

## Why the battle for creativity is worth fighting

**Juliette Claro** is a Lecturer in Education on the PGCE MFL with QTS at St Mary's University Twickenham, and an Ofsted Inspector.

**Dr Charlotte Ryland** is Director of the Stephen Spender Trust, and Founding Director of the Translation Exchange, based at The Queen's College, Oxford.

**Juliette** came to England as a Foreign Language Assistant in September 2000.

*Adapting to teaching French as a foreign language was the best thing in the world for me at the time as I had never experienced so much creativity and authenticity in my own languages lessons in my education in France.*

*I arrived in Essex on a rainy day in September and Mr. Goodman picked me up at the station and told me "Allez, on y va ... nous allons chanter avec les year 10!" Mr Goodman carried his guitar with him into the classroom and set about getting students to conjugate verbs in a singalong. In one hour Mr. Goldman sold me on teaching languages in England!*

Subsequently, my PGCE and NQT (ECT) years fostered creativity and authenticity in the classroom as 'MFL' was a core subject into Key Stage 4 then and there was more curriculum time.

Engagement through culture and target language was paramount, and fostering creativity, authenticity and culture has always remained at the centre of my practice and curriculum throughout my 25 years career as a languages teacher, EAL coordinator, Head of Faculty or Senior Leader.

As I have started to work for Ofsted, and as a link tutor for St Mary's University, I have realised that creativity and culture are being replaced by a greater focus on content. Trainee teachers are told they cannot use songs, for example, because they are not in the curriculum sequence. Really? My question is 'Why not?'

**Vivir mi vida,**  
**Marc Anthony**



He is the top selling salsa artist of all time.  
A four-time Grammy Award, eight-time Latin Grammy Award.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXnjp5YIDek>  
min: 2:38

escuchar      Voy a \_\_\_\_\_ el momento  
encontrar      Para \_\_\_\_\_ el destino  
                    Voy a \_\_\_\_\_ en silencio  
                    Para \_\_\_\_\_ el camino

reír x2      ¿Y para qué \_\_\_\_\_? ¿Pa' qué?  
                    Si duele una pena, \_\_\_\_\_  
                    ¿Y para qué \_\_\_\_\_? ¿Pa' qué?  
                    Si duele una pena, \_\_\_\_\_,  
                    la la le

sufrir      bailar      Voy a \_\_\_\_\_, voy a \_\_\_\_\_  
                    se olvida x 2      mi vida la la la la

gozar      llorar      Voy a \_\_\_\_\_, voy a \_\_\_\_\_  
                    mi vida, la la la la

entender      vivir x 3      ¡Mi gente!

M. Lopez Year 9 Spanish practising future tense in a song In January this year a thought-provoking round table discussion at King's University was organised by Michael Slavinsky, Managing Director of Languages for All, to make the case for languages post-16 and at Higher Education. This shone a light on what 'hooks' young people in to choose to carry on with languages post-16 and post-18.

Year 12 students from schools that defy national trends with A-Level numbers shared their reasons for carrying on with a language, and gave an insight into what motivates them:

- The feeling that they are good at it
  - Access to culture (music, texts, series, films, pen pals...)
- The incentives and sense of purpose that languages create through out-of-classroom experiences (trips, speakers, careers talks, cultural events, university exchanges and projects...)

We hear regularly that the pipeline of future linguists is drying up and, given the views above, we need to ask ourselves as professionals about balance: where is the place of authenticity and creativity within the 'knowledge-rich curriculum' (Gibb 2010) and reduced teaching time on the timetable? Can they cohabit to develop intrinsic motivation for language learning?

This is why St Mary's University, Twickenham and The Queen's College, Oxford have joined forces to create a Special Interest Group on Creativity in the MFL classroom.



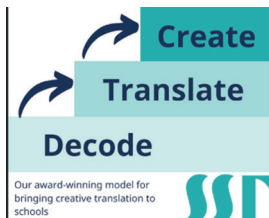
Following our talk on creativity in the MFL classroom session at the Language Show in November 2024, we felt it was time to bring practitioners together to think about creativity and authenticity in languages lessons. So, our Special Interest Group [SIG] for Creativity in MFL was born.

Defining authenticity and creativity within the context of the Languages classroom is essential to make sense of what we are exploring in this group. Echoing the definitions of Widdowson (2003), Gilmore (2007) and Morrow (1977), we define 'authentic' language as 'a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort' (Morrow p98).

And our understanding of **creativity** encompasses these competencies:

- constructive curiosity
- open-mindedness, flexibility and lateral thinking
- exploring the imagination by generating new ideas and content, and
- problem-solving.

(Education Scotland commissioned a review on the connection between creativity and learning; in his paper Collard (2016) highlights these competencies of creativity as a means to stimulate the executive functions of the brain.)



Stephen Spender Trust model for Creative Translation

**Hör zu**

A very limited portion of the start of WW1 outbreak killed King Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845-1886)

**Sadler (11/14)**

Am Abend (1888) Wittern, die goldenen Beeren  
Und blickten Sehen, darüber die Sonne  
Daher (1888) umlagert die Nacht  
Barbarische (1888) die wilde (1888)  
Ihr antworteten (1888)  
Doch (1888) (1888) im (1888)  
Rufen (1888) (1888) (1888) (1888)  
Die (1888) (1888) (1888) (1888)  
Alle (1888) (1888) (1888) (1888)  
Unter (1888) (1888) (1888) (1888)  
La (1888) (1888) (1888) (1888)  
Zu (1888) (1888) (1888) (1888)  
Und (1888) (1888) (1888) (1888)  
O (1888) (1888) (1888) (1888)  
Die (1888) (1888) (1888) (1888)  
Die (1888) (1888) (1888) (1888)

~Geroa (1888)

What do you notice about the poem?

