An Early Start:
Young Learners and Modern Languages
in Europe and Beyond

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Introduction

Marianne Nikolov and Helena Curtain

Young learners are in. Twenty years ago when we both started out promoting an early start our colleagues would ask, “Can’t you find some decent area of expertise?” “This is a dead topic. Those programmes don’t work.” And now, here we are editing a wonderful collection of papers to provide an overview of what is going on all over the world. It seems young learners are alive and kicking.

This recent interest is indicated not only by the growing number of children studying modern languages, but also by a range of international publications on methodology (e.g. Argondizzo, 1992; Brumfit, Moon and Tongue, 1991; Curtain and Pesola, 1994; Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 1991; Scott and Ytreberg, 1990) and research (e.g. Arnsdorf, Boyle, Chaix and Charmian, 1992; Bialystok, 1991; Blondin, Candelier, Edelenbos, Johnstone, Kubanek-German and Taeschner, 1998; Dickson and Cumming, 1998; Edelenbos and Johnstone, 1996; Fink, 1998; Moys, 1998; Rixon, 1999). Besides these books, as will be seen, a number of studies investigate early language programmes in various countries. One of the aims of this volume is to give insights into research issues, and a cross section of the major achievements and advantages, as well as the problem areas in the countries under discussion.

We started thinking about this edited volume in February 1997 in a workshop on Theme-based Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners: Integrating Language, Culture and Content through Learner Involvement in the Teaching and Learning Process (for details see Nikolov 1997). This was a workshop (no. 2/97) organised by the European Centre for Modern Language in Graz, Austria with participants from 20 countries: Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland and USA. It is our pleasure to include nine articles coming from the countries represented at that workshop. Contributors of this volume include not only participants of the Graz event. Some of them (David Carless, Patricia Driscoll, Francesca Gattullo, Gabriele Pallotti, Alex Hausen, Angelika Kubanek-German, Penny McKay and Kerstin Sundin) were presenters at the Teaching of Foreign Languages in European Primary Schools Warwick Euroconference in Warwick, England in April 1997, whereas others (Nadia Berova, Lydia Dachkova both from Bulgaria, and Miles Turnbull from Canada) submitted their articles on an individual basis.

As for the organising principles of editing this volume, we have been hesitant how to arrange the articles so that we do justice to all authors and countries. We explored the texts for thematic threads to group them along, but we could not identify any relevant content-related criterion to weave them around. Therefore, we had a choice: either sequence articles in alphabetical order starting with Australia, then Austria, finishing with USA, or put them one after the other according to a geographical principle. As the idea of the book was born in Graz, we could arrange the articles according to how far they are from Graz, Austria. We chose the latter option. Thus, Austria comes first and Australia is the concluding chapter.

The chapters reflect a wide range of contexts. They include countries with languages rarely spoken by other people as a foreign language, for example Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Romania, and Sweden. In these countries knowing a modern language other than the mother tongue has always been a must, but these contexts differ greatly in how much emphasis has been put on international communication. In some of them foreign language teaching has been on the educational agenda for a long time and the success of these programmes is widely experienced by visitors to the country: for example, Sweden. The other extreme is represented by new Central European democracies, where the need for western languages has emerged recently. In these countries the freedom of choice is relatively new, and the level of enthusiasm and expectations are high. Some of these countries have gone through negative experiences concerning the compulsory status of Russian, which tended to be started at a relatively early age, but with low or no success.

The status of modern language studies in countries whose official languages are often taught as foreign languages, for example Austria, Australia, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Switzerland, UK and USA varies greatly. Although in some of these countries (e. g. UK and USA) traditionally modern languages were perhaps considered less important, a recent interest in language studies has reached them as well. Other contexts have been historically bilingual and multilingual (e.g. Canada and Switzerland), but the status of modern languages and attitudes towards knowing foreign languages are constantly changing, reflecting social, political and educational processes.

In some of the countries the teaching of foreign languages to young learners has been in the educational tradition for a long time, like in Sweden, where the continuity of programmes has been ensured and young learners' motivation has been kept alive. On the other hand, in countries where an early start characterised the learning of Russian, and as it was the only compulsory foreign language throughout students' studies continuity was ensured, results were not at all reassuring: for example in Hungary and other Eastern bloc countries. Although these programmes continued through compulsory school years, and the methodology was also maintained, the vast majority of the population never acquired any useful command of the language for attitudinal reasons.

There are various issues emerging from these articles. The first one concerns the paradox involved in all early language teaching programmes: the intention is to ensure good language proficiency for adulthood, and starting in childhood is meant to help overcome attitudinal and learning difficulties older learners face. But pleasant early classroom experiences and initial success are later influenced by other important variables learners encounter, for example the lack of continuity, different methodology, and how useful they perceive the target language at a later stage of their studies. The first variable seems to be the most threatening for the educational contexts represented in this edited volume. As readers will see, unfortunately continuity of early programmes is often a problem both in methodology and in the lack of secondary teachers relying on what children already know. There is a danger looming head: this renaissance of starting early may fade away if expectations are not fulfilled. Therefore it is the responsibility of specialists to call attention to this serious challenge: an early start in itself will not guarantee successful language knowledge in the long run.

The other issue emerging from these discussions as well as other sources relates to the role of teachers. In all contexts reviewed teachers are the most important stakeholders. The debate is ongoing: should the classroom teacher integrate the foreign language period into his / her timetable or a specialist should come in and instruct children. The evergreen question relates to teachers' proficiency and the appropriacy of their methodology. The discussions are slightly misleading, as this is not an either or question. Both are equally important. Also, it is necessary to bear in mind that we advocate an early start because children will easily acquire the teacher's language without any critical consideration. The teacher's lack of proficiency may therefore negatively influence young learners' language development.

In all contexts there seems to be a consensus on the basic principles of methodology and what is considered to be good practice of teaching young learners modern languages. All authors emphasise – implicitly or explicitly – the importance of focusing on meaning, the integration of language instruction with the mainstream curriculum, a task-based and content-based approach, the need of fun and success in the classrooms, and the learning to learn element leading to the autonomy of learners in early language programmes. Teaching materials do not seem to cause major problems; they tend to be perceived by authors as part of methodology rather than an independent area. In some countries foreign – mostly British – publications are available on the market, whereas in many others local publishers produce relevant and useful materials. Nevertheless, caution is necessary. Very few empirical studies confirm these assumptions concerning relevant methodology: mostly claims on desirable classroom techniques are quoted, but only a few observation projects underpin them.

The need for realistic expectations and assessment of outcomes is elaborated on in a number of articles. These areas lead us back to continuity and to an acute need for research. Ongoing research into young learners' programmes is not typical in all of these countries. As will be seen, some countries are characterised by top-down research

projects, in which decision-makers of language policies have traditionally wanted to gain insights into early programmes (e.g. Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany and Switzerland). In other countries early foreign language teaching is a result of bottom-up pressure, as parents force schools to launch programmes with little control from educational authorities, and almost no evaluation or research are conducted into these initiatives. One of the lessons to be learnt from these articles is obvious: the more financial support central bodies devote to early language programmes, the more control they want to exercise to make sure they get value for their money. This is one of the reasons why more research is a must: support may decrease if expectations are not fulfilled. Outcomes of early language education programmes are hard to assess for various reasons. First, young children's target language development is relatively slow and is best observed in the process. Second, as early programmes using a task-based methodology focus on oral skills, assessment should also follow these lines. This process is time-consuming and expensive. Third, attitudinal development is hard to grasp, and again will blossom only in the long run. Four, realistic outcomes are difficult to define and they vary from context to context.

The length and detail in the articles in this volume vary to a great extent. This is due to a variety of factors: the tradition of early programmes, the number of languages involved, the availability, width and depth of statistical data and research on issues related to early language education, as well as the level of involvement of the authors. Some of the authors are classroom teachers, others are researchers, teacher trainers; most of them publish widely, some have been involved in language policy decisions, while for some contributors this is their first publication. It is hoped that the articles will provide readers with relevant insights into the spectrum of challenges early language programmes face all over the world.

