INNOVATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING · FLORENCE · NOVEMBER 2026

From Professional Development to Classroom Practice

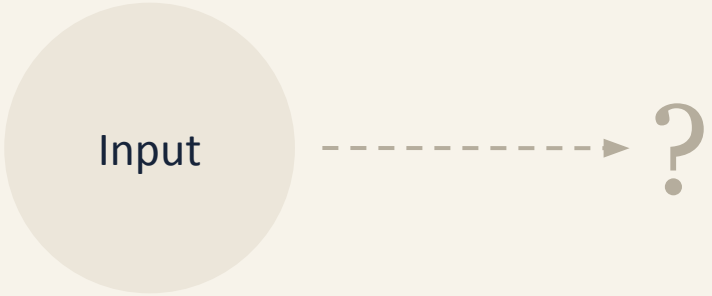
Sustained Professional Learning as a Driver of Improvement in Modern Foreign Languages

What should be made consistent?

Ian Astbury
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Participation is not practice.

Professional development as an event



Classroom practice

Professional learning as a process



…over time, with support

[1] Education Endowment Foundation (2021), Effective Professional Development · [4] Sharples, Eaton & Boughelaf (2024), A School's Guide to Implementation

THE DILEMMA

Coherence versus conformity

Excessive prescription

risks reducing professional learning to compliance

Insufficient coherence

risks significant variation in what pupils encounter and are expected to demonstrate

The question is not how to make practice consistent, but what should be made consistent.

Teacher agency as ecological: achieved within conditions of possibility and constraint · [5] Priestley, Edwards, Priestley & Miller (2012)

CONTEXT

Two contrasting secondary schools, one Trust

11–16 school

Smaller

Greater socio-economic disadvantage

First-cycle implementation **more complete**

11–18 school

Larger

Comparatively advantaged community

First-cycle implementation **less complete**

April 2024 appointment and design → **September 2024** implementation → first cycle of a planned five-year model

Schools differed in size, age range, socio-economic context and prior attainment. England, multi-academy Trust.

THE ARCHITECTURE

Shared destinations, different routes

STANDARDISED

- Curriculum progression
- Assessment expectations
- Model answers & exemplification
- Common evidence

TEACHER DISCRETION

- Explanation
- Modelling
- Practice
- Classroom interaction
- Resource selection
- Adaptation

Key grammar	Assessments Extended Reading	
ser – sing paradigm tener – sing paradigm Adjectival agreement Definite article Indefinite article (sing) me gusta + infinitive Regular –ar verbs hacer stem-changing verbs (jugar)	A1 ***Me presento*** (30 words)	A2 ***En mi tiempo libre*** (45 words)
Key grammar		
'we' form of –ar verbs me gusta(n) + nouns Regular –er and –ir verbs ser – 3rd p.s.	***Mi asignatura preferida*** (50 words)	***¿Cómo es tu instituto?*** (50 words)

