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Directions for modern languages initial teacher education in a changing climate

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How can partnerships enhance the trainee experience?
Welcome to this 40th edition of the Links bulletin which for the first time is electronic rather than in hard copy. I am very much hoping to return to our normal format for the next edition, but for the moment financial constraints have dictated this change.

The theme of this edition reflects that of the September ITE conference: partnership. Having worked for two years on the Our Languages project, I feel qualified to promote the benefits of “partnership working”. The cover image is taken from the Our Languages toolkit which aims to support the development of relationships between mainstream schools, both primary and secondary, and complementary or supplementary schools. If you would like a copy of the toolkit, please email me in January with your full postal address so that I can arrange for one to be sent.

The changing face of ITE is the subject of John Trafford’s article which highlights a number of challenges ahead, including the consequences for ITE of the decline of languages take up in KS4 and the difficult job market. ‘Since he delivered this paper, the TDA has reduced the additional bursary for MFL.’

Directions for Modern Languages Initial Teacher Education in a changing climate

Two issues dominated exchanges between modern languages teacher educators during 2008–09 on CILT’s ‘support for teacher trainers’ website (www.ittmfl.org.uk). These were school placements and employment prospects for newly qualified teachers.

Training

Discussions centred on the difficulty of identifying and securing suitable school placements, and providers identified as problematic the following: the quantity of placements offered; the appropriateness of the experience, especially the range of languages available; the quality of the experience; geographical location; and the continuity of schools’ commitment and ability to host placements regularly.

Ofsted (2008) offers some thoughts about the training of teachers in what they term ‘community languages’, and reports a somewhat ad hoc system, dependent on various considerations, among which is the identification of suitable placements. The ittmfl discussions suggest that the issue is in fact much wider, affecting more mainstream modern language provision.

Overseas placements are a feature of teacher education at Liverpool Hope University. Jan Rowe sets out the profound influence this experience of another system of education has on the professional identity of beginning teachers.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), developed in partnership with Tile Hill Wood School, is a specialism of ITE at Warwick University. This initiative, analysed by Marilyn Hunt and Ana Neofitou, fits into the concept of more integrated languages teaching as promoted by the national curriculum.

Two further joint projects likewise describe an enhanced experience of ITE: firstly, the collaboration between Languages and Art & Design led by the artist, Quentin Blake, at the Institute of Education; then an extended collaboration between French and drama at Oxford Brookes – again both very in tune with the current national curriculum.

An update on the Key Stage 3 Framework for languages completes this edition. Happy reading and all best wishes for 2010!
Masters in Teaching and Learning? development, and the arrival of their responsibilities for professional 
to consider such a change, especially the ad hoc nature of placements would 
though school inspection, the quality of a training had been prominently 
that wonderful gift, hindsight, suggests one remedy. If, when Ofsted 
had first designed its framework for school inspection, the quality of a school’s contribution to initial teacher 
putting into the system, to know whether schools’ needs are being 
wide, but not been very widely adopted despite its successes in some courses, such as at the University of Sheffield, my former base. Its merits 
for student teachers were experiencing in finding their first job. This ironically coincided with a time of burgeoning recruitment, in which the national economic situation plays a part. The status of modern languages as a shortage subject would be threatened if this turned out to be a long term trend.

In the short term, modern languages tutors will need to work with their students in making them more employable. Colleagues in other areas, for example history and primary teaching, have long faced a situation in which full employment for their student groups was far from certain. Relationships with local authorities can be patchy, and indeed the presence of a subject expert within a local authority cannot be guaranteed, but liaison on local trends of language provision might help to inform selection. The motivation for student teachers to demonstrate their high quality should now be stronger than ever in a market that has quite suddenly become more competitive.

Is it also time to revive the idea of the ‘second subject’ (i.e. outside the modern languages specialist area) in training courses, now quite rare? Available teaching time is seriously limited, but linguists may need a broadening of their skills in a tough climate.

Over the horizon
Policy predictions are hard. In a time of recession, with an election imminent, and with language provision in some secondary schools undermined, the best answer from our sector is to continue to produce new teachers of the highest quality. They will be the best answer we can give to any difficulties that modern languages teaching and teacher education face.

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