

## **Working Together for Inclusion**

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At the Scottish CILT Aberdeenshire Outreach conference in March 2005 and again at a local Aberdeenshire INSET day in May 2005, Hilary McColl gave a talk on Inclusive Approaches in Modern Languages. She is a Project Consultant for Working Together for Inclusion (WTI). This is an in-school project, which aims to improve access to the Modern Languages curriculum through professional collaboration.

At Kemnay Academy, we are still in the enviable position of having every pupil in the school study at least one modern language until the end of S4, and by offering Italian as a 'fresh start' to the most disaffected from S3 we ensure, as far as possible, that courses are matched to pupils' needs, and motivation levels are as high as possible. That's the theory, at least.

Unfortunately, for S3 in 2004-5, because of the relative numbers involved, Italian had only been offered to pupils of German. It was felt that, as there were only (!) nineteen pupils in the lower French class that their motivation levels would automatically benefit from increased teacher-attention.

However, there was resentment in this group about being 'stuck' doing French, mixed up with anger-management issues, extreme attention-seeking behaviour, high levels of self-consciousness (so getting them to speak any French was very difficult) and very low levels of self-esteem, exacerbated in almost every case by a complex and ingrained series of avoidance strategies. In other words, hardly any member of the class had learned or had the slightest intention of learning anything.

The very worst examples of difficult behaviour occurred when the pupils were asked to do Reading tasks, particularly where these involved examination conditions and using a dictionary. It was when one pupil graphically illustrated his frustration with the dictionary by chucking it in the bin and storming out, that I finally realised we all needed help, and set up a meeting with the Support for Learning Department. The Support for Learning (SfL) teacher and I worked out a set of aims and a plan of action that were so similar to those of the Working Together for Inclusion (WTI) Project that it made sense for us to formalise our plans for these pupils and to join the WTI Project.

Our aims were to:

1. Improve access to Modern Language study for pupils who were causing concern because of learning difficulties or because of lack of motivation.
2. Gain a better understanding of the factors that hinder learning in Modern Languages and to develop approaches which made it seem easier and more enjoyable.

We agreed that MLs and SfL teachers were to work as a team, focusing on this particular group of pupils. Specifically we would:

1. share perspectives on what causes barriers to learning and makes learning difficult;
2. share ideas about how to reduce the barriers and how to engage pupils in their own learning;

3. collaborate in implementing those ideas with the target group;
4. systematically plan, record and evaluate the developments;
5. disseminate good practice within the department, the school and beyond.

## **PHASE 1**

SfL staff observed the class at work in French, looking specifically at barriers to learning. They then pooled their observations with those of MLs staff. This was a very enlightening discussion, as SfL staff brought to the discussion perspectives of the same pupils operating in other subjects. As a result of this, we agreed the project framework, outlined the characteristics of pupils and set out a list of possible strategies to focus on (see Appendix 1). A reading programme was developed by ML staff, using a commercially produced set of reading cards, to target Standard Grade pupils with low self-esteem. Our long-term goal was increased autonomy for pupils and confidence with reading at SQA General Level.

Our involvement with the WTI Programme meant that time could be set aside for discussion and agreement, and that we were engaging in discussion and evaluation of the project on an on-going basis.

## **PHASE 2**

It soon became apparent that the barriers to learning were greater in some pupils than in others. The twelve pupils who had most benefitted from Phase 1 of the project were now identified and strategies were worked out to help these pupils improve their reading skills.

Features of Phase 2 were:

- Pupils now worked mainly in pairs (of pupils with similar barriers) with SfL staff
- Work concentrated more on the use of the dictionary and partly on SQA past papers
- The aim was increased pupil self-confidence and autonomy in exam situations.
- Staff pooled dictionary resources, including programmes for increasing efficiency in use of English dictionaries, and programmes in other languages.

