

Telling Stories About Teaching and Research

Lab School Stories Reader

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Preface

At the second meeting of the “LabSchoolsEurope” Erasmus project in Cambridge in February 2020, we began sharing our experiences with research and teaching in the form of small anecdotes. The aim of these stories has been to document the daily practices in our Lab Schools and to illustrate the interdependence of teaching and research. For this reason, we asked everyone to share one personal experience related to their Lab School research (e.g. form of a research project in which they participated). That could, for example be a story or an anecdote,

- in which they could achieve a lot of internal impact.
- in which they could achieve a lot of external impact.
- that left them with more questions than answers.
- that was a complete success.
- in which research has helped them with their everyday teaching
- in which something unexpected happened

This reader contains all these stories and anecdotes – with all the positive experiences, fortunate events, oddities, and difficulties.

We hope you enjoy reading!

Christian Timo Zenke and Benedict Kurz

Internal impact

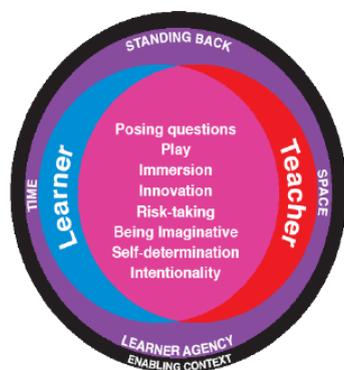
Celebrating creativities and releasing the imagination

Author: Elena Natale, University of Cambridge Primary School

This story tells the journey from a research lesson in Year 3 which inspired a whole-school arts week and subsequently led to the publication of two articles for the Chartered College of Teaching (<https://impact.chartered.college/article/possibility-thinking-developed-through-the-arts-in-a-year-3-classroom/>)

At the University of Cambridge Primary School, all teachers engage in Lesson Study where we work together on a sequence of learning and plan/do/review a research lesson. The first part of Lesson Study is the planning stage, in which the research group formulates a question to explore. This was the start of our journey: the conversations with my research team and the readings directed my focus to the role of the arts in the curriculum. The readings suggested that even though the arts are often underestimated in the curriculum they have an important role in the development of 'little c' creativity (Craft, 2001). 'Little c' creativity is characterised by an active engagement with everyday problems, where students learn collaboratively to find solutions (Craft, 2001). At the heart of this notion of creativity is possibility thinking (PT). This refers to the way in which learners deal with problems and their ability to ask 'what if' questions (Cremin et al., 2006). I decided to direct my research focus towards how the arts can help to promote PT and enable children to engage critically and creatively with the concept of human rights. As a consequence my research question was: *To what extent does playing through art forms enable children to express understanding and opinions about human rights?*

In the lesson, the arts were used as the main pedagogical tool, and the focus of the observations and student's interviews was to identify which core features of PT were present in children's learning.



From Craft, A., Cremin, T., Burnard, P., Dragovic, T., & Chappell, K. (2012). Possibility thinking: Culminative studies of an evidence-based concept driving creativity? *Education 3-13*, 41(5), 538–556.

The lesson built on children's prior learning about human rights and wanted to challenge and deepen their thinking about the right to education by allowing them to make meaning and express themselves through the arts.

The children were given the freedom to choose who to work with and how to play with the arts and their task was to work in groups to explore the meaning of the right to education and develop a shared understanding of it. They then had to find ways to represent this understanding through the arts.

My role was that of an observer and facilitator. Through questioning, I invited children to justify their choices and share the messages that they wanted to communicate. During the lesson, my colleagues who were part of my research group, observed six children and then asked them questions about their learning. Qualitative data was collected through observations and student interviews, this was then used in the post-lesson discussion to reflect and identify key themes related to the research question.

The data highlighted the presence of the following features in children's interactions:

- The children were playing with each other using the arts as tools for learning.
- They were engaging in dialogue about the meaning of the right to education.
- They were making connections with previous learning.
- They were developing innovative ideas by expanding on previous concepts .

These correspond with features of possibility thinking (PT) and creative learning.

Following these observations and the feedback from colleagues and children, we decided to organise an arts-based learning week to provide the whole school with the opportunity to learn in and through the arts and in collaboration with artists. Inspired by a piece of artwork in our school, by Ruth Proctor called '*We are all under the same sky*', we decided to name our week 'Journeys through fragments of the sky.'

The aims of the week were to:

- Explore creativities in teacher's professional development.
- Bring teachers and artists together.
- Creatively explore expressions on themes of journeys and the sky.
- To make a case to expand the place of creativities and the arts in the national curriculum.

Using the possibility thinking model we explored the process of creativity and thought of ways to foster active engagement and create meaningful learning opportunities for all children.

This week was influential for the whole school community. Most children, even the ones who found it hard at first to adjust to the different structure of the week, by the end felt comfortable and fully engaged in the learning. Therefore, the arts brought children, school staff and artists together. The children also learnt to work collaboratively, help each other and share resources and ideas. The children played with the arts and used their imagination to move beyond the obvious. Furthermore, the children developed innovative responses and interpretations for the meaning of the

sky. The week culminated in a whole school immersive performance where the audience was invited to journey with the children around the school and to the community centre in search of the hope that had been taken away. In the end, everyone realised that hope is present where people come together as a community.

The practical implications of the week were:

- Working with the artists provided excellent professional learning opportunities.
- Working with the artists helped staff and children to experience how ideas can grow seemingly out of nothing and highlighted the breadth of possibilities that the arts can offer across the curriculum.
- The children were the time to play collaboratively with each other and explore ideas in unfamiliar ways. As the possibility thinking model suggests, time, space and adults taking a step back are key factors, necessary to promote children's agency, nurture talents and help them to find unique easy to express themselves (Burnard et al., 2006; Craft et al., 2012).

The week proved to be a learning opportunity for everyone and I decided to share our school's journey with the professional and research community. As a consequence, I wrote an article in the Impact journal of the Chartered College of Teaching, sharing the learnings from my lesson study and James and I also wrote an article reflecting on Arts week.

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Do, ask, ask, ask, adapt, repeat

Author: Benedict Kurz

When you are visiting a school, you do not already know, one way to make yourself familiar with what is going on beyond the surface of shiny websites and school programmes is speaking to children without a teacher present (e.g. during a student-led school tour or at lunch time). Another wonderful resource are non-teaching staff members. For example, the perspective of a school caretaker has been very helpful for me in the past. Too often, unfortunately, these various groups are neither fully considered in the decision-making processes of schools nor in practise-based research approaches – even though they might have valuable experiences, recommendations, and criticism to contribute.

This story is about how we asked all parties involved, in order to further develop a small project implemented to foster students' second language learning outside of the classroom. By that, I intend to illustrate how incorporating lab school values like democracy and participation within a research approach can be a beautiful way to further develop school projects.

The first of the so-called FEPs, short for "Forschungs- und Entwicklungsprojekte" which means research and development projects, I was able to get to know at Laborschule was called "English Any Time". In this project, English teachers from Laborschule and a researcher from Laborschule's research institute looked into different ways of fostering informal language learning. The idea behind this project was that children show vast differences in prior knowledge, experience, learning types, and learning strategies. These differences result in various needs. To address these various needs in regard to learning a second language, different approaches were considered, implemented and evaluated. I will present one of those approaches.

Since the activity of speaking a foreign language is essential for improving listening and oral skills and thereby an important part of learning a language, one string of the project was to create low- threshold and low-stakes situations for speaking English outside of the classroom. Therefore, people who could speak English and could create a variety of these situations at Laborschule were needed – and found in the English students from Bielefeld University. Part of the German teacher training at university (which means doing a Bachelor of Education with at least 2 teaching subjects followed by a consecutive Master of Education) are internships. These internships differ in aim, length and the number of hours of actual teaching. Every year a new group of English teacher trainees from Bielefeld University can come to the neighbouring Laborschule to do their second internship within their Bachelor studies. The aim of this so-called practical studies internship (in German: Berufsfeldbezogene Praxisstudie BPSt) is to reflect on the choice of becoming a teacher while at the same time getting a first glance at the teaching profession. This second internship is estimated to have a workload of 120 hours, which they spend within and outside of regular English classes (year 3-5). During the lessons, these university students support the teachers and, for example, can work with students individually. Part of their internship is also conducting a small

project. For this so-called “teaching project” they were asked to create opportunities for Laborschule students to speak English outside of English classes. The guideline for them, the university students, was to only speak English with the children. Hence, from “good morning” to “see you tomorrow” these students had to speak English all the time. The university students designed their teaching projects during their preparation seminar at uni and under the supervision of their university lecturers. Implementation was accompanied by Laborschule’s teachers who also were their contact persons within Laborschule.

