

# MFL curriculum and methodology

## **1. The unique contribution of Modern Foreign Languages Curriculum**

According to Shirley Lawes (2000), I think that the contributions of the Modern Languages Curriculum are to:

- Increase a cultural awareness: learning a Modern Foreign Language (MFL) can make pupils aware of different cultures, ways of thinking and living. I think it can prevent racism, for example. By culture, I mean History, tradition and arts. MFL can also widen young people's horizons and break down the barriers between people from different countries and cultures.

- Give the opportunity to pupils to become aware of the construction of their own language through another one if MFL is close to English like German, for example.

- Build up their personality and express their creativity. As the Modern Foreign Languages key stage 3 Curriculum (2008) says:

*'Learning languages gives pupils opportunities to develop their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and to express themselves with increasing confidence, independence and creativity.'*

- Have access to other subjects and knowledge thanks to the foreign language: all these skills can help the pupils for their future studies.

In brief, learning a foreign language is a longlife skill and the contribution of the MFL curriculum is unique because, on the contrary to other subjects, it brings all the opportunities above together.

## **2. The advantages and disadvantage of the Modern Foreign Language Curriculum**

In one hand, the existence of the GCSE is a good thing because it involves the 'four skills' (listening and responding; speaking; reading and responding; writing) which the Grammar Translation (GT) didn't do. In another hand, according to Rosamond Mitchell (2003), I think that this division and imposing progression is made without regards for the nature and the progression of language learning. The 'four skills' depend on each other and you can't teach them separately. This question's the view of the National Curriculum of Modern Foreign Languages (NCMFL)'s definition of communication.

The GCSE is an improvement, as well, because it is open to the whole school with different levels of achievement, but the A to C level of the GCSE are hard to achieve. It is explain by the fact that the levels criteria are the same than for other subjects but pupils have a shorter time to work on it: five years rather than twelve.

In addition to that, the GCSE promotes communication but there are contradictions between what the pupils need to know to communicate in the target language (TL) and what they need to know to take this exam.

Moreover, the new NC (2007) has improved because it provides clear standards of achievement for KS3 teaching. It also doesn't impose any content or method to the teachers compared to the original Curriculum.

The problem is that the KS3 language teaching is focused a lot on the Levels of Attainment rather than the question of the language learning progression. These levels are quite superficial and not logical. It is also very constraining and it creates

learners who can't really communicate but only repeat ready made sentences. As Mitchell (2003) says, the NCMFL lacks a methodology which permits pupils to communicate in the TL and which guides the teachers to help them through that process. A new curriculum could be built with strands for grammar, interaction, learning how to learn to replace the 'four skills' model.

Finally, there is also no detail or specificity about the progression in terms of linguistic development in the NC and the 'ladder' metaphor of language development is too simple. The language learning process is more complicated than that.

### **3. The advantages and disadvantage of the modern foreign languages' methodologies**

The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching (CLT) is an improvement compared to the GT and the Audio-Lingual (AL) method because it focuses on the communication skill and its aim is to make pupils able to speak, write and understand (the 'four skills'). On the contrary to AL method, the CLT aim is to teach transferable structure and make pupils communicate with each other. It is less teacher centred approach.

In another hand the National Centre for Languages (CILT) (1985) made a list of ten important points about the communicative approach. Those points point out a few difficulties which still occur nowadays. First, I agree that it is important to teach through the meaning in condition that we don't forget to teach the grammar through categorized language as Kumaravadivelu (1994) advises.

Then, the lessons and objectives should be personalised. 'Communication' means being able to say how you are and what you think even if your language is not perfect. Salter (1989) thinks that the teachers try to teach a Foreign Language (FL) in a more communicative way but they often teach useless things to the pupils, things they won't use in the real life because of the constraints of the GCSE questions. This also affects KS3 because, for what I have seen in my placement A, the teachers plan the language keeping in mind what the pupils would need to know for this final exam.

