



# Primary Schools (A Dialogue)

**BERNADETTE CLINTON (DIALOGUE LEAD)**

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**SPECIAL COLLECTION:  
POST-PANDEMIC  
PEDAGOGIES  
FOR LANGUAGE  
EDUCATION**

**ARTICLES -  
DIGITAL MODERN  
LANGUAGES**



## ABSTRACT

Our discussions ranged widely over not only digital learning but also the other issues that concern primary languages teachers at this moment. Although the teaching of a language to pupils from ages 7 to 11 has been compulsory in the UK since 2014, implementation throughout the country has been uneven. Levels of training, funding and numbers of qualified teachers have varied widely from place to place. This is reflected in our dialogue, and the frustrations of some are clear. The lockdowns in schools exacerbated the divide between those schools that gave priority to language learning and those that did not. The support of school leaders was vital. The use of digital tools and the capacity of the languages community to support each other was a major positive outcome of the pandemic. These links and organisations have been maintained and have strengthened the sense of community, with a heavy reliance on digital tools.

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Learning a language has been a compulsory part of the primary curriculum for all pupils in England between the ages of 7 and 11 since September 2014. Unfortunately, national support to prepare for this initiative was withdrawn in 2011 and has not been reinstated. Many primary schools, therefore, have struggled to successfully implement high-quality languages provision. The pandemic and the resultant lockdowns exacerbated the gap between those schools that were meeting their statutory requirements and those that were struggling. Our dialogue reflects the concerns felt by many primary language teachers around the country as well as exploring the role of digital tools. The roles of a school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the commitment of the executive body of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) are crucial to the success, or lack of success, of language provision in schools. Primary schools are busy places with pressure to achieve high marks in English Reading and Writing and Maths by the end of Key Stage 2, when pupils leave the primary sector at age 11 to move on to secondary school. Headteachers need to be made aware that language learning is a key way to enhance literacy skills and to enable pupils to genuinely become global citizens, as many schools claim that they aim to do. Headteacher organisations, such as the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), are playing their part in educating school leaders about the importance of language learning. Even our school inspection system, run by Ofsted, has begun to look in more depth over the last two years at the languages provision in primary schools. These may all help to convince headteachers to place language learning at the centre of the curriculum.

All those involved in this dialogue have many years of experience in teaching and promoting primary languages. They have all been advocates for primary languages for many years and have been involved in this initiative in some cases since 2004. Wendy has been teaching German, French and Spanish in Enfield in a variety of schools and has contributed to coaching and training others, including trainees at Middlesex University. Raquel is the lead on the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach in Hackney and has been the lead practitioner there since the initiative began in 2013, sharing her expertise with other teachers. Her school was granted International Spanish School status in recognition of her work. Anna saw that to make progress in Coventry, teachers and other stakeholders needed to be brought together to raise the profile of languages in the city and to support each other. Together with a colleague, she used the occasion of Coventry being named City of Culture to set up the new Coventry City of Languages. Bernadette ran the Primary Pathfinder Initiative in Enfield with the support of CILT, the National Centre for Languages, from 2004 until 2011, and then set up the Spanish as First Language Initiative in Hackney in 2013. She also teaches on the primary trainees' programme at Middlesex University. We had planned to involve others in the dialogue, but our four contributors have provided a rich and varied coverage of the main issues.

The government has recently announced extra funding to promote language learning in schools. It is to be hoped that the new National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE) will be a catalyst for change. Digital tools can play a crucial role in encouraging a "languages for all" approach. With an appreciation and celebration of the wealth of languages that we have in England and a greater understanding that speaking *only* English is not enough in our ever-shrinking world, language acquisition will be seen as the powerful, fun and exciting activity that we know it is!

The questions we considered during this dialogue were:

1. What were the overall and short-term effects of the pandemic on language education in your area? How can these be measured effectively?
2. Do teachers and learners have more developed senses of digital (or hybrid digital/non-digital) literacies?
3. What are good case studies/examples of best practice that emerged from the pandemic, and that are still useful today?
4. From a learner perspective, what have been the main things that they have gained or lost? Have they become more autonomous? Has there been greater peer-to-peer interaction?

5. Have the kinds of online conversations that happened during lockdown carried on, and have different areas of language education become more connected as a result?

## EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

### QUESTION 1: WHAT WERE THE OVERALL AND SHORT-TERM EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN YOUR AREA. HOW CAN THESE BE MEASURED EFFECTIVELY?

