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Moving on: the challenges for foreign language learning on transition from primary to secondary school.

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Introduction

Many countries are strongly committed to learning languages before the age of 11. In several countries of central and eastern Europe, as well as in Denmark, Spain, Italy and Iceland, a particularly big increase is apparent in the percentage of pupils in the whole of primary education who learn at least one foreign language (Eurydice, 2005). This expansion of primary foreign languages in almost all mainland European countries may be attributed to the European Parliament's resolution recommending measures to promote linguistic diversity and language learning. Indeed, the Action Plan 2004-2006 (Commission of the European Communities, 2003:7) advocated 'mother tongue plus two other languages'. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the government department responsible for educational policy in England, announced an entitlement for all primary school children in England to learn a foreign language throughout key stage 2 (KS2, pupils aged 7-11) by 2010 (DfES 2002a; DfES 2002b). This non-statutory *entitlement*, however, contrasts sharply with the *compulsory* study of two foreign languages in the primary curriculum in many European countries. These recent policy decisions in England to expand foreign language learning in the primary sector by the end of the decade have major implications for transition to the secondary sector and create a challenging and problematic scenario for language teaching in both key stage 2 and key stage 3 (KS3, pupils aged 11-14). This paper presents findings on the issue of transition from case studies of a DfES funded project into the evaluation of 19 local authority Pathfinders in England piloting the introduction of foreign language learning at KS2. To set these findings in context national provision for foreign language learning in England and research on transition in other countries are examined. Finally it investigates the challenges England faces for transition in the light of the new entitlement and discusses implications for the future.

The national context

There has never been a UK-wide policy for primary modern foreign language provision. Scotland, which has for many years managed its educational affairs autonomously, introduced foreign languages into its primary schools over a decade ago. Wales has formulated its own primary and secondary curriculum with due

respect for Welsh, tending to give greater priority to its national language than other languages. Northern Ireland, similarly, has had to take account of its indigenous language and has never developed a foreign language programme for young learners. The Government's decision relating to England, however, to shift the focus of compulsory language learning from 11-16 to 7-14, represents a significant new challenge for primary and secondary schools in England. This radical policy shift started in 1999 by supporting the Early Language Learning (DfEE/CILT) initiative to develop Primary Languages provision when CILT, the National Centre for Languages, created the Good Practice Project with projects across England and Wales and a National Advisory Centre on Early Language Learning (NACELL, <http://www.nacell.org.uk>) was founded. A modern foreign language (MFL) is not statutory in key stages 1 (KS1, pupils aged 4-7) and 2 (KS2, pupils aged 7-11), although non-statutory guidelines were introduced in the National Curriculum for England (DfEE/QCA 1999) for KS2. Consequently, staff, training and resources have varied substantially. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) research project (Powell *et al*, 2001) evaluating primary language provision indicated 21% of maintained schools with KS2 pupils were offering some form of MFL teaching. A more recent survey (Driscoll *et al*, 2004a) established that 44% of schools teaching KS2 pupils offered some form of MFL, but only 3% to all four year groups.

Foreign language teaching in England currently ranges from language 'encounters' (for example, where pupils have a variety of languages 'tasters'), languages taught in after-school (often commercial) clubs, language awareness programmes, and languages (mainly French) fully integrated into the curriculum. MFL provision in KS1 and KS2 varies considerably both within and across regions in time allocation (from 5 minutes a day to 120 minutes a week), the FL starting year (from Year 1 to Year 6), class size and teacher expertise (subject specialist, generalist primary teacher). Time allocation and teacher's knowledge and skills are key factors in determining success. Language provision often reflects local authority commitment to promoting MFL in primary schools or the enthusiasm of individual head teachers who view MFL as a curriculum priority. Provision has also been extended by the growing number of Specialist Language Colleges (SLC) through their outreach activities for primary schools. During the period 2003-5 additional funding for 19 local authority Pathfinders to pilot the introduction of foreign language learning at KS2 led to a range of different potential models. This diverse picture inevitably creates distinct challenges for transition from KS2 to KS3 where pupils arrive at secondary school

with a diverse range of experience in foreign language learning from no language input to a potential of four years' study, but maybe in a language other than the one taught at secondary!