The first article focuses on Austrian primary schools. Interest in primary-level language teaching has been strong, and after a five-year transition period from 2003, an important decision in language policy will ensure that all Austrian children will have their first contact with a foreign language from the age of 6. Although a wide range of languages is offered, English is by far the most popular. The Austrians advocate an integrated approach in which the class teacher implements the foreign language curriculum. They hope to overcome difficulties in continuity with the help of an open-ended language portfolio.

Hungary is discussed in the second article. Despite the failure of early Russian programmes, Hungarians' attitudes towards learning foreign languages are positive, and since 1989 early English and German programmes have mushroomed all over the country. Although the National Core Curriculum advocates a relatively late start (from age 11), most schools launch lower-primary language courses. The challenges include a shortage of qualified teachers and the lack of continuity.

The third context is Croatia, an excellent example of educational innovation. A state-sponsored experiment has resulted in a large-scale early language project in which very young children have been involved in intensive language studies in four target languages. This research-based innovative approach may serve as a model of careful planning and ongoing assessment not only in language attainment but also in psycholinguistic areas.

Italian children are in focus in the fourth chapter. The ministry sponsors compulsory foreign language instruction introduced at the age of 8. A recent inquiry is meant to explore children's development in the target language as well as in intercultural awareness, using questionnaires for teachers and pupils, and tests. Continuity, curricular integration and teachers' proficiency seem to be the most important challenges in Italian schools.

Germany is also characterised by a revival of interest in primary foreign language teaching. A variety of programme types can be found in the 16 federal states, and target languages beside English, French and Russian include the languages of the neighbouring countries and minority languages represented in the school population. Despite the initial unwillingness among teachers to assess pupils' development, some attempts have been made to integrate testing into the processes.

Chapter six explores early language programmes in Switzerland. Altogether 25 different school systems live side by side, and a heated debate is going on as to what the first foreign language should be in public schools: one of the national languages or English. As a new Swiss language policy develops, regional variety will be maintained, and schools will be encouraged to start in grade 2 of the elementary school at the latest.

The Czech Republic has also experienced an educational reform since the political changes in 1989. Educational opportunities have multiplied, but the most important problems are related to teachers' low level of communicative competence. According to statistical data, only a quarter of primary-school teachers is qualified. On the other hand, the Czech people have benefited from European projects, and innovative teacher education programmes will hopefully help them improve the situation.

The eighth chapter looks into another country where recent political changes have opened up new educational perspectives. In Romania, traditionally, French is the first foreign language, but there is a growing demand for English. Romanian children are motivated to study foreign languages and most of them have the support of their parents. Having to design their own syllabuses and materials means a challenge for teachers of young learners, as these are relatively new tasks.

Bulgaria, discussed in chapter nine, can boast of some good extracurricular traditions and pilot projects in teaching modern languages to children based on Suggestopedia. Two foreign languages are introduced in primary schools, and parents' attitudes are

positive. Unfortunately, there are not enough qualified teachers, continuity is not always ensured, and financial incentives are also lacking in the state sector.

The tenth chapter looks into issues related to early language education in Poland. The National Curriculum introduces a foreign language at the age of 11, but parental pressure has been strong to start earlier. Sometimes parents pay private teachers on the school premises, but these programmes lack methodological supervision. Although new scenarios are being considered for the future, they will be hard to implement because of the shortage of staff and financial resources.

Chapter eleven takes multilingual Belgium into consideration. The critical overview gives insights into the complexity of issues related to legislation, choice of languages and methodology. Since legislation prohibits the use of another language as a medium of instruction, bilingual education is illegal in Belgium. Therefore, languages are taught as foreign even in bilingual areas, and the grammar-translation method seems to dominate classrooms. Although language proficiency should not mean a problem, legislation excludes teachers from teaching their mother tongue as a foreign language.

The next chapter summarises early language teaching in Estonia. Two foreign languages are compulsory in primary schools and the overwhelming majority of students choose English. In Russian-medium schools Estonian has to be taken as the official state language from grade 2, and the second modern language starting in grade 6 tends to be also English. The shortage of teachers is a common problem.

The Swedish tradition is described in chapter thirteen. The move of the educational pendulum can be easily traced in the high and low ebb of interest in early language programmes over the last decades. In Sweden class teachers teach English as a first foreign language in grades 1-6, but schools can decide when they start. Besides regular progress tests, a national test is compulsory for all 5th graders. Not only school curricula, but also the mass media support children's language acquisition: attractive undubbed English programmes available on television contribute to young learners' motivation and language development.

British primary-school programmes are discussed in the next chapter. The rapid increase of interest in the teaching of modern languages to young learners is due to parental pressure in the state and the private sector. Although in England, Wales and Northern Ireland every fifth primary school offers some form of foreign language provision (most frequently French), in Scotland all primary schools have been involved recently. Difficulties include issues related to continuity in the language and in the approach of instruction.

The Canadian overview focuses on Core French Programmes in elementary schools, in which children have a short daily contact with the target language, and it also gives a short summary of immersion programmes. In bilingual Canada a lot of money and

effort have been put into educational research, and besides linguistic gains, attitudinal and cultural benefits are also emphasised. The comparison of the variety of programmes is possible with the help of standardised proficiency tests in grade 8.

Chapter sixteen elaborates on early language learning in the USA. A significant increase in early programmes characterises this enormous country, where Spanish and French are the most common languages of instruction. The article gives a detailed description of the organisation and methodology of various FLES programmes, and identifies the most important issues and challenges: time and intensity, content-based teaching, and teacher education.

The last but one chapter takes Hong Kong into consideration. English in Hong Kong shares some characteristics of both a second and a foreign language, and there has been considerable effort invested into its study. The challenges teachers face include the lack of confidence in using English, traditional approaches over the communicative approach and large class sizes. Curricular and methodological innovation, in the form of a Topic Oriented Curriculum, are on the educational agenda.

In the last chapter the rapid expansion of Australian primary foreign language programmes is detailed. The list of languages taught is the longest among the countries mentioned in this book, and the challenges are also familiar. Among them the most important ones are: teachers' availability and proficiency, continuity of programmes, whereas others were rarely mentioned in other contexts, like low motivation and huge distances. Interactive television programmes are unique to the Australian continent, and telematics is another innovative tool meant to overcome difficulties caused by distance.

A final word is necessary concerning the language of the articles. Most of the authors are users of English as a foreign language. The editors suggested changing of wording or the addition of explanations only in cases where they felt an international audience may not understand easily. Otherwise, the terminology is untouched in each article, and no attempt has been made to use the very same terms. For example, you will find various labels for programmes, teachers and school types. It is hoped that terminology will be self-explanatory from the context.

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Foreign Language Education at Austrian Primary Schools: An Overview

Elisabeth Jantscher and Isabel Landsiedler

This paper gives a brief overview of the present situation of foreign language education at Austrian primary schools. The manifold individual initiatives (for example, in kindergartens) to introduce a foreign language at an even earlier stage (3 to 6 year-olds) are not taken into account since there is no co-ordination between these initiatives and there are no efforts being made to link them to foreign language education at primary level.

After presenting some sociolinguistic background information and a short outline of the Austrian school system in general, we will focus attention on different aspects of early language learning at primary school level. We will conclude our outline with some personal comments on current challenges and problem areas in the field of early foreign language learning in Austria.

