Notes from the Chair

A question that occupies me a great deal is how much freedom I should give to the teachers in my department to teach the way they want to teach, and indeed to the individual Heads of Languages too, regarding how they run their departments. I wonder if other HoDs think about this on a regular basis too? The members of my department might disagree, but I believe that I give the members of my department a lot of autonomy and that I listen to their views and sometimes adapt or promote their ideas via our weekly briefings and MFL teaching and learning group. I believe that this comes as a result of the way I was treated as an NQT back in the nineties. I was given a huge amount of scope to teach as I wished, to experiment and use my creativity and my ideas. I was trusted and I was listened to. Just as most of us have a tendency to teach in the way we were taught ourselves, I wonder if we manage others the way we were first managed?

I am curious about how the colleagues in our various departments feel about the amount of freedom they have and wonder where the line of tolerance should be set. Some colleagues, I know, would struggle with being given too much autonomy over their teaching, others would revel in it. As a HoD, we want to be seen as strong and, as a true leader, we might see it as a failing to give our colleagues carte blanche. Is it not, however, the sign of great courage as a leader to let go of the reins and is having faith in our colleagues not extremely powerful? After all, if we saw it all going horribly wrong, we would pull them back into line, wouldn't we?

So, in what areas should we give our fellow linguists freedom and when should we insist on conformity? Those of you who attended the recent conference will have heard Jess Lund speak about the Michaela Community School where she works. Teachers (and pupils) must follow very strict rules about how to teach (or learn) not only French, but all subjects. Going on a ‘learning walk’ there, you would see lessons across the whole school that are identical in methodology and technique. This approach has attractive features. The HoD or senior manager can completely rely on standards being upheld across the school – there is no chance that a teacher will do ‘their own thing’ or be unprepared, not cover the whole syllabus or that one pupil is advantaged or disadvantaged over another, as far as their learning is concerned. Is it not stifling for pupils and teachers, though?

The extent to which teachers can teach to their own accord comes down to how schemes of work are drawn up. The detail put in to these documents will indicate how much free rein teachers have in the department. Coupled with regular observation, the HoD would then have a clear idea of exactly what is happening in each teacher’s classroom. I am a strong believer in observation for personal development, but I would argue that the following activities all instill the ethos of the department and encourage colleagues to teach in a similar or complimentary way without enforcing it: regular communication about what and how particular topics are being taught; planning lessons together if teaching parallel sets; sharing resources; making time to regularly discuss teaching as a department; asking each other the rationale behind teaching in a certain way. Some schools will not allow HoDs to choose their own exam board, some will have school-wide policies about classroom behaviour or use of technology that affect the way they teach. Some departments will enforce use of target language at all times, teaching a particular literary text or teaching grammar through context. One of the reasons I returned to teaching at my school was precisely because the staff (and pupils) are encouraged to be open-minded, creative and innovative. It is not a total free for all, but it is about getting colleagues on board and sharing good practice and also encouraging colleagues to run with an idea. Modern Languages Departments, in particular, in my opinion, should encourage variety, and crucially must be outward-looking, as we are teaching a ‘living’ subject that is evolving all the time. Is that how you could describe your department?

The recent conference was a huge opportunity to be outward-looking and pick up new ideas. Thanks to Vice-Chair, John Wilson, the range of speakers was superb and The Perse School was a brilliant venue. Thank you to the committee for their energy and hard work. Things have not slowed down since... Two of us spent two days at Warwick University with colleagues from Higher Education wading through piles of A-level scripts as part of Ofqual’s research into the inter-comparability of subjects at A-level. The National Modern Languages SCITT continues to take off with hubs hopefully starting up at Uindle and Oxford next year, in addition to the hubs in Sheffield, Dulwich and Bolton. Peter Langsdale (Italian) and Marta Viruete (Spanish), along with Kevin Dunne’s help (Conference Secretary) are busy planning Italian Day (March) and Spanish Day (June). So there is a lot in the pipeline. And my final words this term are, as I said at the conference, “Be controversial!” Keep challenging and don’t give up!

Notes from the Editor
Notes from the Editor

I read with interest this edition’s contribution from Pauline Moloney about her successful school trip to Lyon because I am also about to head to France’s second city on a French Exchange with Year 9. The city is more compact than Paris, life is slightly cheaper and, because fewer of our pupils have been there, it holds something of a ‘wow’ factor that more than competes with the splendour of the Eiffel Tower, which so many of them have seen or will see with their families. Our partner school, Sainte-Marie Lyon, has up to fifteen partner schools around the world and no fewer than eight exchanges a year. The question for their pupils is not ‘to go or not to go on an exchange?’ but ‘which one?’ We hope that our pupils will be inspired by the school’s ethos and come back ready for further adventures!

This is the tenth newsletter that I have worked on as Editor and I have really enjoyed each one. It is interesting to stay up-to-date with developments in ML examinations, qualifications and teaching and every term I am inspired by the exciting and creative work that teachers and professionals are up to and which we feature in this publication. During my tenure, we have moved to a web-based format, which we hope will allow you to share the newsletter more easily with your colleagues. I think this role has made me more alert to good practice and interesting ventures, always with this newsletter in mind, which I am sure has made me a better Head of Department too! I hand over now to Bori Gannon, of Brockhurst and Marlston House Schools, who will bring her expertise, creativity and experience of work both in the secondary and prep school sectors to the post, so do get in touch with Bori if you have any ideas for future contributions to the newsletter.

ISMLA Spanish Day

Keep an eye on your inbox and the website for the registration form for the upcoming Spanish Day on 9th June. It will take place, as it did two years ago, at the Instituto Cañada Blanch in Notting Hill, thanks to the generous support of the Consejería de España. Two excellent speakers are already confirmed, Dr Michael Thompson from the University of Durham will give a talk entitled ‘Lorca & Censorship under Franco’ and Dr Paul O’Neill from Sheffield University will speak on ‘Teaching Spanish Grammar & Pronunciation’. We hope to see you there!

ISMLA Mentoring Scheme

For the first time, we have more mentors than mentees so do make the most of this opportunity while you can! The idea of the scheme is to pair up Modern Languages with aspirations of (sooner or later) moving into senior leadership with linguists who either currently serve on senior management/leadership teams or who have done so in the past. It is a completely informal arrangement and the terms of it can be agreed upon by those involved. Contact can be as frequent as desired and by whatever method is most convenient. It is suggested that the arrangement lasts for a year and involves at least one face-to-face meeting, if geography permits, and two subsequent telephone calls. If you are interested, please contact Duncan (duncan.peel@guildfordhigh.co.uk).

Davina Suri

Message from the Membership Secretary

A few notes on membership

You will have noticed over the past three years that we now email invitations to renew rather than send letters. This has the advantage of a reduction in postage and printing costs, and a reduction in paper. All replies to me can be made by email. Please note the following:

Please do let me know if there is a change of contact details, whether person or email address. At times of promotions, maternity leaves or changes in personnel, ISMLA’s emails sometimes bounce back which means that you don’t get the newsletter or to hear from us about our events.
Please use this email address to contact me: jwhye2@icloud.com.
Your membership is not renewed automatically each year. Each school must physically do this every year. One school thought that membership had to be paid for each teacher. This is not the case. Your subscription covers every teacher in the department.
Although as HoD you might forward all the necessary information to renew membership to your bursary, this does not mean that they act upon your request! It really is worthwhile checking that payment has gone through.
I am more than happy for you to contact me and tell me how communications can be improved!

Julia Whyte (Membership Secretary).

Massive response to severe grading - Ofqual urged to take action

Over 2,600 ML teachers, middle and senior leaders responded in under a week to show the strength of their concern and the impact of the problem.

• This survey shows overwhelmingly strong support for such a change, with 98% (over 2,500 respondents) urging Ofqual to take action.

• It also shows the devastating impact severe grading has had on the decline in numbers studying the subject, and over 90% reporting in their school the resulting negative perceptions pupils hold about the subject and effect on progression routes.

• Over 80% reported that, in their school, severe grading at GCSE has also had a negative impact on the judgements about the performance of the subject and of individual staff.

The findings have been presented to Ofqual.

Outcomes of Survey

Severe Grading ppt presentation

ALL Severe Grading page
http://www.all-london.org.uk/site/index.php/severe-grading/
The NML SCITT

A new skew to the training of ML teachers – we only need 3,000…

Here, Nick and Sara give you an update on SCITT one year on.

What is a SCITT?

The rather ungainly SCITT stands for ‘School centred initial teacher training’. It is similar to a traditional teacher training course with a PGCE but almost all of it is school-based. Of a school year two and a half terms are spent in one school, one half of a term is spend in a dissimilar school. In addition, trainees will spend time training with the SCITT and the participating university outside of school. The successful applicants are called ‘associate teachers’ and I have referred to them in this way.

Why bother?

Estimates vary but England may need as many as 3,000 language teachers if the expectation is for 70% of the GCSE cohort to take a GCSE in a modern language. You will know that the number of A level candidates is a serious concern – now think of undergraduate numbers taking a single honours ML degree – and then the numbers taking the joint honours degree we would prefer for timetabling reasons. One helpful estimate is that of the numbers taking a language degree, roughly 6% go on to be teachers.

What isn’t the SCITT?

It is not a way of poaching numbers from the many outstanding PGCE providers – with whom many of us have long standing and valued relationships. The idea is clearly to increase the overall numbers of graduates training to be high quality language teachers. Some graduates will be better suited to and will prefer one format – others will prefer another.

