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use. It allows the teacher a more accurate response than a sea of blank faces in response to the ubiquitous question: *Vous avez tous compris?*

Constructive feedback and targets for moving forward

Feedback is the key pillar that drives an AfL approach in that it enables pupils to know what is going on in their learning in interlingual terms, takes them out of the 'fog of uncertainty' identified by Jeff Lee et al (1999) in Year 9 pupils where a substantial majority of pupils interviewed claimed not to know what was going on in their language lessons. AfL focuses on qualitative feedback but does not exclude summative assessments

and grades. It does, however, call for pedagogically sound and comprehensible summative assessment, i.e. valid and meaningful assessment.

Many language departments already write comments in the target language although these are not always very concrete, nor varied and might, as William writes in Harrison et al (2003), lead to so much time taken in circumlocutions in the target language that there might be a case for some judicious use of English. Whatever the statements the teachers think out, they need to be useful so that they can help the learner move on. The feedback can be individual or undertaken on a whole-class basis where errors then become a focus for constructive feedback and learning as opposed to a catalogue of minus points and

complaints. We need also to think about targets for progressing in skills other than writing where currently comments predominate. Planning targets, to include feedback on skills in addition to writing where feedback predominates, lends itself to departmental collaboration and provides a useful focus of thinking and learning in the practice of assessment for trainee teachers. The approach can be learnt, tried out and practised in small doses by teachers in a way that is formative for them.

References

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Developing creative writing in the MFL classroom

Researching with trainees

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Inspired by workshops in creative writing run by an eminent children's writer in Keele's partnership schools, a creative writing strand was developed throughout last year and became a joint action-research project, involving PGCE MFL and English staff, students, mentors in school and, most importantly, pupils in the classroom.

In the session at this year's CILT annual conference for ITT, where the focus was on research, we looked at the rationale for the project and its development; at some of the findings from the first year; and thought about the significance those findings might have in developing a research culture in MFL ITE.

Aims of the project: for students and pupils

For ourselves as tutors and for the ITE students, the aims were primarily to find out whether creative writing could be developed in the MFL classroom in a PGCE year and, therefore, whether such a dimension could be usefully incorporated into initial MFL teacher education. In addition, we hoped that the work would give our Associate Teachers (ATs) insight into ways to teach writing. A further aim was to encourage cross-curricular co-operation and understanding between teachers of MFL and English. As the project developed, we added the thread of action research, which gave the MFL ATs the chance to experience one approach to research from the 'inside'.

Our aims for the pupils who would be on the 'receiving end' of the project were based on two

sources: experiences from the Keele PGCE English project, where an established children's writer worked with both pupils and teachers in our Partnership schools; and Gill James's (2005) article, 'Creative writing in other languages' (*International Journal for Theory and Practice of Creative Writing*, 1). Both these sources emphasised that a primary purpose in working with pupils on creative writing in a foreign language was that it would motivate them, by showing them they can do a lot with a little and that they could very soon be working independently at a higher level than they may have thought possible. Through the potential increase in motivation, we hoped that pupils would be inspired to both write and, given some judicious encouragement by teachers, to read in a foreign language. Through both reading and writing, again with sensitive direction, pupils could

develop their awareness of literary genres, both in the mother tongue (whatever that might be) and another language.

Taking this perspective of discovering more about your own language by writing in another, we hoped that, in time, the foreign language lesson could thus act as a means both of enhancing literacy skills and promoting the concept of multi-literacy.

How action research fitted in

In order to avoid the pupils and their classteachers feeling like they were being used as guinea pigs in the project, we decided that a top-down model of imposing our 'good idea' on schools was not ethical. The use of an action-research approach, where all involved were participants and had, at least, the chance to have a say on how they experienced the process, seemed to offer an appropriate methodology.

Running the project

We started the project in the Autumn term 2005 and ran it on a shoestring from departmental funds. The project had two aspects: a cross-curricular one where MFL and English Associate Teachers worked together in mixed groups on a day-long creative writing session (run by the writer Gill James) and the MFL-specific one. Altogether, we spent twelve hours working on creative-writing techniques, looking at how we could apply action-research principles to the classroom situation and feeding back on experiences in the classroom. In the course of two school placements, ATs had the chance to apply what they had learned in the session to creative writing with pupils. Not all ATs had the opportunity to do this, due to restrictions within some school; not all felt able to apply what they had learnt at this early stage. In all, about 50% of the MFL cohort for that year had some classroom experience of working with creative writing.

The whole group designed two questionnaires to track the experiences of pupils and their class teachers; designing together was key to the principles of action research

(Stringer, 2004). School-based mentors were sent a letter explaining the project and asking permission to run it and were offered a taste of creative writing techniques at a joint MFL-English mentor session in the summer term.

Feedback from ATs, teachers and pupils was overwhelmingly positive. Pupils reported enjoying the lessons, teachers commented positively on pupil engagement and work produced. ATs, in a final feedback session, produced a sheet of 'advice' for future ATs. Here is an extract:

- * Avoid calling the piece of work 'creative writing' when presenting it to pupils. It could be poetry, prose, dialogue, theatre play, picture interpretation, journalistic 'reportage', etc.
- * Make it clear to pupils that creative writing is all about writing anything independently.
- * Use of dictionary could slow the process down, but can also be useful as it is a skill in itself.
- * This is a way of making languages more enjoyable and imaginative, and it could be tied to the curriculum.
- * Pupils should be made to know that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' in order to boost their confidence about producing their own piece of writing.
- * Allow for increase in noise level as long as pupils are on

task. Creative groupwork should allow pupils to express their individual opinions.

- * Mind-mapping and brainstorming at the start of lesson focuses pupils' attention on task and gets them quickly engaged.
- * Be sensitive to the fact that personal topics could provoke strong emotions in pupils. (Think of potential solutions during planning.)

Implications of the findings

The positive feedback from those involved has encouraged us to keep the theme of creative writing and to widen the cross-curricular dimension in this new academic year. We are planning to hold six two-hour mixed sessions, where English and MFL ATs learn and work together. We also intend to offer a creative writing session to MFL and English school-based mentors, so that they can gain confidence in using creative writing techniques in their classrooms. The action research will go into its second cycle (Stringer, 2004), and we hope to use the principles to enhance the new research emphasis on our (now) Master's-level PGCE course.

*Regardez les bateaux sur la mer!
Touchez le sable entre les
doigts du pied!
Ecoutez les mouttes dans le ciel!
Goûtez les huîtres au café!
Sentez le vent dans les cheveux!*

Poem developed by Keele Associate Teachers to illustrate working creatively with the imperative