The pilot scheme for teaching French in primary schools (1964-74) was abandoned following a report (Burstall, 1974) which indicated that primary MFL (specifically French) made no substantial difference to long-term achievement. Within this report certain factors were recognised as impediments to success and these remain pertinent to the current situation and to the issues discussed in this paper, namely, insufficient *liaison* between primary and secondary schools; lack of *continuity* in FL learning between primary and secondary; and lack of subsequent *differentiation* by MFL teachers in secondary schools. Interestingly in the States there was a similar failure in the 1960s of foreign language learning in elementary schools when repetition of previously learned material on transfer to high school resulted in severe lack of motivation (Rosenbusch, 1995). There continue to be considerable concerns about the transition from primary to secondary education since there are many primary schools where no language teaching has been undertaken and this leads to widely different levels of interest, experience and competence amongst children in their first year of secondary school. Transition is an aspect of primary languages development which could be a serious hindrance to successful longer term implementation and continued sustainability. Hence, research into effective practice in this area is essential.

Challenges for key stage 2 to key stage 3 transition in England

In England educational phases are organised into key stages: key stage 1, years 1-2 (age 5-7), key stage 2, years 3-6 (age 7-11), key stage 3, years 7-9 (age 11-14), key stage 4, years 9-10 (age 14-16). In general pupils complete their primary education (KS2) at the end of Year 6 (age 10/11) and transfer to secondary school to start year 7 (age 11/12). The importance of building effectively on pupils' achievements as they move into secondary school is clearly recognised. Indeed, one of the explicit objectives of the KS3 strategy is to improve progression across the key stages. The Office for Standards in Education, (Ofsted), the government department responsible for the inspection of schools and Local Education Authorities in England, noted that continuity in the curriculum and progression in learning as pupils move from primary to secondary schools are longstanding weaknesses of the education system across the curriculum (Ofsted, 2002). Amongst the main findings, Ofsted recorded that secondary schools were not building well enough on what their Year 7 pupils had

achieved in English and Mathematics in Year 6 and generally did not know in sufficient detail what their new pupils could do. As a result they had neglected to set targets for improving attainment in Year 7.

This broader issue of transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school has preoccupied teachers and researchers for some decades. Galton *et al* (2000) reveal that much of this research has focused on the social adjustment of pupils to the change of school, rather than the impact of the school change on academic performance and that the limited evidence available suggests that around 40% of pupils experience a hiatus in progress during school transfer. Their research attributes this mainly to a lack of curriculum continuity between the primary and secondary stages of schooling and more importantly to the variations in teaching approach.

During the academic year 2004-5 Ofsted visited more than 300 secondary schools to evaluate the impact of the KS3 National Strategy. Whilst they recognised improvements in teaching and learning and pupils' achievements, continuity of learning on transfer to secondary school was still judged unsatisfactory in more than half of the 300 schools inspected in the survey and transfer and use of data from primary to secondary was considered unsatisfactory in nearly 25% of these schools (DfES, 2006).

For MFL, the issue of continuity is crucial. Simply learning a language from an early age is not in itself a solution. As Marinova-Todd *et al* (2000) indicate:

Research has shown that in formal settings early L2 instruction does not prove advantageous unless followed by well designed foreign language instruction building on previous learning. Children who study a foreign language for only a year or two in elementary school show no long-term effects; they need several years of continued instruction to achieve even modest proficiency.

Ever increasing numbers of pupils will enter secondary school with prior MFL learning. This may present a real problem for secondary MFL teachers confronted with pupils from a range of feeder primary schools where 'entitlement' allows variety in language provision in time allocation, teaching quality (both subject knowledge and pedagogic expertise), and indeed the language studied. As long as key stage 2 MFL teachers are not constrained, or indeed supported, by statutory requirements, a wide

variety of approaches will continue to exist. In these circumstances the challenge is to achieve continuity in learning, meaning that pupils should not repeat prior learning or have to attempt over-demanding work, both of which could have negative effects on pupil motivation and attitudes. Year 7 interviewees in a study conducted by researchers at Warwick (Powell *et al*, 2001) expressed frustration about having to repeat work covered previously; this could have a damaging effect on pupil motivation, even after a relatively short time at secondary school.

