‘Meanings that Matter’

A practical guide to authentic communication in the target language

Katie Lee, The Willink School
for Mike,
who taught me so much and gave me confidence
What is ‘immersion’ language teaching?

100%

teacher and pupil target language is the norm
Authentic spoken communication

- Two-way
- Built on and builds a relationship of trust
- Contains personal emotion or thought
- Fulfils a function
What does immersion language learning achieve?

• Immediate meaningful **success** for the pupil in communicating in the foreign language

• Confidence in **language manipulation** from the start

• Simplest way to bring ‘**meanings that matter**’ to the languages classroom

• Intensive training in **higher order skills**

• A framework for **increased discipline** in the classroom
- **Levels 1 and 2** Set phrases and memorised language.
- **Level 3** Occasionally substitute items of vocabulary to vary questions and statements.
- **Level 4** Use their knowledge…to adapt and substitute single words and phrases.
- **Level 5** Make themselves understood
- **Level 6** Apply knowledge…in new contexts…use target language to meet most of their routine needs for information and explanations
- **Level 7** Initiate and develop conversations and discuss matters of personal or topical interest…improvise and paraphrase
- **Level 8** Deal with unprepared situations
- **Exceptional** Deal confidently with unpredictable elements in conversations or with people who are unfamiliar
Key Processes

- use previous knowledge, context and other clues to work out the meaning of what they hear or read
- listen for gist or detail
- initiate and sustain conversations
- reuse language that they have heard or read in their own speaking and writing
- adapt language they already know in new contexts for different purposes
- deal with unfamiliar language, unexpected responses and unpredictable situations
Basic Principles

• **Empathise** with the learning experience
• **Model** successful communication at pupil level
• **Scaffold** phrases and vocabulary
• Explicit training in communicative and learning strategies
• Encourage pupils to ‘be themselves’ in the foreign language – *pupil-led*
• Be **persistent** and **consistent** in expectations
• Expect the impossible
Hamer's ‘Balanced Activities Approach’ (1991)

**LANGUAGE LEARNING**

- Finely-tuned input
- Roughly-tuned input
- Checking
- Internalising

**LANGUAGE LEARNER**

- Practice output
- Internalising
- Communication output

**LANGUAGE USE**

- Teacher correction (cognitive reinforcement)
- Success in communicating (behavioural reinforcement)
Beware!

Immersion techniques are most successful when…

• Implemented by the whole department
• Training/reflection takes place
• Rolled out from Year 7
First Lesson

• Immerse them with a smile
• Step back and explain
• Set targets for progress
• Allay their fears
• Give them a ‘safety float’
• Jump in and start swimming…
• Congratulate them and reflect on strategies
Keep them swimming
- sustaining pupil target language

- Diversion is investment
- Modelling
- Don’t appear to respond to English
- Language hubs on the walls – and exploit them
- Accept ‘baby’ language to start with
- Rewards
- Teams
- Keep raising the bar
- Give them time to think on the spot
- Exploit naturally occurring situations
- Engage personalities and interests
- Pupils keep personalised list of ‘talk’ vocab
- Names
- Peer help
- Humour

…there’s no substitute for persistence!
Sustaining teacher target language (water aerobics exercises for teachers!)

• Establish, use and develop classroom language ‘hubs’
• Script instructions and question sequences
• Start with confidence-building by simple instructions
• Think words, visual, actions, tone
Explanations and Instructions

• Stop-look-listen routine
• Bricklaying analogy
• Examples
• Slide with their copy
• Modelling
• Think context
• Cognates
• Scripting
Teaching Grammar

- Get them *doing* it first
- Prepare *context* carefully to establish meaning
- *Highlight* the target structure
- *Elicit* similarities, differences, patterns, reasons
- Use colour and *visual* effect/structure
- Teach them simple *terminology* to describe what they see
- Guided and focused examples to *demonstrate* understanding
Meanings that Matter in the Languages Classroom

Authentic communication about...

• ‘Topics’

• Language

(language of learning)
Meanings that Matter in the Languages Classroom

Authentic communication about…

- Classroom routines and needs
- Learning activities
- Learning

(language for learning)
Cheats

• Written English on whiteboard
• Whispering to individuals
• Definition of ‘within the lesson’
• Meta-script for strategy-building in first stages
Pitfalls to avoid

• ‘Lopsided growth’ – pupils continue to speak English
• Native speakers beware – helping is not helpful
• Mismatched expectations – if they can’t do it, reformulate
• Expecting perfect sentences – accept ‘baby language’
• ‘Translation mode’
Troubleshooting pupil tricks

- ‘Red herrings’ - keep it relevant, but allow self-expression.
- ‘Comment dit-on….en francais?’ – deal with the question not the answer, make them repeat it.
- Endless vocab requests – make them copy it, prompt recycling, only give the minimum.
Are your classes splashing in the shallow end or swimming the deep end?

Do you...

...Start well then tail off after the first term? 
*Increase your stamina!*

...Find it’s easier in English? 
*Practise some water aerobics!*

...Find it’s quicker in English? 
*Re-evaluate the learning objectives!*

...Find the pupils soon lose interest? 
*Have you let go of them yet?!*

...Find the pupils soon start sinking? 
*Did you teach them the basic strokes?!*