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„Challenges at the Transition from Primary to Secondary School with regard to English Teaching – A Qualitative Study of Teachers’ Views in Selected Schools in Vorarlberg“

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1. Introduction

The transition from primary to secondary school is a crucial event in the life of a child. Accordingly, the changeover is a much debated topic among pedagogues as well as in the relevant literature. Although the significance of the transition as a critical period has been emphasised by numerous studies, the necessity of enhancing it is only gradually being accepted. In an Austrian context, the recent introduction of the new middle school (*Neue Mittelschule*) has given rise to new discussions of the problem of transitions in the educational system, increasing the prominence of the topic.

Since transitions are by definition a type of discontinuity and often involve substantial changes, they are particularly sensitive periods in the life of a person. The thorough preparation of children for moving on to another school is a central aspect of a successful and positively experienced transition. In addition to several changes with which children are confronted when entering secondary school, a lack of coordination among the individual schools often entails a number of problems. A gap resulting from lack of information and communication among schools has been identified as one of the main reasons for grievances occurring in connection with the transfer to secondary level (Buchholz 2005a: 533).

In this thesis I set out to investigate problems and challenges arising at the transition from primary to secondary school in Austria. In addition to examining the transition in general, special attention is paid to the changeover with respect to English teaching and learning. A second aim of the present work is to arrive at possible solutions for existing problems and to find ways of facilitating the transition.

The thesis is divided into two main parts, a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part comprises Chapters 2 to 5 and is based on existing research and literature dealing with the transition. In addition, this part includes information on the Austrian school system. Chapter 2 looks at the changeover from the perspectives of students, teachers and parents, and points out the various challenges faced by the three groups, before examining ways of amending the situation.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the transition in English. Besides discussing shortcomings of the transition and potential solutions with regard to English teaching, the chapter addresses factors that influence language learning, including aspects such as learner age, personality and motivation.

The fourth chapter provides information on the Austrian school system and on the curricula of primary and secondary schools, as well as a section on the demographic and educational situations in Vorarlberg. Moreover, it compares the Austrian school system with the systems of Vorarlberg's neighbouring countries Germany and Switzerland.

Chapter 5, the final chapter of the theory part, provides a concise analysis of three English textbooks, examining whether they account for aspects relevant for the transition. This is done by looking at how the four language skills in the textbooks are balanced.

Chapter 6 contains the results of an empirical study carried out within the framework of this paper. The project involved performing qualitative interviews with teachers from one primary school and two secondary schools located in Vorarlberg. The aim of the study is to gain insight into teachers' perspectives on the transition and to compare them with each other as well as with the findings recorded in the theory part of this thesis.

Although the findings gained from my research partly indicate a growing awareness of the problems ensuing from the transition, there is still evidence of a gap between primary and secondary schools. This manifests itself in a partial lack of information and communication among schools on the one hand, and in substantially differing statements about the effectiveness of the transition on the other hand. Therefore, I will argue for improving the transition by means of increased cooperation efforts, an enhanced primary school English teaching practice, and improvements in teacher training.

2. The Transition from Primary to Secondary School

The wealth of different terms and phrases which have been used to describe transitions in the school system, especially the transition from primary to secondary school, already points to the importance and the complexity of this topic. In the relevant literature, transitions in the educational system have been termed “breaks” or “discontinuities” (Koch 2001: 67) in the life of a person, “complex normative life event[s] involving a series of changes” (Sirsch 2003: 385), or “significant, sometimes stressful, life event[s]” (Chung, Elias & Schneider, 1998: 83). Although, as Sirsch (2003: 394) points out, there is no consensus about the type of event school transitions belong to, they are certainly critical and often decisive in the lives of children. Griebel and Bergwanger (2006: 33) define transitions as “complex processes of changes within the individual, embedded in communication with his/her social environment“. As such, transitions are “phases of life associated with heightened demands and changing environments which mean an accumulation of stress factors” (Welzer 1993, quoted in Griebel & Bergwanger 2006: 33). This is especially true for the transition from primary to secondary school, which, apart from the change from nursery school to primary school, usually marks the first big break in the school career of a child and involves a number of important decisions.

In the Austrian school system the main decision to be made at the interface of primary and secondary school concerns the type of school the child will attend after primary school. From the perspective of parents and children, this decision is a very serious one as it predetermines the course of a child’s education and therefore has implications on the future of the individual. The Austrian school system is often criticised for its division of secondary schools into *Hauptschule* (secondary modern school) and *Gymnasium* (grammar school), and for the early selection resulting from it. Furthermore, the scheduling of the transition after four years of primary school, i.e. around the age of ten, is seen as too early by experts and involved persons alike (see, for example, Katschnig & Hanisch 2006). In terms of educational policy the transition to secondary school is no less disputed than it is from the perspective of parents and teachers. The ongoing debate in connection with the introduction of the *Neue Mittelschule* (new middle school) in Austria shows that a delay of the transition to a later date is of political concern as well.

In other European countries, such as Switzerland and Germany, the regulation of the transition is slightly different than it is in Austria (see also Section 4.3.). While in

most cantons of Switzerland, the transition takes place after six instead of four years of primary school, Germany has a two-year 'orientation stage' following primary school. Despite these modifications, the transition in these two countries is also subject to criticism, for example by Kramer et al. (2009: 17) who address the "weitreichenden Folgen für die Schülerbiografie von Kindern" in connection with an early transition in the German system.

2.1. Challenges at the Transition

From the above-mentioned aspects of transitions in the educational system it becomes clear that changes from one type of school to another are by their nature sensitive and problematic events, which need to be treated with special caution. Considerations and decisions on the topic of transitions should ideally take into account as many different aspects of the situation as possible. This means that all the parties involved in the transition, i.e. students, parents, and teachers with their respective interests should be taken into consideration when decisions concerning the interface of primary and secondary school are made.

While improving the transition is a challenge in itself, there are also numerous challenges and problems faced by the people involved in the transition. In her psychological study, Sirsch (2003: 394) puts forward the hypothesis that, depending on various factors, children perceive the transition either as a challenge or a threat. Kramer et al. (2009: 73) use the terms "Chance und Risiko" (opportunity and risk) to describe the contrasting characteristics and emotions often associated with the transition. Griebel & Bergwanger (2006: 32) also stress the fact that „there are positive as well as negative effects attached to the transition to secondary school“. These effects have a bearing on "the awareness of one's individuality, self ability and the mental health of the child (Griebel & Niesel 2004, quoted in Griebel & Bergwanger 2006: 32). According to Lazarus and Launier, the way a person copes with a stressful situation depends on the evaluation of the situation by the individual (Lazarus & Launier 1981, quoted in Ackermann 2006: 9). Thus, it is crucial whether a situation like the transition from one school to another is seen as a challenge or a threat. Accordingly, perceiving the transition as a challenge evokes positive emotions in the child, while a transition that is regarded as

a threat will call forth negative sentiments such as fear, anger, or mistrust (see Ackermann 2006: 10).

The literature concerned with the changeover from primary to secondary school usually focuses on one of the parties involved in the process, i.e. most works look at the transition either from the perspective of students, teachers, or parents. While this way of concentrating on one point of view is normally reasonable, blanking out a substantial part of the whole picture also bears the danger of giving a one-sided account of the situation. For this reason, the following sections will be concerned with the perspectives of the main participants in the process of entering secondary school, namely that of students, of teachers and of parents, respectively. In each section, challenges and possible problems occurring at the transition as displayed in the literature will be addressed, thus emphasising the problematic nature of school transitions as well as the need to pay particular attention to this period. After that, possibilities of facilitating the transition and potential solutions for frequently occurring problems will be discussed. Among the problems mentioned in the literature in connection with the transition from primary to secondary school are, for example, changes in society such as “zu große Klassen, eine zu heterogene Schülerschaft und zu unterschiedliche Lernausgangslagen“ (Koch 2001: 69). Furthermore, Koch (ibid.: 71-73) cites increased educational aspirations, especially on the part of parents, which in turn present a challenge for schools and teachers. Among the problems frequently faced by students are, according to various studies cited by Ackermann (2006: 11-12), increased demands by the new school, problematic social relationships, as well as difficulties with teachers (Elias et al. 1985, Schenk 1998 quoted in Ackermann 2006).

2.1.1. The Perspective of Students

Of all the groups involved, students are obviously the ones most directly affected by the transition to a new school. For the student, who in the Austrian system is confronted with the transition to secondary school at the age of ten or eleven, the changeover raises a number of issues. Besides having to decide on a school type and on a particular school to go to after primary school, children have to deal with various further challenges connected with the transfer. In the process of changing from primary to secondary school, two periods can be distinguished: the period preceding the transition and the first few months immediately following the transition. Many empirical studies on the topic of

transitions include interviews or similar methods of enquiry before as well as after the transition. Thus, the perceptions of the transition can be recorded in prospect and compared in retrospect.

Since the future school is still often unknown to the children, the pending transition is likely to evoke fears and uncertainty in them. Like most major changes in life, school transfers are accompanied by contrasting emotions such as anxiety and pleasant anticipation. On the psychological level, the self-concept of pupils is an important factor in connection with school transitions. It has been stated that pupils' self-concept depends to a large degree on the judgements made by themselves and by teachers on their own achievements and is therefore closely related to success in school (Kramer et al. 2009: 28):

Entscheidend für die Entwicklung des (Leistungs-)Selbstbildes beim Übergang von der Grundschule in die Sekundarstufe I ist der Effekt der eigenen sowie fremden Leistungsbewertung der Schülerinnen und Schüler beim Übertritt von einer leistungsheterogenen in eine leistungshomogenere Gruppe.

This statement expresses the central role of achievement in the process of changing to a new school, and at the same time it emphasises how crucial the self-perception of the child is for a successful transition. With the introduction of the new middle school and the resulting abolishment of ability groups/streams (see Section 4.2.1.), the homogeneity of classes has been reduced considerably. In grammar schools, by contrast, the overall performance of students can be assumed to be less heterogeneous than it is in primary schools, which is due to the selection process taking place at the transition to secondary school.

While classes in secondary schools do not necessarily have to be more homogenous in terms of achievement than they are in primary school, they can either boost or reduce a pupil's self-esteem, depending on a number of factors (see Kramer et al. 2009: 28-29). Dörnyei (2007a: 87) also stresses the importance of the "self"-issues (self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-worth)", stating that these are "particularly sensitive areas in primary/secondary school learning". Self-confidence is essential for successful learning to take place because people who lack "a sense of self-efficacy in a given domain perceive difficult tasks as personal threats [...] and are likely to give up" (Dörnyei 2007a: 87). The opposite is true for people with a lot of self-confidence: They are more likely to approach challenging tasks with a positive attitude and thus success is

more likely than failure (ibid.: 87). However, it cannot be taken for granted that a ten-year-old has already gained a fully developed self-concept along with the ability to judge her or his intellectual abilities well enough to make far-reaching decisions concerning his or her educational career. Sirsch (2003: 385) suggests that the transition be regarded as “a critical transition in terms of the developmental psychological perspective of life event research“, adding that “life events represent a potential for change and may have positive or negative effects”. Thus, the effects of life events are by definition incalculable, a feature that is intensified by variables such as a child’s self-concept, the future school or parental support in the case of the transition to secondary school.

2.1.1.1. “*Sekundarstufenschock*”

A phenomenon occurring frequently at the transition to secondary school is a decline in motivation brought about by the increased requirements of the new school. This sudden drop in motivation, which often results in an aversion to school and to learning, is termed “*Sekundarstufenschock*” following Hansen, Rösner & Weißbach (1986, referred to in Koch 2001: 29):

Der Übergang von der Grundschule in die weiterführende Schule ist daher oft Ausgangspunkt eines Motivationswandels der Schüler, die ausgestattet mit einem positiven Selbstbild und dem Vertrauen in ihre Fähigkeiten die Grundschule verlassen und nun in der Sekundarstufe erste negative Lernerfahrungen machen.

Kramer et al. (2009: 37) mention several aspects connected to the *Sekundarstufenschock* that have to do with changes occurring in the course of the transition to secondary school. These include changes in assessment, the change from the form teacher system to subject teacher system, a loss of social contacts, and moving to a larger school building. A further problematic aspect of the transition is the low reliability of grades as predictors for students’ performance in secondary school (Koch 2001: 30). Bad marks are often the result of lacking social contacts rather than of a lack of aptitude (ibid.: 45-46).

To prevent the phenomenon of *Sekundarstufenschock*, a successful entry into secondary school is crucial. This can be reached by assimilating teaching methods of primary and secondary school and by an adaption of secondary schools to the habits and needs of students instead of expecting students to adapt to the school (ibid.: 30). Based on classroom observations made in a primary school in German federal state Rheinland-

Pfalz over a period of four years, Sarter (1997: 46) notes that a reduction of motivation for foreign language learning is already observable during the final two years of primary school. As one of the reasons for this the author mentions the adopted view of primary school language teaching as being inferior to 'real' language teaching in secondary school (ibid.: 46). Consequently, children's appreciation of primary school English is diminished, at the same time raising expectations towards English in secondary school. However, since these insights are based on observation, they lack scientific underpinning, as the author herself notes (ibid.: 39).

Apart from Sarter's observation, the literature does not mention a *Sekundarstufenschock* with explicit reference to English. This might either be due to the fact that this phenomenon does not exist in connection with English, or, what is more likely, that it has not been studied separately. A possible reason for this is the status of English in Austrian primary school as a course without assessment and with a very limited time frame. Thus, neither students nor secondary school teachers have very high expectations in terms of students' proficiency levels.

Buchholz's (2005a: 536) findings also point towards a correction of students' self-image triggered by the changeover to secondary level. She reports a drop of students' confidence in their English skills after the transition. While about half of the students questioned in the course of her study felt well-prepared for English in secondary school when asked prior to the transition, almost 60% reported the opposite when asked after the transition. Although this does not necessarily point to a loss of motivation, the fact that in the same study 56% of students said to have difficulties with tests and dictations at the start of secondary school, and slightly smaller portions had problems with grammar and spelling, indicates a need to attune primary and secondary levels better to each other.

The necessity to enhance the transition by equipping students with a high self-image in the foreign language is stressed by Demircioglu (2008: 74):

Damit Kinder im Verlauf der Grundschulzeit ein hohes fremdsprachliches Selbstkonzept aufbauen, müssen Grundschullehrer während des Anfangsunterrichts in der Fremdsprache besondere Möglichkeiten der direkten und indirekten Selbstkonzeptförderung integrieren. So lassen sich positive Auswirkungen auf die (fremdsprachlichen) Leistungen der folgenden Schuljahre erzielen.

The establishment of a positive self-image in foreign language learning is best supported by noticing and appreciating students' learning progress (ibid.: 80). For primary school

English, regular feedback by the teacher is especially important due to the lacking assessment of students. Since children's self-image and motivational system as far as learning is concerned are not fully-developed until the age of twelve, supporting children in these processes is a fundamental task of primary school (ibid.: 79). Monitoring the progress of every student and praising advances is just as important a part of primary school English teaching as encouraging the improvement of weaknesses.

2.1.1.2. The Scheduling of the Transition and the Pressure to Perform

A problematic issue that has to do with the personal development of children is the point at which the transition takes place. Koch (2001: 28) states that the transition after four years of primary school is clearly too early. The reason she gives for this often cited criticism is rooted in developmental psychology:

Dem Stufenmodell der intellektuellen Entwicklung nach Piaget zufolge, hätten Kinder vor dem Übergang in eine weiterführende Schule die Stufe der konkreten Denkopoperationen noch nicht vollständig erreicht und könnten somit logische Denkprozesse noch nicht durchführen. (Koch 2001: 28)

The stage at which abstract thinking is developed is usually not reached until the age of eleven or twelve (ibid.: 28). Against this background, it would make sense to defer the transition by one or two years, as it is already the case in some European countries, for example in most parts of Switzerland. Here, in most cantons the duration of primary school is six years, which means that the pupils are twelve years old and more advanced in their development when the transition takes place. What is more, a transition that is scheduled after six rather than four years of primary school allows for a more realistic prediction of a child's school career (Koch ibid.: 109), i.e. the decision made at the transition is more likely to fit a child's abilities. This is in accordance with the answers Koch received during interviews with teachers of primary and of three types of secondary schools in the German state of Hessen. Primary school teachers are of the opinion that it is difficult to make judgements and predictions about the strengths and weaknesses of a ten-year-old (ibid.: 109), emphasising that it is usually easier to do so after two more years of primary school.

The fact that at the age of ten, students are passing through critical stages psychologically as well as socially increases the uncertainty and the pressure felt towards

the transition. It is evident that ten-year-old children cannot make a decision like the one required at the end of primary school on their own. Consequently, they are supported by adults, in most cases by their parents and teachers. However, frequently the ideas of parents and teachers regarding a child's future school career differ substantially, which results in conflicting opinions. This situation is described by Kramer et al. (2009: 17) as "Spannungsfeld von Elternwille und Grundschulempfehlung". The often conflicting opinions and wishes concerning the transition represent a challenge and can eventually turn into problems if there are no clear legal guidelines. Parents who want their children to go to grammar school instead of secondary modern school often impose pressure upon their children as well as on primary school teachers in order to obtain the marks required for entering grammar school. Kleine and colleagues (2009) address this situation in connection with what they call increased "Bildungsaspirationen" (educational aspirations):

Die überwiegende Mehrheit der Eltern will mittlerweile eine Hauptschullaufbahn vermeiden und strebt tendenziell einen Realschul- oder Gymnasialabschluss für ihr Kind an. (Ditton et al. 2005, quoted in Kleine et al. 2009: 105)

The increased expectations of parents towards their children's education have various consequences, but the one that is most relevant here is that many children are exposed to an ever growing pressure to perform. Consequently, it is important for children to have strategies available for coping with the different demands they are confronted with by schools and parents. The earlier the transition is scheduled, the earlier the pressure to perform is put upon the children, and the fewer strategies to cope with it are at their disposal.

The admission standards for grammar schools are regularised and recorded in the Austrian Schulorganisationsgesetz. This means that, unlike for instance in Germany, the regulations for entering a Gymnasium are basically the same for all Austrian provinces, and are defined as follows:

Die Aufnahme in die 1. Klasse einer allgemeinbildenden höheren Schule setzt voraus, daß die vierte Stufe der Volksschule erfolgreich abgeschlossen wurde und die Beurteilung in Deutsch, Lesen, Schreiben sowie Mathematik für die vierte Schulstufe mit „Sehr gut“ oder „Gut“ erfolgte; die Beurteilung mit „Befriedigend“ in diesen Pflichtgegenständen steht der Aufnahme nicht entgegen, sofern die Schulkonferenz der Volksschule feststellt, daß der Schüler auf Grund seiner sonstigen Leistungen mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit den Anforderungen der

allgemeinbildenden höheren Schule genügen wird. Aufnahmsbewerber, die diese Voraussetzung nicht erfüllen, haben eine Aufnahmeprüfung abzulegen. (§ 40 SchOG Aufnahmuvoraussetzungen, http://www.jusline.at/40_Aufnahmuvoraussetzungen_SchOG.html, 19 August 2011)

Although these guidelines are clearly defined, the individual schools are free to tighten their admission standards and to reserve their limited capacity for the pupils with the best grades. The fact that marks are ultimately the only criteria according to which the selection by grammar schools is carried out shows that there still is a lack of a more integrated way of deciding on the qualification of a student for this school type. Also, the different ways of dealing with grades in primary and secondary schools are often problematic. Whereas in primary schools children gradually become accustomed to being graded during the last two years, and are usually given relatively better grades, they are often shocked when they receive bad marks as soon as they have entered secondary school (Katschnig & Hanisch 2006: 307). According to Katschnig & Hanisch (ibid.: 307), a more realistic way of grading children in primary school could amend the situation.

2.1.1.3. Social factors, Cooperation and Personal Variables

In addition to the pressure that is put on children in order to attain the grades required by grammar schools, they are confronted with a completely unknown situation in their new schools. While studies have shown that for a great portion of children the imminent transition represents a challenge rather than a threat (see Sirsch 2003: 393), there are some children who have difficulties in coping with the new situation after the transition. These problems are often due to the abruptness of the transition and to a lack of support for students. Consequently, the changeover is experienced as being thrown in at the deep end (see Katschnig & Hanisch 2006: 305). After the transition, the rapport established between the primary school teacher and students comes to a sudden stop: “Die erarbeitete Vertrautheit [...], welche eine Bedingung für das Lernen im Pflichtschulalter ist, geht beim Wechsel verloren“ (ibid.: 305). This loss of the primary school teacher as an attachment figure combined with the new situation of a multi-teacher system in the new school is experienced as a burden by many children. Combined with a lack of exchange of information about the individual students among primary and secondary school teachers, the feeling of being left alone is intensified (see Katschnig & Hanisch ibid.: 305).

Cooperation among schools of different school types is a crucial factor in connection with the transition. Lacking contact and communication among schools can have negative consequences, especially for students. Katschnig & Hanisch (ibid.: 305) mention problems caused by differing teaching methods and habits in primary and secondary schools, which lead to difficulties for students in adapting to the new school and its conventions. In primary school, learning is generally more open and unrestricted than it is in secondary school. Here, instruction is generally more teacher-centred and teachers are less flexible in planning their lessons, since the day is normally divided into 50-minute slots (see Katschnig & Hanisch 2006: 305).

As mentioned already, not every child experiences the transition to secondary school as a problematic event. It has been stated that certain groups of students have more difficulties with transitions than others. In their comparison of transitions in different European countries, Döbert, Kann & Rentl (2011: 24), claim that especially low-achieving pupils, socially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with a migration background have difficulties that are rooted in the structure of the German educational system. With strongly differentiated transitions, the German school system tends to create disadvantages for the above-mentioned groups of students, and in some cases it intensifies already existing disadvantages (Döbert, Kann & Rentl 2011: 24). Due to the structural similarity of the German and the Austrian school systems in terms of transitions, this problem also applies to the Austrian context. Instead of an early selection, the authors advocate school systems with less differentiated transitions: “Solche Benachteiligungen gibt es in deutlich geringerem Ausmaß in den europäischen Staaten, die über weniger differenzierte Übergänge [...] verfügen” (ibid.: 24). In connection with social disadvantages, Maaz, Baumert & Trautwein (2009: 12) identify educational transitions as one of four main areas in which social inequalities can occur. While the authors state that there is a consensus among educational research that transitions constitute a decisive factor in the formation of social inequalities, they also note that to prove a causal relationship between social origin and school achievement is a very complex undertaking (ibid.: 13, 26-27). Factors such as “Bildungsnähe” or parental support of children in school-related matters must not be confused with social strata (ibid.: 27). However, since a connection between social origin, school system and success in school seems to exist, it can be said that the social justice of an educational system depends to a certain degree on its structure and on the way in which transitions are arranged.

2.1.1.4. Challenge or Threat?

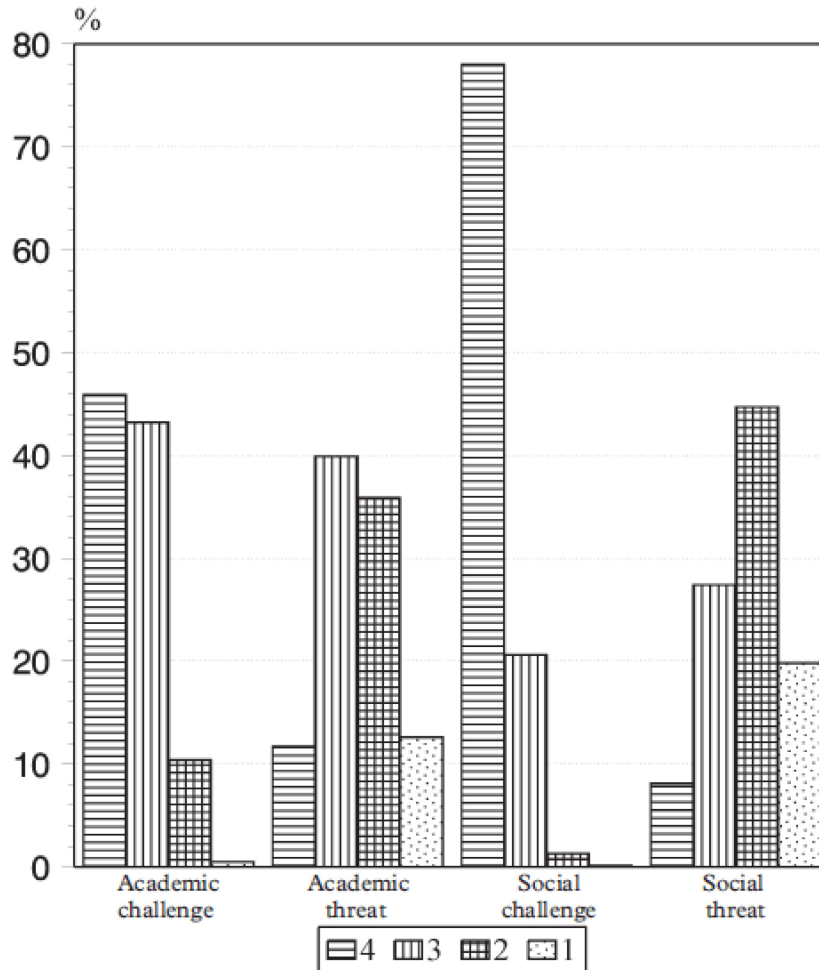
A child's perception of the imminent transition either as a challenge, i.e. as a positive event, or as a threat, i.e. with a negative connotation, depends on numerous variables. According to Sirsch (2003: 386), such variables include "aspects of self-concept, anxiety, learning environments and social climate factors". Among the last-mentioned are especially "relationships with teachers and peers" (ibid.: 386). Further factors that determine the perception of the transition are "social network variables, school achievement", and "content predictability" (ibid.: 386). *Content predictability* here refers to the "extent of information about the event" (ibid.: 386). Thus, the way the transition is perceived, and consequently experienced, depends on psychological as well as on environmental and social factors.

Sirsch (2003: 386) investigated the perception of the imminent transition as a challenge or threat by means of a questionnaire in the course of a study which comprised 856 primary school pupils in Vienna. What is notable with the results of Sirsch's study (see Figure 1, p. 14) is that 90% of the students questioned perceived the transition as an academic challenge, and for 52% it represented an academic threat. The category "social challenge/threat" shows similar results, with 98% apprehending the transition as a social challenge, and 73% seeing it as a social threat. According to this study, most students perceive the pending transition to secondary school both, as a challenge and a threat, with a tendency towards the challenge aspect. Moreover, the social aspect seems to be predominant compared with the academic one in terms of challenge as well as threat. These results suggest that, although views of the transition are seldom purely negative or purely positive, there is still a considerable degree of insecurity among pupils as to what awaits them after primary school. A reduction of this insecurity can, according to Sirsch (ibid.: 394), be reached by familiarising children with the new environment prior to the transition. She states that "children who have already been to their new school indicate feeling less threatened" (ibid.: 394).

In this context, a reinforcement of measures to reduce children's insecurity towards the change of schools would be desirable. Such measures could, among others, include visits by children to their future schools, visits by students and teachers of the secondary schools to primary schools, or informative meetings for students and parents prior to the transition.

Figure 1 Transition to secondary school as a perceived challenge and threat. The appraisals of the event as challenge and threat are the mean values for the respective items that were rounded for the purpose of the diagram; high values indicate a high challenge or high threat. Possible answers were 4 = *I strongly agree*, 3 = *I somewhat agree*, 2 = *I somewhat disagree*, 1 = *I strongly disagree*.

Source: Sirsch 2003: 390



2.1.2. The Perspective of Teachers

The presence of teachers' opinions and perspectives on the transition in the literature is surprisingly small, given the fact that, as opposed to students or parents, teachers represent the group that has to do with the transition on a regular basis. Koch (2001: 67) draws attention to this situation, stating that "die Einschätzung des Übergangs von der Grundschule in die weiterführenden Schulen aus Sicht der Lehrerinnen [ist] noch wenig erforscht". Koch has taken one step to counteract this fact by undertaking a study that deals with teachers' attitudes towards the changeover from primary to secondary school.