Language Context in the Country

In Austria there are three recognised official languages: German, Croatian and Slovene. The Austrian variant of German is clearly dominant being the native language of 93% of the Austrian population. Croatian and Slovene are also accepted for professional, administrative and legal purposes in the areas where the respective ethnic groups live, which is mainly in the south (Carinthia) and in the east (Burgenland). Despite strong efforts to protect and support the use of these minority languages, German is slowly replacing them in most areas (for example, in southern Styria, Slovene has almost disappeared). As Croatian and Slovene are regional varieties in Austria and are mainly used for oral communication, there is a neglect of written communication, which gradually leads to a state of diglossia or even language loss. The languages of the other resident ethnic groups that are recognised by the state (Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, Roma and Sinti) have not yet been granted official status. Other languages like Bosnian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian or Turkish are used privately by immigrants and migrant workers. In addition, there are several other small language communities, especially in Vienna, that do not even appear in language statistics (Landsiedler, Kerschbaumer, Kettemann & Cossée, 1998).

Language	Speakers	Language	Speakers
German	7,300,000	Hungarian	33,000
Serbo-Croatian	158,000	Slovene	29,000
Turkish	120,000	Polish	25,000
Croatian	60,000	Czech	19,000
English	41,000	Rumanian	17,000

Table 1: Languages spoken in Austria (1991)

The sums have been rounded and include only native speakers. Only the ten most frequently spoken languages are listed. Source: National Census, May 1991 (see also Landsiedler, Kerschbaumer, Kettemann & Cossés 1998).

With regard to the use of languages in the Austrian media the dominant position of the German language is obvious: Only five percent of newspapers and magazines appear in languages other than German. Although programmes from neighbouring countries can be received in most parts of Austria and more than two thirds of the households have access to TV channels in foreign languages (mainly English, French and Italian) via cable or satellite, only a small percentage of the Austrian population actually makes use of these opportunities. Concerning economy, trade and tourism German is again the dominant language since Germany and Switzerland account for almost a third of the overall foreign trade; English, however, is gradually becoming more important and slowly catching up with German at all levels of economy (Landsiedler *et al.*, 1998).

The School System

Compulsory education in Austria consists of nine years of schooling. Usually, children start their school education at the age of six with the four-year primary school (Volksschule).

On completion of the fourth year, the children / parents have the following choices:

- the four-year general secondary school (Hauptschule), which offers setting differentiation or team teaching in German, Mathematics and Foreign Language (usually English);
- a higher general secondary school (allgemein bildende höhere Schule).

Choices must again be made before enrolling for the ninth year of school education. A large number of pupils choose the prevocational year (Polytechnischer Lehrgang) to finish their compulsory schooling. Concerning upper secondary education pupils can choose between several types of schools with varying focus (emphasis on classical or modern languages, natural sciences, domestic skills or on technical or vocational

skills). Most of those types of schools qualify for admission to tertiary education (universities, colleges of art and music, etc.) (Federal Ministry of Education and the Arts, 1994).

Language Education at Austrian Schools

Languages Learnt

German is taught as a compulsory subject at all schools and at all levels and in most cases also serves as the medium of instruction. In Austria children start their foreign language career already at primary level with one compulsory foreign language. At secondary level the average number of languages learnt varies between one and two at lower secondary level (age group 10-14) and at higher secondary level (age group 14-19) two modern foreign languages are learnt in general. However, the picture in detail is much more complex since the number of foreign languages learnt does not only depend on the type of school but is also closely related to individual priorities (for example, focus on modern languages) set up autonomously by schools. Furthermore, pupils are frequently offered the opportunity to learn additional languages on an optional basis.

With regard to the choice of languages, English is by far the most commonly taught foreign language at all levels, i.e. in primary schools approximately 97% of the children have their first contacts with English, in lower secondary education the percentage is about 95% and in upper secondary education 50% of the pupils enroled learn English. All other languages (French, Italian, Spanish, etc.) are much less popular, with French and Italian leading the list (the data refer to compulsory language learning in the school year 1991/92; cf. Kettemann, Landsiedler, Kerschbaumer & Cossée, 1996).

Recently, there have been strong efforts to encourage and support the teaching and learning of less commonly taught languages (for example, Croatian, Russian or Slovene) in almost all areas of Austria. Another important trend which should be noted in this respect is the growing interest in setting up bilingual classes, streams or schools (mostly German / English).

Concept of Language Learning: Curriculum

The philosophy underlying the Austrian educational system is to equip young people with the knowledge and skills required for their future lives and jobs and to encourage life-long learning.

The concept of language teaching in Austrian schools is based on the communicative approach in language learning and is put down in the Austrian curricula which are national and exist for all grades and school types. The Austrian curricula are ordinances promulgated by the Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs on the basis of the School Organisation Act and are structured according to a standard pattern consisting of different sections: general aims and objectives, cross-curricular principles (for example, health development or safety development), didactic principles, schedules and the curricula for each subject (German, Mathematics, Modern Foreign Language, etc.). The foreign language curricula provide detailed lists of suggested aims, topics and activities for each grade. However, it has to be stressed that the Austrian curricula serve merely as a framework, which leaves the final decision of topics, order of presentation and selection of teaching methods to the teacher (Federal Ministry of Education and the Arts 1994; Kettemann *et al.*, 1996). After briefly outlining the sociolinguistic background and the Austrian school system in general, we will focus on early language learning in the sections to follow.

The Primary Level

From the modest beginnings in the early 60s when first pilot runs were carried out at Viennese primary schools, early foreign language education has gradually gained interest and importance all over Austria. A decisive step was taken in 1983, when a first compulsory encounter with a foreign language from the third year of schooling (age: 8) onwards was introduced for all Austrian primary school children.

In the early 90s first attempts were then made to lower the age for starting with a foreign language and – at the same time – to introduce the new methodological approach of integrated foreign language learning. Building on the positive experience gained from the pilot years this new foreign language programme was incorporated into regular schooling practice in the autumn of 1998: after a transition period of five years all Austrian primary schools will offer a foreign language from the first year of schooling. In other words, from the school year 2003/2004 onwards all Austrian children will have their first contacts with a foreign language at the age of 6 (cf. Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, 1998; Beranek & Weidinger, 1999).

This long tradition and pioneering role of Austria in the field of early foreign language education, however, needs to be seen as part of Austria's whole language policy followed over the past three decades: for some thirty years, language issues in general have been of central importance within Austria's educational policy and the development of foreign language programmes at various school levels has always been encouraged and promoted by the educational authorities. Furthermore, it should be noted that Austria has closely co-operated with and been actively involved in the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project Group (cf. Heindler, 1998) for a very long time.

Languages: Offer and Choice

German – the mother tongue for more than 90% of the population – serves as the medium of instruction in most public and private primary schools. In addition to these German mother tongue schools, there are also schools which focus on bilingual education, i.e. that part of the curriculum is taught through a foreign or second language. Bilingual language learning can be found in border regions where – in addition to German – Slovene, Croatian or Hungarian, as the native languages of minority groups, are offered as the languages of instruction, and also in urban settings where there is a certain demand for bilingual teaching (mostly bilingual German-English programmes).

For some groups of the population (immigrants, migrant workers, refugees, etc.) the authorities have made certain provisions for teaching the respective mother tongue as well as for additional teaching of German as a second language.

There is a wide choice of languages which can be learnt (however, without any formal assessment) as foreign languages at primary level: Croatian, Czech, English, French, Hungarian, Italian, Slovak, and Slovene. Although there is a big choice of languages as well as a general language policy to diversify language learning, English is still by far the most popular foreign language taught at primary school level (about 97% of all primary school children learn English). All the other languages range far behind English, headed by French and Italian. The decision which language to start with is made by each primary school individually, depending on parental wishes, teacher supply and the specific regional situation and demand (cf. Kettemann *et al.* 1996).

The National Curriculum

As for all other grades and school types there is also a national language curriculum for the primary school level. It is issued by the Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs and offers a wide range of possibilities for language learning. The fundamental objectives for learning a foreign language in the primary school context are:

- to motivate for life-long language learning;
- to prepare the ground for communicating in a foreign language;
- to generate in children essentially positive attitudes towards other;
- languages and respect for other ways of thinking and acting.

