THE EDINBURGH PROJECT

During school session 2002-2003, City of Edinburgh Council Educational Services received funding from SEED's Innovation in Modern Languages fund for a project which would provide support for mainstream secondary schools who wanted to look at how they could improve access to Modern Languages for pupils who were at risk of failing or of being left out of Modern Languages provision altogether. The Project aimed to contribute to the City's work on inclusion and in particular to its policy of entitlement to modern language learning for all. In each of the schools, the project was designed to reflect an aspect of the school's own development priorities as well as contributing to the national educational priorities.

The work of the project was based on certain observations and premises:

- that all children can benefit from Modern Languages provided that they are offered a course that is appropriate for them (e.g. evidence from special schools and units);

- that some traditional ways of teaching Modern Languages are not appropriate for all pupils but actually create barriers which prevent some pupils from learning as well as they might;

- that small changes in the way in which modern language learning is presented can sometimes spark significant improvements in motivation and attainment;

- that modern language teachers sometimes need help to identify the barriers and to effect changes which might make a difference;

- that this help is available in schools, provided that it can be mobilised effectively.

The value of modern language specialists and learning support specialists working together to effect improvements in learning and teaching in modern languages has been recognised for some time[1], but has sometimes been poorly supported by School Management. Some schools allocate the bulk of available LS time to work with individual pupils or support for English and Mathematics programmes. Where LS staff *have* been allocated to ML classes, the lack of time allocated for preparation and planning had made collaboration much less effective than it might have been, resulting in frustration for the teachers involved.

An innovative feature of this Project was that it provided funding to allow pairs of modern language teachers and learning support teachers time to share perspectives and planning as well as delivery of programmes and so have an opportunity to effect real improvements. The support and commitment of School Management, as enablers, was seen as crucial to the success of the Project.

In practice, the work in each school was monitored by the Principal Teacher of Modern Languages. A consultant was appointed to manage the project and to offer support in schools.

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[1] Note, for example, the overwhelming interest in the SALT workshops on "Working Together" which, despite being run on a Saturday, were attended by LS and ML representatives from over 60 schools.

The Pilot schools

The Pilot schools were asked to:

- identify individual pupils or a groups of pupils deemed to be struggling or 'at risk of failing' in Modern Languages

- identify a core team consisting of the modern language teacher responsible for the class or group and a learning support teacher familiar with the pupils and with supporting in a modern languages context.

- observe the pupils at work and to share perspectives in order to identify barriers and to devise strategies for tackling them

- try out strategies (with support from LS) and to evaluate them

- disseminate ideas which appear to have promise

Three Pilot schools were identified and all chose to look at S1/S2 classes.

Broughton High School wanted to improve Modern Languages provision for pupils in S1 and S2 who arrive from Primary school still working at Levels A & B in Literacy.

St Thomas of Aquin High School's Project focused on an S2 class of pupils with a wide range of learning needs with the aim of improving motivation and attainment to the point where pupils could be presented for General Level at the end of S4.

Tynecastle High School wanted to look at ways of keeping a mixed ability S1 class on task for more of the time.

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SEED has provided funding for the pilot projects to continue this session and for some dissemination activities to be undertaken.

Key Features of the Project

Success within the context of each school's project seemed to be linked to the following features:

1 **A practical, school-centred approach**
   In each school the project was centred on a specific group of pupils who were causing concern, and developed accordingly. It also drew on manpower and skills already available within the school. This meant that the three projects were all different but that any strategies developed were likely to be seen to be valid, and relevant to other contexts within the project school.

2   **A shared perspective on learning**
At the outset of any collaborative venture, there must be opportunities for collaborators to share their perspectives on the nature and purpose of the task in hand. In this case, ML and LS teachers needed an opportunity to ensure that they were 'speaking the same language' – not the same foreign language, but a common language in which to express perceptions about what is actually happening during specific learning situations. In this project, opportunities for sharing perceptions consisted of:
(a) a session with the project consultant in which 'barriers to learning' were explored with the teachers involved;
(b) joint classroom observation of the pupils who were the focus of the project, or a representative sample of them. Observation schedules were used which could be compared and discussed later.

3   **Provision of dedicated time for planning**
ML and LS teachers have tried to work together before but, even where time has been made available for team teaching, provision of dedicated time outside the classroom for consultation and joint planning is extremely rare. This project was unique, we think, in that it provided some funds for cover to allow observation, planning and evaluation to take place. While continued provision of such funding cannot, of course, be guaranteed, the project seems to have made the case for provision of dedicated time outside the classroom to be viewed as an essential component of any future curriculum development project.

4   **Explicit support from school management**
Ad hoc arrangements between staff are certainly useful, but in this case the planned approach needed to be underwritten by SMT so that the necessary cover arrangements could be made, and to validate in the eyes of the school the work being undertaken by the teachers and pupils involved. The intention to disseminate the findings of the project also needed SMT involvement.

5   **ML 'ownership' of the project**
LS teachers are often viewed by subject departments as providers of help for pupils experiencing problems in their class. In such a role, a LS teacher is, in a sense, *deus ex machina* and the solutions they provide, while effective for the individual pupils involved, have little impact on curriculum development as a whole. It seems to have been important, in this project, for the funding to have come via the Officer for Modern Languages and for the Modern Language teachers involved to have 'ownership' of the project and to retain responsibility for implementing the strategies jointly agreed.

6   **A problem-solving approach; a model for managing change**
This was a pilot project, so it was important to the schools that any positive findings should have relevance beyond the original context. *Ad hoc* solutions rarely have an impact beyond the context for which they are devised. The project provided a mechanism for moving in a more formal way from problem identification, to consideration of possible strategies, through to implementation and evaluation. This problem-solving approach seems likely to result in insights which may lead to more lasting change. The mechanism also provided a way of recording the process in ways which could be tracked by others outside the core team. In the event, both Modern Languages and Support for Learning departments felt they had gained insights which could be applied elsewhere, not only to other modern languages but also to other subject areas.

George Reid CEC
Hilary McColl
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