Developing Practice Relating to New GCSE Requirements – Specifically Translation

School(s) or partnership name: Cardiff High School
Local Authority(ies): Cardiff
Phase(s): Secondary

Context and background
With the education agenda increasingly shining a spotlight on the use of technology to support learning and teaching, and following a successful bid for grant funding to innovate in this area, we sought bespoke training for members of the French Department to enhance their knowledge and teaching of translation. We also purchased published resources to inform our practice.

The new French GCSE qualification requires that pupils use their translation skills - both into and from French. We identified students in Year 9 who would continue to study French at GCSE next year and the current Year 10 cohort who would be involved in the learning and teaching strategies and activities developed. This training took place in June 2016 with Dr Liz Wren-Owens, an academic and lecturer in translation at Cardiff University. This involved exploring the key concepts of translation and what it demands of learners, and this enabled us to start working on enhancing and refining our own strategies and the resources used at A Level to enable our GCSE pupils to tackle the new demands of translation.

Nature of strategy or activity
As members of the French department had varying experience in translation and teaching translation, it was decided that a staff skills audit in the form of a questionnaire would be useful to help target the most useful strategies for developing the team’s teaching. Likewise, an initial pupil questionnaire was devised to ascertain pupil understanding of translation, what difficulties they could foresee, what was the point of learning to translate, and also an attempt at translating an unseen short paragraph from French to English.

We decided to focus on the following aspects:

- building an appreciation of why we need to be able to translate to get the pupils to buy into translation
- building confidence in having a go and working things out
- devising strategies and activities to encourage pupils to translate meaning - not just words
- emphasising the lack of word to word equivalent and to work on identifying sets of words that work together, eg compound tenses
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- building further confidence and independence and moving away from reliance on phones and translation apps. Instead we reframed the use of phones to check your own translation and to refine and redraft
- develop thinking skills and problem-solving skills further – identify shortcoming in translations and how they could be improved
- feedback that leads to pupils compiling an ongoing self checklist for translation and ‘My Common Errors’ reference section

We are aiming to continue with this work at key stage 4, especially to develop strategies to tackle English to French translation and to begin working on the basic skills of translation with younger pupils at key stage 3. We are aiming to develop a department-based translation-bee competition and ‘Translator of the Month’ at key stage 3 to engage learners in the art of translation from a younger age.

Impact on provision, learning and teaching and/or leadership

Students have been very engaged in the activities that require problem solving and thinking skills to work out meaning and unknown items of vocabulary in translation from French – English. In English-French translation, pupils have to concentrate on ensuring their use of grammar and spelling is accurate and we have found that this has made them more inclined to learn verb endings and spellings on a regular basis to ensure they do not lose valuable marks.

Students are being encouraged to create their own translation checklists after teacher or peer feedback also to refine and redraft their first attempts at translating a passage, using their checklist or other resources, such as an online dictionary app. This is an area for further development, where pupils will become more independent in acting on feedback given by the teacher or by a peer.

A staff skills audit was then carried out at the end of the project which showed an increased knowledge of the concept of translation, the skills of teaching translation and in the confidence in devising activities to enhance pupil progress in translation. Likewise, pupils were asked to attempt an unseen translation from French to English to measure the enhancement of skills and understanding they had acquired during the project. The majority of pupils avoided the common pitfalls they had previously encountered and all attempted the whole translation, making ‘intelligent’ deductions where they did not know a specific piece of vocabulary. Pupils were much more inclined to translate ‘chunks’ of meaning rather than individual words.

Translation is becoming part of lessons, weekly, in the department.