

TECLA INTERVIEW

Original Spanish version is available on the Spanish Embassy Education Office website [here](#)



JOSÉ JIMÉNEZ SERRANO

Technical Adviser to the Spanish Embassy Education Office in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE FOR LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

In this issue of Tecla we have the pleasure of interviewing Emma Marsden and Rachel Hawkes, director and co-director of the National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy, NCELP.



Emma Marsden:

Professor of second language education in the Department of Education at the University of York. She began her career teaching French and Spanish and was Head of

Spanish in an 11-18 school in Derby. Emma has published over 50 articles and book chapters on research into language learning and teaching. Many of these focus on the learning and teaching of grammar and work at the interface of research and classroom practice. She is director of OASIS, IRIS, and co-author of *Second Language Learning Theories*. In 2015 she became Associate Journal Editor of "[Language Learning](#)", and has been the Journal Editor since 2019.



Rachel Hawkes:

Rachel Hawkes is co-director of NCELP managing the Centre together with Emma. She works across the 11 schools in The CAM Academy Trust, where she is Director of International

Education and Research and SLE for languages. She is a former President of ALL, and is author of several languages text books. She also has a PhD from the University of Cambridge, focusing on teacher and learner interaction in the secondary languages classroom.

TECLA INTERVIEW

necessary!) technical jargon. There is a danger that snippets of this filter through, and can be spread ‘scatter-gun’ style, bamboozling teachers with shiney terms that might seem appealing. But this work needs to be done carefully, and researchers need time and experience in synthesising and distilling the research that is likely to be most **relevant** for particular contexts, to express it in a way that is useful for people who don’t have the time, training, or incentive to read full research articles. My experiences on my PGCE and then working in schools and on policy advisory groups, along with data collected from teachers and teacher educators, demonstrated to me that there is so much interesting and useful research that could be disseminated more widely (and this is one reason my colleagues and I established OASIS <https://oasis-database.org>).

This, of course, doesn’t mean that research has some kind of one size fits all ‘answer’ – but it can help us to think about problems in a new way, evaluate the evidence, give us ideas about how to do things differently, be better informed about innovation, challenge our thinking, or reassure us that something that is already done is likely to be generalisable to other people or contexts. So, NCELP offered me the opportunity to share some findings from research more widely, but also to think about the kinds of studies that researchers should be doing more of or what they could be doing differently that would be more helpful to educators and policy-makers.

I was also inspired to work with NCELP because I would like more young people to enjoy languages, have positive experiences learning them, so that they want to learn more later in their lives, and are open to experiencing and understanding different cultures and ways of seeing the world. I also think that learning a language teaches you a lot about yourself and your own language too.

Perhaps most importantly, I was really keen to work with Rachel. NCELP offered me the chance to

¡Lucía y su familia ya están en el Carnaval de Tenerife! Lucía escucha a diferentes personas. ¿De dónde es cada persona, de Canarias / Latinoamérica o de España (Península y Baleares)?

Escribe la palabra con [ce], [ci] o [z] en la columna correcta. ¡Atención! En ocasiones hay dos palabras en una frase.

escuchar

	Canarias / Latinoamérica	España (Península y Baleares)
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

Carnaval de Santa Cruz de Tenerife

NCELP National Centre for Excellence in Language Learning

NCELP resource: listening activity on the Tenerife Carnival

work closely with an incredibly open-minded, smart, determined, and insightful individual, whose experiences and expertise seemed to complement my own really well. Together, and working with expert colleagues in a small network of schools, I was excited to see what we could do!

Rachel Hawkes (RH): My reasons for wanting to be involved with this project resonate with Emma’s although obviously our personal and professional experience differ. In my various teaching, leadership and training roles over the past 28 years the core motivation has been to share a love of languages and language learning with learners of all ages, and to inspire them to take their learning with them through life. Within the formal education system, an important part of this involves enabling students to be successful in their learning, including in national exams, and my colleagues and I in The Cam Academy Trust have dedicated ourselves to developing our classroom practice to make this a reality for students across the age and ability range. And we have seen success. Around 90% of our students take a language for GCSE and results are very strong. However, I was convinced that there was still room for improvement. Some of our learners would still hit a plateau, others would need what I describe as ‘above and beyond’ interventions at KS4 to keep them on track!