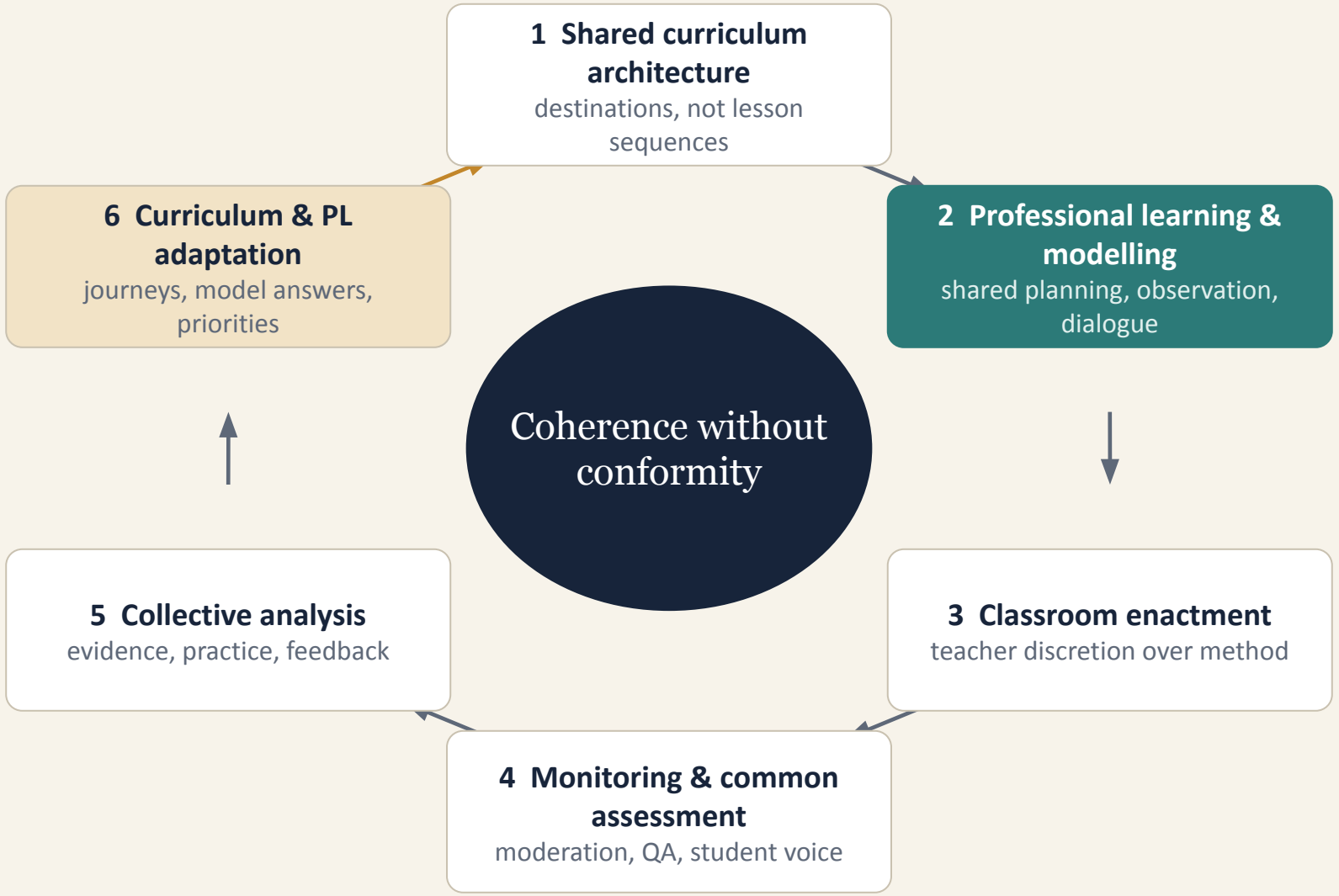
Year 7 Spanish learning journey, Autumn–Spring (excerpt; school identifiers removed)

Destinations, not lesson sequences.

SUSTAINED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The implementation cycle

Professional learning ran alongside implementation, not before it.



Adapted from Figure 1 (Astbury, 2026). Process thinking informed by [1] EEF (2021) and [4] Sharples et al. (2024).

EVIDENCE INFORMING ADAPTATION

What the evidence changed

EVIDENCE CONSIDERED TOGETHER

- Common assessment
- Moderation & QA
- Classroom observation
- Professional dialogue
- Student voice

DOCUMENTED ADAPTATIONS

Higher-level grammatical structures
repositioned where pupils' prior exposure was not a secure enough foundation

