

Think Differently

Creating a climate for innovation in language learning

How to set up a micro-project in your school

What is in this document

This document explains what the Think Differently project is all about. It provides guidance of how to set up a micro-project in your school and signposts you to resources and methodologies to help you make it a success.

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Think differently! Try something new!

Creating a climate for innovation in language learning

"If we always do what we've always done, we'll always get what we've always got."

Introduction

More than ever the world needs young people who are internationally-minded and able to participate positively in an interconnected and interdependent world. This means promoting a step change in our approach to multilingualism and cultural awareness. This is why the 'Think Differently' project has been set up.

What is the *Think Differently* project trying to achieve?

We want to create an international network of schools engaging in a series of micro-projects to explore new approaches to language learning.

We know that there are new and exciting opportunities worth exploring. Technology, for example, is offering new ways to engage in language learning. Students can communicate more easily with native speakers using tools like Skype and mobile apps can deliver frequent bite-size multimedia activities to learners in compelling ways.

Importantly, we know there are groups of young people who want to engage in language learning for the first time. There are other groups that want to re-engage in language learning having had a poor experience first time around. There are others that have chosen to specialise in other academic subjects but would still like to continue to be involved in language learning.

This project is about inspiring and exciting young people and their teachers to try something different. It is not about squeezing out an extra few marks in a formal exam, although it might do that too! It is about reaching young people who want to join or rejoin the life enhancing experience that is language learning.

An invitation

We hope you will want to join us. At the moment we want to encourage and support schools and individuals keen to try small scale projects.

Projects can be formal or informal, take place in school or outside of normal curriculum time. They might involve teachers, classroom assistants, mixed aged classes, local and online communities.

To support schools we have created this document and associated web-pages. These pages are designed to help school interested in participating in this exciting project.

Setting up a micro-project

What is a micro-project?

A micro-project is a small-scale enquiry-based project. It is about trying something new and doing it in a way that makes it possible to evaluate impact.

The project might be a new idea that a teacher tries with a small group of children in class or through an after-school club. It might involve an informal or formal learning situation. It might involve online learning or a blend of online and face-to-face sessions.

While there are no constraints on what you choose to explore we do want to undertake these projects with a degree of rigour so that any successes can be credibly shared with others. The small seed we plant today might grow into a major project in the future.

To help you do this we have produced this booklet (and associated web-pages) to offer some guidance on setting up a micro-project in your school.

Using a five step process

We suggest you design your project around a five step process. Working through the following steps will help you to construct a well-designed project in a way that it can be credibly shared with others. The five steps are:

1. Explore – consider what innovations are worth investigating
2. Design – identify the focus and construct a plan
3. Pilot – test out the innovation
4. Review – evaluate the effectiveness of the innovation
5. Share – share your story with others

Signposts to other resources

In addition to the five step process, the *Think Differently* project will we create a growing library of resources and case studies offering advice and inspiration as you take your micro-project forward. See:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/schools/support-for-languages/think-differently>

The five step methodology:

Step 1: Explore

Before you begin to design your own micro project get inspired by spending some time exploring some of the resources on the *Think Differently* web-pages:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/schools/support-for-languages/think-differently>

The purpose of the explore phase is to raise awareness of the sorts of innovations that are already being investigated and to look at some of the evidence of what works from research. It will also be important to think about what is possible in your school.

Awareness raising

You might begin by exploring some of the short case studies from other schools. Are you able to use and adapt some of the strategies that are successful in these schools?

Founded on research and expertise

Explore some of the high impact strategies from educational research¹. How might these strategies be harnessed to support better language learning? We know, for example, that feedback, peer teaching and collaborative learning can make a difference of up to eight months' progress for some pupils. Can we design an innovative micro-project that makes use of this research? You might find the *innovation matrix*, available on the website, a useful tool to help with your thinking.

What is possible?

Investigate the scope for innovation in your school. It might be possible for you to run a small project within your own lessons. Perhaps a small group of interested teachers might wish to come together to try something new. Maybe there is broader interest in the school and you are able to set up a larger scale project. Whatever your circumstances it should be possible to try something. Small-scale, 'proof of concept' ideas are great at this stage of our initiative.

¹ The work of John Hattie and his book *Visible Learning* and the Education Endowment Fund teaching and learning toolkit are accessible examples of sources of research evidence See <http://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/> and <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/>

Step 2: Design

This step is all about designing your micro-project. It is worth spending a little time planning carefully. A good plan will make sure you that your micro-project is robust and will help to keep things on track as the project progresses.

Identify an inquiry question

Begin by thinking about what you intend to explore. It can be useful to frame your innovation as a question. For example:

“Will the use of Skype buddies increase the confidence and capabilities of Year 9 students to participate in extended classroom conversations?”

Identify a group to participate

Identify the group that will participate in the micro-project. If possible, identify a group that will not be participating. Make sure both groups are similar in their make up. This group can act as a control or non-innovation group. This can be particularly useful when evaluating the effectiveness of the innovation.

