12 Real language meets real business

Bill Muirhead[1] and Sarah Schechter[2]

1. Introduction

The Real Business Language Challenge was a collaborative pilot project between Coca-Cola Enterprises (CCE) and Routes into Languages East for Year 9 and 10 pupils. It was based on CCE's award-winning Real Business Challenge, part of its highly acclaimed education programme. The Real Business Language Challenge transformed the project into a language and enterprise task, thus enhancing cross-curricular opportunities (Languages with Business Studies/ PHSE/ Citizenship). It was felt that since language is a great employability asset, supporting schools with teaching and encouraging the uptake of modern languages fits with – and indeed, boosts – the overall objective of the programme: to increase learners' employability and enterprise skills (in particular teamwork, problem-solving, creative thinking, leadership, financial capability and business acumen), giving them a competitive edge in today's job market.

Keywords: employability, enterprise, cultural awareness, cross-curricular.

2. What we did

Initially we adapted the standard Real Business Challenge model and ran a pilot project, with the students forming teams (or small 'companies') of six to eight to develop a healthy juice brand that took inspiration from one of the nations competing in the next Special Olympics World Games. The students

1. Coca-Cola Entreprises Ltd, Uxbridge, United Kingdom; bmuirhead@cokecce.com

2. Routes into Languages East, Cambridge, United Kingdom; sarah.schechter@anglia.ac.uk

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had to choose a country where the target language (French, Spanish or German) was spoken. When developing their product and brand, students needed to take inspiration from the culture of a country that was competing in the Special Olympics. In particular, they were required to:

- form teams ('companies');
- create a company profile and showcase it on their PowerPoint, ensuring that they worked together as a team, sharing and delegating tasks;
- respond to the brief by carrying out market research, developing their brand (including logo design, slogan, packaging design and labelling), researching the country of origin and its culture, researching the nutritional content, completing cost and profit projection and promoting the product; and finally
- use no more than 10 slides to present their ideas on PowerPoint, giving their juice brand overview, including information on their company profile, market research, artwork, drink details, ingredients and nutritional information, brand development and packaging, cost and profit projection.

The project was supported by a comprehensive Teacher's Pack, adapted from the original version which can be found by signing up here: http://www.therealexperience.co.uk/the-real-business-challenge.

All tasks had to be completed in the target language, providing an ideal opportunity to introduce authentic, contextualised functional language in class as well as the need to explore cultural issues in class. There was flexibility in how teachers taught towards this.

The winning group, from King's Ely School, was invited to the Real Business Challenge Regional Final at Norwich City Football Club for a day of language tasks, where they were supported by a Coca-Cola Enterprises mentor who spoke

and used the target foreign language (Spanish) in their role. At this event, the pupils were tasked with developing a campaign to promote awareness of the Special Olympics and presenting their campaign to a panel of experts using the foreign language.

3. Discussion of outcomes

The pilot project was very well received and 34 teachers registered for it – in our experience a very high number for a pilot project (about 300% more than one would expect). We therefore feel that this project merits a case study, not because of its success in numbers, but perversely because of the paucity of entries and fact that that positive reception of the concept, had failed to translate into a high level of entries. We endeavoured to discover more and our investigations yielded the following qualitative responses:

> "I love the concepts but am under pressure in particular this year (we have a weaker cohort)".
>
> "It looks very interesting and motivating".
>
> "I was hoping we could get together an entry for this but timescales were just too difficult".
>
> "We just didn't get organised in time to run the project – we had a re-shuffle in the department (lots of teacher absence) and the groups taking part ended up switching around so I'm afraid it's fallen through".
>
> "Not submitting this time. However, it did inspire our Business Studies Dept in concept".
>
> "I think it is a fantastic project because it is around a topic that I think will engage young people and it includes all kinds of skills that they need to develop".

Most felt that the problems were theirs and were due to the exigencies of everyday life in a Language Department. There were very positive comments on the idea of the project itself and the potential learning outcomes. Many said that they would like to run it the following year and embed it in their Schemes of Work. A few expressed the desire for more support from Routes into Languages in running the project. This has led us to rethink the project and provide more support and scaffolding for the busy teachers.

4. Conclusion

The above journey has led us to the conclusion that the project was a valuable one and should be continued in some form, but it needs to be adapted to ensure its success, so this year we will be exploring the possibility of incorporating the project into an on-campus Language and Business Enterprise Day, working with schools to prepare the students in advance. In addition, Routes into Languages East partners at the University of East Anglia have been awarded AHRC funding to support the funding of their follow-on intercultural communication business challenge.

Reference and link

The Real Business Challenge: http://www.therealexperience.co.uk/the-real-business-challenge

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