Why might you be interested?

The key elements of the SCITT format are:

- A high quality collaboration between the state and independent sectors and designed by both.
- Schools can recruit their own ‘associate teachers’ and put them forward for selection on the course – how many of your language associates have a degree and would make excellent teachers?
- Schools can attract high quality graduates with only one language – who may not be eligible for some PGCE courses. Our clear expectation (and sometimes explicit in a contract) is that, once they have acquired the methodology, they are expected to teach Year 7 in another language within if possible within in their training year. Government funding for subject knowledge enhancement (SKE) courses is available and there are SKE courses available at every level. Once qualified, we would then expect candidates to continue working on their second language and advance by one year group each year and to teach up to at least KS3 and if possible to GCSE.
- The ‘associate teacher’ spends virtually all of the year in your school
- You train the ‘associate teacher’ to suit the methodology of your department.
- You strengthen your links with your partner state school (few of us indeed cannot learn from much of the excellent
practice in state schools...)

- Schools can be involved or not as they wish in the interview process of the student they host. We have on occasions found ourselves in position of being unable to enthuse about clearly high quality trainee teachers who have performed to an excellent standard elsewhere but are less suited to our school.

- In HMC’s input into the design of the SCITT, it was a clear requirement that the course must be ‘admin-lite’.

- Independent Schools can employ the trained teachers.

If you are currently hosting PGCE students and are satisfied, we see no reason whatsoever to abandon it, but you could consider hosting NML SCITT trainees, too. This is a great initiative for schools who are looking for a different format.

Nuts and Bolts

The NML SCITT is run by Silverdale School, a state school in Sheffield which also runs the Sheffield Teaching School Alliance and has considerable high quality experience in providing teacher training.

Successful applicants qualify for £26,000 tax free – or £28,000 tax free if they apply via the British Council. Of this money, the applicant would then pay £9,000 in course fees.

Associate teachers aim to teach up to 10 hours by the end of the first term – and fifteen hours by the end of the year. Schools will have different approaches - we have our associate teachers helping with GCSE oral practice one afternoon a week in our partner state school, and one lunchtime a week at our school. They will be hosting a French school visit in late November – and accompanying our own trips abroad.

The SCITT administration is well defined and easy to administer. This will come as no challenge to any aspiring Head of subject or a teacher who is competent and comfortable in their department.

Associate teachers apply to join the NML SCITT through UCAS, they are then shortlisted and interviewed by Silverdale School or in one of the hub schools in Bolton and Dulwich. Schools can choose to be part of the interview process if they wish to have a say.

Mentor training is also provided by the NML SCITT.

Cash? Schools will commit because you believe in the need to recruit more teachers – not because you need to address a financial issue! Remuneration exists of course and will be broadly similar, pro-rata, to that offered to host a PGCE student.

The show so far

We have been very impressed with the calibre of students and support from the NML SCITT.

What next?

We have already invited several to apply for the course next year.

The Science SCITT is also being developed and details will emerge in time.

Contact Nick Mair (Dulwich), Sara Davidson (Oundle) or Gaynor Jones (NML SCITT) to find out more. We recommend a phone call or a visit.

Nick Mair and Sara Davidson
An MFL qualification of interest to pupils in the CCF

Tinker, tailor? – but your pupils may well be more interested in soldier, spy – or the emergency services

An MFL qualification of interest to pupils in the CCF or completing the Duke of Edinburgh.

Those of you who heard my piece at the ISMLA conference on the 3rd of February will already know something of this project. The purpose of this article is to give a little more information and to ask for details of those schools who might be interested.

Background

We have seen a continued slide in the numbers of pupils taking an ML examination nationally at GCSE or A level. This appears to have been further exacerbated in schools where there has been a change from 4 AS to 3 A levels. Our subject can find itself in what should be an attractive ‘enrichment’ slot but few schools seem to have made this work. I have endeavoured to find a solution!

What next?

The Chartered Institute of Linguists has confirmed it will allocate resources to develop an examination which I hope will be of interest to pupils who enjoy taking part in the CCF or completing a Duke of Edinburgh qualification. The current thinking is that it might be in the second half of the summer term after internal exams and it is suited for Year 10 CEF A2 Level (Foundation GCSE?) and Year 12 pupils CEF B1 (post good GCSE). There are likely to be two formats of the exam – one for those interested in the military, the other more skewed towards emergency services. The first two parts of each exam are identical but the third will vary. The current proposed format of the exam is a suggestion, and given to outline a potential task. It will be clear that I have written this format as a linguist and will defer to those with more specific military or emergency service knowledge.

Task 1 - Distress message

L Comp: A helicopter sends a distress message giving details such as location, likely remaining flight time before ditching and number of people on board. Format is multiple choice. The recording will be heard only once but the information will be repeated three times as might happen in the real world. There will be appropriate background flight noise.

Task 2 - Humanitarian support

Listening comprehension and English writing task: The task is similar to the one above but the candidate is require to produce a summary and set of instructions in English to resolve the situation.

Task 3 - Location (with appropriate military / emergency services skew)

Listening comprehension and TL writing task: There is uncertainty about location – candidate must understand information to confirm location and surrounding. This may involve a map / photos. The candidate is require to produce a summary and set of instructions in the target language. Marking will consider the written information as if it were delivered orally.

Caveats

Whilst there has been sustained initial interest from the relevant quarters and the CIOL have confirmed they will allocate resources to produce it, I write this article in the hope that enthusiasm from state and independent schools will make the examination more likely.

What might help make it work?

The format of the exam is genuinely engaging – these are real life situations. At the moment the proposal is that, as in real life, there will be designated high stake questions, where an incorrect answer will score 0 for the whole task. The recordings will have an authenticity and urgency that will appeal to pupils. The marking is likely to be on absolutely
unequivocal communication of information – as might happen in real life. It may well be possible that in future years the exam format is from head camera footage (possibly taken from video games).

The levels are pitched up at CEF A2 (think foundation GCSE) and B1 (think post good GCSE) to encourage pupils to complete a GCSE and to continue after GCSE.

It is hoped that the format of the exam will be particularly attractive in areas of the country where uptake of MFL is under threat.

The timing is attractive. The suggested slot is late June, after internal examinations and at a time when, after a hard year, motivation can flag.

The format is easy to administer: a single listening comprehension exam, and will be attractively priced.

The emergency services version and the military version are planned to be run on the same day, one after another.

The Chartered Institute of Linguists are highly respected and have a long tradition of engaging and testing exam formats.

The format has the support of two ‘leading’ Russell Group universities.

Is this for your school?

This implies no commitment on your part, but if you think your school might be interested could I ask you to run this past your CCF / DfE team?

Their support is not, of course, essential, but it would worry me if they had reservations and I would be keen to produce an attractive and useful format as possible.

I stress again that resources have been allocated by the Chartered Institute of Linguists (who currently work with the MoD) to develop the examination and that there has been initial sustained interest from the Ministry of Defence.

I would be grateful for an email to mairn@dulwich.org.uk expressing an interest, interested year groups (10 or 12 or both?), and stating if the second half of June would work. I can then email the current version of the examination at CEF A2.

Nick Mair

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**ISMLA Conference 2018**

This year’s exhibition was an immense success, on which we congratulate John Wilson, who worked so hard to coordinate the event. 25 organisations were represented at the exhibition, including several welcome new faces, who all enjoyed the splendid facilities at the Perse School. The organisers, initially a little disappointed to learn that the new arts centre’s brand new building would not be ready in time for the conference, emerged convinced that the welcoming and spacious loft space that we took over last month could not have been bettered. Our exhibition was bustling and animated, as delegates chatted with each other and with the exhibitors over coffee and after our delicious lunch. We should like to record our thanks to Pierre Pillette, to Alastair Shaw, to the estate staff, and, of course to the caterers for making this occasion such a successful one for exhibitors and delegates alike.

David Cragg-James

Jenny Davey

Please read on for a summary of each of the excellent sessions that delegates attended at the exhibition.
Jocelyn Wyburd: The Landscape for Languages

As many of you will know, Jocelyn Wyburd is Director of the Language Centre of Cambridge University and prior to that at Manchester University. She was Chair of the University Council for Modern Languages until last year, and the former Chair of the Routes into Languages national Advisory Board. In the past year she has contributed chapters to two books: Languages after Brexit: how the UK speaks to the World and Innovative language teaching and learning at university: enhancing employability (which is free to download!). Jocelyn speaks French, Italian, Nepali and German, as well as what she calls ‘passable’ Spanish.

Always one of our most popular speakers at the conference, Jocelyn did not disappoint. Her opening keynote speech entitled ‘The Current Landscape for Languages in the UK (taking account of Brexit) gave us much to worry about, but there were also some hopeful notes. She made the point that over half of global leaders have either a social sciences (44%) or arts or humanities (11%) bachelor’s degree and NOT a STEM degree. Likewise, 62% of candidates to the last UK General Election had an Arts, Humanities or Social Sciences background and 58% of Chief Executives of FTSE 100 Index Companies have studied AHSS at some stage in higher education. Languages, she argued, enjoy a positioning alongside AHSS subjects. Jocelyn referred also to Google’s recent research on its own staff and the fact that it found that the top seven characteristics at Google were all soft skills, which are byproducts of foreign language acquisition and that STEM expertise came in, perhaps surprisingly, last.

