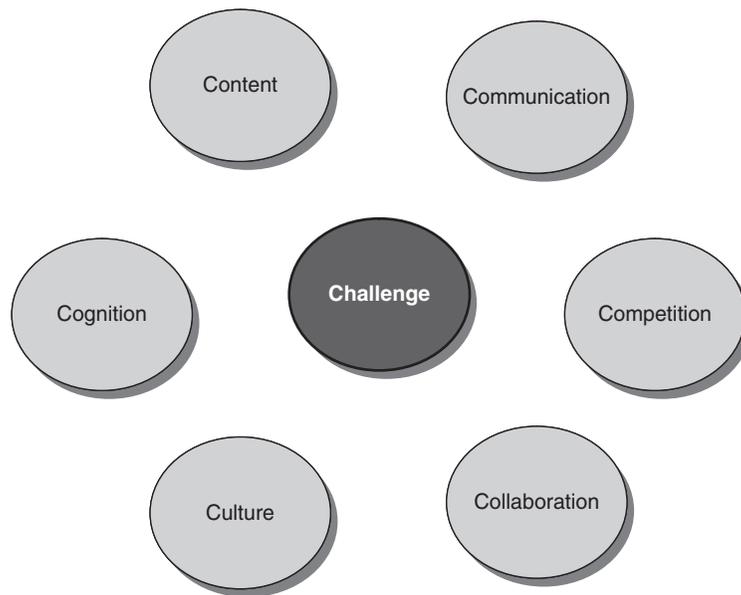
Figure 2.1 Qualities offered by language teaching

We will now consider (Figure 2.1) the importance of some other qualities that language teaching, like all good teaching, can offer children. Conveniently, these qualities can be expressed in a series of words that begin with 'c':

- culture
- communication

- content
- challenge
- cognition
- collaboration
- competition.

We will look at each of these in turn below, show how they link together and offer practical classroom examples through an activity or resource. We will also ask you to reflect on an aspect of each element.

Culture

Culture may seem to be an obvious component of learning a language. The 'Languages programmes of study: Key Stage 2' document for the National Curriculum in England does not detail what culture might mean beyond mentioning different types of texts, but the opening sentence is, 'Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures' (DfE, 2013b: 1). 'The Key Stage 2 Framework for languages' (DfES, 2005) had intercultural understanding as one of its three equally important strands, with a full set of objectives for each year group in the phase. Both French and Spanish, which are currently the major languages in primary schools, have the advantage of being global languages, spoken on three or more continents. France, Germany and Spain are themselves also multicultural societies. So, 'culture' can include a fascinating range of aspects concerning daily lives in schools and in a multitude of different homes, cities and villages that have some resemblances to and some key differences from the experiences our children will have there. Also, of course, our own children will come at alternative cultures from a wide variety of different standpoints, many of which will not be British in origin.

The potential richness for the whole curriculum of encouraging interaction on a cultural level in language lessons is immense and some authors have approached this notion in the context of language learning and cultural competence among older learners. The breadth of vision around culture that we will see in Byram's work, for example, is worth remembering, as an eventual aim, however. He has a model of cultural competences based on different types of 'knowledge' (Byram and Zarate, 1994; Byram, 1997):

- *savoir comprendre* – knowing how to understand
- *savoir apprendre/faire* – knowing how to learn/do
- *savoir s'engager* – knowing how to engage
- *savoir être* – knowing how to be/behave.

This is useful in that it gives us a sense of true intercultural understanding leading to both knowing *what* to say and *how* to say it because we have a deeper

understanding of the people with whom we are interacting. In other words, it is eventually about understanding what makes people the way they are.

At primary level, we need to start with the realisation that many of our children will not have actually experienced different cultures and we can unwittingly set up stereotypes if we dwell too much on stating overly simplistic differences and unintentionally inviting 'horror' (frogs' legs, snails and horsemeat come to mind!). This starts with the power of image, which gives a stream of messages that we are not even aware of. In *Reading Images: The grammar of visual design*, for example, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explore the many ways in which different cultural images, including those in children's picture books, communicate their meanings. A complex mix of existing cultural concepts, juxtapositions of visual material and conventions, such as the direction of 'reading' (inherently left to right in Western cultures), create out of a simple picture an image that has as much power as dense text. We only have to look at some of the cultural 'loading' in our media (associations with Second World War uniforms, drinking beer and lederhosen for Germany, for example) to see that we are in constant receipt of stereotypical imagery.

For all these reasons, when evaluating materials for use with primary age children, it is very important that teachers consider their cultural content and the power of the imagery. If a book, DVD, picture material or an online resource makes extensive use of line drawings, clip art, neutral photographs, then its contribution to cultural understanding is very limited and might even be negative. If, on the other hand, it has authentic photographs showing children of an equivalent age in natural settings, then this encourages children to notice and ask questions about apparent similarities and differences. Many current resources use video extracts to present language and, as with Early Start Languages (www.earlystart.co.uk/index.html), for example, even a short clip of children eating lunch, being at school or shopping can open up the possibility of culture-based conversations. The short sequence in Early Start French 1 of a French family eating at midday shows a range of differences that exemplify some cultural attributes (for example, French children often eat lunch at home in a more formal lunch setting, there are different patterns of 'courses', collaborative laying, or clearing, of the table). While there is still a place for cartoon characters in stories and for all the fantasy possible with such images, they should be combined with strong, authentic, culturally accurate representations in any good set of materials.

