

Working Together for Inclusion: A collaborative project in the ML classroom

Aberdeenshire Schools October 05 – May 06



Start date	Weds 4th October 2005
End date	Weds 22nd May 2006
Schools	Referred to in this online report as School A and School B
Authority Representative	Anne Moncur, 5-14 Development Officer
Project Leaders	Hilary McColl (Independent Consultant) and Catriona Oates (Scottish CILT)

Project Origins

Hilary McColl gave a talk on Inclusive Approaches in Modern Languages at the Scottish CILT Aberdeenshire Outreach conference in March 2005, where she detailed some of her previous work in school projects. They involved a collaborative approach between ML and support for learning staff to overcoming barriers to learning in the ML classroom. Some teachers expressed interest in engaging in this sort of work and an invitation was extended to the project leaders to compose a project outline to put to teachers at a local Aberdeenshire INSET day in May 2005. (See appendix 1). After this, teachers were invited to formally express interest and out of the initial five schools that did so, two schools ended up participating in the project (*referred to here as School A and School B*). As the meeting was in May, this gave time for the schools to seek approval from their SMT; Aberdeenshire Authority agreed to support the project in terms of release time for the four key meetings and the first project meeting was set for October 4th 2005.

Project Specifications

TIMESCALE

The project would run in the academic session of 2005-06 between October and May. Four facilitation sessions of half a day would take place and there would be ongoing work in between these meetings. The local authority was also represented at the meetings by Anne Moncur, 5-14 development officer for Modern Languages. It was decided that School A was the most convenient venue for the meetings as the majority of participating teachers were based at this school. The DHT at School A also gave of her time to attend and kindly organised hospitality.

OUTLINE

In broad terms the outline of the project is to encourage teachers to look closely at their own practice and at the learning experiences of their pupils; to identify what needs to change in this practice (in order for learners to become more motivated or engaged, or better behaved or achieving; as defined by the project aims – see below), and to engage in professional dialogue with support for learning colleagues to find ways to facilitate this change. In this way, the project is not prescriptive, it does not provide answers, but encourages teachers to find the answers for themselves, as they know best (or are encouraged to find out) the individual difficulties their pupils are facing. The teachers are asked to identify a target class, group or individual whom they feel are facing difficulties in their language learning which are yet unresolved. In School A, the group selected was two S2 classes; and in School B, one Standard grade class.

The facilitation takes place over the course of the project, with ongoing collaborative work by the teachers taking place between each meeting. This starts as observational in the first phase, moving on to address individual needs, then planning and implementing strategies to address these needs, then generalising these strategies to addressing needs all learners share.

AIMS

The participating schools determined the aims of the project.

School A defined their aims as detailed below.

- To raise greater awareness of the range of learning and teaching approaches which can be adopted to promote inclusion and motivate pupils with diverse abilities.
- To provide a bank of differentiated resource material available to all ML staff.
- To improve pupil motivation.
- To improve attainment.
- To encourage a positive ML departmental ethos for pupils and staff.
- To encourage collaborative work between ML and SfL staff.

For school B the aims were:

- An increased awareness of reading strategies and their effectiveness in terms of attainment.
- Increased confidence and less teacher dependency in reading tasks.

COSTINGS

To reduce costs, the original proposal was reduced from 4 whole day meetings to 4 half-day meetings. The authority met the cost of the consultant's fee and the schools were themselves responsible for arranging timetabling and cover. School A also provided the venue and catering, while School B covered travelling expenses for two teachers. Scottish CILT made provision for the time and expenses of its member of staff.

Project Evaluation

The project was evaluated on the basis of the aims as identified by each school, as the meeting of these aims was the clearest indicator of success that could be defined. In order to establish a baseline, thus enabling a contrasting exercise between pre-project circumstances and any changes effected by the project, an evaluation exercise was carried out in School A. In School B, project work was already underway before the first meeting took place so a similar exercise could not be carried out. It was decided that the best form of evaluation would be evidence gathered in the teachers' logs, and any assessment evidence which became available in the course of the year, as the target class in School B was an Standard grade French class. As both schools defined the aims for themselves, a joint evaluation would not have served the project in any case.

The evaluation exercise in School A involved a pupil questionnaire and teacher interviews. It was felt that, as motivation, attainment, attitude and behaviour were factors identified for improvement, some attempt should be made to get an idea of pupil perceptions on these issues. A questionnaire was devised and distributed when the classes were together after an assembly in October, at the beginning of the project (See appendix 2). The questionnaire asked pupils to do the following.

