

Leicester students put languages in context

David Sly-Jex working with the Lancaster School



The Lancaster School, in Leicester, is a comprehensive school for boys aged eleven to sixteen. The school acquired specialist sports college status in 2000, adding a second specialism in arts five years later, but despite these areas of expertise, students are also encouraged to study languages. A clear language learning mission – to use authentic materials and establish contacts to facilitate exchange visits and work projects – led to the school working with local language enthusiast David Sly-Jex.

David has lived and worked abroad for many years and speaks a number of languages including German, Dutch, and Arabic. He began his career as an automotive engineer in the army in Germany and went on to become director of several companies in the automotive industry before running his own business led him to work in Russia and Bangladesh. David is an avid supporter of languages and was keen to pass his valuable experience to the next generation of business people.

This project is part of the Business Language Champions programme, co-ordinated by the Regional Language Network East Midlands. It is designed to bridge the gap between school and the workplace and to reverse the decline in the take up of modern foreign languages.

David's first visit to the school was in March 2006, when he spoke to students aged fourteen to sixteen. The talk was so well received that David was invited back in March 2007 and booked for a similar session in 2008.

David begins his sessions by greeting pupils and asking how they are in Dutch, Arabic and Bengali, which opens up the discussion to what he actually said. He aims to engage his young audience with his questioning style and belief that laughter is an excellent vehicle for learning. David also makes use of dialect, talking to students in broad Norfolk, Suffolk and Irish, getting them to suggest to him that language is merely an extension of dialect.

To support his talks, David has developed special materials to use at the school, including basic phrases in a large number of languages, which the students try out for themselves with hilarious results. These materials prove that learning languages can be fun and that it's not difficult to learn some basics, which will go a long way towards putting your business colleague at ease and developing rapport with them – vital in any international business context.

Jun Shaw, head of languages at the Lancaster School describes the impact of David's visits:

"As a result of all this work, more and more pupils are choosing to study languages at KS4. The Faculty now has 6 sets studying for GCSE as well as a number of pupils doing community language GCSE'S. All this for an optional subject in an inner city boy's school means that I'm very pleased."

"The children found the work with David interesting and informative, learning about how languages were needed in so many types of business, and this in conjunction with booklets about languages and business that I made as a follow up to the work with David, has had a big impact." He added.

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