

Introduction

Authority:	Renfrewshire Council
Case Study Focus:	1+2
Establishment:	West Primary School
Learners' Stage:	P6 – two classes of about 30 pupils in each
Level:	2



About the School

West Primary School is located in the West End of Paisley. The school serves an extensive catchment area which includes children of a wide range of abilities and different experiences from a variety of social backgrounds.

The building dates from 1938 and having previously housed a secondary department as well as a primary department, is large and affords spacious accommodation. It also houses a nursery class, a language centre, Right 2 Dance, a community education wing and Maxwell Park Nursery.

The primary school is led by Lynn Ferguson, Head Teacher and the staff work in partnership with parents to create trust and understanding to help all children achieve their potential.

The school provides a balanced structure of learning to allow every child to progress at his or her own pace.

Background

Progressing towards 1+2 Approach

Although most of the pupils are of Scottish origin, the school does have a mix of cultures and in particular has a pupil who recently moved with his family from Beijing. His father is a university student. The fact that the school had such a direct contact with the country and its language made the decision to consider Mandarin as an option more viable.

In addition, staff felt that there was a need to further motivate their learners to learn Modern Languages, French being the only other language offered to date. The P6 teachers Andrew Minshall and Janette Altan were also open to the idea of a different approach to looking at a social studies context rather than the project on the Victorians that they had previously undertaken.

Janette Altan spoke about how the idea for the topic came about. "It was initially just a social studies topic which led to introducing another language – it then grew arms and legs".

Planning

The school contacted SCILT/CISS to consider ways of introducing China and the Chinese Language. As they had no access to a teacher of Mandarin, the school was interested to see how much they could achieve in a twelve week project, without a language specialist. A meeting was held to discuss possible ideas and to share materials which might support the work – both on-line materials and physical materials. The P6 teachers were very keen to learn some Mandarin along with their pupils. Access to the CISS website enabled both teachers and their pupils to explore the characters and learn some important but simple phrases. A Chinese parent helper came in to help the pupils explore Chinese culture and her son, a P6 pupil, supported the teachers and fellow pupils with their pronunciation. The teachers were amazed at the amount of solid language learning that took place over a twelve week period with very little previous knowledge. Neither of the two teachers involved are MLPS trained, but all the teachers can see the benefits of this approach to learning a language by investigating its culture. The school is keen to cultivate a similar approach to the learning and teaching of other Modern Languages as the pupils have found it so motivating.

In line with a Curriculum for Excellence, it was suggested that the approach of "the pupil's voice" is an effective starting point for introducing a language and culture. Pupils were asked :

- What do you know about China?
- What would you like to know about China?
- How would you like to find out about China?

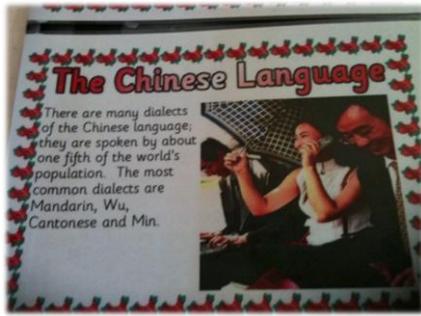
Implementation

Pupils selected topics for both collaborative work and working in pairs or on their own. They explored all the curricular areas including:

Languages

As far as language was concerned, simple phrases such as "hello", "how are you", "my name is..." and "goodbye" were part of every lesson over the twelve week period. It became part of their daily classroom routine. The children were fascinated by the appearance of the Chinese characters and were very motivated to learn to read and write the simple characters on the CISS website. The pupils often worked in groups and chose a Chinese animal to represent their group.





The pupils developed their knowledge of languages by learning about the different Chinese languages and dialects, such as Cantonese, Wu and Shanghai-ese. This afforded the class the opportunity to explore Scotland's languages and the different languages and dialects spoken throughout the UK.

The Chinese parent helper brought in Chinese language newspapers (available free in most Chinese supermarkets) and the children worked in pairs as "language detectives" to spot the character they knew. The pupils were very motivated by the real language context and the grown up nature of the work.

At the outset it was envisaged that this would be a Social Studies project which would last 12 weeks. However, the children became so enthralled with the context that they wanted to learn the language.

The learners' enthusiasm and motivation was such that it grew way beyond expectation and the school is considering ways of taking the learning of Mandarin into P5 and P7 in the future.

Thus it is envisaged that progression in the learning of the language will be embedded as it is hoped that Mandarin may well become the L3 for the school in the future.

The language covered in the 12 week project included:

- [Simple characters](#)
- Numbers 1-99 and their characters and tones
- Recognition of importance of tones and learning of how they work using [Panda Tones](#) powerpoint on our website
- Some carefully chosen radicals
- Simple expressions and greetings
- Animals
- Weather

Remarkably, ALL pupils could read, recognise and say the above along with the correct tone and even write the simpler characters. It is all the more astonishing when we consider that this was achieved without a specialist teacher.

View pictures of the wall display of newspaper work -

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/scilt/sets/72157633356744722/>

View this film clip of pupils conversing in Mandarin - <http://youtu.be/taoDuTkqDpU>

Literacy

Learners designed menus for Chinese New Year with a specific focus on using as many appropriate and interesting adjectives in English as possible. The teachers, inspired by fortune cookie messages, used this as a stimulus for creative writing. Additionally, they used Chinese New Year as inspiration for poetry writing to say goodbye to the Year of the Dragon and to welcome in the Year of the Snake. Pupils also wrote letters to imaginary friends in China telling them about life in Scotland and made up profiles of their favourite Chinese celebrities. Individually, pupils made “fact files” about China and the Chinese language. The school is hopeful that they will find a suitable partner school in China to develop this idea further.