**Bernadette Clinton**

I work with 54 primary schools in the London Borough of Hackney. They all teach Spanish. At the start of the lockdown, some schools felt unable to cope with teaching a range of subjects online, at the same time as teaching the children of key workers in school. Some redirected the Spanish teachers to support with Literacy or Maths. Others allowed the teachers to develop innovative approaches to teaching both online and with those in school. Others used things such as BBC Bitesize just to keep the pupils hearing the language and set tasks for pupils to undertake at home. It was difficult at the time to get information from every school about what they were doing. I sent out suggested lists of websites and useful material to use. Hackney did a regular update in all subjects, sharing websites and ideas. Many schools used Google classroom as a way of capturing the pupils' work. We did not find much of the material hastily produced by some providers to be useful.

In Hackney, we have a system of learning objectives for each year. In Year 6 the schools indicate for each child which year's objectives each pupil is secure in. These results are sent to every receiving Hackney secondary school to give them an idea of the starting points that they need to build on. Most primary pupils transfer to a Hackney secondary school. In 2020 65% of pupils across the borough achieved the objectives for Years 5 or 6. In 2021 55.5% of pupils achieved the Year 5 or 6 objectives. In 2022 that figure went down to 43%. In 2020 the assessments were carried out in March before the lockdown and were in line with previous percentages and our expectations. The pandemic had a drastic impact – in some schools more than others. (It also led to a reduction in those taking languages at GCSE.)

**Raquel Tola Rego**

I will be talking about Parkwood Primary in the London Borough of Hackney. At Parkwood Primary International Spanish School, Spanish is treated as a core subject and therefore lessons were not cancelled. All pupils from Nursery to Y6 continued to learn Spanish.

Our experience and approach were different in the first and second lockdowns. During the first lockdown, I worked at school with children of key workers for two days a week (not focused on Spanish) and taught my weekly Spanish and Content and Language Integrated Learning CLIL/Art lessons to each year group from home on the days I wasn't in school. Pupils attending school would also join these sessions remotely. Children enjoyed the sessions but not all joined in, as many didn't have access to the internet or had to share a device with other siblings. Lessons were online but following the same style and routines we follow in the classroom.

During the second lockdown I was in school teaching the children of key workers and children at home simultaneously online. This was a great experience but also quite demanding, as I often found myself talking to the camera and not looking at the children who were physically in front of me, or missing questions that came up online while checking on those pupils in the class. As the weeks passed, the system worked better and better, and I felt more comfortable teaching online and face to face at the same time.

We also set up Duolingo accounts for all pupils in Y2 and KS2, had a weekly live Spanish storytelling session on Instagram and a weekly Art in Spanish challenge on Twitter and Instagram. We also kept sharing pupils' work on our school's social media.

Overall, pupils made good progress, but not as much as they would have done in class. And some pupils fell behind because they only had one device to share with others at home and took it in turns to miss Spanish and CLIL/Art lessons.

Yes Raquel, you are right to make that distinction between the first and second lockdowns. It is difficult now to remember all the things we went through – at least it is for me! Schools were much more prepared with resources and plans by the second lockdown.

**Anna Grainger**

We have found in Coventry that languages were not widely taught across the pandemic. At my school I set Spanish work but not many pupils did it, and during the second lockdown when I was not able to go from class to class, I created videos to teach Spanish which TAs then delivered in the classroom. A few parents did contact me during the first lockdown, whose children had done the set work, and said that they had really enjoyed learning Spanish alongside their children. Some schools in Coventry worked closely with parents to give them the skills to help their children across the curriculum, and this has been positive as some parents have been more engaged with their child's learning. In Coventry we have found that attendance has been impacted post-pandemic and this will have a negative effect on engagement and participation generally.

**Wendy Walker**

Yes, Raquel and Bernadette, I agree that the first and second lockdowns were very different. In the first, schools were not familiar with online platforms and it was a real learning curve for staff. Pupils seemed to find it easier! I am basing my experience of that time on being the MFL teacher in three primary schools (German in one and Spanish in the other two) in the London Borough of Enfield. I continued to go into each school on the days I normally worked to teach the vulnerable/key worker pupils their Modern Language and I also provided the same work for the pupils at home, either through Google Classrooms or Microsoft Teams, depending on the school. In one school I did do some simultaneous teaching, as described by Raquel, which had the benefit of bringing pupils in both settings together again. The impact of the pandemic on pupils' learning, as outlined by Raquel and Anna and shown by Bernadette's data, is worrying, but I feel that in terms of Modern Language teaching and learning at primary school, this academic year has been a great improvement on the last two.

