

How to teach modern languages – and survive!

## MODERN LANGUAGES IN PRACTICE

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**MODERN LANGUAGES IN PRACTICE 17**

Series Editor: Michael Grenfell

# **How to teach modern languages – and survive!**

Jan Pleuger

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**To Gilbert, who inspired me,  
Maggie Léglise, Christian Lhoumeau and Juan**

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## *Introduction*

This is not a book for the teacher of 'high-flyers'. Teaching them languages could not be easier. It is for the teacher of average pupils of any age, but especially those working in large classes in ordinary state schools. I have written mainly about Key Stage 3 and 4, with a nod to A-level here and there, but most of these ideas can be applied to learners at any stage, including adults. For simplicity I have used French as my example, but of course such methods can be used to teach any language.

These practical strategies are aimed principally at reducing both pupil and teacher anxiety. (The two are, of course, closely linked.) They were laboriously arrived at by me, during a long career in modern language teaching, spanning the whole revolution which took place in the last 20 years – the introduction of 'a foreign language for all' (trauma), 'mixed ability language teaching' (more trauma), and the arrival of the National Curriculum (almost terminal trauma). They may not work for you.

The last twenty years has been an exciting time in the language teaching profession. Once upon a time, long ago, it was a tranquil affair, involving only the most academic and well-motivated pupils, who would work industriously on long lists of dry vocabulary and intrinsically meaningless grammar exercises. All this had to change, and it did. With the advent of 'a language for all' (pupils no longer allowed to vote with their feet at age fourteen), we had to turn our attention for the first time to 'motivation'. There was no alternative. A few years later, in came 'mixed ability languages' (no setting), which concentrated our minds on new methods once again: this time it was 'differentiation'. We coped. The final trauma was the introduction of the famous National Curriculum (mountains of paperwork, assessment and centralisation), which, struggle as we might, could only mitigate against both our recent allies, 'motivation' and 'differentiation' (not to mention teachers' free time).

We rose to these challenges magnificently, calling on the many resources of modern technology which for the first time became available to us. We were buffeted by the winds of constant change and the flurry of meetings with county advisors. Courses became a way of life. We re-thought our philosophy over and over again to suit the latest trends. But we battled through. The examination system was re-modelled, our teaching methods were transformed and our classrooms became friendlier and more motivating places.

There remains doubt, however, about the success of foreign language teaching in

## *Introduction*

this country. As our ties with Europe grow stronger, why do so many students give up languages at sixteen? Why do A-level entries decline, and degree courses have fewer applicants? This despite statistics in 1999 showing that modern language graduates have lower unemployment rates than all others, including Maths and Science.<sup>1</sup> A glimmer of hope has appeared on the horizon following the increase in numbers opting to study languages post-16, after the introduction of the 4–5 subject AS level in the year 2000. But, of those who do graduate, fewer are choosing teaching as a career, and large PGCE cash bonuses have had to be introduced by the government in order to entice students of shortage subjects into teaching. What does all this imply for the future of modern languages in our schools?

There are many possible reasons for Britain's lamentable performance in foreign language learning. The growing importance of English as a world language and on the Internet may have lead to feelings of complacency, and the dominance of US culture around the world poses no challenge to us linguistically. The global popularity of a largely English-speaking entertainment industry has motivated young people abroad to learn English, whilst native speakers have no such incentive to learn European languages. Our students are also at a disadvantage in the priority given to foreign languages in our school system. Most schoolchildren in Europe begin learning English sooner, and devote more hours of the timetable to it thereafter, than schoolchildren in Britain devote to foreign languages. This island population, with its history of empire, has always rather felt that other countries should be learning its language and not vice-versa. America has continued this theme. How dominant would the English language now be if Columbus had colonised North as well as South America? Being an island may also have been a factor. It is possible that we have not been genetically programmed to pick up many languages, as have those groups who for centuries lived at the great crossroads of Europe and with many neighbours.