In her section on Brexit, Jocelyn relayed a selection of news stories which revealed the ignorance of some Brits (including Farage) towards languages. She highlighted the concerning findings of last year’s Language Trends survey regarding decline in uptake and emphasised the British Council’s warning that more young people must learn languages for UK to remain globally competitive post-Brexit. The British Council’s top 5 languages for the UK are: 1. Spanish 2. Mandarin 3. French 4. Arabic 5. German and the government needs to prioritise the teaching of these now, alongside STEM.

She strongly recommended all Modern Language Departments buying a copying of Michael Kelly’s collection of essays: Languages after Brexit: How the UK speaks to the World as it contained persuasive arguments for the study of languages. Concluding, Jocelyn urged us to lobby for continued participation in Erasmus+ and other exchange programmes and the right to work/reside in the UK for non-UK EU nationals for the sake of teacher supply. We collectively (both schools and universities) need to look at providing a wider range of more flexible ways of facilitating language learning, she said. Brexit offers an opportunity to lobby even more strongly than before – for national cross-departmental language policies, a national strategy, and about funding issues affecting state maintained sixth forms. The message was ‘harness that ammunition’!

Sara Davidson

Dr Silke Mentchen: Cambridge Admissions

Dr Silke Mentchen started by outlining the differences between the broader MML degree at Cambridge compared to Oxford. Cambridge are unashamed of the emphasis on the study of literature and the ‘Medieval’ of the degree title reflects the fact that language is taught historically across periods. All undergraduates must start with two languages and there are a range of courses to choose from, as well as those offered by the Language Centre. Linguistics is also an option both within a language choice and as a subject in itself. Students are also able to borrow or import a paper from another subject in their final year. There are two pathways available to students and prove equally popular. One is to take one post A-level language with one at ab initio level and the other to take two post A-level languages. The ab initio stream join the post A-level stream after one year and their grammar is usually better than those who have studied the language at A-level but their vocabulary is more limited. The year abroad is key to widening vocabulary. Language and culture are interlinked and the language is studied alongside literature, linguistics, history and thought. Offers are usually A*AA, with the A* not required in a particular subject, although it is possible for the university to ask for an A* in a language if they feel that this is right for that particular student. Cambridge as a university is very well aware of the issues caused by severe grading and offers reflect this. In terms of subject choice at A-level, there is not much subject hierarchy with a wide range of subjects suggested as complementing languages. The assessment test remains at interview and is comprised of a written piece in
the target language where students are encouraged to show off what they know, at the risk of making slight errors, rather than playing safe and being 100% accurate. Dr Mentchen recommended the departmental websites for information as well as Villiers Park and HE+ for additional materials. There are a number of upcoming university open days and the CAmmact Teachers’ Day on the 19th of March. The talk was extremely clear and very detailed, leaving delegates extremely well informed on the structure of the Cambridge MML degree and how to prepare their pupils.

Jenny Davey

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**Pierre Pillet: Keeping your SLT on side**

There will be few teachers and heads of department who could have failed to learn something of interest from Pierre’s talk. The key idea would be that it is vital to ‘control the vision’ of Modern Languages in your school. Pierre’s crucial point is that the price for failing to do this will be that someone else will do it for you – and almost certainly not to your advantage. Few schools will not be suffering from declining numbers in some of the languages on offer. Combine this with exam results that, to a Chablis-guided parent, can look less strong than other departments and a Mr Micawber approach to financially viable A level set numbers and you can see that ‘controlling the vision’ is paramount.

Pierre offered practical and realistic ways of addressing the perfect storm lashing our subject – be it asking parents to pay more for the improved staff / pupil class ratio, reducing contact time with the help of structured work in library supervised sessions or pruning excessive language choices in the early years. Make it clear to your SLT that you are being economical with, for instance, buying resources or carefully looking after textbooks so that they need replacing less frequently, as this will show your managers that you are prepared to make sacrifices, just not at the expense of the breadth and quality of your curriculum. These are not easy choices, but can often make the difference between survival or implosion.

On offer too were also some of the ambitions that we have at our hearts; the message was that if you prioritise these things and create a coherent vision for your department, your SLT will be interested. Finding the right sort of training day, university links, work experience, mentoring, tailored language paths and engaging exams will all enhance your department and your subject in the eyes of SLT.

Heads can find languages departments ‘unlike others’ and that can be difficult for them. Assessing a lesson where you can’t understand what is being said, timetabling conversation lessons and oral exams, dealing with culturally diverse groups of eloquent strong personalities defending their own subject area, risky trips abroad and perhaps even stranger exchange visitors are all unique to our departments and make the SLT’s lives less straightforward. The huge majority of Heads are prepared to be very supportive if you can show them you are in control of a plan and not simply buffeted by the random gusts of the everyday.

Pierre’s talk was enlightening, clear and inspiring – merci, et aux barricades!

Nick Mair
In our recent annual ISMLA conference Roma introduced us to THE LANGUAGE MAGICIAN which is a free gaming assessment tool for the languages classroom at primary level, conducted by a consortium of ten partners from four countries under the lead of the Goethe-Institut London. The project is co-financed by the Erasmus+ fund of the European Commission. The bespoke computer-based testing tool will soon be accessible online in five languages (Spanish, French, German, Italian and in English for EAL) and is said to follow the benchmark system of the CEFRL (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

The programme has two main objectives that directly impact on what happens in the primary languages classroom. On the one hand, it aims to contribute to an anxiety-free learning environment where testing takes the form of a virtual role-play activity, promoting and making languages more accessible to all. On the other, its intention is to provide primary languages teachers with a compact assessment tool of reliable standards, generating instantly available data on pupil progress and achievement, making the assessment of skills a relatively hassle-free task.
From the teacher's point of view (being a recently appointed Head of Languages at a small prep school in the Berkshire countryside) I can certainly see the appeal of readily available (free) technology which may provide my department with quality assessment of our youngest pupils, not only within a single year group, but also as they progress from one year to another. THE LANGUAGE MAGICIAN is intended to follow pupils from age 5 to age 11, testing three skills (reading, listening, writing and additionally, thinking skills) and – when repeated - proving information about progression. A speaking module will be provided via the website, enabling teachers to look at all four skills in the time of two 35-minute lessons.

From the pupil's point of view, I have little doubt that THE LANGUAGE MAGICIAN will be a hit in all language classrooms that give it a go. Its attractive imaginary world (within which a Potteresque narrative meets the look-alike characters of the movie sensation, Madagascar) promises to be a joyful and engaging activity and consequently a powerful stimulus for learning. Pupils are given a clear objective as well as a sense of progression throughout the game. In the meantime, failing to complete a linguistic task will not result in pupils not being able to complete the magical quest, which is an important factor in the test's playfulness and appeal.

From a practical perspective, each LANGUAGE MAGICIAN test lasts 35 minutes from beginning to end. Once started, skipping and pausing is not an option. A similar rigidity is characteristic of the content which is pre-set and cannot be tailored to the needs of the individual classroom. Pupils progress through stages of difficulty. Challenges like recognizing and differentiating spoken language or matching spoken language and pictures, writing words or short sentences in the target language alternate with tasks that have to do with the storyline, are given in the mother tongue. It involves choosing an avatar, casting spells or freeing and feeding the animals. As much of the game involves interaction with the characters, reading and listening skills become essential to success. Speaking, however, remains a task that will need to be creatively incorporated in a subsequent lesson, but can be done with the ideas given on the website. Teachers can (but do not need to) prepare their pupils for the game. Some ideas for preparation lessons will also be given on the website. There were some ideas brought forward during Roma's presentation as to how this might be done, some suggesting that children record each other, which, in my mind, could potentially result in superfluous preparation. Overall, however, the LANGUAGE MAGICIAN is promising to be an exciting new development in early years languages assessment and I am eagerly waiting its launch this spring!

Bori Gannon

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**Joe Dale: Making the most of being the part of the MFL Twitterati**

@joedale began his talk by giving us an insight into the creation and history of his incredibly successful #mftwitterati which now has 5,000 followers who share ideas and good practice via Twitter. He cited articles in the Guardian from 2013 and 2015 that support the use of platforms such as Twitter owing to their crowdsourcing techniques, which have led to the creation of larger banks of ideas and increased resource sharing.

Joe’s talk contained a veritable plethora of information about different ways in which we can make productive use of technology in the classroom such as through the use of Padlet for collaborative creative storytelling, and http://textingstory.com, through which you can create recordings and create activities such as audio scavenger hunts for pupils.

Joe warned delegates that those of us using Vocalrecall would find that, as of that morning, it no longer existed. However, Joe reassured delegates that it would return but in a slightly different guise, possibly under the name ‘ClassQR’. Delegates were encouraged to explore this site as a way of providing audio feedback to pupils and as a method by which teachers could record language ‘natively’.

He also had bad news about the demise of Storify from May but reassured everyone that Wakelet functions in a very similar way!

Other sites mentioned in Joe's talk were Pinterest and both the LIPS ‘Languages in Primary Schools’ and GILT ‘Global
Innovative Language Teachers’ groups on Facebook.

Joe also gave delegates tips about how to become better digital archeologists and encouraged us to stop sending ourselves emails with all our links. Instead, he advocated using https://flipboard.com to curate links that may be useful in future.