**Bernadette Clinton**

Thanks for these comments from Anna and Wendy. I think it was particularly difficult for those who were teaching in a few schools as they were not able to go from class to class, as Anna says. I know that many were restricted to areas of the school or to certain year groups. I do think that schools are still using Google Classrooms, and this has been a positive outcome of the lockdowns. I agree with Anna that another positive was the involvement of parents. Talking to some of our Portuguese colleagues this weekend – partners in our final Erasmus+ project – they felt that some parents were sitting “offscreen” as they taught online lessons, critiquing what they were doing and looking to find fault. Do any of you feel like this?

**Anna Grainger**

I didn't teach live lessons, so I don't feel that any parents were critiquing me. I think that the supportive parents encouraged (and helped) their children to do the work, but those who were less supportive didn't. One of my biggest issues and concerns though is the lack of respect and support towards MFL from classroom teachers. Two years ago we became a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT, where several academies group together into one organisation). So, now I have to teach two afternoons at the other school in the MAT. I get told that children will be finishing their English or Maths work in my lesson, which is unacceptable. When I challenge this, I am told that the child's English/Maths must be the class teacher's priority, failing to understand that I too have to go through performance management on a yearly basis and show progress. In my opinion very few classroom teachers understand how we learn languages, not understanding that if children miss the first 10 minutes of a lesson, they miss out on the initial building blocks and are then trying to “build the tower in mid-air”. They don't understand that in a language lesson the teacher is not giving input for the first 10 minutes and then the children are writing for the next 50 in silence, so that if any child comes in late the teacher can explain it again one

to one. I think this work must be done with primary school teachers and I'm wondering if the work that Bernadette and Raquel have been doing could extend to this.

### **Raquel Tola Rego**

Following the comment from our Portuguese colleagues that Bernadette has mentioned I would say that, in my experience, parents were very supportive in EYFS and KS1 Spanish and CLIL/Art lessons and many joined in with the singing, dancing and activities and did lots of pair talk with their children. They were happier during the second lockdown, as I believe they understood how the school was working to provide all lessons in the timetable for all children simultaneously in school and online. Many gave positive feedback and explained they had loved learning with their kids.

I agree with Wendy that it was probably us teachers who struggled more than our pupils using online platforms. This was probably due to different reasons. One is that we have our lessons planned and ready in a format that is not always compatible with online teaching, and another is that some of us lack skills and fear being taken out of our comfort zone. And yes, Wendy says this year has been a great improvement! Teaching primary pupils online can be done and can be fun. Progress can be made too. But being face to face with the younger pupils is just a whole different experience – it is the best experience!

### **Wendy Walker**

As regards the comment about the Portuguese parents, I very rarely saw a parent sitting in on any of my online lessons, and I did not hear of any parents being negative about what the teachers were teaching in any subject area. The opposite in fact, in that the parents were very grateful for what the schools were doing for their children in the lockdowns.

### **Bernadette Clinton**

We have found that, to inform all class teachers about the way we teach and get them engaged, we have insisted on running whole school staff training in primary schools. In an hour's session we have been able to share our approach with them and suggest simple daily activities that they can try to enhance language learning, for example, taking the register, greetings, instructions, praise. Where teachers are nervous about their own accents, we have urged them to use their language "experts" in the class, where they are lucky enough to have some, or we have provided sound files. Of course, the full support of the SLT is needed to make this successful. Some schools have developed language ambassadors who are given a list of phrases of the week that teachers have been asked to use and they "report back" to the languages teacher if this has or has not happened. This does need a lot of goodwill to exist among other staff!

### **Raquel Tola Rego**

This is true, the staff meetings, language ambassadors and use of native speakers has had a very positive effect and excellent feedback.

## **DEVELOPING DIGITAL LITERACIES**

### **QUESTION 2: DO TEACHERS AND LEARNERS HAVE MORE DEVELOPED SENSES OF DIGITAL (OR HYBRID DIGITAL/NON-DIGITAL) LITERACIES?**

### **Bernadette Clinton**

A positive outcome of the pandemic has been the development of teacher and pupil skills in the use of digital tools, I think. I mentioned the use of Google Classrooms which many teachers are continuing to use. We still run training online, for example, using Zoom, especially if we want to reinforce one concept in a one-hour session. This enables more teachers to easily attend. We have some super examples of how some schools have used the lockdown to really involve and engage with parents.

Both teachers and learners have more developed skills in the use of digital tools. And I believe parents do too! As Bernadette has said, we all continue to use many of the tools we started using during the pandemic and I feel we are more connected as a community.