The national curriculum also provides the teacher with a detailed list of suggested aims, topics and techniques; it is – however – left to the teacher to select and adapt these.

As far as linguistic skills are concerned, the focus should be on listening and speaking skills: in the first two years the young learner should spend nearly all of the time devoted to foreign language learning with listening to and speaking the new language. Especially at earlier stages, the emphasis should be on listening comprehension since some children need a so-called "silent period" before they are "ready" to use the language productively. Reading and simple writing in the foreign language should not be introduced before grade 3. Both, reading and writing, have to be introduced gradually and related to the children's individual cognitive and personal development.

Some of the topic fields suggested in the national curriculum are: "The child and his family and friends", "The child and school", "Body and Health", "Seasons", "Nature" (Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, 1995; Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs and Centre for School Development / Department 1, 1998).

Language Learning Programmes at Primary Level

The great majority of Austrian primary schools carry out language learning programmes which correspond with the national curriculum and focus on an age-appropriate introduction to one foreign language (mostly English) with an average weekly exposure time of about 50-60 minutes. The starting age is either 6 (integrated approach) or 8 (traditional model) and the number and length of language learning sessions varies from 10 minutes offered several times a week (integrated approach) to 30 minutes twice a week (traditional model). Additional languages – on an optional basis – are offered by schools individually, according to demand and capacity.

However, some Austrian primary schools offer programmes which are quite different from the above mentioned ones. They often exceed the curriculum guidelines and therefore have to be approved by the educational authorities. Among these programmes, the intensified learning of one foreign language as well as programmes focusing on first contacts with a second foreign language are the most common ones.

In the following sections we will briefly present the characteristic features of the different foreign language learning programmes without, however, going into any details.

The Traditional Model

The traditional teaching model has been followed for some twenty years and is still quite popular with many primary school teachers. The children are introduced to one foreign language in grades 3 and 4 with an average weekly time of foreign language contact of about 50 minutes, mostly split up into two units of 20-30 minutes each.

The teachers are trained primary school teachers, who are very often the class teachers at the same time. This programme attempts to provide first contacts with a foreign language and to pave the way for developing at least elementary communicative skills in the foreign language.

Integrated Approach

This rather new approach to primary foreign language education has been gradually growing in importance since the first pilot runs in the early 90s. Building on the positive experience gained from the pilot phase (as well as parental pressure and support from policy makers), integrated foreign language education (or "embedded" language learning) starting at the age of 6 (= first year of schooling) was incorporated into regular schooling practice in September 1998 (see above).

Integrated foreign language learning means "embedding" the foreign language in other areas of the primary school curriculum. "Embedding" the foreign language can take a variety of forms: from the so-called "weak" version where the foreign language is merely used for everyday classroom language (registering, organising pair or group work, talking about daily activities, the weather and the date, etc.) to the "strong" version where the foreign language is integrated in subject areas such as mathematics, social studies or physical education whenever possible. The intensity and frequency of integrating the foreign language in the primary school curriculum is left to the teacher and strongly related to his/her language and methodological skills.

Obviously, for this approach the foreign language teacher needs to be the class teacher at the same time. Integrated language teaching is far more demanding for the teacher than teaching the foreign language in a more subject-like approach (traditional model): "embedding" the foreign language whenever appropriate implies not only a good command of the foreign language but also the application of new methodological techniques. The class teacher should be able to lead the children skillfully and naturally from their first language to the foreign language by using the foreign language in a flexible and spontaneous way (cf. Jantscher & Heindler, 1998).

In order to provide a smooth transition from the traditional foreign language learning model to the fairly new approach of integrated foreign language learning the Austrian Ministry has granted a transition period of five years (1998-2003). Within this transition period the regional educational authorities are responsible for offering necessary training programmes which help primary school teachers to improve their foreign language competence and to expand their repertoire of strategies.

Programmes Exceeding the Curriculum Guidelines

As stated above, language learning programmes exceeding the curriculum guidelines can only be carried out with special approval of the Ministry and the existence of certain preconditions (teacher supply, ensuring continuity from primary to secondary level, budget, etc.). For this reason these language learning programmes can be offered only by a limited number of primary schools.

Intensified foreign language learning programmes

Intensified language learning includes everything ranging from five lessons (50 minutes each) a week to bilingual teaching with about 50 percent of the content areas presented in the foreign language.

Common characteristics of all intensified language learning models are:

- involvement of teachers who are either native speakers of the target;
- language (mostly English) or have near-native competence in the foreign language;
- the classes usually consist of German speaking children and children speaking the target language;
- daily exposure to the foreign language by teaching some areas of the curriculum in the foreign language (the foreign / second language as the medium for content instruction);
- team-teaching respectively good collaboration between teachers.

The linguistic objectives of these programmes range from “building up communication skills in the target language” to a “near-native command of the target language”, depending on the kind of programme (cf. *ZOOM 3*, 1996).

Programmes Focusing on First Contacts with a Second Foreign Language

Aiming at greater diversification by providing first contacts with two foreign languages (English and French, English and Italian, etc.) these programmes have gained growing interest at primary school level.

The objectives underlying these programmes are similar to those stated in the traditional or integrated model, focusing rather on first positive contacts with the foreign languages and cultures concerned (starting with the first foreign language in grade 1 and introducing the second foreign language in grade 3), than on high communicative proficiency (cf. *ZOOM 3*, 1996).

Teaching Methods, Assessment and Materials

Foreign language teaching at primary school level has to meet the general principles of primary education and the basic aspects of foreign language learning. In other words, foreign language teaching in primary schools should:

- be child-centred and experiential (for example, including stories or fairy tales);
- be holistic and multisensory;
- include active and playful learning (for example, games, role-plays, sketches, rhymes);
- provide meaningful contexts to support comprehension and to stress the here and now.

The teaching, however, can only be successful when the (short) sessions of foreign language teaching take place at times best suited to the children. So it is up to the class teacher (who is preferably the foreign language teacher at the same time) to choose the right time for her / his foreign language portions. The teacher should use the target language as much as possible and the children's native language only as much as necessary (Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs *et al.*, 1998).

With regard to assessment, it should be noted that the philosophy underlying early language teaching in Austria does not include formal testing or formal assessment of any kind. However, teachers are free to use informal methods of recording their pupils' achievement (day-to-day observation, personal notes, etc.).

As far as foreign language learning materials for the primary level are concerned, schools can choose among a wide range of textbooks included in a list of recommended teaching materials published by the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs. Before materials can enter the list they have to be approved by a special commission, which assesses the newly published textbooks according to their compliance with the national syllabus and appropriateness for primary school children.

Most of the recommended teaching materials refer to the traditional concept of foreign language teaching (subject model) in grade 3 and grade 4. For the recently introduced approach of integrating foreign language learning in the teaching of other subjects in grades 1 and 2 only a limited amount of material has been published so far.

In order to support the approach of integrated foreign language learning *and* to encourage diversification, a nationwide project group set up by the "Centre for School Development" (Department III, Graz, Austria) has developed a wide range of materials for altogether 10 languages and published them in a series of booklets (ZOOM 1, ZOOM 2, ZOOM 3 1996; ZOOM 4 1997; ZOOM 5 1998; ZOOM 6 forthcoming).

These very practice-oriented materials (for example, collection of short activities for integrating a foreign language into other subject areas such as physical education or mathematics) have been made available to several thousand primary school teachers all over Austria and gained great importance.

In addition to published materials (mostly textbooks), teachers frequently use supplementary materials such as objects, pictures, maps, (board) games, or audio cassettes, or take the initiative to develop their own, tailor-made materials.

Teacher Education for Primary School Level

In Austria – as in some other European countries – the primary school class teacher is in most cases the foreign language teacher to early learners. This is obviously useful and to some extent even necessary, because the foreign language should not be taught in splendid isolation but should be linked to other areas of the primary school curriculum. The class teacher knows the children and the appropriate content and is therefore the best person to plan and organise the foreign language development.