Entry into the European Community was supposed to change all this, and perhaps may do so in the future. These things take time. But we are still receiving many children into the ML classroom who do not see the point of learning the new subject and have to be motivated by the teacher. We are thus in a different position from the teacher of Maths, Science and English, and must provide, where there is little intrinsic motivation, extrinsic incentive to learn.

I firmly believe that the key to successful language teaching is the enthusiasm of the ML teacher her/himself. However, when I started teaching I found that love of my subject and the desire to communicate that love to my pupils was not enough. Nor was humour, light-heartedness, knowledge of the learning process, respect for the difficulties of that process or affection for young people. Indeed, some of these could be counter-productive. My work was stressful because I was having to try too hard in terms of time and energy to get things across to my classes, who were not sufficiently interested. I began to have feelings of failure. It was stressful for them



## Introduction

too. We were engaged in a rather dismal dance, in which I tried to make them do what they didn't want to do, and they resisted. They became either bored or resentful. In short, they did not want to learn what I was offering.

What I really needed, and did not have, were *practical* techniques for expressing my enthusiasm and engaging theirs. Which activities would make the foreign language interesting, enjoyable and relevant, and which would not? What would suit my particular style of teaching, and also the particular style of learning of each class? I wanted to give children a sense of mastery, and control over their own learning – how was that to be brought about? How were learners of every conceivable range of ability to be kept working together at their own pace, without being bored, and at the same time stretching the high-flyers? Which is more valuable – enthusiasm or ability? What ways could I find to interest individuals in independent learning? Can they be forced to do homework? In what ways can slow or reluctant workers be motivated to go on, and to improve?

What about co-operative effort, and using the various talents of pupils to benefit the class as a whole? Could the strong be induced to help the weaker students? Could those who struggled achieve the same satisfaction as the high-achievers? And what about competition – can there be competition without demoralisation? Is it possible to pay equal attention to everyone in the class, including the 'quiet ones' (who sometimes believe that the teacher does not speak to them very often because he/she does not like them!). Was I any good at relating to parents, and did it matter? In what ways was I going to bring the foreign country into the classroom and vice versa? How could I achieve my aims for learning whilst at the same time making my classroom a safe place where 'failure' was allowed, as a normal step along the road to success, and learners would feel secure because they were being valued for what they were and not for what they knew? And most of all, how could I fill my classes with enthusiasm and maintain that enthusiasm over the years?

Over many years, I learnt that successful language learning only takes place when tasks are brought within the scope of the learner, and when rewards and achievement are built into every activity. But it is far from obvious how this is to be done. Below are some of the practical techniques I have used with children of all ages and abilities. When parents come into school on parents' evening and ask how it is that their child actually *likes* French, and 'can do it too', as they themselves never could, you know that you must be doing something right. I hope these ideas will prove as useful to you as they have to me.

### Note

1. Footitt, H. (2000) Losing our tongues just when we need them. *Guardian Higher Education*, 1st February 2000, 3H.

## Chapter 1

### *Keeping sane*

Q Becoming a teacher of modern languages – why do we do it?

Q ML teaching – easy option or nightmare?

Q How to cope with the four skills

Q Where do feelings of failure come from?

Q What is the secret of success?

A It is the only available career which really appeals to you, and you have no idea what will be involved

A Far more difficult than you expected, but also far more rewarding

A Break down your tasks into simple units with which you can feel secure

A Trying to do too much too soon

A Retaining the enthusiasm of your learners

#### **In at the deep end!**

Welcome to the modern language teaching profession! For some years now you have enjoyed travelling to the sunnier climes of Europe, and imbibing the fruit of the vine (there is no avoiding it!) You have admired the style and verve of the unEnglish, and cannot deny that you have picked up a little of their eloquence and elegance yourself. As a result you have come to feel that your true vocation may lie in this area. But you have a problem. At last the hour you have long dreaded has arrived – graduation. Your student loan has reached unheard of proportions and neither the state nor Daddy will support you in your chosen way of life a moment longer. Decision time has arrived – you must leave the groves of academe and find a job.