Ideally, joint cross-phase planning of MFL learning, for example local projects designed around clusters of secondary and primary feeder schools, can lead to a programme in secondary, building on KS2 work without unnecessary duplication. As Skarbek (1998:1) emphasises:

‘Pupils must feel that the work they are doing is appropriate to their needs and they should not be presented with the same language and activities year after year, only to be met with the same scenario when they enter secondary school’.

However, as this may not always be possible, effective transition arrangements are clearly essential if the undoubted benefits of primary MFL are to be fully realised in secondary schools. The survey which formed part of the Warwick study (Powell *et al*, 2001) revealed that only 53 of the 108 LEAs in the sample made LEA-wide arrangements to facilitate transition; only 56% of secondary teachers reported links with feeder primary schools where MFL took place; and crucially only 20% of secondary teachers in the sample made use of transfer data. In a more recent survey into the provision of foreign language learning for pupils at Key Stage 2 Driscoll *et al* (2004a) found that approximately 50% of all primary schools reported having no transition arrangements with SLCs or other secondary schools. Equally, in their small scale research study, Bolster *et al* (2004) found that there was almost a total lack of liaison between primary and secondary phases generally and any information which was passed on excluded any reference to MFL.

Driscoll (2000) reported the need for the creation of effective networking strategies to support greater collaboration within cross-phase liaison to ensure sustainability and coherence. In an evaluation of 12 national pilot projects in Scotland Low *et al* (1995) found that generalist primary teachers appreciated regular contact and reciprocal visits with secondary colleagues. This, however, requires a significant amount of time for cross-phase planning, in service training and reciprocal visits. In their systematic review of research evidence of the characteristics of effective foreign

language teaching to pupils between the ages of 7 and 11, Driscoll *et al* (2004b:6) recommended 'support mechanisms which facilitate links between primary and secondary schools to ensure progression and continuity of learning from KS2 to KS3.' However, amongst the conclusions drawn by Galton *et al* (2003) in their research into pupils' general experiences of transition, they found that although the increase in exchange visits between primary and secondary teachers had developed improved understanding, transfer schools had difficulty balancing new and challenging work for Year 7, providing smooth progression from Year 6, and meeting KS3 targets.

Galton *et al* (1999) found that a substantial minority of youngsters were at risk of becoming disaffected at the transition period and that the transfer of information relating to both academic and pastoral needs for those at risk was an important issue. For MFL, a common approach to additional prior language learning information to accompany the national common transfer file would assist secondary schools in ensuring secondary teachers are aware of the skills each new cohort brings. The European Language Portfolio, (http://www.nacell.org.uk/resources/pub_cilt/portfolio.htm) developed as a Council of Europe initiative, is an open-ended record of a pupil's achievements and progress in languages including details of languages known, learned, where used and favourite activities, as well as a self-assessment record of what a pupil can do in listening, speaking, reading and writing with space for examples of work. Whilst this can act as a motivational tool for pupils, it is difficult to imagine how secondary teachers would have time to access and make full use of all this information.

A more stream-lined record, compiled by the primary teacher would certainly assist in planning and differentiating in the secondary classroom. Liaison between secondary schools and feeder primary schools can greatly enhance information transfer. The National Languages Strategy (DfES 2002) stated that by age 11 pupils should have the opportunity to reach a recognised level of competence in MFL to be acknowledged through a national scheme, the Languages Ladder, (http://www.dfes.gov.uk/languages/DSP_languagesladder.cfm). This starts with a basic grade of competence for new learners. Secondary teachers would need to take account of this external assessment if applied at the end of KS2.

Research on transition in other countries

The European Commission research on modern languages in pre-primary and primary education across the member states of the European Union conducted by an international team (Blondin *et al*, 1998) provides a useful starting point for this review. This overview suggested there was substantial evidence of positive attitudes at primary level, but there was limited evidence of successful transfer to secondary when comparing primary languages with lack of primary experience.

Research rooted in a society where English is the mother tongue has even more relevance to language planning in England than that taking place in contexts where English is the target language of instruction. Hill *et al*. (1998) investigated the effects on language learning of transition from primary to secondary in schools in Victoria, Australia, and produced worrying evidence of stasis rather than progress in learning. While the State could be commended for its policies of entitlement and diversification (over 40 languages are taught across Victoria State schools, including several Asian and indigenous languages), the benefits of an early start were brought into question. Revisiting the issues in a more recent conference paper, Hill (2002) went so far as to state that for secondary students having studied Indonesian as a foreign language at primary level, 'Indonesian study appears to have actually been a disadvantage.' It is worth reminding policy-makers, perhaps, in the light of concerns about levels of achievement and organisational difficulties, that there is currently taking place a serious re-evaluation of what the Australians call LOTE (Languages other than English) in their education system.