Pre-service teacher training for primary school teachers in Austria is offered at colleges of education (Pädagogische Akademien) which normally last three years. Prospective primary school teachers acquire the whole range of skills that are necessary for teaching all subjects at primary level (including compulsory training in one modern foreign language). For this reason, primary school teachers are not university-trained foreign language specialists but more likely all-round subject teachers with a special training in methods of teaching young children. One of the disadvantages of this kind of teacher training might be that primary school teachers sometimes lack sound linguistic competence.

For this reason the optional (usually free of charge) in-service training programmes, which are offered to all teachers on a regular basis and throughout their professional career, are very important. The training programmes offered are supported by the regional educational authorities and are geared to the specific requirements of the provinces. Many teachers also take advantage of informal opportunities to improve their foreign language competence and their understanding of the target language culture(s): they participate – often at their own expense – in tailor-made language courses for teachers either in Austria or in the target language country, or they read literature or watch movies in the target language.

Challenges and Problem Areas

Foreign language education starting at primary or even pre-primary stage has received considerable attention and acceptance in recent years. However, experience gained from various research projects clearly shows that an early start does not in itself guarantee better outcome than a later start. Various aspects have to be taken into consideration and certain conditions have to be met for success to be possible. Concerning effectiveness of language learning at primary level, the following factors are considered to be of great importance for successful early language learning: well-trained teachers (language competence and methodological skills), well-organised in-service training, well-structured curriculum with adequate timetable, suitable and motivating teaching materials, continuity of language learning within the primary school and from primary to secondary stage, quality assurance measures (Federal Ministry of Education and the Arts, 1994; Kettemann & Landsiedler, 1997).

Although several of these "conditions of success" have been put into reality and seem to work quite well in Austria, there are still some challenges in the field of early foreign language education. Public over-optimism as well as enthusiasm on the side of parents, teachers and policy makers, however, sometimes lead to forget about the (still) existing problem areas.

In this final section we should therefore like to draw attention to three of the most striking challenges currently being tackled within Austria:

- teacher education for the integrated approach;
- gap between primary and secondary level;
- expectations vs. outcome.

Teacher Education

One of the current challenges seems to lie in teacher training as a great amount of teachers are currently being confronted with a completely new situation and challenge: a wide range of methodological strategies as well as a good proficiency in the foreign language are considered to be necessary prerequisites for successfully integrating a foreign language in the primary school curriculum.

Basically, all Austrian primary school teachers are trained – either by initial or in-service training programmes – to teach a foreign language at primary level. However, integrating the foreign language in the first two years of primary education asks for much more flexibility in the foreign language and the application of new techniques

and strategies. Currently, great efforts are being made to offer tailor-made programmes to primary school teachers all over Austria (cf. Beranek *et al.*, 1999).

Although training programmes geared to the specific demands of integrated foreign language learning have been worked out by most of the responsible regional authorities, there is still the need for nationally accepted qualification criteria, which then could provide the basis for developing long-term measures concerning initial and in-service teacher training for the primary school level.

Continuity

The gap between primary and secondary schools has been without doubt one of the major problem areas over the past twenty years and still is the reason that many secondary school teachers tend to start from scratch rather than building on achieved foreign language competence.

The reasons for this lack of continuity from primary to secondary level have been identified by experts in a number of workshops, seminars and conferences and are well-known (cf. Heindler & Felberbauer, 1995; Komorowska, 1997):

- lack of information on both sides due to little or no contact between primary and secondary school teachers;
- different language learning approaches: holistic, child-centred teaching at the primary level vs. academic, subject teaching at the secondary level.

Whereas the question of different learning styles and approaches in primary and secondary schools and their influence on the "linguistic performance" of the individual child certainly calls for long-term measures, the existing information gap between primary and secondary level could be (partly) bridged by short-term or medium-term measures.

Information on learning styles, teaching methods, objectives (linguistic and other), etc., could be circulated either on an informal basis (mutual school visits, exchange of teaching materials and curricula, etc.) or in a more formal way by, for example, language portfolios, which could help to facilitate the smooth transition from primary to secondary stage by recording the achievement and progress in languages.

The idea of an open-ended language portfolio for all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary) was advocated by the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project Group some years ago and has been taken up by several European countries. Currently, various models of a European Language Portfolio are being piloted in different

countries and educational contexts. At present the idea of a Language Portfolio and its introduction is also under discussion in Austria.

Expectations vs. Outcome

Teachers and pupils are often faced with far too high expectations from parents who believe that starting to learn a foreign language at such an early stage *must* lead to communicative proficiency in the foreign language. However, research work carried out in the field of early foreign language learning (cf. Kettemann *et al.*, forthcoming) prove that miraculous results cannot be expected from young children exposed to a foreign language on the basis of one or two hours per week. The reason is simple: the young child lacks access to learning strategies and memory techniques (owing to limited cognitive capacities) which secondary school children usually use. Moreover, a young child's concentration span is very short (10-15 minutes), which makes short, frequent sessions with lots of revision necessary (cf. Peltzer-Karpf & Zangl, 1998).

The gap between expectations and real outcome can have quite a demotivating impact on children and place immense pressure on teachers. Therefore, it is decisive to make the objectives of language learning at primary school level transparent to teachers, pupils and parents alike. A clear setting of aims and objectives (e.g. by means of a language portfolio kept by the children) would certainly motivate children and support teachers and consequently would help to overcome this problematic situation.

Conclusion

It would be well beyond the scope of this article to go into more details as regards the situation of early language learning in Austria and some of its current challenges and problem areas. We hope, however, to have provided an insight into the present situation of our country and contributed to further discussions of the topic not only in Austria but also in other European (and non-European) countries.

To sum up, we should like to point out once more that in the field of early language learning many important steps have been taken and a remarkable amount of work has been done so far in Austria. Despite this successful history and pioneering role we should always keep in mind that there is still a long way ahead of us!

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Teaching Foreign Languages to Young Learners in Hungary

Marianne Nikolov

Introduction

This article is to give the reader a short overview of Hungarian education, the role of foreign languages in it, the state of early language teaching, how teachers cope with challenges, and finally, what the major achievements and problems in these areas are.

Hungary is a small Central European country with a population of 10.5 a million. Hungarian does not belong to the Indo-European language family but is a Finno-Ugric language. The vast majority of the population speaks Hungarian as the mother tongue, whereas the most important ethnic minority groups speak German, Croatian, Rumanian, Slovakian and Roma. For centuries, Latin was the official language and Hungarian did not assume this role until the middle of the 19th century. Traditionally, the most important foreign language has been German but in l949 Russian became a compulsory foreign language in state schools from the age of ten through secondary and the first two years of tertiary education. This tradition changed drastically in 1989 when foreign language learning became liberalised. Since then German and English have become dominant in state education, but the popularity of these languages dates back to the late 1960s. A limited number of specialised classes in both primary and secondary schools was tolerated by the communist regime, mostly because influential professionals put pressure on educational authorities to allow their own children to study languages. For the last three decades English and German have been the most requested foreign languages in extra-curricular courses, evening classes and the private sector.

Hungarians have generally positive attitudes towards learning and knowing foreign languages, but only a low percentage of the population would claim to know them. A representative inquiry conducted in 1994 found that about 17% of adults said they had a working knowledge of German, 12% of English and 9% of Russian, while other languages ranged from 1 to 2% (Terestyéni, 1996, p. 4). The majority (90%) of respondents with secondary education backgrounds and about 60% of college and university graduates claimed that they could not manage in any foreign language. On the other hand, 84% of the participants said they wanted to study a modern language (for more detail see Nikolov, 1999a, pp. 14-18).