What do you think the poem might be about?

Ms Howarth's Year 10 creative translation using phonics as a scaffold before using glossaries

Objectives of the group:

- To collate and disseminate information about current research, policy documents and practitioner advice for the use of authentic resources, literature and media in the MFL classrooms
- To conduct a small-scale action research project to explore how teachers and secondary school students are currently using authentic resources to develop fluency, problem solving skills and literacy skills
- To collate and share good practice
- To work with partnership schools and trusts to develop good practice
- To publish best practice and resources to share with the wider community of MFL teachers

Initially we created a Padlet for the members of the group to highlight current barriers to creativity and opportunities for creative curriculum planning. Their responses highlighted three strands:

- Workload and lack of time or expertise for non-specialists to find and adapt authentic resources effectively for their classes
- Curriculum Content and lack of time at Key Stage 3 and 4 to add authenticity and creativity in lessons
- School systems and policies on prescribed methodologies to ensure consistency.

The group then decided to look for opportunities to inject creative ideas into lesson planning without reinventing the wheel, with these watchwords:

- Developing resilience and self-motivation
- The importance of positive routines to set the tone for creativity (building on prior knowledge to introduce authentic and creative content)
- Incidental and positive use of target language to build resilience
- Scaffolding for accessibility (using glossaries and sentence builders to develop problem-solving skills)
- Building confidence through phonics and performance in target language in groups or pairs
- Using videos and films to consolidate learning and bring authenticity
- Developing curriculum sequences, and planning resources embedding creativity instead of it being added on

**Kirikou**

Objetif : Je peux apprécier la richesse culturelle du monde francophone

DO NOW: choose the correct answer for each question

1) Écoutez cette musique - de quel continent vient-elle?  
a. L'Europe  
b. L'Asie  
c. L'Afrique  
d. L'Amérique du Nord

2) Regardez ce village - où est-il situé?  
a. En Angleterre  
b. Au Sénégal  
c. En France  
d. Au Canada

3) Regardez ce petit garçon - comment s'appelle-t-il?  
a. Il s'appelle Kirikou  
b. Il s'appelle Kirikou  
c. Il s'appelle Kirikou  
d. Il s'appelle Kirikou

4) Regardez cette femme - comment est-elle à ton avis?  
a. Elle semble sympathique  
b. Elle a l'air méchante  
c. Elle est gentille  
d. Elle paraît riche

(Fig 3: M. Tournier, J Claro Year 7 End of Year film project after Language Festival)

**Un hombre sin cabeza - Armando José Sequera**

Un hombre sin cabeza  
no puede usar sombrero.  
Pero éste no es su mayor problema:  
no puede pensar,  
no puede leer,  
no puede cantar,  
no puede comer  
No puede escuchar,  
no puede entender,  
que para amar y besar  
cabeza se ha de tener.  
Y como tiene dos pares de ojos  
mira de frente y baja la mirada  
todo al mismo tiempo  
y no nos enteramos.

**Ayuda**

Hombre = man  
Cabeza = head  
No puede = cannot  
Este = this  
Mayor = main  
Pensar = think  
Entender = hear  
Amar = love  
Besar = kiss  
Se ha de tener - we must have  
Pares = pairs  
De frente y baja - in front of and below  
No enteramos = we learnt

St Mary's University Poetry Live competition: year 8 Spanish performing a poem in target language after using the Stephen Spender Trust model of creative translation (Ms Claro)

The student and teacher voice that we have gathered so far is full of examples of engagement and enjoyment on both sides; it's clear that the teachers have as much fun as their students, when engaging creatively with authentic material.

So, 25 years after my PGCE it seems that Mr. Goodman was right after all: the solution to the drying pipeline of linguists lies in engagement between people, and with culture.

Creativity has its place in the Languages classroom, not only because of its motivational elements but because cognitively it offers new dimensions to language learning beyond the exam specifications and mark schemes. Graham et al. in their Creative Multilingualism: A Manifesto (2020) summarise why language teachers consider creativity important in their lessons, because it offers perspectives and skills that go way beyond GCSE and A-Level grades:

*'We have argued for classroom activities that give opportunities for these experiences, introduce an element of unexpectedness and unpredictability and stimulate imagination and its related characteristic, empathy.' (p166)*

We are currently integrating the initial group into a formal ALL Special Interest Group and readers will be able to engage and join in future projects, announced through the usual ALL routes. The ALL web area is: <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/about/community/special-interest-groups/>

A longer version of this article, along with fuller references is available here: <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/languages-today/languages-today-extra-content/>

Languages for all: <https://www.languagesforall.org/home>

Creative Multilingualism: A Manifesto <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0206>

More on Poetry Live here - in the green box: <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/news-events/challenges-and-competitions/>

Other active ALL SIGs include those for ITET (teacher educators / trainers), Subject Leaders and De-colonising the Primary / Secondary curriculum.