- Rank in order of perceived difficulty the subjects they studied.
- Justify why they found French easy or difficult.
- Detail exactly what they found easy/difficult/ enjoyable in class.
- Express their thoughts on learning another language and about other cultures.
- Say whether they would study another language (L3) at school.

The questionnaire was repeated at the end of the project in school A in order to make a comparison possible.

The teacher interviews carried out at the beginning of the project sought to establish the concerns and the range of methodologies practised in class. Class teachers and SMT were also asked to give a post hoc evaluation of the project.

Project Findings

Pupil Evaluation 1

French in relation to other subjects.

The evaluation exercise as described above revealed that when asked to rank their subjects in order of difficulty, French was regarded as the second most difficult of all subjects taken, with information technology being the most difficult. (See appendix 3). When asked which they find hardest, only maths was regarded as more difficult than French. Justifications were given for these responses, and it is significant that the most common justification for finding a subject difficult is a perceived lack of ability in the subject, suggesting a lack of confidence or self-esteem.

About French

All the responses to this are detailed in appendix 3 section 4. Most pupils found that French is hard for them sometimes, as opposed to being easy or difficult. A significant majority find difficulty in understanding spoken and written language, and understanding the link between these two. (5/16 statements). One response indicates the lack of understanding of the underlying concept of time, and not necessarily the language used to express it.

Classroom activities

This section gives us an idea of preferences within the range of classroom activities available. A high percentage (18%) believe themselves not to be good at writing, and a similar number (16%) state their favourite activity as speaking with a partner.

Thinking about learning French

Findings in this section were most interesting. Most (80%) expressed the belief that it is important to learn another language, and almost as many again (72%) would like to be able to speak French well. More than half (54%) said they would like to study another additional language at some point.

Wish List

Given a wish list for French classes, pupils came up with some interesting ideas. A significant wish, which implicitly requests the teaching of strategies for learning and retaining language, is "I wish there were better ways to make it stick in my head."

Pupil evaluation 2

The end of project questionnaire was intended to establish any changes in attitude or motivation which may have taken place as a result of the intervention. (See Appendix 4) More than half (55.5%) indicated they now enjoyed French more than they used to; 28% did not enjoy French in S2 and 17% did enjoy the subject in S2. When asked to justify their responses, the negative responses were fairly predictable and similar to reasons given in the first questionnaire(see App4, section 3), but the positive responses show an appreciation of varied activities; more group work; more interaction; better working methods and less working from the textbook. This corresponds to planning and strategies implemented by the teachers as detailed in the available project logs. (See appendix 5.)

When asked again about learning languages, fewer responses supported the notion that it is important to learn a language. (57%). 50% (previously 72%) now wish to be able to speak French well, and 55.5%, the only figure to remain at a similar level,

would like to learn an additional language at some time.

In terms of classroom activities, an increase in the following factors, which were a feature of the project, has all contributed to pupil's enjoyment, and we may assume, motivation.

- Group working tasks.
- Role –play.
- Use of computer and IWB.
- Working with a partner.
- Use of video.

There is a significant proportion of pupils who, when asked what they would like to do less of, answered with less work from the text book. (Mentioned 15 times in the comments). This was something which was discussed during the meetings. On close scrutiny the layout; the expression of learning intentions; instructions and justifications for individual tasks and opportunities for consolidation of what has been learned sometimes fell short of expectations within the teaching cycle which Hilary McColl has devised and used in project meeting discussions. It is interesting to note that pupil perception also reflects this.

These findings, whilst disappointing in some respects (notably the attitude to language learning questions) do highlight the enjoyment and participation of pupils in an increasingly active approach to learning, which is consistent with strategies and activities devised and implemented by the teachers in the project. It is also reasonable to assume that more active learning will impact not only upon motivation of pupils but also concerns over levels of teacher dependency in the classroom.

Teacher Interviews

In School A the main concerns from the subject teachers were as below.

- The range of abilities within the class –a high percentage (50%) was reported to have below standard attainment in English.
- Lack of confidence.
- Reluctance to take risks.
- High levels of teacher dependency.
- Slow pace of “coverage” and requests for help slowing down the pace of the lesson.
- Lots of revision needed each lesson.
- Concerns for more able in class not being challenged.
- A need to keep the class “together” (referring to pace of learning.)

For the SfL teachers the concerns were as below.

- Appropriateness of the curriculum.
- Underachievement of pupils.
- Pacing of the teaching.
- Lack of opportunities for consolidation and repetition.
- Achieving and managing differentiation.
- Poor concentration.