The Educational System

Primary education starts at the age of six, but prior to the first year in school all children are expected to attend kindergarten for at least a year. Although recently children can begin their secondary education at the ages of 10, 12 or 14, most of them follow the traditional track and at 14 enter one of the three types of secondary schools: grammar schools, vocational schools and trade schools. Grammar schools require students to study two foreign languages, vocational schools require one, and trade schools usually offer none, although some have recently introduced foreign language courses. Students in grammar schools take an exam in a foreign language as part of their school-leaving examination. Compulsory education lasts 10 years, and the earliest age of leaving school is 16; the majority finishes school at the age of 18.

The Hungarian educational pendulum has gone from one extreme to the other over the last few decades. Until the late 80s the system was completely controlled: all students followed exactly the same curricula and syllabi, learnt the same units from the same textbooks at the same time of the year. In 1989 the old curriculum became outdated, but as there was no new one to replace it, teachers were free to do what they liked while a new national curriculum was being developed. This process is illustrated by the widening of the choice of teaching materials. While in 1989 the ministry's list of suggested materials included altogether 34 course books in all foreign languages for all state school types, in 1997 the list contained 645 published materials, among them 353 in English and 175 in German (*Halász és Lannert*, 1998, p. 426).

The National Core Curriculum (*Nemzeti alaptanterv*, 1995) was introduced in 1998. It covers the first 10 years of state education, while the curricula of the last two years of secondary education are regulated only by the school-leaving examinations. Now the government is trying to introduce new syllabi for each subject to implement the aims of the National Core Curriculum and to establish new procedures of quality assurance.

Foreign Languages in the Curriculum

The general objectives of the National Core Curriculum for foreign languages focus on the development of oral and written communication skills, and the document requires the teaching of at least one foreign language for the purpose of practical use. From the point of view of foreign language education, the document represents a step backwards: the old curriculum introduced a foreign language in grade 4 (age 10), the new one a year later in grade 5; and previously two modern languages were mandatory in state education, now only one, except for grammar schools. Also, weekly hours are not allocated to subject areas any more, but rates are identified in an overall frame and decisions are made locally. Therefore, many teachers fear that the overall time used for modern languages may decrease.

Despite the fact that officially foreign languages are to be introduced in grade 5, reality is different, as parents put a lot of pressure on schools to start earlier. Children in early language programmes receive an average of one to two lessons of 45 minutes a week or three to four lessons in specialised classes. In most of the cases, local authorities sponsor these programmes by manipulating their budgets, and early language studies form and integral part of the school curricula. Sometimes parents also contribute towards the cost, and if the school cannot ensure financing of the programme, language classes are extracurricular activities but schools provide the space.

The ratio of students studying Western languages in primary schools has increased significantly over the last decade. In the academic year 1988/89 all children over 9 were obliged to study Russian, and very few of them learned a second foreign language. Since 1989 a dramatic decline has been experienced in the teaching of Russian and a concurrent increase in the number of students studying German and English. In 1996/97 German was studied by slightly more primary-school children (51.5%) than English (45.3%), while only 1.3% learnt French and 1.5% Russian (Imre, 1999, p. 201). On the other hand, in secondary schools English is more popular (64%) than German (Vágó, 1999).

The pressure on schools is enormous: most parents want their children to start learning a foreign language as soon as possible. Folk wisdom also supports the general assumption: “The sooner the better.”

As Table 2 illustrates, over 40% of the children in grade 3 (age 8-9) study a foreign language, and many of them start as early as in grades 1 and 2, four to five years before the age required by the National Core Curriculum. Although the officially suggested starting age is 11, most of the parents favour an earlier programme, and schools need to fulfil these parental wishes in order to attract more children and get more financial support per child from the ministry.

Young children can be expected to outscore older beginners in the area of pronunciation and oral fluency, but the present situation is not without pitfalls, or as the Hungarian saying goes: it is not all cream down to the bottom.

Grade	Number of pupils studying foreign languages	Percentage in year
Grade 1	19 859	15.9
Grade 2	26 815	22.6
Grade 3	49 034	40.9
Grade 4	112 655	94.3
Grade 5	118 631	95.2
Grade 6	114 089	94.2
Grade 7	114 233	95.6
Grade 8	113 503	95.9
Total	668 819	

Table 2: The number and percentage of primary-school pupils studying foreign languages in Hungarian state schools in 1996 / 97 (Vágó, in Halász Lannert, 1998, p. 430).

Table 2 illustrates one of the negative tendencies: about 5% of the population never get any foreign language instruction. These tend to be children in small villages, where no early language programmes are launched and when they join bigger schools at age 11; they already lag behind the others. Therefore, they get exempted from learning a foreign language. Most of these children never getting a chance to learn languages belong to the biggest ethnic group of Romas *(Girán és Kardos*, 1997).

On the other hand, about 5% of the children learn two foreign languages: one from the first, second or third grade and a second foreign language from the fifth or seventh, but there is a lot of variation in programmes depending on availability of teachers and resources. In these cases the first foreign language tends to be taught in intensive courses. Altogether 21% of schoolchildren attend intensive courses at primary school (Vágó, 1999, p. 141). This means two to three classes a week in the first three or four grades and four to five classes from grade 5.

As German is not only a foreign language but also the language of an ethnic group in Hungary, a specific development must also be mentioned. As has been pointed out, the German language has played a special role in Hungarian education. The reasons are historical, geographic, ethnic and economic: the tradition of German teaching dates back to the history of the Habsburg-Hungarian monarchy; also, the shared border with Austria, the nearness of Germany, the presence of German minority groups in the country, and the importance of links in economy and tourism provide explanations for the predominance of German among foreign languages. Recent statistical data suggest that most of the students learning German in ethnic schools do not come from ethnic backgrounds, but from professional families where parents put emphasis on an early start. Thus some of the government money meant for minority education is inappropriately used (Imre, 1999, p. 194).

Teachers

Four different types of foreign language teaching degrees exist in Hungary:

- five-year single or double major university degrees qualify teachers to teach at any institution, most importantly in secondary schools. This is the most prestigious teaching degree, but in most of the cases trainees do no primary-school practice, though they can teach young learners;
- four-year double major college degrees qualify teachers to work at primary schools and teach foreign languages in grades 5 to 8;
- three-year single major college degree holders are qualified to teach across the range of educational institutions. This is the most recent teaching degree type;
- four-year lower primary college degrees with a language specialisation allow teachers to work in grades 1-6, but most frequently they are hired for grades 1-4.

Holders of the first three types of degree work as language specialists, whereas teachers with lower-primary degrees are either class teachers and teach their classes a foreign language as well, or work as language specialists in the lower primary section of their schools. As a general tendency, it can be claimed that there seems to be a strong relationship between the length and quality of the teacher education programme, its prestige and the target age group graduates are qualified to teach. Unfortunately, the least amount of curricular input in the target language and culture characterises the lower-primary teaching degree.

The most serious problem is that there are not enough appropriately qualified teachers in the right posts. Teachers with prestigious degrees find well-paid jobs in business or the private sector, while teachers qualified to teach in primary schools work in secondary institutions, thus they have to upgrade their degrees to keep their jobs. In 1991/92 less than half of the teachers of English had a teaching degree. Schools were so much in need of teaching staff; they allowed people of other professions or teachers of other subject areas to teach a foreign language with an intermediate-level language certificate. Since then the situation has improved: almost 5,000 teachers of Russian and of other subjects have graduated from three-year re-training in-service programmes at universities and colleges (Vágó, 1999, p. 153), and new pre-service teacher-training programmes have been implemented. Despite the efforts of the ministry and international organisations like the United States Information Agency, the Peace Corps, and the British Council, the perspectives are still grim for various reasons.

Although, for instance, in 1997 / 98 over 3,000 foreign language majors were admitted to tertiary education, over half of the graduating teachers do not take up teaching in state schools (Vágó, 1999), mostly for financial reasons. To illustrate the point, a young graduate with some computer skills can make about four times more money at an

international firm than at a state school, and hourly rates at private language schools are triple of those in tertiary institutions.