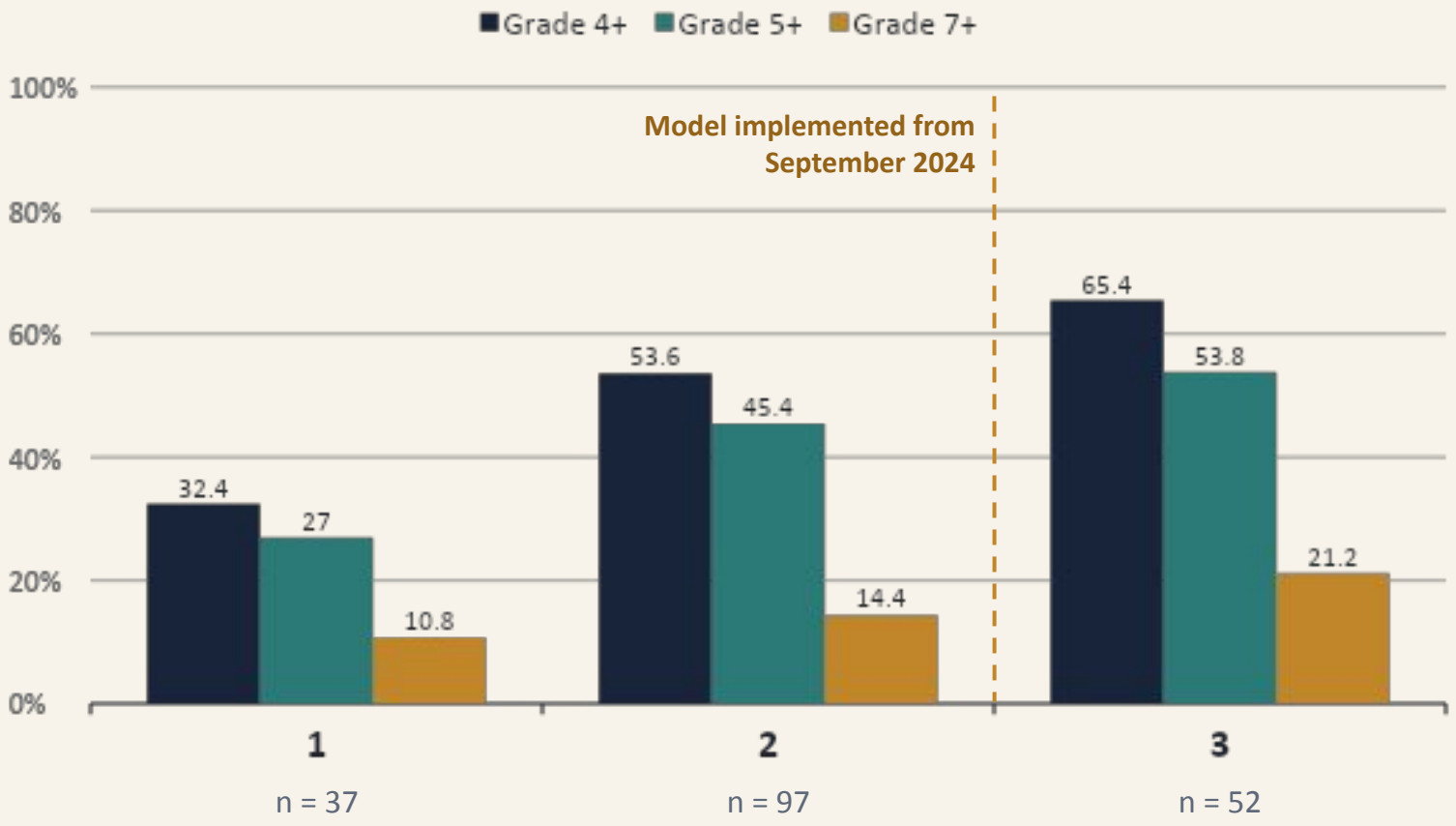
Model answers
refined following practitioner and pupil experience

Feedback processes
streamlined to reduce teacher workload, keeping pupils' opportunity to respond to and improve draft work

The same evidence then set the next cycle's professional-learning priorities.

Source: Astbury (2026), §5.

An existing upward trajectory, continued



Subject Progress Index

2023	**–1.15**
2024	**–0.77**
2025	**+0.32**

SPI: a Sisra measure comparing pupils' subject performance with peers of the same Key Stage 2 (age 11) prior attainment.

GCSE 9–1: grade 4 = standard pass · 5 = stronger pass · 7 = high attainment.

Cohort sizes varied, partly through option-setting policy. Overall attainment only; not skill-by-skill. Source: Astbury (2026), Table 1.

VARIATION AND LIMITATIONS

What the findings cannot establish

VARIATION

2025 GCSE Spanish, 11–16 school — SPI by teaching group

+0.52

Author's class

–0.13

Second group

11–18 school, 2024 → 2025 (less complete implementation)

French SPI	**–0.34 → –0.13**
Spanish SPI	**–1.65 → –1.27**
Dept grade 5+	**52.5% → 61.3%**
Dept grade 7+	**16.3% → 19.8%**
Spanish grade 5+	**20% → 34%**

THIS CASE CANNOT ESTABLISH

A causal effect of the model

A counterfactual: no control group

Comparable cohorts across years

Equivalent implementation across schools

Independent judgement: author as designer, leader and teacher

Gains in each language skill or communicative competence

Findings indicate association, not causal impact.

Source: Astbury (2026), §§6–7. The between-group difference is not evidence of the model's effectiveness.

PROTECTED LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

Capacity is implementation infrastructure, not administrative support.

12

hours' teaching per fortnight at the 11–16 school in the first cycle; remaining role capacity worked across the Trust

design model monitor analyse respond

Is there capacity to sustain the feedback loop beyond initial design?

Contextual factors include time, roles and data · [4] Sharples, Eaton & Boughelaf (2024)

FIVE PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES

Provisional, not proven

1 **Standardise expectations, not pedagogy**

2 Make expected outcomes visible

3 Embed professional learning within implementation

4 Use evidence recursively

5 Protect capacity for implementation

Source: Astbury (2026), §8. Longitudinal evaluation continues across the five-year model.

What changed for the children?

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