

Authority: Aberdeenshire

Case Study Focus: Developing intercultural awareness and communicative competence with low performing pupils

Establishments: Learners' stage/s: S1

Practitioner/Staff role: German Foreign Language Assistant, in consultation with staff in Modern Languages department

This Case Study illustrates how a class of low performing pupils were motivated to learn the German language through a project focusing on cultural aspects of Germany. The German Foreign Language assistant was given responsibility for the project which lasted throughout the year and in which pupils combined language learning with discovery of the way of life in another country.

Within this project, the following aspects of CfE were explored:

This case study exemplifies how all three of the Introductory Statements from the CfE Modern Languages Framework can be integrated through using personalised cultural activities as the context for developing competence in the foreign language and an enhanced understanding of the similarities and differences between the English and German languages.

'I gain a deeper understanding of my first language and appreciate the richness and interconnected nature of languages.'

'I develop skills that I can use and enjoy in work and leisure throughout my life.'

'I enhance my understanding and enjoyment of other cultures and of my own and gain insights into other ways of thinking and other views of the world.'

By engaging the pupils in a wide range of collaborative activities and by relating aspects of family life in Germany to the pupils' own experiences, the project develops the four capacities that underpin CfE in the following ways:

Successful Learners with enthusiasm and motivation for learning and able to learn independently and as part of a group, through comparing their own experiences with those of the German FLA as a 'real and relevant context' for their learning.

Confident Individuals with self-respect and able to relate to others and manage themselves, through demonstrating understanding of different contexts for using German and the social, cultural and linguistic competences appropriate to each context.

Responsible Citizens with respect for others and able to understand different beliefs and cultures.

Effective Contributors with an enterprising attitude and able to work in partnerships and in teams, through working collaboratively to share their own life experiences.

Background

About the educational establishment and the learners: Fraserburgh Academy is a comprehensive non-denominational school in the north-east of Scotland in Aberdeenshire. Pupils are streamed in years 1-3 into three broad bands. The project was undertaken with a class in the lowest band.

Project aims

The main objectives of this project:

It was envisaged that the pupils would:

- gain greater understanding of different German traditions and festivals and of how these relate to their own experiences.
- show increased motivation to learn the foreign language in order to communicate in relevant situations through an increased interest in the life of the country.
- produce their own artefacts and craft work related to cultural aspects of life in Germany.
- demonstrate responsibility for their learning through maintaining a 'portfolio' of all their learning experiences, including a record of the language learned and examples of products created.

Learning experiences:

It was envisaged that through this project learners would experience:

- increased enjoyment and confidence in using the foreign language to communicate meaningfully with a native speaker and with each other.
- greater awareness of aspects of another culture and how that relates to Scotland.
- enjoyment through participating in activities which involved other subject areas, such as expressive arts, geography and history.

Process

Preparation and Planning

The Principal Teacher, when discussing how the FLA should be deployed at the beginning of the school year, suggested that she work closely with a small class of low achieving pupils in order to give them greater cultural understanding while also developing their language skills. In line with the Modern Languages Framework in CfE, the department was thereby seeking to give enhanced prominence to cultural awareness as a context for developing language learning skills.

The Role of the Foreign Language Assistant

It was agreed that the Foreign Language Assistant would work with the class for at least one hour a week throughout the year and she was given responsibility to devise a programme for the class which would enhance the pupils' awareness of aspects of German culture. The FLA prepared a number of power points and posters for the pupils which she related to particular festivals which took place on specific dates throughout the year. She also conducted personal research into aspects of life in different parts of Germany and produced materials and activities for the pupils based on these cultural aspects but which also developed the pupils' language skills and knowledge of the necessary German language.

The German FLA worked closely with the class teacher who provided details of the S1 language syllabus so that this could be incorporated as appropriate into the cultural activities planned by the FLA. In line with CfE and with AifL approaches, the pupils were encouraged to identify the language necessary to communicate in each situation and were actively involved in relevant and realistic activities. The pupils were also required to assess and record in their personal portfolio what they had learned and produced for each cultural aspect they had studied.

Activities:

- The pupils were invited to compare lifestyles in Germany with their own, through discussion of the power point presentations which the FLA produced.
- The FLA brought in photos of her family, friends and home area which stimulated a great deal of interest on the part of the pupils. They, in turn, brought photos of their own families, friends and homes into the class and

described them in German.

- At Christmas, the pupils wrote letters to 'Sankt Nikolaus' to an address in Germany which were answered in German, providing a great motivational boost. To see the power point presentation click on the Weihnachten in Deutschlandff Fraserburgh link on the main web page.



- Pupils maintained a 'portfolio' in which they recorded the language they had learned and kept artwork, rubbings of German coins, notes about special events and research they had carried out themselves under the guidance of the FLA.
- Various festivals were re-enacted with the pupils, for example, at the feast of St. Barbara, blossoms were brought into the classroom and at Hallowe'en pupils designed costumes.

Impact

Impact on pupils

As a result of participating in the project, there was a noticeable increase in the pupils' motivation for German. The class teacher observed that the pupils are much more willing to speak the language and that, although they are devoting at least an hour of their three hour allocation for German every week to cultural aspects dealing with lifestyles, festivals and traditions, there has been no loss in attainment in terms of language competence (successful learners, confident individuals).

Pupils now feel more confident about speaking German because the FLA has given the language a context which is seen as 'real' and has made clear what language is necessary for successful communication: 'I like speaking German with a real German and realising that she understands me'. Pupils are now more eager and more confident to go to Germany, owing to their increased knowledge of the country and its traditions: 'I'm trying to persuade my mum and dad to take me. Some of Germany looks beautiful' (confident individuals, responsible citizens)

Impact on staff

Members of staff within the modern languages department have noticed a marked increase in motivation in the pupils involved in the project and are convinced that the original idea of using cultural awareness as the main context for learning is a sound one. The department has benefited from the resources that the FLA has produced about different cultural aspects of life in Germany and which she has shared with them. Members of staff throughout the school are also more aware of cultural aspects of Germany, as the FLA has presented some of the power points she produced, for example, on Christmas in Germany, to whole school assemblies.

Impact on Parents and Community

Feedback from the parents has been very positive. They have expressed themselves very satisfied with the project and feel the pupils have benefitted from the personalised nature of the contexts provided by the Foreign Language Assistant.

Next Steps

It is planned to continue the project with the class into S2 and possibly S3.

The PT would like to extend the focus on cultural awareness as the context for learning to all languages and at all stages and it is planned to develop French cultural input along the lines of the German one which has proved so successful. In particular she is eager to see the project extended to the primary schools in the cluster to ensure that pupils from an early age are made aware of cultural traditions and festivals in other countries and can discuss differences and similarities with their own.

The Modern Languages department is very grateful that the German FLA has invested such a great deal of time and effort researching different traditions and has demonstrated a great deal of creativity in producing a motivating programme for low achieving learners which combines language learning and cultural input. She has also provided a model for further similar programmes in other languages which the school intends to implement. “She has responded really very well to being given the freedom and responsibility to take this project forward. It highlights so clearly the benefits of having a native speaker who has such in-depth knowledge of the culture and who can respond with such confidence to the flood of questions that our pupils always want to ask.” (BCT)