The lack of attention paid to the teachers' perspective on the transition is also a reason why the present thesis includes an empirical part dealing with teachers' attitudes towards and their evaluation of the transition (see Chapter 6).

The questions on which Koch bases her study concern the relevance ascribed to the transition by teachers, problems at the transition, and necessary steps to be taken in terms of school development to facilitate the transition (Koch 2001: 67). The results of Koch's research show that, among 212 teachers from German primary and secondary schools only 3% regard the transition to secondary school as unproblematic. Koch (ibid.: 68) therefore concludes: "Im Umkehrschluss kann daher wohl angenommen werden, dass ein Großteil der hier befragten Lehrerinnen sich also bereits in irgendeiner Form mit der [...] Fragestellung auseinandergesetzt hat". It thus seems that the transition is perceived as a problematic event by many teachers, which is also reflected in the willingness of over two thirds of interviewees to take part in further education courses on the topic of transitions (Koch 2001: 68).

The presence of the transition in everyday life of teachers suggests that many of them are confronted with challenges and problems that call for action in order to improve the situation. Koch (2001: 69) identifies changes in society as a main reason for problems occurring after the transition and for a need for action. Social changes include increased numbers of students, and consequently larger class sizes, as well as changes in children's daily routines, which in turn affect their behaviour and their educational needs (see Koch 2001: 69). These factors impede successful teaching and learning and thus add to the difficulties teachers face at the transition.

A further problem teachers and schools are confronted with are the increased expectations concerning the educational degree of children. Most parents nowadays prefer grammar school to secondary modern school. A trend towards grammar school has been shown especially in a German context, but it is also clearly visible in Austrian school statistics (see Table 1, p. 16). Even over the relatively short period of five years, numbers of pupils attending AHS have risen considerably. In the year 2004/05, 67.1% of Austrian students attended *Hauptschule* and 31.3% opted for grammar school in the first year after secondary school. In 2009/10 it was a total of 63% attending either *Hauptschule* or *Neue Mittelschule*, while 35.6% entered AHS in year five. This means an increase of more than four per cent in pupils entering a secondary academic school, and an equally significant decline in secondary modern school pupils over a five-year period. This continuous shift towards grammar school affects the educational landscape.

According to the results of Koch's study, this situation leads to an increased competition among secondary schools (Koch 2001: 72). As a consequence, those schools that lose out on well-performing students in the course of the competition are forced to look into the subject of transitions and to take measures in order to improve the situation (see Koch 2001: 72).

Table 1 Distribution of students according to school types, years 5-8; numbers in %

Source: Bmukk1, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/ueberblick/stat_tb.xml, 9 September 2011

Year 5

	<i>Hauptschule</i> (Secondary Modern School)	<i>AHS</i> (Secondary Academic School)	<i>Neue Mittelschule</i> (New Middle School)
2004/05	67.1	31.3	--
2006/07	65.4	32.8	--
2009/10	47.6	35.6	15.4

Years 5-8

	<i>Hauptschule</i> (Secondary Modern School)	<i>AHS</i> (Grammar School)	<i>Neue Mittelschule</i> (New Middle School)
2004/05	68.4	29.6	--
2006/07	67.3	30.6	--
2009/10	59.5	34.4	4.6

In connection with increased educational aspirations, Koch (ibid.: 108-109) addresses the question of whether or not the free choice of a secondary school for parents is favoured by teachers. Here, primary school teachers generally favour leaving the decision to parents, which for them means less responsibility. Secondary school teachers, especially grammar school teachers, by contrast, tend to object to this arrangement, since it results in higher numbers of weak students in secondary schools. As a consequence, the teachers argue, those students are unable to cope with the increased demands of the new school and lose their motivation. Moreover, teachers do not feel responsible for a successful integration of weak students into their school (ibid.: 108). Grammar school teachers therefore tend to hold the view that “[z]u viele ungeeignete Schüler in den Sekundarschulen ‘stören’ den reibungslosen Ablauf des Unterrichts” (Koch 2001: 109).

Thus, the challenge for the regulation of the choice of a secondary school is to strike a balance between the teacher's recommendation as an expert in education on the one hand, and the parents' right to choose what they consider best for their children on the other hand.

A second consequence of parents' growing desire to grant their children admission to grammar school is pressure imposed on primary school teachers in order to obtain the grades required for entering AHS. Katschnig & Hanisch (2006: 304) mention this problematic aspect, stating that many parents want their children to get the chances that they were denied themselves, which results in an ever growing demand for better grades:

Dieser Wunsch der Eltern überschattet meistens ab der dritten Klasse Volksschule das Schulleben, weil die Eltern AHS-reife Kinder wollen und ihnen alles andere nicht mehr wichtig ist. (Katschnig & Hanisch 2006: 304)

According to Katschnig & Hanisch (ibid.: 304), this problem is rooted in the much too early scheduling of the transition as well as in the various other problems mentioned earlier (e.g. the fact that grading is the sole criterion considered by secondary schools).

Against this background, Katschnig & Hanisch (ibid.) argue that the importance assigned to the role of the teacher as an advisor and expert is crucial. After all, it is the teacher who, by evaluating and grading the pupils' achievements over a period of several years, predetermines their future school careers. At the end of year four of primary school, the teacher has usually known her or his students for at least two years, which by all means enables him or her to make recommendations as to which type of school would be adequate for each student. However, considering the influence parents often exert on primary school teachers, the only way to reduce discrimination at the transition is its deferral, for example by means of a two-year orientation stage in grades five and six as mentioned by Katschnig & Hanisch (2006: 304).

A further problem for secondary school teachers is the fact that they are confronted with very heterogeneous groups of learners immediately after the transition. Skill levels in the different subjects can vary considerably from student to student. In Koch's (2001: 69) study, teachers complained about "zu unterschiedliche Lernausgangslagen", which is particularly problematic in connection with increased class sizes. Katschnig & Hanisch (2006: 309) also draw attention to the varying skill levels, in this case in English, among children coming from different primary schools. According to Buchholz (2005b: 338), the differences in foreign language skills according to classes can

reach up to 400 per cent. This value refers to the average performance of fourth-grade primary school classes of students as measured by Buchholz by means of a three-phase test involving the appliance of the four language skills in various shapes (see Buchholz 2005b: 98-99).

For secondary school teachers, there are two common approaches as to how to deal with this situation. The first one is to start from scratch at the beginning of grade five as it is the practice in numerous secondary schools. The second approach is to employ a system of internal differentiation as used for example by new middle school (see Section 3.3.4.). However, both alternatives bring about new challenges and problems which will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3. The heterogeneity of learner groups in secondary schools is also partly the result of lacking cooperation among primary and secondary schools. This makes it difficult for primary school teachers to prepare their students for the demands made by their future schools. Koch (2001: 16) addresses this issue in the following statement:

Da in den meisten Fällen keine Zusammenarbeit zwischen Grundschulen und weiterführenden Schulen besteht, bleiben viele Grundschullehrerinnen im Ungewissen darüber, welche Arbeitsschwerpunkte, Inhalte und Themen sie zur Vorbereitung auswählen sollten und was sie ihren Schülern in die weiterführenden Schulen „mitgeben“ müssen.

Consequently, closer collaboration of primary and secondary schools is necessary in order to attune their curricula to each other and to inform teachers about the methods and contents used in the different schools.

For primary school teachers, especially teaching a foreign language – in most cases English – is often a challenge. A first reason for this is that teachers are often not absolutely comfortable teaching English because many do not feel skilled enough in English. A second reason is that the status of English in Austrian primary schools is not that of a “real subject” that is graded, but that of a “verbindliche Übung” which is to be integrated into the existing subjects during the first two years (see Bmukk 2010: 218). In grades three and four, one English lesson per week is allocated. Thus, for primary school teachers, English can be a very exciting part of their occupation, which brings diversion into the daily routine, but it can also be a burden.

The quality of any school lesson depends very much on the expertise and the teacher’s enthusiasm for the subject. English language proficiency, which often varies considerably among primary school teachers, can be seen as correlating with the

aforementioned factors. This is probably what Buchholz (2007a: 59) means by the following statement: “Deshalb beruht gerade in der Grundschule die Qualität des Englischunterrichts zu 99% auf der Qualität der Lehrpersonen”. If the “quality” of the teacher is taken to include language proficiency, foreign language teaching competence as well as personal commitment (ibid.: 59), it becomes clear that only a well-grounded training can provide for competent teachers. Buchholz (ibid: 247) cites experts who have noticed a direct correlation between the proficiency of primary school children in English and their teacher’s commitment to the subject. One factor that adds to this circumstance is that, again according to Buchholz (ibid.: 247), in Austria the level children are expected to have reached by the end of primary school is not clearly defined. A second factor is an insufficient incorporation of English into teacher education:

In Österreich sind Volksschullehrpersonen, die Englisch unterrichten, grundsätzlich nicht als Fremdsprachenlehrer ausgebildet. Vielmehr wurde auf Basis eines Maturawissens in Englisch die fachdidaktische Ausbildung schrittweise in die Studienpläne der Pädagogischen Akademien eingebaut. (Buchholz 2007a: 248)

The gradual integration of English into teacher education, which happened between 1998 and 2003, means that especially older teachers often do not feel proficient enough to teach English. Although there were special courses for teachers already in service in order to make up for lacking qualifications in English, the organisation of these courses was very diverse (see Buchholz 2007a: 63). Teachers who finished their training more recently are on the whole better prepared, which is due to increased foreign language training during recent years (see Buchholz 2007a: 248-249), but their degree of English language proficiency according to Buchholz (ibid.: 259-265) is still relatively heterogeneous.

It is not surprising that the entirety of the above-mentioned circumstances results in substantial variation of skill-level and motivation for teaching English among primary school teachers. This again strongly influences children’s level of knowledge and skills in English when they enter secondary school. Accordingly, the comparability of pupils by means of grades is even more affected in English than it is in most other subjects. The issue of teaching and learning English in connection with the transition will be taken up again in Chapter 3.

2.1.3. The Perspective of Parents

Parents play a key role in the transition process, because the ultimate decision as to the child's education is left to them. Depending on the performance of the child in school, it is the choice of the family which type of school is adequate for their offspring. Griebel & Bergwanger (2006: 32) also point out that, in the German context, the teacher acts as an advisor, while the parents make the decision about the child's school career. This distribution of roles has its advantages as well as disadvantages. On the one hand the parents' right and obligation to educate their children must not be violated, on the other hand the opinion of the teacher as a professional pedagogue should by all means be incorporated into this important decision. Kramer et al. (2009: 19) address these conflicting regulations concerning the transition:

Das Staatliche Bestimmungsrecht nach dem der Staat die Aufsicht über das gesamte Schulwesen hat [...], kollidiert hier mit dem Grundrecht der Eltern, dass Pflege und Erziehung der Kinder das natürliche Recht der Eltern und die zuvörderst ihnen obliegende Pflicht sind [...]. Folglich existiert zwischen staatlicher Schulaufsicht und elterlichem Erziehungsprimat eine 'Kollisionszone'. (Leschinsky 1994: 973; Avenarius & Heckel 2000, quoted in Kramer et al. 2009)

In Austria parents and children have a certain freedom in opting for a school type after primary school, but ultimately the marks a student attains in the final year of primary school have a decisive influence on the choice of secondary school. Whether a child will visit grammar school or secondary modern school/new middle school largely depends on the school report, which is problematic in many ways. While grades make students easily comparable, their formation is very subjective and, strictly speaking, allows for valid comparisons only within the individual school class. In contrast to other school systems (e.g. Finland, France, England) which use external exams for selecting students (see Eder, Neuweg & Thonhauser 2009: 264), grading in the Austrian system is done by the teacher alone without any external measures. Due to the resulting subjectivity of the grading process, the norm for grading varies from teacher to teacher.

A further undesired effect of grading as the decisive criterion at the transition is the pressure parents often execute on primary school teachers. As mentioned earlier, there is a general tendency towards grammar school, while the number of children attending secondary modern school is declining (see for example Baumert, Maaz & Ulrich 2009: 105). In addition to this trend, researchers have observed a correlation between the level

of education of parents and that of their children, i.e. the higher the educational degree of the parents, the higher that of their offspring, and vice versa:

Bei gleichen geistigen Voraussetzungen geht das Akademikerkind mit größerer Wahrscheinlichkeit auf das Gymnasium als das Kind ohne akademischen Hintergrund. (Stern 2004: 38)

Bellenberg & Tillmann (2011: 64) cite numerous German and international studies that report the same phenomenon, namely better educational opportunities for children from well-educated and well-to-do families.

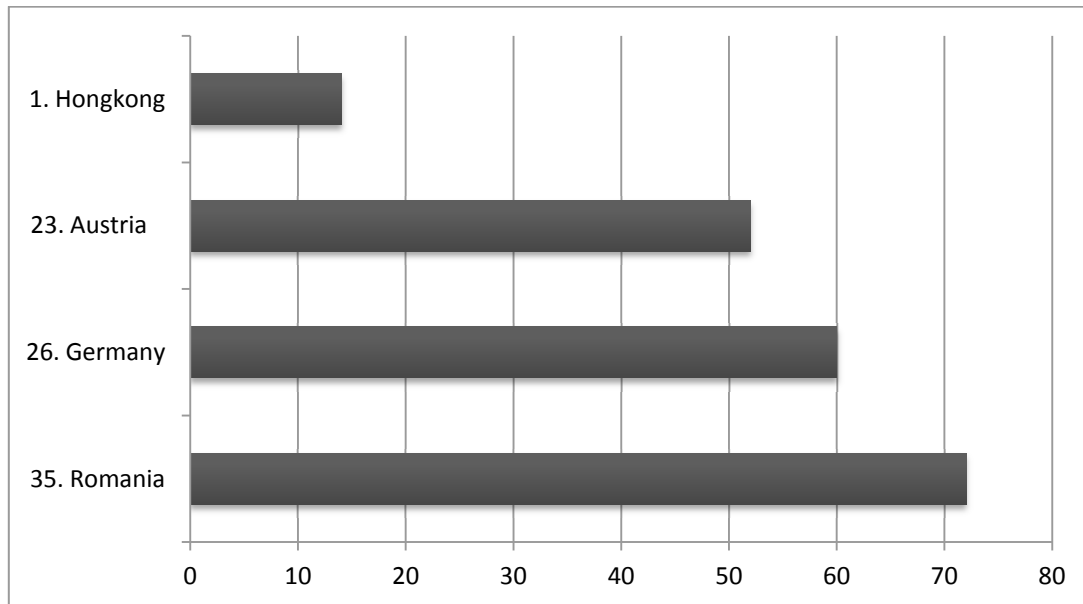
The German study IGLU (Bos et al. 2006: 236-241) has investigated the relationship between social origin and reading competence in primary school children in an international context, comparing 35 countries (see Figure 2, p. 22). According to the study, Germany ranks among the ten countries in which the difference in reading competence between children from a high income background (including academics, technicians and executives) compared to that of children from a low income background (manual labours) is the greatest, amounting to 60 points. In Austria, which is ranked only three positions higher than Germany, the difference is 52 points, and thus only insignificantly lower. The highest value is reached by Romania with 72 points, the country with the smallest difference is Hongkong, reaching 14 points (Bos 2006: 237). These results point to a relatively high correlation between social origin and reading competence, which in turn implies higher educational opportunities for children from a higher social background. As with all studies of this type, though, results and conclusions drawn from them are to be treated with caution.

Nevertheless, the question arises what the reasons are for the greater educational success among children from a well-to-do background. Bellenberg & Tillmann (ibid.: 65) see the main reason in the differing possibilities in terms of learning: „Dahinter stecken ganz unterschiedliche Lern- und Fördermöglichkeiten in bildungsnahen und bildungsfernen Familien“. This tendency to „pass education on“ from one generation to the next is called „primäre soziale Ungleichheit“ (primary social inequality) (ibid.: 65).

Griebel & Bergwanger (2006: 32) stress the importance of parental support for the child before and during the transition: “[T]he emotional relationship between the parent and child, also the support given by the parents, determines how easily the transition will be achieved“. The relationship between parents and child is essential for a successful

Figure 2 Differences in reading competence of children from high and low income backgrounds; The horizontal axis shows the difference in reading competence between children from a low income background and children from a high income background in points as measured by the study.

Source: Bos et al. 2007: 237



transition, which is an additional challenge for parents. Their main tasks are to decide which the best school is for their children and to give them sufficient emotional support. As Griebel & Bergwanger (ibid.: 34) continue, “the wellbeing of a child [...] within the new school is [...] a prerequisite for successful interaction and learning”. For parents it is therefore important to become aware of their crucial role during the transition. A challenge for many parents is to find a compromise between wanting the highest possible education for their child, and at the same time responding to the child’s personal needs. Interestingly, the study of Büchner & Koch (2001: 88) showed that among parents the child’s wishes concerning the choice of secondary school receive highest priority. This attitude is, however, not based on mutuality: “Bei [den Kindern] steht der Wunsch der Eltern als Kriterium für die Auswahl der weiterführenden Schule eher am Ende der Prioritätenliste” (ibid.: 89). Furthermore, social factors such as friendships are often important for parents as well as for children in choosing a school (ibid.: 88), which again indicates a high provision for the child’s option. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that this option will in most cases be more or less strongly influenced by the parents’ wishes, be it consciously or unconsciously.

2.2. Facilitating the Transition

In consideration of the issues arising at the transition from primary to secondary school, it is necessary to give thought to possible ways of facilitating the transition for the involved persons. This section will discuss various possibilities of facilitating the transition relevant in connection with the problems addressed so far. However, a list like this can only be a selection with no claim to completeness. Therefore, only a selection of measures for facilitating the transition will be presented here.

Before dealing with different possibilities of facilitating the transition as mentioned in the literature, I would like to present some of the results of a study carried out by Elfriede Jarmai in 56 Viennese grammar schools in 2001 (Valsky, http://schulen.eduhi.at/lipss/manual_3/TRanslationDE/_1_uebertrittsproblematik_an_wie_ner_schulen.htm, 9 September 2011). The results of the study show that many schools endeavour to make the transition easier for students, teachers and parents. Actions taken by schools in order to facilitate the transition include sending “information about an open day” to primary schools, presenting “intended target classes at an open day”, and inviting fourth forms of primary schools to the secondary schools (Valsky *ibid.*). Visits by head teachers and “designated form teachers” (Valsky *ibid.*) to feeder schools are also part of the preparation for the transition. Further measures cited by Valsky (*ibid.*) are, for example, meetings of third and fourth form primary school teachers with future fifth form teachers, or visits of groups of teachers and students to feeder schools (Valsky *ibid.*). In year one after the transition, in many schools the “form teacher spends more than 50 % of the children’s time with them during the first school week [...], first forms have older tutors”, and „the team of subject teachers may establish a special methodological target“ (Valsky *ibid.*). Further activities at this stage are optional „communication” lessons run by the form teacher, excursions of several days’ duration and field days with students and parents.

These activities and projects only represent a selection of the measures listed in Jarmai’s study. Judging from the wealth of transition-related projects carried out by Viennese schools, a growing awareness of the need to improve the transition and to support students in the process of changing to a new learning environment can be assumed. In the following, further ways of facilitating the transition as presented in the literature will be mentioned with reference to the problems and challenges cited earlier in this chapter.

2.2.1. The Teacher as Advisor

One possibility of making the recommendation regarding the further school career of a child a more integrated one is to give more weight to the primary school teacher's rating of a student's capabilities. Although in many cases the teacher's recommendation is already being considered in addition to the school report, an incorporation of this in the school law would be desirable in order to move away from relying exclusively on marks. It makes sense to look at the decision about a child's school career as a process that begins much earlier than towards the end of primary school. The German *Kultusministerkonferenz* draws attention to this in the following statement:

Die Entscheidung [...] darf nicht ausschließlich durch das Ergebnis einer Prüfung [...] bestimmt sein [...]. Das Verfahren muss sich vielmehr über einen längeren Zeitraum erstrecken, der den Lehrern hinreichende Gelegenheit zur Beobachtung des Kindes und zur Beratung der Eltern gibt. (KMK 2010: 5)

The teacher's knowledge about her or his students' strengths and weaknesses should not be neglected, nor should they be expressed in a single number. Talks among teachers of both school types and parents before and after the transition are certainly a means of facilitating the transition for all persons involved. In this context it is important not to neglect the children's needs and opinions concerning their education.

2.2.2. A Common School for 10-14-year-olds?

An often-cited solution for several drawbacks related to the transition from primary to secondary level is a common school for 10- to 14-year-olds. Especially in an Austrian context this type of school is very topical due to the ongoing "*Modellversuch Neue Mittelschule*". In the course of this project, which was launched in 2008/09, all former secondary modern schools are to be turned into new middle schools until 2015/16 (Bmukk2, <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/nms/index.xml>, 13 September 2011). The *Neue Mittelschule* has the potential to improve the transition in various respects, but some of the problems it has been stated to solve still persist. The frequently criticised breakup of students after primary school is only partly amended by the introduction of new middle school, since the division of lower secondary level into *Neue Mittelschule* and *AHS* is maintained. Consequently, the transition to secondary school remains selective, although

the permeability between *Neue Mittelschule* and *AHS* has been increased by granting students with adequate performance levels access to upper secondary level.

A common school until the age of 14 or 15 for all children, and thus a delay of the choice of a particular secondary school, would allow for a more realistic choice of school type. Between the ages of ten and fourteen, children develop rapidly and their abilities and skills become more apparent. However, Döbert et al. (2011: 24) critically point out that structural changes are not enough to solve problems at the transition:

Eine andere Schulstruktur und insbesondere ein längeres gemeinsames Lernen löst nicht die bestehenden Probleme [...], schon gar nicht soziale Probleme, sondern schafft im Gegenteil neue, bisher so nicht bekannte Probleme.

New problems are likely to occur in the wake of the introduction of a common lower secondary stage, resulting for instance from very heterogeneous classes in terms of strong and weak students (ibid.: 24). This is a point also made by Paukert (2007), who mentions a homogeneous learner group as one of two main preconditions for successful teaching. Based on his long-standing experience as a teacher, Paukert (ibid.) argues that the scenario in which weaker students benefit from stronger ones only works if the achievement gap is a moderate one. If a group is too heterogeneous, the result will be frustration of weak as well as strong students, and ultimately also of the teacher (ibid.). One way of dealing with heterogeneous groups of learners is internally differentiated learning, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. The second criterion for optimal teaching conditions Paukert (2007) names is a class size of no more than 20 students (see also Section 3.3.2.1.). This request is only partially complied with by the *Neue Mittelschule*, where the maximum class size is 25, which is still a relatively large class size for guaranteeing individual support for each student.

Another aspect of the *Neue Mittelschule* that is listed as an improvement on the website of the Austrian Ministry for Education (http://www.neuemittelschule.at/die_neue_mittelschule/paedagogische_konzepte.html#c9, 13 September 2011) is the individual advancement of every student according to his or her abilities. This is a characteristic identified by Döbert, Kann & Rentl (2011: 22) as one of the most central aspects of a successful educational system. The authors argue that increased individual support for weaker students is more promising than making structural changes to the school system:

Grundsätzlich kann [...] davon ausgegangen werden, dass nicht die Schulstruktur, sondern eine früh einsetzende und kontinuierliche Förderung der einzelnen Schülerinnen und Schüler ausschlaggebend für eine erfolgreiche Bildungsbiografie ist. (Döbert, Kann & Rentl 2011: 24).

The money otherwise used for structural changes could thus be invested in the development of supporting systems for students, schools, teachers and parents (ibid.: 23).

With regard to the problem of social inequalities, delaying the transition to a point when the students are older and their abilities have become more apparent than at the end of primary school, a common lower secondary school makes sense. However, with this kind of common school, numerous new questions and problems arise. Koch (2001: 69) mentions changes in the upbringing of children, which result in “eine[r] zu heterogene[n] Schülerschaft und zu unterschiedliche[n] Lernausgangslagen”. Against this background, putting the whole spectrum of increasingly heterogeneous pupils together in one common school while at the same time warranting “individuelle Förderung” (individual support) (http://www.neuemittelschule.at/die_neue_mittelschule/paedagogische_konzepte/individualisierung_video.html, 25 August 2011) seems to be an extremely difficult undertaking. These insights suggest that a reform of the school system mainly aimed at changing its structure is not a guarantee for a higher efficiency in learning.

In terms of the pressure put on primary school teachers by parents, a common lower secondary school is an often-cited suggestion for improvement. Accordingly, Katschnig & Hanisch (2006: 304) speak of a growing call for a common school or some kind of orientation stage by teachers of all types of schools. The *Orientierungsstufe* (orientation stage), as common in some German federal states, comprises years five and six and has the aim of observing students intensively in order to make an informed decision as to the type of school most appropriate for the individual learner (see <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orientierungsstufe>, 6 September 2011). According to Schuchart’s (2006: 97) evaluation of studies regarding the efficiency and the success of the orientation stage in different German federal states, the two-year phase following primary school does not yield noteworthy advantages: “Insgesamt gesehen lassen die Befunde nicht auf eine eindeutige Überlegenheit der Förder- bzw. Orientierungsstufenempfehlung schließen” (ibid.: 97) The number of “correct” recommendations concerning the type of secondary school adequate for the individual student is not significantly higher than of those made after primary school. However, Schuchart (ibid.: 98) draws attention to the fact that the studies evaluated in her work date

mainly from the 1980s, and that inferences as to the present situation can therefore not be made.

2.2.3. School Development and increased Cooperation among Schools

Problems at the transition are often rooted in a lack of cooperation among schools as well as in lacking school development efforts. A changing society requires schools to constantly develop and to react flexibly to the needs of their students (see Koch 2001: 69-70). This is in line with Fölling-Albers' (1992, quoted in Koch 2001: 69-70) postulation of a school that needs to adapt to the changing needs of its clients. The challenge for schools therefore is to consider transition-related aspects in their developing processes. Every school needs to decide on which steps to take in order to facilitate the transition and to make it as smooth as possible. According to Koch (2001: 112-113), "übergangsbezogene Schulentwicklung" (transition-related school development) comprises three central aspects, namely "vorhandene Kooperationsstruktur" (existing cooperation structure), "Unterrichtsgestaltung" (educational design) and "formalrechtliche Regelung des Übergangs" (regulation of the transition according to formal law). In connection with existing cooperation structures, Koch (ibid.: 112-113) emphasises the need to establish a closer collaboration between primary and secondary schools. This is reflected in Büchner & Koch's (2001: 96) study on the transition from the perspective of children and parents, where 58% of parents favoured closer collaboration between primary and secondary schools.

Tied to this is the requirement of what Koch (ibid.: 113) calls "Angleichung der Unterrichtsgewohnheiten" (assimilation of teaching practices) of primary and secondary schools. This falls into the domain of educational design and requires teachers of secondary schools to adapt their teaching methodology which, according to Koch's study (2001: 113), is often too teacher-centred. Also, organisational changes such as blocked lessons should be part of the harmonisation of primary and secondary school teaching practices (ibid.: 113). The third aspect of transition-related school development, the legal regulation of the transition, is the one Koch (ibid.: 113) rates least important. What is more, Koch doubts that a consensus regarding the legal regulation of the transition will be reached in the foreseeable future, because opinions among persons involved differ considerably (Koch 2001: 113). However, this judgement has to be treated with caution since Koch's study relates to a German context, which means that the legal regulations

concerning the transition are not the same as they are in Austria. Furthermore, Koch's focus here lies exclusively on the perspective of teachers. While a change of legal regulations concerning the transition might not be favoured by all groups of teachers, a deferral of the transition could be beneficial for the children.

In their study dealing with the transition from the perspective of children and parents, Büchner & Koch (2001: 96) find that more than half (58%) of parents interviewed think that a transition after four years of primary school is too early. Against this background it is certainly necessary to put the scheduling and the mode of the transition up for discussion. The results of Koch's study also show that the efforts and methods of improving transition-related issues vary considerably among secondary schools:

Insgesamt erwecken die Beschreibungen damit den Eindruck, dass eine übergangsbezogene und schulformübergreifende gemeinsame Schulentwicklung in der Schulwirklichkeit noch nicht etabliert ist. (Koch 2001: 87)

Whether this is equally true for an Austrian context has yet to be assessed. However, since school development efforts are usually administered on the institutional level, they can be expected to differ from one school to the next. As a consequence, a coordination of cooperation efforts on a national level must be considered.