TECLA INTERVIEW

I had been very interested in research from the early 2000s, eventually completing a part-time PhD in 2012. When the opportunity arose to bring research and classroom practice closer together, I couldn't say 'no'! And to be honest, the past four years have been fairly mind-blowing; a rather sober recognition of much that I didn't know about language learning coupled with an exhilarating, non-stop learning experience. Emma and I enact (on a daily basis!) a synthesis of language research and teaching experience. Her deep knowledge of the field, as well as her ability to identify and elucidate meaningful connections between theory and practice are inspirational.

What are the goals pursued with this project?

EM: Our main goal has been to provide research-informed professional development and resources for teachers of French, German, and Spanish. This has involved extracting ideas and principles from relevant research on a really wide range of topics, for example: on effective teaching of different components of competence (knowledge of sound-spelling relations, vocabulary, grammar, and the kinds of meaningful practice that promote their learning); feedback on spoken and written production; assessment; motivation; computer-based tools; transition from primary. We had to think really hard about which research is the most relevant (there is a lot which is *not*). Then, with expert teachers' help, it became clear that we had to operationalise these findings – put them into illustrative, off the shelf, examples of schemes of work and resources.

What is NCELP's scope of action?

EM: Between 2018 and 2022, we worked closely with 18 Specialist Teachers in nine Lead Schools. These teachers came to many training events and we went to their schools to offer short workshops on key topics. We all learnt together about what would help to communicate our ideas further and better. The Specialist Teachers then gave training to the teachers in their Hub schools.



Learners using NCELP resources in class

In December 2022 we moved into a new phase, opening up our CPD nationally. The CPD, delivered by some of the Specialist Teachers we worked with during the first three years, is freely available online – you can find out more here: <https://ncelp.org/professional-development/>. NCELP course leaders are also providing [one hour briefings](#) on the new GCSE.

Shortly, the resource development teams will have completed the fully resourced [schemes of work](#) for year 9 in French, German, and Spanish. This work is painstakingly meticulous, as it tracks the revisiting of all aspects of language (vocabulary, grammar, sounds), ensuring that students get opportunities to practice it, time and again, but in different contexts covering all sorts of interesting thematic content. I've been so impressed with how creative the teams have been, with texts covering an increasingly wide range of social, cultural, geographical, and historical issues. Starting soon, we will create some illustrative schemes of work for year 10 and 11, along with some example activities that will support preparation for both the current and future (2026) GCSE.

TECLA INTERVIEW

NCELP's work was initially organised around the creation of "Language Hubs" between schools. What is the profile of the schools that are part of these "Language Hubs"?

RH: For this pilot project the DfE designated nine Language Hubs, each to be comprised of one lead school and four nearby hub schools. Lead schools had to apply to the DfE. Among the criteria was a strong track record in terms of both GCSE uptake and outcomes. Lead schools invited four local schools to join their hub. These were schools that had identified some room for improvement in terms of uptake and outcomes. You can find more information about this, [here](#).

What is the focus of your work? Do you work with schools across the whole of the UK?

RH: In the first three years of the pilot we worked with the nine Languages Hubs, made up of 9 lead schools and 36 hub schools. The focus was on the professional development of the project teachers and we sought to forge a closer relationship between language teaching and research to bring about some changes to pedagogy designed to improve students' intrinsic motivation. In the current 4th year of the pilot we have extended our reach to teachers in all schools in England via a free online CPD course made up of five 2.5 hour sessions. Teachers can find out more about that, [here](#).

What kind of activities do you run to encourage students to choose a language at GCSE?

