

The primary voice Liz Black (ALL President 2022-24)

There is nothing more encouraging to hear than that the seeds that were sown by a teacher in primary school have resulted in a learner continuing to enjoy learning languages and make progress, or even that a student has decided to take a language at A level or degree level. How wonderful!

Primary teachers are experts at creative planning and sparking an early interest in language learning and are so often in a unique position to foster this. At ALL we believe that primary language teaching and learning makes an enormous contribution to the child's whole learning experience.

What is unique about primary age children is that they keep asking questions! They are so curious about the world. My personal view is that questions should be answered, but of course I am aware that time is short and the timetable needs to be followed. Our Programme of Study states that pupils should be taught to "*engage in conversations; ask and answer questions; express opinions and respond to those of others; seek clarification and help...*" <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-programmes-of-study>

The planning put in to teach and cover important knowledge in the primary curriculum is thorough and rigorous, but even a few minutes looking spontaneously at a word or phrase that a child has asked about, or an issue that has been raised, is time well spent.

Over my years of working cross-phase between primary and secondary schools, I have seen committed teachers adding to their detailed schemes of work added as they review pupils' responses and interests. Of course, they may ask about unusual vocabulary or cultural practices that we may not always know. But that means we can tell them about Language changes and the new words that are continually being added to common usage anyway! It is good to teach children how to use reference skills carefully, and to model being lifelong learners ourselves. Learning *with* them is also precious.

What or who has influenced language teaching in primary schools in the past? What have we learnt from this? How will this affect our planning and teaching in the future? A few organisations and researchers who have influenced me are

- John Hattie from New Zealand and his work on the vital importance of the teacher, and the teacher's *mindframe*.
- Michael Byram and his book *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence Revisited*.
- linguists at CILT and in ALL

CILT was the Centre for Information on Language Teaching (and research) which was closed by the Coalition Government. They completed a lot of work - in particular on progression between Y3 and Y6, and I was challenged by this example

Progression in Intercultural Understanding.

Recognise - Identify - Compare - Explain - Produce - Demonstrate

which seems to mirror Bloom's taxonomy.

This made me think about how does the sequence compares with John Hattie's research? *Language competence and intercultural understanding are an essential part of being a citizen. Children develop a greater understanding of their own lives in the context of exploring the lives of others. They learn to look at things from another's perspective, giving them insight into the people, culture and traditions of other cultures.*

I respect and admire professionals who keep reflecting such a lot – academics and practising teachers. Michael Byram, for instance, wanted to 'revisit' his work and rewrote his book, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence Revisited* adding wonderful details how his thinking had evolved.

It is good to be challenged to think deeply about the purpose of teaching languages today and the significance of the intercultural dimension of language teaching, particularly as we are all considering the way forward since so much changed with the pandemic.

If we consider again the KS2 PoS "*Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world*" we can see that the thinking is interconnected.

I would also highly recommend to you the work on grammar and terminology in the National Curriculum produced by the National Association of Language Advisers <https://www.nala.org.uk/grammar-project/>

Finally, I would like to consider the concept of *intercultural communicative* language teaching and learning. This emphasises communication as the primary goal of language learning and sees culture and language as closely linked. It recognises that culture is always present when language is used, sees cultural skills being as important as language skills in language learning, and emphasises *interculturality*—the development of a deeper awareness of one's own language and culture as one is learning the target language and culture, and understanding the dynamic interplay between them.

Encouraging competence in another language enables children to interpret, create and exchange meaning within and across cultures. Today's British children can be mature, considerate and thoughtful (and many of them are multilingual). They are very aware of other people's needs. Primary teachers can look at what is being covered elsewhere in the curriculum and identify where some meaningful, linked and creative input could be added in their language time.

For example, the theme of Journeys in Year 6 includes Immigration: could this be expanded to give children a chance to express some simple opinions in another language on Brian Bilston's palindromic poem 'Refugees' <https://nationalpoetryday.co.uk/poem/refugees-2/> Emma Stanley – @MissStanleyY6 - shared some excellent ideas and pupil work on X that demonstrate this. You can download them here <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/8fiymrexhunlp34/AABwCMe5vJBPpHD-KktvYWwda?dl=0>

We have all lived through uncertain times in recent years and learnt to be flexible. Children need to be prepared for change and guided how to think flexibly too - learning other

languages helps them to do this. That is the unique place of languages in the primary curriculum as they are encouraged to “learn new ways of thinking”.