

INDEPENDENT  
THINKING  
ON ...

# MFL

*Crista Hazell*



HOW TO MAKE MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
TEACHING EXCITING, INCLUSIVE AND RELEVANT

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# FOREWORD

Since establishing Independent Thinking in 1994, we have worked hard to share with educators around the world our belief that there is always another way. The Independent Thinking On ... series of books is an extension of that work, giving a space for great educators to use their words and share great practice across a number of critical and relevant areas of education.

*Independent Thinking on MFL* is a book that couldn't have come at a better time. As I write these words, it's 2020 and the world is splintering in a way it hasn't done so for decades. Politicians around the globe are stoking nationalism and isolationism in a way that pits 'us' against 'them' and makes political currency out of vilifying anyone who is 'other'. If all you know is your type, your culture, people who look and speak like you, then this is quite an easy thing to do.

But what happens when you have a world view that embraces other perspectives? When you spend time learning about 'them' and immersing yourself in their culture? When you are able to communicate directly in the language of the 'other'?

What happens is that you realise there is no other.

As a former MFL teacher myself, I know the power that learning languages has to transform our views of the world. While the school syllabus can get bogged down in buying cabbages and asking your way to the *quincaillerie*, the best language teachers see a greater purpose for their work, one that involves helping their students to find their place in a bigger world.

## INDEPENDENT THINKING ON MFL

And talking of the best language teachers, there is no better person to write this book than Independent Thinking Associate Crista Hazell. With many years' experience as a successful MFL teacher and head of languages, Crista shares so many great insights, approaches and ideas that will transform language teaching in any primary or secondary classroom.

If we want the world to come back together, where else to start but in talking together, whatever the language.

**IAN GILBERT  
YORK**

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# FIRST THOUGHTS

Firstly, thank you for purchasing *Independent Thinking on MFL*, which is one of a series of titles from Independent Thinking Press. Check out the other titles too – they are definitely worth adding to the continuing professional development (CPD) library in your department or school. If you don't have one yet, then what an excellent way to start!

This book is for MFL teachers of all ages and stages – those who are new to the profession and those with more experience – written by an experienced MFL teacher who thinks that being a teacher is the best job in the world. It has been inspired by my adventures in the classroom over 20 years. I am grateful to the wonderful young people I have had the privilege of teaching: they have challenged and inspired me, and I hope I have returned the favour. It is heartening to have witnessed the way so many learners have battled through the key stages and become brilliant linguists, who now use their language knowledge and skills in their daily lives working as engineers, doctors, artists, photographers, midwives, zookeepers and shopkeepers. There are also learners who have been inspired and moved by the culture and traditions beyond this green and pleasant land who have gone on to travel far and wide on exotic adventures. Finally, there are who that have become teachers who are promoting languages in their daily work. I am very proud of them all.

*For trainees, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and recently qualified teachers (RQTs):* This book should serve to support you in your learning journey to becoming a marvellous MFL teacher. It includes tips, strategies, methods and activities, all of which I have successfully

used in the classroom with learners from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 5. There is also a specific help section in Chapter 10. My advice on where to start is to know your learners really well, beyond any data. If you build the relationship first, the language learning will come.

*For experienced MFL teachers:* I am amazed by the collegiality and positivity of MFL teachers and the MFLTwitterati, and the colleagues I have met at TeachMeets, conferences and languages events – thank you for your smiles and support. I hope you enjoy using this book to enhance the MFL experience in your classrooms.

*For teachers who are not based in England:* I do make reference to features of the education system in England, as this is what has framed my practice. Key stages are obviously not universal terminology, but I hope that you will understand what I mean and equate this to the system in which you work. For guidance, learners are aged 7–11 in Key Stage 2; 11–14 in Key Stage 3; 14–16 in Key Stage 4 (at the end of which GCSEs are sat); and 16–18 in Key Stage 5 (at the end of which they take their A levels).

*For overseas colleagues:* I hope you find the following pages helpful and insightful for integrating into your practice with second-language learners. Or for those of you in international schools who want to mix up your teaching style to support ex-pats, or indeed the local children and young people with whom you work, there is plenty here for you to choose from. Enjoy the journey!

## CHAPTER 1

# HOOK THEM INTO LEARNING

One of the learning hooks that I enjoy using in the MFL classroom is asking the question, 'What is your favourite foreign language word?' I also ask this question in workshop sessions and at conferences. I love seeing people's faces as they trawl through their vast philological memory, deftly sifting through all the languages they have learned and selecting one single word. Whether they are teachers, school leaders, teaching assistants (TAs), foreign language assistants (FLAs) or students, their expressions fascinate me. The visible excitement as their brains locate their favourite word is fantastic, although inevitably there is also some conflict in the choice of which word takes the top spot. At this point I add that they can have one word per language, and their anxiety fades and their eyes begin to sparkle. The pleasure individuals show as they share their special words is a joy to behold. Often, the words are well-loved with others in the room; there is nodding, grinning and the positivity spreads like wildfire. It's wonderful to see.