Katschnig & Hanisch (2006: 306) report that teachers interviewed in the course of their study pleaded for obligatory cooperation measures concerning the transition. These include, for instance, regular meetings of primary and secondary school teachers. Additional steps to facilitate the transition mentioned by Austrian teachers are structural adjustments and in-service education courses shared by teachers of primary and secondary schools (ibid.: 306). Such measures comprise the introduction of subject teachers, for example in English in year four of primary school, as well as extra lessons with the form teacher at the beginning of secondary school (ibid.: 306). Thus, the switch from the single-teacher system to the multi-teacher system would be less abrupt.

Finally, one often neglected, but very important, precondition for a successful transition are the experiences a child makes in primary school. Positive experiences in primary school are likely to result in a positively experienced transition:

Je ausgeprägter die schulische Lernfreude bereits in der Grundschule ist, desto günstiger sind die Voraussetzungen für den weiteren erfolgreichen Verlauf einer Schullaufbahn. [...] Brüche in den Lernerfahrungen [...] gilt es

deshalb in dieser vorpubertären Lebensphase so weit wie möglich zu vermeiden. (Büchner & Koch 2001: 47)

Against this background the role of primary school is of great importance and predetermines the educational path of a child. In order to experience the transition to the new school positively, a positive connotation with primary school is vital.

2.3. Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to identify challenges and problems at the transition from the perspectives of the different social players affected by the transition. From the literature on the topic of transitions it becomes clear that all parties involved are confronted with various challenges. This makes the situation a highly complex one, because it is almost impossible to do justice to all persons concerned. Although there is no consensus among experts as to what kind of event the transition to secondary school is, it is frequently described as a particularly sensitive period with great potential, but also as one that bears many risks. The transition can be equally stressful and problematic for students, parents and teachers, often exposing them to high levels of pressure. In the literature, various ways of facilitating and optimising the transition are suggested. Among those taken up in this chapter, the most relevant are striking a balance between parents' and children's wishes and the teacher's recommendation, postponing the transition, and improving school development efforts and cooperation among schools. Furthermore, it has been noted lately that Austrian schools have increased their efforts to improve the transition. However, there are still aspects with great potential for improvement, and the transition still needs to become an integral part of school development.

3. The Transition in English

This chapter deals with the transition in connection with English and with the issues arising in the course of the transition. The focus is again on the Austrian school system and the various problems and issues that are addressed in connection with it in the literature. Although a number of different foreign languages are offered in the Austrian primary school curriculum, this section refers exclusively to English. This has to do with the undisputed primacy of English among the foreign languages taught in Austrian primary schools (Bmukk & Bmwf 2008: 56), as well as with the focus of this thesis on the transition in English.

The first section of the chapter is concerned with issues for English teaching and learning at the transition, i.e. with circumstances which often lead to problems around the time of the transition. After that, learner differences are discussed in section two. Here, the concept of ‘young learners’ is addressed in connection with English teaching as well as the role of motivation, age and personality of the learner in foreign language teaching. Part three of this chapter centres on different possibilities of facilitating the transition in English. Such possibilities include, for instance, enhancing the cooperation of English teachers, applying methods of internal differentiation in class, enhancing the status of English in primary school, or training specialist language teachers for primary level.

3.1. Issues for English Teaching and Learning

In addition to challenges on the personal, organisational and institutional levels (see Chapter 2), the transition entails challenging and sometimes problematic issues on the level of the individual school subjects. For English teaching and learning, the challenges are different from those arising in connection with other subjects, due to the rather short history and the status of English in Austrian primary school as “verpflichtende Übung” (obligatory course). As we will see later in this chapter, several problems arising in connection with primary school English teaching are to do with its status in the curriculum and its position among the other subjects.

One problematic aspect of English teaching in primary school is that there are great differences in English language proficiency among teachers. Buchholz (2007a: 27-28) addresses this problem, stating that while many primary school teachers are

competent on a methodological level, they frequently lack extensive training in terms of foreign language competence. It has to be noted, however, that foreign language teaching requires an appropriate teaching methodology, which means that language competence and didactics are inseparable.

The often incomplete education in the linguistic domain is mainly rooted in a fragmentary in-service training of teachers who were educated before English was introduced in primary school. As a consequence, many primary school teachers, especially those who have been in service for a longer time and have the feeling of being forced to learn and teach English, lack the motivation for doing so. For them it means additional work and more effort without adequate compensation. Buchholz (ibid.: 329) thus goes on to conclude:

Es wäre illusorisch, anzunehmen, dass man von der großen Gruppe der Volksschullehrer, die seit 20, 30 Jahren ihren Dienst versehen, trotz nachgelernter Fremdsprachendidaktik plötzlich verlangen kann, Englisch adäquat und professionell zu unterrichten.

The solution Buchholz suggests for this problem, namely the recruitment of specialist language teachers for primary school, will be discussed in detail in Section 3.1.1.

As mentioned in connection with general problems at the transition in Chapter 1, lacking cooperation among primary and secondary school teachers is one of the main reasons for lack of continuity at the transition. This is also true in connection with English teaching and learning. Secondary school teachers have too little knowledge about the content and purpose of primary school English teaching as well as of the teaching methods employed by primary school teachers (Demircioglu 2008: 61). Similarly, primary school teachers often have wrong opinions concerning the requirements of secondary school English and their colleagues' expectations in the subject. Buchholz (2005a: 532-533) describes the situation in the Austrian schools investigated by her as follows:

Obwohl die Befragung definitive Missverständnisse zwischen Grund- und Sekundarschullehrern ergab, die auf Informationsmangel beruhen, finden Kontakte zwischen den Schulen kaum statt; signifikant niedrig ist die Bereitschaft zur Kooperation bei den HS-Lehrern (bei knapp 50%), was vielfach mit der Feststellung, 'es würde keine Probleme in der Zusammenarbeit geben', begründet wird.

In addition to this lack in willingness and perceived need for cooperation, the picture secondary school teachers have of their colleagues in primary school is rather negative

with respect to English. According to Buchholz's study (ibid.: 533), one quarter of secondary school teachers spoke out against an education in English during primary school, stating that teachers are insufficiently trained in English, thus conveying mistakes in pronunciation and vocabulary to their students. Here, a clarification of the focus of primary school teacher training and teaching practice is necessary.

The problematic side of lacking cooperation efforts is also addressed in the Austrian Language Policy Profile published by the Ministry of Education (2008: 50). It is pointed out that while the significance of the transition is recorded in the curricula of primary and secondary schools, there is no legal implementation of cooperation measures among schools. Increased exchange of information between school types and knowledge about the respective methodologies are, however, inevitable for improving the transition in English.

3.1.1. Diverging Learner Levels at the End of Primary School

A central problem occurring at the transition lies in the diverging levels of English language proficiency children have when entering secondary school. Although this is not perceived as particularly problematic by secondary school teachers asked in the course of the empirical study for this paper (see Chapter 6), ignoring the stage of learning of the individual student increases the danger of demotivating them. What is more, the relevance of foreign language learning in primary school has to be questioned if secondary school teachers start from scratch in grade five, thereby largely ignoring previous knowledge of their students (see Buchholz 2007a: 323). What adds to this situation is that secondary school teachers frequently lack detailed information about the contents and aims of primary school foreign language teaching (Demircioglu 2008: 61). Demircioglu (ibid.) therefore rightly questions the efficiency of early foreign language learning.

It is not surprising that under the present circumstances which make the quality of English instruction mainly dependent on the teacher proficiency levels at the primary level of the individual students vary substantially. Buchholz (2007a: 309) mentions seven areas in which diverging proficiency levels in English at the end of primary school can occur:

- “Erreichung der Fremdsprachenziele (achievement of curricular aims)
- Sprachfertigkeiten (language skills)
- Grundwortschatz (basic vocabulary)

- Aussprache und Intonation (pronunciation and intonation)
- Kommunikationsstrukturen (communication structures)
- Alltagssituationen (everyday situations)
- Erreichung einer grundlegenden Handlungsfähigkeit in der Fremdsprache (attainment of a basic capacity to act in the foreign language)”

This list demonstrates the complexity of English teaching in primary school and the need for a teacher education that accounts for this complexity. Although the level of English language proficiency reached by a student at the end of primary school depends to a certain extent on their personal aptitude for and on their attitude towards language learning, Buchholz (2007a: 319) comes to the conclusion that teaching modalities and language input play a key role in primary school English learning.

In her comparison of classes from three different Austrian primary schools in the four skills in English, Buchholz (ibid.: 313-319) found that there were no skills in which all three classes performed better than in others. This suggests a lack of adherence to the aims defined in the curriculum Buchholz (ibid.: 318). Although the concentration on certain aspects of the language is legitimate and desirable to a certain degree, a common standard for primary school English is essential (ibid.: 319), particularly with regard to the transition.

As far as the reasons for failure to reach the aims defined in the curriculum are concerned, Buchholz (2007a: 320) sees the problem partly rooted in the (lacking) implementation of English teaching on the part of the teachers, but locates the main responsibility for this in the political domain:

Vielmehr ist das ursprüngliche Dilemma, dass diese Probleme zwar scheinbar in erster Linie von den Lehrern abhängen, aber gleichzeitig von ihnen nicht beeinflussbar sind. Lehrer sind hier nur die Transmitter von Problemen, die sie nicht selbst verursacht haben: Probleme, für die die schulpolitischen Stellen und Schulbehörden verantwortlich zeichnen.

A lack of support and of in-service training courses in English offered to primary school teachers has led to a teaching practice that often fails to reach the aim of enabling children to communicate in English (see Buchholz 2007a: 320-323). Being a course without assessment quite understandably has earned primary school English the reputation of a “fun-subject” that is not to be taken too seriously (ibid.: 322-323).

Buchholz also addresses the question of the possibilities children and secondary school teachers have of coping with such divergent levels of knowledge at the beginning of secondary school (ibid.: 319). While secondary school English teachers mostly respond

to this problem by starting anew in grade five, Buchholz (2007a: 324) suggests the introduction of “Profillehrer” (profile teachers) for foreign languages in primary schools. A profile teacher for languages would be in charge of all matters related to the foreign language, naturally including teaching the language. This new job profile would entail the implementation of separate English lessons conducted by a specialist English teacher instead of the form teacher (ibid.: 324). Thus, the time pressure often mentioned by primary school teachers as a reason for skipping English could be eliminated (see Buchholz 2005a: 531). Also, the status of English in primary school could be raised and the quality of English teaching improved. As a consequence, secondary school teachers could assume a certain standard in English among the students coming from primary school.

3.1.2. A Gap at the Interface of Primary and Secondary School

In her article on the interface between primary and secondary school in Austria, Buchholz (2005a) locates a “gap” between primary and secondary schools. According to her study of primary and secondary schools¹, on which the article centres, there is a considerable lack of continuity between primary and secondary level:

Abgesehen von den bekannten Unterscheidungen im Unterrichtsgeschehen, wie Methodik, Zeit- und Personaleinteilung, existiert zwischen Volks- und Sekundarschulen auch in allen anderen Bereichen keinerlei Kontinuität. (Buchholz 2005a: 531)

A comparison of assumptions and expectations held by primary and secondary school teachers about their colleagues reveals a striking divergence between assumptions and reality. While with respect to English teaching primary school teachers attach importance to teaching dialogues, stories and numbers, they do not deal with lexis, word order or German grammar (Buchholz 2005a: 534). Teaching German grammar clearly falls into the domain of German teaching, and thus it should be separated from English instruction.

In addition to a well-founded knowledge in German grammar, secondary school teachers would expect students to possess a basic vocabulary, simple skills in free speech (dialogues, word order) and integrative listening (ibid.: 534). Whether such a significant gap in the knowledge about practices and requirements among school types still exists

¹ Buchholz, Barbara. 2003. „Educational Evaluation on the Transition in English Between Primary and Secondary Schools – In Particular Consideration of the Project ‚Language Intensification English‘ in Austria“. MA-Dissertation, University of East Anglia, Norwich, England.

eight years after the publication of Buchholz's study is for this study to find out, and will be discussed in Chapter 6. In addition to lacking adjustment of primary and secondary school English learning to each other, there are considerable differences in teachers' and students' perceptions of students' skill levels at the end of primary school. Teachers' opinions concerning their students' abilities exceed their pupils' own evaluation by 50-70% (ibid.: 534-535).

The gap between primary and secondary levels is reflected in the summary of the problems reported by primary and secondary school teachers in Buchholz's study (Buchholz 2005a: 537). Here, the entirely different natures of English teaching in primary and secondary schools become apparent. While in primary school English teaching poses a time-problem and involves "more work" and "additional strains" (ibid.: 537) without any extra pay, secondary school teachers might want to avoid having to adapt their teaching to changing primary school English practice. Moreover, secondary teachers tend to be "conceited towards primary ELT", although they sometimes have a shortcoming in pedagogical training compared to primary teachers, who in turn often have the feeling of being "second-class" English teachers (ibid.: 537).

The results of this complex of problems are negative attitudes towards the respective type of school and its teachers, as well as a refusal of any kind of change. The impression is created that a lack of motivation on the side of the teachers, combined with too little initiative coming from educational policy, impedes improvement of the transition.

3.2. Learner Differences

Style and methods of teaching are always determined to a large extent by characteristics of the learner. This is true for all kinds of learning and teaching, but especially for language teaching and thus also for EFL teaching. Bleyhl (2007: 174) calls foreign language learning a "highly complex bio-psycho-social process". Learning a language involves the whole personality of the learner, including biological, psychological (comprising emotional and cognitive-linguistic dimensions) and social factors. Successful learning will only take place in an environment that enables learning without pressure and that allows for mistakes (ibid.: 176).

Among the “factors affecting second language learning” (Lightbown & Spada 2000: 49) are intelligence, aptitude, personality, motivation and attitudes, learner preferences and beliefs, and age. Two of these factors, namely motivation/attitudes and age, are of particular interest in the context of transitions. The age of the learner is a crucial factor in the process of learning a foreign language, and it must be taken into consideration when designing learning materials and choosing teaching methods and interaction formats. In this section, issues in connection with teaching young learners are discussed first, before different aspects influencing foreign language teaching are addressed.

3.2.1. Teaching Young Learners

Teaching what is often termed ‘young learners’ requires special precaution. But what exactly are ‘young learners’? What are their characteristics in terms of language learning? And what are the implications and consequences for language teaching? While there are different definitions of the young learner, it is mostly the age group between 5 and 12 years that is considered to represent young learners (see for example Rixon 1999 and Cameron 2001). Thus, the concept of ‘young learners’ comprises children, or “pre-adolescents” (Ur 1996: 288), and covers students attending grades one to six. Accordingly, when confronted with the transition to secondary school, students are still considered to be young learners.

Due to children’s “greater immediate need to be motivated by the teacher or through materials in order to learn efficiently” (ibid.: 288), it is vital to attune learning aids and teaching methods to their needs. According to Ur (ibid.: 288), there are three particularly appealing ways of presenting language to children, viz. pictures, stories and games. Since children act more on impulse than older learners do, and are consequently more easily distracted, they need vivid materials to support their learning. Picture books are “the most effective combination in teaching” because here, through a combination of pictures and stories, different perceptual channels are activated (ibid.: 289). Ur’s (1996: 289) advice to incorporate games into language teaching is in accordance with the emphasis placed on playfully arranged teaching and on games by the primary school curriculum. At the same time she stresses the fact that language learning instruction should never “convey the message that it is just fun, not to be taken too seriously”, calling this “anti-educational and potentially demoralizing” (ibid.: 289). The goal should always

be learning. And since being active benefits children's learning process, "game-based procedures" should always form a part of language teaching that is geared to children (ibid.: 290).

With regard to the age which is the most suitable for starting learning a second language there are different opinions among researchers. While it is often thought that the earlier a second or foreign language is introduced the better it is learned, this view has been challenged repeatedly (see Section 3.2.2.). Generally, listening skills and pronunciation have been reported to benefit from an early start, whereas grammar is said to be learned slower by younger learners (Cameron 2001: 17; Ur 1996: 286). Ur (ibid.: 287) also points out that younger children "rely more on intuitive acquisition" than older students do, which is especially problematic when exposure to the foreign language is limited as it is in "formal classroom learning". She therefore concludes that teenagers are most likely to be "overall the best learners" (ibid.: 286). However, when considering motivation for and attitudes towards learning, the situation might be a different one. These two factors will be looked at in Section 3.2.3.

3.2.2. The Critical Period Hypothesis – How beneficial is an Early Start?

With reference to various studies which "suggest that there is a time in human development when the brain is predisposed for success in language learning" (Lightbown & Spada 2000: 60), many researchers believe that there is a certain period early on in life during which languages are learned best. However, the Critical Period Hypothesis, defined by Cameron (2001: 13) as "the idea that young children can learn a second language particularly effectively before puberty", is not supported by all studies on this topic. According to Lightbown & Spada (2000: 67) the context and the goal of language learning determine the extent to which an early introduction of a language is successful. When the aim is "native-like mastery of the target language", an early start is much more beneficial than when "communicative ability for all students in a school setting" is aimed for (ibid.: 68). Ur (1996: 287) also challenges the Critical Period Hypothesis by claiming that early language learning that takes place in a school setting might not be as profitable as starting around the age of ten. This is supported by various studies which "show that older learners can attain high, if not 'native', levels of proficiency in their second language (Lightbown & Spada 2000: 67). However, Ur (ibid.: 287) also admits that, in

the long run, an early start is beneficial if learning is “maintained and reinforced as the child gets older”.

For the Austrian context, where the aim of foreign language teaching is not native-like proficiency, this means that starting early is not a necessary precondition for success. However, if the focus is on the right aspects of the language during the early stages, i.e. on listening and communicative skills rather than on grammar and writing, children will profit from an early start in learning a foreign language. And since most of them continue to learn English in secondary school, they are likely to benefit from early second language learning in the long run.

An often-cited argument against an early introduction of a second language is the “interference argument” (McLaughlin 1984: 60), which claims that the structures of the first language interfere with those of the second language, thus affecting the learning process (Tough 1991: 222). While Tough (ibid.: 222) points out that “children may intuitively be seeking for structure characteristic of their first language” when learning a second language, Beardsmore (1982, cited in Bhela 1999: 23) does not refer exclusively to children when saying that “many of the difficulties a second language learner has with the phonology, vocabulary and grammar of L2 are due to the interference of habits from L1“. According to this, interference of L1 with L2 exists in all second language learning settings regardless of the learner’s age. The concern often uttered in connection with young learners is that contact with a foreign language may have negative effects on the first language. Vollmuth (2004: 13), however, states that from grade two onward, children have largely completed the “Routinisierungsprozess [...] an erstsprachlichen Lese- und Schreibtechniken”, so that the chance of a negative effect of L2 on L1 is very low. Moreover, Tough (1991: 222) refers to more recent findings, which indicate that strategies acquired in learning the first language are also applied when learning a second language, thus positively influencing the learning process.

As a consequence of this modified view of the relationship between first and second language, “transference” rather than interference is assumed in second language learning theory:

Such transference seems more likely to take place when the experiences through which the second language is learned are of a similar nature to those through which the strategies have been developed in the first place. (Tough 1991: 222)

The implications of this for EFL teaching are that the way in which English is taught to children should resemble the way in which they have learned their first language. However, this conclusion has to be treated with caution, since the context of second language learning in a classroom setting differs substantially from the way in which a child acquires its first language. Moreover, as mentioned above, younger children tend to rely on intuition more than older learners do, and are consequently receptive to the teaching methods suggested by Tough to a greater degree.

In connection with the transference argument, Tough (*ibid.*: 224) names four basic strategies used by children learning a first language. These are imitation, repetition, formulaic speech and incorporation of new elements into existing structures. Just as parents support these strategies of children intuitively, the language teacher should do this deliberately (*ibid.*: 225). Also, the teacher should act as a model in terms of language use, and children should have the chance of making mistakes, and thus to learn via “trial and error” (*ibid.*: 222). In addition to this, the teacher should “repeat[...] phrases that give clues to the different structure” of the second language, or respond with “slightly exaggerated articulation” (*ibid.*: 222-223). All this requires well-trained primary school teachers who are proficient speakers of English. Against this background, the introduction of specially trained profile teachers of foreign languages in primary school as suggested by Buchholz (2007a: 324; see also Section 3.1.1. of this volume) seems indispensable if the quality of elementary-level foreign language teaching is to be enhanced.

3.2.3. Motivation and Attitudes

The learner’s motivation for learning a language is an aspect relevant for many decisions, on the side of the teacher as well as on that of the students. Moreover, motivation for and attitudes towards language learning depend on a number of factors, some of which are examined in this section.

According to Matsumoto (2009), teachers are among the factors exerting the greatest influence on pupils’ motivation. Thus, the teacher can influence the motivation of students either positively or negatively, and, depending on the age of the students, she or he will have to make use of different methods and instruments in order to increase motivation (see Lightbown & Spada 2000: 58). Furthermore, it has been stated that success in learning a language depends to a large degree on the motivation and attitudes

of the learner. Ur (1996: 275), for instance, refers to a study by Naiman et al. (1978), noting that most characteristics which are normally attributed to good learners are “clearly associated with motivation”. However, statements of this type have to be treated with caution, since the results of motivational studies depend on a number of factors. The design of the study, the language proficiency tests used with it, the persons tested, and the way the results are interpreted all have a bearing on what the researcher concludes with regard to motivation and success in language learning (see Lightbown & Spada 2000: 52).

Different types of motivation are distinguished in the literature including, for example, ‘integrative’ and ‘instrumental’ motivation, or ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ motivation (Ur 1996: 276). Integrative motivation refers to “the desire to identify with and integrate into the target-language culture”, whereas instrumental motivation refers to “the wish to learn the language for purposes of study or career promotion” (ibid.: 276). When learning a language in the classroom, the motivation for learning will rather correspond to the latter of the two types. This means that students do not need English for purposes of integration, but often for purposes that are not immediately apparent at the time of learning.

In contrast to other subjects, the importance and the benefits of learning a foreign language, especially English, are normally not questioned by students. Most of them see and appreciate the benefits of having a command of such a widely used language. Buchholz (2007b: 332) reports that English ranks high among Austrian students, being judged positively by 90% of students asked. Thus, except for a personal dislike of the subject or the teacher, there will normally not be a lack of motivation for learning English.

The terms ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ motivation refer to “the urge to engage with the learning activity for its own sake”, and to “motivation that is derived from external incentives”, respectively (Ur 1996: 276). While the ‘ideal’ learner is intrinsically motivated and thus has an interest in the language per se, Ur (ibid.: 276) points out that this is typically the case with younger learners and usually decreases the older students get. Demircioglu (2008: 79) emphasises the dependence of a task’s attractiveness on the developmental stage of the learner. Younger children need to be motivated via immediate benefits of a task, whereas older children, even at primary level, can already consider long-term effects of certain tasks and learning efforts.

An important stimulus for extrinsic motivation is success. Successful learners will always have a higher motivation for keeping up their level of success. This can be

influenced by the teacher via praise or grades (Ur 1996: 278). Other sources of extrinsic motivation named by Ur (ibid.: 279) are “authoritative demands” (i.e. motivation resulting from pressure exerted on students by the teacher), tests, and competition, which can all motivate students to learn.

But not only extrinsic motivation can be influenced by the teacher. Although intrinsic motivation is by definition rooted in the individual and mainly based on students’ attitudes towards a language, its culture and its speakers, there are also ways of raising students’ “desire to invest effort in the learning for its own sake” (Ur 1996: 280). The presentation of learning contents and the communication of positive attitudes by the teacher are essential, especially at the beginning of a course. Moreover, awakening the students’ interest in the tasks and thus in the language is vital for keeping learners motivated (ibid.: 280). In connection with this, Lightbown & Spada (2000: 57-58) list several ways of motivating students by applying different pedagogical practices. Among these are variation in tasks, activities and materials, “using cooperative rather than competitive goals” (i.e. having students work together to fulfil a task rather than competing against each other), and “motivating students into the lesson” (ibid.: 57).

3.2.4. Other Factors Affecting Second Language Learning

Having discussed learner differences and motivation at length, two of the factors that are often said to have a bearing on second language learning, namely personality and aptitude, will be addressed below. Although there are several other personality traits such as intelligence, learner preferences (Lightbown & Spada 2000) or ‘cognitive style’ (Cook 1991: 87), mentioned in connection with language learning, those included here are those most relevant in connection with the transition in second language learning.

3.2.4.1. Personality

Personality of the learner is another factor that has an impact on second language learning, and it is linked to the learner’s age. Traits such as inhibition often depend on personality as well as on age and can have a great influence on language aspects such as pronunciation. As Lightbown & Spada (2000: 55) point out, risk-taking is essential for success in language learning, but it is often “discourage[d]” by inhibition. Whereas young children generally have fewer problems imitating the sounds of a foreign language, this

can be an obstacle for adolescents, “who are more self-conscious than younger learners” (ibid.: 55). Thus, inhibition is considered to be one of several reasons for young children’s fast progress in adopting pronunciation patterns of a language.

3.2.4.2. Aptitude

The concept of aptitude is based on the observation that some people are better language learners than others (see Cook 1991:75). Those people are thought to possess one or more of several characteristics which are assumed to enhance language learning, including for example a good memory or a high analytic ability. There are various procedures for testing aptitude, most of which test second language aptitude in connection with classroom learning (ibid.: 77).

The implications of language aptitude for English teaching are especially relevant with regard to the transition to secondary school. Within a class there will always be a wide range of aptitudes, resulting in a more or less heterogeneous group of students. It is the teacher’s task to organise teaching in a way that appeals to the different learner levels and aptitudes. Cook (ibid.: 77-78) names three possibilities of coping with different levels of aptitude within a class. The first one, selecting only those students “who are likely to succeed”, while barring the others, is not very plausible, as the author herself admits. The second one is streaming students into different groups according to their levels of aptitude, as it is the practice in Austrian secondary modern schools. The third way of dealing with different aptitude levels is to differentiate within a class, i.e. to provide “different teaching methods and final examinations”, which may include “varied exercises within the class” (ibid.: 77-78). This third possibility is similar to the teaching practice aimed for in Austrian new middle schools (see Section 3.3.4.).

3.3. Facilitating the Transition in English

With respect to the problems occurring at the transition in English addressed in this chapter, several approaches towards improving and facilitating the transition have been suggested. In order for secondary English teaching and learning to benefit from an early start of English teaching in primary school, an efficient way of implementing early foreign language learning is essential. It is therefore necessary to consider ways of

ensuring a purposeful English teaching practice at primary level first, and to look at possibilities of improving the transition from the perspective of secondary school afterwards. This will form the first part of this section. After that, some areas of improvement concerning both primary and secondary levels are discussed. These include, among others, cooperation of primary and secondary schools, the use of a differentiated teaching practice, and assessment/grading.

3.3.1. Primary Level

Although the aims and proficiency levels that are to be reached by the end of primary school in English are defined in the curriculum, learner levels still differ substantially at the start of secondary school. What are possible solutions for this problem? One possibility is the introduction of standardised English tests at the end of primary school as suggested by Buchholz (2005a: 538). These tests would have to be based on common standards defined for primary school English. However, since not all children in Austria learn English in primary school, the implementation of such tests would pose a problem. Hence, it would make more sense to define standards to be reached in English by the end of primary school. These should be recorded in the curriculum, which would then serve as a clear guideline for English in primary school by formulating learning aims and standards more detailed than in the past.

In addition to a test at the end of grade four, Buchholz (2007a: 329) demands a professional and focused, yet playful foreign language teaching practice that yields perceptible results. This conforms to Schultz-Steinbach's (2001) postulation of maximum transparency with regard to the aims of foreign language learning in primary school. The best way of improving English language teaching in primary school without generating unmanageable costs is the introduction of specially trained English teachers and offering advanced training on a regular basis (Buchholz 2007a: 329). Considering the knowledge and expertise required for teaching a foreign language effectively and successfully, such measures seem indispensable for language teaching on primary level.