Although he only had 45 minutes, Joe managed to fit an incredible amount into his talk and I am certain that all delegates who attended left buzzing with new ideas to put to use in the classroom and an increased understanding of how to ‘harness the power of technology’.

Daniella Mardell

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Dave Hargrave: Blogging for languages

In a digital world we are no longer alone as teachers, and the support available online for seeking advice, sharing resources and generating discussion with colleagues all over the world is endless. It was a delight to put a face to a blog and listen to Dave Hargrave explain why he set up his blog EverydayMFL (www.everydaymfl.com), how it has enhanced his own teaching as well as that of many others, and the plans that he has for its future. Initially, Dave started to blog as a means of logging and storing his lessons in a concise, logical and readily-accessible manner which would allow him to go back to them and reflect on what he had done well or not. He quickly realised that people were not only reading his blog, but sharing it via social media and around departments. Before he knew it, Dave found that he was part of a whirlwind of discussion on languages teaching and was brought into contact with some big names on the ML circuit: Joe Dale, Steve Smith and Gianfranco Conti to name a few.

Dave explained how simple and cheap it is to set up a blog and, with social media, its exposure can spread rapidly online. There are some legal and safeguarding issues to be wary of, however, such as the need to use copyright free photos and acknowledge the authors of your materials as well as being careful with data protection.

Dave has plenty of ambitions for the future of his blog and he gave many examples of the direction that blogging can take: for students, for parents, for departments. Dave’s modest yet hugely insightful talk left us all wanting to find out about what languages teachers were talking about on the world wide web and, for some of us, inspired even set up a blog of our own.

Melvyn Bardou

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Professor Wendy Ayres-Bennett: Introducing the MEITS (Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies) Research Project

Professor Ayres-Bennett began by posing the paradox that we in the UK are apparently poor at learning languages and yet live in a richly multilingual country.
The aim of the MEITS project, she said, was to turn around perceptions where utilitarian arguments to learn languages are failing and to look for new reasons and arguments to learn languages, objectives which have led to £4 million funding from the AHRC for the four years of the project to 2020. The ultimate goal would be for languages to achieve the same status as STEM through getting languages higher up the political agenda and putting pressure on policy makers and government.

Based in Cambridge but with partners elsewhere in the UK, in Norway and Spain, the project has a distinctly international and interdisciplinary perspective. It is working with many external partners too including the general public, language events such as Edinburgh fringe. One intriguing aspect she mentioned is why there are no language museums in UK.

The project is looking at the challenges, benefits and problems of speaking more than one language, at issues of language and identity. It is also trying to take a more holistic view of languages in the UK, taking traditional languages as well as new ones new like Mandarin plus the rest of our complex linguistic landscape including indigenous and community languages.

There are six research strands to the MEITS project

Arts of identity: literature, cinema, culture and citizenship in a globalizing Europe, looking at Ukraine and Catalonia in particular. Language, society, power and identity: trying to cultivate a culture of being modern linguists rather than language specialists.

Standard languages, norms and variation. Why are rules so persuasive? What is a standard language and is it good?

Sociolinguistic perspectives on multilingualism: identity, diversity and social cohesion. For example, in Northern Ireland does learning Irish help reconciliation when taught to future Protestant leaders?

The influence of multilingual identity on foreign language learning. Looking at attainment of those who start monolingual and those who already have one or more home languages and are adding to their repertoire at school. If trained to think of themselves as having multilingual identity, this can help to motivate and provide sense of achievement. The project is looking at the progress of 2 groups, Can pedagogical intervention help? Here, they are working with 7 schools across the country and different locations, size and demographics.

Learning across the lifespan, revisiting age, circs and languages. Primary language results remain mixed; there is enjoyment but no sense of progress exacerbated by issues of hours of teaching and teacher quality. There was much discussion at this point as to whether it was better to wait post-primary to begin ML learning. The researchers are working with primary schools, secondary schools and adult education.

Multilingualism and cognition: implications for motivation, health and well-being. This strand is looking at the various benefits of multilingualism, be they social, cognitive or ideological. Aspects professor Ayres-Bennett suggested were whether people who learn later in life get similar benefits to earlier learners’ benefits. Yes, it would seem. Linguists are apparently better at switching between tasks and are more mentally agile.

Professor Ayres-Bennett concluded with the thought that it would be wonderful if the general public appreciated the true value of multilingualism. However, attitudes may be changing. Following experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq the armed forces have learned to appreciate language as a core skill and are encouraging people to come forward to register their competence in modern languages and offering financial rewards. The Metropolitan Police are also seeking to recruit officers with language skills given language diversity in London.

More detail about this fascinating and highly relevant project can be found at http://www.meits.org.

Peter Langdale
Gloria Visintini: The MOOC ‘Cultural Studies and Modern Languages: An Introduction’.

Gloria Visintini is the Language Director for Technology Enhanced Learning at the School of Modern Languages at the University of Bristol, creator of the Cultural Studies MOOC, winner of the 2015 University Award for Education, Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and member of the Society for Italian Studies executive committee.

What is a MOOC? It stands for massive open online courses, first developed by top American Universities in 2006 in the ever-developing world of digital access to knowledge. Think of it as an extension to what we used to know as Distance Learning.

Over the past few years, a range of UK universities have also started developing MOOCs, among them, the University of Bristol. One of its recently developed courses is entitled Cultural Studies and Modern Languages: An Introduction, which is hosted on the FutureLearn platform. Available to the public, it was designed to give people a flavour of how exciting studying modern languages can be, while improving awareness of what the study of languages is about. A degree in modern languages is often perceived to be only about acquiring fluency in another language, but it is also about exploring different cultures and societies – something Gloria and her team wanted to emphasise through this MOOC.

It was launched in February 2015 for the first time, with several subsequent re-runs. It attracted around 48,000 joiners across the world so far. (Around 50% of them started the course.) As well as raising awareness of what is involved in the study of a modern language, Gloria and her team also wanted to experiment with new pedagogies and technologies, to disseminate their work and research, to engage with the general public, as well as to improve recruitment figures.

The course is taught across four weeks with four main themes: Slogans, Books, Monuments and Images. These cover a variety of languages and thus cultures (French, Czech, German, Italian, Austrian, Russian and Spanish).
This particular format was chosen because it conveys the idea that the study of culture includes a range of studies and exposes learners to a variety of topics within a single course. It also allows them to learn in small bites (and dip in and out of the course) and creates a structure that is easy to follow. And finally, it reflects the type of teaching done at Bristol, across departments.

Gloria explained how the course was put together, using members of the Modern Languages Department in Bristol and gave some background to the development process of this particular course as well as detailing some of the major challenges: agreement on content, designing academic content, seeking permissions for third-party images, marketing effectively, support from University teams and organising work within multiple teams. A post-course evaluation survey revealed a 90% rate of good or excellent comments.

At the end of Gloria's talk a number of those attending said that they had in fact done this online course and rated it highly and felt it could be of great use also to their A Level students (as well as extending the knowledge and expertise of the teacher). An obvious issue would be the availability of the course at times of the academic year that would suit the timetable of a school. Gloria spoke to individuals at the end to discuss how this might be resolved and ideas were exchanged informally.

My feelings were that this MOOC would be a very good starting point for students who wished to gain an insight into the cultures of the languages they were studying and to understand that it is not just the language that makes a nation. It would also be a gentle introduction to how modular courses at university works and thus, we hope, whet their appetite for further study. I would also encourage teachers to look at what FutureLearn has to offer. Courses from a range of universities include: Cultures and Identities in Europe, Hispanic Film and Culture, Spanish and Italian for Beginners, German at Work to name but a few. There is even an Introduction to Irish Language and Culture!

Julia Whyte

Jane Woo: Characters and rapping - thoughts on successful learning in Mandarin

A native Mandarin and Cantonese speaker, Jane Woo’s passion for teaching & learning languages was evident to all those who attended her talk at the conference. Jane completed her teacher training at the UCL Institute of Education and is currently involved in action research, which focuses on recurrent mistakes language learners make and how to best avoid them. This is particularly useful in order to make pupils aware of their progress. Action research may include methods such as questionnaires, interviews, observation grids, focus groups, learning logs, keeping a diary, recordings or the use of school data.

We had the opportunity to see an example of a teaching journal. The idea is that the teacher keeps a factual recording of what has been taught in lessons and a simple rating or lesson evaluation under three categories: enjoyment, engagement and difficulty. The teaching journal is useful to identify a pattern in your pupils' learning over a period of time.
So how may keeping a journal help a teacher? According to Jane, it is good to focus on one group of learners or perhaps on one aspect such as Chinese characters or a verb tense. It is then important to look at the pattern over a period of time and draw conclusions that will influence your future teaching. The idea is that keeping a journal should be flexible and fit around your teaching life. It can also be a useful reflection tool for Mandarin teachers who may not have other colleagues to discuss lessons with immediately, as often there is only one per department.

For Jane, other tools for successful learning in Mandarin include the use of activities:

Guessing games when learning Mandarin characters.
Beat the teacher – put a few words on the board, take the meanings away and pupils repeat them in a competition against the teacher.
mbdg.net is a useful online resource to write characters together.
Use of mini whiteboards to write characters as a group activity. Perhaps give points to the most beautiful characters or to the person who draws the character the quickest.
N-1 game – repeat the sentence/characters the teacher has said minus one.
Detective game.

