

**Authority:** City of Edinburgh

**Case Study Focus:** Developing Intercultural Awareness through a programme of lessons on China

**Establishments:** Learners' stage/s: S1-3

**Practitioner/Staff role:** Chinese Foreign Language Assistant

This Case Study illustrates how all the pupils in years 1-3 in an Edinburgh secondary school follow a programme which explores differences and similarities between Chinese culture and their own. Throughout the year every class in years 1-3 is timetabled for one period a week in a four week block to work with the Chinese Foreign Language Assistant who has devised a linguistic and cultural programme which involves pupils actively in learning about China, its education system, festivals and philosophy. Pupils study aspects of the language and learn how to speak basic phrases in Mandarin. They also learn how to use chopsticks, do paper cutting and calligraphy and learn songs within a structure that ensures that they also understand the cultural implications of each event. The Foreign Language Assistant also supported a group of pupils from the school who took part in the annual national Mandarin speaking competition and who won the regional final (Scotland and Northern England) and progressed to the final in London.

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

This case study exemplifies how the following Introductory Statements from the CfE Modern Languages Framework can be achieved:

**'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.'**

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

Through the work that the FLA has done with the pupils, the four capacities are developed in the following ways:

**Successful learners** with openness to new thinking and ideas and with enthusiasm and motivation for learning about a hitherto unknown culture.

**Confident Individuals** with self-respect and able to develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world, confident that they are able to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner with Chinese native speakers through greater understanding of underlying cultural meanings of actions and the knowledge that they may be able to put this understanding to good use in a future career.

**Responsible Citizens** with respect for others and able to understand different beliefs and cultures through gaining greater understanding of cultural influences.

**Effective Contributors** with an enterprising attitude and able to work in partnership and in teams to produce a successful presentation for the Mandarin Speaking competition and to be aware of the possible relevance to their future life and work of their knowledge and understanding of the Chinese language and culture.

## Background

**About the educational establishment and the learners:** Balerno Community High School is a six year comprehensive secondary school in the South West of Edinburgh. The school has links with a Chinese school and is keen to promote closer ties. In August 2010 a group of pupils from the Chinese school will visit Balerno and there will be a return trip by Balerno pupils to China in October. The Chinese FLA is very energetic and self-motivated and has put together a programme which is described below and which uses the focus of the school links and exchanges to provide additional relevance.

## Project aims

The main objectives of this four week programme:

It was envisaged that the pupils would:

- gain general understanding of the importance and significance of certain Chinese cultural customs and practices.
- learn basic Mandarin greetings, numbers and expressions.
- be able to produce their own paper cutting patterns and lanterns.
- be able to write their own name in Chinese calligraphy and say what it signifies.
- take part in challenges which test their understanding of what they have learned about Chinese culture and language.
- develop collaborative skills with others in the rehearsal and performance of the presentation for the Mandarin speaking competition.

Learning experiences:

It was envisaged that through this programme learners would experience:

- an opportunity to discuss a hitherto unknown culture with a native speaker from that culture.
- an understanding and tolerance of another country's customs and ways of living.
- greater understanding of another culture's festivals and how they are celebrated.
- enjoyment through collaborating as part of a 'team' in the planning and production of an event for others to enjoy.
- the enjoyment of learning to communicate in another language which is not commonly taught in the school curriculum.

## Process

### The Role of the Foreign Language Assistant

#### Preparation

The Chinese Foreign Language Assistant was able to access support from the Confucius hub in Edinburgh. However, in order to make materials and resources which would be of particular relevance and interest to her pupils, she did a great deal of personal research into various Chinese festivals and adapted sources from a variety of Chinese media which she incorporated into power points. She adapted and rewrote some of the Chinese songs which she then taught phonetically for the pupils. She also designed templates for the paper cutting activity and, in keeping with the aims of CfE and critical skills thinking, she devised challenges to help learners revisit previous learning and to demonstrate what had been learned successfully.

