

Ensemble Languages Case Study (2)

What can I learn from the other phase to impact positively on my practice and transition? Focus: using the target language and teaching phonics

Summary of Observations

This Case Study centres on lesson observations across three separate school settings: Fallibroome KS3, Prestbury Upper KS2 and Mottram St. Andrew KS1. The main research focus was the use and impact of the target language ('TL') within the classroom environment and the use of phonics strategies to aid language learning. Two primary teachers observed a Year 7 French lesson in order to observe the use and effect of TL in a typical lesson. The secondary teacher observed a phonics session with a small Year 1 group, the focus of which was to identify some of the main principles of teaching phonics in English and to consider how these may be applied to teaching French. The secondary teacher and one of the primary teachers observed a Year 5 lesson, again with the focus on the use of TL.

What we wanted to learn

Lisa (Primary): I wanted to learn how to use TL effectively within the classroom and to find out what impact it has upon the children's learning. As a new primary MFL subject leader I was also hoping to gain an insight into the teaching of languages in lower KS3 in order to inform my understanding of the transition between primary and secondary when teaching languages.

Hannah (Primary): I wanted to know how best to encourage children to use target language in classroom and how myself and other non-French speaking staff can best use classroom language effectively when teaching.

Claire (Secondary – and Primary Feeder School Support): I wanted to develop my teaching of phonics in French and also gain more insight into how I can support my Primary colleagues, in particular with their use of classroom language.

What I learned

Lisa: In both the lessons I observed **I learnt that effective use of TL has a huge impact upon children's learning and their engagement.** The delivery of everyday classroom directions and questions in French clearly signposted that it was a French lesson and that there was an expectation to speak in French rather than English. I also felt that, as the whole class are immersed in this approach, it created a 'safe' environment for the children; they were willing to 'have a go' at asking a question or responding to the teacher in French. I observed the teachers correcting pronunciation in a very positive way which encouraged children to make further attempts to speak in French. Perhaps what was most striking, in both the lessons which I observed, was the fun and engagement which resulted from using French for simple classroom management. The use of French displays and 'quick reference' sheets at the front of French exercise books definitely supported learning. In addition the Year 7 children used a French dictionary to aid their learning and independently research unfamiliar words.

I also observed that the repetition of French words or phrases, along with actions, images and written text, helped to scaffold the learning. **The identification by the teachers of phonetic patterns within French words helped the children to read and pronounce words correctly and apply this phonic knowledge to other words with the same graphemes.**

Hannah: I learnt from observing high school lessons that **it is important for teacher and pupils to use as much classroom language as possible.** From the minute they enter the French lesson they

aware that this is conducted differently to other lessons- as if they are in a little part of France. With classroom displays, help sheets in books and constant repetition the children become comfortable with using classroom language to ask for classroom equipment, go to the bathroom etc. **It is important to make children aware of the phonics as they become familiar with these key phrases. This then gives them a reference point when they see other words containing these phonemes.**

Claire: I learnt some technical terms regarding the teaching of phonics, such as phoneme/diagraph/ triagraph,(which many of the Year 1 children knew and understood!). I also learnt more about how English phonics are introduced to learners, and this helped me to consider the sequence and the speed at which we cover them in French. It also helped me to remember issues for the introduction of a second language, such as **the importance of exposing pupils the ‘environmental’ sounds of the language, i.e. simply listening to the pattern and rhythm of the language, without necessarily understanding it.**

How this will impact on my practice

Lisa: I will share the findings from my Case Study with my colleagues and **encourage the use of everyday classroom language in French, backed up by actions and images, so that speaking and listening in French is something which children become comfortable with and learn from. If this begins in primary classes it should aid transition into KS3.** As a result of our work together we have concluded that more phonic strategies could be employed when teaching French both in KS2 and secondary schools and we are collaborating to produce some phonics activities using French phoneme sets and graphemes. I will share these resources with my primary colleagues.

Hannah: **Right from the start of the year we need to encourage children to be using French language, that as soon as they enter the French lesson that they need to be aware that is to be conducted differently to other lessons.** Having a French display in the classroom highlights to the children that French is a priority and having key phrases on the wall enabled the children to use the target language in lessons (and not just French lessons). Single word commands for example, regardez, écoutez, répétez, greeting the class in French, count downs in target language mean the children are listening and responding to the language without thinking. As MFL coordinator I will create a key phrases and vocabulary sheet for children across the key stage to have in their French books and also one with key phrases for the teachers to refer to.

Claire: This has helped me to consider the following in relation to French phonic teaching:

- Do we introduce the phonemes in a meaningful order, with easier sounds first and more complex sounds later?
- Do we introduce too few or too many phonemes at the same time?
- Can we find longer words which combine several sounds?
- ‘Environmental’ sound of French – just getting pupils to listen to the cadences and patterns of how it sounds – not just the phonemes but the intonation.
- Constant recall of phonics – is it being mentioned and linked all the time in lessons?

Above all, this has reminded me never to underestimate the abilities and knowledge of Primary pupils, when they arrive in my Secondary classroom! It has also given me more evidence that a great deal of effective teaching can take place with Primary age pupils, and I am keen to support my Primary Feeder colleagues in this delivery. **Furthermore, we in secondary schools must plan for the pupils’ progression of learning.**