**Bernadette Clinton**

Yes, I agree. Teachers also began looking at things like genial.ly and canva. We were lucky to be part of an Erasmus+ project and the teachers in one of our partner regions – in Tenerife – are experts at using digital tools. They have shared training on canva and on setting up a school radio on our Erasmus+ project website ([www.landevproject.org](http://www.landevproject.org)). We have learned a lot from them.

**Anna Grainger**

I agree. We very quickly learned to use Class Dojo to set and receive work, as well as being able to answer any questions that the children had while not being in the classroom. There were some fabulous webinars organised by the Association for Language Learning (ALL), where language teachers came together and shared their expertise on a whole variety of tools and ideas that could be used both during the pandemic and once normal service resumed.

During the second lockdown we had about half of our children in school and half at home, so I had to quickly learn how to create video lessons that could be taught by a TA in the classroom but could also be accessed by children at home. Some schools recommended Duolingo and other apps for self-study. Two years ago, the school purchased iPads for every pupil. This gives some amazing opportunities for teaching languages. However, I have noticed that many children are unable to do basic things on an iPad, for example scan a QR code or rejoin the internet if their iPad drops out.

**Wendy Walker**

Yes, I agree with Bernadette and Raquel about how Zoom and schools' online platforms are digital tools that are here to stay. As I teach every two weeks in one of my schools, and have to send follow-up work for the teachers for the week I am not there, I sometimes send some of the activities I created for pupils to do on Google Classroom/Microsoft Teams at home/ in school during the lockdowns. These are ideal for non-specialist teachers, as they have the sound files and the step-by-step detailed instructions that supported pupils at that time. As regards Duolingo, as mentioned by Anna, I have noticed in the last year or so an increase in both school staff and pupils saying they use the app.

**Bernadette Clinton**

Yes, I do think that overall our digital literacy skills have greatly improved. The ALL webinars were a lifesaver during the lockdowns to support us all in enhancing our skills and have continued, although now less frequently. It was so helpful to have these free webinars which gave people the sense of community and coming together at a time when many were feeling isolated. Lots of new contributors emerged with something useful to contribute, in my opinion. What do others think?

**Anna Grainger**

I completely agree, Bernadette. It was nice to be able to have opportunities to get to know other language teaching colleagues from across the world through these webinars. I learned so much and even agreed to lead a webinar to show people how to use canva (my first webinar presenting!)

**Raquel Tola Rego**

Yes, we all agree on this point. Meeting so many new contributors was so positive, fresh and inspirational. Well done Anna!





**Figure 1** Parkwood pupils having a joint lesson with their partner school in Zamora.

## CASE STUDIES OF BEST PRACTICE

### QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE GOOD CASE STUDIES/EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE THAT EMERGED FROM THE PANDEMIC, AND THAT ARE STILL USEFUL TODAY?

#### **Bernadette Clinton**

We had some innovative examples of best practice. Raquel will talk about how she combined online and in-school teaching, so I will talk about Daubeney Primary School. The Spanish teacher used the school website to great effect, listing useful websites, providing stories and activities as well as showcasing the work of his language ambassadors. During his school Hispanic Week in 2020, he organised and ran a whole series of activities for each day of the week. He involved children presenting the research they had done about one of the Spanish-speaking countries from their homes. He involved members of staff, who gave information about themselves in Spanish and the pupils had to guess who they were. The greatest achievement, I think, was getting parents from around the Hispanic world to video themselves in their kitchens explaining how to cook traditional dishes. These are still on the school website and are still used. Look at the Spanish section of the school website, [www.daubeney.hackney.sch.uk/spanish](http://www.daubeney.hackney.sch.uk/spanish).

#### **Raquel Tola Rego**

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to share an example of good practice on a Digital Modern Languages online event for primary language teachers in February 2021. At this event, which is available online (<https://digitalmodernlanguages.wordpress.com/2021/03/01/free-remote-teaching-resources-for-primary-languages/>), I showed how our online sessions were engaging, fun, effective and interactive, and how progress was achieved within the lesson and across different year groups (on the same topic). EYFS parents and carers joined in with the sessions singing along, and parents of pupils in KS1 and KS2 sent pictures and videos of their work to be uploaded to the school's social media channels. Families joined in with our weekly live storytelling on Instagram and the Spanish Art challenge became so popular!

#### **Bernadette Clinton**

Your session for the Digital Modern Languages presentation was an excellent example of how to present fun and engaging activities with pupils both at home and in school.