#### **Air stewardess or translator?**

You have dismissed the idea of becoming an air stewardess or steward (how old is too old?), or a tour representative (adore package tours?). You would really love to do translating or interpreting (bilingual or a genius?) and highly paid secretarial work is tempting (speak two foreign languages and like offices?). Somehow you are not quite suited to any of these. So what remains? Well, as your mother used to say, ‘there is always teaching’. Suddenly, you look at teaching in a different way and it begins to assume a rosy glow. Yes, you had left school vowing never to go back, but wait a minute, what about those long holidays and early afternoon departures? The teacher friend you have in France who spends every

afternoon on his surf board? Permanent contact with the foreign country you love, and all those free school trips? The respectful hush in the classroom and those eager faces looking up at you, yearning to be filled with knowledge? And, best of all, sitting on the other side of the desk at parents' evenings – revenge at last? You quite like children, they quite like you, so why not teach them French, Spanish, Italian or German? What could be easier? After all, this is a profession where you start with many years experience at the receiving end, so it's obvious that you know how it's done. In no time at all you will have the whole class rattling away like native speakers!

### **First encounter with the National Curriculum**

When you arrive at your first school, however, you find it is not quite as you imagined. You find that you are not, after all, going to do your own thing. A considerable shock awaits you. You are introduced to that great national monument: 'The National Curriculum'! This document strikes fear into the heart of the boldest of readers. There are also frightening things called SATS, regular national tests to reveal exactly what your class has (or has not!) learnt, and something else you had forgotten all about – classes of bored children! Even, yes, children who do not like French, Spanish, Italian or German and have no desire whatsoever to learn them. It is hard to imagine, and it is not what you had expected. At first sight, you are discouraged by the enormity of the task before you. But do not fear, this is a normal reaction. What could be more natural? Teaching languages is not an easy option, and you are beginning to find that out. Language learning is divided into four areas, and the skills required for each are all quite different. Not only do they vary greatly in difficulty but each one requires completely different teaching methods.

### **Keep calm**

Do not be afraid, all is not lost. The good old National Curriculum, scourge of teachers who were in schools during the early nineties, need no longer fill you with dismay and feelings of inadequacy. Its complexity was beyond human comprehension, and I am proud to say that I lived through the introduction of the original document, which divided up language teaching into myriad tasks of unbelievable complexity, all written down in excruciating detail using almost incomprehensible prose. Thanks to the teacher troops who went over the top before you, and their vociferous protests, the new and modified NC slipped quietly in with the new millennium, and is a considerably simplified document. Don't worry about it. Just find out from your co-ordinator how it is interpreted in your school (because all is in the interpretation), and get on with it.

### **Taking the bull by the horns**

Ignore the National C. for the moment, but don't forget to keep your eye on the ball. What is the ball in language teaching, you might well ask? The ball, I'm afraid, is examination success. That is what you will be judged on, what your school will be judged on and what you will have to have in mind from the earliest years. The four skills to be examined will be listening, speaking, reading and writing. In real life, all the skills are learned together in an interconnected jumble, but in the classroom, you have to be aware of each separately. It's simpler therefore to divide your teaching task into these four areas from the beginning. Ask yourself exactly what has to be learned in order to be proficient in each of the four areas:

- (1) *Listening and responding* = lots of practice in listening to tape recordings of authentic French and answering questions about them. Main problem: finding sufficiently easy material at the right speed for the first year or two.
- (2) *Speaking* = memorising and repeating fluently some common conversations. Main problem: motivation.
- (3) *Reading and responding* = learning a wide range of new words (including different parts of the verb). Main problem: avoiding boredom.
- (4) *Writing* = memorising and writing, with correct spelling if possible, some simple material e.g. a short letter. Main problem: many children cannot achieve this in their own language, let alone a foreign one ...