In the last 20 years, crossover culture has been very strong and this leads to a need to reappraise what we mean by 'culture'. Spain as a holiday destination has continued to grow in popularity and, as a result, many children are familiar with much of the obvious features of Spanish life, such as some of the food, the climate and coastal landscapes. We can delve deeper, however, and present more traditional food and issues from the climate and less familiar landscapes if we plan this in carefully. More concrete examples can develop this theme. While food is an obvious cultural aspect of interest, there is much less value now than there was in offering learners of French a French breakfast as an activity, though this was common in lower secondary just a few years ago. Our

supermarkets offer *pain au chocolat* and *brioche* as standard items, as well as *baguettes* in plenty. French yogurts are commonly advertised on television and hot chocolate is a more common breakfast drink than before.

We need to look at shopping habits, eating habits and a wider range of food items and make the point that French food has a strong North African influence, rather like ours has (among others) an Indian influence, and for at least some similar reasons. In sport, the premier league has brought not just French footballers into common view but also a host of French-speaking players from Africa. Countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Sénégal are known to older primary children, some of whom may have seen scenes from Africa on television, watching African Nations Cup football. Spain and Portugal bring with them strong associations with South America, such as Argentina and Brazil. Access to less superficial cultural material is potentially more manageable if we can build on that initial basic knowledge. The Arsenal FC's Education programme The Double Club has created materials across the curriculum, including non-British origin players speaking in their own languages.

Many might see this as a partial diversion, however, because surely children cannot handle these conversations in the target language? As with everything connected to target language use (we deal with this in more detail in Chapter 3), we should look hard to find ways in which it might be possible before we opt for the safer English route. Scaffolding can be used to support children's use of the target language and this can take the form of a series of questions that offer language and support its reuse to express real opinions. By Y6, this should be possible at a relatively high level.

Example from practice

In a PowerPoint presentation we created, which used some material from an Oxfam website, a young girl's daily routine in rural Burkina Faso was explored very simply. She had to get up early, have her breakfast, then she walked for an hour to get to school, fetched water, had a day's lessons, walked home, helped her mother to cook and clean, then spent the later evening with family and friends, making their own entertainment.

Apart from some useful French language, this was tapping in to citizenship and environmental themes. Here is a sample teacher's scaffolding script:

'Alors, Mariam se lève à cinq heures, prend le petit déjeuner et elle marche une heure (soixante minutes!) à l'école.' (This sentence is said more than once, with the PowerPoint or other visuals in support. The figures '1 hour = 60 minutes' can be written on the whiteboard while pointing at the clock or a watch.)

'Se lever à cinq heures, c'est bon? Marcher une heure à l'école, c'est bon? Ça serait bon pour toi ou un problème pour toi?' (Use mime as well as images

(Continued)

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and elicit an answer from one child then ask several others so that repetition occurs. Do this in a natural manner, with a range of children being genuinely asked for their opinion. They will, after all, have different opinions, so this dialogue is for a real purpose, both individually and collectively.)

'OK, ca serait un problème pour toi, mais pourquoi? A cinq heures tu es trop fatigué/e? Après une heure de marche, tu es trop fatigué/e?' (Giving vocabulary such as *après* and *trop* in a definite context is important because connectives, prepositions and adverbs often allow children to express more shades of meaning. They need to encounter these words in sentences that have a real purpose and not just learn them as isolated items. Note that the 'push' from the teacher here is to ask for reasons. The question 'Why?' needs to appear early and be used regularly in any target language.)

With these questions it is possible to respond in very simple or slightly less simple ways. This means children can self-differentiate, but still participate – the emphasis is on communication and finding real answers to questions where the answers are not known in advance.

It is also very positive to encourage children to experiment with using familiar language in different ways. Here they might want to express something about carrying things to school or the weather. If they are used to you as the teacher wanting contributions and supporting, making half-sentences into full sentences, then they may draw from previous work and offer: *j'aime …', 'parce que le sac est …'* or *'il pleut …'.* If you then supply a word such as *dormir, lourd* or *souvent,* they will have the satisfaction of having made an original contribution and a chance of remembering the new item because they heard it and put it into a real context that belonged to them.

The PowerPoint then led to a more challenging worksheet suitable for older KS2 learners with more depth of language learning behind them.

Culture, then, can be brought directly into the fabric of the language teaching lesson – it can *be* the lesson and is certainly not an add-on, something the teacher includes from time to time as a topic that gives a change from language work. The new National Curriculum does not exclude this kind of work and encourages authentic use of text.