#### **Anna Grainger**

Coventry City of Languages was devised and set up during the first lockdown – a response to the frustration and crisis that language teaching and learning finds itself in. The pandemic gave us that space to think about how to improve things and to start to make links and relationships

with potential stakeholders. As I said previously, the ALL webinars were fantastic, where practising teachers shared their skills and ideas. This gave me the opportunity to learn about websites and apps to really engage more reluctant learners.

### Wendy Walker

Fantastic to hear about the good practice in Hackney and Coventry! Nothing to report on in Enfield that I know of!

### Bernadette Clinton

I do think that Anna is correct to point out that the lockdown did give some of us time to think in a more strategic way about how we could develop language teaching and learning, and using digital tools certainly contributed to that. Wendy, I think that you did develop some innovative approaches, such as the role play ideas using your puppets that you shared at a session with the primary BA trainees at Middlesex University. [Figure 2](#) shows one of your online inputs.


Year 3 L.O. To practice known questions and answers in Spanish by

- Recognizing them in their written form
- Listening to them
- Repeating them

Look at the [slides](#)

- Click on the sound [icon](#)
- Repeat
- Click on the sound icon again to check that you are saying it [correctly](#)

What's your name?



**Figure 2** Example of input for an online lesson.

Does anyone want to share any other things that they or other teachers they know developed?

### Anna Grainger

I'm not sure I can think of anything else that "developed", but when we invited potential stakeholders to an initial meeting to discuss the Coventry City of Languages idea we discovered that there were so many people across Coventry who shared our vision, but that nobody had ever thought to try to get everyone around a (virtual) table to discuss how we could all work together to achieve the vision.

### Wendy Walker


The example Bernadette gives above about the role play with puppets links to what Raquel talked about earlier in the dialogue about the importance of, wherever possible, including normal classroom routines in work delivered through remote learning.

### Bernadette Clinton

I must mention the calendar that the Hackney Music Service put on their website [www.hackneymusic.co.uk](http://www.hackneymusic.co.uk) in March 2021, where for each day of the month they had a clip and



an activity linked to music, dance or song from around the Spanish-speaking world. It was a fantastic joint activity which everyone could access every day in March.



**MUSIC AND SPANISH 30 DAY CHALLENGE MARCH 2021**  
**A STEP BEYOND USING SONGS TO LEARN SPANISH**  
**MUSIC FROM AROUND THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD**

EXAMPLES – all links to videos shown on the [website](#)

DAY 1 LEARN THE CHOCOLATE CLAPPING SONG. WATCH THE VIDEO AND CHECK OUT THE LYRICS AND THE TRANSLATION

DAY 18 WATCH CARLOS ACOSTA AND VERONICA CORVEAS DANCING CUBANIA – A CUBAN TALE. THINK OF 3 WORDS IN SPANISH TO DESCRIBE IT

DAY 28 'VOCAL SAMPLING' ARE AN INCREDIBLE SALSA BAND WITH NO INSTRUMENTS. WHAT INSTRUMENTS CAN YOU HEAR THOUGH? SAY IN SPANISH

<http://www.hackneymusic.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HMS30daysofSpanish2021.pdf>

**Figure 3** 30-day challenge in March 2021 of joint Music/Spanish activities: sample activities.

## MAIN GAINS FOR LEARNERS

### QUESTION 4: FROM A LEARNER PERSPECTIVE, WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MAIN THINGS THAT THEY HAVE GAINED OR LOST? HAVE THEY BECOME MORE AUTONOMOUS? HAS THERE BEEN GREATER PEER-TO-PEER INTERACTION?

#### Bernadette Clinton

Some pupils have lost confidence in their ability to succeed in languages (although this is more applicable to secondary students). The lack of face-to-face interaction with the teacher and with peers in the short term affected their confidence in speaking, but I think that this has now ceased to be a problem. It will be interesting to see what the teachers feel about this.

#### Raquel Tola Rego

This is an interesting question. At Parkwood, those pupils who were able to join in with the lessons every week or most weeks continued to develop all four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. It was very positive to see how different learners benefited from being online or in a smaller group in the class. Some who tended to be shy would turn their video off and speak or use the chat to show off answers that they knew and the private chat to ask questions they wouldn't ask in the class in front of their peers. Those in the class had small groups to work with; some didn't have the friend they always work with and realised that they could work well or even better with others too. Pupils who were unable to attend (most) sessions did lose confidence and vocabulary.

