



Language showering in Jyväskylä since 2010

In the City of Jyväskylä, Central Finland, language showers have been offered to primary school pupils since 2010. The activity was initiated by German language teachers who were thinking of ways to get pupils excited for the language. This article explains how in two years the co-operation between the City of Jyväskylä and the University of Jyväskylä has expanded from afternoon activities of pupils to kindergartens. The article will start off by explaining what the term language shower (or language showering) means, after which the focus will be placed on the Jyväskylä model. Finally, the article will present the views of some students and kindergartens.

What is language showering?

Language showers are essentially short sessions given in a foreign language. The main differences between language showers and language immersion include the short duration and the use of multiple languages. Language immersion is usually limited to one language, while language showering employs both the foreign language and the child's mother tongue. The ideal is that language showers would go unnoticed by the children and given amid everyday activities and routines. In a school, these routines could include greetings and asking how the other person is doing, or any other activity that is repeated on a daily basis. Language showering is not tied to a certain time and place, and thus, it is not necessary that language showering is carried out by language teachers at school. Instead, language showers can be given by any multilingual person. Language showers attempt to familiarize children with foreign cultures through songs, games and other activities.

As a term language showering has become widely recognized among the teaching staff through the national *Kielitivoli* project. When it comes to language showering, the aim of the project has been to get children excited about foreign languages – to the extent that they choose to learn an optional foreign language in primary school (A2-language). A few of students at the University of Jyväskylä have written their theses on the way language showering is executed in Jyväskylä. Based on these



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student papers it seems that children learn to recognize roughly 60-80 words after ten hours of language showers. Keeping the goal of the project in mind, it can be noted that so far there are neither research data nor statistics regarding the effect of language showering on the language choices that pupils make at school. In the City of Jyväskylä, however, language learning did not become more popular among pupils in the areas where language showering was offered.

Knowledge of foreign cultures is also an integral part of language showers. During language showering it is easy to teach children tolerance towards other cultures and their customs. When reversed, the multilingual children can also educate the people doing language showering on their culture. As an example, cuisine has been discovered to be a simple way of approaching foreign language. Besides that, it is easiest to start language showering with games and songs that the children are familiar with. This way the children will already know the rules of the games and the melodies of the songs. It is important to remember that everyone can apply their own talents and methods to language showering. Thus, not everyone involved in language showering needs to be able to play games or sing. For example, counting from one to ten in a foreign language repeatedly, while one pushes the child in a swing is one way of language showering.

The Jyväskylä model

Language showering, which is a part to of the *Kielitivoli* project of the City of Jyväskylä, started in *kesäjälkkäri*, a club that provides pupils with activities in the summer, in 2010. The goal was to develop foreign language activities that would reach a wide audience of pupils. The summer club was agreed upon to be the best alternative for the activity, as the participating children form a heterogeneous group that is not limited to the stereotypical group of pupils who choose to study additional foreign languages at school. The activity also meets the values and goals set for morning and afternoon activities by the Ministry of Education: the equality of children and the acceptance of multiculturalism.

Over time the University of Jyväskylä has become more involved in language showering, and language showering has evolved from a project to a fixture. A project course offered by the Department of Languages at the University of Jyväskylä made it possible to get the activity started. Initially language showers were given in three languages (German, Swedish and French) for a month in facilities

provided by both the City of Jyväskylä and private service producers. The children participating in the *kesäjälkkäri* club received a daily dose of 2-3 hours of language showering. In the fall of 2010 language showering became a part of the curriculum of teacher education. In the following two years groups of students gave language showers in afternoon activities and preschool. The language selection expanded to six languages (German French, Spanish, Russian, Swedish, and English). By summer 2012 language showering had outgrown its traditional subject boundaries as a student of physical education was involved. Language showering is no longer an experiment, but has become a permanent activity and a part of the studies of future language teachers instead. The Jyväskylä model does not, therefore, only serve the interests of the City of Jyväskylä, but also aims at national, long-term benefits.

Benefits of language showering as a part of *Jälkkäri* afternoon activities

The *Jälkkäri* afternoon activities include different kinds of theme days and other themed activities. Language showering has thus been a natural part of the activities. Language showering is different from school clubs in that it is not considered a school-like activity. While language clubs are usually most attended by children who are interested in languages, the *Jälkkäri* activities are attended by everyone who does not go straight home after school. Thus, language showering also reaches children who would not otherwise participate in language clubs. When the activity is pleasant, the positive experiences of the participants will spread through the grapevine to the ears of other children who do not at the moment participate in the activity. Language showering attempts to leave a positive imprint on children, which hopefully leads to children learning more languages in school.

Experiences of students, kindergarten staff, and children

In general the experiences have been almost exclusively positive. Students have gained more confidence in working with small children and learned to control groups better. The constructive criticism from kindergarten teachers suggests that the language showering sessions given by student teachers have been too school-like and controlled in the beginning. Thus, it is important to remember that language teaching should provide pupils with possibilities of being physically active. Another criticism

is that pupils studying in CLIL classes were also uninterested in participating in language showering in English, as the activity reminded them too much of the school environment. As the activity was made less formal, the complaints ceased. It is difficult to develop any kind of activity without setbacks, so feedback has an important role.

Pia Bärlund argues that children are interested in foreign languages, if only we, as adults, knew how to teach them the right way. She also regards teaching based on physical activity as an important experience student teachers, as there are vast differences between teaching children who know how to read and those who do not.

The National Core Curriculum for Before- and After-school Activities for Schoolchildren says that by getting to know different cultures it is possible increase understanding, reduce prejudice and to enrich the ways of being together. Language showering represents an easy and manageable way to meet these goals. Done following the Jyväskylä model, language showering has provided both children and students with a means of learning something new and expanding one's world view.

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