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# **“Why teach languages to pupils with SEND? They’ll never need them!”**

Alison and Patrick Organ  
Language World, Rugby 2016



# Background

Alison Organ

Senior Lecturer in Languages,  
York St John University

Patrick Organ

Teacher of Science,  
Specialist Leader of Education,  
The Forest School, Knaresborough



# Languages at Forest

- No MFL specialist at the school
- No space in the timetable for languages
- SEND schools are encouraged to “modify the MFL programmes of study” (QCA, 2009)
- Language requirement addressed through ‘language days’
- Staff felt a need for pre-event language specific support, and input on the day



# York St John's contribution

- YSJ was approached by The Forest School
- Routes into Languages funding
- Opportunity for B Ed and Language degree students
- We were apprehensive about delivering a language day in a special school
  - not knowing what the children are capable of
  - no SEND training



# Why teach languages to pupils with SEND ?

- entitlement
- “predictable benefits”
- “unpredictable benefits”

# Entitlement

## “6.12 Curriculum

All pupils should have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. The National Curriculum Inclusion Statement states that teachers should set high expectations for every pupil, whatever their prior attainment. Teachers should use appropriate assessment to set targets which are deliberately ambitious. Potential areas of difficulty should be identified and addressed at the outset. Lessons should be planned to address potential areas of difficulty and to remove barriers to pupil achievement. In many cases, such planning will mean that pupils with SEN and disabilities will be able to study the full national curriculum.”

(DfE, 2015)

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(DfE, 2015)

# “predictable benefits”

- Stimulates language development
- Revisit concepts at the root of language learning
- Improves articulation
- Opportunities for developing social skills
- Cultural awareness – and the idea that things can be different, that things can change.

(McColl, 2000)

# “unpredictable benefits”

- Students with severe communication difficulties, or who choose not to speak, will speak the target language.
  - Students learn to do Maths, learn the days of the week, tell the time, in the target language.
  - Building self esteem with EAL students
  - Introduce use of communication aids
  - Improved memory
  - Improved articulation and language modulation
- (McColl, 2000)

# “unpredictable benefits”

- Deaf child learned English word order, having studied it in German.
- Dyslexic student enjoyed the “only subject in which he was just as good as everyone else”
- Success in use of hand puppets to engage pupils in MFL spread to other subjects
- Visual impairment (difficulty tracking text across a page) not an issue when learning vocabulary lists in columns – spread to other subjects.

(McColl, 2000)

# Strategies and support

Vivienne Wire, “Autistic Spectrum Disorders and learning foreign languages”

(Wire, 2005)

“Children with Autism, Strategies for accessing the national curriculum, modern foreign languages”, (DfES, SEN North West Regional Partnership, 2004)

# Strategies and support

“Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties: Modern foreign languages”, QCA, 2009.

<http://www.specialeducationalneeds.com>

(David Wilson)

<http://www.languageswithoutlimits.co.uk>

(Hilary McColl)

# The case for collaboration

“Special schools (in the maintained, academy, non-maintained and independent sectors), special post-16 institutions and specialist colleges all have an important role in providing for children and young people with SEN and in working collaboratively with mainstream and special settings to develop and share expertise and approaches.”

(DfE & DoH, 2015)

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# The case for collaboration

“..we seem doomed as a nation to continue alienating learners who are convinced that they ‘can’t do languages’. I live in hope that someone, somewhere, will ... provide the means for effective collaboration between language specialists and support specialists. In this way language teachers will be enabled to provide successfully, for all learners, the chance to benefit from the richness of their linguistic and cultural heritage.”