The implementation of an efficient foreign language learning practice in primary school entails providing for regular lessons and the introduction of some kind of quality management (see Buchholz 2007b: 331). It is not surprising that in a subject that lacks clearly formulated curricular aims as well as assessment of any kind, it is almost exclusively the teacher's personal commitment that determines success or failure. The

fact that English lessons are often skipped for lack of time adds to this problem and illustrates the dilemma in which many teachers find themselves. Combined with time pressure, an education in language teaching that is often fragmentary is unlikely to produce optimum results.

In consideration of these shortcomings, raising the status of English in primary school seems unavoidable if a common standard of foreign language teaching is to be reached throughout Austria. Ways of securing and evaluating children's learner levels at the end of primary education are needed, along with possibilities of providing for comprehensive and professional training for language teachers.

3.3.2. Secondary Level

For secondary schools, the biggest challenge regarding the transition in English is coping with diverging learner levels among children entering secondary school. One way of dealing with this situation without ignoring students' previous knowledge is to employ a differentiated teaching practice (see Section 3.3.4.). Thereby, the danger of rendering English learning boring for those pupils who are ahead of their classmates can be reduced (see Demircioglu 2008: 61). As a reaction to an increased quality of English teaching in primary schools, secondary schools need to move away from the practice of treating their fifth grade students as beginners of English. Moreover, a common standard among primary school students would allow secondary school teachers to start from this shared basis, and thus appreciate the effort of students and teachers in primary school.

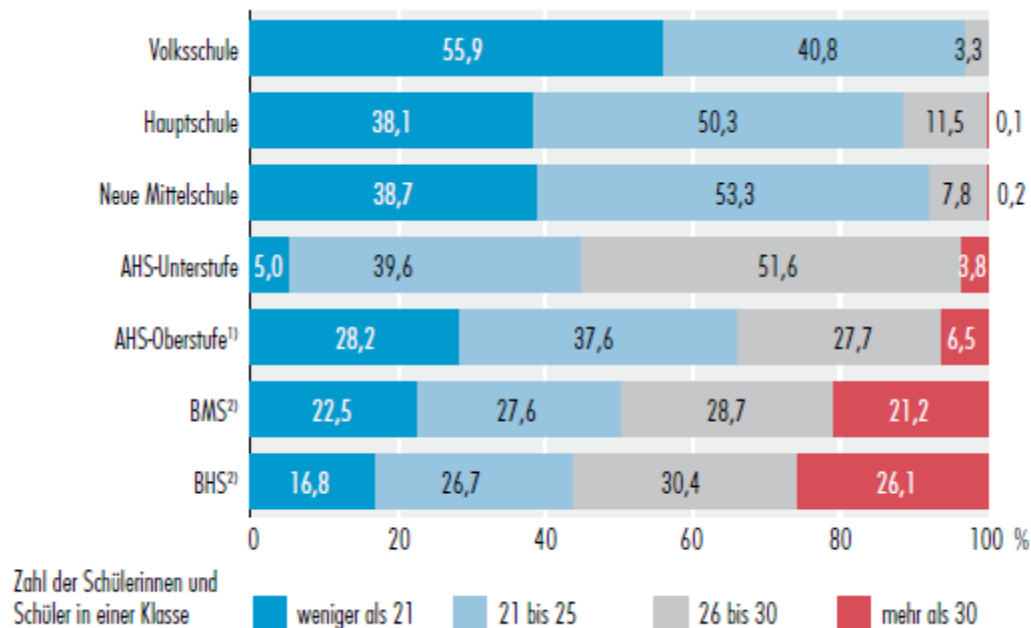
3.3.2.1. Class Size Reduction

A teaching practice that responds to the individual needs of students requires structural adaptations. The most important change would involve reducing the class size to a level that makes differentiated teaching possible, i.e. ideally to a maximum of 20 students per class (see Altrichter & Sommerauer 2007: 749). Class sizes at the primary level come closest to the desired levels, with almost 60% of classes being smaller than 21 students (see Figure 3, p. 45). However, this value is significantly lower for all school types at the secondary level. With an average of 25.3 students per class in 2009/10 (Statistik Austria 2011: 74), especially secondary academic schools are confronted with the problem of large class sizes at the lower level (Figure 3). While in secondary modern schools and

new middle schools the class size was below 26 students in 88.4% and 92% of cases, respectively, this value was as low as 44.6% for lower secondary academic schools in 2009/10 (ibid.: 73).

Figure 3 Distribution of students according to class size in 2009/10

Source: Statistik Austria (2011: 74)



Positive effects of small class sizes have been reported repeatedly. Blatchford (2009) especially notes the benefits of small groups for the “individualisation of teaching”:

Qualitative studies suggest that in smaller classes it can be easier for teachers to spot problems and give feedback, identify specific needs and gear teaching to meet them, and set individual targets for pupils. Teachers also experience better relationships with, and have more knowledge of, individual pupils.

Despite these advantages, it is often pointed out that class size reduction does not automatically result in better teaching methods and practices (Blatchford 2009; Altrichter & Sommerauer 2007: 749). Accordingly, smaller class sizes “should always be accompanied by a review of teaching methods, classroom management and inservice training in order to maximise potential benefits“ (Blatchford & Mortimore 1994: 424, quoted in Altrichter & Sommerauer 2007: 749).

The reduction of the number of students per class is thus a starting point for further reforms aimed at improving English teaching and learning at the beginning of

secondary school. According to Altrichter & Sommerauer (2007: 749-750), such further steps should include the creation of possibilities for developing teacher qualifications required for teaching groups of different sizes effectively.

3.3.3. Cooperation

If the gap between primary and secondary school English teaching as mentioned by Buchholz (2005a) is to be closed, or at least reduced, enhancing cooperation and communication among primary and secondary schools is essential. It has already been pointed out that among primary and secondary teachers there is a striking discrepancy in knowledge about the practices used by their colleagues (see Buchholz 2005a: 531-535 and Section 3.1.2. of this volume). This mismatch leads to wrong assumptions about the requirements made by secondary schools and the skills taught in primary schools in English. Increased continuity between primary and secondary school is therefore necessary in order to minimize the gap between the two school types. But how can this be achieved?

It is obvious that a regular exchange among primary and secondary school teachers cannot be established unless it is regulated by means of legal guidelines or via financial incentives. Most teachers are not willing to invest more work without receiving compensation for it. In order to reduce misconceptions and stereotypes prevalent within a group of teachers regarding the English teaching practice of another group of teachers, communication is vital. This can be accomplished by arranging regular meetings of primary and secondary school teachers, or, as suggested in Section 2.2., by organising advanced training courses that are shared by teachers of primary and secondary schools. Benischek (2000: 81) regards close cooperation as an integral part of a smooth transition to secondary school:

Die Teamarbeit zwischen den unterschiedlichen Lehrergruppen sollte ein fixer Bestandteil in den Studienplänen der Lehrerbildungseinrichtungen sein. Problemmindernd könnte auch der Austausch von Unterrichtsmaterialien, Unterrichtshilfen und methodisch-didaktischen Konzepten zwischen den Lehrern verschiedener Schularten sein. Erstrebenswert wäre auch, wenn die Eltern verstärkt miteinbezogen würden, die Schulpartnerschaft sollte so ausgebaut werden, dass alle Beteiligten mitbestimmen können und auch Verantwortung zu tragen haben.

The author here argues for an incorporation of cooperation efforts into the curricula of teacher training institutions as well as for the inclusion of parents into school-related decisions. Making exchange among colleagues an integral part of teaching and providing compensation for such efforts would benefit EFL teaching in general and help reducing misconceptions about primary and secondary teaching practices.

Further measures regarding an improved cooperation mentioned in the Language Education Policy Profile (Bmukk & Bmwf 2008: 50) are better adjustment of the educational concepts of primary and secondary schools to each other, offering more advanced training courses for primary school teachers, and employing native speakers of English in primary school English teaching. Also, increasing teachers' sensitivity for problems occurring at the transition by addressing these in the context of teacher training would be desirable.

Summing up, cooperation needs to be improved via school development efforts at the federal level as well as at the level of the individual schools. The challenge will be to convince teachers of the need to boost cooperation with their colleagues, which entails granting them adequate compensation.

3.3.4. Internal Differentiation

In Chapter 2, the concept of internal differentiation has been mentioned as an alternative to a more teacher-centred approach to ELT in which all students of a class receive the same tasks. The counterpart of internal differentiation, external differentiation, involves either

- splitting up secondary schools into different types of school (secondary modern schools, grammar schools etc.),
- assigning students to streams according to their abilities, or
- offering mandatory elective courses in addition to a common instruction of all pupils (Sitte 2001: 199, translated by the author).

The 'traditional' approach to teaching is largely based on the (implicit) assumption that the preconditions for learning a subject are basically the same for all pupils. By contrast, the concept of internal differentiation accounts for individual differences in foreign language learning by creating learning situations that allow students to find their own approaches to tasks, with the aim of acquiring a language (or any other subject) (Herber,

Hofmann & Martinek 2005: 727). Internal differentiation is mostly subject-related and refers to teaching methods that are attuned to the individual aptitudes, abilities and interests of students (Sitte 2001: 199):

Die „Gleichartigkeit“ der Schüler einer Klasse gibt es nicht. [...] [Die Heterogenität einer Klasse] äußert sich nicht nur hinsichtlich von Differenzen bei der Sprachbeherrschung und im Vorwissen, sondern auch in verschiedenen Interessen und Begabungen sowie in unterschiedlicher Konzentrationsfähigkeit und Leistungsbereitschaft der Schüler.

This focus on the personal history of every student emphasises the need for an approach that takes these variables into account. Especially at the beginning of secondary school, English teachers are confronted with very heterogeneous learner groups in terms of language proficiency (see Section 3.1.1.). I will therefore argue that, with respect to English teaching, internal differentiation can be profitable for both primary and secondary schools.

3.3.4.1. Internal Differentiation as a way of dealing with Diverging Learner Levels at the start of Secondary School

Internal differentiation constitutes an alternative and more efficient way of dealing with diverging learner levels at the start of secondary school than assimilating pupils' learning levels. The widespread practice of providing undifferentiated tasks for all students does not reflect insights from learning theory. As pointed out in Section 3.2., the way in which a foreign language is learned depends on numerous factors, which vary from one learner to the next. A differentiated way of teaching English involves devising different versions of a task, thus providing several levels of difficulty. In working on those tasks either on their own or in teams, students are encouraged to find their own approaches to the tasks (Sitte 2001: 199). As a student-centred approach that accounts for the individual learning level and progress, internal differentiation is a promising way of dealing with diverging learner levels.

An experimental study examining the effect of differentiated English teaching, as opposed to the teacher-centred approach, has yielded results that demonstrate the benefits of internal differentiation in primary school (Herber, Hofmann & Martinek 2005). The study was carried out in a primary school in Salzburg in 2004 and involved two fourth grade classes of the school. The first class – the experimental group – received

differentiated instruction in English for one school year, while the control group was exposed to instruction following the “traditional” teacher-centred method. When tested after a one-year experimental phase, the experimental group showed a considerably higher increase in English learning gains than the control group did (ibid.: 732). Thus, the adoption of internal differentiation in English teaching clearly yielded a positive effect on pupils’ achievement in primary school (ibid.: 735).

On the basis of the results of the study by Herber and colleagues, a beneficial impact of a differentiated teaching practice can be assumed for secondary schools as well. This approach has been taken up by the Austrian new middle school, which, in contrast to the traditional *Hauptschule* with its system of streams, relies on internal differentiation. Whether and how well this approach is being implemented in the classroom will be addressed in Chapter 6, but the question is certainly up for investigation by future research. Internal differentiation is also an often-cited possibility of arranging a common lower secondary stage for all pupils (Olechowski 2005: 912). Olechowski (ibid.: 912) supports this theory by emphasising that learning efficiency is higher in heterogeneous learner groups than it is in homogeneous classes, given that the different abilities are accounted for by the teacher.

3.3.4.2. Internal Differentiation in Austrian Secondary Schools

According to the curricula for Austrian primary and secondary schools, differentiated and individualised methods of instruction should form part of the teaching practice in all subjects. Considering the relatively high effort required for organising differentiated instruction, one would expect that the approach is in fact rarely adopted in schools. However, the results of a study by Mayr (2002) indicate that Austrian secondary school teachers practice internal differentiation to a greater extent than generally assumed (see Table 2).

Mayr asked an unspecified number of teachers of German, English and mathematics from schools in Upper Austria to describe a random selection of their lessons with respect to measures of differentiation by means of a questionnaire. The results show a clear tendency towards internal differentiation in both school types, with higher numbers for almost all differentiation measures in secondary modern school (Table 2). Besides the relatively broad definition of “internal differentiation” adopted by the author, the fairly frequent use of differentiating measures can have different reasons.

One would be greater willingness and motivation among secondary modern school teachers to teach in a differentiated way. A second reason could be that secondary modern school pupils are more heterogeneous in terms of achievement and abilities, thus forcing teachers to adapt the tasks to their abilities. However, since the percentages arrived at for secondary modern school still refer to the system of streamed classes, it can be assumed that the learner groups are rather homogeneous, thus favouring the reason mentioned first. This would imply a certain rigidity in the teaching practice of grammar school teachers in the three subjects investigated by Mayr. However, more extensive research is needed in order to make valid judgements in this respect.

Table 2 Measures of internal differentiation in Austrian secondary schools
 Source: Mayr 2002, http://www.gemeinsamlernen.at/siteVerwaltung/mBeitrage/Arbeitsmappe/Tabelle_1_Differenzierungstypen.pdf, 31 October 2011

Differentiation by means of...	Secondary Modern School (<i>Hauptschule</i>)	Secondary Academic School (<i>AHS</i>)
varied contents	23%*	22%
different levels of difficulty of tasks	25%	18%
varied task length	28%	21%
different social forms	20%	28%
varied learning material	20%	11%
varied support by the teacher	39%	40%
different homework tasks	17%	11%
Made use of at least one of the measures mentioned	48%	54%
Total number of lessons	64	76

*Percentage of lessons in which the respective differentiation measure was used

Despite the comparably frequent use of differentiating measures, additional work is the criticism most frequently uttered by the teachers in connection with internal differentiation. The author explains this seeming contradiction between research results and statements made by teachers with the fact that in practice often very simple forms of differentiation are applied. These include, for example, explaining a task again to a

student while the rest of the class is already working on it, or allowing a student to finish a task at home (ibid.). He adds that the more complex the method of differentiation, the less frequently its use in class is reported. Since Mayr's study dates from 2002, i.e. from the time before the introduction of new middle school, there is no indication of differentiation measures used in this type of school.

3.3.4.3. Improving the Transition in English by Implementing Internal Differentiation in Primary and Secondary Schools

On the basis of what has been said about internal differentiation so far, its use in English lessons in primary as well as in secondary schools is very likely to contribute to an improved transition. As demonstrated in the study by Herber, Hofmann & Martinek (2005), children receiving individually matched English instruction in primary school learn significantly more than those taught in a traditional way. A primary school teaching practice optimised in such a way would form a solid basis for secondary foreign language teaching applying methods of internal differentiation. In addition, using internal differentiation supports learner autonomy, thus enabling pupils to gradually take on responsibility for their own learning (Herber 2008). As such, this method of teaching is more effective and less frustrating for children entering secondary school than having to 'relearn' things they already know, due to an undifferentiated teaching practice.

However, it must be kept in mind that instruction which relies on internal differentiation always involves additional work for the teacher and will only yield positive results if it is applied consistently. This includes, for instance, checking whether and to which extent students possess the skills required for certain tasks, or devising graded tasks and different versions of the same task (Herber, Hofmann & Martinek 2005: 728). Consequently, an effective use of differentiated methods of teaching requires certain skills on the part of the teacher, which cannot just be assumed to be at their command. If internal differentiation is to yield perceptible success, its incorporation into teacher training is essential.

3.3.5. Assessment and Grading

In contrast to all other subjects taught in primary school, English goes without any kind of testing or assessment during all four years. While the absence of pressure through grades or performance tests is generally said to benefit the learning atmosphere and progress of learners (see for example Bleyhl 2007: 176), tests and grading have the potential to add to the learner's sense of achievement and thus to increase their motivation.

As mentioned in connection with learner motivation (Section 3.2.3.), success is a crucial factor with regard to motivation, maybe "the single most important feature in raising extrinsic motivation" (Ur 1996: 278). Dörnyei (2001: 132-133) stresses the positive aspect of grading, stating that if used in a purposeful way, grades can contribute to success in the learning process. Moreover, if tests do not involve too much stress and are not overused (Ur 1996: 279), they are a good means of monitoring students' progress, and a way for them to apply and demonstrate what they have learned.

An important task of language teaching in primary school is to render children's first encounter with a foreign language playful and to give them time to get to know the language. At the same time, especially young children need some form of feedback on their achievements. While oral reports on pupils' progress constitute the most common form of progress report in primary school English (Buchholz 2007a: 56), this practice requires a lot of discipline from the teacher. Keeping track of the individual student's progress without any kind of formal assessment is difficult. From this perspective, grades are a valuable way of providing feedback for children and parents, and an important indicator of areas that need improvement (Benischek 2000: 19). However, there are also alternative methods of assessment (e.g. verbal assessment) which are already being used in a number of schools, especially primary school throughout Austria (see Stern 2010: 64).

With respect to the abruptly beginning and often uncompromising grading practice in secondary schools, a preparation of students by means of a gradual familiarisation with grading during primary school would be desirable in English. However, the focus of foreign language learning in primary school is mainly on oral, communicative and auditory skills rather than on reading and writing. Thus, testing or feedback can only be applied to spoken language and is to be given orally (Duffek 1999: 47).

Ultimately, a practice of foreign language learning aimed at reaching a common standard by the end of primary school will need to establish a method of measuring

students' progress in a way that is suitable for children. At the same time, changes in the organisation of foreign language teaching in primary school are necessary. Here, ensuring regular units of English teaching every week is particularly important. In the long run, enhancing the status of English to that of a fully fledged subject must be considered, especially since a first contact with English is increasingly already made in nursery school (see Buchholz 2007b: 336). This ties in with Buchholz's (2005a: 538) criticism of the status of English teaching in primary school and with her call for a reevaluation of primary school English teaching:

An den Volksschulen muss das Englisch von einem Hie-und-da-Spaßgegenstand, welcher in zufälligen "Eintropfsequenzen" unreflektiert verabreicht wird, zu einem fokussierten und professionellen, integrativen Fremdsprachenunterricht (kommunikativ, holistisch, cross-curricular) mutieren.

The move away from the reputation of being a purely 'fun-subject' is certainly necessary if English in primary school is to be more than just an occasional diversion from the daily routine. As a subject in its own right, English in primary school should convey basic reading and writing skills as well as aspects of German grammar (ibid.: 538). Moreover, Buchholz (ibid.: 538) suggests a standardised performance test at the end of primary school (see also Section 3.3.1.).

The task of secondary schools in terms of assessment and testing is to take into account the practices of primary school and thus to gradually get pupils accustomed to being tested and graded in English. However, this again requires an adaptation of primary school English teaching, since tests are part of the secondary school curriculum already in grade five. Rendering the transition more continuous is therefore again a question of coordination and cooperation which requires the commitment of all persons involved.

3.3.6. Teacher Training

In order to reach the aim of improving the transition with regard to English learning and teaching, various aspects in connection with teacher training need to be considered. In addition to a solid education in the linguistic as well as in the didactic-methodical domains, continuing education is indispensable for both, primary and secondary school teachers of English:

Um den Anforderungen zu entsprechen, gilt – gerade bei Fremdsprachen – das Prinzip des lebenslangen Lernens, der kontinuierlichen Fortbildung. Daher genießt die Verbesserung der Lehreraus- und Fortbildung für Fremdsprachenlehrer in den Bildungsprogrammen der EU absolute Priorität [...]. (EC Aktionsplan 2003:5, quoted in Buchholz 2007a: 27)

Providing more English training and in-service courses for primary school teachers as well as making the necessary financial and personal resources available are central tasks for Austrian education politics (Buchholz 2005a: 539). Moreover, the author demands an increased number of English lessons during primary school teacher training (ibid.: 539). The English training of primary and secondary modern school teachers, who are educated at so-called universities of education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*), is inevitably less extensive than the linguistic education of secondary academic school teachers who, in addition to pedagogic and didactic training, study English as a subject at a “traditional” university. What adds to the difficulty of providing primary school teachers with an all-embracing linguistic education is the fact that, in their role as form teachers, they have to cover up to nine subjects (see Bmukk 2010: 29), whereas secondary school teachers specialise in two subjects (see Section 4.5. for further information on teacher training in Austria).

Although opinions tend to differ in this respect, Buchholz (2007a: 27-28) locates deficits among primary school teachers especially in the subject-specific domain, whereas secondary school teachers still often have shortcomings at the methodical level, despite an increased integration of didactics into teacher training at university during the last decades. As mentioned in Chapter 2, advanced training courses shared by primary and secondary school teachers would be beneficial for both parties. An alternative possibility, addressed in Section 3.1.1., would be the introduction of profile teachers for languages in primary schools (see Buchholz 2007a: 324).

In an Austrian context, advanced training is especially important for primary school teachers, since foreign language teaching in grades one and two has been compulsory only since 2003/04 (Buchholz 2007a: 27). Thus, there are still many teachers who have not had any training in English during their pedagogic education. Combined with a fragmentary further education of those teachers during the 1990s, this often results in teachers’ feeling uncomfortable and incompetent in teaching English (ibid.: 63-65).

Another step towards an optimised education of English teachers is an obligatory stay in an English-speaking country. While there are several national and regional exchange programs students and novice teachers, a compulsory stay abroad during

training would ensure that every teacher of English has had contact with the respective culture for a longer period.

A final task of teacher training is to sensitise teachers to the importance of the transition. Therefore, addressing the issue in the course of teacher education as well as offering advanced training courses on the topic of transitions is advisable. A problem in connection with further training is that, due to the freedom of choice of courses, a regulation of contents and competences acquired in further training courses is not possible. Consequently, only those teachers already interested in the issue of transitions will opt for a corresponding course. “[Deshalb kann] auf Grundlage der Fortbildungen keine zielgerichtete Bildungsplanung oder Personalentwicklung betrieben werden” (Bmukk & Bmwf 2008: 49).

3.3.7. Enhancing the Prestige of English in Primary School – The Significance of Innovation

Several authors have noted that while the English language generally has a high reputation among parents and children, English teaching in primary school is often not taken seriously, neither by secondary nor by primary school teachers (Demircioglu 2008: 61; Buchholz 2007a: 320). Moreover, it has been mentioned that responsibility for raising the status of primary school English lies mainly with educational policy (Buchholz 2007a: 324). Kettemann, De Cillia & Haller (2003) relativise this view by stating that innovations in language teaching are determined by a number of factors. Some of them and their implications for primary school language teaching are addressed in this section.

Successful advancement of early foreign language learning presupposes a supportive relationship between administration and teachers. Kettemann, De Cillia & Haller (2003: 160) emphasise the importance of supportive and motivational steps taken by school authorities and administration. Hence, it does not suffice to impose innovations from above and leave their realisation to the individual institutions. Rather, a collaboration of all parties involved is needed for effective school development. This includes cooperation of teachers from different schools with parents. The authors demand that teachers are granted financial support from school authorities in the form of compensation for additional work. Moreover, authorities should provide the basic conditions for innovations to take place (ibid.: 160). Many factors such as employing

native speaker assistants, increasing the number of foreign language lessons, or enhancing teacher training in English depend on financial support (ibid.: 164).

According to Kettemann and colleagues (2003: 161-162), the quality of innovations in language teaching depends on several factors. Among others, these include learning aims and contents, direct contact with speakers of the target language, time and places available for language learning, and the availability and use of teaching materials. Finally, evaluation is important for guaranteeing the quality of innovation processes. Only by using evaluative measures can it be assessed whether the goals set at the start of an innovation process have been reached, or whether further steps are necessary.

The determinants of innovation processes mentioned above illustrate the complexity of such projects. With respect to English teaching in primary school, the implementation of an early start at low costs is not enough to secure a teaching practice that is professional and yields optimal results. Possibilities for raising the status of primary school English involve providing incentives for primary school teachers who participate in advanced training courses (Buchholz 2007a: 322), or for those who are especially engaged in terms of innovations (Kettemann, De Cillia & Haller 2003: 165). Such incentives could take the form of certificates, ECTS credits, money, or exemption from work (Buchholz ibid.: 322). In addition to these kinds of reward, Kettemann et al. (ibid.) suggest setting up a central coordination office for contacts with native speakers of English and for stays abroad. All these measures would constitute a move away from primary school English as a “fun-subject” (Buchholz 2007a: 322), and towards a serious practice of early foreign language teaching.

3.4. Summary

In this chapter, we first looked at issues arising at the interface of primary and secondary schools with respect to English teaching and learning. Among the difficulties met at the transition are diverging learner levels at the start of secondary school, discontinuities in the transition process due to lacking cooperation efforts, and shortcomings in attuning primary and secondary English teaching to each other. Combined with deficits in teacher education, which concern the linguistic aspect among primary school teachers and the didactic aspect among secondary school teachers, these problems call for adaptations in

teacher training, teaching practice, and in the domain of education policy, which was only touched upon.

By investigating different factors that influence second language learning, conclusions regarding the implications of an early start in foreign language learning have been drawn. Although there are studies which indicate that an early start is not essential for acquiring a level of English that enables successful communication, most researchers agree that starting early is beneficial if the teaching practice matches the particular purpose of a foreign language learning course. It is therefore the task of educational policy to ensure a high quality standard of English teaching during primary school in order to provide students with a solid basis for English in secondary school.

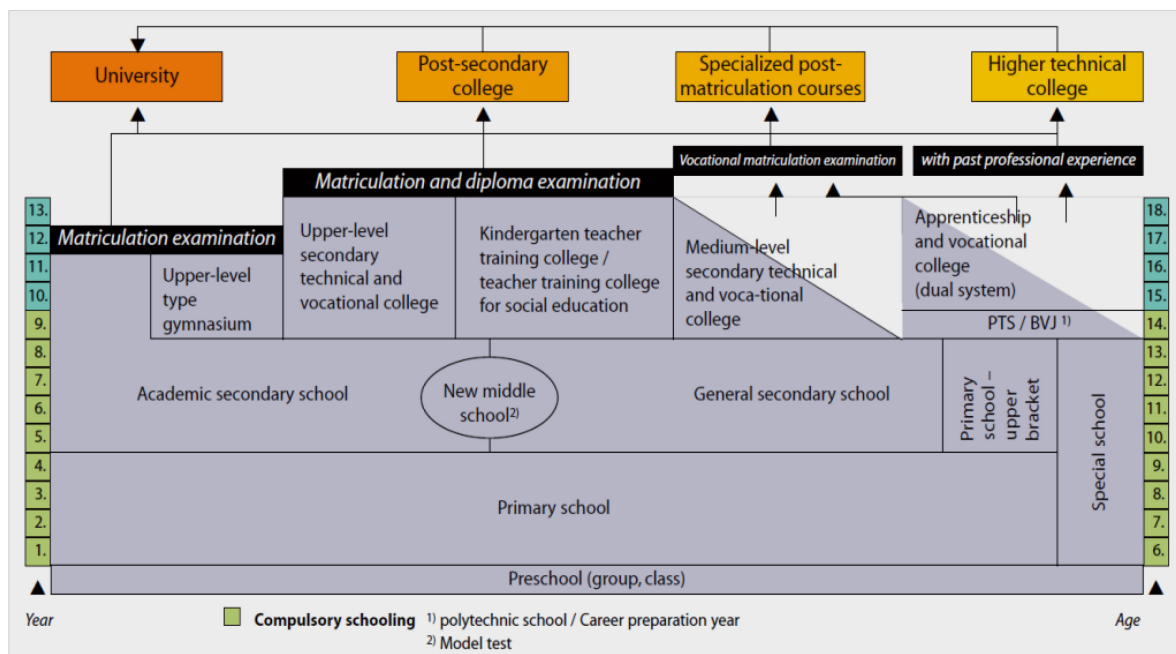
The final section of the chapter concentrated on possibilities of facilitating the transition with respect to English teaching and learning. Here, cooperation and communication among schools and teachers turned out to play an essential role. Another important point is a differentiated way of teaching at the primary as well as at the secondary level. In connection with this, the introduction of specialist language teachers for primary schools was suggested, along with adjusting grading practices of both levels to each other as a means of rendering the transition smoother. Finally, enhancing the prestige of primary school English was determined as an important step towards a serious teaching practice involving a change of its status to that of a fully fledged subject.

