



Philosophy for Children, Modern Foreign Languages and the new GCSE specification

Following a session I delivered for Teach First colleagues, I was approached with a question about P4C and MFL. How could meaningful P4C be embedded several immediate obstacles appeared present:

- At both primary and secondary level, the subject is centred around learning vocabulary
- Grasp of language is limited and often rudimentary, making discussion in the language near impossible
- It wasn't obvious what concept-based discussions could be pursued beyond 'why is language important?'

It is unfortunate that primary and secondary language provision rarely equips children to have meaningful discussions. It may make them experts on ordering coffee, or describing their pets, but having in depth conversation remains a step too far. It is encouraging, but also daunting, that the new GCSE specifications require pupils to come up with more spontaneous speech in their exams. In particular, responding to an unseen picture and 'express, justify and exchange opinions'. Elements of P4C could be used to ensure that pupils are prepared for these new courses, and can express ideas in the target language.

I came up with the following three ideas to help this teacher, and I hope they help you too. I begin with finding questions, and then what to do with them.

1. Explore a society's history and culture

Language degrees will explore the culture and history of a society, as well as the language itself. This rarely occurs in schools, but it doesn't mean we shouldn't try. A news website instantly provides us with modern issues facing a foreign country, and these can be explained in the classroom. At the time of writing, immigration policy is making the news in Germany, as is the ethics of bullfighting in Spain.

2. "Popcorn" the big concepts within language

Although 'why is language important' may seem one of the only questions that can be discussed, language is rich in philosophical concepts waiting to be explored. Try "popcorning" them – in other words, imagine them springing up. Here's 5:

<i>Protection:</i>	<i>Should endangered languages be protected?</i>
<i>Communication:</i>	<i>Is language the most important form of communication?</i>
<i>Trade:</i>	<i>Would shared language improve trade?</i>
<i>Tolerance:</i>	<i>Does learning a language make us more tolerant?</i>
<i>Understanding:</i>	<i>Would people understand each other better if we all shared a language?</i>



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3. Make the most of their limited language – example session plan

You can use the following activity to combine pupils' natural desires to problem-solve and express their opinion, whilst letting them absorb and practice new vocabulary.



Announce that the next question is an open question that invites opinion. Then let the pupils be detectives and translate it. This could involve working together, using a dictionary, or clues hidden around the room. The fact that it is a problem to be solved, and that it is asking their opinion will safeguard against apathy.

Example: *La France devrait abandonner l'interdiction de la burqa. Êtes-vous d'accord?*
(*France should drop the ban on the burqa. Do you agree?*)



You have your question, in this case based upon a topical issue, and so you can now offer them ways to easily express their position in the target language.

For example, have anchors around the room to represent certain positions:

<i>Je suis d'accord</i>	<i>(I agree)</i>
<i>Je suis d'accord en partie</i>	<i>(I partly agree)</i>
<i>Je ne suis pas sur</i>	<i>(I am not sure)</i>
<i>Je ne suis pas d'accord</i>	<i>(I disagree)</i>

Pupils can either play detective with these too, or be given a translation. Now, they are ready to express their opinion and back up with reasons. Depending on the extent of their language, this may be the point you wish to revert things back to English. If you wish to push them even further, you may wish to present some ready-made reasons in the target language, and ask them to either pick them up and explain them, or piece them together to form a written sentence in their books. For example:

Parce qu'il empêche que les femmes soient traitées différemment
(*Because it does stops women being treated differently*)

Parce qu'il valorise les femmes
(*Because it empowers women*)

Parce qu'il encourage les gens à se mélanger
(*Because it encourages people to mix together*)

Parce qu'il ya de bons arguments des deux côtés
(*Because there are good arguments on both sides*)

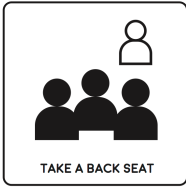
Parce que les gens ont le droit de porter des vêtements de leur choix
(*Because people have a right to wear clothing of their choice*)

Parce qu'il est injuste sur les personnes religieuses
(*Because it is unfair on religious people*)

Parce qu'il touche davantage les femmes que les hommes
(*Because it affects women more than men*)



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To enable the pupils to drive the conversation, you can now let them go back into English and carry on. Key to successfully mixing P4C and MFL is to keep the target language embedded in the discussions as far as you can, but this does involve preparation. So as the discussion organically develops – perhaps onto issues of religious freedom as a whole. You will still be talking about something relevant, and know they have developed their language skills.

NEXT STEPS

Could the question be set as a 'Home-Talk' option? (in whichever language they speak at home!)