Mandarin rap podcasts were mentioned as particularly useful. Pupils usually like the idea of repeating raps and other pupils record themselves singing them. This is especially good for beginners, as most of the pupils join in singing even if they are not confident with pronunciation yet.

What was particularly interesting is that we put into practice all of Jane's teaching ideas in the session and they worked really well, even if some of us did not speak any Mandarin! They can of course be applied to the teaching of other languages as well. We thank Jane for her enthusiasm, her practical ideas and for sharing her research methods with us. It was an absolute pleasure having her as a guest speaker at our conference.

Marta Viruete

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**Stephen Rich: Writing a Russian textbook - What, how, why?**

Why? Very few Russian textbooks are published in the UK. Stephen used existing textbooks like Novaya Iskra, Ruslan, Vnimanie etc. and always wanted something slightly different for his students (e.g. full grammar explanations and tables). It is useful even in the twenty-first century to have an actual hard copy as there are times when there might be no working wi-fi in the classroom or at home, students still need to practise handwriting Cyrillic and a textbook is always useful to set homework exercises. Whilst it is evident that teachers should not only use a textbook but employ it as part of a balance to complement other material e.g. online worksheets, Stephen’s textbook does also include worksheets and answer tables, which do make a teacher’s job easier.

Who for? This textbook is for suitable for GCSE students or equivalent, with suitable exercises but it is not geared for a specific GCSE course. By the end of Book 1, pupils should already be basically prepared to sit the GCSE. This is the second year that the book has been trialled on Winchester College students who do tend to be bright and motivated, but it should be accessible to all, and differentiation by outcome would work well with a mixed-ability group.

How? The textbook became progressively harder and more time-consuming to write as more complex concepts were introduced. Stephen wrote about one chapter per week (creating a Word document for each chapter) made up of four teaching handouts he had trialled in class that week. The main issue was doing the formatting using Microsoft Word. He used a simple digital voice recorder for the listening exercises. Recordings are of Stephen and his wife (who is a native Russian) but, in the future, Stephen hopes to make use of visiting Russian exchanges as it would be ideal to have just native speakers. He commissioned a native Russian illustrator to create the beautiful, authentic images that are ideal for the new GCSE picture-based discussions.

Content? Note that this book does not include how to read/write Cyrillic or produce first words but he has got plans to incorporate his own alphabet booklet. There is an assumption that the teacher will introduce Cyrillic and basic vocabulary in the first few lessons before the textbook introduced. All instructions are in English in the first book then in Russian once imperatives have been learned in Book 2, apart from for a few complicated tasks for which an English explanation is offered. Lessons progressively combine previous topics and new grammar and the content is mildly amusing, to engage the pupils. There is colour-coding for grammar (yellow for new grammar, grey if should be familiar). Tricky grammar is omitted until appropriate.

Associated materials? There is a website planned (to be like frentchteacher.net) and Stephen plans to add cultural information in English. We looked at some matching exercises and heard some listening exercises, which were all
entertaining, attractively-produced and would be accessible to a range of students at GCSE level.

Availability? The textbook will be available to buy in the summer. Stephen had to set up a company and put copyright on material but this has not been met with too much difficulty. Given that the textbook is for Russian, Stephen self-published as he was doubtful that this would be viable for a commercial publisher.

Format? The textbook will be spiral bound for practical reasons and for durability.

As a group, we discussed what we look for in a language textbook:

Lots of interesting practice questions
Up-to-date and relevant material
Workbook plus textbook
Topics (esp. grammar) revisited as pupils progress
Practical ease like page numbers and clear sections

The popularity of Stephen’s book and our group discussion showed that there is still a need for new hard copy textbooks, especially for Russian, that have been produced by practising teachers and tried out on students. I would emphasise the importance of humour in textbooks to engage students and encourage them to improve their linguistic skills in order to access entertaining material. The impact of beautiful visuals, particularly those that relate to the culture of the places where the target language is spoken, on incentivising learning and providing stimuli for speaking exercises is also clear. It is the nature of our job perhaps that sometimes we do find that there is a need to ‘reinvent the wheel’ in order to provide up-to-date, appealing resources and to meet the demand for lots of practical language exercises to use in the classroom and for homework.

Jess Tipton
Professor Catriona Seth raised an interesting question in the French literature session at the conference: Où sont les femmes? The issue starts on a lexical level: the TLFi recognises neither the word auteure nor autrice and, whilst we can use auteur to refer to a male or female writer, the slightly patronising-sounding femme auteur is in use and seems unsatisfactory when compared, for example to chanteuse, which, whatever your view on the future of masculine and feminine versions of occupations, is what we would expect of the French language.

Unfortunately, life and semantics are aligned in this instance and, as Professor Seth showed us, whilst there have certainly been prolific female writers through the ages, recent anthologies of literature are far quicker to find room for male writers, who have not necessarily stood the test of time (who still reads François de Curel?), but who seemingly deserve a wider readership. To be appreciated as a female writer, you have to be among the greats, Professor Seth argued, too good for people not to sit up and listen. In five different poetry anthologies, no more than 5% of each collection was written by a woman. Twentieth-century anthologies of literature are no better, finding space for the following women but very rarely any others:

Anna de Noailles
Colette
Simone de Beauvoir
Françoise Sagan
Nathalie Sarraute
Marguerite Duras
The message was pessimistic: if you compare the number of celebrated female writers from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, there has not been great progress. Speaking of the eighteenth century, Germaine de Staël, known as Madame de Staël, may have been one of the era’s most important writers across Europe, famous far beyond her country’s borders, but she was only honoured with a Pléiade edition last year, to mark the bicentenary of her death (which we also marked with a newsletter cover of her portrait). She was too modern, confident and intellectual a woman and might have offered too radical an example, perhaps? It is difficult to comprehend but, in the twenty-first century there is still work to be done. Professor Seth believes that the current issue dates back to the French Revolution, which clearly stood for equal rights for men: ‘des droits de l’homme’. There remains a deep mistrust of women who venture into the public sphere, who are somehow all descendants of Marie Antoinette, if white male journalists are to have the last word. And perhaps there remains a specific suspicion of female writers in particular, as stated by Rétif de La Bretonne: « Une femme autrice sort des bornes de la modestie prescrite à son sexe. » (1784).

What can we do as teachers? We can work to redress the balance in the texts that we choose to present to our classes, as teachers in France have tried to do recently, imploring those that set the baccalaureate to equally represent male and female writers. Whatever texts and films you choose to study, you can always introduce your students to female writers through poems, short stories or extracts, when they fit with your lesson content. After hearing Professor Seth’s superb presentation, both fascinating and entertaining, I am certainly more conscious of the disparity and will endeavour to redress the balance in the context of both literature and film in the future.

Davina Suri
Jess Lund: Languages the Michaela way

Our final speaker of the day was Jess Lund, Head of Modern Languages at the Michaela School. Sara had been to the Michaela School last term and wanted her to come and share her innovative approach to teaching French with everyone, both because it yields impressive results but also in order to inject some controversy into the day's proceedings! As it turned out, ISMLA delegates were fascinated by the Michaela method and no tomatoes were thrown; Jess is an engaging and dynamic speaker, whether you are convinced by the school’s methodology or not. However, as committee member Julia Whyte said, throwing textbooks away in favour of Jess’ techniques may be more rewarding, but it is a lot of work unless your whole department is doing the same thing. If you would like to find out more, see Alastair Shaw’s article from our last newsletter here: http://www.ismla.co.ukuploads/1515171016-Autumn%202017.pdf

Alastair Shaw

ISMLA French Day

Queen's College London, Saturday, 18th November 2017

Nobody on the ISMLA committee could remember the last French Day that we had hosted, which suggests that it was rather a long time ago. Perhaps there was an assumption that French is a staple on most schools’ curriculum and that, because it is taught at primary level and often in Year 7, it can take care of itself. However, precisely because Heads of Languages may be focused on keeping up interest in German or promoting Arabic ab initio in the sixth form should not mean that provision in French be overlooked. French teachers are as busy as anyone and this French Day was a great opportunity to take a breath, find the time to chat to colleagues, with plenty of discussion about the new curricula and specifications going on, and to amass some new ideas for the classroom.

Dr Mary Harrod from Warwick University spoke about ‘La Haine’ which remains an ever-popular choice to teach at A Level. When she asked me why A Level teachers were so seemingly obsessed with Matthieu Kassovitz’s seminal film, I told her the truth: ‘because teenagers still love it’. The film dates from 1995 so, having watched the film upteen times, we might be very aware of the problematic nature of the film with its overstylised, clichéd representation of the banlieu, its oft-criticised representation of race and gender, but our students seeing it for the first time find it exciting and are exposed to a different kind of cinema and a different social space from that which they are used to. Dr Harrod placed the film very carefully in its cinematic and social context and reminded us of the wealth of other banlieu films that we can use as a comparative piece or suggest to our pupils. She also suggested several American films that were clear influence on
Kassovitz, which were useful in placing the film in an international context. A couple of my A Level students who had been keen enough to attend the French Day were very excited to rewatch the film after Dr Harrod's talk.