#### Planning

The lessons were planned as follows:

Week 1: General information about China, introducing the panda and the dragon. Pupils learn how to say hello and the accompanying appropriate actions. They also learn about the Chinese classroom and the customs therein, for example, the respect shown to the teacher by pupils standing up when s/he enters.

Week 2: Pupils learn about Chinese food, the importance of the balance of yin and yang and the underlying meaning behind each dish.

Week 3: Pupils start learning about Chinese festivals and about paper cutting. They also learn about the Chinese zodiac.

[the third lesson The Twelve Animals of the Chinese Zodiac.ppt](#)



Week 4: Pupils learn more about Chinese festivals and calligraphy.

Activities:

- Pupils were shown a power point with questions about China in the form of a challenge to find out how much they knew already about China. The FLA then explained the answers and discussed with the pupils general questions about China. [My first lesson 9-15.ppt](#)



- The pupils learned how to greet the FLA and each other appropriately in Mandarin including appropriate hand gestures.
- General information about the Chinese classroom was given and discussed as well as the 'one child' situation.
- Within the context of food and drink, pupils underwent a 'chopstick challenge' which involved picking up a number of items with chopsticks. Pupils were also alerted to what is considered bad table manners in

## China



- Within the context of festivals, pupils were able to make their own Chinese lantern (see photos) and make paper cutting patterns.



- Also within the context of festivals the pupils were shown how to write their name in Chinese characters and then produce their own name using Chinese calligraphy



- On the week of the Chinese New Year, the FLA prepared a power point with information and the New Year song, which she had also taught the pupils, which was run on a loop on the interactive notice board in the school foyer.
- All these activities were supported by power point presentations which the FLA used as a stimulus for discussion with the pupils.
- The FLA also teaches an Access 3 Mandarin class after school to interested pupils.

## Impact

### Impact on pupils

- The pupils showed great interest in Chinese culture and were able to question the FLA at length about a variety of topics. Pupils' evaluations were extremely positive.

- Pupils are able to use basic Mandarin expressions to meet and greet others, to order food and to count.
- All pupils are now more interculturally aware regarding another country's customs and celebrations (responsible citizens).
- The pupils who took part in the Mandarin speaking competition are now more confident as a result of performing in front of other schools and were boosted by their success in the regional heat (confident individuals).
- The pupils who took part in the Mandarin speaking competition learned how to operate collaboratively as part of a performance team (responsible citizens, successful learners, effective contributors).
- The links with real pupils in China was a motivating factor for all pupils and 22 pupils from Balerno will go to China in October 2010. All of these will have been through the FLA's programme, therefore will be able to meet and greet with confidence the host school's teachers and pupils. They will also be expected to report back to the rest of the school. (Responsible citizens, effective contributors).

### Impact on staff

All members of staff have shown great interest in the work of the Chinese FLA, who has spoken to staff on several occasions about Chinese customs and festivals. As a result, all members of staff have a greatly increased knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture and they have also tried to make links to their own subject areas where relevant e.g. Home Economics, Art. Members of staff within the modern languages area have been very supportive of the FLA and have shown great interest in her materials and teaching approaches. They have encouraged the pupils in their learning of Chinese language and culture and have tried to make relevant links to the culture and language of the more commonly taught European languages.

### Impact on Parents and Community

Parents have been very supportive of the initiative to introduce and develop Chinese language and culture. They have been kept informed at all stages and at parents' evenings have expressed themselves very pleased with the Chinese input. The parents and the school community are aware that the success of this project is entirely dependent on the high quality of the Chinese Foreign



Language Assistant, who has shown boundless enthusiasm and initiative in developing the programme.

## **Next Steps**

- **The trip to China in October should provide an additional and very relevant focus for the pupils' learning, even for those pupils not directly involved.**
- **There will be a new Chinese Foreign Language Assistant next year in the school and the plan is to continue with a similar programme, building on the success of this year's. However, as well as developing further knowledge about Chinese culture, it is hoped to allow more time for developing language skills, since because of time restrictions, this part of the programme has necessarily been 'light touch'.**