

Assignment 1

A comparison of the differences and similarities observed in the teaching strategies and classroom management styles between KS2 and KS3 in MFL.

A comparison of the differences and similarities observed in the teaching strategies and in the classroom management styles between KS2 and KS3 in Modern Foreign Languages.

In light of the comments made by Johnson in the *Languages Review* (2007) and the publication of the KS2 Framework for Languages in 2003, it seems increasingly more appropriate to analyse and evaluate the provision for Modern Foreign Languages (henceforth, MFL) in England. Many linguists, teachers and professionals have welcomed the government's commitment to language learning; in fact, Adonis (1:2005) believes that these fundamental, albeit cautious, steps will secure "the nation's languages capability and a vision of languages as a *lifelong skill*." Despite the air of positivity, many have stepped back from the hype and deliberated over some of the challenging issues that may potentially arise from its introduction: in particular, those issues concerning transition between KS2 and KS3. Bolster *et al.* (1:2004) believe:

"...if MFL is to be coherent across the different phases of the curriculum, then continuity in teaching and management strategies are essential if the subject is to be successful."

By drawing attention to the specific ways in which the subject content will be taught and managed at both ends of the educational spectrum, the quotation also highlights the importance of the overarching theme of continuity in MFL across the Key Stages. These will be at the forefront of this discussion. However, before elaborating further on these themes, it would be beneficial to describe, from a historical perspective, MFL education and learning in England as a means to contextualise the discussion.

Before the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, MFL was considered to be a speciality subject reserved for the academic elite. Even with the advent of comprehensive secondary schools in the 1960s little was done to alter this inequitable approach. Nevertheless, entitlement became statutory for all secondary students in the late 1980s and remained at the core of the National Curriculum until recently. As a result of the reassessment of priorities for students coupled with perceived falling standards in other subjects, MFL was stripped from the Key Stage 4 curriculum with the intention to degrade it to the lower echelons of KS2 by 2010. In response to the readjustment, experts in the field of MFL pedagogy, such as Kirby (6:2007), purport that the change was in the "national and international interest." Furthermore, partly due to the publication of the *Common European Framework for MFL*, the changes have encouraged the British government to streamline the age at which children learn a foreign language throughout England and bring this provision into line with the rest of Europe.

Evidently, MFL teaching and learning has had a turbulent history but the future is perhaps more promising. Hawkins' Model for MFL (121:2001) advocates a bipartite approach to language learning and teaching: Stage 1, *language apprenticeship*, (Key Stage 2) will equip primary children with the tools for language learning and Stage 2 will involve intensive immersion in one FL at KS3. Considering teaching strategies and classroom

management at both stages, it will be possible to evaluate whether Hawkins' approach can achieve the overarching theme of continuity in transition.

For the purposes of this discussion, the theme of classroom management will be divided into three subsections, as proposed by Froyen and Iverson (221:1999). Firstly, *content management* relates to the management of subject content. Based on observations of primary schools which already have provision for MFL at KS2 (and intermittently at KS1), it is clear that many teach at a more advanced level than that suggested by Hawkins and go beyond National Curriculum expectations. For example, Students would normally be expected to acquire some basic metalinguistic knowledge and begin to develop those oral/aural skills required of MFL but, in addition, students are also perfecting complicated written and reading skills expected at KS3. Equally, some primary schools are opting for their own models, two of which are described by Tierny and Gallastegi (50:2005): that is, the embedded and the immersion models. The former was observed in a school where French was taught within other topic-based project work about Europe. The latter was observed in a school with a professional linguist who taught classes together as a whole class group, totally in the Target Language (TL), by using well-practise routines such as eliciting personal information from students, singing songs and playing familiar games to teach new vocabulary.

In comparison with KS3, MFL currently finds itself in an intermediary period of pre- and post-National Strategy where some teachers still prefer to follow a communicative/immersion approach through which students passively acquire metalinguistic knowledge whilst in contact with the Target Language (TL). In the post-era, MFL teachers are being encouraged to combine this with a Subject Teaching Model the aim of which is to "develop the child's linguistic competence" through explicit metalinguistic instruction (50:2005). Hawkins' Model attempts to develop this linguistic competence at a younger age so that when students reach KS3 they can learn at a more accelerated rate and achieve higher levels of competency. The question is whether theory can become reality and the overarching theme of continuity becomes an issue. Both psycholinguists such as Marinova-Todd (2:2000) and ordinary secondary teachers question whether KS2 MFL provision will ever be robust enough or taught with sufficient expertise to allow for adequate acquisition of knowledge, therefore, allowing students to progress at 12-14 years. Alternatively, will extra teaching be required to clarify these topics? It is difficult to provide a response to these questions until KS2 provision for MFL becomes mandatory in 2010.