In Scotland, where education policy is managed autonomously, the extension to the Modern Languages in the Primary School (MLPS) pilot project to all schools in Scotland was announced in 1993. In this initiative, firmly based in the 5-14 curricular context and in some cases taught by secondary teachers, researchers found that teachers did not necessarily build on what pupils had done during their primary education, that there was a lack of metalinguistic emphasis and, although secondary pupils were able to use more language, it tended to be 'more of the same' rather than a richer mixture (Low *et al*, 1993, 1995; Low and Johnstone, 1997). In terms of methodology, pupils often experienced a change from a relatively open framework, allowing for creativity, to teachers constrained by a coursebook-dictated structure repeating similar linguistic demands. Later evidence from the Scottish MLPS initiative revealed that over 80% of pupils achieved the most basic level of competence and around a third more than this, with secondary students widening their linguistic repertoire and beginning to become more creative in their use of

language (Scottish Executive, 2003). However, there is no evidence as yet that Scotland is seeing an increased level of competence post 16 as a result of languages in the primary school (Tierney and Gallastegi, 2005). Tierney and Gallastegi also report that transition remains patchy. Communication between schools in the two sectors can vary from considerable liaison and transfer of information to little or no contact with regard to modern languages and pupils are not guaranteed continuity of the language studied at primary level.

Findings from eight Pathfinder case studies

Methodology

The findings reported here form part of a larger study (Muijs *et al*, 2005) into the 19 local authority Pathfinders in England piloting the introduction of foreign language learning at KS2 during the period 2003-5. A series of eight case studies were identified in order to explore the operation of Pathfinders on the ground and a total of 41 schools were included in the sample, including one special school, one specialist language college (SLC) and one secondary school, not a SLC, but working on an outreach programme for MFL with seven primary schools. The selection of case studies was influenced by the number of different basic models identified in the initial phase of data collection, from the telephone interviews with LA officers and the Pathfinders' initial plans and by socio-demographic and geographic diversity. Schools were selected to reflect different socio-economic groupings, schools of different type and size, schools in different locations i.e. inner-city, rural, metropolitan, borough and schools which were performing or improving at different rates.

The case studies were investigated utilising three main methods: interviews with head teachers, teachers and pupils, lesson observations and collection of documentary evidence. Interview transcripts were analysed using theme analysis. The interviews enabled the development of categories and typologies and comparative analyses so that, 'instances are compared across a range of situations, over time, among a number of people and through a variety of methods' (Woods, 1996, p.81). The information derived from these was triangulated with other data sources, so allowing robust pictures of how the different Pathfinder models are working in practice in schools.

Choice/continuity

As many Pathfinder schools had started by introducing languages into Years 3 and 4 and had not, as yet, reached the transition point between primary and secondary,

transition issues were in these cases not yet apparent. Where transfer did occur, however, primary-secondary patterns of transfer were complex in the majority of Pathfinder local authorities, with children moving on to secondary schools in sometimes two or occasionally three different local authorities. This produced the inevitable result that pupils could not necessarily continue immediately in Year 7 with the language studied in Year 6. Most secondary schools received pupils from a wide range of primary schools and were unable to adjust the languages on offer to provide continuity in a specific language. Indeed, even the special strategies adopted by the SLC were not always capable of dealing with all the issues arising out of the mixed experience of languages pupils brought with them.

Transfer was less problematic where the SLC was the main link secondary school and most children transferred there. However, in some cases, even where the SLC led the teaching in a cluster of schools, pupils did not necessarily transfer to the SLC. One head teacher referred to the difficulty of transition as pupils transferred to 20 schools:

'Only a very small number (6/7) go to the SLC, 55 others have 2 years' French and possibly will not do French when they transfer because the high school may do Spanish or German in the first year or go back to basics.'
(head teacher)

Lack of continuity in a specific language was a concern voiced by many, especially where the secondary school changed its Year 7 language from year to year:

