Teaching languages through ilanguages and Talk for Writing

Louise St John explains how Victoria Road Primary School is using ilanguages and its links to the Talk for Writing approach to enhance the children's ability to communicate in French and Spanish.

At Victoria Road Primary School, as in other Plymouth schools, we have had a lot of success using the Talk for Writing approach in English to increase the children's progress and enjoyment in writing and I was very interested by the connection with the ilanguages schemes of work for French and Spanish.

The basic principle of Talk for Writing is a three-stage approach in which children imitate the language they need orally, before reading and analysing a text, and then writing their own version. As a linguist, I was struck by how familiar this process felt to learning or teaching a foreign language: repeat, rehearse and internalise key language; adapt and change certain individual words or elements; "own" the language and use it independently in a different context.

Because all of this is about how children learn, and how children acquire, relate to and use language for their own purposes, there are many similarities in the Talk for Writing approach and MFL teaching. Both are concerned with children internalising the pattern of language and adopting good models, structures and rhythms. Both require children to orally rehearse before reading and writing. Both enable children to feel confident 'playing' with language and to provide a 'toolkit' for independent use. Essentially, both methods result in learners using language confidently and independently for a purpose that they enjoy and value and that the teacher can assess.

In Year 3 we have used the 'Au Magasin des Animaux'* story as an exemplar text as it contains several high-frequency phrases (Voici.., Il/ Je voudrais…) and the conjunction 'but' ('mais'), and the children really enjoy the story. After hearing and repeating the story several times, and introducing gestures, the children then 'read' the story supported visually by a text map (pictured here) and physical movements, enabling them to re-tell the story. The visual and physical re-telling supported their learning around 1st and 3rd person in verbs in English and French. They then re-told and acted out parts of the story in groups. (We are particularly excited about visual story mapping as a tool to support memorising, which is such an important skill in languages learning.) And if you look at the video here, you will see that the children are excited too!

https://youtu.be/vHk91Ls56BU

Moving on to the next stage, we differentiated activities to support different learners. Lower attaining children played games matching gestures to written words / phrases and copied the writing. Middle attaining learners used the story map and gestures to order the story in writing. Higher attaining learners adapted the story using language from a previous topic in Year 2 to talk about 'Au Magasin des Jouets'.

Find out more about ilanguages here: www.ilanguages.co.uk

'Au Magasin des Animaux' comes from ilanguages Year 3/stage one scheme which is fast becoming the scheme of choice for many schools around the UK because it builds in clear progress and is user friendly for both experienced as well as beginners in foreign language teaching.

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