Reflection point

Think of an aspect of life in a target-language-speaking country – preferably arising from experiences you have had personally – that would be an interesting cultural element for your teaching. What resources might you look for that would engage children and allow them to explore differences in the right spirit and, preferably, using the foreign language? Write three questions you might use to help children notice and react to the aspect you have chosen.

Communication

Communication is obviously an essential part of language learning and teaching. Ask most modern language teachers if they have a style or method to their approach and they will reply that they are 'communicative' language teachers (see also Chapter 9 for a full discussion of this theme). The essence of the communicative methodology is that learning occurs via authentic communication – real messages for real purposes, using authentic language and authentic stimuli. This involves real menus, real transport timetables, real estate agents' details of houses, real penfriend letters from real children and real school timetables. The accepted curriculum is survival topics, which, for example, have always featured in the modern languages examinations at the national GCSE level, taken normally at age 16 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Clearly primary age children need to learn how to identify themselves and survive (with adult support) during a stay in a target-language-speaking country. It now seems common sense that we should achieve this by helping them to learn by using the real materials they will encounter when abroad and allow them to practise dialogue which could take place there. In doing so, we should look to techniques from drama (for example, hot-seating or giving participants in a role-play 'secret' circumstances for the dialogue) to make the communication more inherently interesting and enjoyable. Even so, there is a danger in fashioning an entire language-learning curriculum around survival, especially when a concept such as van Ek's 'threshold level' (1975; van Ek and Trim, 1991) can become diluted to a syllabus consisting of vocabulary, grammar structures and topics.

Van Ek (1975) listed the themes or topics needed as foreign language knowledge to survive in another country. With these he included the language functions, grammatical understanding, key vocabulary required, but also how the language worked as a system of communication, socially and culturally and how speakers might compensate when their competence was limited. The 'syllabus' was one for survival, but in a sophisticated, linguistically competent way rather than what might be termed as at 'phrasebook' level.

In fact, in addition to those elements, discourse competence, sociocultural competence and compensatory competence all appear in van Ek's work and indicate the inclusion of genuine rather than staged (and stilted or mechanistic) communication. Even if GCSE examination boards maintain that this has been a part of their design, the reality is it has not been tested at any but the highest levels. Examinations are notorious for setting the standards, objectives and 'feel' of teaching and learning (Volante, 2004; Menken, 2006) and it would appear that GCSE ML has done this. Ironically, the low levels of thinking and creativity, the formulaic demand of role play and prepared questions, the endless listening and reading to spot contrived shades of meaning (that is, the lack of challenge) have resulted in the examinations being perceived

as more difficult than those in other subjects. Difficulty in securing real motivation appears to have led to difficulty in fulfilling examination demands. One young secondary learner complained that her ML lessons were dominated by the unit tests and, in the unit tests, they had to learn what they were going to say or write and had no opportunity to respond using their real opinions and experience. This led to a slightly ludicrous situation where she had to write that she had visited the Louvre in Paris, when, although she really had been to Paris, she had not been to the Louvre. The option of writing the truth – that she had been to the Musée D'Orsay – was not allowed!

Of course, being able to use the language competently in a foreign country is a vital aim of language teaching and we should all equip our children with aspects of that skill, but if this is their *only* diet, it is not surprising that by KS3 learners have often tired of it. So, to explore communication more fully, we need to think what it is that learners are communicating *about*. This leads us to the next 'C' and shows us that communication as a concept, when used by itself, is limited.

Content

Content is often ignored in language teaching, where there is a tendency for the 'medium to be the message'. In other words, the content is the language itself rather than something else learned *via* language. As we saw above, if the content is an abstract global concept such as 'survival', there is a danger that processes can become mechanistic as learners try a range of parallel ways to reach a laudable but intangible aim. So, objectives might focus on a list of vocabulary or a grammatical structure or a skill such as complaining politely or the ability to give directions to a particular place. The problem with this is that it appears to learners that they are mostly either simply learning something for its own sake (for example, a list of words) or as relatively trivial content, unless a visit is imminent and they can see its immediate real purpose.

Using language is much more important than *knowing* language or knowing *about* language. Clearly, to use language effectively you need to know some language and have some kind of overview of how it works as a system, but if objectives stop at the *knowing* or knowing *about*, it might be harder to move on to *using*. If the objective is to use the language from the start, then the other factors will take care of themselves and the *purpose* of language learning will be unambiguous from the first lesson. Dropping learners into a target-language-speaking country and asking them to survive *is* authentic and does have a meaningful content, but recreating that in a classroom with learners who all share a different language from the one being used and expecting reality to be suspended is less convincing. Alternatively, learning about something else (which may be cultural) has the effect of deflecting

attention away from overtly practising the language and towards solving a problem or establishing a new concept. An example of what we mean by this follows and the original of the worksheet we are referring to is available in the *A La Française* pack (Tobutt and Roche, 2007).