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# YSJ / Forest language days

- French (with passports and stickers)
- Tour de France
- Italian
- Japanese



# French day



Geography – town planning

Food tech – making and eating crêpes



# Science - fermentation



# Music





DT – making houses



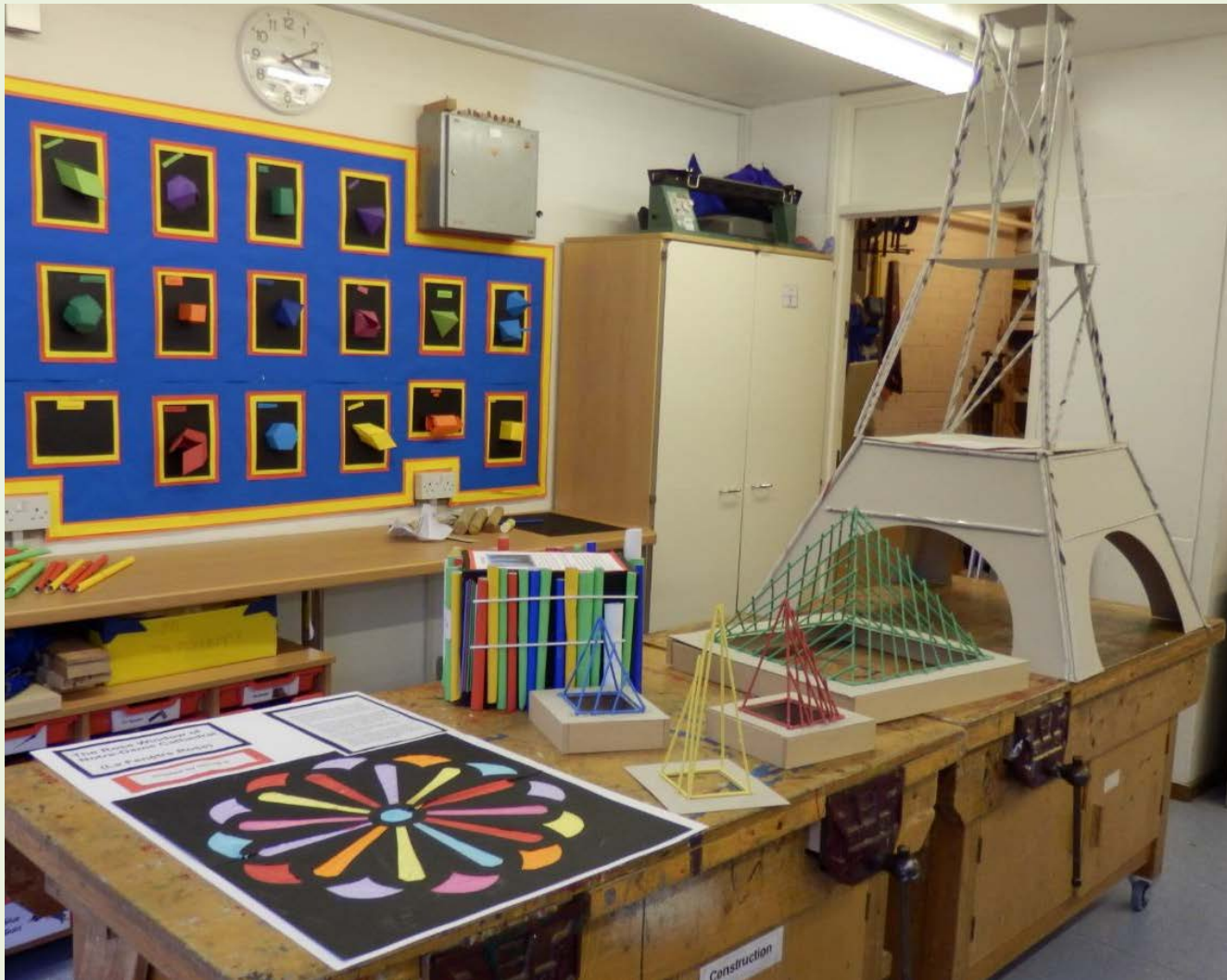
Drama - animals

# Tour de France Day

Maths – numbers  
and colours



DT – building an Eiffel tower, a Pompidou centre, a pyramid and a stained glass window