### **You are not Hercules**

I have enjoyed working with foreign language teachers both here and abroad and I have found them on the whole to be, like me, a conscientious lot. I suppose learning to speak a second language involves a touch of perfectionism in the first place. To be done successfully it must be done correctly, and with a good eye for detail. Chemistry teachers do not expect every pupil to become a chemist, but second language teachers really do want every pupil to speak good German, Spanish or whatever. This expectation sometimes creates extra tension in the learning process, raised teacher blood pressure, and debilitating feelings of failure. These feelings of failure stem from:

#### ***The three common delusions of the beginning ML teacher:***

- (1) Children want to learn the language you want to teach them.
- (2) Learning a foreign language is easy.
- (3) All you need is a good coursebook.

### **A learner teacher in a no-win situation**

I began teaching with no teacher training whatsoever and therefore underwent a long period of probation. Part of the probation procedure involved the headmaster

standing outside my door and listening to what was going on inside! A somewhat riotous atmosphere had developed, as tended to happen, inexplicably, to my lessons in those days. My headmaster was a gentle and kind man, and naturally concerned. He enquired in a well-meaning sort of way, what exactly I had been doing at the time of his inspection. I explained to him innocently that I had been writing out on the blackboard the difference between the Perfect and the Imperfect tense, with examples and questions, the whole of which they were supposed to be copying into their exercise books. I could not understand his raised eyebrows. This was a Year 10 class, what could be more useful, essential even, for them to learn? The fact that they were not listening, learning (or doing) anything at all, had escaped my idealistic notice. I was too busy imparting knowledge. Aside from issues of class control (!), this was the moment of my first, and most important realisation – you can only teach learners what they want to learn.

### **You can reduce your stress levels**

If you are working with mixed ability classes, accept from the start the fact that you are not going to be able to teach all the things on our skills list to *all* the children. Divide the learning load up into what you can realistically hope to achieve, and do not try to teach everything to everyone. Some will never learn to spell in French, some will never write well or at all. You are not to blame. This is not to do with good or bad teaching, it is to do with the innate ability of the child in those particular areas. Always bear in mind that a child is unlikely to be able to do in French what he cannot do in his native language. The different levels of exam paper allow for these ability gaps, and setting will hopefully transform the situation in Years 10 and 11. So do not worry too much about writing for the first two years, and concentrate on what the class *can* do. Do not discourage yourself and do not discourage the children.

### **Beware of ‘old fogies’**

The staffroom is a very important place for you, especially when you are new and lack confidence. This is the place where you will forge your identity, and where you must acquire most of your information and feedback. Assemblies and department meetings are not enough. Listen and you will find out how the school works. Most of your colleagues will be supportive, especially those in your own department. But never assume everyone will be on your side. As in any other group, each staffroom has its quota of individuals with personality problems. If snide comments are made, ignore them, and don't take it personally. Within a day or two you will have picked up which are the colleagues you can learn from and work with, and which are not. You will also quickly identify who are the ‘old fogies’. These are the people who have been at the school since time immemorial. They can be of use on matters of information such as where were surplus tape recorders stored before the

inspection of '89, or how do you get keys for the store cupboards in your room, but ignore any comments they have to make on teaching methods. Their teaching methods will be as prehistoric as their careers. If one of them should start to mutter in the staffroom about yours, just remind yourself, silently of course, of their doleful French classes, and remember the lack of enthusiasm or achievement they engender by their noble pursuit of 'high standards'.

### **Simplification is everything**

Around you in the staffroom you will notice teachers with a wild-eyed look. Say nothing – it is from too much reading of the National Curriculum. Take care not to become one of them. Just think of it like this – the class has four or more years to acquire the following, in order of difficulty:

- (1) a large store of new words;
- (2) recognition of new words by hearing only;
- (3) fluency in common conversations;
- (4) spelling of new words;
- (5) ability to write from memory some simple material.

Let's narrow this down even further. For the first two years you can safely ignore the last two requirements. So you have only three main areas to address from the beginning. This is reassuring. Of course, there still remains the problem of the sheer volume of material to be covered, but that is not where your real difficulty lies. As a new teacher, your most challenging task is not the passing on of knowledge. If this is the only thing you have in mind, and if you dedicate your teaching time to it, you will be disappointed far more than you are satisfied, and your lessons will be dispirited affairs. You will find that learning is not taking place as you had hoped, in fact some children will be wasting their time. Only the bright few will be achieving anything.

