The new National Curriculum for Foreign languages

_Liz Black from the Association for Language Learning (ALL) looks at the new National Curriculum for Foreign Languages and how to respond to its challenges._

**Headlines**

The Government’s decision to encourage the learning of a foreign language by children in England from Year 3 upwards has addressed the concerns of many in the UK. Competence in another language enables children to interpret, create and exchange meaning within and across cultures. It also helps children develop skills that will open further opportunities later in life.

Any modern language can now be taught. There was much debate about the original draft list of seven modern foreign languages to be taught in KS2, with the result that this was removed shortly before the final National Curriculum purpose of study document was circulated during September 2013.

Members of the Association of Language Learning (ALL) view the new statutory requirement as an extremely positive step forward. Both the duration of learning and the number of languages learned has lagged behind the European average. The stated purpose of study for languages within the new National Curriculum for Languages in England for KS2 and KS3 is potentially inspirational and encapsulates what teachers would want for language learners of any age.

Some of the major issues in planning a languages curriculum throughout KS2 include:

- communication – teaching language in a context
- cultural knowledge – authentic experiences
- grammar – learning how to use language
- texts.
Context and culture

Learning how to ‘engage in conversations’ in another language is undoubtedly a wonderful achievement, but presenting conversational language in isolation will not make it memorable, nor will it provide an opening to other cultures. Curiosity is stimulated by exposure to the culture of other lands, and the internet facilitates just this type of learning. For example, many charities have photos and clips of children speaking in their home, school or village. Not only can the children hear and see the children as if they were in their classroom, but they can also benefit from the visual experience.

Grammar, but not ‘grammar grind’

Children are to be taught to understand basic grammar and how to apply patterns of the language, as well as how these differ from or are similar to English. We believe that this focus does not signal a retreat to the ‘grammar grind’ of the pre-communicative languages teaching era. Rather it puts emphasis on the value and practical usefulness of being able to manipulate language, and re-states the importance of grammatical structure within a curriculum which aims to develop children’s capacity to stand on their own two feet in a foreign language context.

Texts, materials and talk

The inclusion of literary texts, authentic materials and spontaneous talk is also welcome. Just as in their study of English, these approaches help children develop a greater awareness of language and metalanguage, and become sensitised to the nuances of other languages.

Home languages and dialects

Home languages and the use of dialect should not be seen as a problem, but as an opportunity to value cultural heritage and exploit the richness of language.

The children can be asked to share an aspect of their home life that they consider different, or vocabulary for common items they use or can see on their way to school. The teacher could ask parents or other relatives to visit the school and talk to the children about the festivals they celebrate, or could cook with the class, for example.
Our advice to schools

We have a chance to develop a vibrant curriculum for the future. We must capitalise on everything that is available to us, and everything we already know, to engage and motivate the children.

- **Plan creatively** Our planning needs to tap into the creative roots of our learners, with the aim of increasing their confidence and enjoyment of manipulating the language they are learning.

- **Set the spark early** Sparking an early interest in myths, fables and legends from other countries through poetry, music, dance, drama and film clips is among the effective teaching strategies that are being used by countless primary colleagues across the country.

- **Embrace classroom talk** The primary classroom is an ideal setting for this. If either Latin or Greek are chosen the focus will be to provide a linguistic foundation for reading comprehension and an appreciation of classical civilisation, but there will be little opportunity for practical communication, just simple oral exchanges.

- **Use authentic materials** Elaine Taylor, Chief MFL HMI for Ofsted stresses the importance of using authentic materials and says that it is ‘a shame these are underused as there is so much out there. She adds that intercultural understanding needs to be built into the teaching rather than as a ‘bolt on once a year’.

**Key point: digital literacy**

Digital literacy is not mentioned specifically in the new programme of study, but the potential to use the internet will be at the forefront of teachers’ minds.

The opportunity to take children on a virtual journey, or use a live webcam, to see clothing, housing, school, games, agriculture and food on the other side of the world must be viewed as wonderful! It will give children the opportunity to reflect on their unique ‘place’ and truly ‘deepen their understanding of the world’.

**Useful resources**

A list of useful resources to support your work with the primary National Curriculum for Languages can be found at the website of the Association for Language Learning [www.all-languages.org.uk](http://www.all-languages.org.uk).

**Want more?** For more practical advice on developing an outstanding curriculum in your school, register for a Primary Curriculum 2014 event in association with Pearson and the Cambridge Primary Review Trust. [www.pearsonprimary.co.uk/cprtevents1](http://www.pearsonprimary.co.uk/cprtevents1)

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