The new National Curriculum for Languages at KS3 (and KS2, for that matter) might appear quite daunting at first glance – but in fact, it affords educators a wonderful opportunity to teach with more freedom and creativity than ever before. With the old NC came levels and an obsessive desire to monitor and track pupil progress every two seconds. Some teachers have been so busy testing their learners that there has been little time for anything other than the ‘core’ i.e. vocabulary, grammar and structures, AfL and exam techniques. Now, however, there is a big emphasis on intercultural understanding, and a strong focus on literature, translation and dictation – all of which can inspire exciting and engaging lessons that students will both enjoy and remember.

**Cultural connections**

The new National Curriculum for Languages for KS3 states clearly in its opening Purpose of Study “Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high quality languages education should foster pupils’ curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world.” The message is loud and clear: teaching vocabulary and grammar and structures alone is no longer enough. Two of the three strands of the proposed new GCSE for Languages for 2016 also revolve around culture – this is very encouraging and shows some joined up thinking in action. Rather than treating intercultural understanding as an add on, therefore, teachers of languages are going to need to think about how they can incorporate some cultural input into every lesson they teach.

A simple example could be when teaching the topic of school. Learners could study the timetable of a pupil in a school on the French island of la Réunion, sourced quite effortlessly online. They could compare and contrast their daily routine looking for similarities and differences.

When teaching the topic of leisure, students could investigate typical games that children play in Latin American playgrounds and see how they compare with a UK playground.

For the topic of holidays the focus of a pupil-led research project could be to plan a trip to a German speaking country such as Switzerland or Austria with a maximum budget of €2000 for a family of four.

With careful thought and planning, perhaps with an emphasis on cross curricular links, most KS3 topics lend themselves to some cultural input. Where the text book does not offer helpful sources of cultural material, teachers can, with the help of the internet, source a wealth of authentic material to inspire their pupils.

**Telling tales**

The new National Curriculum for Languages at KS3 also states that pupils should “read literary texts in the language [...], to stimulate ideas, develop creative expression and expand understanding of the language and culture”. This, for me, is one of the most exciting new
Children love to receive letters and parcels and

Reaching out
School/year group?

This type of dictation task requires
preparation in the form of grapheme-phoneme
 correspondence instruction. Pupils’ phonemic
awareness is vital to the success of dictation
activities as pupils are required to use their
knowledge of letters and sounds to grapple
with new and unknown language. This again is
very much in line with the requirements
outlined in the new National Curriculum
for Languages at KS3 and suggestions made in the
most recent MFL Ofsted report from 2011.

According to Professor Mike Kelly
discussing language provision in the UK in a
newspaper article of September 2013: “Young
people are bored with describing their pets
and what they do at the weekend [...] You’ve
got to bear in mind that for 13-year-old kids,
when they’re making their subject choices,
their decision depends heavily on what they
enjoy studying.”

Including more intercultural understanding,
literature, and fun ways of incorporating
translation and dictation in MFL secondary
classrooms will certainly provide new and
creative ways of making language lessons more
stimulating and relevant. The ideas outlined in
this article, which link directly to the
expectations of the new National Curriculum
for Languages, appear to offer us some real
hope for the future.