Before the S4 prelims: sessions were spent demystifying a General Reading paper with pupils. There were early indications of partial success of the reading programme. Whilst previous pass rates for the class at General Level had been at 63-65% the prelim pass rates for the class at General Level was now 82% (*In fairness, however, it should be stated that the majority of identified pupils were just scraping a pass at this stage.*)

By the end of Phase 2 we already noticed a decrease in attention-seeking behaviour in general in the class, slightly increased self-confidence, a decrease in the tendency to 'give up', and a decrease in frustration in the prelim reading examination.

### **PHASE 3**

By Phase 3 of the project, SfL staff felt they had established relationships of sufficient trust with the pupils to discuss with them individually their strengths and needs. Individualised strategy maps were then worked out. Pupils were active decision-makers in the process, so they had ownership of their own strategies. Pupils identified three personal strategies which they felt would have a positive effect on their grade. Their strategies were put onto card, in some cases 'personalised' with colours, stickers etc, and also laminated. The pupils then sat another prelim General paper (four of the targetted pupils were by this point also entered for Credit). They were allowed to have their 'strategy card' on the table throughout the examination. This time, all but one pupil passed comfortably, and all pupils spent longer in the examination working out the answers. Pupils then shared their strategies with one another. It was a genuine revelation for many to realise that the process had really been individualised, and that their strategies really were their own. Conversely, some were surprised that things they could do easily had formed targets for others.

ML and SfL staff recognised development in several areas as a result of this project, and were able to increase pupil self-esteem still further by getting the pupils to identify and celebrate ways in which they had improved as individuals and as a group. They were now much more able to:

- take more responsibility for themselves as learners;
- perceive the dictionary as a useful tool;
- tackle General (and in some cases Credit) reading tasks without panicking because they had strategies;
- get on and leave gaps to come back to, because they had strategies;
- recognise that they may have to involve guesswork in their range of strategies;
- spend a reasonable amount of time checking guesses in the dictionary before writing answers in.

From the staff perspective, we identified the following developments:

- greater appreciation of the potential benefits to pupils as a result of formally agreed and structured collaboration between ML and SfL staff;
- greater appreciation of how the strengths/skills of ML and SfL staff combine to give more depth to observation/analysis of learning;
- more productive collaboration resulting from the tight focus of the project;
- a valuable list of general difficulties encountered by pupils in their reading.

### **Results**

- All nineteen pupils in this lower-band French Standard Grade class achieved an overall Grade 4 or above (eight Grade 3s, five Grade 2s and one Grade 1)
- In the reading examination itself, only three pupils gained Foundation Grades, and there were 13 General Grades and 3 Credits.

- More important than the grades, however, was the increase in pupil self-esteem and self-belief, which meant that these pupils could aim for, and achieve, a much higher level in the Speaking and Writing, and could approach the Listening and Reading calmly and confidently.
- Several of these pupils have come back to the Department, some of them returning to school specially to do so, to tell us how surprised and delighted they were that their French grade was equal to, or in some cases better than, their other grades.

### **Next steps**

The success of this project had three interdependent support factors:

- Firstly, the opportunity for pupils to get individual, and later paired, attention, away from the main group, from a teacher who was focussed on pupils' needs.
- Secondly, the involvement of Senior Management, who facilitated meetings and discussions, and gave us the time properly to evaluate the project as it developed.
- Thirdly our involvement with the WTI Project, which meant we could discuss each phase of the project with our colleagues from the other secondary school in the project, and with the Project Consultants, Hilary McColl and Catriona Oates (Scottish CILT), and that we had to formally record the results and evaluation of each phase. We got valuable feedback on our own project, found out about developments in the other project, and were able to plan, or at least to discuss, next steps as a group.

As a result of the successes achieved we have decided on a number of strategies:

- Greater collaboration with Primary schools to try to embed confidence with use of foreign language dictionaries from the earliest stage;
- Gradual introduction of dictionary skills from S1;
- We would like to roll out the programme next year to S4 lower band classes in all languages: with staff from the Support for Learning Department where possible, but trying to find ways of incorporating confident use of dictionary into departmental aims for all Standard Grade classes.