4. The Austrian School System

This chapter first provides a short overview over the Austrian school system and its transitions (see Figure 4). The focus lies on the school types relevant for the context of this thesis, i.e. on primary and lower level secondary schools, as well as on the different options available after the transition. Moreover, curricula of the different types of school are compared. Here, especially regulations concerning the transition and foreign language teaching syllabuses are examined. The second part of this chapter deals with the situation in the province of Vorarlberg concerning primary and secondary schools. This includes school statistics as well as general demographic information about the population of Vorarlberg.

Figure 4 Overview of the Austrian school system (simplified)

Source: Bmukk 2008a: 2



The Austrian school system is divided into primary and secondary levels. Covering the age group from six to ten, primary school lasts four years and is compulsory for all children. Besides primary school, primary level offers “special needs schools” as well as “integrative/inclusive education in regular schools” (<http://www.oead.at/index.php?id=465&L=1>, 3 October 2011). After grade four of primary school, the second transition (the first one being that from nursery school to

primary level) in the course of a child's education is due. For secondary level there are several options to choose from. Secondary level I covers grades five to eight and includes "upper level of elementary school, secondary modern school, grammar schools as well as special needs schools and inclusive education" (ibid., 3 October 2011). Which path a child takes after primary school largely depends on its performance and its grades in primary school. Compulsory schooling in Austria is completed after 9 years, which means that all students must attend secondary level II for at least one year.

4.1. Primary Level

After nursery school, children enter primary school at the age of six. If an optional pre-school year is chosen, this date is delayed by one year. The overall objective of primary school is "to provide children with a basic and well-balanced general education which fosters their social, emotional, intellectual and physical skills and abilities" (Bmukk3, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/enfr/school/gen_edu/prim.xml, 3 October 2011).

The school year 1998/99 marked the start of a transitional phase which envisaged the implementation of a "modern foreign language (Croatian, Czech, English, French, Hungarian, Italian, Slovak or Slovenian)" as a compulsory part during all four years of elementary education until 2003/04, "though without assessment of the child's performance" (ibid., 3 October 2011). Since the end of this transitional phase in 2003/04, teaching a foreign language has been compulsory in all Austrian primary schools. Before the extension to grades one and two, foreign language teaching had been a compulsory component of the curriculum for grades three and four since 1983/84 (Buchholz 2007a: 48).

In the vast majority of cases, the foreign language learned in primary school is English. According to a survey dating from the school year 2004/05, 97% of all Austrian primary school children learning a foreign language learned English (ÖSZ 2007: 4). As with most subjects in primary school (except for religious education), foreign language classes are taught by a form teacher. In grade four, parents receive a recommendation regarding the continuing education of their child.

4.2. Secondary Level

On secondary level, which is further divided into secondary level I and secondary level II, different types of school are available. Secondary level I comprises grades five to eight. Here, pupils can choose between secondary modern school (*Hauptschule*), new middle school (model test) (*Neue Mittelschule (Modellversuch)*), and grammar school/secondary academic school (*Allgemein bildende höhere Schule – AHS*). Secondary academic school comprises three different types of grammar school. A fourth possibility is the upper level of primary school which, however, due to its low prevalence in Austria, is insignificant. Secondary level II comprises the upper levels of different secondary academic schools (grades 9-12), as well as the various upper secondary academic schools and secondary technical and vocational schools and colleges.

4.2.1. Secondary Modern School (*Hauptschule*)

The main task of secondary modern school is “to provide all pupils with a basic general education within a four-year period“ (Bmukk4, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/enfr/school/gen_edu/low.xml, 3 October 2011). Admission to secondary modern school requires successful completion of primary school. During this period, pupils are „prepare[d] for working life“, and „equip[ped] with the necessary knowledge for transfer to upper-secondary schools“ (ibid., 3 October 2011). However, secondary modern school represents a phase-out model, since all secondary modern schools are to be turned into new middle schools until the school year 2015/16.

The traditional secondary modern school uses a system which “stream[s] pupils in the subjects German, mathematics and modern foreign language” in order to meet their “abilities and pace of work” (ibid., 3 October 2011). Requirements made in the stream for the highest-achieving students are to equal those of lower secondary academic school (Bmukk 2003b: 3). In contrast to new middle school (see Section 4.2.2.), a “[t]ransfer between the individual streams is possible” at any time during the school year (Bmukk4, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/enfr/school/gen_edu/low.xml, 3 October 2011). According to the website of the Austrian Ministry of Education (last updated March 2008), 40% of the students graduating from secondary modern school start an apprenticeship (most of them do so after attending a one-year polytechnic school), about 45% opt for secondary technical and vocational schools and colleges, and only 6% enter the upper level of

grammar school (Bmukk5, <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/abs/hs.xml>, 4 October 2011). Secondary modern school is thus a school with a focus on preparation for working life, but there is also the possibility to attend “*Oberstufenrealgymnasium*”, a type of upper level secondary academic school, after four years of secondary modern school (Bmukk6 <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/abs/ahs.xml>, 4 October 2011).

4.2.2. New Middle School (*Neue Mittelschule – NMS*)

New middle school is a type of school that was introduced in 2008/09 in the course of an educational reform. It represents a new development of secondary modern school. As such, it is intended for pupils who do not attend grammar school after primary school. The aim is “to provide a joint school for all 10- to 14-year olds that is open to all students who have completed the fourth grade in primary school“ (Bmukk7, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/enfr/school/bw_en/bw_en_ps.xml, 6 October 2011).

Although new middle school is basically comparable with the traditional secondary modern school, it has undergone a number of changes. Besides “eliminating separation of children into different educational avenues too early on“, new middle school aims for a „broad implementation of a new learning culture based on individualization and internal differentiation“ (ibid., 6 October 2011). Streams as common in secondary modern school do not exist anymore in new middle school. Instead, every class receives tuition as one group in all subjects. Consequently, a wide range of abilities is combined within each group. However, students are still assigned different statuses according to their performance in primary school. Particularly well-performing students are assigned *AHS-Reife* (grammar school status), which means that their level corresponds to that of a grammar school student. In contrast to this, there is *Hauptschul-Reife* (secondary academic school status), which designates the level of a secondary modern school student. Reclassification of statuses usually only happens at the end of a school year in order to avoid hasty decisions.

Another structural change connected to the introduction of new middle school is the limitation of the number of students per class to 25. By applying methods of internal differentiation (see Section 3.3.4.), individual support of students according to their abilities is to be granted. In this system, strong students have the role of “model pupils” and work together with weaker students (http://www.neuemittelschule.at/die_neue_mittelschule/paedagogische_konzepte.html, 4 October 2011). Thus, new middle

school aims for an optimal profit for all students by responding to their individual abilities and interests (ibid., 4 October 2011). Among the long-term aims of *NMS* are a close cooperation of *NMS* and grammar schools. This includes the cooperation of teachers from both schools, a guarantee for students to choose a school within a certain area, and the application of a variety of teaching methods (Bmukk8, <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/nms/zp.xml>, 4 October 2011).

4.2.3. Grammar School/Secondary Academic School (*AHS*)

The aim of the third type of school to choose from after primary school, secondary academic school, is to “impart broad and extended general education, thereby providing pupils with standard entry qualifications for university and a solid basis for more specialized education or training“ (Bmukk6, <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/abs/ahs.xml>, 4 October 2011). Secondary academic schools are divided into a lower and an upper level, each of them covering four years. Admission requires excellent or good grades in the subjects German, reading and mathematics, or a “recommendation by the teaching staff of the primary school” (ibid., 4 October 2011). If these requirements are not complied with, there is the possibility to take an entrance exam. A transfer from a secondary modern school to a secondary academic school is possible if certain conditions are fulfilled. During the first two years of lower level, the subjects taught in secondary academic school are the same as in secondary modern school. From the third year onward, there are three different types of secondary academic school (Bmukk6, <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/abs/ahs.xml>, 4 October 2011):

- Grammar school/”[c]lassical secondary academic school” (*Gymnasium*): “Latin from grade 7 onwards, a second foreign language from grade 9 onwards” (Bmukk9, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/enfr/school/gen_edu/secon.xml, 4 October 2011)
- “Secondary academic school emphasising mathematics and science” (*Realgymnasium*): “the focus is on mathematics and science, descriptive geometry (lower level), geometrical drawing (lower level, elective), pilot projects emphasizing practice-oriented education (labs, computer science)” (ibid., 4 October 2011)

- “Secondary academic school emphasising economics” (*Wirtschaftskundliches Realgymnasium*): “more chemistry classes (lower level), economics, psychology and pedagogic, home economics and nutrition” (ibid., 4 October 2011)

In all secondary academic schools there are school leaving exams in the form of the “*Reifeprüfung*”. This certificate, which “puts emphasis on reality-oriented studying, independent working, interdisciplinarity and on foreign languages“, students are granted „access to studies at institutes of higher education“ (Bmukk9, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/enfr/school/gen_edu/secon.xml, 4 October 2011).

4.3. Comparison of Austrian, German and Swiss School Systems

There are a number of features common to the school systems of the three adjacent German-speaking countries Austria, Germany and (the German-speaking part of) Switzerland. However, there are also differences between these three systems, which, especially in connection with the transition, will be looked at in the following paragraphs. Since the relevant literature often relates to a German or a Swiss context, it is important to point out the main differences and commonalities of the respective school systems. In connection with Vorarlberg, which borders Germany as well as Switzerland, the comparison of the neighbouring systems is even more relevant. In the following, the three school systems and their handling of transitions will be contrasted.

One main difference between the Austrian system and the systems of Germany and Switzerland is their organisational structure. While in Austria decisions concerning schools and education mainly fall to the federal government, German and Swiss systems are organised locally. This means that schools mainly belong to the sphere of competence of the individual federal states (Germany) and cantons (Switzerland) (http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schulsystem_in_Deutschland, 5 October 2011). Despite these organisational differences, a common characteristic of all three school systems is a relatively early transition after primary schooling, which results in “[...] einer früh sichtbaren Differenzierung [...]” (Döbert, Kann & Rentl 2011: 22). In contrast to Austria, the duration of primary school in two German federal states (Berlin and Brandenburg) and in most cantons of Switzerland is six instead of four years

(http://www.bmbf.de/pub/bildung_in_deutschland.pdf and <http://bildungsszene.educa.ch/de/sekundarstufe-i-2>, 5 October 2011).

The situation regarding foreign language lessons in primary school holds only minor differences. Whereas in Austria the inclusion of a foreign language – mostly English – during all four years of primary level was implemented between 1998/99 and 2003/04, in Germany and Switzerland a foreign language is compulsory only from year three onward. However, many schools offer a foreign language from the beginning of primary education in these countries as well. In Germany, English is taught in all federal states beginning in grade three at the latest, in two of them it already starts in grade one. In five federal states either English or French can be chosen as a foreign language in primary school (see Gompf 2006: 2-3). In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, English lessons start in year three of primary school at the latest, and the implementation of a second foreign language during primary school is currently being worked on (http://www.ag.ch/fremdsprachen/shared/dokumente/pdf/sprachenunterricht_ch.pdf and <http://bildungsszene.educa.ch/de/lerninhalte-3>, 5 October 2011).

In Switzerland, the decision about the secondary education of the child is based on the school report as well as on teachers' recommendations, sometimes also by means of entrance exams. On the lower secondary level, a "separated model" involving several school types predominates in most cantons (<http://educationscene.educa.ch/en/lower-secondary-level>, 5 October 2011). Pupils are assigned to the different school types according to their achievement levels. Other models are the "cooperative model", which adopts "core classes with different performance requirements" (ibid., 5 October 2011), and the "integrated model", in which "pupils with different performance levels attend the same class", i.e. there is a common lower secondary school for all pupils (ibid., 5 Oct 2011). Upper secondary level in Switzerland offers "general education" (grammar schools) and vocational education (ibid., 5 Oct 2011).

A feature that is exclusive to the German school system is the two-year orientation stage following primary school. It serves the purposes of orientating children towards their future school career and of furthering their individual talents and interests (http://www.bmbf.de/pub/bildung_in_deutschland.pdf, 5 October 2011). In most cases, orientation stage is already part of a particular type of secondary school, but children have the possibility of changing to a different school during or after orientation stage (<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orientierungsstufe>, 5 October 2011). Thus, a high permeability is guaranteed during these two years. However, it can be doubted whether

this regulation is efficient and provides a real chance for students to find the school type that is optimal for them. As Schuchart (2006: 97) points out, there is no persuasive evidence for the efficiency of the orientation stage (see Section 2.2.2.).

Lower secondary school in Germany is composed of three school types, viz. secondary modern school (*Hauptschule*), mid-level secondary school (*Realschule*), and grammar school (*Gymnasium*). In most German federal states, secondary modern schools, which usually cover grades 5 to 9, offer an additional 10th grade on a voluntary basis. Another school type offered in some parts of Germany is the comprehensive school (*Gesamtschule*), which comprises grades 7 to 10. In the “integrated comprehensive school”, children of all achievement levels are taught within the same class, similar to Austrian new middle school. In the second type, the “additive or cooperative comprehensive school”, several types of school are housed within the same building (http://www.bmbf.de/pub/bildung_in_deutschland.pdf, 5 October 2011).

4.4. Curricula

The purpose of this section is to briefly list the main tasks of primary school and lower secondary schools in Austria according to the respective curricula. Special attention is paid to those aspects of the curricula that are relevant for the transition from primary to secondary school, as well as to teaching methods and to English/foreign language teaching.

4.4.1. The Austrian Primary School Curriculum

In addition to its aim of providing children with an elementary and balanced education in the domains mentioned earlier, primary school has the task of laying the foundations for successful learning in secondary schools (Bmukk 2010: 6). Further tasks relevant in the context of this thesis are the enhancement of communicative and language competences, and the gradual development of an adequate attitude to work (e.g. accurateness, diligence, patience) and of increased autonomy (ibid.: 6-7).

In order to render learning suitable for primary school children, a number of different, often playful, methods and forms of teaching are to be applied: “Ausgehend von den eher spielorientierten Lernformen der vorschulischen Zeit zu bewusstem,

selbstständigem, zielerreichendem Lernen hinführen“ (ibid.: 7). These include for example

- “Lernen im Spiel [learning via games]
 - offenes Lernen [unrestricted learning]
 - projektorientiertes Lernen [project-oriented learning]
 - entdeckendes Lernen [learning through discovery]
 - wiederholendes und übendes Lernen [learning through repetition and practice]”
- (Bmukk 2010: 13).

With regard to the transition to secondary schools, the primary school curriculum makes a few general recommendations. According to the curriculum, the pedagogic organisation of the transition is of particular importance. Therefore, the transition to secondary school should happen in cooperation with parents and secondary schools, and it should be as harmonious as possible (Bmukk 2010: 17). Recommendations include projects aimed at getting to know the respective schools such as open days, school parties, taster days and school visits. It is the task of the teacher to prepare children for the new learning environment. Moreover, frequent communication and exchange of information among teachers and parents are mentioned as important factors in connection with the transition. The curriculum also draws attention to the fact that providing knowledge about pupils’ future schools is a significant contribution to a successful transition (ibid.: 17).

4.4.1.1. English in Primary School

The obligatory integration of a foreign language into the existing subjects is defined in a core curriculum (*Rahmenlehrplan*). Teaching a foreign language is obligatory during all four years of Austrian primary school (see Table 3, p. 69). For grades one and two, every school can arrange foreign language teaching flexibly according to the core curriculum without increasing the number of lessons per week. Over the whole year, 32 lessons of foreign language are to be integrated into the existing lessons. For grades three and four, one lesson per week is allotted for teaching a foreign language.

The purpose of foreign language teaching in primary school is to arrange the child’s encounter with a foreign language in a casual environment and to render it suitable for children (Bmukk 2010: 215). Moreover, children’s interest in the foreign language should be sparked, and a positive attitude towards foreign languages should be created.

Concrete aims are to motivate children to engage with foreign languages, to initiate their ability to communicate in a foreign language and to contribute to their openness towards other cultures (ibid.: 215). As with the other subjects, the use of a playful methodology is also important in second language learning.

In terms of language skills, the focus is on listening and on oral communication. The integration of reading and writing as supporting measures is only intended for grades three and four. Writing is generally to be kept to a minimum. Listening and speaking are to be trained by means of rhymes, songs, stories, dialogues, role plays and sketches. Also, exercises concerning pronunciation, as well as the acquisition of a basic vocabulary are part of the curriculum. Grammar, by contrast, should only be learned incidentally, i.e. formal teaching of grammar and related terminology is not planned. As far as possible, instruction should be in the foreign language (Bmukk 2010: 218-219). The speech acts children should be able to carry out at the end of primary school include

- greeting someone, introducing themselves,
- expressing regret; expressing approval/disapproval,
- asking for something,
- answering the telephone,
- apologising,
- expressing approval/disapproval,
- talking about their health, their abilities etc.,
- reproducing short poems, stories, rhymes etc. (ibid.: 216-217).

Accordingly, the following topics are, amongst others, suggested for inclusion into English teaching in primary school:

- me and my family/my friends,
- me and my school,
- me and nature,
- me and the world of fantasy

(Bmukk 2010: 217).

4.4.2. Austrian Secondary School Curricula

In this section, a short outline of secondary modern school and lower level secondary academic school curricula is presented. For new middle school there is no separate curriculum. Instead, the new middle school curriculum is the same as that of lower level secondary academic school. Curricula for those subjects that are the same for secondary modern and secondary academic schools are identical for both school types (Bmukk10, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/lp/lp_ahs_unterstufe.xml, 7 October 2011). Consequently, aims, contents and methodology for English teaching are identical for both types of lower secondary school that are of interest here.

Among the central tasks of secondary schools are support of and contribution to students' acquisition of knowledge and competences, as well as the conveyance of values. In particular, critical reflexion and autonomous thinking are to be furthered. In the case of secondary academic school, a deepened general education is also part of the educational objectives. Along with extensive knowledge, self- and social competences should be conveyed (Bmukk 2004: 2).

The handling of transitions is of great importance according to the curriculum, since first experiences in an institution often have formative character. In order to ensure continuity of the learning process, it is important that teachers be familiar with the curricula and with common teaching methods of primary schools: "Um die Kontinuität des Lernens zu wahren, ist in der 5. Schulstufe auf die Lehrplananforderungen und die gebräuchlichen Lernformen der Volksschule Bezug zu nehmen." (Bmukk 2004: 11-12). Demands made on pupils have to be in accordance with those made in primary school and should be increased gradually:

Die Lernanforderungen, die an die Schülerinnen und Schüler gestellt werden, müssen den Übergang von der bisherigen Schulart berücksichtigen und dürfen nicht zu rasch gesteigert werden. (Bmukk 2004: 12).

Tests should initially serve the purpose of getting a picture of the level of knowledge of students. It should only be after an adaption phase that testing procedures are used to assess a pupil's performance. Finally, there is the possibility for teachers of the same and of different subjects to plan their lessons together and thus coordinate their action. This may include the organisation of project classes in order to facilitate students' settling in to the new school (ibid.: 11).

4.4.2.1. English in Secondary School

A foreign language is part of the curriculum for all four years of both secondary modern and lower secondary academic schools. Similar to primary school, the foreign language opted for in the vast majority of Austrian secondary schools is English (Eurydice & Eurostat 2008: 62-76), although as many as 13 languages are offered. According to statistics published by Eurydice & Eurostat (2008: 71), 99.1% of Austrian pupils learn English at secondary level I. The total number of weekly foreign language lessons in secondary modern and secondary academic schools as laid down in the curricula differs only by one lesson, amounting to 14 in secondary modern and 15 in secondary academic school (see Table 3).

The foreign language curricula are almost identical for secondary modern and secondary academic schools. At the centre of foreign language learning are communicative competence, social and intercultural competence, and the acquisition of learning strategies. Communicative competence, i.e. the competence to communicate successfully, is the superordinate goal of foreign language teaching. Consequently, communicative intentions and aims should always be in the foreground (Bmukk 2008b: 1-2).

Table 3 Number of foreign language lessons per week and overall number of lessons according to school type

		Grade 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	Total	Overall number of lessons (all subjects)
Primary school		x ²	x ¹	1	1	x ¹	90
Secondary modern school		4	4	3	3	14	120
Secondary Academic school	1st foreign l.	4	4	4	3	15	120
	Latin/2nd foreign l.	--	--	4	3	7	

Sources: Bmukk 2003a: 1

Bmukk 2010: 29

Bmukk10, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/lp/lp_ahs_unterstufe.xml, 7 October 2011

² 32 lessons per year are to be integrated into the existing subjects, the total number of lessons per week stays the same;

Generally, all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), should be practised equally. This includes participating in conversations and speaking coherently. The individual competences and language levels are defined according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR³), comprising levels A1, A2 and partly B1. In Austria, the level to be reached at the end of lower secondary school is A2/B1, the aim upper secondary is B2 (Buchholz 2007: 31). At the beginning of secondary school, the focus should be on listening and speaking:

Im Anfangsunterricht allerdings sind die Teilfertigkeiten des Hörverstehens und der mündlichen Kommunikation durch regelmäßige Hörübungen sowie durch ein möglichst häufiges Angebot an Sprechanlässen verstärkt zu fördern. (Bmukk 2008b: 2)

Here, primary school English teaching and its emphasis on listening and speaking is taken into consideration. Thus, the past education of children is accounted for in secondary school curricula, which can be seen as a starting point for rendering the transition smooth in terms of teaching methods and content.

In contrast to primary school, grammar and vocabulary form an important part of secondary school language instruction. However, these language aspects should be presented and learned in context whenever possible, and they should not be treated as being independent from language context. Furthermore, the functional aspect of grammar has priority over the formal aspect. Collocations and phrases should form an integral part of vocabulary learning (Bmukk 2008b: 2). In order to do justice to the individual differences in learning strategies and interests of pupils, a variety of methods should be applied, including open learning, autonomous learning, portfolios, short presentations, or learner's diaries. As in primary school, the target language should be used as much as possible in foreign language classes of secondary schools (ibid.: 2-3).

One of the few differences between secondary modern school and secondary academic school curricula is that the former contains a section on differentiated teaching. Teachers have the task of providing learning materials that display different levels of difficulty in order to support the individual learning progress of every student. This includes offering more complex tasks for better-performing students. The curriculum mentions different factors to be considered in context with differentiated instruction, such

³ See Council of Europe: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp

as complexity and comprehensibility of tasks, using a variety of methods addressing the different perceptual channels, and the degree of required assistance (Bmukk 2008b: 4).

4.5. Teacher Training

Teacher training in Austria is partly the task of upper secondary education, partly it is settled in the tertiary sector. Training for nursery teachers and non-teaching supervisory staff or social education workers takes place either in kindergarten teacher-training colleges or in teacher-training colleges for social education (Bmukk 2008a: 14). Both of them have the form of five-year upper secondary levels with matriculation examinations. Alternatively, a *Kolleg*, i.e. “a two-year full-time advanced level vocational course” can be taken in order to attain the above-mentioned certificates (ibid.: 14). For admission to these courses, A-levels are required.

Teachers for primary schools (including pre-school), secondary modern schools, special schools and polytechnic colleges are trained at universities of education. Students with a degree obtained in a three-year bachelor course at a university of education are entitled to teach either in primary or in secondary moderns schools, depending on the study course taken (<http://www.ph-vorarlberg.ac.at/index.php?id=bachelor>, 11 October 2011). In Austria there are 34 colleges of this type (Bmukk11, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/ueberblick/schulstat_oester.xml, 10 October 2011).

Qualifications for teachers of academic secondary schools are obtained at universities. In most cases the combination of two subjects is obligatory. Depending on school type and subjects chosen, either the graduation from a specialised teaching-degree study course, a master-degree, or sometimes a diploma or doctorate, is required (http://www.bmwf.gv.at/startseite/wissenschaft/national/studieren_in_oesterreich/bildungs_und_berufsinformationen/lehramt, 11 October 2011).

4.6. The Situation in Vorarlberg

Since the empirical part of this study focuses on schools in Vorarlberg, a short introduction of the region and its most important features seems appropriate. Section 4.6.1. contains a brief outline of the cultural, demographic, political and economic

situations in Vorarlberg. Section 4.6.2. below is concerned with Vorarlberg's educational situation.

4.6.1. General Information and Demographics

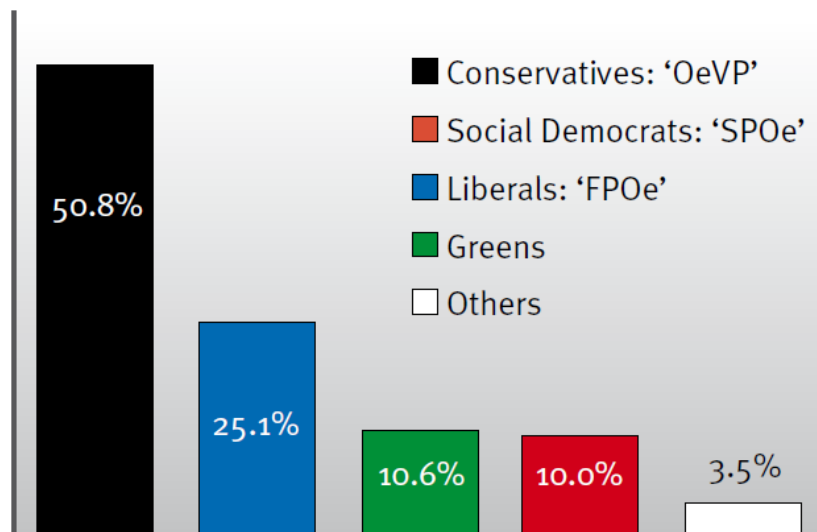
Vorarlberg, the westernmost and second smallest (in terms of area as well as population) province of Austria, has a population of 369,424 according to the 2009 population census (State of Vorarlberg 2009: 16). Its capital is Bregenz with 26,752 inhabitants. The largest city, however, is Dornbirn with a population of 42,301 (http://www.vorarlberg.gv.at/english/vorarlbergenglish/history_facts/factsandfigures/vorarlberg-itsdistrictsan.htm, 10 Oct 2011). Vorarlberg borders Germany with the Lake of Constance to the north, Switzerland and Liechtenstein to the west and south, and with Tyrol the only Austrian province to the east. Great parts of Vorarlberg are of rural character. However, the population density of the Rhine Valley "is already comparable with that of urban areas" (State of Vorarlberg 2009: 6).

In terms of language and history, Vorarlberg has a special status, being the only Austrian province in which an Alemannic dialect is spoken instead of an Austro-Bavarian one. This is why it "culturally has much more in common with its Alemannic-speaking neighbors Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Swabia than with Bavaria and the rest of Austria" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vorarlberg>, 10 Oct 2011). Around 13% of the population is of foreign nationalities, the greatest part thereof being Turkish (5.4%). Other nationalities include former Yugoslavia, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Switzerland (<http://www.vorarlberg.gv.at/english>, 10 Oct 2011). The majority of Vorarlberg's population is Roman Catholic (78%), other religious groups include Muslims (8.4%) and Protestants (2.2%).

In politics, the conservative Austrian Popular Party (ÖVP) has been dominant since the end of the Second World War, always having received "an elected majority in the Assembly" except for the period between 1999 and 2004 (State of Vorarlberg 2009: 8; Figure 5 shows the distribution of votes in the election of the State parliament of Vorarlberg in 2009).