In the end, the whole English Any Time project was evaluated. To evaluate the part I spoke about, all involved parties were consulted. Therefore, the teachers were asked about their impressions. What worked from their perspective and why, what did not work and why and what recommendations would they might have for a next round? Three group discussions were also done with five to six children to get to know their impressions and experiences with the university students’ different projects. We recorded and transcribed these discussions. The anonymised discussions were analysed by using qualitative content analysis. In a third step, we made a round table to ask university students for their feedback. Finally, we galvanised all collected impressions and experiences into different recommendations for a new group of teacher trainees in the following year (like creating an advice sheet for the university students).

With this story, I argue for acknowledging the expertise of every group involved (in our case: teachers, children, university students). Including their perspectives and listening to what they have to say is a vital part in the process of evaluating and developing school projects and, hence, schools. It is this small step detective work that allows us to understand to what extent a project has reached its goals, what worked for whom and what did not, and what were the non-intended outcomes.

The story of how to flip and influence teaching by a blended learning scenario

Author: Oliver Wagner, Pädagogische Hochschule Wien

Teaching student teachers at the University College of Teacher Education I was seeking for ways and methods on how to best support students in their professional development as didacts, educators and researchers.

Literature research very soon led me to the didactical concept of Inverted Classroom combined with Design Based Research as my methodology of choice.

The concept of Inverted Classroom Model (ICM) is also called „Flipped Classroom“: „Inverting the classroom means that events that have traditionally taken place inside the classroom now take place outside the classroom and vice versa“ (Lage, Platt & Treglia, 2000, p. 32) and: “Flipping the classroom is more about a mindset: redirecting attention away from the teacher and putting attention on the learner and the learning” (Bergmann, Sams, 2012, p. 11).

ICM thus swaps the phases of knowledge transmission (traditionally classroom attendance) and of self-studying (traditionally at home). Consequently, input (sometimes also combined with little tasks) usually takes place digitally before teachers and students meet face to face.

The advantage of this concept is, that students can acquire the course content individually, self-regulated and completely autonomous. Moreover, it frees time and space in class for questioning and applying what was learnt together with other students and the teacher. Reinmann argues that the advantage of this kind of Blended Learning Szenario is that pre- knowledge is homogenized and activated, and questions are provoked. The core idea is to use precious class time for problem-solving, intensifying, applying and consolidating content knowledge.

Handke (2014, p. 181) sees the advantages with regard to individual learning speed as well as independence of space and time. Additionally, he anticipates a greater learner activity during the classroom attendance phases.

To implement the concept and its documentation I have decided to use the method of Design-Based-Research (DBR) which is supposed to be a design-oriented approach for teaching and learning situations.

Since the beginning of the 1990s DBR is more and more used in the learning sciences. Literature provides different processing models. One common feature though is a cyclic progression of phases (Raatz, 2016, p. 41; Reinmann, 2014, p. 65; Reinmann, 2005, p. 60f.; Euler, 2014, p. 19; Jahn, 2012, p. 43):

problems (analysis) – developing interventions/designs – implementation – evaluation – modification – generating principles

This kind of research aims at innovative solutions for educational contexts as well as gaining new scientific insights (Raatz, 2016, p. 39; Reinmann, 2005, p. 61; Euler, 2014, p. 16).

The BDR Collective (2003, p. 5) adds that its research is an important method for understanding how, when and why pedagogical innovations occur. Usually, its starting point is the often-criticised lack of practical relevance of traditional learning science (Euler, 2014, p. 16; Reinmann, 2005, p. 55).

Thus, Reinemann (2005, p. 58) concludes regarding traditional research methods: "(...) und sie erweisen sich als nahezu unfähig, Menschen in der Praxis Konzepte und Instrumente an die Hand zu geben, mit denen konkrete Lehr-Lernprobleme in spezifischen Situationen gelöst werden können."

Collins, Joseph und Bielaczyc (2004, p. 16) add, that DBR was developed to address following core areas of learning science:

- „The need to address theoretical questions about the nature of learning in context.
- The need for approaches to the study of learning phenomena in the real world rather than the laboratory.
- The need to go beyond narrow measures of learning.
- The need to derive research findings from formative evaluation"

The core idea of DBR therefore is, so Reinmann (2005, p. 60), to investigate learning phenomena not in the laboratory but in a realistic practical context, and thus becoming interesting not only for research but for reality itself.

The study was conveyed over one semester and affected not only course conceptions but also influenced students in their teaching methodology.

One part of students even implemented Flipped Classroom into their teacher training and explored, together with classroom teachers and university teachers, its suitability for daily classroom use.

In particular, students acknowledged the practicability of DBR which is often missing in educational science since they could document, implement and pass on design principles.

The didactic model of Flipped Classroom was implemented and researched too. First insights about the implementation into a school setting led to a deeper discussion concerning new didactic concepts and their effects on learning processes amongst student teachers.

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External impact

“Help me learn with my emotions”

Author: Pascale Haag, EHES

Since 2017, the Lab School Network has been collaborating with the French National Education system to conduct action research projects on two themes:

- creating learning communities
- school well-being.

While in many countries, collaboration between researchers and practitioners is considered by the Ministry of Education as a real lever for teachers' professional development (Adams & Towson, 2014; Thomaz 2016), partnership or collaborative research remains little institutionalized in France, where it is still struggling to gain recognition for its legitimacy (Gillet & Tremblay, 2017). Although action research is still very often considered less "scientific" than experimental research, a movement is emerging and a growing number of researchers are willing to give up "the overhanging posture of the researcher, usual in institutionalized social sciences, which have long thought of revealing the situations they describe and making their action and its motives visible to the actors themselves" (Ingold, 2011). The Lab School Network is taking part in this move.

In June 2019, I participated in a meeting of a professional development group on school well-being. It was organised by the Research and Development Unit (CARDIE) of Paris School District rectorate (Rectorat de l'Académie de Paris). The purpose of this meeting was to connect headmasters and researchers in order to undertake action research on themes related to well-being. It was there that I met H. M., the director of a nursery school with 8 classes located in the north of Paris, in a highly underprivileged neighbourhood ("priority education district").

The teaching team of her school is very cohesive and eager to give all children, from the earliest age, every chance to succeed at school. The school faces many difficulties due to the heterogeneity of the classes and the great diversity of the pupils' needs. They come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and some families speak very little French. As a result, a number of students enter kindergarten at the age of three with previously accumulated gaps in vocabulary acquisition and mastery of the French language. As a result, for some children, entering learning presents significant difficulties and creates many frustrations.

The difficulty is all the greater in early childhood because children do not yet have the ability to express how they feel. In school, a child's day is filled with emotions of all kinds, whether they are related to the acquisition of knowledge – from enthusiasm for new discoveries to fear of making a mistakes – or to interactions with peers and teachers. This is why it is so important to support students in the discovery of their emotions, so that they gradually learn to identify them, to name them, to regulate them

and to make the best possible use of them throughout their entire education, and also later, in their personal and professional life.

This is why the pedagogical team and the director decided to embark on an action-research project they called “help me learn with my emotions”. I have had the privilege of being involved in this project since September 2019, in partnership with the district inspector and the research and development unit of the rectorate of the Académie de Paris.

At Lab School Paris, taking into account the emotions, the well-being of the students and the development of their socio-emotional skills is at the heart of pedagogical project. We strive to take into account the contribution of scientific research in these areas. Part of my own research work focuses on school well-being and the creation of an optimal learning environment. Our way of operating is based on daily exchanges between teachers and researchers and on a permanent self-evaluation of the actions implemented, in order to constantly improve the quality of teaching. Some of these exchanges take place informally, almost without our thinking, for example, during the lunch break. Other more structured moments are devoted to concertation and reflection: a meeting of one and a half hours a week, a half-day team seminar before each school holiday (five times a year), and a two to four-day seminar at the end of the year and before the start of the school year.

