

Preface

Creative Intercultural Collaboration in the UK Modern Foreign Languages Classroom: The quest for social justice

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This issue features a series of articles which outline approaches to teaching and learning Languages foregrounding collaboration, and in which creativity is fostered and culture is drawn upon. It is worth noting that the innovative practices explored have been developed under challenging circumstances, in diverse contexts in London, UK and against the odds. The publication of the Teaching Schools Council's Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review in England (Bauckham, 2016); the Ofsted Curriculum Research Review for Languages in England (Ofsted, 2021) and ensuing consultation and proposed changes to the GCSE syllabus and examination by the Department for Education (2022) have led to a linguistic-led shift towards language learning being structured around 'three pillars' of vocabulary, grammar and phonics. Language educators (Zhu et al, 2022; Porter et al, 2022; Woore et al, 2022) in the UK have been responding, commenting for example on the potential value of including culture as a fourth pillar and the role different forms of creativity play in facilitating effective, motivating and communicative languages teaching and learning. The articles in this issue are written by a cohort of recently qualified languages teachers who inform this ongoing conversation and landscape of Languages teaching and learning. They provide insights into the impact of collaboration including that of the pupils for deploying creativity and culture to teach and learn languages, particularly in the diverse linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic contexts in which the work in these articles was carried out.

The articles offer ways forward which acknowledge, address and could transcend an otherwise potentially restrictive focus on phonics, vocabulary and grammar. After all, motivation for languages study is organically affected by factors beyond these three pillars including: opportunities to explore culture, opportunities for learners to draw on their own cultural and

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linguistic contexts and the extent to which students are given the opportunity to feel successful and are encouraged to have high expectations of themselves, in a way that is relevant to them.

The language of literacy: Developing student independence and confidence in the MFL classroom through a collaborative approach to literacy by Amy Cragg examines the potential of collaboration as a means of finding and implementing strategies that ensure improvements in students' self-reported independence and confidence in literacy, whether in reading or writing, in their languages study, within the MFL classroom. Drawing on evidence from collaborative discussions with colleagues and wider literature, the study shows that a scaffolded approach to reading has a tangible positive impact on student motivation and engagement. A mixed method of data collection is adopted to demonstrate students' affective and effective outcomes both before and after the intervention. The research shows a positive correlation between both types of outcomes and the implementation of a scaffolded reading strategy, evident in student appropriation of the strategy and student outcomes in reading exercises. Cragg writes convincingly about the value of real collaboration in which the personal contributions of all are recognised as valid (McAllister, 2023) for not only reflecting on one's own practice but also for creating the conditions for further action research.

In ***Engaging with others to identify areas of learning***, Nicholas Mark Page evaluates how a community of practice of twelve collaborating Modern Foreign Languages teachers can improve students' literacy levels in the target language and develop learner autonomy. The group of practitioners identified reading as a neglected skill as students and teachers alike considered it to be easier than listening, speaking and writing. The community of practice agreed that taking a phonics approach in reading promotes fluency, which enabled the author to create a multipurpose intervention which combined reading aloud with reading comprehension over a series of lessons. The twelve collaborating practitioners agreed that the impact of this intervention would be measured by analysing the results of a student questionnaire and by collecting samples of learners' work. By reading aloud relatable, authentic texts, students enjoyed reading, confidently interpreted longer texts and improved their pronunciation.

According to Page, the formation of a community of practice in which collaboration occurred led to the enhancement of a phonics approach. He sets out the necessary conditions to ensure that a focus on reading authentic texts aloud can enable learners to make connections between their own experiences and the target language culture. He demonstrates that in this way learners not only develop confidence but also develop empathy; a key benefit of learning other languages and about other cultures (Byram, 1997), which of course are inextricably linked (Agar 1994, Risager, 2015, Shaules 2016).

In her article ***Improving writing skills with Year 10 French students*** Juliette O' Connor provides a sequenced approach for improving writing in a collaborative interactive environment

in which students develop their own autonomy through peer and teacher feedback. She reflects on her experiences in a school in South London and the different approaches taken to improve writing skills in French lessons. By drawing on, and critiquing, current MFL research and practice, the author aims to highlight some of the potential barriers to learning, such as challenging socio-economic circumstances, as well as emphasising the ways in which teachers may mitigate against these. By focusing specifically on writing in French year 10 lessons, the author breaks down the process of writing and helps both students and readers to improve their metacognition around key parts of the GCSE (2014) questions. The findings show that structured feedback and consistent praise can have a strong impact on attainment, helping to direct students' efforts and increase their confidence. It appears clear from her findings that considering approaches which include creative inclusion of aspects of culture, which move beyond the restrictions of the GCSE examination and the three pillars, can have a direct impact on outcomes for students.

Amy Flynn foregrounds the role of creativity in collaboration and emphasizes the importance of understanding community voices. Significantly, she strongly advocates for a recognition of learners' funds of knowledge and the breadth of their cultural and linguistic repertoires in the collaborative process. She assuredly conveys the impact of such an approach on learners. ***In Promoting self-esteem, motivation and creativity through collaborative, pluri-lingual story translations*** she discusses how a collaborative and creative approach to Foreign Language Teaching can improve self-esteem, motivation and academic attainment in a multi-cultural school community in East London. The research intervention drew inspiration from the learning context, as well as the Storyline method and experience of collaborative translation. It was designed in response to low self-esteem and motivation among Y7 (11 year olds) language learners and the school community following COVID-19 lockdowns, and was planned, delivered and analysed over a period of two-and-a-half months. Research findings indicate that the co-creation of new semi-structured social contexts for language learning, reflection and creativity motivates learners, “community collaborators” and teachers. By providing the necessary resource and feedback, participants collaboratively developed original multi-lingual story translations. This approach not only promoted the linguistic creativity of prior higher-attaining students, but also improved the translation skills of middle and lower attainers. Furthermore, it fostered a collaborative and dialogic culture, enhancing the self-esteem necessary for all learners.

In the final article ***Raising learner motivation through a cultural pen-pal scheme: a collaborative study***, Dikshali Shah explores how a pen pal scheme can be an effective means of integrating and developing understanding about the target language culture. The intervention explored by Shah is underpinned by the premise of inclusivity, which is shown to enhance the learners' development of cultural awareness and curiosity. The article sets out how collaboration amongst colleagues at partnering schools was established to agree a shared goal and implement culture into lessons across schools. This study aims to raise motivation levels for language

learning by giving KS4 students (15-16 year olds) the opportunity to interact with the second language community through a pen-pal scheme. Dörnyei's (2001), language-related integrative values were applied to develop activities that can develop cultural awareness. Byram's (1997) *savoirs* informed assessing cultural understanding, reflecting on one's own culture, analysing cultural phenomena and carrying out comparisons. Evidence of these criteria were identified in two sets of email exchanges that KS4 students sent to their pen pal. To measure the impact of the intervention, pupil work was compared from the first and second email exchange to detect development in cultural understanding. Pre and post intervention questionnaires were employed before and after the two email exchanges, to gauge levels of motivation at School A and their interest in learning about target language culture and their attitudes towards direct contact with the target language community.

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