Peter Langdale had been very impressed by Dr Amanda Crawley Jackson’s talk at the Prince’s Teaching Institute and had suggested that we invite her to talk to ISMLA members. We were all very glad that he did and that she accepted. She gave a fascinating talk about her research on the representation of migrants and refugees that she had conducted across many countries, including France. We looked at various photos and she asked questions that I had not previously considered. Did the photographers engage with their subjects? Did they pay them? Did they even ask permission to take them? Even if they were photographing children? Who takes the photos that end up on our front pages of migrants in flimsy boats in treacherous conditions crossing the Mediterranean Sea? How might it feel to be a vulnerable person perched precariously in a tiny boat in the middle of the ocean and to hear the whirr of a helicopter coming to help…. no, just to take a photograph, possibly throw down a bottle of water and then speed off. Dr Crawley Jackson’s research is fascinating, enlightening and touching and we all had lots of new ideas about how to use photographs in our lessons and how to approach the topic of immigration at A Level from new angles.

Melvyn Bardou had used a contact at the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie to secure our next speaker, Mr Alexandre Wolff, who gave us an incredibly detailed overview of French and its place around the world and a Powerpoint presentation brimming with charts and maps to make an A Level French teacher sing with joy! The organisation serves an important purpose and, as Mr Wolff stressed, is not France-focused; there are eighty-four member states or observers of the OIF. For geographical reasons, it is obvious that our teaching is likely to take on a France-focus, but this talk did remind me that including schemes of work or topics based on Senegal, Madagascar or Switzerland, for example, should not be tokenistic but reflect the reality of the living language that we teach.

After lunch, Mr Steve Smith reminded us of the importance of teaching listening skills. He stressed that these are perhaps the most useful skill that our pupils will need beyond the classroom and that they can be overlooked as we try to perfect our pupils’ writing. He reminded us, as usual, of creative and fun games that we can use to make practising listening skills more exciting and of the importance of teaching phonics from the start, which echoes recent recommendations from the government for French teaching. So many of our students fly into a panic during listening exams or struggle with this area, dare I say it, because of a lack of attention span or inexperience with engaging with an audio text for longer than forty-five seconds, in any language, that the session’s recommendations were gratefully received by all.

Finally, Dr Simon Kemp spoke to us about the Holocaust texts on the A Level syllabus. His favourite was clearly ‘Un Secret’ which is the least-taught of the three, perhaps because there is more ambiguity to its plot and characters. Dr Kemp urged us not to shy away from the text as our pupils would find it gripping and its complexities rewarding. By contrast, he pointed out that ‘Un sac de billes’ was rather long, albeit popular among our pupils. It was useful to hear that, as an Admissions Officer at Oxford, he would be happy to hear that pupils had studied two texts or films from the same historical period and would not feel that their experience was too narrow. Indeed he pointed out the advantages to staff who therefore have less history to teach. What was important, instead, was that pupils read widely beyond the curriculum, whether from the same historical period or not.

My thanks go to the QCL staff who gave us the venue for the event, to the ISMLA committee members who helped with the running of the day and to our excellent speakers who really made the day what it was. Now, we look forward to this year’s Italian and Spanish Days. There are lots of INSET days on offer but I really feel that the model we tend to adopt at ISMLA covers wide ground, enriches our subject knowledge and gives us relevant and useful ideas to take back to the classroom. As ever, if you have any recommendations for our subject days or if you would like us to think of doing things differently, do please get in touch.

Davina Suri
Italian teachers across the country came together at North London Collegiate School for a series of CPD talks focused mainly on the new A level specification. This was the second all-day conference for Italian organised by the ever-dedicated Peter Langdale, and it was once again a great success, dare I say possibly even better than the first.

We were treated to a series of talks by speakers from a variety of universities and schools. The day started with two thought-provoking talks related to Theme 3 of the A level programme, L’Italia, una società in evoluzione. Dr Jennifer Burns spoke about approaches to migration in contemporary Italy. She invited us to consider the different historical and geographical perspectives on migration in Italy since the 1980s, and in turn, its cultural and social impact.

Dr Ruth Gynn then continued to provoke our reflections, this time on the concept of the North/South divide, which is also a part of Theme 3 of the syllabus. She first made the very important point, which I was embarrassed to realise I had not considered before, that the divario Nord/Sud is usually presented as fact when it is, in fact, just a theory. She therefore suggested that when teaching this topic we approach it as a concept which has evolved over time, considering how and why it has evolved and perhaps encouraging discussion of its validity. She ended her talk with every language teacher’s dream goodie bag: a list of suggestions of texts, songs and films that will be useful to our teaching of this topic.

Before lunch, Anna Hemsworth told us about the many different things that they do in her department at Manchester Grammar School to promote Italian to their students. She first highlighted her policy of only having non-language specific clubs and activities (for example, a Languages club rather than French or Italian Club), so that no one language is given more importance. Some other suggestions were art workshops, a “Lingo” band, going into feeder schools to give taster lessons, forging links with universities, inviting ex-A level students in to speak. A number of teachers stressed the importance of making sure Italian is represented in whole school themed events. And of course the secret weapon, food! A trip to a local pizzeria, perhaps a cooking lesson, these are always popular.

After lunch, Prof. Giuliana Pieri told us about her project on interdisciplinarity in the classroom, in which A level students of History, Art History and Design studied Futurism for a day at the Tate Modern. She is keen to involve Italian language in her future work, and she and Peter showed us some materials they had already produced for Theme 4 of the new A level Dal fascismo ai giorni nostri. These can all be found on www.teachitalian.co.uk, a new website that Peter has painstakingly set up as a resource-sharing hub – there is already some fantastic material on there and the more of us that share our materials, the better it will get. I would encourage all Italian teachers to take a look and to email one or two of their own resources to Peter at teachitalianuk@gmail.com so he can add them to the site.

Dr David Brown, a sixth form teacher and contributor to the new A level History specification, also gave us some original ideas for teaching Fascism, from his own repertoire. His “Fascist Pizza” activity could most certainly be adapted for an Italian lesson and could very well make a difficult topic more accessible to students.

For the last two sessions of the day, I attended, from a choice of four, a discussion on the new GCSE and a talk on La vita è bella. My own school has actually moved to IGCSE since the change in syllabus, and I had thought many other independent departments would do the same, but from discussions with other colleagues I get the impression that most Italian departments have in fact chosen the new GCSE. Although this session was not directly relevant to my own teaching, I still found Sharon Mangion’s suggestions of resources quite useful – I had not yet come across www.thisislanguage.com, so I have now signed up for a free trial.

Lastly, in his presentation on approaches to teaching La vita è bella, Dr Charles Leavitt focused exclusively on the controversy surrounding the setting of the film during the Holocaust. Although at first, I was not convinced that his discussion could be accessible to A level students, by the end of the talk I realised that I would be much better equipped to help my students understanding the more challenging themes of the film.

A very warm thank you to all of the speakers, and of course to Peter Langdale, for sharing their precious time and valuable expertise with us. All of the presentations from the day can be found on www.teachitalian.co.uk. A special thank you should also go to North London Collegiate School for gallantly stepping in at the last minute to host the event, after the effects of the cold weather had momentarily left us without a venue just a few days before the event.

Sarah Bottaioli
How to run an immersion day?

In November and December 2017, the Scottish Six Schools’ Group ran our eighth annual French, Spanish and German Days, with over 130 Lower Sixth Form linguists. The idea took off nine years ago, when a chance meeting at an Edinburgh prep school paved the way for a series of termly meeting where HoDs from Fettes, Glenalmond, Merchiston and Strathallan could share our experiences as boarding schools running both the Scottish and English systems. Stewarts Melville School joined us for that first meeting when the idea of an Immersion Day was first mooted. Since then Loretto have also come on board and, with ISMLA’s sponsorship, nearly 1000 pupils will have attended one of these days, run by the schools for our own pupils. This is entirely due to the determination and commitment of the staff at the schools, who, to make sure that events go ahead, have conquered snow and ice, high winds, the interminable traffic works in Edinburgh and more recently, the added complications of the roadworks for the new Queensferry crossing over the Forth.

We have learned through trial and error and now have a format, which, whilst continuing to evolve, retains a basic format and a key aim – to offer our Year 12 pupils a series of varied and challenging workshops, run in the target language and which encourage them to speak as much as they can.

We quickly learned from our first French Day at Stewarts Melville that the sessions had to be as interactive as possible if we wanted our pupils to speak. Since then, we have developed a basic format which enables us to offer a day catering for levels which range from IB Ab Initio, through Scottish Higher, AS, A Level to IB Languages A and B.

We rotate the days around the schools, with the hosting HoD taking responsibility for arranging the programme but with the other schools on hand to offer staffing if needed. Pupils are divided into groups of up to 16, who move through a series of activities run by teachers. This last year we have attempted to double-staff each session, to give colleagues the chance to go around and see what is happening as well as to have a break.

The first session is always Speed Dating. This allows even the most nervous of pupils the chance to start speaking in the target language, asking and answering simple questions, which can easily be differentiated to allow for more confident speakers. After that, the pupils set off to their first work shop. We have had success with a wide variety of activities using film, music, poetry, debating, running dictations and definitions. Stewarts Melville challenged us early on to extend the day after lunch, arguing convincingly that if our pupils were going to spend hours travelling to the day, we needed to make as much of it as possible. Fettes provided further inspiration last year when they shook up the traditional format, introducing cooking, which of course, proved an instant hit with hungry teenagers. We end the day with a plenary session, in English, which aims to finish on a high note and open eyes to the possibilities offered by languages outside the classroom. We have been lucky enough to hear Professor Antonella Sorace herself on Bilingualism Matters, Merchiston introduced us to GCHQ (Sam the Spy’s talk at Strathallan was a particular success), Loretto to opera and university admissions tutors, whilst Glenalmond built on the last year’s success at Fettes, by asking a former pupil to come back and talk about how they now use languages in their current position. In the first few years, we used a speaker known to us all as simply the Whisky Man who delighted pupils with his real life examples of how speaking other languages would enable them to enjoy career success in the future.