For me, as a researcher, all these moments are occasions for learning and allow me to closely observe the dynamics of the school from day to day: difficulties encountered with the students, with the parents, actions that make it possible to resolve them, obstacles that sometimes arise, what works and what doesn't work, etc.. This knowledge is not theoretical, but is based on the personal experience I can have of the life of a school. This is not very common in France because, unlike in Bielefeld, researchers rarely have the opportunity to spend a lot of time in schools. My experience at Lab School Paris helps me in several ways:

- I witness first-hand the workload of teachers and this encourages me not to overly solicit them, unlike other researchers who start action research with teachers and expect them to be actively involved in the time-consuming data collection process.
- my aim is to enable both the implementation of actions on the ground and the further development of knowledge, and my acquaintance with the concerns of teachers enables me to seek theoretical frameworks and researches that may be relevant to them and foster their professional development.

The project that we are carrying out with the nursery school in Paris only consists in 5 meetings during the year with the team of teachers (the last meeting was supposed to take place in May, but it is not sure yet whether schools will reopen). They allow me to share with other teachers the reflections that we carry out at the Lab School and my role is also in a way that of a mediator. My current challenge is to find a way to share the results of our work on a larger scale, in a greater number of schools, to accompany the changes in practices that are required to meet the challenges of our century and enable children to become responsible, enlightened, and solidarity-oriented citizens.

Improving spelling

Author: Ellen Millar, University of Cambridge Primary School

At the beginning of the academic year, my team and I were reviewing our class's writing assessments and noticed that a common theme that needed improving was spelling. We found that spelling was below age related expectations for a large majority of the year group across a range of skills, from spelling phonetically to common exception words.

We felt that the children would not be able to make the accelerated progress needed by covering spellings purely in lesson time and that external provision would be needed. I decided that I would run a parent workshop for all year groups to encourage parents to get involved. This workshop would happen a few weeks after parents evening so that teachers could speak directly to parents about their child's spelling needs and then direct them to a possible solution. We chose to take this approach as, only emailing parents about workshops, does not always guarantee the best turn out but by directly speaking to parents and offering a solution may generate a larger audience.

I read a variety of different research articles and used this to underpin the workshop. Whilst reading the different articles, I noticed that most of the research showed that the more reading a child does, the better their spelling becomes so this was to be my main point in the workshop. I also found research that supported a variety of spelling strategies used in schools that could be adapted for home learning. It was important that there was not an expectation for parents to teach their children spelling rules and patterns but to support them by using different strategies such as mnemonics, using phonics to choose the correct spelling and breaking a word into syllables. The strategy researched that I found to be the most successful in class was using your 'spelling voice'. This ties in very closely to phonics strategies and it involves pronouncing a word in the way you would spell it. For example, the word 'knight'. My spelling voice would pronounce the 'k' at the beginning of the word, therefore making it more accessible to spell.

After collating all of the research and putting the workshop together, I delivered this to parents. We had a large turnout and positive feedback both during and after the session. The workshop presentation was also emailed out to any parents who could not attend. After a few months, we noticed a vast improvement on spellings from the previous year expectations within the year group. The children became more independent with their spelling corrections and could successfully identify words they knew they had spelt wrong, and seek the appropriate method to help them spell it correctly. At the follow up parents evening, I found I was having more conversations with parents sharing how they are supporting spelling and the impact this had made as the child's target was now something different. I believe that this is an example where using research has had an external impact, thus improving children's progress and attainment.

Challenges

The story of how the challenges of mainstream school practices brought us to LabSchools

Authors: Jana Chocholatá and Gabriela Oaklandová, Masaryk University / Labyrinth

Gabi: Jana and I have decided to write this personal story together. We met at work and it took us some time to realize two things. Our attitude towards some conventional aspects of mainstream education and how it impacts children was very similar. With international perspectives we knew about and some outstanding practitioners around us, we believed we could at least modestly contribute to the transformation of this education system and help it become more meaningful and children-friendly.

Jana: To expand on Gabi's idea, we shared the impression, which gradually developed into a solid opinion based on two-fold experience, that many children have a hard time fitting into the system of education designed for the "average", unproblematic pupil. This opinion was not based solely on the experience of our children within the school system, but we realized, to our horror, that it is actually based to a major extent on our experience as learners/school children, which led us to the realization that (almost) nothing or very little has changed since the time we left school. We realized that children who cannot fit that one desirable shape are either terribly bored and therefore demotivated, or they develop a feeling of inferiority just because they are not able to please the teacher the way other children are.

Gabi: I think that one of the reasons it took us so long to realize what we had in common was our emotional overload at that time. Our children were struggling through the state school system, and we were struggling through it with them. The strength that this everyday struggle takes from children and their parents effects society on an everyday basis, and we were good examples of this. Waking up every morning ready to fight for better treatment for your children is a tiring experience. We started sharing these feelings. At that point, I'd stopped working on the set-up of forest schooling in the Czech Republic, I'd stopped participating in the introduction of the Step by Step programme in Czech state schools, and I had dropped out of my PhD. I was exhausted. Then came the tipping point. I was in the middle of a rant about what was wrong and how it should be done differently when a friend of mine told me: "Why don't you teach a subject on this?" I talked to Jana, we talked to a few colleagues with similar interests, and together we designed a course called Challenging Conventions in Education. The course is primarily designed to be positive, and it enhances democratic aspects of education. This happened in 2016/17. We needed to find for our students a primary school that would demonstrate the democratic approach to education we wanted them to be exposed to, and which would let them observe democracy in practice. A school like this was not that easy to find at that time in the Czech Republic. We were researching the field and identifying various Czech education specialists who might come and talk to our students when the head of our department, asked me: "Why don't

you talk to Břetislav Svozil, the headmaster of the new laboratory school in Brno?” And this was the second tipping point. In Břetislav Svozil we found someone prepared to demonstrate to our students on multiple occasions what a democratic school might look like, and he has spoken to them on multiple occasions since. And – crucial to the happiness of my own family – in 2018, he opened a pilot class for lower-secondary school, and my daughter was accepted in this class. A year before that, my son went to study at a private secondary art school. Our family life has become much brighter, I have gained new strength and optimism, and I’m again ready to play my part in the improvement of Czech state schooling.

Jana: After our son’s two-year struggle in a mainstream school, we managed to find him a place in a private primary school which uses the Step by Step programme. As the school was full of young, committed teachers, it worked incredibly well, and our son thrived every way. Unfortunately, it was only a primary school, and we were not able to find a lower-secondary school with similar standards. So again, the school has stopped being meaningful and enjoyable, and our son perceived it as an inevitable, boring, compulsory kind of experience which, hopefully, will prepare him for entrance exams to an upper-secondary school. When Gabi got involved in Labyrinth, I knew it was not an alternative for my own child, because by then he was too old, but I fell for the idea of a school whose democratic principles and practices could be potentially transferred to any other school and/or where our students could do their teaching practice and get hands-on experience.

Gabi: By 2017, I would have explored Czech alternative schooling thoroughly and focused on cooperating with the Labyrinth school. Although Labyrinth does not present itself as an alternative as such, within the Czech state school system this school stands out as an alternative because of its democratic and child-centered approach, which are two aspects of schooling that had struggled to find a place in the Czech school system. Since 2017, cooperation between Labyrinth and the Department of English Language and Literature at the MU Faculty of Education has intensified. One of our joint projects is the design of an ESL/EFL learning concept that will take some of the children to an AP exam while also developing language skills and a system for those children who do not aim to take this exam. We are also very much bearing in mind the basic laboratory concept of transferability into the state school system, and thinking of ways this concept can be applied in Czech state schools.

Jana: Well, yes. Besides the initial contact through our students (teacher trainees), we wanted to offer help and expertise related to foreign language teaching. Thanks to the fact that the school is keen on the latest trends backed by the latest research and cooperates with academics and other experts in various fields, we were able to consider demanding concepts, such as language immersion, the natural acquisition hypothesis and implicit learning, which brought us to the idea of “casual exposure”, explained below. We were aiming at a concept which would be transferable to regular state schools. And Labyrinth would be a platform where our university students, themselves prospective teachers, could get hands-on experience of the new concept.

As a result, our cooperation with/involvement in Labyrinth takes place on three levels:

- a) teaching practice for our students – prospective teachers, who thus improve their understanding of democratic principles in education
- b) research activities carried out by university students, ourselves and teachers at Labyrinth, all aimed at describing and improving democratic teaching practices
- c) connectin latest research findings and teaching practice, making this part of our teaching with the idea of transferring it into mainstream schools.

Jana and Gabi:

When designing the language concept, we worked with three basic ideas:

- a) implicit and explicit language learning (Dörnyei, 2012);
- b) language immersion (Fortune, 2010);
- c) language sensitization (Fenclová, 2005).