#### Anna Grainger

I am finding that children in my schools are continually being taken out of my lessons for more Maths and English interventions, which takes time away from the rest of the curriculum. There seems to be a lack of understanding, particularly in primary schools, that literacy and numeracy can be learned through other subjects, including Languages, Music, PE etc. We are so hung up on league tables and results due to the fear that Ofsted can so easily come in and give a school a bad rating. I honestly believe that this approach is counterproductive, as those children who struggle with Maths and English are not given the opportunity to discover what they ARE good at and end up believing they are no good at anything, so just give up. This risks us, as a country,

just producing the next generation of NEETs. [This stands for Not in Education, Employment or Training, and is used to talk about disadvantaged groups who have somehow got lost after leaving school.] Some of our secondary schools in Coventry have had MFL time reduced both in KS3 and KS4 over the last two years, as they decided that they needed students to have more English and Maths lessons over the course of the week.

### **Wendy Walker**

Following on from what Bernadette has said, I do find that the pupils I teach in MFL are pretty much back to how pupils were prior to the pandemic in speaking activities, that is, mostly very willing to participate. I do not think the pandemic has put primary school pupils off learning a language, but it is a different story in secondary schools, of course, where many pupils switch off languages and other subjects they enjoyed at primary school. Yes, I had the same interesting pupil experiences as Raquel in respect of the online/in class teaching and learning in the lockdowns.

### **Bernadette Clinton**

I know Anna that your experience is far too widespread in schools. Schools even take out pupils who speak another language and do not appreciate that many of these pupils flourish and do much better than monolingual English speakers in their ability to make progress in a third language without it adversely affecting their learning of English. The argument I use with headteachers who organise in this way is to ask them to look at the Curriculum Review produced by the Lead for Languages at Ofsted, which specifically calls out this practice of withdrawing pupils from language lessons as an example of poor practice. Do others have examples of ways that you are working with pupils to help them become more autonomous learners?

### **Anna Grainger**

I took that review to my headteacher, but her response was “Oh you’ve found those too have you, well I’ve told you before that this is going to be happening as I can’t have staff sitting around doing nothing[!] and this is what our children NEED.” We have an Ofsted inspector in our MAT and it concerns me that they know how to play the system. I also think that if an Ofsted inspector understands MFL then there could be a very different outcome than that of an inspection with an inspector who doesn’t understand. This makes the inspection very subjective and two different inspectors could potentially come to a very different decision about the provision. This aligns with the current narrative of the outcome of an inspection being “luck of the draw”.

### **Bernadette Clinton**

Yes, we know that there is a big groundswell of support now for inspections to be radically changed. I was just pleased that in the new Framework there was a recognition that primary languages had to be included. This has happened in some of our schools, especially where Languages has been chosen by the school for a Deep Dive. This means that a school has chosen Languages as a curriculum area to be looked at in detail. This has raised the profile of Languages. Platforms like Twitter and the setting up of Facebook language groups have contributed to the raising of the profile of primary languages. I also think that organisations such as the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) have contributed through their links with headteachers. They contributed a lot in encouraging headteachers to ensure that speakers of Heritage Languages had the chance to gain GCSE and A level grades when there were awarded grades in 2021.

### **Wendy Walker**

The schools I work in keep newly arrived pupils who do not speak English in their language lessons and their support teachers are there, learning along with them, which is something your headteacher could consider, Anna! I agree with Bernadette’s comment about these pupils flourishing in the MFL their peers are learning without it affecting their learning of English. Very

often their own language, for example, Polish, Turkish, Albanian, will have words that are similar in French/German/Spanish, and they are very proud to be able to tell you that.

### **Bernadette Clinton**

Thanks, Wendy, for adding your own experiences on supporting newly arrived pupils who don't yet speak much English. Many headteachers have forgotten, or perhaps never got involved with, the great work that Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) colleagues used to do in terms of staff training and setting the agenda in schools. Since the EMA teams in local authorities no longer exist in most parts of the country, their knowledge and expertise has been missing. There was a fantastic pack produced by the National Strategies on Bilingual Learners. This must be available somewhere online. Perhaps we can suggest to the DfE (Department for Education) that they run some online training? This would be something that could be well delivered remotely. I think I will start mentioning this to various people in the DfE.

### **Raquel Tola Rego**

I am pleased to know that there are other schools that keep new pupils who do not yet speak English in the classroom. We do that too; as Wendy and Bernadette have already mentioned, these pupils can learn English and an MFL at the same time and make lots of connections between these and their mother tongue. Not only vocabulary connections, but grammar connections too.