The emotional connection to a particular word often returns the speaker to a special happy place, perhaps in the classroom, a memory from childhood or an international experience with friends, teachers or peers. When I ask why a word is so beloved, people frequently say that they like the way it sounds, the way it rolls off the tongue, the way it makes them smile or laugh as they enunciate it, the quirkiness of the word, the mix of



placement, tackle tenses, negotiate negatives and place object pronouns in the construction. Students can use their creativity to generate fantastically original sentences, which has the effect of deepening the learning experience, not to mention wowing their peers. Students have to be aware of unfamiliar vocabulary in terminal assessments, so venturing off-piste in tasks like this, which forces them to identify and use unusual words, extends their expertise in this area. Best sentences can also be used as a dictation or storytelling activity; speaking tasks create additional opportunities to develop oracy skills. There are lots of options.

I remember my first ever French lesson: I loved learning this amazing new language which is spoken in France, Africa and beyond. It was at this point that I realised I could travel the world and communicate with other people in another language. I was at a middle school in Leeds, dressed in a brown and gold uniform, and in that instant my world changed forever. I ran home at the end of the day and proudly announced that I was going to be a French teacher. Some 14 years later I was graduating from Manchester Metropolitan University with a bachelor of education degree. The lass from Leeds was leaving to start a new life as a teacher, and it was the best feeling in the world – as it still is now. I had made it: I was realising my dream.

I'm not sure that my MFL teachers were aware of how much I adored their lessons (I would invariably complete my MFL homework first, often spending many hours on it) or how desperately I aspired to be a teacher, envisaging myself helping students like me to love languages, to be excited by languages and to travel the world using languages to communicate. It was that ability to converse with other people from across the globe in their native tongue that excited me most. It is such a joy to be able to

teach others to make themselves understood in the markets of Marrakech, the terraces of Tunis, the cafés of Caen, the libraries of Lille, on public transport in Paris or asking questions in Quimper and Quebec. Moreover, language skills are needed in the UK to support business, trade, technology, finance, government, tourism, the NHS and our local communities. You name the career choice, and I'm certain that the ability to speak an additional language is an asset.

However, language learning in schools is in crisis because not enough time is being allocated to the subject. Languages are disappearing from school timetables amid the continuing pressure to keep budgets down. The decrease in the number of linguists at Key Stage 5 and the number who go on to study a language at university has resulted in the teaching profession recruiting native speakers from overseas to meet demand for languages teachers in UK schools. With additional constraints on our European partners following recent political decisions, the challenges are only set to increase. As well as teachers' contact time being increased, some teachers are also being asked to learn a new language over the summer to plug gaps in the timetable (despite already being able to speak three other languages fluently). I'm all for creative solutions but learning a new language in six weeks isn't valuing the subject, the teachers or the students.

The students I have taught haven't always seen how languages could help them in their careers, yet I know of former students with an eclectic mix of careers, all of whom have been called on to use their language skills with no notice and limited time to prepare. I was once on a British Airways flight preparing to enjoy some serious downtime in the sun. Midway into the journey, as others around me slept, I was awoken by several flight attendants with serious expressions. A passenger was seriously unwell

and required medical attention, but the flight staff couldn't communicate with her. They didn't know whether the pilot needed to divert the plane to the next available airport or continue on to the destination.

It was my job to ascertain if the poorly and distressed passenger had a diagnosed medical condition. We established a language in common and, calmly but with a sense of urgency, I was directed to identify key information and details so the medically trained flight staff could intervene to relieve her symptoms and find out if the plane would have to land at the earliest opportunity. Despite serious breathing issues the passenger passed on the vital details. It was a tense time: the information I was communicating to flight staff needed to be precise. The role of translator had never particularly excited me; it was the ability to communicate with others, to speak and understand in the moment, that had spurred me on to learn languages at school. Yet there I was assisting a medical team with a seriously ill patient. I have always said to learners in my classroom that they don't know when they will need to use their language skills.

Former students have contacted me over the years to tell me how – while at work, on holiday or simply in the right situation at the right time – they have been called on to use their language skills to assist in an important or lifesaving situation. We know that having an additional language on top of your native tongue opens doors, so it's our job as MFL teachers to make sure that we prepare our students to be effective and tolerant communicators in their local communities and able to work with colleagues in other countries across the globe. We are a small island, so it is essential that we communicate and collaborate with our neighbours. We shouldn't expect everyone to speak our native tongue and so not attempt to learn other languages. The more we learn about other languages, the

more we learn about other cultures. As global trade networks and markets develop, and digital technologies bring us ever closer together, the least we can do is learn to communicate effectively with our colleagues and partners worldwide.

