

Languages Learning at Key Stage 2: a longitudinal study (2006-2009) Pedagogy, Achievement and Attitudes

Patricia Driscoll¹, Sue Sing², Ros Mitchell³, Carrie Cable⁴

¹Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, Kent, United Kingdom, ²University of Exeter, Exeter, Devon, United Kingdom, ³Southampton University, Southampton, United Kingdom, ⁴Open University, Milton Keynes, United States

Background

The commitment of the government to introduce languages as a statutory subject in 2011 represents a significant challenge for head teachers, teachers and local authority advisers in England. The launch of the National Languages Strategy in 2002 (DfES) outlined the vision for primary languages education while the Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages (DfES, 2005) set out the teaching aims and objectives for teachers, which included a recommendation for an hour per week within the school day. The aims of languages learning at Key Stage 2 are intended to be at least dual-purposed: to provide children with the opportunity to learn a different language and about a different culture; to enhance their understanding and appreciation of their own language and culture (DfES, 2005). Over the last 20 years, primary schools have been building their capacity to provide languages. But, with a dearth of teachers with linguistic competence or with the confidence to teach a subject where they have little knowledge or experience of what constitutes an appropriate pedagogy, progress has understandably been uneven.

Research Questions

This longitudinal study was commissioned by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), and conducted between Autumn 2006 and Autumn 2009 by the Open University, Southampton University and Canterbury Christ Church University. It was designed to investigate the different ways in which a sample of primary schools in England build capacity to provide languages learning across Key Stage 2 and the impact of this experience on pupils' achievement and attitudes. The project's key objectives were as follows:

- 1. to review existing literature on languages learning and teaching on Key Stage 2 pupils;
- 2. to investigate staff attitudes towards teaching languages in primary schools;
- 3. to examine teaching approaches used in languages teaching including teachers' perceptions of effective teaching strategies;
- 4. to determine schools' approaches for assessing, recording and reporting attainment and progression in languages learning;
- 5. to assess the impact of languages learning on pupil attitudes to learning languages and on the development of intercultural understanding;
- 6. to evaluate the impact of languages learning over three years;
- 7. to evaluate any impact of languages learning on other areas of the curriculum.

Methods

Approaches to teaching languages vary across England (Muijs et al, 2005) as they do across Europe (Edelenbos et al., 2006). Teaching staff with differing levels of linguistic competence and knowledge of the target country and of the learners' abilities and interests also varies (Driscoll 2004; Muijs et al, 2005, Driscoll et al., 2005). In a recent study, Wade and Marshall (2009) found a decline in the number of peripatetic and specialist secondary teachers and an increase in the number of trained class teachers teaching languages. In the light of these changes, together with the introduction of new

resources, language pedagogy in schools is changing which impacts on children's learning experiences.

This study involved a mixed-methods research design, which drew on qualitative and quantitative research methods. The team worked with 40 primary schools in England over the three years of the study, the majority of which had been providing languages learning for Key Stage 2 pupils for some length of time. The sample included a range of school types, from small rural schools to large, urban and suburban schools and those in more and less economically affluent areas. They had different staffing models and time allocations for languages and teachers had different lengths of experience of languages teaching as well as varying levels of linguistic expertise.

A one- or two-day research visit was made to each school each year, during which time key members of school personnel were interviewed to explore the nature and development of their beliefs and attitudes about languages learning provision. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with head teachers, languages coordinators, those teachers who had been observed teaching languages during the field visit, teaching assistants and foreign language assistants. In order to seek children's perspectives on their languages learning experience, focus group discussions were held with small groups of children from each of the four Key Stage 2 year groups. In addition, in the first two years of the study, each focus group participant was asked to complete an individual questionnaire.

One of the key aims of this research was to track changes and development in schools' languages provision over the three years of the project and therefore each year all instruments for the case study work were reviewed and amended to pursue emergent issues.

Frame

All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed thematically with the support of a software package (NVivo). The lesson observation data was also analysed in this way, with changes in content and teaching approach documented; this data was further supported by quantitative analysis of fieldworkers' systematic observations. In 2006/07, key themes were analysed by individual respondent type (i.e. head teacher; class teacher etc.); in 2007/08 and 2008/09, identified and emerging themes were explored by looking across the data from different respondent types. The children's questionnaire data, collected in the first and second year of the project, was entered into SPSS, and analysed with support from this software package.

Research findings

This paper reports on the different ways the case study schools have been providing languages across Key Stage 2 and how they have been combining different types of teacher 'expertise' to develop their capacity to provide languages education to their pupils. In addition, we document the different approaches and methods adopted by teachers to deliver languages and their perceptions of the most effective strategies for teaching languages. We will also present evidence of the impact of languages learning on children's linguistic progression, their skill development and their attitudes and motivation towards languages learning in the primary years and for the future. The scope of intercultural awareness included in languages teaching will be explored together with children's knowledge and understanding of other cultures. From this research, we will draw conclusions about the nature and development of the inclusion of languages education across Key Stage 2 and discuss some of the implications arising for secondary schooling and beyond.

References

DfES (2005) *The Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages*. London: Department for Education and Skills.

Driscoll, P., Jones, J., Martin, C., Graham-Matheson, L., Dismore, H. and Sykes, R. (2004b). *A Systematic Review of the Characteristics of Effective Foreign Language Teaching to Pupils between the Ages 7 and 11*. London: EPPI-Centre, Institute of Education, University of London.

Edelenbos.P., Johnstone, R. and Kubanek-German, A. (2006). Languages for the Children of Europe: Published research, good practice and main principles. Brussels: European Commission. Also available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/doc/young_en.pdf.

Muijs, D., Barnes, A., Hunt, M., Powell, B., Arweck, E., Lindsay, G. and Martin, C. (2005). Evaluation of the Key Stage 2 Language Learning Pathfinders. London: DfES.

Wade, P. and Marshall, H., with O'Donnell, S. (2009) Primary Modern Foreign Languages Longitudinal Survey of Implementation of National Entitlement to Language Learning at Key Stage 2. Research report No. RR127. London: DCSF.