## **MORE CONNECTED LANGUAGE EDUCATORS**

### **QUESTION 5: HAVE THE KINDS OF ONLINE CONVERSATIONS THAT HAPPENED DURING LOCKDOWN CARRIED ON, AND HAVE DIFFERENT AREAS OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION BECOME MORE CONNECTED AS A RESULT?**

### **Bernadette Clinton**

Yes, I think that the large numbers of webinars and online activities have made us as a community more connected. For example, the CLIL Mondays run from Aston University have attracted attendees and presenters from all over the world. This has been an eye-opener for us in the UK who are grappling with trying to introduce more of a CLIL approach in our classrooms. The groups and webinars that ALL are continuing to run have brought us together and enabled a lot more teachers to feel part of the language world.

### **Raquel Tola Rego**

I completely agree with Bernadette on this question, and I think this is a great outcome for the language teaching community.

### **Bernadette Clinton**

Another aspect of digital learning that we have continued to use in Hackney has been running online lessons for staff to enhance their language skills. Raquel has run these and has enabled us to offer these to school staff outside as well as in Hackney schools. We recorded these too, so that staff who could not attend the sessions could follow them later in their own time. It took teachers a while to feel comfortable answering the questions in front of their colleagues. They were shy than the pupils at first! We will offer this again in the autumn term.

### **Raquel Tola Rego**

Of course, I forgot to mention the lessons for staff. We ran these sessions for years before the pandemic, but they used to be in person. It was great to get everyone together in the same place, but also not always easy for many to arrive on time or attend because of their school being a bit too far, etc. Having these lessons online and recorded means more can attend; some stay in work and are able to carry on working after the lesson, some join in on their way home, and all can re-watch or just follow the sessions at a more convenient time for them.

From a Coventry Local Authority point of view, probably not. Through Coventry City of Languages, we have managed to create links across Coventry, with schools and other language organisations and speakers. Language teachers are more connected generally across the city and we have connections with the universities and other stakeholders, which has opened opportunities for language learners at all key stages. I totally agree with Bernadette too about the great work that ALL has been doing. I love what you are doing in Hackney to allow staff to improve their language skills. It's something we would like to do in Coventry, but I can see it will be a lot of hard work to convince teachers to join in as they all have so much to do every day. It would be great to be able to share these sorts of initiatives and exchange ideas on the best way to set them up and get teachers engaged. I always say, language teachers are always ahead of the game!

**Wendy Walker**

Yes, I too agree entirely about the webinars and online learning connecting the MFL community and being great for teachers' CPD. However, the links and initiatives that Hackney and Coventry have created are sorely lacking in Enfield! It was once a leading London borough in MFL when Bernadette was the Languages' Adviser!

**Bernadette Clinton**

Since we are now recording Raquel's language classes for teachers, which are linked to the delivery of the KS2 curriculum, we are happy to share these with Coventry, or anybody else. I know that we are in a good position in Hackney where we have 40 days a year of paid adviser time – which is not a lot but still gives us the space and freedom to work with schools, unlike in Coventry where I know you are doing things in your “spare time”. Do let us know how we can work more together. Please give us your ideas.

**Anna Grainger**

It would be great to work more closely, but the current system is a bit of a postcode lottery. Personally, I don't know the answer, but I do believe that things must change nationally in order for us to be able to achieve the most favourable outcome. We've had a few people get in contact to ask how they can also become a Town/City of Languages, and if they can achieve this then we should all be looking to work together. I do think we need to start by getting headteachers on side and ensuring that they understand that good language teaching is not just about learning a list of 20 nouns, or playing a few games. Until we can do that the MFL culture will not change in schools, in my humble opinion.

**Raquel Tola Rego**

Anna, I completely understand you as I used to have the same problems in the past: children taken out of my lessons, class teachers and TAs not understanding how important language lessons are... I personally think that teaching with the class teachers in class has made a big difference, but I also have very supportive headteachers in the two schools where I currently work. During my lessons, teachers stay in, and many used to try and sit at the back marking or calling pupils during my lessons. But I include them in my lessons, I ask them questions and tell pupils how amazing it is that Miss or Sir are also learning with us. My headteachers see this as a continuous CPD for teachers and they are all expected to be in the lessons and take part, as well as do some daily Spanish (like the date, weather, register, etc). It won't be easy to change teachers' and SLTs' minds, but it can be done. Bernadette and I love inviting people to see what we are doing here in Hackney. I wonder if your headteacher might be interested in visiting Hackney, maybe Parkwood Primary Spanish International School? Here all pupils stay in the lessons, including SEN pupils.