When I've canvassed colleagues about what they enjoy about being MFL teachers, the sorts of responses I've received describe how they like that they could:

- Teach students to communicate in another language.
- Educate students about their first language through learning another language.
- Open students' hearts and minds to a life beyond their current home, village, town, city and country.
- Share with learners a skill they will have for life.
- Empower others to discover and make new, interesting sounds.
- Invite learners to discover novel, intriguing yet familiar words.
- Encourage international travel.
- Inspire thinking at a global level.
- Promote internationalism.
- Foster acceptance, understanding and tolerance of other people, cultures, customs, religions and traditions.
- Take students overseas to discover new lands, ideas, sounds and spaces.
- Train students to listen for gist as well as specific information.
- Support students to become excellent orators.

## HOOK THEM INTO LEARNING

- Help students to make grapheme and phoneme links.
- Develop students' language confidence and fluency.
- Share a passion for languages.
- Give the gift of language learning to others.
- Help students to access a range of literature, music, drama, poetry and film in other languages.
- Support anxious learners to overcome their fear of making errors.
- Promote the concept that international borders aren't limits.
- Guide learners on a linguistic adventure.
- Embolden learners to become translators.
- Inspire a new generation of linguists and language learners.
- Give learners a skill that can be useful in every type of job and career.
- Open the door to learning additional languages.
- Empower learners by helping them to find and use their voices.
- Facilitate learners to access reading and listening materials in other languages on the internet and in print.
- Inspire learners by collecting 1,001 things from overseas holidays and visits to use in the classroom.
- Intrigue learners by recycling stories, articles and magazines, and gifting them to learners to read and be further inspired.

- Connect with other professionals and always be enthused by something new we have learned.
- Get paid for doing something we love!

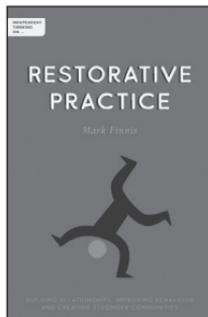
In the rest of the book, I will share my thoughts, experiences and ideas on listening, speaking, reading and writing in the MFL classroom. All of these creative strategies have been used successfully by myself and other colleagues with learners of MFL and English as an additional language from Year 6 through to Year 13 – as well as with international students – to make language lessons exciting, inclusive and relevant. The chapters take you on a journey and provide an insight into what is possible.

There is no one way to teach languages – there are many different techniques. I am grateful to have found some novel ways to help learners access, engage with and become confident in language learning. I am also thankful for the openness, collegiality and collaboration of my colleagues, which has ensured the best possible language learning experiences for our MFL students.

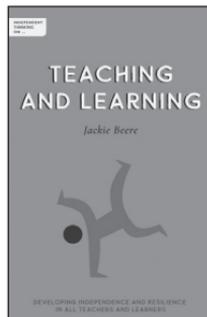
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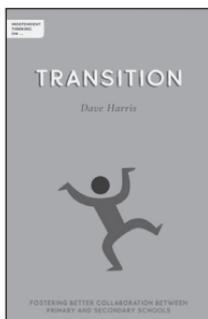
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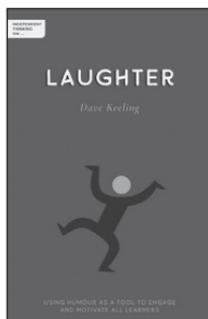
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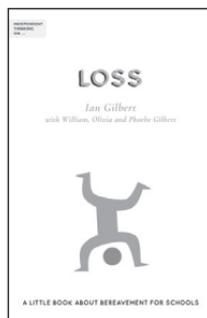
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## LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE HAS THE POWER TO TRANSFORM A LIFE, AS WELL AS HELP BREAK DOWN THE BARRIERS THAT SEEM TO BE RE-EMERGING BETWEEN NATIONS, CULTURES AND PEOPLE.

In the UK, MFL teaching has always had to battle with the 'everyone speaks English' argument, not to mention that, for so many, all that remains of their years learning a foreign language is *bitte*, *por favor* or *s'il vous plaît*.

But with teachers like Independent Thinking Associate Crista Hazell at the front of the class, things can be very different.

Drawing on her many years of experience as an MFL teacher and head of department, Crista shares tips, techniques and inspirational ideas geared to help teachers build confidence, increase enjoyment and improve outcomes as they take their MFL teaching to a whole new level.

## FOR MFL TEACHERS AND HEADS OF LANGUAGES DEPARTMENTS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS, SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES.

Whether you are an NQT or a more experienced MFL teacher, the encouragement and practical ideas contained within this book will ignite, or reignite, your passion for the increasingly essential job of teaching modern foreign languages.

**KATHY ELLIOTT, MFL TEACHER**

*Independent Thinking on MFL* is bursting with ideas and practical suggestions for MFL teachers.

**PROFESSOR ANNA LISE GORDON, DIRECTOR,  
THE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION AT ST MARY'S UNIVERSITY**

Crista proposes a wealth of strategies rooted in classroom practice, many of which require little in the way of burdensome preparation.

**JOHN CONNOR, INDEPENDENT MFL CONSULTANT**

*Crista Hazell is an MFL specialist with many years' experience both in the classroom and in positions of leadership. She has worked across the UK and internationally – in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East – with students, teachers and school leaders in developing teaching, learning, relationships and behaviour.*

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