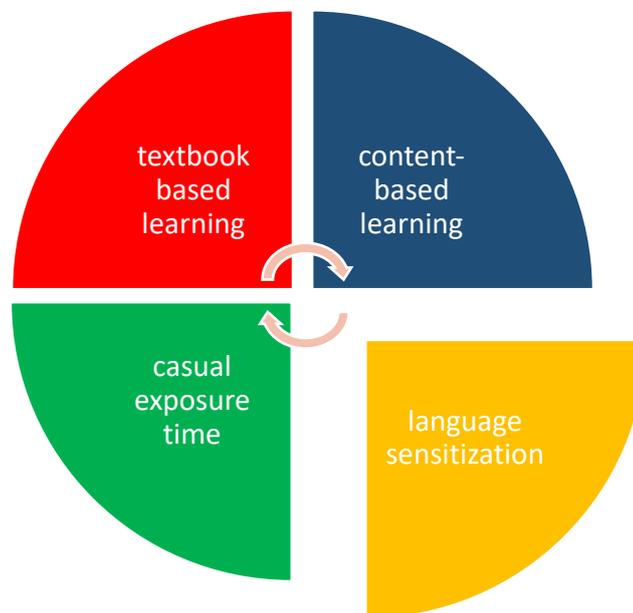


Fig. 1: Language concept

Jana: Dörnyei's theory of *implicit and explicit language learning* is in line with the natural acquisition and comprehensible input hypotheses (Krashen, 2002) and connects two processes which either take place simultaneously or subsequently: one is the implicit learning seen and promoted esp. in young and very young learners; the other is the explicit learning mostly associated with intentional classroom instruction typical of teenagers, young adults and adults.

Immersion is typically associated with bilingual learning environments. In Labyrinth, there are several bilingual pupils in every class, which means that the aspect of bilingualism is already present. We understand this as something that can significantly contribute to all pupils' effective language learning.

Regarding the concept of language sensitization, we believe that children need to be informally exposed to foreign languages at an early age. This happens quite naturally in some cultures. In the former Czechoslovakia, for example, everybody was bilingual

(Czech and Slovak), although the two languages are closely related. This is where the idea of language sensitization comes from. Children should be first exposed to languages which are closely related, from the same language family. Only then should this expand to linguistically more distant languages. Raising awareness of other languages is in line with the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990), as well as with the current EU policy promoting multilingualism, where speaking three foreign languages should become a standard.

Gabi: The language concept that we are using demonstrates its explicit angle through textbook-based learning and partly through content-based learning. The implicit angle demonstrates itself partly through content-based learning and fully through casual exposure/immersion. Along with Jana, two of our university colleagues and Labyrinth's teachers of English we are putting together materials and other practicalities so that we can pilot the casual exposure time room in the upcoming school year. One of the Labyrinth teachers is also consulting her thesis with me. This work is on the theory of immersion, and it documents the whole process of putting the theory of immersion into practice. We are expecting this thesis to provide us with a firm basis on which to build a useful and user-friendly source for state schools, which they will refer to when creating a space for casual exposure to English. The figure below demonstrates what we expect the casual exposure room to look like and which centres we need to supply with appropriate and varied materials.

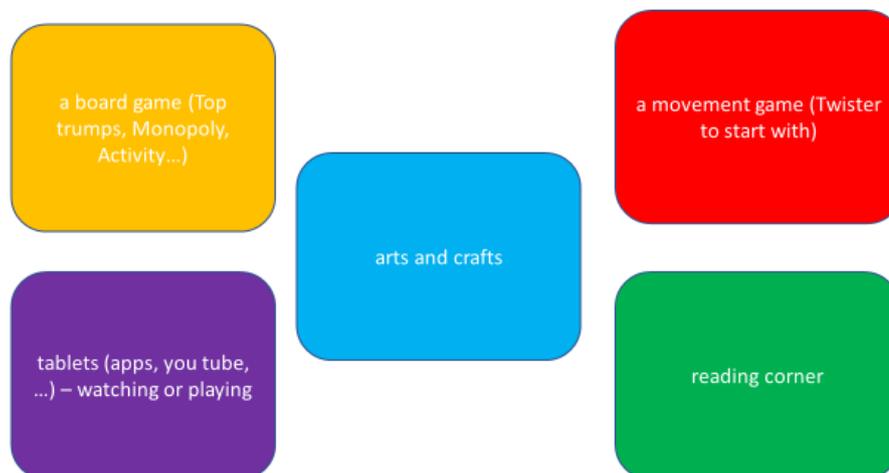


Fig. 2: Casual exposure time language room and its centres

Jana: The different types of learning centres respect the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2010) and individual learner differences, including different learning styles. At the moment, we are working hard to provide a range of suitable materials for different grades and levels of English. Another challenge is to prepare the materials so that the pupils will be able to use them on their own, perhaps with help from their peers, under the passive supervision of an adult. We are also concerned with practicalities

regarding the time children will need to spend in each centre, updating materials so that there is always something relevant and appealing to everybody, etc. The activities in the centres pose other practical questions related to the methods in which the impact of casual exposure time can be researched.

Gabi: The textbook and context-based part of learning requires a clear and explicit system. At the moment, Jana and I, two of our university colleagues and Labyrinth's teachers of English, are working on putting together a language portfolio which we expect to pilot in the next school year. We expect this portfolio to be highly personalized, and we are including as much preparation for teachers as we can. And as Jana mentions in the paragraph above, we are perhaps left with more questions than we had at the beginning of this cooperation, but we are inspired by the challenge.

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More questions than answers

The story of the Fluid Bilingual Classroom

Author: Gabrielle Cummins Lab School Paris

Although I had taught in a French/English bilingual school before, it was setup in the traditional model of half the day in one language, half the day in the other. The LabSchool has set up their bilingual classrooms in the new “reciprocal” model, which is based on research by Christine Hélot. There are two teachers, one English speaking and one French speaking, but we are both constantly switching back and forth and speaking both languages all the time depending on which students we are with.

I have also taught in a progressive school with mixed level classes the last two years in the U.S. But the way the classes are set up at the Lab School Paris are both multi level, as well as using this fluid bilingual model, which adds layers of complexity to teaching there. Our class has students a range of ages, from 6 to 9 years old, so three grade levels, and a range of linguistic abilities. Most students speak French, only one student doesn't speak french. About 1/3 of the class is bilingual with French and English, and around 1/3 only speaks French.

Everyday new questions arise about many, many things! From the beginning, classroom organization, management, and logistics proved a challenge. We had to asses and organize small working groups based on language as well as academic abilities and ages. Organizing the student's working tables as well as our own materials then had to be redone based on where each group was. We also had to figure out how we would work when we were in the full group, with translating and repeating things in both languages. This brought up lots of questions about inclusion, as of course English speakers are the minority in the class, being in France. We also had questions about learning and the effectiveness of our lessons and methods because of language. A big question at the beginning was around literacy skills. Since there are no best practices yet with this new bilingual method, we chose to teach French reading first. As we had some students complete beginners in reading, and some students who read already in one or both languages, the complexity of when and how to work with each group to make sure that each student was getting what they needed was also a challenge, that is still constantly evolving.

Another big question that came up was about relationships, between students as well as teachers and students. We worried that the language barrier would make some students feel isolated or they would have a harder time connecting and creating friendships. We also worried the dynamic between French and English-speaking teachers, if children would feel more comfortable with one of us if we shared a mother tongue.

The BIG ONE: Is it working!? Everyday, we are assessing and reflecting and changing things and trying new things, and we're always asking this big question. As of now it

seems that yes, most students are learning and parents are happy. But, everyday were still evolving as a classroom, teachers, and a school. Overall, my experience so far in this new school has been inspiring, fascinating, challenging, rewarding, frustrating, as well as very complicated.

I worry often about not feeling like I'm not able to do as much as I want or did before in a single language classroom. There are many layers to the learning in the classroom and also its functioning that are very complex and subtle. I have lots of questions about time and how much time it takes to do things being completely different from what I'm used to.

The biggest impression on me though has been made by the incredible innate ability of children (humans) to communicate and learn from each other that transcends language. Our relationships with the children and their friendships with each other have proved that language is no barrier. To watch the children who don't speak a common language play and form friendships is one of the most inspiring things I've experienced, as well as watching how much of the other language they've learned from each other and how much of a motivator friendship has been to bridge that divide and be able to work and play together.