Example from practice

Les monuments de Paris

Materials

- Pictures of la Tour Eiffel, le Musée du Louvre, la Cathédrale Notre Dame
- Facts (formatted in boxes, they can also be cut up and used as a classification activity):

C'est une église.

C'est un musée.

C'est une tour.

La construction a duré de 1163 à 1345.

La construction a duré de 1887 à 1889.

Il a été construit en 1594.

Elle a été construite par Gustave Eiffel.

La hauteur est 324 mètres.

La hauteur est 69 mètres.

La pyramide à l'entrée est 21 mètres haut.

Il y a plus de 12 millions de visiteurs par an.

Il y a plus de 6 millions de visiteurs par an.

Il y a plus de 8 millions de visiteurs par an.

Ici on peut voir La Mona Lisa de Leonardo da Vinci.

La tour a été construite de 18 038 pièces métalliques.

'J'aime les arts.'

'J'aime l'histoire.'

'Je suis sportif! Je prends l'escalier!'

Activity

The activity here is to match the sentences to the monuments. The objectives include learning some information about the three monuments, but also aim to

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broaden the knowledge of the children about the kind of historical sights Paris offers, to reinforce a historical awareness that modern cities have features that originated at very different times. Language objectives are mainly about receptive language (that is, comprehension) and include, for some or all, using contextual reading to infer unknown vocabulary items, using grammatical information (il/elle and grammatical gender). Depending on the level and experience of the children, the class could also be asked to reason in French. *'La cathédrale est plus agée que la tour', 'La tour est plus populaire que la cathédrale, n'est-ce pas?', 'La Mona Lisa est une peinture – c'est dans le musée.'* So, active language use as well as the receptive processing of language can be involved in an activity like this. Children will learn something (a non-linguistic content) and will have used language to do so, reinforcing vocabulary, pronunciation and possibly grammar.

〜〜   **Reflection point**

Take any three common language teaching topics and list next to them three dimensions of content that you could involve in presenting the essential language to primary children. An example might be:

Colours – What are the primary/secondary colours? Which colours do we use to express different emotions? Do a survey of colours of family cars or the children's bedroom walls or pets.

Challenge

Challenge sits in the centre of our list of seven terms. It is especially connected with what we have just said about content and clearly links into the next 'C', cognition. All the other 'C' words have a link into challenge, however, if we interpret them in that way.

Children generally welcome being challenged because they acknowledge that they are in school to learn and this process is often more stimulating when it is harder than when they simply coast. This is where excess repetition can be harmful, especially over time. If the content remains trivial and the curriculum is repetitive (the previous National Curriculum and GCSE survival topics have always tended to operate in a spiral that recurs at various points), if the activity types consist of short, undeveloped tasks with unsubstantial outcomes, then we should not be surprised if motivation drops. We can challenge our children in many ways, and the later chapters of the book will all deal with this as one of the constant themes. The main emphasis

should always be on children discovering rather than being told, making connections for themselves that, admittedly, we may have set up for them, using language naturally and creatively and being inspired to go off and tell or teach someone else.

One Y4 boy, responding to a questionnaire, wrote the comment in Figure 2.2.

7. What do you most enjoy in French lessons?

Figure 2.2 Response from a Y4 boy

The *type* of challenge is, of course, important and the same boy added this (see Figure 2.3) to a later question (we think 'tingly' might be the intention of the third word).

10. If you chose strongly agree or agree for Question 5, can you write *how French lessons feel different* in this box.

Figure 2.3 A further response

Children often like things that are 'hard' rather than 'easy' and one comment that showed this came from a Y3 focus group: 'When things are hard you learn it quicker.' A Y6 boy commented on why he liked to do topic work in French: 'You've got a challenge to do rather than doing just what you already know.' Many good language teachers report comments from parents that children teach parents or siblings foreign language expressions while walking home from school or at the table having a meal. It is obvious that to do this they must first care about what they have learned and also see a purpose in knowing it in the first place or else why would they bother?

Cognition

Cognition, then, links to this discussion because, essentially, what we need to do in language lessons is make children think. This is at the heart of the learning process everywhere else, so it should not be surprising that it is central here, too.

Thinking can be at different levels and in different guises. In commonly used language topics, thinking can be rather difficult to engender, because, often, the way these topics are approached is via fairly descriptive rather than analytical processes. When asking about likes and dislikes, for example, children may want to express more subtle shades of opinion and you may wish to ask them why they have certain opinions. This raises more difficult vocabulary and structures.

We could argue, however, that when languages are linked with other subjects, thinking is easier to manage. It can start at the level where children make a single, simple decision while using language in comprehension mode. Questions that operate like this might be, 'Did the Vikings have glass? Did they have chocolate? Is this sound from a violin or clarinet? Is this bridge made of wood or stone? Which of these animals is depicted in this collage?' This level of vocabulary (that is, single words) does not need to be presented separately, or pre-taught, as the simple format of asking 'Is it x or y?' or 'Was x true, yes or no?' actually teaches that vocabulary while the learners' minds are focused on the question being asked.