RH: Our main focus is on curriculum design and learning activities that are part of everyday classroom teaching. We target pedagogy improvements that engender student success and intrinsic motivation, within a very time-limited learning context. Recognising the importance of integrating language and culture, many resources link phonics, vocabulary and grammar with aspects of culture, whilst others draw on social, historical, literary and popular elements of culture.

Lee unas frases de la primera parte de la historia. ¿Son verdaderas o falsas?

1. Los Reyes de España ayudaron a los conquistadores* en sus viajes.
2. En América los españoles encontraron imperios débiles.
3. Atahualpa y su hermano empezaron una batalla para ser el rey.
4. Francisco Pizarro y sus hombres llegaron a Perú antes de una batalla entre los incas.
5. Los caballos mostraron miedo de los incas.
6. Los incas atacaron a los españoles cuando llegaron a la costa.
7. Los españoles caminaron hasta Cajamarca después de bajar las montañas.

*conquistador = conquer

NCELP resource: reading activity on the Incas

Lucía y Nadia hablan sobre las tradiciones de Navidad. Lee el diálogo y marca la opción correcta. Luego, escucha y comprueba.

- Nadia, tu familia es mexicana, así que ¿van / vamos a viajar a México para pasar allí la Navidad?
- Sí, en general mi familia y yo. Los Reyes Magos* van a las casas a dejar regalos la noche del 5 al 6 de enero.
- Este año mis primos ¿van / vamos a poner den... de Navidad.
- ¿Y tus primos y tú ¿van / vamos a poner den... de Navidad?
- Sí, una piñata en forma de... *Los Reyes Magos = The Three Wise Men
- ¿Y vosotros cuándo ¿van / vamos a poner den... de Navidad?
- Aquí nosotros 10) ¿van / vamos a poner den... de Navidad?
- van (vals / vamos a dejar los zapatos debajo de la puerta, para los Reyes Magos ¿Ellos 12) ¿van / vals / vamos a llegar hasta México?
- Claro, los Reyes Magos 13) ¿van / vamos por todas partes, pero nosotros 14) ¿vais / van / vamos a dejar los zapatos al lado de una puerta.

La Piñata – estrella con nueva *picos, *picos = points
La Flor de Navidad es original de México

NCELP resource: reading and listening activity on Christmas

NCELP has also rolled out Gammar Grammar to schools. This digital game, available on iPads, android devices and on the web, makes grammar practice engaging and motivating, through a suit of mini-games in French, Spanish and German.

In addition, we recognise the learning and motivational value of extra-curricular activities, for example, the Foreign Language Spelling Bee and the Translation Bee. An introduction to the FLSB is included in NCELP's Y7 resources. Other activities, such as international school links and exchanges, sit outside NCELP's remit, but many of our project schools benefit from such partnerships and several hold the International School Award.

TECLA INTERVIEW

Are the activities you organise free of charge? Are they open to any school that wishes to participate?

RH: All of our lesson resources are free of charge, and any school anywhere can download, use and adapt them so long as this is not for commercial use. Gaming Grammar is also completely free to all schools. Our CPD course is open to any teachers and teacher educators in England. The FL Spelling Bee and Translation Bee are under the umbrella of Routes into Languages but there is no funding for these activities so the organisers are required to make a charge to schools. For state schools it is £100 for all three languages and any number of pupils to take part.

What role does NCELP play regarding the situation of Spanish and foreign languages in general within the British education system?

EM: NCELP aims to better understand, improve, and promote language learning, and we hope that our work helps to open up the Spanish-speaking world to more children. Our remit is to do this for French, German, and Spanish education in secondary schools in England. But, our resources – both for the classroom and for professional development – are freely available to all. So, we very much hope that educators in the other nations in the UK, and beyond, will find them useful, and Rachel has been delivering CPD with

