

Do you speak

M A N G L I S H ?

TEACHER AND AUTHOR LISA JANE ASHES OUTLINES HER VISION FOR A COHESIVE APPROACH TO THE SECONDARY CURRICULUM THAT GIVES STUDENTS A REAL REASON TO LEARN...

Finding out that England is 22nd out of 24 countries for levels of literacy and numeracy is embarrassing, perhaps – but not surprising. There have been many strategies over the years to put right this wrong, yet despite all attempts, figures would suggest that we are still on a downward spiral. MAnghish is not another strategy, nor is it a quick fix. It is an approach to secondary school teaching that asks teachers to collaborate for the success of every child in their school. Currently, MAnghish is still a vision of how things could be; my ambition is to show all schools that, through collaboration, understanding and careful planning, we can overcome the dogma that haunts our classrooms and change secondary education to ensure the successful future of all our students.

MAnghish started as a nickname for the vision that I am about to describe. The idea

came to me as I was asked to reform our Key Stage 3 curriculum. The aim was to ensure that all departments were planning to meet the latest version of the Ofsted criteria (2011). As the school's only AST and with no literacy coordinator (yet), I was asked to develop schemes of work to weave in reading, writing, communication and maths across the curriculum. Work began with English and maths, mapping what we were going to teach, how and when we were going to teach it. Following that, I met with all other departments one by one and, as we mapped out their year, my eyes began to open.

Looking at the curriculum from this great height, being able to see everything that a Key Stage 3 child was about to experience, it occurred to me how disjointed things really were. The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 was revolutionary. For the first time, every pupil was entitled to an

education that would open his or her eyes to the possibilities of a world beyond factory life. It was easier than ever for 'Average Joe' to reach for his dreams. However, this also marked the start of league tables and exam culture. The expectation that all children must succeed in all areas of the National Curriculum has created insular subject specialists, and the fear of failure closes doors to literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, especially in Key Stage 3.

The typical secondary curriculum is now made up of many subjects, each giving around an hour's worth of content before booting out the child to walk on into the next, unrelated session. Subjects separated only by plasterboard can often seem a million miles away from one another in content. Five times a day for five days of the week, our children are going from one unrelated lesson to another, having their brains crammed full. Students who enjoy learning new things may thrive but imagine the students who find every lesson a struggle.

Memories of my own school experience began emerging; back then, mathematics appeared to be a waste of my time. I did not see the point in anything the teacher was trying to fit into my mind, often asking for a point to this boring, irrelevant, hard work. The reply was always the same, "to pass your exam!" I didn't feel the need to have a qualification in mathematics at that age and so the teacher was subject to my disengaged misbehaviour. When I later decided to become a teacher, suddenly I needed a mathematics GCSE. Lo and behold, the information went in and I passed. I was never "rubbish at it" as I had often proclaimed; I simply had not found the point that would engage me in learning. It is important to note that I excelled in design technology. I never saw the link between maths and the measurements and data analysis that I carried out as part of this course. Even after taking DT at A level, I would still happily proclaim my ineptitude at mathematics while practising it effortlessly in this seemingly unrelated subject.

A curriculum that has been organised by teachers who think in MAnghish finds the point in reading, writing, communication and maths through collaboration to recognise existing links. Teachers create resources that allow



pupils to apply learning from English and mathematics across the whole curriculum. Subjects remain separate in content but barriers are broken down as pupils use content and skills that are relevant to all areas of learning. As part of the aforementioned Key Stage 3 reformation, resources such as GAP SPLITT planning mats for writing were created in communication with all teachers. English teachers explicitly taught pupils how to use the resource and teachers of all other subjects referred to it when expecting written tasks in their own lessons. Teachers noted that using this simple resource meant that the quality of writing outside of English lessons increased as pupils recalled and applied literacy skills across the curriculum. A simple but effective link had been created.

A literacy and numeracy coordinator was appointed not long after this and I had to return to my own role in school. However, I could not stop there. Ever since, I have been planning, creating and practising as much as possible without stepping on any toes. Writing all of my ideas and actions down, 'MAnGLISH' the book was born, in which I demonstrate how, through careful organisation of the curriculum and creation of cross curricular resources, all teachers can support literacy and numeracy without reinventing the wheel or shoehorning in things that take away from their own subject specific content. The links that are created when designing a MAnGLISH curriculum allow learners to stay focused on the subject they are studying but also enable them to practise the skills taught to them by English and maths specialists.

MAnGLISH reminds teachers that pupils are the future citizens of our country and not numbers on a spread sheet. It also allows teachers to see how supporting reading, writing, communication and maths throughout pupils' secondary years will lead to examination success but also to success beyond the exam as they are able to see the relevance of developing literacy and numeracy skills. Can a student of art gain an A* without the reading skill of analysis? Surely an understanding of ratio and proportion is also required? How can a student in geography reflect upon their findings without the skill of report writing? Don't they analyse data and interpret graphs when exploring population? How can we develop articulate pupils that can voice their opinions, concerns and learning to us without first developing the skill of



communication? What we must remember is that many of us are so good at integrating these skills in our own subject that we often forget that they are there. If we want to ensure that are students have transferrable literacy and numeracy skills, we must work together to ensure that they are developed.

Recently, I discussed these thoughts with a teacher who said, "What can I do about it? I'm only a teacher and I do as I am told." How many people reading this will feel the same? I too am 'only a teacher', a teacher who has had the opportunity to see the curriculum for what it is

right now and what it could potentially become. If you are only a teacher but you want to make a difference, you can! Speak to colleagues in English and mathematics, find out what is being taught and question your subject for purposeful links. Never tell pupils you are rubbish at maths. Instead, look for the maths in everything and celebrate it. Ask yourself, where is the maths in my subject? Where is the communication, the reading and the writing? If you are an individual, you can make a difference to the classes you teach; if you are a school leader, you could help me change the world.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lisa Jane Ashes is an experienced and successful English teacher, trainer and AST and takes a leading role in Continuing Professional Development at a secondary school in the North East of England. It was here that she developed the MAnGLISH curriculum; her innovative solution to the problems inherent in implementing whole school literacy at Key Stage 3. Her book, *MAnGLISH: Bringing Maths and English together across the curriculum*, is published by Independent Thinking Press.