'I did speak to the secondary teacher, and she was explaining that sometimes Year 7 begin with German and then it's French, and then it's German, and so on. So, it's difficult, and it was quite an issue on one of the Pathfinder courses—if you're going to encourage KS2 French or whatever, it's so difficult, if then a year is lost, when they go to secondary, because it's a different language that's being taught. I understand the children can pick it up a year after, but the input, the amount of inputthat a KS2 school has got to give, it seems a shame not to pick it up immediately.' (primary teacher)

Some parents queried why their children were studying German instead of another language since there was less German taught at secondary school in that area. The SLC becoming a 'partner' secondary school had helped to alleviate fears in this case. Those doing German who went on to the SLC were well catered for. *'It is useful for them to be ahead.'* There was an awareness that at secondary school some pupils

would not continue with French although one co-ordinator wondered whether having learned one language, the children might find it easier to learn another.

However, some teachers were unconcerned about the change of language as they felt it gave pupils 'a much broader perspective' and helped them to make links between languages. Indeed the prospect of learning a new language was sometimes viewed as particularly beneficial:

'When they [the pupils] know they're going to transfer through to whatever school and some of them will be doing Spanish, I've never heard any of the children complain about it and [say,] 'oh it's been a waste of time doing this'. It's an excitement that they are going to learn another language.' (primary teacher)

In the Pathfinder using a multilingual investigative approach, teachers felt a change of language at secondary would not be detrimental, as pupils were developing generic language skills:

'I think what we're doing is laying the foundations for a more problem-solving approach; we're teaching them skills of remembering and learning language, that it should positively effect whatever language they go on to look at.' (primary teacher)

Information transfer/communication

The study revealed diverse practice amongst the Pathfinders regarding information transfer and generalisation is consequently difficult. In some Pathfinder schools effective transition and transfer arrangements were in place or were developing.

These included general transition activities, for example:

- meetings with secondary staff
- good liaison with the secondary school with the Year 6 teacher attending a meeting at the secondary school and the secondary school sending staff to the primary school in the summer term
- series of visits – sometimes reciprocal
- involvement in secondary activities, e.g. French day
- homework club in Year 5 and ICT club in Year 6 so children meet the secondary school teachers and familiarity develops
- standard pro-forma of formal assessment records
- (electronic) core transfer document, including SATs results
- areas of collaboration, e.g. ICT

- pupil induction days at the secondary school
- transfer of more sensitive information verbally
- parents' information evening.

There was evidence of local authority meetings between primary and secondary staff to outline the Pathfinder languages project and some schools/Pathfinders were working towards a transfer document including information relating specifically to languages. In some Pathfinder schools, this was already well-developed and examples included:

- pupil portfolios/profile cards/certificates to take to secondary school to show achievements
- information relating to French attainment with levels
- the European Languages Portfolio
- own 'Languages Portfolio' with records of language skills, including languages spoken at home, overseen by the teacher but completed by the children
- a tiered language award with criteria
- meetings with the secondary school languages staff
- reciprocal observation planned for some staff, observing secondary colleagues in a local secondary school to which many pupils transfer, and a secondary teacher coming to watch Year 6 French teaching.

Transition to key stage 3 had been of particular interest to one local authority and transfer to the secondary sector had therefore been a key area for exploration. As a Pathfinder their intention was to build upon earlier experience of transition initiatives and to extend opportunities for primary and secondary teachers to observe each other's teaching in literacy and numeracy as well as in early language learning. Another example of a transition project in practice involved funding for teacher release time, so that the primary Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) and secondary colleagues could work together including observing the primary AST at work. According to the head teacher,

'They have been overwhelmed at the quality of the work going on. It is about whether the secondary schools are able, willing, to take on board where we're at. Everyone comes away thinking, "This is amazing, this is fantastic," but then the onus must be on them [the secondary schools] to take it forward.'
(headteacher)

Effective transition mechanisms generally (and inevitably) relied heavily on the co-operation of both sectors. Sometimes transfer was facilitated by personal contacts such as the fact that in one case the primary AST had worked closely with the secondary AST, who happened to be in the school to which many of the KS2 school children transferred. However, this sort of link, which relies on individuals, is extremely vulnerable. This was demonstrated by the fact that this person was leaving the local authority. The primary AST commented with something of an understatement: *'We are going to have to take a step back now, which is unfortunate'* (primary AST). Transfer mechanisms need to be much more robust. It cannot be assumed that outreach teachers in Year 6 would "automatically" pass information on to secondary colleagues.