Reflecting about reflexivity's implementation

Author: Gabrielle Allante, Lab School Paris

We are currently running an action-research project about teachers' reflexivity (self-reflection) using an inductive approach. In theory, reflexivity is a powerful tool for learning, professional development, and collectively improving our organisation. It appears as a relevant theoretical framework within the context of a laboratory school for it allows to consider the teaching practice as an experimentation approach and the teacher as a researcher "in context" (Schön, 1983, reedit. 2016). Moreover, it is a process that has been used to support teachers' professional development (Jorro, 2005) and that may be part of teachers' initial training curriculum (Colsoul & Robin, 2016). Reflecting on his own professional practice may allow a teacher to extract and remember learnings from meaningful real-life experience, and thus improve the way he teaches and supports pupils' learning process.

We face different types of challenges at this time:

1. Sharing a common understanding of reflexivity.
 - We are not sure whether the concept of reflexivity has been clearly understood.
 - We are not sure whether the tool that is reflexivity has been perceived as valuable, useful enough.
2. Turning theory into practice by implementing reflexivity.
 - Apparent contradiction between teachers' work schedule and reflexivity's key ingredients: time and mental space.
 - Teachers seem more comfortable with sharing practice and experience with peers than with analysing directly their own ways of working.
 - Our workshops' design and perhaps this year project's design might not be favourable to the expression and development of the participants' reflexivity.
3. Collecting data in a way that is both effective and adapted to teachers' habits and main interests.

Our pending question is: "what are the triggers or teachers' reflexivity in the primary school system in France?"

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Delicious democracy

Author: Kirsten Beadle, Laborschule Bielefeld

A few years ago the Laborschule colleagues embarked on a potentially sweet-and-sour journey which looked into the childrens' rights. It was a long and at times sticky bun of a process but the results were scrumptious.

We produced a constitution in which we weighed up every single right from many different perspectives. We ended up with a lot of children's rights and we wrote them all down. Everyone working with our youngest, had to sign this document, almost like a contract, to ensure that our children would be able to express their rights on a daily basis.

The idea for this constitution resulted from a research project looking into the subject of democracy education for our youngest children at Laborschule Bielefeld. Once signed it, it was time to implement its contents and to inform the parents about it. My colleague and I chose not to simply read the whole paper to the parents or send it via email. We invited them to a parents' evening where we presented the constitution (and its importance to us) to them. Having given an overview over the whole constitution, we took a much deeper look into 3-4 rights. One of them was the children's right to choose their own food during lunch time which struck a particularly mouth-watering chord with the parents.

Up until then, the food provided by the school was simply put on the table by the members of staff. The kids had no say in what they would get. The choice was made for them by the staff i.e. me:-) Normally I knew pretty well, what the kids like but sometimes I ended up throwing away a lot of food because the kids didn't fancy it on that particular day. The children were not involved in the process of choosing any of their food.

With this new right they now were the decision makers. In order for them to have a better idea of the menu every day, I took photos of all different culinary offers in the dining hall over several weeks.

Every morning we put up the photos of that day's food, sat the kids in assembly and let the children decide on what they would like to eat by putting their hands up. We counted the little waving hands and used those numbers to order what they would like to eat for lunch that day. With those numbers the staff members could now serve the exact portions of food on the table. The advantages were twofold and immediate:

1. The children ate what they had ordered, which seemed to make everybody happy and actually turned lunchtimes into little adventures, where the kids felt in control. The general atmosphere during lunch was audibly improved.

"But I have never liked rice. It looks like eating bugs" changed to "I've got mashed potatoes - yummy and creamy!".

“Ughh! The stuff on your plate looks like poo.” changed to “what have you got there? That looks nice”.

“I’m not eating *that*. I only like what my dad cooks.” changed to “This is like my daddy’s cooking but like eating in a restaurant!”

2. We were also able to reduce food wastage which is an obvious bonus with regards to the environment and social responsibility. We openly discussed this with the kids and they were clearly happy to be contributing.

“I’m saving the world and eating at the same time; My two favourite things!”

The parents, at first, expressed concern that the kids would only eat pizza every day. We assured them that studies have shown that our bodies tell us when we are lacking in certain foods and our experience at the Laborschule has supported these findings. The children don’t reach for the chips every lunchtime. They vary their diet and they seem to enjoy doing it. They compare what they are eating with each other and they discuss what they like to eat and don’t like to eat.

Later in the year, a parent came back to me with a big smile on her face, thanked us for our trust in the process and to say that the approach had worked. “It’s lovely to see”, she said, “how our daughter seems to know more about food and about *different* foods, and feels much more adventurous when we cook new things at home. She chooses when to try new food by herself and not just because we tell her to”.

What is more, we witnessed another, unexpected, bonus to this whole food-democracy-project. Healthier eating habits seemed to filter down from the older children to the younger ones. At the Laborschule, in house 1, the groups consist of mixed ages. Years 0-2 learn, play and eat together. We noticed, in the first few weeks that most “nuller” (what we call the 0 graders) took every opportunity possible to reach for the pizza. Just like for example when adults are drawn towards the grill section or desserts of the buffet in holiday hotels. The dining hall and the food on offer is new for the nullers and so they go wild for the first few days - pizza was the clear winner with the youngest kids in the first weeks. But, slowly but surely, we noticed a powerful change. “Soup - yuck! I’m having pizza!”.

The “nullers, desperate to fit in as any new arrivals are, watched the “1ers” (6 years olds) and “2ers” (7 years olds) over their pizzas, with eagle eyes for a while keenly eating their soup. One of the classic Laborschule philosophies (children learning from older peers) kicked in and the nullers began trying the soup too. Sure enough, it wasn’t as yucky as they thought. If it’s cool enough for Fatima, it’s cool enough for me.

The Laborschule food-democracy-revolution wasn’t finished there - there has been one last exciting development. The buffets at the Parent-Child-Afternoons (a semi-regular social meet-up between kids, parents and teachers) started to change too. Where parents had previously brought popcorn, cola and crisps, cheese on a stick, red peppers and apple juice sat proudly on the buffet table....and are duly devoured.

Success

It has only been a little thing; a small contribution to the kids' school life; a baby step. But it has been a yummy step. It has been a healthy step. It has brought a smile to some faces (both kids and adults) and it has led to delicious little changes of behaviour.

Bon appétit à tous!

The story about *Herz über Fuß*

Author: Sabine Jakl, Pädagogische Hochschule Wien

The project Herz über Fuß of the elementary school of the University of Education in Vienna serves the development of personality in the primary level. Pupils experience support in body perception, the topic of proxemics, the experience of closeness and distance, is brought closer. The development of a positive self- image even in conflict situations is just as much the focus of the project's interest as working on and with emotions - on one's own and on recognising the feelings of others in our society. In addition, the project deals with learning how to express oneself in body language and to perceive the body language of other people. The students' resilience is strengthened.

The project was developed by E. Eichinger, the counselling teacher of the Praxisvolksschule, and since its implementation in 2016, it has been continuously implemented by her in the classes of the Praxisvolksschule. Within the framework of the project, parents' evenings on project contents are also held. Elements of the project can also be found in the teaching of the University of Teacher Education within the framework of didactic reflections with students as well as in coaching in the Reflected Practice.

The project itself is divided into five modules, Heart Room, Heart Kitchen, Heart over Foot, Heart Recipe and Heart Valve, which are to be implemented regularly in all classes of the practical elementary school. The project developer works with all students in the class, the class teacher acts as an assistant. It is also possible to arrange individual appointments with the project developer. In connection with the class situation, the modules are used in different intensities. Individual elements of the project are reflected in the Assembly, which takes place monthly in the school's gym.

For me personally, it meant the entry into the world of research. I wrote an article about it and together with my colleague from the University I present the project at various conferences. The project Herz über Fuß is a project to be developed out of school and subsequently researched together with colleagues from the University of Education in Vienna.

English Corner in our school library

Author: Cornelia Hofmann, Laborschule Bielefeld

Our „English Corner“ is integrated into our school library and was implemented as a part of the „English Any Time“ research project. We had a student assistant who wrote her master thesis about the implementation.

We had the XXX foundation, which funded the books and part of the furniture (beanbags, shelves, carpet). Partly it was equipped by school money.

You can find English children's books for ages 5 to 15+. There are a lot of picture books in hard and soft covers, a variety of factual books in general, sometimes in English and German. There are some picture books with CD, so pupils can listen to the story while reading. For this we got five CD players and earphones with multiplier-cables, so more than one child can listen to a certain CD.