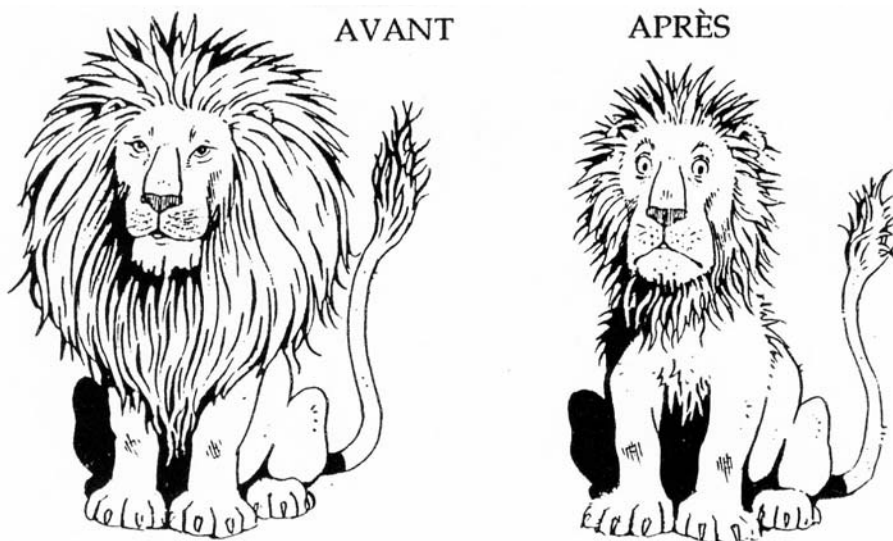
### **You are on your own**

What you have to do is to harness your own enthusiasm into finding ways in which to engage, and retain, the initial enthusiasm of the beginner. And there is only one way of doing so – by providing success and enjoyment in all your learning activities. And only you can do this. I have suffered from a common delusion throughout my teaching life. It is to do with coursebooks. It is particularly strong whenever a new course is introduced by one of the language publishers. The delusion consists of a belief that the new course will provide *everything* that my classes need for successful learning. Looking at the expensive, brightly coloured new coursebook, full of cartoons and quizzes and puzzles, you may know the feeling: how can I fail? Many of the latest courses use humour to good effect and have a splendid variety of materials and activities, attractive layout and beautifully

coloured illustrations. (Visit the Centre for Information on Language Teaching in Covent Garden<sup>1</sup> *before you buy anything* – you can see it all there). They have an air of gaiety and promise about them too, which is vital. But they are not enough. All is in how the teacher uses them. You will find this from the very first page. The most entertaining coursebook can be as dull as ditchwater with a dull teacher, and they cannot inspire a class which does not want to learn. Only you can do that. A course like this can be an important, even an essential, aid but in the end, you can rely on no-one but yourself to create the atmosphere of excitement and interest which will keep your classes learning over the long term. Before we go on to think about teaching methods which will achieve this, let's think about what I consider to be one of the main causes of lack of enjoyment in modern language learning – anxiety.

### ***Note to Chapter 1***

1. The Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, 20 Bedfordbury, Covent Garden, London WC2N 4LB. Tel. 020 7379 5082.



The National Curriculum is unveiled, 1992



## Chapter 2

# Creating confidence

- Q Does speaking in a foreign language come easily?
- Q If fear of failure is normal, how can we get rid of it?
- Q What does an anxiety-free first lesson for any age group look like?
- Q Is homework fun?
- Q Is homework assessment always possible?
- Q Apart from thumbscrews, what techniques can be used to extract work from homework defaulters?
- A Most of us find speaking to an audience intimidating, even in our own language
- A By making sure the task is within their grasp
- A Give them a very short speech act, attractively presented, and lots of practice
- A I have not yet found a way to make homework fun. Other things are always more fun. Please write to me if you have!
- A It has to be as constant and inescapable as the sword of doom. It is the only way to actually get homework done by *all*
- A After one chance to catch up at home, it must be done at school *in their own time*