Thinking continues in the process where children make meaning from text, often as a group or whole class, as we showed in the example of the French monuments. It is present again when children are asked to reassemble sentences or generate their own simple sentences in response to pictures. If we ask children to respond to simple open questions where the answer is personal and not already known by the teacher, we again move away from formulaic parroting of learned material and back to a child having to think, 'What has she asked me there? How do I respond?'

Thinking tends not to occur, however, when vocabulary is simply repeated or when very tightly controlled pair practice or role play is used, especially if the children's own views or experiences are not elicited by the task.

The limitations of some common language learning activities should now be clear. An example might be flashcard games that have a place in the learning cycle but will become formulaic and tedious if used at the same point in every new topic. Partly this is due to repetition of a format but also partly due to the nature of the format itself. Excessive practice of common topics, such as personal information, is a further example. If we rehearse questions to which we know the answer too often and everyone else in the class knows the answer and the pupil we are asking knows that everyone knows the answer, then the motivation to give that answer becomes minimal. The worst example of this is the type of question that goes, *'Stephen, cómo te llamas?'*

but asking ages in a single-year class is similar, unless you are investigating proportions with birthdays at different points or establishing an age order, in which case you need years and months. Even asking about brothers and sisters more than once falls into this category and needs another dimension. One good way to sidestep all of this is to ask children to take on a different identity and keep it a secret. All of the same questions can then be asked but none of the answers will be known in advance. If we do not think about this, then, in the worst scenario, any real level of thinking can be absent from the entire learning cycle.

〰 〰   **Reflection point**

You have used a café menu to introduce a number of drinks. You do not want to play flashcard games with these items now, so need to consider some other activity that will involve some thinking as well as the use of the vocabulary. What could you do?

Collaboration

Collaboration is vital in language learning because language use generally involves some form of communication between two or more people. This might seem obvious given the amount of talk associated with the ML curriculum at all levels, but we do need to think beyond the obvious. Talking to a formula is not strictly collaboration and talking to a rigid formula makes the fact that two are involved in a dialogue almost superfluous. So, by 'collaboration' we mean that a pair or group of children are working for a real purpose (Oxford, 1997; Crandall, 1999; Dillenbourg, 1999; Fisher, 2002). This might be to make something, solve a problem or exchange information in an authentic way. You might even combine all three if you decide to instigate a survey about pets to find out the average number of pets per pupil then create a pie chart on pet popularity and perhaps push a little further by asking the children if they have had a pet who has died. While many children do know some other children's pets' names, colours and bad habits, this still contains a very real chance to find out unknown facts, use the information for another purpose and involve a more affective issue that is all too real for many children.

We are not just talking about talking, though. Children nearly always respond positively to being asked if they prefer to work collaboratively in general and, within the area of language learning, this is especially true of reading. They tend to make much more of a text when reading in a pair or group and also enjoy the reading more. In a group, it tends to become a

matter of collective 'finding out', of argument and it carries a greater (because more public) sense of task completion and satisfaction. Reading is also much more immediately accessible as an activity when carried out collaboratively. So we can ask children to read earlier and read more if we do it this way. In an unpublished doctoral thesis (Hood, 2000), we looked at lower secondary age children reading individually and in groups and found clear evidence of higher levels of performance when they were working in the collaborative mode.

Competition

Very many children really love both playing games and solving problems and, in so doing, competing either individually or in teams. Competition can be healthy and involve high levels of collaboration. We just need to be careful to ensure that the focus does not move so much on to competition that it leads to a desperation to win and shortcuts too much the language and the process of using the language. It can also lead to anxiety among some children (Crandall, 1999; Oxford, 1999; Pollard and Triggs, 2000; Ortega, 2007). Ortega, particularly, deals with the relationship between competitiveness and anxiety and offers a set of classroom procedures to ensure a healthy ethos. Whole-class games, such as identifying vocabulary on the whiteboard as fast as possible, have the inherent danger of involving a very small number of children and leaving the majority on the sidelines at any one point. When using a whole-class format, therefore, it is important to issue something (for example, a card with a number or vocabulary item) to everyone and then carry out a team competition where an item is called out and the first person to stand up, show the card and say it correctly wins a point. This means anyone can be involved at any point. Group-based games have the advantage of involving lots of children relatively continuously. An example of this (available in the *A La Française* pack, Tobutt and Roche, 2007) is an envelope game involving euros that has a distant similarity to the TV programme, *Deal or No Deal*. Board games, which can be based on snakes and ladders-type formats are popular, but tend to take more time to play. With these, it is vital to think about 'surround sound' social language (which will be seen in Chapter 9 as language for learning) and get as much target language activated as possible. This has to be prepared for as it will not happen by itself.