We also have dictionaries, one the one hand picture dictionaries to browse through, but also tip toi dictionaries – with the tip toi pen you can listen to single words or sentences from the book, play games or solve small quizzes.

The English corner is held up to date by our librarian, who adds new books and keeps the key for our CD compartment. She also has new batteries, in case one of the CD players or tip toi pens run out of battery.

The English Corner may be used during individual learning times, as the kids in Stage 2 have them. Those kids are taught in mixed age groups of 20 – 24 kids and they are from 8 to 11 years old. Some of the groups have English lessons integrated into their daily schedule. Some have their English lessons with another teacher than their class teacher. Those childe have three English lessons per week and it often makes sense to use the English Corner in one of them, because otherwise English does not find a natural way into the lessons.

I am using the English Corner once a week with my Stage 2 kids, which I do teach three lessons per week. Each pupil has got an „English Corner book“, which is a small workbook, in which each pupil constantly works on his/her own level with books of his/her own choice.

Each group has a great level variety in English – some kids can only understand a few words, wheareas others are speaking English at home.

Each lesson my pupils have to choose a book to work with during that lesson – they may use one book for several lessons.

Children with very little understanding of English browse through the book, try to read the words or listen to the CD or a grown-up. When finished, they draw their favourite page into their English Corner Book – they may copy a picture or part of a picture they like, use the cover or take a character from the book. Underneath they write 5 – 10 words which are new to them. The other kids and grown-ups help with the translation.

As soon as the children are capable of understanding sentences, they may write those under the picture to describe the picture in their own words or they copy a sentence from the book.

Older kids sometimes don't want to draw pictures anymore, which is fine. Some translate whole chapters or even books, some take only the essence and try to use new words in sentences.

Another part of the English corner lessons is reading out loud and listening. As the kids are working very individually and do not need much assistance (after it has become a routine of course), I can go from one child to another and talk to him or her about his or her learning. Some kids are eager to read out loud, some of them do it spontaneously and cannot get enough – some others need preparation time and work hard before they read a passage or chapter out loud.

During this round I skip between reading to the kids and getting something read by the kids. To me it is a very rewarding time. Over some weeks, everyone has gotten some special attention and that makes a huge difference when learning English.

To finish the English Corner lesson, we go back to our area and into the assembly, which is a circle with everybody. The final game we play is called „Question Time“. On the board kids find to speech bubbles: „What did you read?“ and „I read“ We practice both question and answer as a chant with everybody, but I split the group into „question“ and „answer“.

Sometimes we talk about the pronunciation of the present and past form of „to read“ and what purpose the „did“ has in our question.

When finished with the chant, I call „question time“ and all the kids get up and ask three different kids the question „What did you read?“ and have to answer to all of them aswell. It is great to see when some kids help others who struggle with words or pronunciation. This wasn't always as easy as it is now. For introducing this into a new group I would spend about 4-5 lessons with rather strict schedules and tasks – with time, you can let the kids work more freely most of the time.

A story of my way to a laboratory school

Author: Monika Votava Mandelíčková, Labyrinth Laboratory School

My story starts in 2011. At that time, I came across the participatory action research for the first time. I had had the experience of traditional research methods behind and the experience of being a primary and secondary teacher. I felt the need to connect these two things together. Luckily, I met people who were enthusiastic about the same things and were ready to start new projects.

At that time, I was working as the secondary teacher at local grammar school. My teaching career was full of everyday work. I realized that, as for many teachers around me, my work is reducing to daily routine without many challenges.

So, I accepted a call to join the team which focused on promoting primary education in the region. For the first time I experienced crossing the traditional models and we started with involving new actors into education. At that time, we were working in one of the local public primary schools and we slowly changed it into a community school.

Reflecting our university experience, we started introducing research topics in the Deblín primary school and implementing them into school curriculum. We started with the research of place-based education and sustainable development. We were enthusiastic about participation of university teachers and students who were cooperating with pupils and primary school teachers.

Some of the outcomes can be seen here:

https://www.zs-deblin.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ucebnice_deblinsko.pdf

https://www.zs-deblin.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/atlas_deblinsko.pdf

https://www.zs-deblin.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/dvojjazycna_ucebnice_deblin.pdf

The school curriculum was refreshed according to the research outcomes. New textbooks and methodologies were created and incorporated into everyday practise. The school used the experience also for supporting active citizenship in students' projects.

Students were, for example, involved in the Extra class project for several times. The project supported active participation of students in local community. Thanks to the concept of place-based education, the students were able to touch the problems or needs of local community, suggest solution and realize it.

For the outcomes see:

<http://www.extratrida.cz/projekt/www/projektova-nastenka/?idProjektu=57>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wGRCxTxgO8>

The concept of community school, same as the school projects and activities, were successful. Not only they brought more students to school every year but also attracted the attention of other headteachers, teachers and researchers. We were happy to

share our experience. However, as the proverb says: appetite comes with eating, we were also looking for the ways to push the experience to higher level.

This was the initial impulse for the idea of laboratory school – a new concept for Czech milieu. We started a theoretical survey of the concept, contacted the International Association of Laboratory Schools, created a think tank and led number of discussions on education and reflected educational challenges for the 21st century. Of course, we spent hours and hours by preparing administrative issues, observing possible places for the school, visiting kindergartens and presenting the project to parents and teachers.

Something that seemed a great nice dream at the beginning was slowly getting concrete shapes. Labyrinth – laboratory school was finally opened in 2016. We suggested the name Labyrinth and added a motto: *“I will find my path in the world.”* It is a clear message to those who want to be part of the school.

Although the school was founded on private basis, it has aimed to be strongly connected to public educational system since its beginning. Labyrinth joined the network of teacher-training schools, so it is open to future teachers for pedagogical practise and/or for their research. In the same time people in Labyrinth are members of various projects – e.g. MAP – Local action plans for education in Tišnov region, Academy for headmasters, Leaders in Education etc.

The school feels public responsibility and is active in various projects opened to wide public: e.g. Eduspace festival: <http://eduspacefestival.eu/en/>

Labyrinth is an organic system that is growing thanks to a cooperation of teachers, pupils, parents, local actors and other people or institutions bringing their expertise and experience.

At the time of its opening, Labyrinth started with two classes and 40 students. Four years later the number of students is approaching 200. The school is not spending money on massive advertising. It has proved that the voice of people involved – children, parents, teachers is the best advertising.

And as it goes with the stories, it should end up with a clear message to the readers. So here it is. Never give up your dreams! There is nothing more than to see them coming true!

The story of how research made go out of my comfort zone (and is going to be a success)!

Author : Philippine Woitiée, Lab School Paris

When I arrived at LabSchool Paris in September, it was the 1st time I had to teach CP grade : « the year you're learning how to read » !

In most of the schools, teachers follow a reading manual. So that's how I was planning to do it.

Marlene Martin, our pedagogical director, is specialized in « learning how to read ». She published a book called *J'apprends à lire en dix minutes par jour*, edited by L'instant présent.

Her work is inspired, among others, by the French scientist Stanislas Dehaene. I read her book and she explained to me what research is saying about learning how to read. Then, she said to me there was no reading manual on the market that was matching our needs.

I had to drop my plan and create with her help all the documents we needed. At first, she came a lot in the classroom and she created documents I could lean on. After a few months I really understood the whole strategy of the method called « méthode graphémique » which is based on the pattern written (not the sounds we hear). Indeed, even if for us adults, it's really easy to hear the sounds in a word, it is not that easy for a child who doesn't know yet how to read. Therefore, we start with the « graphemes » since the children can see them and then associate them with a sound.

I'm adjusting everyday the learning process in order to make it more efficient but I can already observe how children pay great attention to the meaning of the words and the spelling is more accurate. Of course, we will be more aware of the results of using this method in the following years. But I have a feeling it is going to be a complete success!

The story of the puzzle pieces

Author: Jan Wilhelm Dieckmann, Laborschule Bielefeld

In my daily work as a teacher, I have to constantly think about the way I communicate. In every situation, it is important to rethink and make a sensible decision on how to interact with the students in a purposeful manner so that I can give them the best support possible, for example, when they are learning or in case of a conflict situation. Here, the choice of possibilities is huge: From an extremely strict and authoritarian way of teaching to the involvement of the students.