Figure 5 Distribution of votes in the 2009 election for the State parliament of Vorarlberg

Source: <http://www.vorarlberg.gv.at/english/pdf/vorarlbergkompaktengl.pdf>, 10 October 2011



With regard to economy, Vorarlberg has recently been “performing well above the Austrian average“ (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vorarlberg>, 10 Oct 2011). While the textile industry was the most successful sector until the 1970s, it is metal, clothing, machinery and packing materials, as well as electronics industries that dominate nowadays. With an export share of 54% in 2008, Vorarlberg was 17% above the national average. Furthermore, agriculture and tourism play a crucial role in the rural and mountainous areas of Vorarlberg. The service industry has increased considerably since the 1960s, and production and export of renewable energy are commercially important (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vorarlberg>; State of Vorarlberg 2009: 9).

4.6.2. Education in Vorarlberg

In 2009/10, there were 165 primary schools, 55 secondary modern schools, of which 51 offered new middle schools, and 13 secondary academic schools in Vorarlberg. Table 4 (p. 74) shows the numbers of schools relevant for this thesis in Vorarlberg as well as in Austria. What is striking is that, while the total number of schools is the lowest among all Austrian federal states, Vorarlberg has the highest number of new middle schools. This means that Vorarlberg accounts for 20.6% of Austria’s 247 new middle schools (Bmukk11, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/ueberblick/schulstat_oester.xml and Bmukk12, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/ueberblick/schulstat_vlbg.xml, 10

October 2011). Thus, the *Vorarlberger Mittelschule* is said to have done pioneer work concerning this relatively new school type.

Table 4 Total numbers of schools in Vorarlberg and Austria according to school type

	Vorarlberg	Austria
Primary schools	165	3,197
Secondary modern schools	55	1,162
New middle schools	51	247
Total of regular schools	280	5,786

Sources: Bmukk 12, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/ueberblick/schulstat_vlbg.xml, 10 October 2011

Bmukk11, http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/bw/ueberblick/schulstat_oester.xml, 10 October 2011

Although the population of Vorarlberg has a comparably high ratio of young people (23.7% compared to an Austrian average of 20.8%), the participation in secondary and tertiary education is rather low. Compared to the national average, the portion of Vorarlberg students leaving school after having completed compulsory schooling is relatively high. With 23.4% of pupils attending secondary academic schools in grade five, Vorarlberg ranks among the last three provinces, together with Upper Austria and Tyrol (Statistik Austria 2011: 131). The situation at secondary level II is similar, with 49.7% attending secondary academic schools in Vorarlberg in 2009/10, while it was 57.8% nationwide.

Vorarlberg's peripheral geographical position within Austria is reflected in various further aspects of school statistics. In the tertiary sector, Vorarlberg is represented only by one university of education (*Pädagogische Hochschule*) and one advanced technical college (*Fachhochschule*). With no university on local territory, numbers of university students and graduates in Vorarlberg are clearly below the Austrian standard. Only 17.4% of people aged between 18 and 25 are university students, the Austrian average being 27.7%. In 2008, merely 11.7% of Vorarlberg's inhabitants aged between 25 and 64 had a university degree, while it was 14.1% nationwide (Statistik Austria 2011: 131-132).

Numbers of children entering primary school in Vorarlberg recently declined due to a sinking birth-rate. While there has been a slight decrease in students attending secondary modern school, the figures of pupils in lower secondary academic schools has been rising since 2004/05. For secondary vocational schools, a steady rise in numbers of students has been recorded during the last decade (Statistik Austria 2011: 132).

Due to the high percentage of people with a migration background among the population of Vorarlberg, their participation in education is of interest. According to the Austrian education report of 2009 (Lassnigg & Vogtenhuber 2009: 43), the portion of children with a migration background is especially high in pre-school and in special schools. The Austrian average of pre-school children speaking a non-German mother tongue is 40%, that of Vorarlberg 50%, which is only topped by Vienna with 60%. In primary and secondary modern schools of Vorarlberg, the numbers of children with a migration background are settled around the Austrian average. However, in lower level secondary academic school, children with a non-native background are represented clearly below average with around 6% in Vorarlberg and 12% in Austria (ibid.: 42-43).

5. Comparison of English Textbooks: The Four Skills

Since the coursebook plays a central role in foreign language teaching, an analysis of primary and secondary school English textbooks is of interest for the context of this thesis. Although the textbook is even more central to instruction in secondary schools than it is at the primary level (Vollmuth 2004: 79), Leupold (1999: 139) emphasises the constitutive role of the coursebook for early foreign language teaching.

In order to keep the comparison fairly compact, I chose to focus on one particular aspect of the coursebooks that lends itself to the purpose of this analysis. As many English language courses are based on the division of the language into the “four skills”, the course book analysis will concentrate on the weighing of these aspects. In so doing, I want to find out how well primary school coursebooks are suited as a preparation for secondary school, and in how far textbooks for the secondary level are attuned to the way English is taught to primary school students. The question in how far English textbooks account for the transition, i.e. for the needs of pupils immediately before and after the transition, will be explored by looking at the way in which the four language skills are dealt with in English syllabuses. Additionally, the presentation of aspects of grammar and vocabulary will be investigated. The comparison will concentrate on three books: The *LASSO Englisch 4* pupil’s book for fourth grade of primary school, the *New You and Me I* textbook, and the *MORE! I* student’s book, both intended for use in grade five. These are the books used by the three schools in which the teacher interviews for the empirical part of this thesis have been carried out.

5.1. General Remarks

In addition to the balancing of the four skills, it is important how the textbooks account for the transition in terms of methods and interaction formats. While the primary school textbook has the task of preparing children for English in secondary school and to introduce different aspects of the language playfully, secondary school textbooks should adopt interaction formats and topics that tie in with those used in primary school.

The *LASSO 4* textbook generally adopts a very playful approach to language teaching. Interaction formats and task design are chosen accordingly. All tasks are supplemented either by pictures, photos, or auditory material and thus appeal to several

perceptual channels. As a preparation for secondary school, writing is introduced gradually through tasks that involve, for example, completing words or finding rhyming words with the help of pictures. Aspects of grammar are frequently integrated into activities in a playful way, for instance the present progressive tense is practised by describing pictures.

Both textbooks intended for grade five present their contents in a way that is appropriate for children. Including a multitude of visual stimuli such as pictures and photos, they resemble the design of their primary school equivalent. In terms of interaction formats and topics both, the *MORE! 1* and the *New You & Me 1* tie in well with primary school teaching practice. Both textbooks regularly incorporate songs, chants, sketches, stories, cartoons etc. and present language in the context of topics such as “We love colours!”, “Clothes” (*MORE! 1*), “Sweets and snacks”, or “My body” (*The New You & Me 1*). All of these topics bear resemblance to those suggested in the primary school curriculum.

5.2. The Four Skills

5.2.1. *LASSO 4*

In the *LASSO 4* coursebook, the focus is clearly on the skills of listening and speaking. A great number of tasks involve listening to language before doing related activities. Naturally, pupils are confronted with written language throughout the book, constantly encountering simple written language. An accompanying CD includes stories, songs, rhymes and texts that are played to the pupils (Beer et al. 2007: 5). For consolidation of learning contents, there are various tasks and activities such as dialogues, gap-filling activities, or matching exercises. In addition to auditory and communicative skills, emphasis is laid on introducing children to writing step by step, e.g. by filling in missing words while listening to a spoken text.

Thus, the *LASSO 4* coursebook basically includes all four skills, but clearly focuses on listening and speaking. While reading forms an important part of many activities, there are no tasks that concentrate exclusively on reading development. Hence, in terms of the four skills, *LASSO 4* conforms to the regulations as recorded in the curriculum. By introducing simple written language, it prepares children for secondary

school. All in all, the book serves as a good preparation for the requirements of secondary schools as stated in the curriculum.

5.2.2. *MORE! 1*

The *MORE! 1* textbook is largely based on the distinction of the four skills. In the table of contents, every unit is presented according to the skills practised, and in almost all units all four skills are addressed. In addition to the labels “Get talking”, “Reading”, “Listening” and “Writing”, reference to activities centred on vocabulary and grammar can be found in every unit. The teacher’s book, however, does not explicitly address the role of the four skills in the book. Rather, it emphasises the overall aim of the coursebook, which is to enable children to interact successfully (Kamauf et al. 2008: 3). Also, the appropriateness of materials for the learners’ age is stressed (ibid.: 2-3).

Writing skills are built up with the help of a portfolio, starting with short writing tasks, which are gradually increased in length and complexity. Many activities involve more than one skill, combining reading or listening with speaking, or reading and writing with listening. Obviously, listening still plays a central role, which again reflects primary school teaching practice. Grammar practice is part of every unit. However, it is always introduced in context first, and only afterwards are certain grammatical aspects explained and practised separately. Moreover, pronunciation is an integral part of the book. Pronunciation practice is mostly aided by listening. Thus, the *MORE! 1* textbook can be said to account for all aspects of the language in a balanced way.

5.2.3. *The New You & Me 1*

Compared to *MORE! 1*, the *New You & Me 1* textbook at first sight seems to be less skill-based. The individual units are not organised according to the different skills. However, in contrast to *MORE! 1*, the teacher’s book explicitly addresses the development of the four skills and their significance for learning English (Gerngroß et al. 1994: 5). Looking more closely at the individual units, it becomes clear that all skills are practised regularly and in a balanced way.

As in the *MORE! 1* coursebook, communicative competence is the overall aim here as well (ibid.: 5). At the beginning of the book, the focus is still rather on listening, speaking and reading than on writing, which points to a consideration of primary school

practice. Writing is introduced gradually throughout the book, and often serves the purpose of supporting learning, but it is also practised separately (ibid.: 16). A number of different interaction formats and ways of practising listening and speaking skills are adopted. These include listening to and acting out dialogues, sketches and stories, as well as listening to and singing songs.

Grammar forms an integral part of the book and is practised in a separate section in every unit. As in the *MORE! 1* textbook, explicit grammar practice is intended as a supportive measure (Gerngroß et al. 1994: 7) and serves the development of communicative ability. Moreover, it is presented playfully in the form of “grammar rhythms”. Vocabulary is presented in “picture dictionaries” in every unit, supplementing individual words with pictures. In addition to this, the workbook provides “wordfields” and “words in context”. Pronunciation plays an important role as well and is practised in tasks where a pair of similar sounds has to be distinguished in several words. This mostly involves listening to the words on CD.

All in all, the *New You and Me 1* conforms with all the demands made by the curriculum in terms of skills and with respect to the transition in English. Although the first impression may be a different one, the book systematically practises all four skills (Gerngroß et al. 1994: 7-8), while at the same time accounting for primary school English practice.

5.3. Conclusions

In the *MORE! 1* student’s book, all four skills are practised right from the beginning, with the exception of writing in Unit 1. Thus, the emphasis of primary school English on spoken English does not seem to be accounted for. However, since listening, speaking and reading skills take priority over writing skills at the beginning, the coursebook does take children’s previous knowledge into account. In terms of contents and interaction formats, the book also ties in with the areas focused on in primary school. A great advantage is the overview of skills, grammar and vocabulary included in the units in the table of contents of the book. This makes it easy for the teacher to render the input balanced in terms of skills. Moreover, “progress checks” at the interval of five units help monitoring the students’ progress and locating areas that need improvement.

In both books for secondary school, aspects of grammar are practised regularly and, in addition to contextualised forms of presentation as demanded by the curriculum, there are separate sections dedicated to practising grammatical items. Vocabulary is presented in context as well as in separate sections. Here, the advantage of the *New You and Me 1* lies in its use of picture dictionaries.

By way of conclusion, it can be said that all three books analysed in this section consider the transition and the associated demands to an adequate extent. The primary school textbook integrates different aspects of the language in a playful way and offers a good basis for secondary school. Both books intended for secondary school provide practice in all four skills as well as in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. They also tie in with the contents and interaction formats characteristic of primary school English teaching. In terms of skills, the *MORE! 1* textbook is structured more clearly and may be easier to use in class than the *New You & Me 1*. However, these factors depend on numerous variables such as the context in which the book is used and on personal preferences of the teacher.

6. The Study

6.1. Methods

The aim of the empirical study has been to find out about the ways in which teachers and heads of different types of school in Vorarlberg perceive and deal with the transition from primary to secondary school. The idea for the research has been to do qualitative interviews with teachers from three different types of school: primary school, secondary modern school/new middle school, and grammar school. The interview as a qualitative method was chosen because it allows the researcher to get into direct contact with the participants of the study, and because it allows for a very immediate way of collecting data on a certain topic. Defined by Polkinghorne (2005: 137) as “inquiry aimed at describing and clarifying human experience as it appears in people’s lives”, a qualitative approach seems to be the most suitable for the purpose of gathering detailed information on personal experiences with different aspects of transitions in the school system. The downside of qualitative data, however, is that it “tends to be bulky and messy” (Dörnyei 2007b: 125). Due to the blurred boundaries between what can and what cannot be considered data, it is therefore important to be careful in the process of analysing what has been collected during the interviews.

The focus of the interviews is on challenges and difficulties teachers and students face at the transition, as well as on ways of approaching these challenges and facilitating the transition for all parties involved, but especially for students and teachers. For this purpose, three interview guides have been designed, one for each type of school. Each of the guides comprises between 23 and 25 main questions, some of them with sub-questions (see Appendix for interview guides). The sub-questions, or “probes” (Dörnyei 2007b: 138), were intended to be used as optional questions depending on the answer of the interviewee, and they had the function of avoiding double questions. This type of semi-structured interview, which combines characteristics of structured and unstructured interviews, seemed suitable for the purpose of collecting information in the form of teachers’ personal experiences on the topic of transitions. Defined by Dörnyei (2007b: 136) as being “suitable for cases when the researcher has a good enough overview of the phenomenon or domain in question, and is able to develop broad questions about the topic in advance” (Dörnyei 2007b: 136), the semi-structured interview lends itself to the objectives of this particular study. Since the research questions had been defined before

the exact procedure for data collection was decided on, broad questions about the transition had already been formulated. They were then used as a starting point for the interview questions. Considering these factors, the semi-structured interview seemed the most appropriate method to investigate the topic at hand.

A further advantage of this type of interview is that no “ready-made response categories that would limit the depth and breadth of the respondent’s story” (ibid.: 136) are used. Thus, the semi-structured interview does determine the structure of the talk, but it provides the respondents with a considerable degree of freedom in terms of length and elaborateness of their answers. Another great advantage of this type of interview is that although “the interviewer will ask the same questions of all of the participants” (ibid.: 136), she or he retains a certain level of flexibility, always being able to follow the development of the talk and “to let the interviewee elaborate on certain issues” (ibid.: 136). Thus, the data of the various interviews can be compared with each other, but at the same time the order and wording of the questions can be adapted to the individual situation. However, it is important not to vary wording and sequencing of the questions too much, because, as Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007: 353) point out, the way a question is formulated can influence the response, which in turn will affect the “comparability of responses”.

After designing the interview guides based on the literature consulted (see Chapters 2 and 3) and on the research questions, there was a short piloting phase in which the guides were tested. This phase involved conducting one interview with the head of a primary school and one with an English teacher from a grammar school, both located in Vienna. Based on these pilot interviews, a few minor changes and adaptations were made to the guides before beginning with the actual data collection.

6.1.1. Aims of Interviews

The overall aim of the empirical study was to gather as much relevant information as possible on the defined topic within the limits set by the scale of the study. In more detail, this meant that various categories had to be defined and operationalised in the form of interview questions prior to the interview phase. The final version of each interview guide comprises three parts, the first one dealing with the transition in general, the second with the transition in English, and the third part concentrating on future aspects and ways of facilitating the transition.

Part one is thus concerned with views on and perceptions of the transition by teachers of different types of schools. As a first approach to the topic, it intends to find out how present the issue of transitional difficulties is in schools in Vorarlberg. Furthermore, the first section of the interview guide is an attempt to gain insights into forms and practices of cooperation among different types of schools, as well as into the degree of personal engagement of individual teachers in the process of improving and facilitating conditions regarding the transition. This is obviously tied to the question whether the transition is regarded as being in need of improvement – a question which is also addressed in the introductory part of the interviews.

The second part is centred on requirements and expectations at the transition with regard to the subject English. What is the pupils' stage in language learning when they change to another school, and does this match with the requirements made by the different schools? Connected to this is the question in how far the different types of school know about and take into account the practices common in other schools. Based on these considerations, the aim of section two is to draw inferences on the quality of the transition from primary to secondary school in English. From this information, conclusions concerning characteristics of a smoother transition can be drawn.

Taking part two as a starting point, part three of the interview then focuses on ways of improving the transition in the future. The aim here is to find out where the responsibility concerning the transition is seen, and whether structural changes and changes in the school system are perceived as having the potential to improve the transition. The concepts and aims behind the interview questions are all difficult to operationalise, and the result of the interviews cannot be anything other than personal accounts of the interviewees' experiences with the topic. However, this was exactly one of the purposes of this study, namely to obtain personal views and experiences in the field of school transitions in English.

6.1.2. Participant sampling

The sampling strategy of this study had to be adjusted to the limited time and financial resources, as well as to the restricted scale of the project. Having chosen to carry out the data collection in my native province, Vorarlberg, the geographic area was already pre-defined. The aim was to interview teachers from schools that are situated within a certain area of Vorarlberg, i.e. within the same or an adjacent town. The assumption behind this

is that those schools that regularly take over pupils from the surrounding schools need to maintain a frequent exchange of information with their feeder schools. Accordingly, the proximity of the investigated schools has the advantage of permitting conclusions about the degree of cooperation among those schools.

The main criterion for participants was to either have instructed or to be currently instructing the grade immediately preceding or following the transition, depending on the type of school. In other words, I wanted to interview primary school teachers experienced in instructing fourth graders, and secondary school teachers who were experienced in teaching pupils in their fifth year (i.e. in their first year in secondary school). The main reason for the decision to concentrate exclusively on the view of teachers and not to integrate the perspective of students or parents in the empirical study is that the perspective of teachers and their role in the transition process is often neglected. The biggest challenges for students (discussed in detail in Section 2.1.1.) at the transition include fear and insecurity towards the new school, which often lead to a negative perception of the transition, and pressure to perform put on them by their parents. For parents (see Section 2.1.3.) the difficulty lies in striking a balance between their own wishes for their child's education and the child's personal needs and abilities. Taking into account the fact that teachers are the most likely of the three parties to have a wealth of experiences with regard to the transition from one school to another, they are a rich source of information.

The next task was to decide on a sample size suitable for the project. Here, the criterion was to gain enough information to be able to compare the transition from the three different perspectives (i.e. primary school, secondary modern school, grammar school). At the same time, it was important to keep the amount of data at a manageable level. Therefore, I aimed at finding three teachers from each school type who were willing to give an interview on the topic of transitions. This makes a total of nine interviews, which is an adequate sample size for the purpose and scale of this project. It has to be emphasised here that qualitative data is by definition interested in detailed personal accounts and experiences rather than in comparing as many samples as possible. Dörnyei (2007b: 126) makes this clear when he says that, "at least in theory, qualitative inquiry is not concerned with how representative the respondent sample is or how the experience is distributed in the population". Rather, it is important that the people taking part in the research "can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation" (ibid.: 126). Therefore, further criteria in finding participants were their

motivation and readiness to share their experiences on the topic and thereby contribute to this study. Consequently, the gender of participants did not play a major role in the selection process. Comprising six female interviewees (66.6%) and three male participants (33.3%), the sample nevertheless represents rather accurately the proportions of female and male teachers in the three schools, which is an average ratio of 66.5% to 33.5% (see Table 5). In terms of age and length of service, a wide range was covered by the participants in the study. The lowest number of years of service was three, the highest as high as 38 (see Table 6).

Table 5 Gender proportions in the interview sample and in school staff; numbers in %

	Interview Sample	School Staff
Female	66.6	66.5
Male	33.3	33.5

All of the teachers interviewed had volunteered to take part when asked either personally or via email. Although this means that the opinions of all the other potential candidates could not be included, it guarantees for interviewees who are in one way or another interested in the topic. As mentioned above, the prime focus was on people who were willing to share their knowledge, experiences and opinions on the topic at hand, and who at the same time met the criteria mentioned above. Accordingly, the sampling strategy used here fits best into what Dörnyei (2007b: 128) terms “*criterion sampling*”, i.e. “the researcher selects participants who meet some specific predetermined criteria”.

Finding three teachers who were ready to take part in an interview in each of the schools I had chosen for the study proved not to be particularly difficult. However, since the period in which the interviews could effectively be done was restricted to two weeks, it was a challenge arranging appointments with all the teachers within this time frame. The estimated duration of an interview was between 30 and 45 minutes, which suggested that they be done in a free period, which was mostly the case. However, it turned out that the interviews varied considerably in length, the shortest one being 21 minutes long, the longest lasting for exactly one hour (see Table 6).

Table 6 Interview specifications

Primary School	Date of Interview	Gender of Interview Partner	Position	Length of Service (years)	Interview Duration (minutes)
Mr Weiss⁴	28 April 2011	Male	Head of School	25	32
Ms Schmidt	2 May 2011	Female	Teacher	3	60
Mr Fuchs	2 May 2011	Male	Teacher	38	42

Secondary Modern School (Neue Mittelschule)		Date of Interview	Gender of Interview Partner	Position	Length of Service (years)	Interview Duration (minutes)
Joint Interview	Ms Baumgartner,	3 May 2011	Female	Head of School,	27	24
	Ms Wieser		Female	Teacher	17	
Ms Bauer		5 May 2011	Female	Teacher	30	34

Grammar School	Date of Interview	Gender of Interview Partner	Position	Length of Service (years)	Interview Duration (minutes)
Mr Gruber	29 April 2011	Male	Teacher	13	45
Ms Fink	3 May 2011	Female	Teacher	22	21
Ms Lang	3 May 2011	Female	Teacher	20	29

⁴ All names have been changed.

6.1.3. Settings

All interviews were conducted in German, or rather in the dialect spoken by the interview partners. This had the function of rendering the setting as natural and comfortable as possible. The assumption behind this is that people talk more freely when they do not have to use the standard language or have the impression of a too formalised situation. Moreover, it is the most natural choice between native speakers of the same dialect to employ it in conversation. Since it is important for the data to consist of detailed and honest information, it is essential that the interviewee feels comfortable and that the situation does not create the impression of an examination.

To facilitate data analysis, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. All of them were carried out by myself, which means that undesired variation in experimenter effects could be eliminated. However, the fact that all interviews were done by the same person does not, of course, guarantee the complete exclusion, but at least the stabilisation of the influence of the interviewer on the respondents. Although I tried to be neutral and unbiased towards my interview partners, it is almost impossible to eliminate all personal variables, i.e. the interviewer always influences the outcome to some extent. After all, as Dörnyei (2007b: 141) remarks, interviewing can never be seen as a neutral act of data collection, but “rather [as] a co-constructed social exchange”. Consequently, the uncontrollable factors in interview situations are a problem almost all forms of qualitative inquiry have to face.

All talks were done in one-to-one situations, except for one interview in which the head of a school was interviewed together with one of the teachers. The reasons for this were again of practical nature, but it was also interesting to have a small group interview with different viewpoints and experiences on the topic. Attention was also paid to the setting in which the interviews took place, and as far as possible they were carried out in separate and quiet rooms to avoid interruptions.

6.1.4. Procedure

Before beginning the actual interview, participants were asked permission for recording the interview with a voice recorder. Then they were given a short introduction to the topic and purpose of the study and to how the data would be used. All participants were asked all of the questions from the interview guides, always with the possibility of not

answering a question if it seemed too personal or provoking. This, however, was never the case. When a topic not covered by the pre-prepared questions came up during an interview, additional questions were added spontaneously to elicit further information. Attention was paid to letting the interviewees talk as freely as possible without interrupting them, and to restrict the interviewer's role exclusively to asking questions and to structuring the talk. As Dörnyei (2007b: 140) states, it is essential for the interviewer to bear in mind that he or she is there "primarily to listen (and not to speak!)", which is an obvious feature of the interview, but it always needs to be kept in mind in order not to slip one's own views into the talk, thereby affecting the results.

After completion of the interview phase, the interviews were fully transcribed, i.e. the recordings were converted into written form and standard German. This was done with the help of free online transcription software *f4*⁵. Since what the participants said is more important for this study than how they said something, "*nonverbal* aspects" such as body language, suprasegmentals, paralinguistic factors or "nonvocal noises" are not indicated in the transcripts (Dörnyei 2007b: 246-247). Opting for such a "broad or rough transcription" (Roberts 2003: 4) means, of course, that the subsequent interpretation of the data depends to a certain degree on the researcher's interpretations of what has been said. However, Roberts (1997: 168) stresses the fact that no method of transcribing spoken discourse can ever be free from personal bias of the researcher. For the purpose of analysing the type of information obtained in this particular study, though, rough transcription seems an appropriate method. The danger of including personal opinions and perspectives in this context is not greater than it would be with a narrow transcription. Although it is also true for semi-structured interviews that *how* a person says something is important, the opportunity for the researcher to ask for clarification enables her/him to prevent misunderstandings and ambiguous statements. What is more, the redundancy of spoken language as it occurs in the semi-structured interview mostly leaves little or no doubt as to the message a person wants to get across. Therefore, the approach adopted in this study was to stay as close to the recordings as possible while providing a transcript fitting to written standard grammar.

⁵ available at <http://www.audiotranskription.de/f4.htm>

6.1.5. Data Analysis

Stake (1995: 71) points out that in qualitative research “[t]here is no particular moment when data analysis begins”. While analysis inevitably already starts during data collection, the following sections refer to the work carried after data collection has been completed, during which the gathered material is systematically analysed. According to Miles & Huberman (1994: 10), this phase involves the three steps of “data reduction”, “data display” and “conclusion drawing”, or “data interpretation”, to use a more common term (Dörnyei 2007b: 245).

In the process of analysing the data, mainly methods of qualitative content analysis have been used. While transcribing the interviews, aspects that seemed relevant for my research were picked out and noted down. The aim of this pre-coding phase was to “mak[e] sense of [my] first impressions” (Dörnyei 2007b: 205). Also, aspects that were of little or no relevance for the present topic were identified and ruled out. The notes taken during transcription were then used as a starting point for defining categories. During this stage, the coding process was continued and different coding techniques were applied. Along with the transcripts, the transcription notes served as the basis for further analysis of the data.

As a next step, all the material was revised, coding was continued, and further categories were defined. Thus, categorisation of the material was increasingly refined, and while certain aspects began to crystallise, the data was reduced to a manageable amount.

The interview guides and the literature consulted for the preceding chapters were used as reference points against which the resulting material was matched constantly. By going through the transcripts and revising my notes several times, I was able to develop ideas over a period of time, “to learn from the data and to build that learning into the project” (Richards [2005]: 87). Comparing the results of my own research with existing information on the topic finally permitted conclusions concerning the purpose of this study to investigate problems and challenges at the transition as well as to provide possibilities for improving the transition. During this process of comparing and revising, links and cross-references in the data could be established. Thus, the conclusions arrived at are the result of a process which strikes a balance between standardised procedures and method-independent interpretation.

6.2. Results

As expected, the answers received during the interviews have been very diverse with some questions, while with others they have been surprisingly uniform. The responses given by the interviewees have the form of subjective accounts and opinions regarding the transition, which is in accordance with the aims defined earlier in this chapter. Consequently, answers are quite strongly influenced by factors such as the personal history of the subjects, their age and length of service, and by the school type in which they are teaching.

As far as the general view of the transition is concerned, most teachers agree that it is a critical or challenging event. While not all of them see an urgent need to change or improve it, the majority of interviewees hold that steps need to be taken in order to resolve existing grievances at the transition. Grammar school teacher Mr Gruber⁶, for instance, regards the transition as “eine ganz wichtige Schnittstelle, an der auch sehr viel falsch läuft”, and concludes: “Da muss etwas geschehen.” Primary school teacher Mr Fuchs criticises the fact that children are often “thrown in at the deep end” after the transition, especially in grammar schools and especially with regard to English. Mr Weiss, head of primary school, pleads for rendering the transition “schwellenloser” by enhancing the handover of students to secondary schools.

Presentation of the results is roughly structured according to the parts of the interview guides, starting with general aspects of the transition before focusing on the transition in English. Ways of facilitating the transition are discussed after outlining the problems that have been mentioned during the interviews.