The question of authenticity is another problem. As Grenfell (2003) says, with the constant rehearsal of chunks of language and repetitions of the routine expressions necessary in the classroom, it is hard to achieve the teaching of authentic language. Moreover, pupils have to learn a very specific language about specific themes for the GCSE.

Another thing I have noticed through my observations and according to Salter (1989) is that pupils work on their speaking skill but they don't work a lot on their writing and comprehension skills. They don't take notes or listen to native speakers' conversations except their teacher. Those are two different problems. Firstly, if pupils don't listen to native speakers' conversations, they would not be able to communicate in the TL in an authentic situation. Secondly, if they don't take notes, it means that they won't be able to write in an authentic document (letter, e-mail) in the TL because they have never written it before. In my observations in my placement A, I have seen that pupils don't even have a book to work on at home. They only have a glossary which they are asked to learn by heart. In this case, I think it is quite difficult to improve because pupils can't work by themselves and language learning is something personal. You need to be able to work and progress at your own pace and for that, you need material.

Kumaravadivelu (1994) also explains that the learning of a MFL '[...] raise[s] *[the]* cultural consciousness; culture is part of the teaching of an L2. It can help

learners to understand the native speakers of the L2, to understand their way of thinking' but the place of culture is almost nonexistent for what I have seen during my observation in placement A.

I agree that, as the authors of *Something to say?*'s (2001) say, this approach resolves the problem of the use of the TL because the teacher only speaks in the TL and pupils speak it too: '*You learn to talk to people by actually talking to them*' (Cook, 2001 quotes by Klapper, 2003). On the other hand pupils don't acquire a lot of knowledge quickly. Pupils learn the language in the classroom thanks to the drilling whereas with the GT method they are exposed to a lot of knowledge that they have to learn by themselves at home, but with GT they won't be able to speak in the TL very quickly.

So, I think that the method describes in *Something to say?* (2001) is adapted to English pupils learning a MFL but could not be extended in every country because the motivation of the learners is not necessarily the same: some don't need to speak a FL but others do.

Finally, the method described in *Something to say?* (2001) emphasizes a lot on 'learning by doing' but as Klapper (2003) explains, the doing shouldn't replace the knowing. It is not because pupils can repeat a sentence in a game that they know that they will be able to use it in the real life, to transfer it to an authentic situation. It is good for them to have the opportunity to practice it rather than in the GT method, but pupils need to have time to think about it and find out how the language is built. They need to work more on their own through homework exercises, for example.

## **4. My practice**

### **4.1 The teaching approach I will adopt**

First, to teach in KS3 and 4, I would like to adopt the *Common European Framework* as an inspiration because it is divided in general individual competences (knowledge, how to be, *savoir-faire*) and the communicative competence (linguistic (grammatical, lexical, phonological and orthographical), sociologic (different degrees of formality in languages) and pragmatic (discursive, functional, interaction)) which I find very clear and well-organized. I would work with pupils on those skills through different tasks in which pupils will have to listen, read, write and speak.

Another important point of the *Common European Framework* is the teaching of the culture. I think that it is important to bring in a bit of French and francophone culture into the classroom in relation with the topic taught.

I would like to use the copies of the assessment sheets that the Portfolio of the *Common European Framework* provides. In this sheet pupils can assess themselves by saying how they think they can manage this or this task and the teacher can say what they think about it as well. Self-assessment is very important for pupils to know where they are in their learning and to be in control of it. This is also a good means for pupils to be intrinsically motivated because they can see their progresses.

To help me in my teaching, I think I will use French exercise books and CDs to make pupils work on their writing and oral comprehension because the language is more authentic.

Secondly, I will also adopt the method which is described in *Something to say?* (2001) because I believe in the idea that pupils have to work with their five senses. It is important to make them move and play with the language, do repetitions

to be able to use it. One of the strength of this method is that pupils repeat the language many times with a purpose: win the game. This is a way of motivating them and creates friendly competitiveness.

I will also try to speak only in the TL to pupils because if they don't hear this language there, there is no place where they are going to listen to it. The more they will listen to it, the quicker they will get it.