We run a French Day and then a Spanish or German day each year. The sponsorship from ISMLA has helped with the sudden burden placed on already pressured departmental budgets by the need to feed up to 90 extra pupils or contribute to travel costs. Some years, we offer bespoke sessions for bilingual or native speakers, often concentrating on the skills that they find most lacking when it comes to exams e.g. translation into English or writing essays on literature/film.

The Immersion Days have become a fixture in our calendars and the feedback from pupils and staff has been incredibly positive over the years. We have seen pupils change their minds about degree courses having listened to our speakers and the days are well worth the undoubted effort needed in terms of organisation. Of course, they are only possible due to the teachers involved who have remained tightly in contact over the years. We meet once each term, have wished colleagues well as they are promoted or move schools and have welcomed new members to the team. Perhaps it is due to the particular environment that we find ourselves in, geographically of course, but also in that we offer two national educational systems and are facing times of political and educational change, but I think that we would all agree that our model could easily and usefully be adopted elsewhere too. The Immersion Days and our regular meetings are a welcome chance to catch up, share problems, offer ideas and return encouraged to our own schools.

Jenny Davey
How did we end up here? Immersed in Francoist Spain

Rather serendipitously, back in December we took our sixth-formers to see the same performance of ‘La Casa de Bernarda Alba’ as Dr Michael Thompson of the University of Durham. We got chatting about the excellence of the production, which played the piece very ‘straight’, mindful of the swaths of Spanish students who make up a large part of the audience most nights. The whole ensemble cast was strong, there was creative play with light and colour and the set evoked the claustrophobic, stifling society whilst echoing the play’s focus on the fact that, in these communities, women are as much to blame for their repression as are men. As it so happened, Mike had just completed some research into the performance of Lorca’s plays during Franco’s dictatorship and wanted to bring a workshop into schools to work with sixth-formers on the topic. And so it was that, coupled with the performance at the Cervantes Theatre, our Year 12 class had a very rich introduction indeed to this text and playwright.

On Tuesday 30th January, Mike came along to Queen’s College together with four actors from Théâtre Sans Frontières to take us back to the year 1963, the year in which the miniskirt was all the rage in London whilst in Spain an ultra-conservative Catholicism pervaded all aspects of life, including, of course, the theatre. 1963 was also, significantly, the year of the first run of ‘La Casa de Bernarda Alba’ permitted by the state (apart from a single performance in 1950). The set-up was that our students were British A Level students who had signed up for an educational visit to Spain. Before they left ‘Swinging London’, they were briefed by the travel agent (no short skirts, political chat or condoms please!) and had a talk from Mike about a play that they were going to see. He had hoped to join them on the trip but the government had not taken kindly to his research about censorship in Spain and had prohibited him from re-entering the country.

After the break, we arrived in Spain and the students found themselves helping the cast of Lorca’s play to censor the text according to the regime’s strict regulations so that when the inspector came to see the rehearsal he would allow the first performance to go ahead. They then had to act out their censored version for the inspector, in the hope that it would get the green light to be performed for the first time in Lorca’s own country.

The premise was hugely effective and it gave us teachers such a buzz to see our pupils carefully scrutinising the authentic list of criteria for censorship that Mike had distributed and applying it to the text. It would be difficult to create such a sense of immediacy again, but we could recreate the exercise in censorship in future years. This workshop was slick, creative and cleverly both challenging and accessible to the pupils and I am sure that it will remain a vivid and useful talking point as we explore the play and the history of twentieth-century Spain further.

I am very grateful to Mike and the wonderful performers from Théâtre Sans Frontières for this engaging and immersive experience for our pupils as well as the staff and pupils of University College School and South End High School for joining us and for joining in so enthusiastically. I now look forward to Mike’s talk at the ISMLA Spanish Day, at which he will present his fascinating research in more detail.

Davina Suri
Lyon Bleu: a language school that comes highly recommended

After several years running a French exchange program at our school, changes to safeguarding regulations forced us to abandon it and find an alternative. We spent years running trips to a language school in Nice but have discovered somewhere even better: Lyon Bleu.

We have now been coming to the school for 3 years and I could not commend the experience enough. Firstly, from London you can take the train, whether direct or via Lilly, which is much more straightforward than taking a flight, although there are plenty of direct flights from UK airports too. Secondly, Lyon is a beautiful city with a strong identity; it has very human proportions, a wealth of cultural activity and an efficient transport service… and let’s not forget that it’s also the French gastronomic capital…

More importantly for a teacher, however, is that we have found an intimate language school more focused on quality than quantity. Located in the 6th district (the most residential area of Lyon, by the river Rhone) it is within walking distance of all the main places of interest (the Opera, the Hotel de Ville, and the Old Town to name but a few). All the teachers are hardworking and inspirational and the school as a whole bends over backwards to organise the perfect week for us. Staff are professional and friendly; lessons are intense and always result in incredible progress being made by our students even in the short span of one week.

Over the past three years, the majority of our students have been hosted in large apartments in the 6th district by families who are clearly genuinely interested in helping our students improve in French and in getting them to sample the delicious specialities of the area: quenelles, saucisson pistaché, St Marcellin…
As well as this, every year we have been allowed to choose our afternoon activities, which has allowed us to tailor our itinerary to each year group: past activities include visits to the Museum of Lyon (Gadagne), tour of the Traboules, the Museum of the Resistance, a chocolate factory, a cookery workshop, the Vogue des Marrons funfair and many more.

Finding a serious school that not only delivers excellent lessons but also listens to and accommodates the requirements of its customers, and offers very competitive packages is not an easy task, so I give Lyon Bleu my heartfelt thanks and my highest praise. We will certainly be back.

Pauline Moloney, King Alfred’s School

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**Linguistics: A path to something new**

Spurred on by this year’s UKLO…

This February, many of our pupils will have sat the UKLO and we must thank the team there, led by Dick Hudson, for putting together this exciting and stimulating challenge for us every year. At the ISMLA conference, Jocelyn Wyburd said that, whilst applications for traditional language degrees were on the decline in the UK, applications for Linguistics had pleasingly gone up. Here is an account from a satisfied customer which you can share with your pupils who are hesitating to go down a lesser-trodden path.

My path to Linguistics

When I started my final year at Glenalmond, all I knew was that I wanted to study ‘something with languages’. Then, that turned into French because I enjoyed the dialogue about the grammar and thinking about how the same thing is conveyed differently in each language. Towards the end of the year, Mrs Davey gave me an aptitude test for Linguistics to try it out and see what I thought. I absolutely loved doing the test; it was like a language-based puzzle! From then on I was set on studying Linguistics.

I applied to York, Aberdeen and Edinburgh but the only university I really wanted to go to was Edinburgh. After a considerable amount of support from my teachers, I got into Edinburgh and the rest is history!

What I love about linguistics is that is so wide while still being narrow enough to not feel lost within your subject. If you feel like you might like to do something with language, it is ideal because it can be combined with most things. If you like computer science and languages, there is the exciting field of language processing for computers (also relevant for Artificial Intelligence). If you’re more into history, you might consider historical linguistics which also takes politics and evolution into account by looking at how different languages develop alongside each other and sometimes converge or diverge. Or, if you are interested in psychology, psycholinguistics might be for you. Here, researchers might attempt to discover how children learn their native language or how strokes affect the knowledge of language. And of course there is a social side to linguistics: how does a speaker’s background, gender, race, religion and many other factors affect the way in which they speak?

It must be noted that the degree does not come with a premade job at the end of it. It is important to consider this aspect if you feel you would rather study teaching or another vocational subject where the outcome is clear from the start. Studying linguistics means you have to find your own way. Many people go into journalism, advertising or publishing after a linguistics degree or speech and language therapy, but there are many options and, the good news is that graduates with Linguistics degrees are highly sought-after across the working world.

To conclude, Linguistics is a broad term and the degree is often misunderstood (a lot of people still believe that linguistics is all about knowing and comparing the grammars of languages). But, especially with the Internet, globalisation and advances in science, it is a rapidly changing and exciting field to go into!

Ex-pupil at Glenalmond College
Russian: Moscow Skype exchange

London-Moscow School Skype Exchange

Given the difficulties in organising any foreign exchange these days, let alone with Russia, I decided to set up a Skype conversation exchange with Russian schoolchildren as a compromise. I ran the initiative past our DSL and notified parents/guardians, who were all supportive. Via a friend in Russia, I tracked down a suitable partner school, a state secondary in Moscow that specialises in the arts and dance choreography, whose teacher of English was keen to engage
with the project. As many of our young Russianists are musicians, and a couple are keen dancers, this school seemed a perfect match.

