

Spotlight on Schools

Sharing best practice nationally



Pictograms in the MFL classroom: Using a visual stimulus

What are the aims of the project?

- To encourage students to use target language and improve oral communicative competences.
- To use universal resources with students of different levels of L2 competency in the same class (e.g. heritage language classes from A1-B2) through the differentiation of outcome.
- To develop language and intercultural awareness.

How did you plan for it? How did you organise it?

The teacher divides the class into pairs or small groups and gives each group a pictogram or visual stimulus card. A teacher can create these using Clip Art but commercial versions are available (see picture below). A stimulus card may contain different objects in different colours, people, maps, flags, foods, animals, transport, ticks and crosses signifying affirmative and negative ideas. Using Justyna Kesler's methodology of Look-See-Associated-Talk*, beginners can use the cards simply to identify new words and more advanced students can participate in discursive interactions or descriptions using the pictures as their stimulus. Students can collaborate with others, compare, and contrast similarities between their interpretations of the stimulus card.



**Kesler's methodology says that whenever students look at groups of pictures and symbols, they will all create different relationships between them that tell a different story. For example, what looks like a glass of wine for some will be exactly that. For others, it might be a glass of coke in a wine glass or a drink from their local region. They then link this image to another in the picture to begin to tell a story. As a result, students begin to think in an associative way, building up from single words, to simple phrases, to expressions, idioms, collocations, advanced dialogues and stories.*

How was the project successful?

- Pictograms are great for students who struggle to develop ideas to communicate or require extra input to stimulate memories from their own experiences.
- The cards encourage a greater level of engagement when conducting conversations, discussions and interacting with peers due to the interest emerging from the different associations that students make between pictures and symbols in the pictograms.
- Pictograms allow you to use the *Look → See → Associate → Talk* strategy used by Justyna Kesler (see previous page) as a way to engage students (and teacher!)

Why would you recommend this project to other schools?

- Pictograms are ideal for students who are studying any language at any level and easily reinforce receptive and productive communication.
- Producing pictograms can be real time-saver because they can be used repeatedly for many different topics. They will also save on photocopying.
- Visual - conversational method of teaching is highly engaging (particularly for heritage language speakers) and allows students to demonstrate their individuality.

Additional information

Learning outcomes from Junior Cycle Short Courses in heritage languages.
Student should be able to:

1.2.1. Engage in conversation, discussion and other types of interaction with peers and others, using the language conventions of oral interaction in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes.

3.3.1. Identify similarities and differences in relation to particular features of people and daily life between the target language culture, Ireland and other countries (...) including diversity within these countries, with reference to such areas as eating habits.

4.2.6. to enjoy their learning and be creative

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