6.2.1. The Transition as a Challenge

The transition is seen as a challenge for pupils and teachers in many ways. Especially the structural and environmental changes that accompany the transfer to secondary school are regarded as requiring adaptation on the part of the students. In connection with this, the change from form teacher system to a system of subject teachers has been mentioned as a main challenge in all interviews. When leaving primary school, pupils do not only lose the attachment figure who they have been used to for at least two years, but they also have a very small chance of establishing such a relationship with a teacher in the new

⁶ All names have been changed.

setting. In most cases the new school building is considerably bigger than the one students have been used to, which adds to the unfamiliarity of the new environment. In accordance with research on the topic, teachers generally consider that being confronted with so many changes is a great challenge for a child of ten or eleven.

This is also noted by secondary school teachers, who state that especially children who lack self confidence and have not yet reached a certain degree of autonomy by the start of grade five frequently have problems in coping with the new situation. Combined with increased requirements and the faster progression in subject matter common in secondary schools, the new setting can become too much to handle for pupils. Here, parental support and empathetic teachers are crucial for mastering the initial period of secondary school successfully.

A second issue that has been brought up repeatedly during the interviews is the pressure put on primary school teachers by parents in order to achieve the grades a child needs for admission to grammar school. This has been stated by secondary school teachers and confirmed by all three primary school teachers interviewed. Grammar school teacher Mr Gruber complains that the pressure put on fourth-grade teachers results in growing numbers of children being admitted to grammar school who are not up to the requirements. Mr Gruber as well as primary school teacher Mr Fuchs note that this problem is especially serious for younger primary school teachers who, when confronted with parents determined to get their child into grammar school, lack the experience and authority to stand their ground. In this context, Mr Gruber speaks of the “inheritance of education”, referring to instances when academics want their children to receive the same education as they have attained, adding that the educational degree of parents should not serve as a justification for granting their children access to higher education than their performance would admit.

A further consequence of the pressure enacted on primary school teachers is a growing pressure from teachers on children, who are normally not able to cope with this at all. This again may result in a drop in performance as soon as the child has entered grammar school. Reasons for this might either be the fact that a different type of school would be more adequate, or that the child is unable to cope with the pressure, or even a combination of both.

The main cause of the pressure weighing on primary school teachers is seen mainly in the external differentiation of secondary level into secondary modern school/new middle school and grammar school. New middle school teacher Ms Wieser

notes that through this division, a label is put on children very early on, which already influences the attitude with which they enter secondary school:

Ich glaube, dass das ein riesiger Druck ist und dass Schüler, die es eben nicht schaffen, in die AHS zu kommen, eigentlich schon mit dieser Versagerhaltung - sowohl von den Eltern als auch von den Kindern her - hinein kommen.

Ms Baumgartner, head of a new middle school, regards the division of pupils after primary school and the resulting pressure on teachers and children as one of the key problems occurring at the transition. This again reflects the findings of research on the transition, which identifies influence exerted on teachers as a main reason for social inequalities passed on through the educational system.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, one possibility of reducing the pressure of parents on teachers is to defer the transition to a point when the abilities of a child have become more apparent, allowing for a well-grounded choice of secondary school. Accordingly, two thirds of teachers asked regard the selection after four years of primary school as too early and would favour putting the decision off to a later time. Of the remaining three teachers, only one considers the scheduling of the transition ideal as it is, while the other two believe that it is beneficial for some children, but disadvantageous for others. In contrast to the results of Koch's (2001) study, no tendencies of certain groups of teachers towards one point of view are visible. While Koch (ibid.: 113) found that primary school teachers generally regard the transition as taking place too early, and that secondary teachers do not see the early transition as a problem, the advocates of a deferral of the changeover in this study come from primary as well as from secondary schools. These results point to a growing awareness among secondary school teachers of the importance of the scheduling of the transition and its consequences, which could be taken as an indicator of the need to delay it to point when children are more advanced in their cognitive and social development.

6.2.2. Facilitating the Transition

Suggestions made by different teachers for solving the problems addressed above have often been alike. In order to facilitate the switch from form teacher to subject teachers, Mr Gruber proposes the introduction of new ways of organising learning. In his grammar school, there have already been projects which involved open learning or independent

study, i.e. students receive different assignments and work on them on their own or in groups, the teacher taking on the role of an advisor. This might involve cross-curricular topics and the breakup of the traditional division of teaching time into 50-minute slots. Thus, students spend more time with the same teacher and have the chance of slowly getting accustomed to the new system.

A further possibility of rendering the acclimatisation to the new system more gradual is the formation of a team including all teachers teaching in fifth grade. This is already practised to a certain extent in the new middle school where interviews for this study have been carried out. Working in teams enables teachers to organise teaching more flexibly, to initiate cross-curricular activities, and to coordinate the contents of their teaching. However, Ms Bauer states that a great organisational effort is connected to this kind of teamwork, and that it is almost impossible to organise meetings of all fifth-grade teachers.

The third way of facilitating the change to a subject-teacher system is to have the form teacher spend more time in class during the first months of year five. Thus, children have a person who they can confide in, and the switch to the new system is not too abrupt. This way of facilitating the familiarisation of pupils with the new school is also employed by the new middle school mentioned earlier, and can be realised with less organisational effort than forming teacher teams.

6.2.2.1. New Middle School as a means of Preventing the “Inheritance of Education”

In order to prevent the “inheritance of education” as called for by grammar school teacher Mr Gruber, interviewees suggest prolonging common schooling of all children. This would be a way of deferring the transition, and thus providing equality of opportunities as well as reducing the pressure on primary school teachers and pupils. The way in which teachers imagine this to happen is always a type of lower secondary school for all pupils. However, most of the interviewees are sceptical of the new middle school as it is implemented in Austria, even those teaching in middle school.

Criticism of new middle school frequently refers to a suspected hidden agenda pursuing the aim of saving money in the long run rather than to optimise education. This kind of objection has been uttered especially by grammar school teachers. Moreover, Mr Gruber sees the danger of a growing market for private schools in putting together all

pupils at lower secondary level, which, according to him, must be avoided by all means. Further criticism has been expressed in the form of scepticism about the quality and the standards of new middle school. Grammar school teacher Ms Fink regards a system in which strong students support weaker students as being doomed to failure. In her experience, this works only in rare cases. Furthermore, she is sceptical about the reasons for which teachers support middle school:

Meiner Meinung nach wird das irrsinnig subventioniert und sie müssen irrsinnig schwärmen von der Mittelschule, weil sie sonst abgeschafft wird und sie bekommen wieder größere Klassen.

Ms Lang adds that a lot of commitment is required from every teacher in order to make a project like new middle school work. Hence, she does not regard a common lower secondary level as the ideal solution, because there are always those teachers who are highly committed to a cause as well as those who get less involved in it.

All three teachers from new middle school argue for a common school for *all* 10 to 14-year-olds and thus for merging grammar schools with new middle schools. One advantage they expect from abolishing this kind of external differentiation are to relieve primary school teachers from the pressure enacted on them by parents. The other benefit of a common school for all children is that there would also be excellent students among the others, which in the present system is not the case since the best pupils normally go to grammar school. New middle school is therefore not an ideal solution, because excellent students needed in order to push the others are very rare. This situation is also reflected in the opinions expressed by the interviewees, because none of the teachers interviewed approve of new middle school as it is being implemented in Austria, although the majority is in favour of a longer common schooling of pupils. The main criticism is the continuing differentiation of pupils into new middle school and secondary academic school.

When asked about possibilities for facilitating the transition, none of the interviewees mentioned deferring the transition by extending the duration of primary school, which would be an alternative to a common lower secondary stage. The reason for this may be that it is very unlikely to happen in Austria due to the recent implementation of new middle school, one of the declared long-term aims of which is to grant equal opportunities for all children after primary school. However, extending primary school by two years, as it is already the case in many European countries, should not be ruled out as

a possibility of improving the transition. Although, as Mr Gruber emphasises, selection has to take place eventually, regardless of the modalities of a school system, the crucial question is when it happens. In view of the problems arising in connection with a common lower secondary stage as mentioned in Section 2.2.2., six years of primary school combined with an elaborate supporting system for students would provide a solid basis for any type of education to follow.

6.2.2.2. Cooperation

As noted in Chapter 2, cooperation between primary and secondary schools is a key factor in improving transition. This seems to be considered by the authorities, as there are work groups at the provincial level entrusted with the initiation and coordination of cooperation efforts.

During the interviews, a number of different cooperation measures have been mentioned, the most frequent one being so-called “handover talks” taking place at the end of the year, i.e. shortly before children leave primary school. The purpose of these talks is to pass on information about the individual students to their future class teachers, and to inform them about students’ strengths and weaknesses. As mentioned repeatedly, another aim of these talks is to reduce the potential for conflict by arranging groups accordingly. This means that, for instance, children who did not get on well with each other in primary school can be allocated to different groups. Teachers consistently report positive experiences with this kind of cooperation, because the talks are a way of passing on knowledge to their future teachers about children primary school teachers have acquired over a period of two or more years.

At the same time, some interviewees mentioned the dangers of classifying students before they enter secondary school as well. New middle school teacher Ms Bauer points out that such talks automatically create a bias towards certain students, which is not always an advantage: “Denn wenn sie dann [in die neue Schule] kommen, mischt es sich ohnehin neu und irgendwie ist es vielleicht auch ganz gut, wenn du ein bisschen unvoreingenommen bist.” Hence, too much information may lead to wrong judgements about certain pupils, which might not be adequate anymore in the new setting.

While cooperation in the form of “handover talks” takes place regularly between primary schools and new middle schools/secondary modern schools, there is no such communication with grammar schools as far as primary school teachers are concerned.

According to head of primary school Mr Weiss, this is on the one hand due to the relatively low numbers of pupils changing to grammar school after primary level, on the other hand it is difficult to get into contact with all grammar schools in the region in order to inform them about their future pupils. This corresponds only partially with the information received from grammar school teachers. Mr Gruber states that there is more or less regular contact with teachers from those primary schools where most of the pupils at his school come from. Similarly, Ms Fink, from the same grammar school, reports regular cooperation with all of the feeder schools in the region. Thus, there seems to be a gap in knowledge about the existence and intensity of cooperation between primary and grammar schools.

Further cooperation efforts mentioned by the interviewees are taster days for future pupils of secondary schools, event days for getting to know each other at the beginning of grade five, information evenings for parents and teachers in secondary schools, and open days including different activities. In Ms Lang's experience, taster days serving the introduction of pupils to their future school take away a great deal of their fear and insecurity towards the new institution.

When asked whether there should be more communication among primary and secondary schools, primary school teachers said they would wish for more exchange with and feedback from grammar school teachers. In contrast to this, only one of three grammar school teachers pleaded for increased cooperation, while emphasising that more and more is being done now in terms of the transition. The other two grammar school teachers stated that they did not see the need to increase cooperation efforts, since communication with primary school teachers works well.

6.2.3. Challenges at the Transition in English

The position of English as an obligatory course lacking subject-status in primary school is reflected in the statements of teachers concerning the transition in English. Opinions diverge considerably about how problematic the transition in English is, and consequently about whether it needs to be changed. Some of the primary as well as secondary school teachers regard English as a particularly problematic case because it is handled differently in every primary school. Others again do not see this as a problem, holding the view that "serious" English teaching only starts in secondary school, while primary school English merely provides a playful first contact with the language.

6.2.3.1. Diverging learner levels? -We start from scratch anyway!

Buchholz (2007a: 309 ff.) mentions diverging learner levels at the start of secondary school as one of the main problems occurring at the transition in English within the Austrian school system. When asked about this, secondary school teachers confirmed that there are perceptible differences in terms of skill levels among students at the start of the secondary stage. However, few of them perceived this as a serious problem.

Conforming to the results of Buchholz's (2007a) study, the most common way of dealing with the heterogeneity of pupils is to start from scratch and thereby assimilate learner levels by providing a quick run-down of the basics. Thus, a common foundation for English teaching and learning is created. In accordance with this, the uniform answer to the question of what the expectations in English are at the start of year five was "nothing". Most teachers begin teaching English as if children had not had any previous education in the subject. Besides bringing interest in and enthusiasm for the language, only marginal prerequisites such as "basics in pronunciation" are expected from children when they arrive in secondary school. This ignorance of primary school English should be cause for concern.

Such a questionable way of handling early education in English is mainly due to its status in primary school. Primary school teacher Mr Fuchs refers to this when saying that English is among those subjects that are often dropped due to shortage of time. This corresponds with the results reported by Buchholz (2007b: 323), which indicate that the majority of Austrian primary school teachers asked teaches less than one English lesson per week, thus not complying with the curricular aims. Since English is a *Verbindliche Übung*, there are no standards to be met by students, and thus no pressure on teachers to implement them.

Teachers from secondary schools know that teaching time for English is very limited in primary school, and they employ a pragmatic approach to this fact by not assuming any previous knowledge. To a certain extent, primary school teachers look at the situation from the same perspective, knowing that English as a "full" subject only starts in secondary school. Mr Weiss notes that even within his primary school, learner levels differ considerably according to class and teacher, which is why secondary school teachers practically have no choice but to begin from zero. Mr Gruber says that secondary school English teachers are privileged because there are no qualifications required from their students in order to proceed according to the curriculum. Hence, they do not have to

rely on primary school teachers in equipping children with the knowledge needed to carry on, as is the case with other core subjects such as German or mathematics.

In addition to the moderate benefit primary school English is perceived to have on children's learning progress, not all secondary teachers see an advantage in an early start. Grammar school teacher Ms Fink thinks that ten is the ideal age for starting to learn English as a foreign language. She does not approve of English in primary school, holding that children ought to learn German properly before being taught English. New middle school teacher Ms Bauer goes as far as saying that she would prefer it if her pupils had no experience with English at all when they arrive at her school. She has the impression that children's enthusiasm for the language is diminished by their being acquainted with it on primary level:

Es ist vielleicht eher so, dass sie diese Neugierde nicht mehr so haben, die sie am Anfang, wenn ein neues Fach da ist, haben. Von dem her wäre es mir fast auch egal, wenn sie es nicht mehr hätten in der Volksschule.

Similar to her colleagues from secondary school, she does not see the basis provided by primary school English as one on which secondary school English can rely.

6.2.3.2. Differentiated Teaching as an Alternative?

An alternative approach to starting from scratch in grade five is to use methods of differentiated teaching. Although the curriculum envisages the implementation of differentiated ways of teaching at secondary level, these seem to be used only rarely in practice, at least with regard to English teaching. Only two of the six secondary school teachers interviewed touched upon differentiated teaching as a means of accounting for different learner levels. However, both of them regard it as something that is extremely difficult to realise in practice. Mr Gruber from grammar school admits that catering to the individual needs of every student is desirable, but at the same time he emphasises the difficulties and obstacles connected to it:

Auf alle [SchülerInnen] einzugehen in einem differenzierten Unterricht klingt zwar wunderbar, und es gibt auch genug Seminare zum differenzierten Unterricht, aber es gibt sowas wie den Alltag, und im Alltag gibt es auch sehr viele Störfeuer [...], die das dann wieder schwierig machen. Also es ist nicht so leicht. Es ist eine Herausforderung.

A wealth of everyday tasks and daily chores distract from teaching and make it difficult to employ time-consuming methods of internal differentiation. In addition to this circumstance, new middle school teacher Ms Bauer feels left alone with the challenge of attuning her teaching to the differing abilities of her pupils:

Dann sollst du differenziert unterrichten, was in der Praxis ja - ich möchte einmal jemand sehen, der das wirklich macht, und wie man das macht. Man sagt halt du musst das machen, aber wie man es macht, sagt dir niemand. Und vor allem, diesen Arbeitsaufwand kannst du gar nicht bringen.

This statement indicates frustration due to insufficient instruction in terms of differentiated teaching provided for teachers. It is not enough to demand from them to employ a differentiated way of teaching, they also need to be provided with the necessary knowledge and skills. This again entails incorporation of such practices into teacher training and in-service education.

While Ms Bauer complains about lacking guidance in differentiated teaching, Mr Gruber is certain that sufficient seminars are being offered on the topic. Moreover, he thinks that English textbooks usually contain enough guidelines as to how to account for differing learner levels, although he acknowledges that there it is difficult to realise in practice. Considering these differing ratings of the role differentiated teaching plays at the transition in English, ensuring its inclusion into teacher education appears to be one of the main preconditions for its successful implementation in schools. Teachers need to be convinced of the benefits of differentiated teaching, otherwise its implementation will fail.

6.2.3.3. German as a Precondition for Learning English

Whereas expectations of secondary school teachers concerning their students' English skills are surprisingly low, many of them complain about shortcomings in German. It should be noted here that local varieties spoken in Vorarlberg differ substantially from standard German, which is why learning and using the standard variety can be a considerable obstacle for children. Especially grammar school teachers emphasise the importance of knowledge and skills in German as a precondition for English learning: "Da gibt es eklatante Mängel. Und wenn's in Deutsch nicht funktioniert, dann funktioniert es auch in Englisch nicht", says Mr Gruber. Ms Fink shares this opinion, stating that although the earlier a second language is introduced the better it is, she only approves of

English in primary school if German as a first language has been consolidated. Therefore, grammar school teachers argue for a language teaching practice that focuses on reaching a certain standard in German before English is introduced. Head of primary school, Mr Weiss, agrees with them in this respect, emphasising the need for children to have reached a certain level in German, which is often their second language, before learning English:

Es ist zuerst wichtig, dass sie Deutsch - zum Teil als Zweitsprache - ganz gut lernen, und dann rückt Englisch automatisch in den Hintergrund. Denn wir sagen, bevor nicht eine Sprache fixiert ist und halbwegs sitzt, hat's auch kaum einen Sinn, eine andere Sprache draufzusetzen oder diese zusätzlich zu lernen.

In consideration of this statement, the question arises how children with a migration background or with a native language other than German cope with an early start in English teaching and, consequently, with the transition in English.

Answers to the question whether children with a migration background generally have more problems with English varied. While one of the primary school teachers says there is no clear tendency visible, the other two state that English can become a problem if German is not spoken as a first language or if children are not exposed to it at home.

Grammar school teachers Ms Fink and Ms Lang emphasise that, because of the selective character of grammar schools, students admitted to their school generally perform very well in English, regardless of their background. Hence, there is normally no difference between pupils with and those without a migration background. Mr Gruber contradicts this claim, however, stating that children with a migration background typically do have problems with English, often due to insufficient knowledge and skills in German.

New middle school teachers do not see a connection between family background and performance in English. Ms Wieser is convinced that in English the situation is the same for all children at the start of secondary school, because the language is new to all of them. Ms Baumgartner adds that performance depends on the personality of the child rather than on its descent.

Summing up, a certain standard in German is expected from pupils by secondary school teachers regardless of their parentage, which is in line with what Buchholz (2005a: 534) reports on the topic. What is striking is that there seem to be serious shortcomings in German despite primary school teachers' awareness of this problem. However, this is not necessarily due to an interference caused by an early start in English teaching, but it

might just as well be brought about by shortcomings in teaching of German in primary school.

6.2.3.4. Differences in Methods and Practices of English Teaching

The question of what the differences in English teaching methodology between primary and secondary schools are basically triggered two types of reaction. The first one was to shortly describe the (assumed) differences in methodology and interaction formats. The second type of reaction was to state a lack of knowledge about the different methods used in teaching English. In this case, the only source of information about primary schools secondary school teachers have is their personal experience, which often goes a long way back.

The adjective most often used for characterising primary school English teaching was “playful”. Moreover, primary school is assumed to adopt different approaches to the organisation of learning, such as open learning or learning according to a work plan. In Mr Gruber’s view, secondary school English teaching generally is more teacher-centred than it is at primary level. However, secondary school teachers emphasise that these approaches are increasingly adopted by their schools as well. Also, the focus of primary school English on listening and communicative skills has been addressed. Secondary school English teaching is regarded as a contrast to the playful nature of primary school practice, and is said to be more serious, incorporating all four skills as well as tests and grading.

Despite these ratings of teaching practices, information about the work of teacher colleagues is often scarce. Mr Weiss, head of primary school, reports a lack of feedback regarding English teaching in secondary schools: “Ich kann jetzt nicht sagen, wie der Englischunterricht in den oberen Stufen, also in der Mittelschule oder im Gymnasium gemacht wird.“ While Mr Weiss would wish for an increased exchange among the two levels, secondary school teachers do not seem to see an urgent need to learn about primary school English teaching practices. This might either be due to the fact that secondary school teachers are satisfied with the way cooperation with primary level works, or it could be because secondary schools are less dependent on exchange of information than primary schools are in order to improve teaching practices. As pointed out by Buchholz (2005a: 532-533), lack of exchange of information can lead to serious misconceptions between primary and secondary school teachers.

While adapting teaching methods to the age of pupils is desirable, a lack of knowledge about and interest in the methods employed by the type of school preceding or following the transition is certainly not conducive to improving the transition. The consideration of children's previous knowledge plays an important role in rendering the transition smoother. Although secondary school teachers are aware of the different needs young learners have compared to older ones, the lack of knowledge about primary school practice impedes the coordination of primary and secondary school teaching. Thus, increased communication and feedback among primary and secondary schools as postulated already in Chapter 2 are essential in order to enable teachers to account for the practices of feeder and recipient schools.

6.2.4. Facilitating the Transition in English

From the different suggestions made for improving the transition in English, it emerges that primary school plays a central role in this process. However, in order to improve the transition lastingly, all institutions involved need to cooperate. In addition, curricula for both primary and secondary levels need to be specified to provide teachers with clear guidelines for their teaching. In the following, suggestions for facilitating the transition with regard to English teaching brought up during the interviews are discussed.

While one of the teachers interviewed stresses the need to ensure the implementation of English according to the existing curriculum as a precondition for further steps, several of the interviewees regard cooperation as an indispensable component of a functioning transfer from primary to secondary school. From the nine teachers asked, five assign great significance to the cooperation aspect. Especially primary school teachers argue for closer cooperation and increased networking between primary and grammar schools, since primary schools normally receive no feedback at all from those schools. Only with the help of feedback given by recipient schools are primary schools able to evaluate and develop their practices. In this context, Mr Weiss would generally wish for greater attention being paid to the work of primary schools by secondary schools.

The expectations secondary school teachers bring to the cooperation aspect are of varied nature. Ms Baumgartner from new middle school argues for organising measures to familiarise teachers with different school types and their teaching practices. These could include, for instance, visits and lesson observations in feeder and recipient schools.

Grammar school teacher Ms Lang agrees that cooperation is central to the transition, but she would leave it up to the judgement of the individual teacher when it is necessary to get in touch with colleagues from other schools. In order for this to work, she notes that a certain degree of openness and flexibility is required on the part of the teacher.

From Ms Fink's point of view, focusing on German before introducing English would contribute to a better preparation of children for the requirements of secondary school. In addition to providing children with a basis for English at the lower secondary level, she is certain that this would support the assimilation of learner levels by the end of primary school. Mr Gruber's suggestion for ensuring quality standards in primary school English involves the formulation of minimum requirements:

Ich glaube, es ist auch für die Volksschule wichtig, dass einfach von vornherein diese Anforderungen, diese Mindestanforderungen ganz explizit irgendwo aufgeschrieben werden, und vermittelt werden auf jeden Fall, dass man sagt, da müsst ihr einfach durch.

By introducing and regularly checking up on such common standards, clear aims would be defined for primary school English, which in turn would serve as an orientation point for primary school teachers. In addition to this, clearly defined standards would facilitate primary school teachers' justification of assessment grades awarded and thus enable them to support their decisions when confronted by parents. Primary school teacher Mr Fuchs agrees with Mr Gruber that there is a need to guarantee for a certain standard, which is why he suggests that tests be used in secondary schools for checking students' previous knowledge. Another means of facilitating the transition mentioned by Mr Fuchs is a slower and more careful progression in English at the start of secondary school.

One final area that is seen as having potential for facilitating the transition is teacher training. New middle school teachers Ms Baumgartner and Ms Wieser argue for including aspects of primary school education in training for secondary school teachers and vice versa. Having experienced this during their own training, they are certain to have benefited from getting an insight into their colleagues' field of work. Primary school teacher Ms Schmidt, whose graduation from teacher training college (now university of education) dated back a mere three years at the time of the interview, reports that during her education, the transition was never addressed. She sees this as a serious shortcoming and would strongly approve of the inclusion of issues connected with the transition in teacher education. This would be an important step in raising awareness of possible problems occurring at the interface, and of ways of dealing with them.

Mr Fuchs finally addresses the issue of primary school teachers' competence in the English language, which often affects their confidence and attitudes towards teaching the language. Since there are practically no requirements and no tests in English, primary school teachers are free to keep foreign language teaching to a minimum if they do not feel comfortable teaching the language, which often results in a very marginal education in English during primary school. What is more, this lack of standards and requirements contributes to the substantial differences in English language competence among pupils at the end of grade four. From these statements it emerges that educational policy has a great responsibility in improving the transition. It is the task of school authorities to define standards for primary school English and to devise curricula in which requirements and aims of English teaching at the different levels are clearly specified.

6.3. Discussion

Looking at the results obtained from the interviews, several parallels to the findings of previous studies become apparent. The most striking one is that, with respect to certain aspects of the transition, opinions and views among primary school teachers differ significantly from those held by secondary school teachers. For instance, the perceived need to increase cooperation efforts varies considerably among the two groups.

Judging from the statements made by the different subjects, especially the effectiveness of communication between grammar schools and primary schools needs to be increased. While grammar school teachers are satisfied with the exchange taking place with their colleagues from primary level, the latter state a complete lack of feedback from grammar school teachers. Buchholz (2005a: 533) reports a similar situation, with secondary school teachers stating that there are no problems in terms of cooperation. This suggests that the "gap" at the transition as detected by Buchholz (*ibid.*: 526; see Section 3.1.2. of this volume) still exists despite increased endeavours on the level of individual schools to guarantee regular exchange. Considering these circumstances, it is obvious that primary schools depend on feedback from secondary schools much more than secondary schools need to rely on information from primary schools. However, lasting improvement of the transition can only be achieved if a close and consistent collaboration of both levels is established along with curricular changes.

In addition to this gap in perception of the need for communication, there is a discrepancy in knowledge about the contents and aims of English teaching at the two levels. The fact that many of the secondary school teachers do not know about the aims of primary school English increases their tendency towards ignoring it. Primary school teachers' unfamiliarity with secondary level practice in turn prevents them from directing their teaching to the requirements made by secondary schools. In order to prepare children for secondary school, however, knowledge about the requirements of the different types of school is indispensable.

In contrast to what Buchholz (2005a: 533) reports on the mutual estimation of primary and secondary teachers' competences, teachers interviewed for this study express respect towards the work and competences of their colleagues. However, this has to be treated with caution, since the interviewees' readiness to take part in the study could be regarded as indicating a generally positive attitude towards the transition and the people involved. While most teachers appreciate the work of their colleagues, none of them has extensive knowledge about the job profile of teachers working in feeder or recipient schools. This is alarming, since primary school teachers not knowing the requirements of their pupils' future schools are unable to prepare them for their further career. Equally, a secondary school teacher can account for students' past only to a limited degree in his or her teaching practice if she or he lacks information about what and how primary school teachers teach.

The results of this study demonstrate that a smooth transition depends to a large degree on regular and purposeful exchange, as well as on close cooperation of all schools involved. Networking among the different institutions is therefore a key component in facilitating the changeover from primary to secondary level. The current practice of arranging regular handover talks involving teachers from primary and secondary schools is a first step towards the level of cooperation needed to guarantee a smoothly functioning transition. However, further measures have to be taken in order to improve exchange, especially between grammar schools and the primary level, since the gap still existing between at the transition is a result of lacking communication and an indicator of the areas in which the flow of information needs to be enhanced.

6.3.1. How can Primary School English be rendered more efficient?

The setup of English in primary school as a playful encounter with a foreign language, rather than as a subject in its own right has serious consequences. One of them is the widely held opinion among teachers of primary as well as secondary school that serious English teaching only starts at secondary level. This demonstrates the need to advance the status of primary school English in order to arrive at an optimised situation at the transition.