Prior to the first Skype call the students exchanged letters (see image) with our girls writing in Russian and the Muscovites responding in English. This was the first time our students had used their Russian to convey real-life information (as opposed to nicely constructed written exercises that may or may not be relevant to them) to Russian children. We have now had two group Skype sessions. The first call I slyly arranged in a Year 7 classroom during morning break so that our first-year Russianists, who now all learn Russian for seven weeks as part of the St Paul’s Discovering Languages course, became intrigued by what was happening and hung around to practise their ‘привет’ (hi) and ‘как дела?’ (how are you?). A neat by-product has been that our Russian students from different year groups, on witnessing one another communicating in Russian, have supported and helped each other out. By pure chance we have managed to fit the calls in at a pre-existing Russian News Club time and the first call also neatly coincided with our school’s Russian Day programme of events, meaning our girls could even mention the Russian food they had eaten the day before. The Muscovites couldn’t believe their eyes when we were snacking on actual Russian cakes during the call.

We have now managed initial introductions and short discussions of hobbies by around ten girls at either end aged 14 and up. The Moscow teacher and I have decided that future fortnightly calls will be split into smaller groups by year group and that the girls will prepare Q&A beforehand on a specific agreed topic: next time will be ‘music’ and then ‘food’. These we can correlate with the topics we’re studying in class. There are technical challenges, like the 3-hour time difference with Moscow, audibility issues (it works best in a small classroom) and a coincidental global shutdown of Skype stalling our second call completely, but even these problems seem to have fostered solidarity. I have been particularly impressed by our own girls’ sensitivity and commitment, which I think has been aided by the charming handwritten letters they received and the sharing of a similar sense of humour e.g. ensuing hilarity on both sides after one of our girl’s first brave questions about whether the Russians have a club (=kruzhok) was misinterpreted as whether they have a boyfriend (=druzhok).

The Moscow teacher and I have now put our students into pairs, organised as much as possible by age and shared interests, so that the girls can communicate outside school by email and/or Skype. For this independent aspect, the main messages I relayed to the girls were only to use their school email addresses, to remember the exchange is for educational purposes only, to let their parents/guardians know if they have scheduled a Skype call, and to let a teacher know if they are ever worried or would like to pause or end the exchange. Let’s keep fingers crossed that these virtual communications may develop and evolve into genuine friendships. I have been touched by this example of cooperation, mutual interest, shared sense of humour (and frustration at IT), between the students and also between us teachers, heightened by all the political difficulties between our two countries.

Jess Tipton

Review: The Bonjour Effect

‘The Bonjour Effect’ by Julie Barlow and Jean-Benoît Nadeau

Publisher: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd (28 July 2016)

ISBN: 978-0715651254

£9.99 on Amazon

The Bonjour Effect provides a humorous and fascinating insight into the oddities of our nearest neighbours’ language and behaviour. As two Canadians, the authors share our outsiders’ perspective of the French people. They use their personal experiences and anecdotes to explain some of the things that the French take for granted that puzzle foreigners. How else
could you know that not saying ‘Bonjour’ to a bus driver could lead him to be sarcastic towards you? That making small talk about family and work on a first date could make it your last? Or that a couple arguing in public is seen as the sign of a strong French marriage? To an A Level French student, the sections on attitudes towards politics and unions are particularly interesting and added colour to the respective syllabus modules. For example, the idea that it’s ok for French politicians to have affairs but not to make jokes goes a long way in explaining François Hollande’s unpopularity, which would otherwise be difficult to understand from this side of the channel. This book is packed with useful nuggets that you just can’t get from a standard language textbook. But even for those who have no experience of French, the book will still be an enjoyable read. I’ve learnt that “talking with the French isn’t about communicating or being nice, it’s about being interesting” and that’s certainly what this book is.

Joey Gardner-White (Year 13 pupil at Haberdashers’ Aske’s Boys’ School)
Review: A Level Guide - Un sac de billes

A Level literature guides from Oxford University Press

Oxford University Press guide to Un sac de billes

Author: Colin Povey

Publisher: OUP


£9.50

After Hodder Education released their study guide to Un sac de billes (reviewed in the Autumn 2017 ISMLA magazine) I was quite excited to see that another guide had been published by OUP specifically for the new A-level, thus providing my students with another resource to work from independently. I was already looking at my budget to make sure that I could afford to buy a copy for each of my students until I had a proper look through. Essentially, OUP have come up with a guide which is very similar to the Hodder version in its layout and content and, alarmingly, it contains very little French. This is such a flaw when teachers and students need support with literary analysis in French and a guide in French would have been most welcome.

Back in the noughties, Hodder and Stoughton published the excellent ‘Livret de soutien’ guides as part of the ‘Initiation à la literature française’ series (Paul Humberstone et al). These were entirely in French and were fantastic tools not only for the teacher preparing to teach literature lessons in French but also as an added reference point for the student writing about and discussing the texts in the TL. Why could OUP not have come up with something similar as an alternative to the
Hodder guide? I have, however, used the sample essay section at the back - at least that was in French.

Melvyn Bardou

Oxford University Press guide to L’Étranger

Author: Simon Kemp

Publisher: OUP


£9.50

The OUP study guide to L’Étranger, which was published in 2017 and written specifically for the new AS and A Level syllabai, is divided into six sections: plot and structure, context, characters, language, themes and skills and practice, with the final section (skills and practice) being the most useful in my opinion.

My main frustration with the sections on plot and structure, context, characters, language and themes was that the majority of them were written in English, which is not especially helpful for an exam which requires pupils to analyse and write essays on the text in French.

Nonetheless, there are some useful ‘Activity Boxes’ in each section, with a variety of tasks (in French) to help pupils improve their understanding of the novel including re-ordering key events in a given chapter, gap-fill summaries, analytical and creative questions (describe the scene from the point of view of another character etc.), research based tasks on historical and cultural context and tasks requiring pupils to find quotations or other forms of evidence to illustrate certain themes or techniques or aspects of a certain character in a given extract or chapter. The ‘Key Quotations’ and ‘Upgrade’ tips on exam technique and essay writing, as well as the vocabulary and useful phrases boxes in each chapter are all also useful preparation for the exam.

Overall, I think this guide is a useful resource both to supplement lessons and for pupils to use independently for revision but it would have been more fit for purpose if it had been written in French. It is interesting that at the ISMLA French Day, Simon did ask delegates how they felt about the use of English in the guide and, whilst some pupils who were present responded that they found some explanations in English useful, many teachers would have preferred more in French. Hopefully next time, publishers will consult with teachers about what works best in the classroom.

Alison Drake
Review: Modern Languages Study Guides - La Haine

Further to our collection of reviews of the Hodder study guides in the last edition, we include a further review here of a very popular film to study at A Level. Here, our reviewer finds the mixture of French and English more useful than other reviewers found last time. If you have any views on this, do please get in touch as we would be interested to hear what people think!

Modern Languages Study Guides: La Haine
Publisher: Hodder Education
Author: Karine Harrington
ISBN: 9781471889943

This study guide is an excellent starting point and a treasure chest for every language teacher who embarks on studying La Haine. It is divided into nine well-structured sections, enabling you to plan a very effective and scaffolded approach to the film. It works on many levels, developing students’ understanding and critical appreciation of the issues raised in the film, as well as language skills and developing analytical response with critical skills. Sections 1-5 are very clearly laid out with a mix of French and English, to embed in-depth understanding and key language structures; they simultaneously offer activities and tasks but also elements to build critical skills and boost grades.

On each section, I have created Quizlet study sets and have found the vocabulary lists at the end of each chapter hugely
useful. My students have also found the spider diagrams for themes, characters and techniques highly supportive to enhance their understanding of specific elements and to discuss the film at different levels.

Section 6 examines the director’s methods in English and is an excellent base to work on the various cinematographic techniques used by Kassovitz. The activities at the end of this section effectively consolidate what has been covered and enable students to smoothly analyse these techniques.

My students have benefitted from using the ‘petits exercices de composition’ and the sample essays with marker’s comments as a starting point to improve the planning and the structure of their essays.

Finally, the top ten quotations in the last section have been used in a variety of ways to consolidate their analytical points effectively.

Sylvie Bartlett-Rawlings
Review: Petit Pays

Petit Pays by Gaël Faye, Livre de Poche (£10.95 on Amazon)

As an A-level French student looking for a gripping read outside of my school syllabus, Gaël Faye’s ‘Petit Pays’ most certainly kept me reading into the early hours. Gaël Faye is a Burundian rapper who used his passion for writing to give us an insight into the life of a child who is forced into a world that would make him grow up much faster than he had expected. At the beginning of the 1990s, ten year old Gabriel is living a typical childhood in a comfortable cul-de-sac in Bujumbura, Burundi. His innocent childhood, filled with typical family moments and vivid scenes of living life to the full with his gang of best friends, opens up a seemingly simple novel that is quickly upturned by the breakout of a civil war in Burundi, the event that preceded the inexplicable genocide of the Tutsi tribe in Rwanda. Although many readers will be fully aware of what happens in regards to the civil war and the events that follow, Gaël Faye’s narrative, with the use of emotive, colloquial language (that can be easily followed by a sixth-form student), allows the reader to be a part of Gabriel’s life with all of its
ups and downs and its extremes of tragedy and suffering and to really feel what he is going through. Unsurprisingly, ‘Petit Pays’ won the prestigious Prix Goncourt des Lycéens in 2016, chosen by French students themselves, showing us how popular and relatable this novel is for students worldwide. Gaël Faye said he decided to write this novel, “pour faire surgir un monde oublié et pour crier à l’univers que nous avons existé”. This rapper turned author has successfully managed to encapsulate the events of this time so that the pain and suffering of those involved will not be forgotten.

Gidi Katz (Year 13 pupil at Haberdashers’ Aske’s Boys’ School)