In some primary schools where languages were new to the curriculum, there were no mechanisms yet in place for providing information about language learning. Even in a Pathfinder where languages were more established, the only information passed on previously to secondary schools had been a list of topics covered, but no information on individual children's achievements. Where transfer documents were available in some Pathfinders, the extent of use varied between the case study schools. More significantly, in a large number of schools, although there may have been transition arrangements in place, or a core transfer document was in use, no specific information was sent about what children had done in languages. In some schools there were meetings with secondary staff for literacy and numeracy but not for languages:

'I keep nagging about it. I've raised it regularly at Headteacher group meetings. I've raised it with people who have come down about transfer. We had a very able group last year. Were they going to secondary school and starting all over again? The situation is still unresolved. No information is passed on: it should be; it's not happening. Secondary schools now want less information. It will only be really effective if all schools teach the same language and get to the same level' (headteacher)

Teachers reported on the need for consistency in terms of information transferred to secondary schools:

'...I know the Year 7 teachers were really keen, obviously, for us to take on board the very first part of the curriculum, but as ... KS2 we need to be, each primary, teaching in a similar way—[if] the record keeping, in an ideal world, was the same for everybody, then the information received to all the

secondary feeder schools would be similar, and maybe they'd feel confident that a good job was being done. But if it's done in a patchwork fashion, with no paperwork given to us to send back, it's going to lose its legs, isn't it?
(primary teacher)

In one Pathfinder, secondary schools would know informally pupils had been part of the pilot but they had never spoken to the languages department of any high schools.

'Formal assessment is passed on to the SLC. It's something I will have to consider doing for other secondary schools. It will switch pupils off if they have to start at the same level' (headteacher)

Information exchange was considered to be an important factor by primary colleagues who were keen for secondary schools to act on information received to differentiate learning rather than going back to basics.

'We need to find a way to document what the child has done in the primary sector and to give it real credibility and then get the secondary schools looking at that information and taking those children where they are at rather than at where they think they are.' (primary teacher)

Some teachers were unaware of transfer arrangements and in many schools there had been no meetings between primary and secondary staff. Even headteachers did not meet, although there were one or two personal contacts. A suggestion for the future in one school was to invite the head of languages to see the children in action, as they were not sure enough was done to accommodate children with reading, speaking, listening and writing skills in French. The teacher hoped the secondary school would set pupils in future. One teacher recognised the value of learning about what goes on in secondary:

'..the first thing that springs to mind is that I need to make a visit to the high school and really get to grips with what they are doing there so that I can tailor what we're doing here to meet their needs more. Well it makes sense [to adjust to their scheme], doesn't it really? (primary teacher)

Reciprocal observation is certainly a valuable way of learning to understand each other's context and needs and to promote staff development. Where liaison between sectors had taken place, it had been beneficial in encouraging teachers to evaluate their own practice:

'It has given an insight, it was a revelation, you never think about these kids that come up from primary to secondary school. They belong to the secondary school, ... and seeing them in this primary element has been quite an eye opener. (outreach teacher)

In one school, discussion at head teacher level was taking place about the range of transition projects which were over burdening the Year 6 curriculum and which required rationalisation. This school had separate, excellent English, Science and Design Technology transition programmes. Each of the transition projects typically consisted of three lessons in the primary school and one lesson in the secondary school, so a languages transition project would have to sit within all of these.

In two Pathfinders there were plans for liaison with other primary schools locally. In one Pathfinder within the cluster of primary schools they were looking towards primaries getting together and having a French afternoon and two schools were going to France together the following year. In another, they felt the next step would be to liaise with other primary schools, but there had been a certain amount of ill feeling because of imminent closures.