Although primary school teaching is inevitably arranged more playfully than it is at secondary stage, its potential for providing a solid basis for secondary education must not be neglected. Introducing tests intended for checking up on pupils' abilities and on their stage of learning by the end of primary school constitute one step towards the equalisation of learner levels at the start of secondary school. At the same time, they serve as a point of reference for primary school teachers.

A change of the image of primary school English also requires modifications in its organisation. Increasing teaching time is one option, but, considering the repeatedly uttered call for a well-founded education in German as a basis for English, the efficiency of both, German and English teaching in primary school should be focused on first. For English teaching this entails ensuring that it takes place on a regular basis to the extent defined in the curriculum. The danger of teaching sequences reserved for English being dropped is a problem mentioned in the literature as well as by teachers interviewed for this study. To prevent English teaching time from being 'sacrificed' for seemingly more important matters, a certain period of the week should be reserved for English teaching. In addition to this, regular feedback and some kind of (informal) assessment in grades three and four should be encouraged in order to prepare children for secondary school teaching practice. Depending on the standards, an increase in teaching time might be worth considering as a next step toward a serious practice of primary school English teaching.

Another precondition for guaranteeing consistent quality standards in primary school English is to provide teachers who are competent in language teaching. Considering the fact that many primary school teachers do not feel sufficiently competent in teaching English, training specialist language teachers for primary schools as suggested by Buchholz (2007a: 324) seems the most promising solution for this problem. By taking this step, the quality of primary school English could be enhanced, and teachers feeling

uncomfortable teaching the language would be freed from this burden. In addition, providing specially trained personnel would automatically add significance to English learning and secure its implementation (see Buchholz *ibid.*: 324). Finally, the introduction of profile teachers for English would reduce the dependence of the quality of English teaching on the commitment of the teacher. This frequently addressed shortcoming could be improved by means of providing primary school language teachers with a solid education both in the linguistic as well as in the methodological domains. Thus, improvement of primary level English practice depends to a considerable extent on changes on a level above the individual school.

6.3.2. Consequences for English Teaching at Secondary Level

A primary school practice of English teaching optimised in the way described above has a number of implications for secondary school English. The task of secondary schools is to start taking primary school English into account as a consequence of a raised standard of primary school English. As mentioned during the interviews, secondary schools should be clear about what they expect from first grade pupils in English. These expectations should be recorded in a catalogue and communicated to primary schools, serving as a goal towards which primary school English can then be directed.

As regards variation in learner levels after primary school, the statements made by interview partners create the impression that the problem here is that diverging learner levels are not considered to be problematic. This, however, means to implicitly question the relevance of an early start in foreign language learning, because apart from making a first contact with the language, primary school English does not seem to be of particular importance for secondary school.

While increasing the relevance of primary school English as a basis for ELT at secondary level is one of the main aims of the changes suggested above, ways of responding to the individual skill levels must be established by secondary schools. Although it is included in the methodology section of the curriculum, differentiated teaching has the reputation of being utopian, which is mainly due to the amount of preparation it entails. Here, along with reducing class sizes, providing ways and methods of differentiated teaching in teacher education is definitely necessary in order to equip teachers with the knowledge and tools needed for accounting for students' individual

learning progress. The current practice of including advice for differentiated teaching in the curriculum and in textbooks is obviously not enough.

The challenge for new middle school, which is presented as a solution to many of the problems connected to the transition, is to grant the best education possible for every one of its students. In this context, differentiated teaching is especially important, since new middle school promises individual support and mentoring for every pupil. Doubts concerning its ability to keep this promise have been expressed not only by grammar school teachers, but also by new middle school teachers themselves. If new middle school fails to match with grammar schools in terms of quality, the pressure on primary school teachers concerning grades will not be reduced significantly.

6.3.3. Further Measures

In addition to the ways of approaching the transition mentioned by the interviewees, there are a number further measures which were not addressed during the talks, but which repeatedly appear in the literature. In this section I want to look at some of these possibilities and discuss their potential for the situation in Austria. As mentioned in Section 6.2., none of the teachers interviewed brought up the possibility of extending the duration of primary school in order to defer the transition. Although this practice is part of the Swiss and, to a lesser extent, the German school systems, it does not seem to be particularly prominent in Vorarlberg. I speculated earlier that the reason for this might be the recent implementation of the new middle school in Austria, which makes an extension of primary school in the near future a rather unlikely and therefore not much discussed alternative. However, it represents a feasible way of counteracting the problem of the early transition and it should not be ruled out due to the introduction of new middle school.

A second possibility that did not occur during the talks is obligatory in-service training. While several of the interviewees would generally be willing to do take part in advanced training courses on the topic of transitions, the impression is that most of them would either not approve of being forced to invest more work without compensation, or that they feel that they are already committed to improving the transition so that there is no need for further input. Moreover, Mr Weiss expressed the opinion that networking among individual schools is more effective in enhancing the transition than in-service training. Ultimately, introducing obligatory courses is a sensitive issue because making

advanced training compulsory might result in a negative attitude towards the topic of transitions among a great part of teachers, which would not be conducive to sensitising them for the problems connected with the transition.

Another important issue that was only addressed marginally by the teachers interviewed is the revision of curricula. The desire of teachers for clearer guidelines is expressed in the demand for standards for primary school English, but the curriculum as such was not criticised. However, especially in the case of primary school English, a move away from a mere core curriculum towards a more detailed and structured curriculum is essential as a basis for improvement. This would require further adaptations, such as more teaching staff or specially trained language teachers, as discussed earlier.

7. Conclusion and Outlook

The aim of this paper has been to detect frequently occurring problems and challenges at the transition from primary to secondary school in an Austrian context, and to discuss possible solutions for these problems. In doing so, a special focus has been laid on the transition with regard to English teaching and learning. In order to gain insights into the topic of transitions from the teachers' perspective, this thesis includes an empirical study in the course of which qualitative teacher interviews have been carried out in the province of Vorarlberg. The theoretical background and the basis for the empirical study are constituted by Chapters 2 to 5.

Chapter 2 dealt with various challenges faced by the three groups of persons most directly affected by the transition, viz. students, teachers and parents. In this context, problems frequently encountered in the literature were pressure put on teachers and children by parents, the early scheduling of the transition in Austria, and the difficulties children have in adapting to the new school. Also, the crucial role cooperation between primary and secondary schools plays for the transition was highlighted. Among the suggestions made for facilitating the transition were giving more weight to primary school teachers' advice, introducing a common school for all pupils aged 10-14, and increasing cooperation efforts among primary and secondary levels.

The third chapter was devoted to the transition with regard to English teaching. Here, problems mentioned in the literature included shortcomings in teacher education, heterogeneous learner levels at the start of secondary school, and discontinuities at the transition due to misconceptions prevalent among teachers of different school types. Moreover, various factors influencing language learning and the benefits of starting early with second language learning were discussed. Possibilities of facilitating the transition in English included improvement of cooperation, enforcing the use of differentiated teaching, and raising the status of primary school English.

In Chapter 4, an outline of the Austrian school system was provided, comprising descriptions of the three types of school relevant for this paper. Moreover, the chapter included a short comparison of the Austrian, German and Swiss school systems, highlighting the commonalities and differences of the school systems of the countries bordering Vorarlberg. The remaining part of Chapter 4 contained information on Austrian primary and secondary school curricula, before setting the scene for the empirical study by giving information on demographics and education in the province of Vorarlberg.

Chapter 5 comprised a concise comparison of the three English coursebooks used by the schools in which the interviews for this study were carried out.

Chapter 6 finally constituted the empirical part of this study. Here, methods and procedure were described before presenting and discussing the results obtained from the research. Many of the issues brought up during the interviews reflect those discussed in the literature. This indicates that the transition still confronts teachers, students and parents with challenges and problems that have existed for some time in the Austrian school system. Especially on the level of cooperation and exchange of information, deficits were detected. Although institutional and national school development efforts take the transition increasingly into account, awareness of the problems occurring at the transition needs to be raised among teachers and parents in order to reduce the gap between primary and secondary schools.

In the empirical study, the conclusion was reached that, with regard to English teaching, changes at primary and secondary levels are necessary as well as curricular changes. Primary school English needs to be taken more seriously by teachers of both levels in order to make it a basis from which secondary school teachers can carry on. This entails ensuring a quality standard of primary school teaching and considering an increase of teaching time. Further steps to be taken include, among others, providing for a solid teacher education in English, and introducing assessment during the last two years of primary school.

Secondary schools need to react to these changes by meeting students at the level they have reached by the end of primary school. Teachers should be provided with knowledge and tools necessary for teaching students in a differentiated way. Furthermore, defining requirements for secondary school English as an orientation point for primary schools would serve as a help in clarifying what students should be able to perform in English when entering grade five. In addition, secondary school teachers should be better informed about the methods and contents of primary school teaching.

The topic of transitions in the educational system certainly requires more research in order to be optimised, especially with regard to recent changes in the Austrian educational system. Long term effects of new middle school on the transition and their implications for school development constitute a large area of investigation. Based on the results of this study, several starting points ensue for future research. For example, an evaluation of practices of differentiated teaching in grade five would allow conclusions regarding teaching practices after the transition. Furthermore, investigating the

perspective of pupils on the transition in a context similar to that of this enquiry could be matched against the present results and would yield valuable insights.

Finally, it must be noted that conclusions drawn from the present research are applicable only to the context in which it was carried out. Since the focus lies on one particular area of Austria, results are not representative for the whole country. Comparisons of teachers' attitudes and opinions regarding the transition in different provinces could produce interesting insights. Bringing together results from various contexts would then allow conclusions in a greater context, which in turn would serve school development on a national level.

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Appendix A: Interview Guides

Primary School Interview Guide

I) Übergang allgemein

1. Wie sehen Sie prinzipiell den Übergang von der Volksschule in weiterführende Schulen?
2. Was kann generell getan werden, um den Übergang in weiterführende Schulen zu erleichtern?
3. Was sind Ihrer Erfahrung nach häufige konkrete Schwierigkeiten, mit denen SchülerInnen am Übergang konfrontiert sind?
Liegen die Probleme eher im fachlichen oder in anderen Bereichen (sozial usw.)?
4. Was tun Sie persönlich/Ihre Schule, um die SchülerInnen auf den Übergang vorzubereiten, ihn zu erleichtern (Elternabende, Besuche in Schulen, Hospitationen etc.)?
5. Kooperiert Ihre Schule mit weiterführenden Schulen? Inwiefern? Seit wann? Was hat sich dadurch verändert?
6. Worin liegen Schwierigkeiten/Herausforderungen bezüglich der Vorbereitung der Kinder auf den Übergang von der VS in die Sekundarstufe I?
Wer/was ist verantwortlich für diese Schwierigkeiten?
Was sind Maßnahmen, um diesen entgegenzuwirken (Reformen im Schulsystem, Kommunikation zwischen Schulen, späterer Übergang, Lehrerausbildung etc.)?

II) Der Übergang in Englisch

7. Was sollen die SchülerInnen am Ende der 4. Klasse in Englisch können (Beispiele)?
➔ laut Lehrplan?
➔ in Ihrer Klasse?
8. Von wie vielen SchülerInnen wird dieses Ziel Ihrer Einschätzung nach im Durchschnitt erreicht?
9. Auf welchen Fähigkeiten liegt der Fokus in Englisch in der 4. Klasse: Lesen, Hören, Schreiben, Sprechen?
10. Werden die SchülerInnen in fachlicher Hinsicht in Englisch Ihrer Meinung nach gut genug auf einen Übergang in die AHS/BHS vorbereitet?
11. Wie unterscheidet sich der Englischunterricht in der VS vom E-Unterricht in der AHS/BHS (Unterrichts-/Arbeitsformen, Lehrerrolle etc.)?
Inwiefern berücksichtigen Sie in der 4. Klasse diese Unterschiede?
12. Kommt der Englischunterricht Ihrer Meinung nach in der VS zu kurz oder ist er ausreichend für die Anforderungen weiterführender Schulen?
13. Wie hoch sind Ihrer Erfahrung nach die Anforderungen in Englisch in den weiterführenden Schulen?
Sind Ihre Schüler diesen im Allgemeinen gewachsen?

14. Wie gut wissen Sekundarschullehrerinnen Ihrer Meinung nach über die Fähigkeiten der Volksschulabgänger in Englisch Bescheid?

III) Der Übergang in der Zukunft/Maßnahmen zur Erleichterung

15. Sind die SchülerInnen im Allgemeinen den Anforderungen im Englischunterricht der weiterführenden Schulen gewachsen? Warum/warum nicht?
Was können die weiterführenden Schulen tun, um den SchülerInnen den Übergang zu erleichtern?
16. Welche S. haben für gewöhnlich die meisten Schwierigkeiten mit dem Übergang?
→ Allgemein
→ in Englisch?
17. Gibt es dabei Unterschiede zwischen Kindern mit und solchen ohne Migrationshintergrund?
18. Von wem würden Sie sich mehr Engagement in Bezug auf den Übergang wünschen?
19. Wäre eine andere Schulform eine geeignete Maßnahme, um den Übergang zu erleichtern?
Wie müsste diese aussehen?
Wie viel Potenzial hat eine gemeinsame Schule der 10 bis 14-Jährigen?
20. Inwiefern könnten Veränderungen in der Lehrerausbildung den Übergang erleichtern/verbessern?
Wie müssten diese Veränderungen aussehen?
21. Wären Sie bereit, sich mehr dafür zu engagieren, beispielsweise in Form von Hospitationen in einer AHS/BHS oder einer Fortbildung zum Thema?
22. Welche Rolle spielt Englisch in Ihrem Leben (Bücher, Filme, Urlaub, Theater...)?
23. Gibt es sonst noch etwas, das Sie gerne sagen möchten?

New Middle School/Secondary Modern School Interview Guide

I) Übergang allgemein

1. Wie sehen Sie prinzipiell den Übergang von der Volksschule in weiterführende Schulen?
2. Was kann generell getan werden, um den Übergang in weiterführende Schulen zu erleichtern?
3. Was sind Ihrer Erfahrung nach häufige konkrete Schwierigkeiten, mit denen SchülerInnen am Übergang konfrontiert sind?
Liegen die Probleme eher im fachlichen oder in anderen Bereichen (sozial usw.)?
4. Was tun Sie persönlich/Ihre Schule, um den SchülerInnen den Übergang zu erleichtern (Elternabende, Schnuppertage, Hospitationen etc.)?
5. Kooperiert Ihre Schule mit Volksschulen? Inwiefern? Seit wann? Was hat sich dadurch verändert?
6. Worin liegen Schwierigkeiten/Herausforderungen bezüglich der Vorbereitung der Kinder auf den Übergang von der VS in die Sekundarstufe I?
Wer/was ist verantwortlich für diese Schwierigkeiten?
Was sind Maßnahmen, um diesen entgegenzuwirken (Reformen im Schulsystem, Kommunikation zwischen Schulen, späterer Übergang, Lehrerausbildung etc.)?

II) Der Übergang in Englisch

7. Was erwarten Sie am Beginn der 1. Klasse von Ihren SchülerInnen in Englisch (Beispiele)?
8. Wie viele Schüler bringen diese Fähigkeiten im Durchschnitt mit?
9. Auf welchen Fähigkeiten liegt der Fokus in Englisch am Beginn der 1. Klasse: Lesen, Hören, Schreiben, Sprechen?
10. Welche sprachlichen Fähigkeiten bringen die SchülerInnen in der 1. Klasse mit?
Was sind die größten Probleme von Erstklässlern in Englisch (unterschiedlicher Wissensstand, gar keine Voraussetzungen...)?
11. Wie gehen Sie mit den unterschiedlichen Englischkenntnissen und Fertigkeiten von Erstklässlern um (von vorn beginnen, stärkere Schüler helfen schwächeren...)?
12. Werden die SchülerInnen in der VS in fachlicher Hinsicht in Englisch Ihrer Meinung nach gut genug auf einen Übergang in eine NMS/HS vorbereitet?
13. Halten Sie die fachliche Kompetenz der Grundschullehrer in Englisch für ausreichend?
14. Kommt der Englischunterricht Ihrer Meinung nach in der VS zu kurz oder ist er ausreichend für die Anforderungen weiterführender Schulen?
15. Wie unterscheidet sich der Englischunterricht in der NMS/HS vom E-Unterricht in der VS (Unterrichts-/Arbeitsformen, Lehrerrolle etc.)?
Inwiefern berücksichtigen Sie in der 1. Klasse diese Unterschiede?

16. Wie gut wissen VolksschullehrerInnen Ihrer Meinung nach über die Anforderungen in Englisch in Sekundarschulen Bescheid?

III) Der Übergang in der Zukunft/Maßnahmen zur Erleichterung

17. Sind die Schüler im Allgemeinen den Anforderungen Ihres Englischunterrichts gewachsen? Warum/warum nicht?
Was können die Volksschulen tun, um den SchülerInnen den Übergang zu erleichtern?
18. Welche S. haben für gewöhnlich die meisten Schwierigkeiten mit dem Übergang?
→ Allgemein
→ in Englisch?
19. Gibt es dabei Unterschiede zwischen Kindern mit und solchen ohne Migrationshintergrund?
20. Von wem würden Sie sich mehr Engagement in Bezug auf den Übergang wünschen?
21. Wäre eine andere Schulform eine geeignete Maßnahme, um den Übergang zu erleichtern?
Wie müsste diese aussehen?
Wie viel Potenzial hat eine gemeinsame Schule der 10 bis 14-Jährigen?
22. Inwiefern könnten Veränderungen in der Lehrerausbildung den Übergang erleichtern/verbessern?
Wie müssten diese Veränderungen aussehen?
23. Wären Sie bereit, sich mehr dafür zu engagieren, beispielsweise in Form von Hospitationen in einer VS oder einer Fortbildung zum Thema?
24. Welche Rolle spielt Englisch in Ihrem Leben (Bücher, Filme, Urlaub, Theater...)?
25. Gibt es sonst noch etwas, das Sie gerne sagen möchten?

Grammar School Interview Guide

I) Übergang allgemein

1. Wie sehen Sie prinzipiell den Übergang von der Volksschule in weiterführende Schulen?
2. Was kann generell getan werden, um den Übergang von der Volksschule in weiterführende Schulen zu erleichtern?
3. Was sind Ihrer Erfahrung nach häufige konkrete Schwierigkeiten, mit denen SchülerInnen am Übergang konfrontiert sind?
Liegen die Probleme eher im fachlichen oder in anderen Bereichen (sozial usw.)?
4. Was tun Sie persönlich/Ihre Schule, um den SchülerInnen den Übergang zu erleichtern (Elternabende, Schnuppertage, Hospitationen etc.)?
5. Kooperiert Ihre Schule mit Volksschulen? Inwiefern? Seit wann? Was hat sich dadurch verändert?
6. Worin liegen Schwierigkeiten/Herausforderungen bezüglich der Vorbereitung der Kinder auf den Übergang von der VS in die Sekundarstufe I?
Wer/was ist verantwortlich für diese Schwierigkeiten?
Was sind Maßnahmen, um diesen entgegenzuwirken (Reformen im Schulsystem, Kommunikation zwischen Schulen, späterer Übergang, Lehrerbildung etc.)?

II) Der Übergang in Englisch

7. Was erwarten Sie am Beginn der 1. Klasse von Ihren SchülerInnen in Englisch (Beispiele)?
8. Wie viele Schüler bringen diese Fähigkeiten im Durchschnitt mit?
9. Auf welchen Fähigkeiten liegt der Fokus in Englisch am Beginn der 1. Klasse: Lesen, Hören, Schreiben, Sprechen?
10. Welche sprachlichen Fähigkeiten bringen die SchülerInnen in der 1. Klasse mit?
Was sind die größten Probleme von Erstklässlern in Englisch (unterschiedlicher Wissensstand, gar keine Voraussetzungen...)?
11. Wie gehen Sie mit den unterschiedlichen Englischkenntnissen und Fertigkeiten von Erstklässlern um (von vorn beginnen, stärkere Schüler helfen schwächeren...)?
12. Werden die SchülerInnen in der VS in fachlicher Hinsicht in Englisch Ihrer Meinung nach gut genug auf einen Übergang in eine AHS vorbereitet?
13. Halten Sie die fachliche Kompetenz der Grundschullehrer in Englisch für ausreichend?
14. Kommt der Englischunterricht Ihrer Meinung nach in der VS zu kurz oder ist er ausreichend für die Anforderungen weiterführender Schulen?
15. Wie unterscheidet sich der Englischunterricht in der AHS vom E-Unterricht in der VS (Unterrichts-/Arbeitsformen, Lehrerrolle etc.)?

- Inwiefern berücksichtigen Sie in der 1. Klasse diese Unterschiede?
16. Wie gut wissen VolksschullehrerInnen Ihrer Meinung nach über die Anforderungen in Englisch in Sekundarschulen Bescheid?

III) Der Übergang in der Zukunft/Maßnahmen zur Erleichterung

17. Sind die Schüler im Allgemeinen den Anforderungen Ihres Englischunterrichts gewachsen? Warum/warum nicht?
Was können die Volksschulen tun, um den SchülerInnen den Übergang zu erleichtern?
18. Welche S. haben für gewöhnlich die meisten Schwierigkeiten mit dem Übergang?
→ Allgemein
→ in Englisch?
19. Gibt es dabei Unterschiede zwischen Kindern mit und solchen ohne Migrationshintergrund?
20. Von wem würden Sie sich mehr Engagement in Bezug auf den Übergang wünschen?
21. Wäre eine andere Schulform eine geeignete Maßnahme, um den Übergang zu erleichtern?
Wie müsste diese aussehen?
Wie viel Potenzial hat eine gemeinsame Schule der 10 bis 14-Jährigen?
22. Inwiefern könnten Veränderungen in der Lehrerbildung den Übergang erleichtern/verbessern?
Wie müssten diese Veränderungen aussehen?
23. Wären Sie bereit, sich mehr dafür zu engagieren, beispielsweise in Form von Hospitationen in einer VS oder einer Fortbildung zum Thema?
24. Welche Rolle spielt Englisch in Ihrem Leben (Bücher, Filme, Urlaub, Theater...)?
25. Gibt es sonst noch etwas, das Sie gerne sagen möchten?

Appendix B: Abstract

The aim of this paper is to point out challenges and problems occurring at the transition from primary to secondary school in Austria as well as to present possible ways of solving these problems and of facilitating the transition. The main focus lies on the changeover with regard to English teaching and learning. In this context, a qualitative study of teachers' views in one primary and two secondary schools in Vorarlberg has been carried out.

Transitions are by their nature sensitive and critical life events, the transition to secondary school being a particularly important one since it involves crucial decisions and takes place at a point where the child cannot make these decisions on its own. My approach to the task of describing challenges at the transition is two-fold. In the first part of the thesis, I analyse and review existing literature on the topic of transitions in a German-speaking context. Here, frequently occurring challenges at the transition are examined from the perspectives of the three parties affected by this event most immediately, viz. students, teachers and parents. Next, the transition in the context of English teaching and learning is discussed, including aspects such as learner differences and ways of facilitating the transition. The final two chapters of the literature review contain information on the Austrian educational system and a comparison of three English textbooks (*LASSO4*, *MORE!1*, *The New You & Me 1*) with regard to the transition. The books are analysed in terms of their balancing of the four language skills and of the degree to which they account for the transition.

In the second part, the results of a qualitative study carried out in my native province Vorarlberg are presented. The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the transition from the teachers' perspective, again with a focus on the subject English. For this, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with teachers and heads from three schools in Vorarlberg. The results indicate an increasing awareness of the significance of the transition, but they also point towards a gap between primary and secondary schools caused by a lack of communication and cooperation of primary and secondary levels. Possible ways of approaching this issue include increased cooperation efforts and increased exchange among teachers from different school types as well as changes in English curricula. At the primary level, a common standard for English teaching needs to be ensured, while the task for secondary level is to take into account the English skills of first grade students.

Appendix C: Zusammenfassung

Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, Herausforderungen und Probleme im Zusammenhang mit dem Übergang von der Volksschule in die weiterführenden Schulen (Neue Mittelschule/Hauptschule, AHS) in Österreich aufzuzeigen. Darüber hinaus sollen Möglichkeiten dargelegt werden, diese Probleme zu lösen und den Übergang zu erleichtern. Der Schwerpunkt liegt dabei auf dem Übergang hinsichtlich des Englischunterrichts. Weiters beinhaltet die Arbeit die Ergebnisse einer qualitativen Studie, die sich mit den Ansichten von LehrerInnen in einer Volksschule und in zwei Sekundarschulen in Vorarlberg auseinandersetzt.

Übergänge sind naturgemäß sensible und kritische Lebensereignisse, was auf jenen von der Volksschule in die weiterführenden Schulen besonders zutrifft, da dieser wichtige Entscheidungen verlangt, welche Kinder im Alter von 10 bis 11 Jahren noch nicht alleine treffen können. Ich nähere mich dem Thema der sogenannten „Nahtstellenproblematik“ auf zwei Arten. Im ersten Teil der Arbeit setze ich mich mit der deutschsprachigen Literatur zum Thema auseinander. Dabei werden häufig am Übergang auftretende Herausforderungen aus den Blickwinkeln der drei am direktesten davon betroffenen Personengruppen diskutiert, nämlich aus jenen der SchülerInnen, der LehrerInnen und der Eltern. Danach wird der Übergang in Bezug auf den Englischunterricht besprochen, wobei unter anderem auf individuelle Unterschiede zwischen Lernern sowie auf Möglichkeiten zur Erleichterung des Übergangs eingegangen wird. Die letzten beiden Kapitel der Literaturbesprechung beinhalten Informationen über das österreichische Schulsystem und einen Vergleich dreier Englischschulbücher (*LASSO4*, *MORE1!*, *The New You & Me 1*) mit Blick auf die Nahtstelle.

Im zweiten Teil der Arbeit werden die Ergebnisse der in meinem Heimatbundesland Vorarlberg durchgeführten qualitativen Studie präsentiert. Das Ziel der Untersuchung ist es, einen Einblick in die Lehrerperspektive auf die Nahtstelle zu bekommen, wobei der Fokus wiederum auf dem Fach Englisch liegt. Zu diesem Zweck habe ich neun halbstrukturierte Leitfadeninterviews mit LehrerInnen und DirektorInnen von drei verschiedenen Vorarlberger Schulen durchgeführt. Die Ergebnisse zeugen von einem wachsenden Bewusstsein für die Wichtigkeit des Übergangs, aber sie deuten auch auf eine Lücke zwischen Primar- und Sekundarschulen hin. Diese Lücke wurzelt hauptsächlich in mangelhafter Kommunikation und Kooperation zwischen den Schulen. Möglichkeiten, dieses Problem zu bewältigen sind, unter anderem, erhöhte Kooperation

zwischen Schulen, sowie vermehrter Austausch zwischen LehrerInnen der verschiedenen Schultypen und Veränderungen im Lehrplan. Auf Volksschulebene muss ein gemeinsamer Standard für den Englischunterricht gewährleistet werden, während die Aufgabe der Sekundarschulen darin besteht, die Englischkenntnisse der Erstklässler in den Unterricht mit einzubeziehen.

Appendix D: Curriculum Vitae

Personal information

Name	Simon Hagen
Date of birth	09.06.1984
Place of birth	Bregenz, Austria
Nationality	Austrian
Address	Kelleracker 1a, 6890 Lustenau, Austria
E-mail	a0508204@unet.univie.ac.at

Education

1991 - 1995	Primary school: Volksschule Rotkreuz, Lustenau
1995 - 1999	Lower level grammar school: Bundesgymnasium Dornbirn
1999 - 2004	Music grammar school: Musikgymnasium Feldkirch
June 2004	School leaving examination, passed with distinction
2002 - 2005	Studies of Violoncello at the Landeskonservatorium Feldkirch
2005 - 2012	Teaching degree studies in English, Psychology and Philosophy at the University of Vienna

Work Experience

Oct. 2004 – Sept. 2005	Civilian service in a retirement home in Lustenau
2006 – 2011	Several summer jobs as production worker and parcel deliverer
	in Götzis and Dornbirn

Languages

German
English
French