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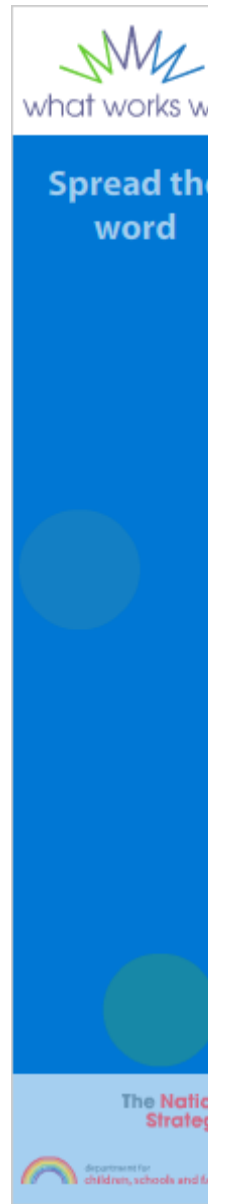
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HELEN KAUT INVESTIGATES A PROJECT THAT HAS BEEN ENGAGING STUDENTS IN MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES THROUGH THE USE OF FILM



Helen Kaut

How can schools make modern foreign languages more attractive to students? Using the help of native speakers and the medium of film could be the answer.

The "Trans-Lingual Express" project has created documentaries in French, German, Spanish and Italian by bringing together secondary school students in London with native speakers working at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

The project was developed by Eastside Educational Trust and funded by PwC and the John Lyon's Charity, part of the Harrow School Foundation. It targets mainly 15 to 19-year-olds.

They not only learn about documentaries and the technical aspects of film-making, but also improve their cultural knowledge and vocabulary by viewing foreign language clips.

Depending on the workshop they attend, the students introduce themselves and London in the relevant language. The films explore a variety of themes such as food, fashion, and journeys. Students in other countries replicate the film-making workshops.

In 2007, all documentaries were edited together and premiered at the BFI (British Film Institute) Southbank on the European Day of Languages.

Things have gathered momentum since, and in July last year, the project was awarded a European Commission Award for Languages.

The initiative originally grew out of a language-learning project in 2004 for primary school children entitled *Parlez Vous Français?*, which included a film about the visit of a French storyteller. Older students filmed the preparations for the visit, the workshop itself, and interviewed the storyteller.

Rakhee Jasani, arts development director of Eastside Educational Trust, explained: "We noticed it had this amazing effect on the older students and their levels of motivation and interest in languages and how they were going to present it.

"We then developed it a bit further. We thought it would be really nice to make an exchange so that their film was something they were talking about, something they were passionate about and interested in."

The initial project was in French, but the Trust soon wanted to include other languages with the view of using the films as a resource which would be available to all teachers and students through its website and on CD-Roms.

To date, 120 students from schools in Paris, Berlin, Madrid and Rome have taken part. The English students have come from London schools including Haggerston School, Hendon School, The Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary, Our Lady's Convent High School, Convent of Jesus and Mary Language College, and The Grey Coat Hospital School.

Two years ago, they created documentaries in French and German, while last year Spanish and Italian were the chosen languages for the films.

The students spend a week filming in London. Professional film-makers from different countries help them with the camera-work and editing, using their respective language, while native speakers from PwC help them with the film scripts.

Each project has a maximum 20 students due to the limited number of cameras available. The groups are divided into four smaller groups and four native speakers are allocated to each group.

Andrea Bergamelli, a senior associate at PwC in London, assisted students with their Italian language skills during last year's project.

He explained: "I mainly helped them to say in Italian what they wanted to express in the film.

"First the students had to decide what to talk about, then they had to come up with a script in Italian and then they had to repeat it in front of the camera. I helped them translate what they wanted to say into the script in Italian, and then I practised with them their pronunciation."

Mr Bergamelli noticed that the project took the students out of their comfort zone.

"One of the challenges was to get them to try and speak Italian without being embarrassed or worried about mistakes.

The other challenge was to express a concept in a foreign language. It is frustrating when a more limited vocabulary hampers your ability to express a concept that you can easily express in your own language."

Grey Coat Hospital School in Westminster, a specialist language school with around 1,000 students, has taken part in all projects since 2005.

All its students learn two languages at key stage 3 and at least one foreign language at key stage 4, with around 50 to 60 per cent of them studying two languages.

At Grey Coat, students can learn French, Spanish, German, Mandarin and Latin and they can also choose Japanese, which is offered outside the curriculum as an extra language.

The Grey Coat students certainly enjoyed learning to make these documentaries.

One of the students told the head of languages Marcus Walzl that it was one of the best things he had ever done.

Mr Walzl said: "I think initially some of the students were not quite sure what was happening, because it was such an unusual project. They may have concerns about whether they are linguistically able to cope with the whole thing.

"I think it was the whole package with the languages and the additional skills coming together which impressed them the most."

Ms Jasani backs this up, adding: "One student said that she started to dream in the language, because she was trying to find different solutions to saying things.

"Just by encouraging them and giving them a real-life context to communicate within made a huge difference in them just wanting to learn. That meant that they made fewer mistakes as well."

Mr Walzl said the project has boosted students' confidence as they had to use languages outside the classroom.

He continued: "They had to use it far more professionally than in the class and were able to move away from the GCSE language. They were then able to adapt and be flexible with the language when they came back into different topic areas.

The grades of the students taking part were also positive. Obviously their speaking exams benefited greatly from taking part in this and it has an impact on all the other skills."

The project also made them aware of other cultures. All participating students were invited to the BFI for the premiere of the edited documentary.

Here they watched the films for the first time, met each other, and compared cultures.

- Helen Kaut is a freelance education journalist.

Further information

Eastside Educational Trust is currently putting together a full teacher's resource pack of Trans-Lingual Express. This will use all films produced and will also be aimed at key stage 3 students to attract their interest before they make their GCSE choices.

Grey Coat Hospital School will pilot the pack, which will be launched after the European Day of Languages on September 26, so that more schools can use the same approach and resources, focused on key stages 3, 4 and 5. This will extend its use beyond the initial 16 to 18 audience.

For more information, visit the Eastside Educational Trust at www.eastside.org.uk