### **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Standard Grade Reading: Barriers and Strategies

Appendix 2: Examples of pupil strategy-cards

## Appendix 1

### Standard Grade Reading: Barriers and Strategies

Barrier	Strategies
<b>Poor alphabetizing skills</b>	
Pupil has to start alphabet from the beginning to find letters/sequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of alphabet cards</li> <li>• Speed-building with letter-sequence recognition</li> <li>• Timed/team activities</li> </ul>
Pupil has problems with sequencing mid-alphabet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forwards and backwards sequencing exercises</li> <li>• Timed/team activities</li> </ul>
Pupil has problems when words all start with the same group of letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cover letters in common</li> <li>• Practise alphabetization of words starting with the same letters</li> <li>• Timed activities to locate words in the dictionary using headwords (identification of page number)</li> <li>• Cards with words on for pupils to move physically into correct alphabetical order</li> </ul>
<b>Non-recognition of declined/conjugated words</b>	
Pupil gives up on a word because it 'isn't in the dictionary'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercises to encourage 'best guesses' based on what <i>is</i> in the dictionary</li> </ul>
Pupil reads first definition of nearest word and tries to make an answer out of it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple-choice exercises to help pupils make the right or 'best' choice</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of self-esteem</b>	
Pupil won't use the dictionary, having 'failed before'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dictionary quizzes/puzzles/timed activities to re-motivate</li> </ul>
Pupil won't go back and 'check guesses'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make 'deals' with pupils that they won't actually 'guess' until they have looked up at least three words</li> </ul>
<b>Not using headwords in the dictionary</b>	
Pupil locates right letter then reads every word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Game: random opening of dictionary closest to correct page</li> <li>• Strategies to find the right page quickly, including using headwords, locating first letter in the alphabet before opening the dictionary (e.g. in the first third / about halfway etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Reluctance to use the English side of the dictionary</b>	
Pupils think this is 'cheating' or they get unsettled by using both sides of the dictionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guided approach to answering General Reading questions</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2

### Examples of Pupil Strategy-Cards

<p><b>Kayleigh's Reading Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look up 3 words, then guess!</li> <li>• A guess is better than a gap</li> <li>• Find/tick the right number of things</li> </ul>	<p><b>Robbie's Reading Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the word isn't in, don't panic!</li> <li>• Know what sort of word you are looking up</li> <li>• Guess sensibly!</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ryan's Reading Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divide up the time and move on!</li> <li>• Do the ticky boxes first</li> <li>• Look up 3 words, then guess</li> </ul>	<p><b>Carole's Reading Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the word isn't in, try the closest!</li> <li>• Guess in your head first</li> <li>• Read the question before answering</li> </ul>
<p><b>Danielle's Reading Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divide up the time and move on!</li> <li>• Try all the questions</li> <li>• A guess is better than a gap</li> </ul>	<p><b>Billy's Reading Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divide up the time and use it!</li> <li>• Look up 5 words before a guess</li> <li>• Remember: the answers are all in the dictionary!</li> </ul>

**Notes:**

*[Pupils' names have been changed to protect pupil identities]*

All six pupils represented here had very low self-esteem, evident from their inability to hazard a guess, even for box-ticking activities. Some would only tick things they were sure of. Others would guess randomly, not even stopping to apply vocabulary and other knowledge they had already, never mind trying to see if they could get the answer by using the dictionary.

Time-management was a problem, either because pupils rushed through the paper and then would not go back and check their guesses, or because pupils got stuck and would not move on without an answer they were reasonably confident about.

One pupil found the structure of the true/false and tick-box questions easier to manage than the more open-ended questions at General level, and a good strategy for him was to attempt these questions first.

Another pupil found not being able to seek verbal confirmation of her choices before committing herself on paper very hard. Examinations were particularly difficult for this pupil.