I also find the way to manage the class with points and teams very helpful to keep pupils well behaving. It teaches them to have a team spirit, to work with others.

Pair work is a good way of making sure that every pupil is talking in the TL and during those times, the teacher can go around the classroom and help pupils.

Finally, I will adopt the GT method to work on grammar, repetition and written activities. I believe that some vocabulary and verb tenses need to be learnt by heart for pupils to be able to use them correctly in class. In my opinion, it is quite impossible to learn everything in context. Learning by hart is sometimes a good thing when you use this vocabulary in class. It also enables the teaching to go on more quickly and pupils to accumulate the language more easily.

#### **4.2 The structure of the learning in my classroom**

I will set clear communicative objectives, for example: 'after this lesson you will be able to introduce yourself'. Then, I will define the vocabulary and the structure of sentence I need. I will explain the different ways to say 'hello' in French in different degrees of formality. This can lead to a bit of culture. We can compare the different way of introducing ourselves between England and France.

Then, I will make pupils work in pairs for them to practice their interaction skill.

I would also create a homework book with different types of exercises and levels to enable every pupil to succeed, as well as an assessment sheet.

I would make the pupils work in pairs with different games to make them repeat and practice the language but, I will also ask them to do some reading and comprehension.

In KS4, I would like to work on the GCSE exam using films and articles to illustrate the topic and make the pupils think, talk and write about it. I will try to personalised my teaching in creating a questionnaire in which I will ask them what they would like to be able to say on that topic, what they would like to be able to do. I really want to involve them in their learning because they choose to keep on studying languages.

I will use the method described in *Something to say?* (2001) but I will do less repetitions and more calm times to let pupils think about what they are doing. I don't want to do games after games like the lessons I saw in my placement A.

I also might change the routine language a little bit. I will not use 'Est-ce que je peux être volontaire pour faire la démonstration ?' but 'Est-ce que je peux faire la démonstration?'. I will use 'écrire' or 'compter les points' rather than 'faire les points' or, 'mimer' rather than 'faire les actions' because it is what you would say in authentic French. I will use the routine to make pupils learn new chunks of language but I would like it to take ten minutes rather than twenty. I don't want to spend all my lessons in the routine and only teach them four new words an hour. In the routine, I

will try to make them learn sentences which make sense not like 'Est-ce que je peux m'asseoir parce que j'aime les animaux.' but 'Est-ce que je peux m'asseoir parce que je suis fatigué.' or 'Est-ce que je peux m'asseoir avec les personnes qui aiment les chats.'

I would like my lesson to be a calm time with a bit of actions and games when I see that pupils' attention is getting lower. I experienced that the Harris, Burch, Jones and Darcy's (2001) method has a tendency to excite pupils. When I was teaching in my placement A, at the first period of the day, pupils were quite sleepy at the beginning of my lesson and after fifty minutes they were too much excited because of all the games we did. In this way some were disturbing others who needed calm to learn. The same thing happens when I was teaching at the last period of the day. Pupils arrived very excited and the game made things worst or, at least, not better. Being excited like that makes it hard for them to concentrate. So, I started to alternate calm times and exciting times and things went better and pupils had more time to think about how the language is working.

I also think that it is important to teach them structure of language and use the same structure in different contexts but for them to be able to use it that way; they need to understand how the sentence is made. For example, when I was teaching 'j'ai les yeux bleus, verts, etc.', pupils often forgot to say the verb because I made them repeat ready-made sentences without doing grammar, showing them what was the subject, the verb and the object. So, I would like to do a little bit more explicit and inductive grammar.

#### **4.3 The ethos I wish to foster**

Finally, I would like my pupils to be motivated by the learning of languages so I will use games for KS3 and authentic documents if it is possible. For KS4 or 6<sup>th</sup> form I would like to use ICT more often to create a class blog for example, if it is possible in the school. I think mixing the two subjects could motivate them to learn a language.