Teacher Evaluation

As the aims of each school were different, it is necessary to separate responses for the first section of the evaluation which pertains to aims and progress.

Teachers at both schools were asked to do the following :

- **rate the progress towards the aims of the project**

School A

- All teachers agreed that progress has been made in the awareness of the range of the approaches adopted to promote inclusion and motivate pupils with diverse abilities, with 3/4 believing considerable progress has been made in this.
- All agreed that progress had been made with differentiated resources, with 1/3 believing considerable progress had been made with this.
- The same is true of progress with pupil motivation
- 3/4 teachers believed progress in attainment was difficult to ascertain, or no progress had been achieved. 1/4 believed that considerable progress has been made with this. Some progress has been made with the departmental ethos, with 1/4 believing no progress has been made. One suggestion was made that positive indicators in the classroom, such as fewer hands up asking for help and increasing independence in the classroom could be interpreted as contributing towards better progress.
- All believe that some or considerable progress has been made in continued collaboration between ML and SfL staff, although this will only be evident in forthcoming sessions

School B

- 2/2 teachers agreed that progress towards the aims of their project was well demonstrated in the classroom.

- **elaborate on any evidence of progress**

Among factors mentioned are :

School A

- Improvements in behaviour with fewer behaviour referrals
- Fewer hands up; more able to stay on task and complete work
- More discussion on individual needs
- More willingness to try different approaches to suit pupils' needs
- More discussion between colleagues from the two departments

School B

Increased self-esteem and improved self-confidence was demonstrated through more confident approach to reading and use of a dictionary. The use of pupil devised strategies to overcome difficulties also helped boost confidence. A decrease in oppositional behaviour and improvements on pupils application to task (Longer time spent on task; greater willingness to attempt a new task; increased willingness to discuss difficulties and to try new approaches to the tasks) were observed by 2/2 teachers.

- **detail benefits of the project at different levels**

For both schools, the benefits of the project fall into two broad categories: benefits for teachers and benefits for pupils. The collaboration between the departments and with colleagues is seen to be of significant professional value to all teachers involved as the sharing of expertise enhances practice. Two teachers explicitly noted their own heightened awareness of the barriers to learning which they identified and that the strategies they have implemented to help overcome these have become integral to their practice.

The benefits for pupils include:

- More effective learning environment.
- Greater awareness of their learning needs and styles, and of the difficulties they sometimes face.
- Better understanding of their needs by teachers.
- Material which is more suited to them and tasks they enjoyed more.
- Development of skills for group work and presentation.
- Increased awareness of their own potential.
- Increased awareness of a wider range of strategies and approaches.
- Ownership of personal strategies which are transferable to other subjects.

When we consider the Standard Grade results of the group targetted in school B the effect of the project is most encouraging. Pre- project pass rates at General level stood at **63-65%** at the beginning of S4. At the prelim stage, after two months of project intervention, this had risen to **82%**. At the end of the session, final exam results showed that **100%**, of the 19 pupils who sat SG French this year from the lower-band class gained a General 4 or above overall. Eight gained an award at grade 3; five gained an award at grade 2 and one, an award at grade 1. **In the reading element, there were three foundation awards; thirteen generals and three credits.** More significant than the pupils' reading grades, however, was the increase in their self-esteem and self-belief which enabled them to aim, and achieve, higher in the speaking and writing elements and to approach the listening and reading calmly and confidently. Several of the pupils have reported to their teacher how surprised and delighted they were when they found out that their grade in French was the same as, or better than, their other grades.

- **evaluate the different elements of the project**

- The opportunity to work jointly on the project was deemed to be vitally important by all teachers, but the time needed for this was an issue which remained a concern.
- The opportunity to focus on their own classes was not deemed to be terribly useful, as two teachers said they always do anyway, and one thought the benefits of the project promoted a change of teaching style which would be of benefit to all classes. One teacher felt that focussing on the nature of specific difficulties and looking for responses to this increased effectiveness in the classroom. Although this was seen as useful in giving the project a focus by one teacher, the overall feeling is that the combination of collaboration and identifying difficulties provided the overarching focus for the project.