### **Anxiety – the demon of foreign language learning**

Even confident adults find speaking in front of others difficult. Ask any best man. To speak in a new and strange language is even more intimidating. Children dread it. This is a perfectly natural reaction and one of the main reasons learners 'don't like French!'. It is your first and most important task to reduce this anxiety, and there are many ways in which it can be done. Firstly, have a friendly chat with the class before any teaching and share their anxiety. Make it clear that what they are feeling is normal. Then point out that we are all born with an innate speaking ability which varies from person to person and is not under our control. It can be developed, obviously, but with wide differences in effort needed. Some will find it easier to learn to speak a foreign language than others, just as some are born better performers at athletics or music. They will easily accept this idea, and be relieved. Perfection is not expected after all! Tell them that some will learn a lot, some less. Speaking ability is not a matter of intelligence. Make sure they understand that the speaking ability we already have when we approach a new language is to do with how well we speak in our own, which in turn depends on how much we have spoken, and been spoken to, in our lives so far. To achieve a good



standard, all we have to do is practice. Remove the idea of failure. Fear of failure is the main reason learners hold back from speaking in a new language.

### **Achieving high standards?**

You may fear that if you do not insist on 'high standards' (e.g. perfect pronunciation and intonation) none will be achieved. Don't worry. You will find that 'standards' have a way of looking after themselves. Does this sound ludicrously optimistic? I'm afraid it may, yet the fact is that I noticed quite early in my teaching career that children have a built in desire to *get things right*. They always know when they are not getting it right and do not need to be told. Criticism will not lead to improvement, nor will it motivate them, quite the opposite. They are their own best critics, and will strive for good results, provided that the task is within their grasp. In my opinion, the second most important skill you can bring to teaching (I have mentioned the first in Chapter 1), is the ability to construct tasks which are achievable by the learner, whatever their level of competence. Not only must they be achievable, they must be immediately seen by the learner to be so. In this way, initial anxiety is relieved and the task will be approached with enthusiasm. You will have noticed how coursebooks with an explanatory and instructional style which is above the level of some of the readers (especially if it is in the target language) can inhibit them to the extent that they are convinced from the start that they 'can't do it' and therefore cannot. Confidence may not always be restored by teacher intervention. To begin with, a small card with an even smaller amount of writing on it provides a very safe and easy-to-achieve task which will boost confidence and enable them to attack the work with enthusiasm. Remember also that they will help each other to achieve, if the climate is right. You can create that climate.

### **Creating the right climate**

After your talk, address their anxiety by going straight into a first speaking task. It must be pairwork, so that they can support one another, easily achievable at their level, and not more than two lines each. A simple 'hello' conversation suited to their age, written by them on card which they will keep as part of a collection. Why on card, you may be asking? Isn't that rather a lot of trouble and expense to be going to? Definitely not. Children *love* cards (as any parent in the grip of the Pokemon craze will tell you). I say 'children', but there is no age limit to their appeal. Young ones like to handle them, decorate them, show them, hoard them; older ones like their permanence, the way they can be individualised and organised, perhaps using IT. As their collection increases they will come to value it in a way they do not value what they write in an exercise book. Not only will they be able to take the cards home to work on, they will have visible proof of what they have learnt. Year 5 learners will be proud to show their family what they can do. Most will be challenged to make their cards attractive. (Who wants to have a box full of scruffy cards?)

### **Why bother?**

Of course, all these things can also be done with an exercise book, but only in theory. Children do not care about exercise books in the way they care about cards. This is another of those inexplicable facts of life we just have to accept. Try and have brightly coloured card, which the younger children will enjoy decorating and making attractive (and not only the younger ones either). And remember that these cards will be around long after old exercise books have hit the bin. Making and decorating them can be a form of relaxation, one of the frequent 'rest breaks' which can relieve the tension, and contribute to the enjoyment, of your lessons. Make it your practice, whenever you sense a feeling of staleness or lack of interest in the room, to change to another activity. This is very important, as a means of maintaining interest and motivation *for all*. If even one member of the group is not involved, regard yourself as failing, and move on.