I would ask them at the beginning of the term what their interests are to plan my lessons in function of that and of the GCSE.

I would also like to create positive competitiveness in the learning that is why I think that working in team in KS3 and give individual points in KS4 is a good idea.

I will try to make my pupils feeling confident. That's why I will reward participation and spontaneous language in giving points. I may give them sweets or other rewards depending on the school policy, but only for special occasions (before holidays, for example) because I want pupils to understand that they work for themselves and not for me. I want to foster intrinsic motivation by giving them feedback and clear personalised learning objectives.

### **5. Pupils' motivation**

To me and according to what I saw in my placement A, one of the most difficult thing in teaching languages in England and one of the most important as well is to motivate pupils.

There are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic:

*'intrinsic motivation stem[s] from the individual's personal interest in the subject being learnt, extrinsic from external factors such as rewards, qualifications or job prospects.'* (Jeff Lee, 2001)

As Graham (2002) says, some pupils think that their success is due to their ability which is an internal factor so their motivation is high because, in another word, they know that their success depends on them.

Some others think that their success or failure is due to luck, difficulty of task. They think it is due to an uncontrollable factor. It is external motivation. This creates a hopeless situation where their improvement is impossible. Those people prefer not to try than trying harder and fail. I have seen this phenomenon happening a lot of times in language classes. Pupils say the language is too difficult, so they won't be able to understand it, so they don't try to:

*'Successful pupils claimed to enjoy learning foreign languages for their own sake and saw themselves as receiving a much higher level of parental support than low ability pupils. Low ability pupils were already in danger of falling into the trap of 'learned helplessness' (Williams M., Burden R., and Lanvers U., 2002)*

Although the main problem is that none of the students in year 11 interrogated in Graham's studies thought that their lack of success was related to their learning strategies. So, a solution to the motivation problems could be to train pupils to *'attribute their achievement in modern foreign languages to the learning strategies they employ.'* (Graham, 2002) because *'[...] pupils [could] be motivated more effectively [if they] attribut[e] outcomes to strategies rather than to either ability or effort.'* Pupils need to see the link between their learning strategies and their success or failure. That's why I will provide feedback to my pupils.

As Andrea Wilczynski (1998-99) says, pupils need to be aware of the reasons why they are learning languages to determine the goals they wanted to achieve. Even if it is difficult for pupils to narrow down their goals and define them precisely, it is important for them to feel that they make progresses. And sometimes teachers have to negotiate with the learners a new way of learning for them to still be in charge of it but it is difficult to persuade them to change their learning strategies because they were not effective. This is the reason why I will give them a questionnaire to know what are their goals and motivations and then, I will discuss with them about it. During one lesson, I will teach them to complete a self-assessment sheet and a kind of portfolio in which they will have to answer question like: did you achieve what you wanted to? What else should you to do achieve that? What is your next goal?

Moreover extrinsic motivation raises some problems:

*'Students who are motivated to learn simply for the sake of getting Brownie points or getting a good grade will always need a new set of incentives and goals to be presented to them. Students who are intrinsically motivated, however, do not need this kind of external reward system, because they will persist in learning for the internal rewards to be gained.'* (Ema Ushioda, 1996, p. 20)

Even if giving points, stickers or sweets to pupils is a means which works because it makes them participate; Ushioda says that rewarding and creating an external motivation in the lessons can damage the internal motivation of pupils because the learning process will be directed by others:

*'[...] The development of effective and sustained self-motivation cannot depend on any externally imposed motivational system of stimuli, goals and rewards in the classroom. Students may work efficiently in the short-term in response to external rewards and incentives, but their motivation is unlikely to sustain itself autonomously if*

*the learning experience does not generate internal or intrinsic rewards.'* (Ema Ushioda, 1996, p. 22)

That is why I think it is dangerous to reward pupils individually each time they show a little bit of interest in the lesson. I find it more important to reward them individually when they did something really good and unexpected. For example, raising their hands when they are not used to participate, being the first person who find the answer of a 'difficult' question, speaking spontaneously in the TL, etc.