- All teachers appreciated the opportunity to hear from colleagues in another school and most enjoyed the discussions which took place.
- The four half day meetings with the project leaders were seen as particularly useful in sharing experiences with both schools. One teacher felt it was a good forum for discussion, sharing information and focussing on the next stage of the project. One felt it helped keep things on task. Two comments were made about time spent explaining what had been done in class being a waste of time, but this was vital for the consultants as there was no other way of knowing what was going on since no use has been made of the project log during the project, in paper or online form.
- Communications with project leaders between meetings was seen as useful overall, and the availability was appreciated by 5/6 teachers. It was suggested that the time limitations inhibited contact. One expression of concern over confidentiality was made. It is important to state that confidentiality would not have been breached by contacting either consultant during the project. The channels of communication were made available to teachers for the purposes of responding to any questions or concerns they may have had during the project, but little use was made of them.
- The support of school management was appreciated and seen as useful in terms of organisation of the meetings, but 2/6 teachers remarked they felt this added pressure to make the project a success. 1/6 teachers felt management had been very supportive.
- The material components of the project were evaluated on a 0-5 scale. Combining 6 returns, the following are assessed on their usefulness out of 30. The initial information was not applicable to most of the participants but was awarded 6. The ring binder of project support materials: 18. The forward planning sheet: 21. The observation logs: 20. The joint planning grid: 21. The WebPages: 11.* the project log: 17. The workshop materials on developing inclusive teaching: 15.* (* Denotes only 4 out of 6 returns for this question.)
- The additional papers provided were appreciated by 4 out of 6 of the teachers. 1 /6 made particular use of the web links which were available and found these particularly helpful. 2/6 appreciated the skills grid in particular.
- Other features of the project which were considered as particularly helpful included collaboration with colleagues; meeting with project leaders; opportunity to analyse and modify own teaching approach; finding out about ML in other schools; gaining a better understanding of ML teaching and of the role of SfL teachers; access to relevant research electronically.

- **consider the wider relevance of the project**
 - Within the wider context, the project is believed to have made a contribution to personal and departmental development by all participants. 5/6 also saw a contribution to school development. 5/6 recognised a contribution to all four capacities within ***A Curriculum for Excellence*** with the exception of “responsible citizens” where 4/6 saw any connection. ***Assessment is for Learning*** principles resonated strongly in the project; especially the *sharing of learning intentions* and *encouraging participation through self and peer assessment* with all teachers agreeing that a contribution to these had been made through the project. Improving feedback and learning how to learn were seen as significant by 4/6 teachers and very significant by 2/6. It is encouraging that some of these principles are seen as functioning within the project, and not surprising that some and not all have featured here. Even when involved in dedicated AifL projects, teachers are encouraged to take a gradual approach to adopting the principles into practice.

- **suggest any changes for future projects**
 - Several helpful comments were made in this section including allocating more time for internal meetings; clearer outline and setting of aims and expectations at the beginning. (Early stages of the project are dedicated to teachers defining their own expectations). One teacher felt paperwork was overwhelming and one felt the grids were not productive. Two teachers were happy with the way the project was run and suggested no further changes.

- **make any other comments**
 - 5/6 teachers mentioned that they enjoyed taking part in the project with one commenting significantly that, having previously been sceptical about the appropriateness of languages for all, she can now see how it might be achieved, and one other commenting on a perceptible change in the attitude to inclusion within the department. Both classes are seen to have improved in terms of behaviour and motivation; in these terms the project can be regarded having achieved success.

Management Evaluation

Only in School A did a member of the senior management team complete an evaluation form. She concurred with returns from staff in the school and added that participation had allowed her to gain an insight into current practice in ML; it widened her understanding of the work of the ML teachers and how they can be supported. Although stating that the opportunity for ML and SfL teachers to work together was the most important aspect of the project, she admitted that finding dedicated time was impossible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, participation in the project appears to have been of benefit to teachers, both ML and SfL. There is clear evidence that gains have been made in pupils' behaviour, motivation, and attainment. There have also been gains in teachers' understanding of the nature of the difficulties their pupils have experienced, and that their practice has altered to accommodate this.

A significant by-product of the project appears to have been the adoption of principles from the **Assessment is for Learning** programme. Feedback, self-esteem, self-assessment, peer teaching and collaborative working are all terms which feature in two of the project logs which have been submitted. This is to be welcomed and can be sustained beyond the context of a Working Together project.

For pupils, the benefits are perhaps more concrete. Standard grade results for the S4 group in school B indicate a very encouraging degree of success, and this is undoubtedly to be welcomed. What may indeed be of greater import to the pupils involved in the project is the awareness of their own difficulties *and the strategies they have devised to overcome them*, the improvement in their own sense of self-confidence and self-esteem as language learners; their preferences in language learning, and their styles of learning which they can transfer to other contexts.

Catriona Oates
Professional Services Officer
Scottish CILT
University of Stirling 28/08/06