Competition between the teacher and the class is extremely popular. A number of guessing games (with a number of guesses allowed or set times allowed for the answer to be reached) can be played in the early stages as directly competitive and this has a certain motivational power, particularly if the children in the class are able to work together. There is also the

advantage that if the teacher is trying to guess a cultural object, location or other item the class has chosen, he or she can use a good range of target language to ask questions and test out guesses, to which the children need only answer 'Yes' or 'No'. This has the effect of offering a good receptive language experience for the children without making impossible demands on them. Of course when the children start to want to take the teacher role, they should be allowed to, even though the quantity of language they have will be far less.

In summary, we might say competition that is firmly aimed at enhancing learning works very well. This can often be organised in teams, thus combining competition with collaboration. Competition purely for its own sake might be popular for a time and with some children or classes, but, in the end, it will wear thin as a motivator.

〰 **Reflection point**

Planning activity

Take a language teaching lesson plan and evaluate it for *challenge* by annotating it with examples of the other six Cs from Figure 2.1 on page 20.

- Are any of the Cs absent? Were opportunities missed?
- Could you insert them easily without changing the plan radically or should the lesson be completely replanned?
- How challenging was this lesson and why do you think that?

From the review of the seven Cs above, we can now infer that any dangers might emerge from too much repetition or restriction of the children's natural desire to use language to communicate. If we rely too much on making it fun, we may run into 'fun fatigue'. It is not that natural repetition or some measure of control over language is not part of the learning process – we mentioned earlier how important enjoyment is – but we need to mesh these elements in to the seven Cs to create a truly stimulating environment. To explore this further, we will ask another question.

〰 **Reflection point**

How can learning another language offer even more to a school (for example, by reinforcing the development of core skills, such as first language or English as an additional language (EAL), numeracy or reasoning)?

Learning another language has always been seen by teachers as a potential consolidation tool for learners with particular difficulties. For example, in Y7, teachers have often commented that 'doing the time' in a foreign language offers students who still have difficulties with this life skill to gain practice in a non-threatening environment with others who are also learning it for the first time in French, German or Spanish.

If we make comparisons between the core subjects and languages, we can see a potential two-way process, where the foreign language draws from the skills established for the core subject but also gives back to them, reinforcing and extending those same skills. This applies to all children, not only those with specific or special needs and establishes ML as a truly integrated subject. In this chapter we will look in depth at examples from literacy.

ML and the National Curriculum in England

The new 2014 National Curriculum organises the English curriculum under the headings of reading and writing, each with several subsections. There is also a global statement on spoken language at the beginning of the document with 12 bullet points (shown below). For reading and writing there are several statutory requirements for each year from Y1 to Y6. If the approaches to ML teaching echo those to first language or EAL teaching, there is additional credibility to the value of the learning. On this basis we will look at elements of speaking and reading to make analogies between the work that is possible in ML and relates to objectives in English.

Speaking

Pupils should be taught to:

- listen and respond appropriately to adults and their peers
- ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge
- use relevant strategies to build their vocabulary
- articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions
- give well-structured descriptions, explanations and narratives for different purposes, including for expressing feelings
- maintain attention and participate actively in collaborative conversations, staying on topic and initiating and responding to comments
- use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, hypothesising, imagining and exploring ideas
- speak audibly and fluently with an increasing command of standard English
- participate in discussions, presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates

- gain, maintain and monitor the interest of the listener(s)
- consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contributions of others
- select and use appropriate registers for effective communication.

We can see immediately that beginner language learners at the start of KS2 will not be able to use the language at a level approaching how they use English, as a first or additional language, but it is important to establish approaches towards achieving that and aims for the first and subsequent years about progression in language use as well as language knowledge. If the language lessons are sufficiently broadly based and offer enough challenge, they will have encountered simple poems, stories and songs as stimuli. In joining in with more repetitive elements they will not just get words but also meaning, as conveyed via intonation and gesture, together with other visual support. They will also start to gain a sense of cultural context. In an ML class, most children will be at a similar level, so the teacher's encouragement to use richer language is crucial. In a Y1 class of Cantonese speakers in Hong Kong, for example, children who had heard the story from *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (Rosen, 1993) in a morning lesson were seen in the dinner queue later playing a game in which they chorused 'We're not scared!' in just the right tone and context and they clearly loved playing a game with the language they had just had contact with.

If the language lessons include a measure of content, such as science, then sequences will be embedded in the work the children cover. Helping plants grow well as a topic offers the opportunity to create simple checklists, combining visuals and text with either simple lists or sequences of information. Figure 2.4 shows how such language might be stimulated and what the best children might produce, at first in spoken form, then later in writing.

Language learning is expected to involve giving opinions and, if introduced from the beginning of learning, this also makes it more connected to children's lives and more 'real'. One item in the Programme of Study for KS2 is:

- engage in conversations; ask and answer questions; *express opinions and respond to those of others;* seek clarification and help. (DfE, 2013b: 2, emphasis added)

Clearly, then, Y3 children should be able to meet contexts in which they talk about an item of personal interest and give some simple reasons for their preferences. This might involve food and healthy approaches. The key to making this happen is how it is stimulated and scaffolded. For example, a simple organiser to prepare for such conversations might be a matrix with four quadrants, labelled as shown in Figure 2.5. By locating foods onto the matrix children are ready to give simple opinions about healthy eating and the more able will be able to add some simple reasons. When this is put together into a paired comparative dialogue or a mini-presentation, we get material relevant to the third of our speaking objectives listed above.