Another point is, for what I observed in my placement A and from the teachers' point of view that rewarding pupils was a way to make them work and participate but also a means to control their behaviour and manage the classroom. They had a tendency to give stickers to pupils only for them to stay concentrate and calm. Ushioda thinks that rewards are good if learners take it as a positive evaluation rather than a control of behaviour. That is why I will give them more feedback than concrete rewards. To be intrinsically motivated, pupils need to perceive themselves as in control of their learning that is why teachers' feedback is important:

*'Evaluative feedback can have the desired effect of focusing the student's attention on perceptions of developing competence only if the focus of learning itself is on skill mastery and task performance.'* (Ema Ushioda, 1996, p. 22)

Short-term targets, learning goals are a way to generate intrinsic motivation because pupils engage themselves in a successful learning (Ema Ushioda, 1996, p. 25). As I said before, that is what I want to introduce the use of self-assessment sheets in their classroom as the *Common European Framework* and Harris, Burch, Jones and Darcy's (2001) method suggests it. It is a good way for pupils to be in control of their learning because they will have to think about it, about what they are able to do or not. They will also have to think about the strategies they use to learn the language. Self-assessment sheets can show them their progress in a concrete way and also give them small objectives lessons after lessons.

Ushioda (1996) advises as well to make the learners practice the language in a safe environment, as the classroom, for them to experience 'communicative successes' to feel more confident so more motivated. This is also the point of view of the method described in *Something to say?* (2001) which gives an important part to the speaking skill. In this purpose I will talk in the TL as much as possible and make them participate as well through games.

Moreover, as Wilczynski (1998-99) notices, introducing culture in the lessons could be a good means to make the use of the language more real and authentic and, in this way, motivate pupils to learn it. In KS4 and 6<sup>th</sup> form, give the possibility to pupils to be part of a Tandem and communicate with a foreigner '[...] can have a positive effect on learner attitudes towards the foreign culture and may therefore increase their motivation to progress in the foreign language.' (Wilczynski, 1998-99)

If the language teaching also suffers from pupils' lack of motivation it can also be because of the language's representation itself. Williams M., Burden R., and Lanvers U. (2002) explain their research shows that pupils have the impression that

French is the language of love and romance so it is for girls and that German was for boys because it represents the power (the war, Hitler, etc.). As a consequence it is not 'cool' for a boy to be seen as enjoying learning French. In this case, I would teach culture because I think it is a good way of changing those representations and making them understand they are *clichés*.

Finally, we can think about the different propositions of Williams M., Burden R., and Lanvers, U. (2002) which summarize what teachers could do to improve pupils' motivation:

- *teachers should discuss with pupils the value of learning foreign languages;*
- *teachers need to help learners develop beliefs in their own abilities to learn a language and to control the process of learning it;*
- *more needs to be done in preventing the early sense of failure in learning foreign languages displayed by pupils of low ability; and*
- *further investigation into learners' perceptions of different languages could conceivably lead to a reconsideration of which language to introduce first. If German or Spanish etc. were perceived by pupils, particularly boys, as more useful, interesting or easier to learn than French, then maybe schools could consider introducing these first.*

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, we have seen that the unique contribution of the MFL curriculum was to bring different opportunities in one subject like creativity, the possibility to explore new cultures and apply to new kind of jobs. We also saw that the National Curriculum has some problems but is still an improvement compare to what English education had before that. We can make the same observation of the different methodologies that have existed since Grammar Translation. The new methods as the one described in *Something to say?* (2001) or CLT emphasize on communication but still need to improve to make the teaching of languages more authentic and personalised. From all the theories of education I know I think I am going to use the GT method for the repetition, the method described in *Something to say?* (2001) for its concerns about the learning style and the *Common European Framework* for the self-assessment sheets and for the way of structuring the teaching. In this way I wish to foster an atmosphere of trust and friendly competitiveness. Finally I will try to motivate the pupils for them to find a personal satisfaction in learning languages.

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