Progression to KS3

In some cases secondary schools were responding to work done in primaries by reorganising pupils into sets. For example, in a cluster where the secondary teacher visited to teach, setting had been achieved because she had taught all the Year 6 classes from five schools. As a result she reported a significant difference in what the Year 7s had achieved:

*'Year 7 are used to speaking to each other in French: there's no "Why do I have to do French?" They love it. Last year I knew exactly where the children were, we had a list of vocabulary and topics that the children had done and they had tests in June and NC levels before they came up'.
(secondary teacher).*

In the second year of the Pathfinder she was teaching Years 4, 5 and 6, so setting them would be more difficult as she did not have personal knowledge of the pupils, although tests were still planned. In another Pathfinder the secondary school in which the secondary AST worked now set Year 7 much earlier, as they had found some children were disaffected. However, they had not grouped children into 'primary French and not primary French' since, although some children had not

learned a European language, they were skilled at community languages and were in fact able linguists. In a further Pathfinder, the second year of the funding was to be used specially for transition to explore the process of setting in Year 7. In future pupils with previous language experience were to be identified and their performance in the secondary school's listening, speaking, reading and writing assessments monitored. Pupils would be *'graded according to merit'*. As a consequence, it might be necessary to run a special grouping. In one Pathfinder a secondary school was taking the top set, regardless of whether they had been doing primary languages, and accelerating children to GCSE in Year 9.

If the potential for grouping is unavailable, secondary departments will need to develop effective differentiation strategies to cater for the range of experiences. In some cases primary teachers were confident this was taking place. However, secondary teachers do not universally welcome the growth of primary languages:

'The kids who have had German in their primary schools are streets ahead of the others. This can be a problem.' (secondary teacher)

Methodology clearly differed amongst schools. For example, in one Pathfinder where schools concentrated on the oral approach to language learning, teachers were less anxious about repetition:

'If they go to secondary school and are doing French there, they will have done no written work, so the secondary school will have to introduce the written work. It's [then] not so much a question of their repeating everything, they will have orally similar sorts of things that they're doing, but they won't have done the written work. It actually gives the children, we find, a bit of a confidence boost, because "Ah, this is something we can already do".'
(primary teacher)

One primary languages co-ordinator wondered whether some secondary schools were really aware of how much some children could do in French by the time they entered year 7. The situation was especially difficult where not all primary schools were providing languages and secondary teachers were going back to basics.

'I was asking [the secondary teacher who visits primaries to teach] what happens with the children, because in the school where she teaches they'd had 3 years of French before they got to secondary school, and she said they did originally hope to fast track them, but because the children come from such disparate areas and there's only a few that do it and then the rest have

none, there weren't [...] enough for them to do this and have a special class for them. So in a way it feels like a bit of a waste that they have to start back at square one, because [...] they must feel [...], "well we've done this, we did this ages ago. Why are we having to do it again?" (primary teacher)

One SLC was dealing with the challenges through enrichment lessons, giving pupils in year 7 the same language teachers as involved in outreach work. They also tried to group children according to language learnt, but this was not always possible. The attitude of some secondary schools was revealed by the fact that some children were re-doing at secondary school the same tier of a language award that they had already accomplished at primary school,.

One language teacher expressed concern about the consistency of teaching competence and content which would impact on transfer:

'I worry that other schools are just getting someone's Mum in, and that all sorts of things are being taught all over the place, and from the secondary school's point of view, what are they coming to me with, completely random things, wrong things? (outreach teacher)

In some cases secondary schools were responding to work done in primaries by reconsidering the KS3 curriculum, or at least being aware of the need to reconsider:

'We were suspicious to begin with. It was new, and now thankfully we've stopped talking about that ... We're seeing things happening in the primary that are going to affect our teaching, our future in the secondary. Yes, it's an exciting period, but it's going to be an upheaval, and we are going to have to re-write our [secondary] schemes again.' (outreach teacher)

One example of avoiding repetition of work done in the primary was a new theme of holidays in the first ten weeks of Year 7 including the past tense to enable pupils to talk about both present and past. In the outreach teacher's view, this would not duplicate and overlap primary work. Inevitably there would eventually be repetition of what had been done in primary and then it would be interesting to measure the pupils' attitudes, perhaps by means of a questionnaire with the Year 7 pupils, to elicit how they were finding languages at the beginning of secondary school.

Another example, where the SLC led the teaching of languages, starting early moved the whole programme down a stage. Their aim was for pupils to complete KS3 work

at the end of year 8, start GCSE in Year 9 and complete end of Year 10. They felt this would create other opportunities and possibly better GCSE results. At the end of KS2 pupils would receive certificates stating units achieved and would bring portfolios to secondary school. Secondary staff would know what level they had been working at to allow for acceleration groups as well as support groups.