Pflanzen brauchen , and

Zwei Pflanzen waren...

Eine Pflanze hat bekommen.

Zwei Pflanzen waren...

Eine Pflanze hat bekommen

WPflanzen brauchen: Licht, Wasser und Platz im Topf.
Zwei Pflanzen waren am Fenster. Eine Pflanze hat Wasser bekommen.
Zwei Pflanzen waren im Schrank. Eine Pflanze hat Wasser bekommen.
Nach einer Woche: die grösste Pflanze war am Fenster. Diese Pflanze hat Wasser bekommen.

Figure 2.4   Helping plants grow well

The use of more precise vocabulary is also simple to draw together. Language schemes of work often involve colours in the early stages, but at Y3 level children are already more sophisticated about their colour appreciation to settle only for the major primary or secondary colours with no qualifiers. It is not complex to introduce words for light-, dark- and even shiny, fluorescent and so more closely reach the expressions children want to use.

Grammar

Perhaps it will be felt that the speaking objectives will be a very easily accessible set for such comparisons. Grammatical strands are no more complicated, as the fact that children are focusing on such issues in English makes it very easy to

J'aime ça et c'est bon pour la santé!	J'aime ça, mais ce n'est pas bon pour la santé!
C'est bon pour la santé, mais je n'aime pas ça!	Ce n'est pas bon pour la santé et je n'aime pas ça!

parce que c'est …..(amer/acide/sans goût/trop sucré etc)

Figure 2.5   Conversation matrix for food and healthy approaches

focus on them also in a foreign language. They will naturally seek patterns and comment on what they find. This comparative approach gives extra support to both languages. We can, however, look for a more complex set to see if the case for a parallel focus between literacy and ML can really be substantiated.

Understanding and interpreting texts

Among the 2014 National Curriculum Y3/4 programme of study objectives we find:

Pupils should be taught to:

- develop positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:
  - o reading books that are structured in different ways and reading for a range of purposes
  - o using dictionaries to check the meanings of words that they have read
  - o preparing poems and play scripts to read aloud and to perform, showing understanding through intonation, tone, volume and action
- understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by:
  - o asking questions to improve their understanding of a text
  - o drawing inferences, such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence
  - o identifying main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph and summarising these
  - o identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning
- retrieve and record information from non-fiction.

As we will show later in the book, it is vital that children are exposed to text at a level commensurate with their experience in English from the very beginnings of their learning. Again, we should remember that an enormous amount of importance attached to text is signalled to them every day in literacy lessons. Therefore, it is illogical not to make parallels with French, German, Spanish or another language. So often the 'diet' we give learners is simply accessed by them as individuals at an appropriate level for their current development. Children in Foundation Stage who are really interested in letter patterns as a result of their phonics work and who pick out letters and sounds while listening to stories from a big book that they see in front of them, will naturally do the same in the foreign language. If they have not yet reached that stage in their work in English, they will not do this. By Y3, rhyming patterns in a poem, significant stages in a story or key words in the description of a town or village will be visible and 'notetaking' (probably orally and collaboratively) is more than possible. Again, from the beginnings of learning in F1 or F2, children listen avidly to stories in a foreign language, look closely at pictures, 'hear' intonation and emotion portrayed in the course of reading and so identify and empathise with characters or situations. At first, it may be preferable to talk in English about a story that they have heard in a foreign language, making the most of the foreign language experience of listening. As with the grammatical objectives, learners focusing on text organisation in English will be able to make similar comments about foreign language informational texts and use that structural understanding to help them identify and infer the meanings of words.

Perhaps these objectives are best considered from the point of view of a single theme – an example might be endangered species. The webpage www.linternaute.com/nature-animaux/animaux/dossier/especes-menacees/top-10 gives access to short dossiers that a teacher could use to produce visuals and simple facts for a theme of *Sauvez ... !* For example, from the card about giant pandas, the 'start text' is:

Panda géant: où vit-il?

Dans les forêts humides et froides qui couvrent les versants des montagnes

du Tibet et du sud-ouest de la Chine, dans les montagnes situées au

Sichuan, au Gansu et au Shaanxi, à plus de 2000 mètres d'altitude.