The second area of content management concerns the management of time and space. This is where the most marked differences can be saliently observed between KS2 and KS3. The Languages Strategy for KS2 suggests that one hour per week should be dedicated to MFL teaching. Observations of those schools with MFL teaching in place, approach time management in different ways. Some schools prefer to dedicate one hour of the weekly timetable to the subject, which, according to Driscoll *et al.* (60:2004), is normally led in around 18% of cases by peripatetic or secondary school teachers. Students would normally have an exercise book to record their

progress and be taught in a formal classroom setting. The principal advantage of this approach is that a specific amount of time is allotted to the subject rather than teaching it on an *ad hoc* basis. Nevertheless, pupils will not acquire higher levels of competency unless the subject is reinforced throughout the week e.g. doing the register in the TL, using numbers in basic numeracy lessons, completing simple classroom routines in the TL. Alternatively, some schools prefer to dedicate a small amount of time each day to the subject normally delivered 'on the carpet' or as a group. This has the advantage of allowing students to reinforce their knowledge each day but, arguably, it does not allow the required depth of study, which forms the basis for the rationale of the Languages Strategy for KS2 and, in many ways, belittles the subject. Secondly, it is also dependent on the abilities and willingness of the classroom teacher to deliver the 15 minutes each day.

The situation at KS3 is saliently different. Time dedicated to the subject is strictly dictated by government norms and students are expected to learn one or more languages totalling 3-6 hours per week. The learning will tend to take place in a formal classroom setting; that is, students sitting in a seating plan, next to a pupil of the opposite sex, all facing the same area of focus (e.g. the whiteboard or the teacher's desk). Despite the fact that content management is markedly different in both teaching contexts, KS3 classroom teachers have tried to bridge the gap and provide continuity for Year 7 students by abandoning the traditional desk layout of rows in favour of groups of desks. Pachler and Field (231:2001) believe that although the proximity to other students may incite 'off-task' interaction, the interaction between pupils is greatly facilitated for both group work and pair work.

The second area of classroom management suggested by Froyen and Iverson (224:1999) is that of covenant management which focuses on the classroom group as "a social system that has its own features that teachers have to take into account when managing interpersonal relationships in the classroom." Differentiation is at the core of this area of classroom management. Convery and Coyle (3-5:2003) believe that in MFL there are four areas in which differentiation must occur to allow all students to access the subject: namely, text, task, outcome, support and interest. In the KS3 context, all of these are dealt with. For example, 'tasks' are often differentiated even though the same stimulus material may be used by all students. Currently at KS2, such levels of differentiation do not occur partly because the subject tends to be taught orally/aurally on an *ad hoc* basis or the material is of a significantly lower level to allow access for all. Nevertheless, one common observation at KS2 (and frequently at KS3) is that when a student has special educational needs, especially in the area of literacy, MFL instruction is occasionally substituted by another subject e.g. extra English in their Individual Education Plan. Yet research carried out by SEN experts such as Edwards (1998) reports that students can benefit from MFL instruction in three principal areas: namely, linguistic development, social development and cultural awareness. It will be interesting to see how primary schools deal with differentiation when MFL learning becomes obligatory in 2010 and there is an expectation that pupils begin to use basic TL stimuli and have their work levelled according to the National Curriculum.

The final area of classroom management concerns that of conduct. It is clear from observations at KS2 and KS3 that this is more of an issue during the latter stage of a pupil's education rather than during the former. One could pinpoint the origins of such discernable differences in behaviour to the differing educational contexts in which students find themselves. At KS2, students are often taught in a very supportive atmosphere by a single teacher, in the same classroom and with the same students every day. At KS3, students are given more independence for their own learning and time management in differing contexts with different teachers often requiring them to fight for attention. In terms of MFL teaching and learning, in the KS2 context, the subject appears to be reserved as a reward for good progress with other work or, as Driscoll *et al.* (2004) highlight, "light relief after a morning of SATs test preparation". Although this approach promotes an air of positivity and an element of 'fun' rather than the disaffection often attested at KS3, it fails to promote MFL learning as an equal to the core subjects. Therefore, in order to provide continuity in the transition between KS2 and KS3 MFL should be considered as an essential part of the curriculum at all stages rather than a reward (or sanction) for positive behaviour.

Therefore, it is apparent that although there are a few similarities, classroom management of MFL is, in the vast majority of cases, very different at KS2 and KS3. In terms of the teaching strategies, salient differences are also observed; however, continuity is more perceptible in MFL learning due to the fact that the same teaching strategies are often employed across both Key Stages. A further contributing factor to the choice of teaching strategies is arguably dictated by what are perceived as the aims of primary MFL entitlement. In the late 1990s, pilot projects were established to evaluate the success of MFL entitlement in Scottish primary schools. The final report produced by Low *et al.* (1995) revealed that it would be difficult to motivate primary school teachers to provide MFL provision if the aims were centred around those highlighted in Stage 1 of Hawkins' Model rather than placing more emphasis on oral/aural skills taught formally and in an embedded curriculum. Tierny and Gallastegi (50:2005) question whether England is on the verge of making the same mistakes.