The majority (65%) of foreign language teachers in primary-school posts are ex-Russian teachers (*Halász és Lannert*, 1998, p. 273), many of them lacking the proficiency, self-confidence and methodological background necessary in the communicative classroom of young learners. Teachers with better skills used opportunities in the early 90s to fill posts in secondary schools or in the private sector. Although these teachers at primary schools are familiar with the principles, techniques and resources of language teaching to young learners, they find them hard to implement in the classroom, and very often rely on the old traditional procedures inherited from their Russian teaching. They focus on form, use drills and rote-learning techniques and rely on the Hungarian language excessively (Nikolov, 1999b and c); thus preventing young learners from developing the appropriate oral skills in which they could later outscore older beginners.

On the whole, the success of early language teaching in Hungary depends on how appropriately qualified, enthusiastic teachers can be attracted to teach in the lower primary section. Not all of the teachers presently working with young learners are qualified or motivated, and this means a potential threat on early programmes. In the next section, I will look at the availability of resources and then on how other conditions of successful language teaching are met in Hungarian schools.

Resources

The interest in child foreign language instruction has increased during the last few years all over the world. Publishers are offering a smorgasbord of attractive teaching materials and resources, and Hungarian teachers have access to these at bookshops, conferences and workshops regularly held by experts and publishers all over the country. Unfortunately, the availability of resources cannot counterbalance all shortcomings in the classrooms. Very few teachers supplement officially suggested course books or exploit replica, authentic and student-made materials (Nikolov, 1999b). They find it hard to make their choice from among the colourful teaching packages, and do not realise that their learners' needs are hardly ever considered as materials are designed for an international market.

When in 1996 Hurts, Derda and Lawson conducted research into what materials lower-primary teachers used they identified the following major tendencies:

- the vast majority of teachers relied exclusively on published courses;
- many teachers "over-taught" course books: materials designed for one year were exploited for 3-4 years, thus making progress very slow with a lot of rote learning, testing and intensive study of every word;

- some schools used a completely different course book each year, for example *Splash, Chatterbox, English Today, Tip Top* and *Wow* consecutively in grades 2 to 6;
- in a number of cases three different Level One books were used in the same school;
- often course books teachers used with particular groups did not match the age they were designed for, for example they used *Project English* in grade 3;
- most of the published materials teachers used were British publications with Hungarian course materials lagging way behind.

The reasons include the lack of attractive Hungarian teaching materials, the excellent PR activity of British publishers and the low level of self-confidence and willingness on part of the teachers to design their own materials.

In-service teacher development courses can help in these respects, for they raise teachers' awareness. Classroom research projects may contribute to a better understanding of processes underlying foreign language learning and may develop teachers' self-confidence. A new in-service teacher development project was launched in 1998 for all teachers in Hungary. Teachers are obliged to participate in refresher credit courses every seven years to be able to keep their jobs. Such professional teacher development courses could offer attractive alternatives for teachers of young learners to update their communicative competence and teaching methodology, but as foreign-language teachers have received a lot of opportunities and support over the last decade, heads of schools now must give other subject teachers priority. Therefore, despite initial high hopes, language teachers do not seem to benefit from these programmes.

Another issue related to teachers' status concerns second jobs and the private sector. Foreign language teachers are considered to be lucky as they can have private students and second or third jobs. Most of them do a lot of private tuition, and as they can hardly survive on their state salaries they take various jobs. They tend to be overworked and underpaid (Nikolov, 1999b).

Young Learners' Attitudes and Motivation

As indicated earlier in this paper, Hungarians' general attitudes towards learning and knowing foreign languages are favourable. A peculiar indication of this phenomenon is the fact that almost 60% of the children get private tuition during their primary-school years (Gazsó, 1997, p. 25), most frequently in modern languages. This high percentage has two reasons: some ambitious parents are extremely keen on their children's progress at school, so they hire private tutors to give pupils special opportunities. Others pay for extra classes because their children need special attention to be able to

fulfil school requirements. In both cases parents are obviously dissatisfied with what free state education can provide.

As for young learners' attitudes and motivation towards modern languages, two studies are informative: the first is cross-sectional, the second longitudinal.

Dörnyei, Nyilasi and Clément (1996) investigated the attitudes and motivation of 14-year-olds during the 1993/94 school year. They asked 4 765 eighth-graders (age 14) in 212 classes across the country. Children were to rank order the first three languages of their choice. The first six languages included English, German, French, Italian, Russian and Spanish, with English and German way ahead of the other languages. The study also found a strong preference of American English to British English among young students, indicating a strong US influence through popular culture, although most teaching materials used in primary schools are British publications.

This study also looked into children's self-confidence concerning their abilities for achieving good levels. Their average on a 1 to 5 scale was high, 3.73, and they agreed with the statement that learning a foreign language was a hard job at 3.36. These data indicate that Hungarian children have positive attitudes towards language studies, most of them expect to be successful in the long run, but they know that serious efforts are necessary for them to achieve good results.

The other study (Nikolov, 1999d) explored why children between the ages of 6 and 14 thought they learnt English, what tasks they liked and disliked, and to what extent the traditional taxonomy of instrumental and integrative motivation could be applied to the Hungarian educational context. Findings of the enquiry indicate that the role of integrative motivation (the type of motivation traditionally identified with higher success rate, related to a positive relationship with speakers of the target language) is unimportant, and young children are not motivated instrumentally either (that is long-term goals related to the usefulness of knowing languages do not influence them significantly). They will progress in the target language if they find classroom activities worth the trouble. Nikolov's longitudinal study (1999d) looked into how Hungarian children's motivation changed over their eight years of learning English in three groups in a primary school with the same teacher. The study found that the most important motivating factors for children between 6 and 14 years of age included positive attitudes towards the learning context and the teacher; intrinsically motivating activities, tasks and materials; and they were more motivated by classroom practice than integrative or instrumental reasons. Knowledge as an aim gradually overtook the role of external motivating factors like rewards and approval. Instrumental motives emerged around the age of 11 or 12, but they remained vague and general. The most important finding with classroom implications relates to the way causes of motivation were found to vary at different ages. For very young children, classes must be fun and the teacher is in focus. The development of self-confidence also seems to play a major role and external rewards slowly lose some of their attractiveness. Instrumental motives

do emerge over the years, but they are balanced by classroom-related motives even at the age of 14.

As these two surveys show, Hungarian children's attitudes and motivation are favourable towards developing their language skills, but it is essential that young learners find ways of using their hard-won limited proficiency for meaningful purposes. Although satellite programmes including English and German cartoons and films have become available throughout the country, only a few of them provide learners with comprehensible input.

One of the challenging ways of maintaining motivation to learn the target language is through communication with other speakers of it. Many Hungarian teachers of foreign languages would like to develop links for their learners with both native speakers and other learners of the same foreign language. Such links may not only ensure children's interest, but could also strengthen cultural awareness and understanding. Several schools with German programmes have established links with German or Austrian partners. Other schools would also welcome links with either international learners of English and German, or native speakers of English. Recently, new possibilities have opened up with the Internet.

Conditions of Early Language Programmes

One of the basic assumptions concerning success in learning foreign languages relates to continuity and intensity of programmes. Language teaching may begin very early, its aims may be appropriate concerning the length of instruction and students' needs, but long-term success will not be available unless later programmes build on early language study. What children learn in early years must be maintained and further developed to be useful for them as adults. Unfortunately, despite all the encouraging achievements, in many cases a waste of effort and energy is one of the characteristics of early language education in Hungary. The reasons are manifold:

- early language programmes show a lot of variation and it is often impossible to stream children with similar language learning histories into homogenous groups within primary-school programmes;
- secondary schools rarely integrate children's previous language experience in their programmes, and a lot of children end up as false beginners and become demotivated;
- children often start a brand new foreign language in secondary schools as they are given no opportunities to continue their first foreign language;
- many primary-school teachers apply inappropriate methodology, come up with unrealistic demands and frustrate learners at an early stage;

- parents often have unrealistic expectations and want immediate results;
- sometimes minimal educational requirements are neglected: children get very short periods, like twenty minutes a week; classes are often inappropriately scheduled into the daily routine of children: they "study" while their peers have playtime; classes are held in tiny rooms or impossible places, like dining halls or changing rooms, where physical activities are limited.