**Bernadette Clinton**

Thanks, Raquel, for sharing your experiences. We have worked hard in Hackney to change perceptions, but it was made possible because we had strong local authority and headteacher

support when we started the project. But we do have to reinforce the importance of language learning, especially when we have new headteachers arrive in the borough. We have had a bit of a turnover of secondary headteachers and we have to make sure that they know what our transition systems are, for example, and how we expect their teachers to build on prior learning. This is an ongoing struggle. My experience is that, as language teachers, we must fight all the time to get recognition, unlike teachers of other subjects such as Maths or History.

### **Wendy Walker**

I have the same experience as you, Raquel, in one school, which has a very supportive SLT, which is key to keeping the subject high profile and for the MFL's teacher's/teachers' well-being! That is an important point you raised too, about the participation of classroom teachers/support staff in language lessons contributing to their continuing CPD. I agree, Bernadette, that foreign languages in primary schools do not generally have the same status as the other foundation subjects, which is unfair. As Anna said earlier, learning a foreign language develops important skills in other subject areas and can be taught through them, so the subject should have equal importance in the curriculum alongside History, Geography, etc.

### **Bernadette Clinton**

We should mention AI and the impact that such things as ChatGPT will have on language teaching and learning. I did see someone's blog where she showed examples of how she had set out some parameters of a text – for example, the phrases to be included, the verb tenses – and asked ChatGPT to produce a text that she could use with a class. She then asked for an exercise to be produced requiring gap fills. It seems to me that this would be useful in terms of producing resources and save us time – if the text was accurate. Has anyone else used these things? Any thoughts on the impact of AI on language teaching?

### **Wendy Walker**

The example of the use of ChatGPT that Bernadette talks about would certainly be useful for teachers, as creating exercises ourselves is time-consuming and requires a lot of proofreading to ensure there are no typo errors. My only real knowledge of the development of AI in terms of MFL has come from reading articles online, which are so recent that they are all dated either 2022 or 2023. I think that in primary schools, where teaching time in MFL is often limited to 30 minutes per week, implementing the new technology would not currently be feasible or a priority, and because AI can only deal with language and not culture. The importance of both elements is referred to in the Programmes of Study in the National Curriculum for KS2 and KS3. I can envisage the new AI being of more use and value in secondary schools in helping to boost motivation in language learning and uptake in GCSE in KS4.

### **Bernadette Clinton**

Many thanks Raquel, Anna and Wendy for taking part in this conversation. Our discussions have ranged widely over not only digital learning but also the other issues that concern primary languages teachers at this moment. These include the struggle to get some SLTs to give languages the space and importance that they deserve in order to ensure that pupils make good progress. We know that we do have to continually fight our corner in a country and a school system that does not value language skills enough. Working with primary schools in Tenerife, as we do in Hackney, we know that their approach with an English lesson every day plus teaching subjects such as Social Studies through English means that their pupils become confident and competent linguists. Digital literacy is also central to their language learning with the use, for example, of the school radio as an assessment tool designed to give opportunities to communicate in English through interviews, reports, notices etc. We need to learn from our European partners.

## **USEFUL RESOURCES**

Aston University CLIL Mondays events run by Learning Through Languages, [www.learningthroughlanguages.org.uk](http://www.learningthroughlanguages.org.uk)

Daubeney Primary School – a school website showing how the school involved parents during the lockdowns, [www.daubeney.hackney.sch.uk/spanish](http://www.daubeney.hackney.sch.uk/spanish)

Digital Modern Languages event, <https://digitalmodernlanguages.wordpress.com/2021/03/01/free-remote-teaching-resources-for-primary-languages/>

Erasmus+ Key Action 2 project: “Language Acquisition to stimulate cognitive development: theory and practice”, [www.landevproject.org](http://www.landevproject.org)

Hackney Music Service, example of joint Music/Spanish 30-day challenge, March 2021, [www.hackneymusic.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HMS30daysofSpanish2021.pdf](http://www.hackneymusic.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HMS30daysofSpanish2021.pdf)

Holmes, B., and F. Myles, *White Paper: Primary Languages Policy in England – The Way Forward*, RIPL, 2019, [www.ripl.uk/policy/](http://www.ripl.uk/policy/)

Labeau, E., and Tola Rego, R., “CLIL to make primary pupils click for languages: Lessons from Hackney”, in K. McManus and M. S. Schmid (eds), *How Special are Early Birds? Foreign Language Teaching and Learning*, Berlin, Eurosia Studies, 2022, vol. 6, pp. 119–44.

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