Clearly language learning in the primary phase will have an impact on the secondary curriculum and secondary schools will need to plan carefully to adjust practice in KS3 especially in Year 7. It is particularly important that the two curricula for the top of KS2 and early KS3 are aligned, both in terms of content and teaching style. This is especially so in Year 6 and Year 7 where a coherent approach and mutual understanding are crucial to progression.

Implications for the future

These findings paint a distinctly diverse picture with regard to primary MFL provision, choice and continuity at secondary level, information transfer and transition arrangements. Whilst these findings relate to the specific context of England, each country needs to look at its own individual situation regarding transition, but these key issues will still apply. In England many primary schools have embraced MFL enthusiastically and recognise its positive contribution to pupils' general development and intercultural understanding. However, concerns remain about staffing, training and funding and even where positive attitudes exist, there seems to be some reluctance to assess pupils. The government is keen that primary languages should be fun but should also involve sustained language learning. There is an implicit expectation that primary languages will improve both take-up and results at KS4. However, the diversity of primary languages under the name of entitlement has real implications for the secondary phase and secondary MFL teachers face a challenging time in reshaping the KS3 curriculum to gain better outcomes. Tucker and Donato (2003) describe a similar challenge for teachers in the USA to develop the cognitive and academic language proficiency of their students following a successful foreign language programme in elementary school.

Time allowed for reciprocal visits and mutual observation of classes would be valuable in establishing both complementary methodology and continuity, building on content and skills, so that prior learning is understood and valued. As primary foreign language learning progresses, it will be crucial to reconsider the MFL KS3 curriculum

initially to ensure differentiation, possibly through setting and fast-tracking for early GCSE entry and later to develop curriculum content.

Studies into learners' attitudes and motivation for MFL (Clark and Trafford, 1996; Lee *et al*, 1998; Chambers, 1999; McPake *et al*, 1999; Stables and Wikeley, 1999) suggest that any MFL curriculum in the special English context meets real challenges in persuading learners of the value of sustained MFL learning. Whilst motivation in the primary phase currently appears high (see Muijs *et al*, 2005), secondary teachers will clearly need to review their language learning menu to retain pupils' motivation throughout KS3 and beyond. Mitchell (2003) argues convincingly for a rethink of the concept of progression in the National Curriculum for MFL, recommending a redesigned curriculum with strands for 'grammar', 'interaction', 'learning how to learn' to replace the current four skills model and including developing relationships with other subjects to ensure that most learners are making meaningful progress with mastery and use of the target language system itself.

Much work needs to be done to tackle the issue of transition and maintain continuity and progression. Bevis and Gregory (2005) suggest practical ways in which primary and secondary teachers can develop effective liaison and joint planning, exploring practical activities, joint events and methodology. Appropriate transfer of information is a crucial part of this process, but more importantly secondary teachers will need training in how to cater for Year 7 mixed-level groups with a wide diversity of prior knowledge and skills to maintain motivation and achieve progression and continuity through effective differentiation. Boodhoo (2005) highlights the role of initial teacher education in developing training components which focus on differences and similarities in teaching and learning styles in KS2 and KS3, training which incorporates an integrated approach to the development of knowledge about literacy, language, MFL and cultural and intercultural understanding (across KS2 and KS3) and training which includes development of knowledge regarding suitable assessment methods for primary languages which can contribute to more meaningful transfer data between KS2 and KS3 schools.

Many arguments have been rehearsed about the government's wisdom in expanding primary entitlement whilst at the same time reducing provision at KS4 (DfES, 2002a). The subsequent decline in uptake of MFL led to the DfES commissioning Lord Dearing to investigate MFL teaching in September 2006. His final report (Dearing, 2007) proposes an ambitious action programme designed to engage more pupils in

studying languages and several themes stand out amongst the wide-ranging recommendations. One major recommendation relating to this paper was to widen the range of languages on offer in primary schools and to make MFL part of the statutory curriculum at Key Stage 2. It is clear that the government is currently placing high hopes on languages in the primary sector as a means to enthuse young people about languages and increase take up and results at KS4 and beyond. Managing the transition process is one of the key factors in determining the overall success of starting languages in primary school. A longitudinal study of the effect of primary language teaching on secondary outcomes is essential to monitor the progress of this change in policy. If we fail to get this right in the next decade, whole generations of youngsters will be lost to languages.

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