

# Languages week: raising engagement in Modern Foreign Languages

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"As languages teachers, we have the joy of teaching a subject in which we can be extremely creative – in the classroom and outside of the classroom. This case study will look at what we do as enrichment in Modern Foreign Languages to involve all and explore learning a language beyond simply being able to communicate and respond".

## Languages Week

Doing one week of intense activities really helps to raise the profile and these are some of my tips and the things we do to raise engagement in Modern Foreign Languages through a one-off special 'Languages week'.

## Activities during Languages Week:

### Badges galore:

At the beginning of Languages Week, we bring along a set of badges to our staff briefing. On the front of each badge is a word in a foreign language and on the reverse is the English translation and the language it is from. We distribute these to as many staff as we can (there has been upset in the past when some have not been given one!) and staff wear them on their lanyards. Students can collect a slip that they fill out, on which they write down the word on the front of the staff badge, the translation into English and the language it is from. It really gets everyone talking about languages!

### 'Give it a go':

We run a series of 'Give it a go' language sessions, that build on some of the other languages that teachers also speak. For instance, my degree is in Spanish, Russian and Czech, but I only ever teach Spanish at my current school. We offer one-off sessions in our other languages to give students a try at these languages. We have offered: Russian, Czech, Slovak, Albanian, Galician, Greek and more, to give students a flavour of these languages. It is very easy to organise, the students love it, the staff enjoy speaking a language they don't often get to teach. It also allows students to get to know you better and find out about the languages that you speak.

## Flamenco classes:

By using some simple YouTube videos, it's very easy to put together a flamenco session. Move all the tables to the side in a classroom and form a circle to practise the moves of one of Spain's best-known dances. It's as loved by our Year 7 students as it is by our Year 13 students! To heavily involve Year 13, set them off to research about Flamenco so that they can present to younger students to give an extra layer of cultural understanding.

## Guest lectures:

A popular session with the older students are guest lectures that staff put on based on what they studied at university and their experiences. It gives students a peek into what university study is like and allows us to share more of our experience of language study with our students.

## Promoting and rewarding participation:

My colleague came up with the fantastic way in which we tie all of the above activities together which we use each and every year. Students receive an 'El Gordo' lottery ticket. There are five spaces to collect stamps, which are awarded based on attendance of activities, completion of our languages quiz, or for finding out five words on staff badges and their translations. On filling up five stamps, students are entered into the Gordo lottery draw, in which they can win gift cards. To introduce it, we give a short section of our lessons over to look at what El Gordo is and to explain how the lottery will work, along with sharing the schedule for the week. It generates a great buzz and also allows us to delve further into Spanish culture.

## From Fish-and-Chip Friday to Viernes de churros:

As a final treat for our Languages Week, my colleague decided to reach out to our canteen staff to see if we could do something Hispanic-orientated. They rose to the occasion superbly! Instead of the usual fish and chips, students were treated to a seafood paella, a chicken and vegetarian variant, too, as well as enchiladas. But the real big winner? The churros and chocolate for dessert! The students and staff alike loved it and it really generated a buzz around the school on the Friday, closing the week in style! It was such a success that we are looking to replicate it next year to include a Turkish, French and Greek-themed lunch to showcase all of the languages we teach within the school.

## Outreach activities:

University language departments often have money set aside to use for outreach activities. The universities are keen to participate in this as it helps them to generate interest and recruit potential future students. As part of the week, we regularly receive guest lectures from a Russell Group university – both in-person and online. Over the past few years, we have sent an increasing number of students to university who have read a lesser-studied language, such as Russian, Korean and Japanese, so this, in conjunction with the 'Give it a go' sessions, is a way of further promoting the study of lesser-studied languages. What is also fantastic about these sessions is that they give students a real flavour of what a university lecture is like and what culture and content modules feel like. We have had lectures on Catalan Independence, Soviet Literature as a voice for protest and Translation and truth – and the feedback has always been superb. It also makes university seem more relevant to our young people.

**"It's always a week that really has impact and that the students absolutely love to partake in. It really raises the profile of languages and gets staff and students talking" - Adam Lamb**