I have always tried to speak to the children on an equal footing because I am convinced that already elementary school students are very well able to form their own opinions and to represent these, which must then be respected. Therefore, it does not seem sensible to let adults decide everything for them. Nevertheless, there are also situations in my lessons in which the children have no choice or participation rights. In these moments, it is important to illustrate in detail what I expect from them.

However, it is difficult for them to recognize when there is an opportunity to speak or listen to the other children and when there is no time for discussion. That's why I thought about it for a long time and also looked for suggestions in research so that my position would become clearer to the children. I needed a change in my communication strategies in order to create more transparency for the students and to avoid unwanted discussions.

There was a research project at the Bielefeld Laboratory School that was titled "Strengthen People". Among other things, these colleagues have intensively dealt with the method of nonviolent communication established by Marshall Rosenberg. It is essential that the actors report their thoughts and their emotional state to the others. They try to talk about their feelings and needs and make a request to the others without blaming them.

Through a little exercise that my colleague did with me, I learned a lot for my lessons. Here is the dialogue of the role play in a short version:

Teacher: "I would like you to work on the task now!"

Colleague as a student: "I don't want to."

Teacher: "Please start working on the task now."

Colleague as a student: "Thanks, no. I want to do it later."

She said to me that when we were kids, we learned to be polite. However, this fact makes my work more difficult now. It is nice that I want the child to do something but it has the opportunity to show that they don't want to. So, I got the simple advice to use the wording "I want you to" instead of "I would like you to".

I was sceptical as to whether this simple trick would actually have a big impact in everyday life. So I tried it out the next day and was truly amazed that no child entered into a discussion with this wording but instead immediately started working on the task. It surprised me that just by changing a few words I could have completely transformed my teaching practice years ago...

Students and teachers are in an unequal balance of power which is dominated by the teacher. However, changing the wording creates a significantly higher level of transparency among the children. Metaphorically speaking the teacher is like a big puzzle for the pupils at the beginning. They have to get to know him. Therefore, this clear and unambiguous change in the teacher's speech helps the students to turn over another small piece of the puzzle.

Therefore, research was very profitable for my daily work as a teacher.

Once upon a time...

Author: Pauline Paquet, Lab School Paris

Once upon a time there was a teacher named Pauline. She was working in a multi-level classroom with children from 9 to 13 years old. She very much enjoyed the disparities in the classroom which encouraged the pupils to help each other.

In this classroom, there was another teacher called Cécile. The two teachers were working hands-in-hands in the classroom. They both had different teaching experiences. Pauline worked in England for 8 years as a French teacher in a secondary school whereas Cécile worked in France as a primary school teacher. They both were extremely interested in teaching something more than French, Math and so on...

They looked at different ways to include soft skills and democracy in the classroom. When September came, they decided to have a class council every Friday where the students could share their ideas and propose things for the classroom. The students felt really happy that they had a voice in the classroom. During the council, some pupils had jobs : the president (who was deciding who was talking), the prime minister (writing down the names of the pupils who are not following the rules), the secretary (takes notes on what is said) and the statistician (collecting data about speakers). The statistician is recording on an Excel spreadsheet how many times the students are talking.

We noticed that a few students were not participating much the council and that some students were speaking at length. We also noticed that boys were talking more than girls.

There were 3 different topics during this council :

1. Propositions to help the classroom
2. Problems that we want to share
3. Thank you / I loved...

One day, a researcher named Nicolas contacted us to observe our council. For his studies, he was observing how democracy was conducted in the classroom. He started coming every Friday, observed, took notes and recorded the council.

After a few weeks of observation, we decided to talk about what he saw and heard. It was quite interesting to have his feedback. We decided to share the questions and observations with the whole class. A few questions were raised :

- What are we looking for when we are a statistician? How are we counting the people who speak?
- What matters? The amount of time we speak or the purpose of what we say?
- What interactions are we having? Are we often criticising? Arguing? Agreeing? disagreeing? Proposing?
- Why are boys speaking more than girls (according to the statistics)?
- Are we counting the teachers as part of the group?
- What is our role as facilitators (teachers)?

- What does the council develop?
- Are we changing behaviour because of the statistics?
- Does it change our ways to express ourselves?

All these questions were discussed together. We decided as a class to change how we are counting speaking. We created a new way to analyse students' contributions during council. We also decided to include the teachers as part of the data (which helped the boys-girls ratio).

The teachers realized that they had to think about their role as facilitators. They had to try to take a step back and let the students decide / answer some of the issues.

It is still work in progress but this research helped us focusing and develop ourselves on what is democracy in our classroom.

To be continued...

How music matters in foreign language learning

Author: Stefanie Rüdigger, Pädagogische Hochschule Wien

One individual difference in second language acquisition which has received special attention over the past years is language learning aptitude. Research in this interdisciplinary field consistently tries to establish universal principles of language aptitude (Reiterer 2009: 157), aims at discovering the origins of linguistic giftedness, seeks to identify the various components aptitude is composed of and furthermore, tries to detect other factors which might influence and consequently add to reveal the nature of language talent.

In view of this line of inquiry, my study sought to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between the cognitive domains of language aptitude, working memory, and musicality with latest insights from a cross-sectional psycholinguistic study that was conducted among primary school-aged children.

The findings aimed at gaining insights into the mental capacities of young language learners so as to make important assets for Early Language Teaching.

In order to reveal the interrelation between linguistic, musical, cognitive-analytic and short-term memory abilities of young language learners, multiple tests were applied.

Results highly suggest that language aptitude, in particular phonetic ability, goes hand in hand with musical aptitude and working memory ability.

Findings of my study urgently call for a more intensive facilitation of musical elements and working memory tasks into the early foreign language learning classroom. This is why I particularly force my student teachers at the University College of Teacher Education to implement songs, chants, and music in general into their teaching of English.

Making friends: the effect of teaching assistants on peer friendship making for children with SEND

Author: Aimee Durning, Cambridge University Primary School

In 1978 Baroness Warnock's report into special educational needs stated that: "The criterion by which to judge the quality of educational provision is the extent to which it leads a pupil towards the twin goals which we have described, towards understanding, awareness of moral values and enjoyment and towards the possibility of independence." (Warnock, 1978: p.6)

This phrase, 'possibility of independence,' became a leitmotif at the University of Cambridge Primary School (UCPS). Opened in 2015, as the first University Training School in the United Kingdom, the school is committed to high quality teaching and learning, rooted in research with principles that are bound to Warnock's research and a vision for a truly inclusive primary education. UCPS's unique curriculum design aims to nurture and develop compassionate citizens. It is driven by a long term vision of how children will be when they are adults, rather than purely focusing on academic outcomes. Will they be compassionate citizens living in a world in which everyone is welcome and included?

Consider the journey of this new school, built on the research informed foundations of Dewey, Greene and Hart (and others) with compassion at its core. Moreover, with a commitment to ensure that all children feel included and valued members of their community. It is essential that educators engage with contemporary research. Over the last three years, we have reflected on how we use our teaching assistants in school and the role they play. This exercise unravels the complexities of Teaching Assistants' work in relation to peer friendships and asks whether they act as are a barrier to the authentic formation of peer friendships for supported children or whether they limit it. Is there enough time and space for supported children with additional needs to build positive relationships with their peers? How do Teaching assistants support new friendships and nurture current ones?

Building on the work of Webster (2016), in 2018, the senior leadership team decided to innovatively change how Teaching Assistants were considered and how they were deployed. We changed the name of Teaching Assistant to Learning Coach because this linguistic turn emphasized what Warnock had suggested – a truly emancipatory possibility of independence for all children including those with specific educational needs; children coached to being the best they can be.

At UCPS, children are not defined by their medical diagnosis: needs are understood but labels such as '*Autism*' or '*Down syndrome*' do not define or limit the opportunities available. At the forefront, there is consideration of *human needs* – importantly how far children experience a feeling of belonging. Whilst changes at the school have shown to be positive, Blatchford, Russell and Webster 2012 suggest that negative effects might still arise:

'but also negative (e.g in terms of separating pupils from their peers and not allowing them so much time to engage in collaborative group work with peers). The effect of TAs on pupils' peer relations needs more attention from research.' (Blatchford et al.,2012: p143)

We decided to direct the Learning Coach Team to carefully observe the interactions between individual children and their peers in the classroom and playground (ongoing research project). We now need to consider the process and outcomes of particular strategies to nurture authentic relationships. Additionally how do we provide opportunities of trusting children and the importance of standing back to allow friendships to develop naturally. This process leads us on to identifying and questioning the hidden pedagogies through which children with special needs can become limited. Actively engaging with research assists us to break down potentially damaging barriers (G. Morewood, 2011) for vulnerable learners.