The teacher can elicit the real key words by asking the class collaboratively to supply possible endings to the sentence, *'Le panda géant habite ...'*. They might offer:

Les forêts; les montagnes; Tibet / Chine; 2000 m

Les forêts sont humides et froides

This can lead to poster work – *Sauvez les pandas géants* – where design is informed by the preceding language work and some Y4 shaping text objectives about persuasiveness are anticipated. Using story books linked to the theme allows it to be located in the child's wider work – even if these books are for younger children, such as Eric Carle's *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What do you see?*, told in the target language. At a very simple level, teachers could show, by means of simple poetry, for example, how the language can *sound* different with different intentions. Ideally, this could involve poems on the endangered animals theme written by children who are native speakers.

The two examples given of ML work associated with National Curriculum English objectives are not contrived to make a link that does not really exist. They demonstrate that a modern language *functions as language*, just as English does. We also need to see the *role* of the language in our teaching, as well as the language, as a teaching end in itself and we need to encourage our children to communicate in and play with the language as well as 'learn' it.

〰 **Reflection point**

The previous Literacy Framework in the Primary National Strategy, which was replaced by the 2014 National Curriculum in England, had separate objectives for listening and responding. The strand objectives for Y1 and Y2 were as follows.

Y1

- Listen with sustained concentration, building new stores of words in different contexts.
- Listen to and follow instructions accurately, asking for help and clarification if necessary.
- Listen to tapes or video and express views about how a story or information has been presented.

Y2

- Listen to others in class, ask relevant questions and follow instructions.
- Listen to talk by an adult, remember some specific points and identify what they have learned.
- Respond to presentations by describing characters, repeating some highlights and commenting constructively.

Which of these could you imagine being used as ML objectives for a Y3 class by the end of the year? Make a few notes about how you might approach one of them.

What differences are there between 'language lessons' and the experience of a child coming into a school with EAL?

To complete the final point from the previous section – that language should be used to serve our teaching and not be an end in itself – we can make a further analogy with EAL. This is the term used to describe the context of a learner who does not have English as a first language. We will explore the research base to content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and EAL in Chapter 9, but it is important to note at this stage that teachers working with children with EAL operate a sophisticated model of scaffolding and differentiation within what is for the children with EAL an immersion framework. Being surrounded by the language and set carefully planned, purposeful tasks with clear outcomes should ensure a positive learning context for all to gain from it what they can.

These skills are very close to what is needed by language teachers and language learning should be as broad as this. The answer to the question is therefore that the differences should be of context, not so much of experience. The contextual advantage for teachers of a foreign language is that most members of the class will probably know a similar amount of the language as each other, whereas the parallel advantage for teachers of EAL is that they have native or near-native command of English. Clearly the competent ML teacher who also has experience of EAL has the best of all possible starting points!

Chapter summary

What can language learning offer primary-age children and what can it offer a primary school? We hope this chapter has demonstrated that learning a language can play a very full role in a primary school and the experiences of its children.

As ML enters the compulsory primary curriculum, it is difficult to see it as just another foundation subject. It needs to be timetabled regularly and this is not a status offered to most other foundation subjects, except physical education (PE) and perhaps personal, social and health education (PSHE). The embedding across the day and week, in registration, classroom organisation and management, routines and, perhaps, music in assemblies, means that it *could* almost stop having an overt focus being put on it. Certainly, some schools, feeling the intensity of time pressures, will look to account for a major part of ML provision by embedding it in other subjects in this way, with only a smaller official amount of time being allocated to it. This will not serve anyone's purposes in the longer term, however.

It may sound greedy on our part, but such embedding should not be seen as a part of the provision, but, rather, a way to prove that ML is a legitimate means of communication for real purposes. The way to 'save time' in the longer run is to give more but ask for more back. ML can contribute to the whole curriculum by taking some of that content in every single subject (including English!) and presenting it to children and asking them to work on it in the target language. First, however it has to be established as an aspect of school life that has real status and real support from all staff, no matter what their capability. In return, the school and the school population should see an increase in confidence, self-esteem and an opening out towards the new horizons that greater cultural exposure can provide. School linking, backed by two-way language use, is so much more satisfying than the realisation that both sides just have to use English and we cannot quite deliver what the other school seems able to do.

The chapter has tried to provide very practical strategies to offer a full range of experiences to children in schools. These have not been specific to age, ability or experience, but organised to demonstrate the importance of elements such as the seven Cs. The next set of chapters will look in more detail at specific ages or specific stages of development of the language curriculum and of children's competence in a school.

Key reading

To see alternative views of how the curriculum can be visualised, look at both The Cambridge Primary Review conclusions (Alexander, 2009) and the 'A big picture of the curriculum' visual at: www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Junior_Cycle/Junior_cycle_developments/Documentation/English_curriculum_framework.pdf

For an interesting view on foreign language materials, culture and tasks (written with secondary learners in mind), see D. Allford (2000) 'Pictorial images, lexical phrases and culture', *Language Learning Journal*, 22 (1): 45–51.

To see practical examples from an EAL context, visit: www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Initial%20Teacher%20Education/Documents/KS1-2-The%20Multilingual%20Classroom.pdf. Follow the link to the teachers' media video. This shows how teachers can be sensitive to the language needs of learners without sacrificing challenge and cognition.