Chinese and Literacy pictures - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/scilt/sets/72157633341215503/>

Numeracy



Firstly, pupils explored numbers in Chinese and learned to count to ninety-nine in the language, using number cards in Chinese, Pinyin and English. By investigating how numbers work in Mandarin, pupils went on to learn the months and days of the week. Tangrams originated from China and the children became fascinated by them. They worked collaboratively to apply their knowledge of geometry in order to produce highly complex and challenging tangram shapes.

View more numeracy pictures - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/scilt/sets/72157633356874322/>

Social Studies

The teachers used Chinese New Year as a stimulus for exploring Chinese traditions such as “Spring Couplets” on doorways, traditional New Year food and customs and encouraged the children to draw comparisons between this and Scottish festivals. They researched the Terracotta Warriors and the building of the Great Wall during the time of the first emperor. Pupils also investigated the geography of China such as the two main rivers,



the five famous mountains and the impact these geographical features have on daily life and culture.

Other social studies images - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/scilt/sets/72157633356925666/>

Science

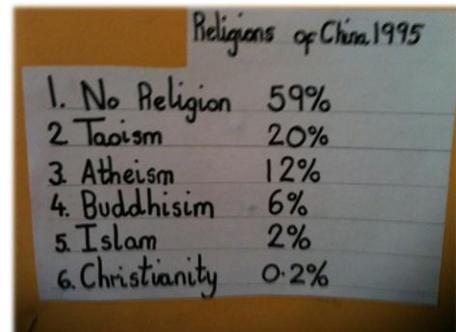


The pupils learned about the building of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze and its environmental impact. They also found out about a wide variety of endangered that are indigenous to China and considered ways in which Scotland plays an important part in supporting China to find solutions to these environmental challenges, for example the work of Edinburgh Zoo and the Botanical Gardens. The pupils created “Fact Files” to compile the information that they gathered about China.

View the video fact files on China - http://youtu.be/M_ZaUrogWsA

RME

In order to discover more about the three main belief systems in China, the children learned about Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. This information was added to their fact files about the country.



Religions of China 1995	
1. No Religion	59%
2. Taoism	20%
3. Atheism	12%
4. Buddhism	6%
5. Islam	2%
6. Christianity	0.2%

Expressive Arts



The pupils learned to sing two songs in Chinese from a commercial CD that also gave them the lyrics in Chinese, Pinyin and English. They performed them at assembly and parents’ evening. Their singing was recorded on the DVD that they produced about the whole topic. The Chinese parent helper led a simple calligraphy lesson



which proved to be very popular with the pupils. They learned to make their own New Year couplets and explored their meaning. Their couplets were

hung on the classroom doors and they were able to take some home to decorate their own doors.

Impact

The teachers, Janette and Andrew, were struck by the depth and breadth of learning that this project afforded to all the pupils, regardless of their ability. In fact, they observed that the context for learning was so stimulating that pupils could achieve much more than would have been expected, as they were so motivated to learn. This was notable even amongst pupils who previously found language work very challenging and those who had not really fully engaged with language learning before. According to the teachers, collaborative and paired work was made more viable, even with large class sizes and such a wide range of abilities, because of the pupils' genuine interest in the topic and engagement with it.

As a result of this approach, the children's self-esteem has increased. Even those pupils who normally require some support have been able to explain, for example, the importance of tones (using the materials on the CISS website such as the panda power point to understand the tone idea.) The teachers felt it was "just amazing!" how the pupils handled the language and the transferrable skills they mastered to work things out.

Although the teachers admitted to being a little nervous before they started, they could not believe how quickly children of all abilities responded. The pupils thoroughly enjoyed learning the language and culture and were proud to have achieved something nobody had ever done in the school.

"The pupils have come up through the school, have seen other work by P6 pupils in the past displayed in the school and are just thrilled to be part of something new and different!" P6 teacher

Listen to this sound clip to hear the teacher of P6 explain the impact that the language learning had on the children. - <http://youtu.be/ccYUnRJ6Ouk>

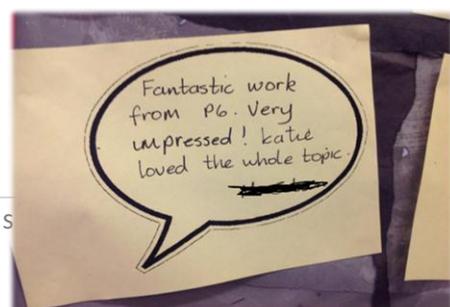
One of the pupils said, "I would have thought it would be hard to learn Mandarin but it's really easy. I never knew it was so easy. I would like to learn more Chinese in the future and maybe teach more people about it."

The teachers were impressed by how quickly the pupils' aspirations soared to the extent that they could envisage learning Chinese and visiting China as real possibility in their future. They felt that the project certainly inspired curiosity in the children to learn more.

View images of pupils' comments about the project :

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/scilt/sets/72157633341740861/>

Parents were invited to an open evening that showcased the work the pupils had produced during



the twelve week project. They too were very impressed by the amount and quality of the work that had been achieved in such a short time.

Challenges and Next Steps

The teachers realise that in order to make the project sustainable they will need further access to training and professional learning to embed language learning and deepen their own knowledge of the country and culture. Andrew Minshall is keen to develop his knowledge of Mandarin and is considering attending an immersion course in Beijing during the summer.

Meanwhile, the teachers are considering how they can share their knowledge in order to expand the project into P5 and P7. This would allow Mandarin to become the school's L3 language in line with the 1+2 approach.