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Something unexpected happened

Surprises rarely come alone...

Author: Christian Timo Zenke, Universität Bielefeld

In autumn 2014, I initiated a research project together with two teachers of the Laborschule, in which we wanted to take a closer look at the open-plan architecture of our Laboratory School and its significance for everyday school and teaching. The project was to focus on the empirical investigation of the relationship between classroom design and inclusion: on the one hand, in order to make a sustainable contribution to the current theoretical and practical discussion on the topic of "inclusive school architecture", and on the other hand, to be able to adapt and optimise the existing space of the Laboratory School in the course of a school development process.

But after the project had finally started in summer 2015 (and is now running until summer 2020), several things happened that we did not expect:

Firstly, we were repeatedly confronted with massive personnel changes throughout the course of the project: While I remained involved in the project in my role as a researcher, one teacher moved from her teaching position to the university in the summer of 2016 in order to work on the project from now on not as a "teacher-researcher" but instead as a "researching teacher". Meanwhile, the other teacher left school in summer 2017 to take a three-year sabbatical, during which she was to sail halfway around the world with her husband and children. In replacement for the two teachers who were "lost" in this way, two new teachers joined the project. The former, however, left the project just one year later to take parental leave, so that only one of them could continue working on the project. Finally, in the school year 2019/2020, another colleague who had just joined the school, became part of the project. Including the three student assistants who consecutively formed part of the project, a total of nine people will have been involved in the project over its entire course - but never more than five at a time. These constant changes in personnel and roles presented the work of the project group with immense challenges (common excursion experiences of the first years, for example, suddenly were no longer "common" experiences; hard-earned contextual knowledge and continuously generated findings had to be worked through again and again, etc.). On the other hand, however, they also led to positive effects: for example, every new member brought new experiences and new impulses to the project group, had new ideas that advanced the work of all, as well as a fresh, new view on decisions and judgements that had already been "made".

A **second** event, which we had not expected, occurred shortly after we started our work in summer 2015: After the Laborschule (built in the early 1970s) had been carrying a massive renovation backlog for years, we were suddenly informed by the Ministry of Education that funds were finally to be made available to tackle the

necessary construction work. In this context, the implementation of a so-called "construction phase zero" was announced: This is a participation procedure in which an external team of consultants tries to develop a vision together with all those involved in a school (teachers, full-time staff, school management members, pupils, representatives of the property developer, etc.) as to how "their" school can react spatially to requirements such as all-day schooling, individualisation or inclusion - so that this vision can then be systematically incorporated into the following phases of the construction project. The project group thus suddenly and unexpectedly found itself at the centre of a school development process affecting the entire school: Together with the Aachen-based architectural firm Hausmann Architekten, it was now our task to develop concrete plans for a conversion of the Laborschule together with all "residents" of the school and taking into account reliable empirical research results. In other words: We, who had started out as a rather abstract research project (with the aim of perhaps making a few recommendations for action), suddenly became central players in a development process that would shape the Laborschule for years to come. Not only did we have to throw away our entire planning for the next few years, but we were now confronted with completely new tasks: We held workshops with teachers to design the teachers' lobby, developed plans for the design of the library and negotiated with architects and administrative staff about square metres and the best position for gyms. At the same time, we repeatedly benefited from the basic design of research projects at the Laborschule: On the one hand, our team was multi-professional (both teachers and researchers), so that we were able to deal with the challenges we faced from several perspectives right from the start. On the other hand, we were also extremely flexible in the way we designed our project work: we were not bound by detailed, previously officially defined schedules, we could react spontaneously to new challenges, change the focus of our work - and after two years we could apply for an extension of our project duration of another three years...

Finally, a **third** event occurred in spring 2017 at state level, when a change of government led to the planned reconstruction being reassessed and hence delayed. Thus, not only had many of our results suddenly become "useless" for the time being, but our work was, in a sense, hanging in the air. If previously we had been working euphorically towards an upcoming reconstruction, we now no longer knew where we stood. Against this background, we started to concentrate our work more on the interior of the school - that is, on an area of the school that we could at least begin to change with our own resources. For example, we cooperated with a furniture manufacturer to try out a new form of school desks, designed seating furniture for the school's open-plan space together with pupils and students from the university and experimented with the concept of flexible seating. For this purpose, we equipped the groups of our two teachers participating in the project with a variety of different seating options (yoga mats, balls, cushions, etc.) in order to systematically observe and evaluate their use and effect in everyday school life. And then: came Covid...

The P and S story

Author: Dixie Adam, ZŠ Labyrinth

One of the English groups I teach is 1st grade Beginners: first grade kids who are learning to write, to read, who are discovering their native alphabet and spelling, and who are also being taught English. It's a lot for their growing minds.

It's also a lot for the teacher because, as you maybe know, teaching kids who can't read and write in their own language, let alone in a foreign one, can become quite repetitive and uninspiring. We teach English four times a week, so you really do want variety but, sometimes, you can feel a little bit stuck and uninspired. Well, I do at least.

In November, we were doing lots of vocabulary which happened to be spelt with a 'p' or 's.' Since the beginning of the school year, we'd already learnt a lot of words beginning with these letters, from colours, to numbers, via feelings. I really wanted to do something with that, like start a little letter dictionary/pictionary, something, anything where they could actually use letters and sound association!

So I devised a simple task. I created an activity where the students had a set of pictures of objects, emojis, colours and numbers which began with 's' or 'p.' All they had to do was cut out the pictures and figure out on their own (or with their classmates, or with my help) whether the picture had to be stuck in the 'P' or 'S' column. Simple.

I showed the activity to a couple of my colleagues. One of them also teaches a beginners' group, so we like to show and share ideas (you never know when an idea can save you last minute!). These colleagues are studying primary school pedagogy and they know very well what and how first graders learn in their first year of education. I know a bit but definitely not as much as they do. So their reaction to my activity hadn't been the most encouraging. "But they haven't done the letters 'p' and 's' in the Czech alphabet, yet!" "Will they recognise that pencil case belongs to the column with this symbol 'p'?"... I thought that these were all valid questions and concerns. I also thought that this wasn't a very difficult task, that it didn't need to confuse the children who, indeed, hadn't yet discovered these two letters in their own alphabet, and that worse came to worse they would struggle with it and I would have more work than anticipated.

I also just really wanted to see them figure it out! Ok, I did have to do a *very* obvious demonstration, starting with checking that they knew that 'p' was 'p-p-p-pen' and 's' was 's-s-s-seven' but they got it so fast. I wanted to hear them say the words while cutting the pictures, and then having to decide which column they went into. Yes, some kids did find it difficult (and I knew they would, because I knew that they were also slow with the alphabet, writing and spelling in Czech, so of course it was going to be a bit tricky for them in English). But the reality is that there is always someone who is a little bit more advanced, or who is quick to understand what is going on. And, what is more wonderful, is that almost all of them are happy to help each other and share their discoveries and knowledge (alas, I'm slowly seeing the sharing aspect fade away, now it's all about "no, don't look, don't copy, Teacher, he's copying me!")

So there they were, cutting away and saying the words out loud, and shouting in joy that 'school bag' went in the 's' column! I didn't have to do anything, and the kids were having so much fun. And, I feel, getting something out of the activity.

But I *knew* this would happen. What was amazing was when the students started to think of other words they knew, ones they had learnt in pre-school, or at home, or on a trip abroad, or even passively at school. And they were figuring out whether the words began with 's' or 'p.' When they decided that 'sun' was a 's' word, they drew a sun! And so on.

I was thrilled. I recommended and encouraged my colleague to use the activity, so that she could see for herself that there's nothing to be scared of. She did and she also enjoyed doing the task with her students. Since then, we've wanted to do something similar with different letters, to expand their association of a spoken word with the first letter. But so far, we haven't managed.

What this activity taught me is that there are no right or wrongs with young learners: either they will get it or they won't. But I don't think that anything we, as English teachers do, can really interfere with their native language. I think that young learners, especially in first grade where their brains are flexible and absorb information like sponges, can do so much more than the rulebooks say.

The important thing is for us, adults, to also have crazy ideas, ones which go against the trend, and to give them a go. Because you never know what your students will get out of it, but also you as a teacher.

Telling Stories About Teaching and Research

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