NCELP WILL VERY SOON HAVE FULLY RESOURCED YEARS 7, 8 AND 9 IN FRENCH, GERMAN AND SPANISH

colleagues in Wales. Also, we hope that our work supports work in other sectors of the education system. We already know that some university language tutors are using our resources and we have had some really positive testimonials about that. Also, Rachel and her colleagues are creating hundreds of primary school resources that draw on NCELP's work for secondary, extending some of the key principles about language-driven curricula and pedagogy to Key Stage 2. Another example is that Dr. Rowena Kasprowicz, an NCELP collaborator at the University of Reading, is embarking on a large project funded by the ESRC to examine the progress that can be made among primary school children who are taught using NCELP-inspired materials. Elaine Minnet, PGCE and undergraduate tutor at the University of Chichester, is conducting a PhD to compare a language-driven (NCELP-inspired) primary scheme of work to a more topic-driven scheme. Finally, although our resources are created in the three languages, many of the key messages in our professional development are generalisable beyond these languages. So, although NCELP's remit is, strictly speaking, the teaching of the three languages in secondary state schools in England, we hope that our work is useful beyond these boundaries.

Can you tell us about the NCELP "Resources" section? What are the benefits of its use for Spanish teachers? Are materials going to be developed for the rest of the year groups?

RH: Spanish teachers can benefit from the full scheme of work with lesson resources for the whole of KS3. All resources are editable and come

Lee la frase y marca la opción correcta: 'había' o 'tenía'.
¿Qué significa la segunda parte de la frase? *piedra = stone leer

1. En la historia	tenía	había	escenas de acción.	action scenes.	
2. El caballero	había	tenía	armas de guerra.	war weapons.	
3. En la región	había	tenía	paisajes de montaña.	mountain landscapes.	
4. El protagonista	tenía	había	un caballo de batalla.	a battle horse	
5. El autor	había	tenía	un nombre de familia diferente.	a different family name.	
6. La casa del personaje	tenía	había	una habitación de estudio.	a study room.	
7. En el pueblo	tenía	había	casas de piedra*.	stone houses	
8. La Mancha	tenía	había	muchas zonas de campo.	many countryside areas.	
9. El señor	había	tenía	libros de aventuras.	adventure books.	
10. En los libros	tenía	había	historias de amor.	love stories.	

NCELP National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy 

NCELP resource: reading activity on Don Quijote

TECLA INTERVIEW

with embedded audio and teacher notes under each slide, and all tasks have animated answer slides for whole class feedback. Teachers might instead want to take advantage of the phonics collection – here we have curated in one place all of the resources for each of the Spanish sound-symbol correspondences that will be tested in the new GCSE. Alternatively, teachers might be interested in using and/or adapting some of the NCELP activity types within their existing schemes of work – in this case they should browse the

Exemplar Activities Collection. There is also a Cultural Collection – here teachers will find lesson resources using poems, songs, extracts of stories, authentic non-fiction texts with ideas for their exploitation. Now that Y9 resources are nearing completion, work is starting on Y10 and Y11 resources. These will be early examples of lesson resources that align with the new GCSE so may be of particular interest to teachers.

Are you planning to extend your scope of action to other levels, such as the promotion of language teaching in primary education?

RH: It would make absolute sense to do so, of course. The recent White Paper suggests that both primary and secondary languages CPD is a priority for the government, so we await further detail about the form this will take and the funding for it. To us it seems important to define the primary languages curriculum more clearly. This will go some way to creating the conditions for better transition as well as more effective CPD for primary language teachers, both specialist and non-specialist.

What are the future prospects for NCELP?

EM: As Rachel mentioned, we hope that following the recent schools White Paper, the Department for Education is able to get the Treasury to support more professional development for foreign language educators, in both the primary and secondary sectors, for several years to come. We also hope that the new curriculum centre, building on the OAK national online academy, will ensure that resources can be created that (a) promote and sustain real progression between primary and secondary school and (b) provide a fully resourced suite of resources for Key Stage 4 to support the new GCSE.



ALL OF OUR LESSON RESOURCES ARE FREE OF CHARGE, AND ANY SCHOOL ANYWHERE CAN DOWNLOAD, USE AND ADAPT THEM

