

The challenge - to produce confident and effective language learners - has always been with us. Not all pupils share the linguistic aspirations we have for them, despite our best efforts. And while we struggle to meet **that** challenge, what about the others who need to be stretched if they are to achieve their potential?

The *ELLSEN**, *Working Together* and *Improving Collaborative Practice* projects that have been on the go since the mid-nineties were the forerunners of this new online version. *Maximising Potential* was piloted last session, with help from Scottish CILT and launched on MFLE last August. (Comments from the pilot schools and archive material from the earlier projects can be accessed on line*).

All these programmes have arisen from, and have confirmed, a number of key observations:

- that all children **can** benefit from ML learning, though not all actually **do**;
- that so-called 'difficult classes' **can** be turned around;
- that whatever the cause of the difficulty is, it's unlikely to be the language that's the problem.

Maximising Potential capitalises on resources that are already in every school. It provides a structured programme in which one or more ML teachers works in partnership with one or more SfL teachers to apply a problem-solving approach to situations (or even to individual pupils) that they themselves have identified as presenting a particular challenge in their school. It supports them as they evaluate their chosen situation and devise effective responses. The programme typically lasts two terms, or most of the academic year.

There are six units. Units 1 & 2 focus on the needs of individual pupils or groups of pupils, and prompts the questions: 'Why aren't they learning as well as we would like them to?' 'What do they need?' and 'How might we set about meeting those needs?'

Units 3 to 6 focus on ways of managing those needs so that ALL pupils (not just those with ASNs) can become more effective learners. They ask questions like:

- How can we cater for learners with difficulties as the same time as stretching the most able?
- What are we already doing well? What changes should we make?
- How can we manage change?

Each of the units follows a similar structure. A few Points for Reflection (of 1-3 pages), followed by one or more tasks for which support is provided in the way of downloadable checklists, observation schedules and planning sheets, all of which are customisable.

What the programme doesn't do

It doesn't:

- provide all the answers (it simply suggests a number of starting points);
- tell teachers how to teach;
- ask teachers to change everything;
- leave it to SfL to solve all the problems in MFL;
- offer 'tips' or quick fixes.

In-school support is crucial

Only if School Managers become involved can the opportunities for effective collaboration be provided, and only through supportive monitoring can the impetus be maintained.

Guidance for School Managers is therefore provided as part of the programme.

External support *

- The Maximising Potential website provides links to a supplementary support website where participants can find examples of good practice from earlier projects, or materials to supplement the basic material on the main website.
- There is a thread on the MFLE Forum where those participating can share experiences or ask for advice.
- Email consultancy is available from Catriona Oates and Hilary McColl.

Additional uses for the programme

- For study or personal CPD by individual teachers or student teachers (all the Points for Reflection have been collected into one booklet that can be downloaded for individual study.)
- As a useful resource for probationers and their mentors.
- As a whole school resource to support inclusion.
- As a resource to develop effective collaborative practice between subject and SfL staff.

* NOTES

ELLSEN *Europe, Language Learning and Special Educational Needs*. (SOEID 1997)

Maximising Potential: <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/maximisingpotential/>

Supplementary website: <http://www.hilarymccoll.co.uk/max.html>

MFLE: <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/mfle/>

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