### **The perils of homework**

Before they begin to copy the card, begin working on it in ways outlined in Chapter 14: 'Speaking', and when both card and pronunciation are ready, ask them to take them home to practice. Suggest they enlist the help of family members if possible. The family will probably be interested in the early stages, and their involvement can be a great help to the learner, even if their knowledge of the particular language is nil. What fun to teach your mother a few words of Italian or French! Next lesson, begin assessing what they have achieved. Let them practice the conversation in pairs whilst you go round the room giving them a mark between 5 and 10, no lower. Do not start marking until a pair has volunteered that they are ready. It is never a good idea to start reviewing homework from cold, as many who actually did make an effort to learn their card, will have forgotten with the passage of time, and need a moment to remind themselves of it. Like gymnastics, the brain needs a warm-up. One day's exposure to new material is *never* enough. This method of checking homework avoids anxiety – you are not performing 'in public', and creates a sense of achievement – you do get a reasonable mark which takes into account effort as well as achievement. If you feel that there has been no effort to be rewarded, treat the pair as homework defaulters. But beware, there is one thing you have to watch with this otherwise admirable system of marking – your attention. Because you are attending to individual pairs, the system can only work if every child is involved in an activity of some sort. Those who finish first must always have something to do – ideas later (Chapter 8: 'Working independently').

### **What to do when the budgie dies or granddad eats the card**

The reasons children conjure up for not doing homework are wild and wonderful to hear, and can brighten your whole day. They are a constant source of amusement in the staffroom and recounting them is an easy way of gaining prestige. The two I mention

above are almost pedestrian, as they were invented by me and my adult imagination, but they reflect the general flavour. There will always be one or more of your class who have not done their homework. It is another of those unaccountable facts of teaching life. Or could it just be human nature? Do not feel responsible in any way. Learn to live with it. Teachers have been known to lose their tempers entirely with particular offenders, resorting to an ever-escalating scale of punishments. They find themselves supervising double-treble-quadruple detentions (no-one else will!) and the whole thing becomes a personal struggle. That way madness lies. Your function is not to punish or to berate, but to *get it done*. Every piece of learning not done is a step on the road to failure. If they claim something has befallen the original (and this is a strong favourite), give them a new blank card and decree that it must be completed and learnt for the next lesson. They will of course have no mark to be entered in their record book – which does not please their sense of symmetry. If they do not comply then you must bring on the big guns – valuable break time (theirs, not yours) given up to do the learning. Let them stand outside the staffroom or wherever suits you, but don't feel obliged to supervise them. You will be surprised how rapidly learning can take place when friends are waiting in the playground. This strategy should be embarked on more in sorrow than in anger on your part. Describe it as their own choice, not yours, and arrange for classmate help if they are having problems. Never allow undone homework to take up *your* time.

### **Time is too valuable to do homework**

If you intend it to be done, every piece of homework must be marked. Learners have a natural disposition to regard homework as some sort of inconsequential add-on extra. They have no natural incentive to complete it. I think the reasoning goes something like this: it is not done at school, therefore it is of no importance. It can only be a personal whim of the teacher, or revenge for the suffering they endured in their own schooldays. Speaking homework is an even more outrageous imposition. Every child knows in its bones that 'speaking' cannot be a task in itself, and is of no importance in any other subject. Therefore it is down to you to provide the incentive to strive, and an excellent way to supply this is by assessment: unavoidable and relentless assessment.

### **Where on earth is the time to come from?**

The logistics of listening to 30 individuals speak whilst at the same time maintaining supervision of the group are formidable. It is a time-consuming business. How can you devote great chunks of your time to listening to pairwork without taking your eyes off the rest of the class? There are several ways to approach this. Having children out to your desk whilst the class gets on with something else is an obvious way and has the advantage that you can see the whole group more easily. But it is a great embarrassment to less-than-perfect performers. No-one is ever so involved in their work that they do not listen to other peoples' oral efforts, with