## Science – parts of the body & health



## Assembly – show and tell and singalong



# Assembly – show and tell and singalong



# Italian Day



DT – leaning tower of Pisa

# Maths – counting in Italian



# Japanese Day



Food tech – making sushi



Art – drawing Pokémon

# Music - Taiko drumming



# How did the York St John students benefit from it?



# YSJ student comments (survey 2013)

## Did you enjoy the French Day?

- Yes 100%

## How did you feel about it beforehand?

- I felt apprehensive about using my French 11%
- I was looking forward to using my French 78%
- I **felt apprehensive** about visiting a **special school** 56%
- I was looking forward to visiting a special school 33%

# YSJ student comments (survey 2013)

## What was your favourite activity / moment?

- The maths and science. The teachers were really hands on and encouraging.
- My favourite moments were when the children were picking up and using French vocabulary as **they astonished me with their ability to learn this.**
- My favourite activity was making the buildings in DT a good twist on French. **My favourite moment was seeing the children speaking French and getting excited by it especially in the assembly at the end.**
- The drama lesson was good, however, lacked spoken French. **Just using French in every lesson was beneficial for the children.**
- The whole school show and tell assembly at the end was my favourite moment of the day.

# YSJ student comments (survey 2013)

Do you think it was a worthwhile visit in terms of your programme?

- Yes I feel it helped me to understand how language learning would be used and taught with SEN children and **abolished any initial fears** I would have in this situation.
- It was definitely good not only to gain activity ideas and whole school approaches but also just to **experience learning in a SEN school**.
- Definitely, it has made me a lot more **confident in teaching languages to special needs children**.
- Yes, I now feel that I could **adapt an MFL lesson** if I had an SEN child in my class.
- Definitely!

# How did the school benefit from it?



# Forest staff comments (survey 2013)

**Did you enjoy the French Day?**

- Yes 100%

**How did you feel about it beforehand?**

- I **felt apprehensive** about using my **French** 50%
- I was looking forward to using my French 50%

**Did the event meet your expectations in terms of how your French held up?**

- I really lacked confidence using my French 0%
- I was worried about it but **my French held up better than I expected** 37.5%
- **I enjoyed using my French** 62.5%

# Forest staff comments (survey 2013)

## How did you feel the children coped with the day?

- Our children coped well and enjoyed the day.
- They had an **excellent range of experiences**.
- All the children in my session enjoyed the input. None of them showed any anxiety or distress due to the change in timetable.
- The majority of pupils thoroughly enjoyed the day. Those who had difficulties were generally pupils with Autism who struggle with changes to their routine.
- Very well. Receptive. From the higher ability **having the chance to show off what they already know** to others having the chance to **learn something completely new**.
- The pupils thoroughly enjoyed and **rose to the challenge**.
- Very well. They **enjoyed learning** new words.

# A successful collaboration

## What was your impression of the York St John students?

- The students were very happy to get involved and worked well with our children. The ones who came to my sessions thought on their feet and responded to the children's interests and questions.
- They were positive, friendly and full of energy.
- Interacted well with the students.
- The students participated enthusiastically and were extremely professional.
- On the whole they were very willing to help and join in. Very impressed.



# A successful collaboration

Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

## Staff

- An opportunity to **discuss** what we wanted to do with the organiser and may be some of the **students** would make the sessions even better.
- Might be good for **the students to suggest activities** and then for **staff to plan with them**. This would be good for the development of the BEd students, **increase confidence for our staff and would probably lead to better outcomes for our pupils**.

## Students

- Perhaps just more chance to chat to the staff about how they go about languages teaching with SEN children and their thoughts on this.

# A successful collaboration

## Message from the Deputy Head

Thank you very much for organising today. The staff thoroughly enjoyed the day as did the pupils. We very much enjoyed your company and would **welcome any student back** who wanted to visit us again!

## Message from the Headteacher

Just a little note to say a huge thank you for the French Day. The pupils had a great time and there was some **clear learning going on in every session I visited**. The day was really well organised and the students you brought with you made a great contribution too. Please thank them for all their efforts.



# Mutually beneficial model

University staff  
& students

or

Secondary  
school staff &  
sixth formers

with

Special school

or

Primary school



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