Capture a starting point

You will need to establish a baseline against which it will be possible to evaluate impact. In the example above, a good baseline would be some classroom observations about the *frequency* and *quality* of student contributions pre-project. The same tool could be used post-project to evaluate any change that occurs as a result of the innovation. You can also use the tool to compare the differences between the two groups.

Some examples of useful tools include:

- Observations
- Work samples
- Short tests
- Questionnaires
- Rich tasks (*An extended assessment task designed to allow students to demonstrate the application of their knowledge and skills*)
- Interviews

Set out a manageable timeline

Schools are busy places so it is really helpful to create a timeline and set aside some dedicated time to run the project. Running a micro-project over one or two terms is often a manageable time frame. Make sure you have built in time to:

- talk to colleagues and plan collaboratively
- devise and capture a good baseline or starting point
- meet and discuss progress as the project is piloted
- capture evidence of change and evaluate impact
- write up or film your story to share with others
- celebrate and think about what you might do next with what you have learned

When you have the foundations in place you can go on to pilot the innovation. Use your timeline to keep things on track.

Step 3: Pilot

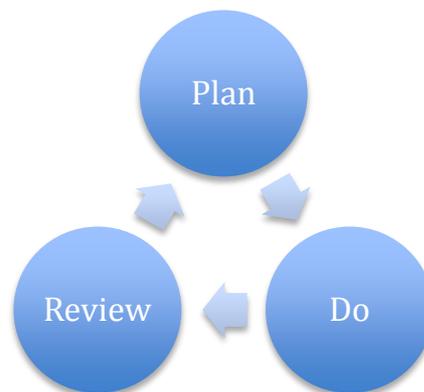
This is the part of the project that everyone enjoys. It is time to pilot your innovation.

Something new

You may be extending when, where and how learning is taking place using technology, you may be offering rich, immersive language experiences or you may be offering students more choice in their learning. Something new will be happening and students and teachers should enjoy the opportunity that the project is offering.

Be flexible

It is useful to think about a series of 'plan – do – review' cycles taking place as you implement the innovation. Keep an open mind and be prepared to adapt and adjust the project as you get feedback from pupils and colleagues. A lot of learning can take place when teachers come together to reflect on how the project is developing.



Everyone a learner

If we knew all the answers before we started then we wouldn't need to prototype our innovation. Don't be afraid to adapt what you do as you go – you will learn from the failures as well as the successes.

Step 4: Review

Think about how long the innovation should run in order for it to have a chance to effect students' attitudes and attainment. As you move toward the end of the piloting phase it is time to think about reviewing the impact of the innovation.

Capturing a picture of change

At the outset of the micro-project you will have captured a baseline or starting point. Now is the time to see what has changed. Ideally you can use the same tool to capture evidence of impact.

What does the evidence tell you

Think about what you can deduce from the information you have collected. The pre and post pilot base-lining tool should give you some quantitative evidence.

Going back to our earlier example we should ask... 'Has the frequency of pupils participating confidently in discussions increased, decreased or stayed the same?'

What has been the difference in results from the two different groups? Has the innovation group made more progress than the non-innovation group?

In addition to the hard evidence from your pre and post piloting tools it is useful to consider the bigger picture. For example, what do students think about the innovation? Has it affected their motivation or attitudes to learning? You might undertake some interviews or use a questionnaire to find out more. What do teachers think? Do they feel that the innovation has extended their repertoire of teaching strategies?

What next?

Think about learning that has emerged from the pilot. What has been the positive impact? Are there any things that you would do differently?

Importantly, what might you want to build into your practice? What advice would you give to others thinking about exploring a similar innovation?

Step 5: Share

The aim of the 'Think differently' project is to create an international network of schools investigating new approaches to language learning.

We would like you to share your story with us. Importantly, we think that others may be inspired and motivated learn from what you are doing. Over time we hope to create a gallery of innovative ideas that will include video clips as well as written case studies.

To get started, however, we would invite you to share your story using a common template. We anticipate a maximum of 800 words.

Title	Think of a short title for your project.
Enquiry question (30 words)	Write your enquiry question. <i>E.g. "Will the use of Skype buddies increase the confidence and capabilities of Year 9 students to participate in extended classroom conversations?"</i>
Describe the project (400)	Describe your project – what you did that was different and how the project was organised.
What was the impact? (200)	Describe the impact of the innovation and the benefits, if any, to learners and teachers.
What have you learned? (150)	Describe what you have learned as a teacher and if and how you intend to take the project forward.
Advice to others? (50)	What advice would you offer to others about your innovation?
<i>Administrative Contact details</i>	<i>Name of school:</i> <i>Email:</i> <i>Contact person:</i>

We would also invite you to be creative and make use of images and video. Please be sure to seek the appropriate permissions before submitting any work.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/schools/support-for-languages/think-differently>

Twitter: #langlearning2015

Links to resources to help you

Available via the website:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/schools/support-for-languages/think-differently>

1. Case study thumbnails
2. Video-clips of the “Think Different!” launch event
3. An overview of research into effective learning
4. The innovation grid developed at the 2015 languages think tank