Observations of current teaching strategies employed by primary teachers, often a mixture of specialists and non-specialist, reveal that this is not the case. Whilst adhering to the principal aim of the KS2 Framework as being "a support [rather than] a constraint; a climbing frame [rather than] a cage" primary teachers do not seem to be ignoring the 'fun element' of language learning. For instance, a popular teaching strategy employed in one primary school was to provide forty minutes formal teaching (i.e. working as a group learning vocabulary through flash cards or using realia) and a total of forty minutes of teaching through a multisensory approach whereby students performed routine tasks such as the register or participated in PE with a teacher using the Target Language. At Key Stage 3, it is evident that classroom teachers endeavour to produce tasks that require the use of two or more learning styles including simple games such as Battleships, Snakes and Ladders or Noughts and Crosses. Therefore, on the surface, it appears that there is a certain level of continuity between both areas of the curriculum; however, it is far more difficult for the KS3 to sustain this learning and take it to the next step like many KS2 teachers are able to do.

An interesting area of comparison of teaching strategy is that of the introduction of new vocabulary. The model schemes of work produced by the QCA for English primary schools emphasise the importance of vocabulary acquisition. According to Michael Heafford's Typology of Tasks (52:2001), students tend to place high value on increasing their passive/active vocabulary through listening to the TL and using visual stimuli such as flash cards. After observing the introduction of new vocabulary in the classroom, this appears to be the case not only at KS2 but also at KS3. Year 6 and year 7 students also appear to enjoy these strategies in conjunction with variations in intonation and rhythm as a method for acquisition. This is, therefore, an obvious area where continuity can be sustained between the Key Stages in MFL teaching strategies.

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interesting.
Another teaching strategy considered by students to be of high value and which has recently been included in the new National Curriculum assessment criteria for MFL is the use of authentic material and the decoding of its meaning through the use of a bilingual dictionary. At KS3, students really enjoy audiovisual material; the most effective forms are those which exist in both the TL and the mother tongue such as *The Simpsons*. Although the standard of language is far too complex to comprehend word for word, videos can be used, for example, as an activity to practise the near future tense in any language. The video may be stopped at a given point and students may make suppositions in the TL about what 'is going to happen' next. In primary schools, students enjoy the same material but with slightly different tasks. For example, students may be asked to put up their hand as soon as they hear a particular item of vocabulary which has been chosen judiciously by the teacher because of its clarity and relevance to the current topic. Once again, continuity has been observed across the Key Stages which, if sustained, may potentially maintain the interest and enjoyment of students.

Despite the similarities, there are many differences in teaching strategies which may pose certain problems for the issue of continuity of MFL across the Key Stages. Although the Languages Strategy for KS2 attempts to formalise and standardise MFL provision in the primary sector, the issues of assessment against the four Attainment Targets (ATs) of speaking, listening, reading and writing are still quite vague. In theory, KS2 teachers are principally expected to employ teaching strategies that promote vocabulary acquisition, oral and aural skills including pronunciation as well as some metalinguistic knowledge. However, when observing the MFL instruction provided by specialist teachers, it is evident that some are more comfortable employing teaching strategies such as skimming and scanning texts in the TL as well as producing writing frames for students to practise their writing skills. In fact, some theorists believe that this 'extension' work is essential because, as Russell (53:2005) claims, after three or four terms of oral work, "pupils were desperate for printed materials to help them memorise what was covered orally."

If this is the case, then this poses problems for KS3 teaching strategies: do KS3 teachers continue to use previous, well-practised strategies or are more advanced strategies required? Furthermore, this is dependent on the skill level of pupils. Currently, vast amounts of differentiation are required in French classes because of the

✓ varying levels of skill and knowledge acquired at primary level. Furthermore, it seems that the situation is only set to become more difficult for KS3 teachers unless strict regulation of the KS2 MFL curriculum is provided other than that outlined in the KS2 Framework. One suggestion has been the nationwide use of the Junior European Languages Portfolio linked to the Languages Ladder which would allow pupils to record their progress through KS2 and KS3 and allow secondary schools to have a greater awareness of the teaching strategies used by their feeder schools to allow for easy transition, and ultimately, continuity in MFL teaching. ✓

✓ The inevitable conclusion to this discussion appears to be that teaching strategies and classroom management of MFL across KS2 and KS3 share some similarities such as the high value attached to the use of authentic materials and interactive vocabulary learning and the management of space within the classroom: however, the similarities appear to end here. In many cases, the way in which MFL is taught in KS2 and KS3 is very different, nevertheless, this does not necessarily imply that there is little continuity between the subject content at both stages. The area which does seem to suggest a potential pitfall, in terms of continuity of the subject, if not managed correctly, is the differing skills that students are acquiring at primary level and, as a consequence, creating potentially complicated differentiation issues at secondary level in terms of pupil progression in the subject. Despite these concerns, both pedagogical theorists and classroom teachers of MFL must play a waiting game, as it will be at least another decade before the true impact of the KS2 Framework can be measured. ✓

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