Very often parents and school administrators do not realise how important it is to meet all of the above conditions for early language programmes to be useful.

Conclusions

This overview was meant to give the reader some insights into how far we have got with teaching modern languages to young learners in Hungary. We can boast of the large numbers of children participating in early language programmes, trying to come up to their parents' expectations. Hungary has come a long way since 1989: now there are enough qualified teachers in the country, but unfortunately, many of the teachers working with young learners do so because they cannot find more prestigious jobs.

As for the quality of early programmes, there is no empirical evidence to prove that an early start is more favourable than a later one, as no such studies have been implemented. Also, realistic aims need to be set for early programmes. It would be extremely important to make teachers and parents understand what young children are capable of achieving, and how attitudinal and linguistic gains may contribute to success in adulthood. The attitudinal perspective is often neglected, and all stakeholders look out for language proficiency, forgetting about the fact that what children actually learn in primary schools may not directly be available or useful for them as adults. Therefore research is needed to explore how early language experiences contribute to the development of language proficiency over the years, and how inadequate conditions may prevent some children from becoming successful.

Teacher education seems to be one of the cornerstones of early language programmes. Enthusiastic teachers setting realistic aims, applying relevant classroom techniques and motivating children in the long run tend to come up with good results. The other decisive factor is continuity of programmes. Early language education may be a waste of time unless secondary schools rely on and exploit what primary schools have contributed to children's foreign language development.

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Marianne Nikolov teaches courses on applied linguistics at Janus Pannonius University, Pécs. She is the author of various teaching materials for young learners of English, articles on child foreign language learning, and has published and edited work on various topics of language education.

Early Foreign Language Education in Croatia

Lidvina Stokic and Jelena Mihaljevic Djigunovic

Foreign Languages

Short History

Croatia has a long history of teaching foreign languages. Its beginnings go back to the second half of the nineteenth century, when German, Russian, Hungarian, French, Italian and English were the modern languages taught at Zagreb University. After the World War II Russian was obligatory from grades 5 to 8, thereafter pupils could choose another foreign language alongside Russian and learn it for four years. Russian is no longer obligatory in Croatia and today English is the most popular foreign language. Hungarian, Italian, Slovenian and Serbian are the languages of Croatia's neighbouring countries. The national minorities from these countries living in Croatia and speaking their own languages have the right to learn their mother tongues and to be educated in their mother tongues.

Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum

While English, German, French and Italian are the languages most often taught in Croatian schools, some offer Spanish and Russian also. Some primary schools offer Latin and Greek from grade five and those who take them up can go on learning them till the end of secondary education if they enroll in a classical grammar school which provides a more academic type of education. The general objectives of teaching foreign languages are to enable pupils to communicate with people whose mother tongue is not Croatian, to learn about foreign people and their countries, and also to enable young Croats to talk about themselves and their own country. The specific objectives differ according to the age of pupils, the level of education and the type of school. The foreign language syllabus for young learners follows what they learn in the mother tongue, which is the main medium of children's acquisition of basic concepts. The cross-curricular approach is applied from the beginning. For example, after learning how to add numbers in the mother tongue in the math lesson, young learners would do the adding in the foreign language classes too. The foreign language teacher collaborates closely with the class teacher. Stories make up a significant part of the syllabus in the early years of learning. In Croatian experience, stories are extremely useful in developing both children's communicative and linguistic competence. Pupils' knowledge and skills are assessed in different ways, among which the most common forms include written and oral tasks, essay writing, problem-solving, experimental

work, tests, and continual assessment of pupils' progress. The final exam in the foreign language is taken at the end of secondary school education, and it is assessed by the pupils' teacher.

Educational System

The Ministry of Education and Sports is responsible for pre-primary, primary and secondary education. The Ministry of Science and Technology is responsible for higher education. Private schools follow either their own curricula or the state curricula.

Children who are 6 years old by the first of April enrol in the primary school which begins in September. All children aged between 6 and 15 must attend primary school which is compulsory and lasts eight years. Full-time students enrol in the first form of secondary school usually by the age of 17. Secondary education for full-time students lasts four years in grammar schools (*gimnazija*), art, technical and related secondary schools; three years in vocational schools; and one to two years in schools for certain vocations.

Upon completion of their secondary school education students may enrol in colleges or universities (faculties or academies). College lasts two years and faculty and academy last between four and five years. Upon completion of secondary school 44% of children continue their education in colleges or faculties (88% of all pupils who finish a 4-year secondary school).

National Curriculum

The elements of the curricular structure, time-table and programme structure of pre-school, primary school and secondary school levels, are stipulated on the national level. At the end of each school year, primary school pupils in forms 1-4 get "pupil's books" while pupils attending higher forms (5-8) of primary school and secondary schools get certificates. The form and the contents of the certifications given by state schools are set at the national level and include pupils' personal data, the type of the programme they completed, the grades the pupils were given in each subject as well as the average grade in all the subjects. Secondary school pupils who take the Matura, or the final school-leaving exam, get an additional Matura certificate. These pupils take exams in Croatian, mathematics and a foreign language. They also write a Matura paper on a topic from a school subject of their choice.

General Structure of Teacher Education

Generally speaking, teachers must get a university degree. Primary school subject teachers (forms 5-8) and secondary school teachers take a 4-year course of study in a

particular subject. There they study not only the subject matter they have chosen, but they also take additional courses in pedagogy, psychology of education and methodology. School-based teaching practice is a methodology course requirement and this is done in pre-school institutions, primary and secondary schools. There is no difference in education and training between primary school subject teachers and secondary school teachers. On the other hand, educators in pre-school establishments have a two-year (four semesters) training. Primary school class-teachers (forms 1-4) had a two-year training till 1992, when a 4-year course of study was introduced. Upon completion of their studies, pre-school teachers get a two-year post-secondary school qualification, while primary school class-teachers, subject teachers and secondary school teachers get a university degree (B. A. or B. S. degree).

The Role of Different Interested Parties in the Teaching of Foreign Languages

In all primary and secondary state schools it is obligatory to learn at least one foreign language, and in some secondary schools two or three foreign languages can be learned. In some pre-school institutions and in some primary schools (lower levels, forms 1-4) the foreign language has been introduced as an optional subject on the experimental basis. It is all sponsored by the state. In the private sector courses are offered in various foreign languages for all age groups and parents pay for these courses.

Teacher Education Programmes for Foreign Language Teachers

Teacher education programmes are mostly financed by the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Ministry of Science and Technology. However, foreign institutions like the British Council, the United States Information Service, the Council of Europe also offer programmes either abroad or in Croatia, with professional foreign language instructors. During the pre-service undergraduate teacher education, the emphasis is put on mastering the subject matter, for which class teachers devote approximately 60% of time, while subject teachers devote almost 90% of their studies to mastering the subject matter. The rest of the time is taken up by courses in pedagogy, psychology and teaching methodology. As for students' teaching practice, class teachers have one month a year of school-based teaching practice, while subject teachers are supposed to spend two hours per week doing class observation and teaching in their third or fourth year of study.

The Ministry of Education and Sports organises in-service teacher training, very often together with the universities and various professional institutions. The most common forms of in-service teacher training are seminars and meetings. They can last from one up to six days and teachers get certificates of attendance.

The foreign language proficiency of teachers is generally high. Foreign language teaching methodology is an important component of the undergraduate course of study. It is a one-year course which language students can take either in their third or fourth year of study.

The probation period of the primary school teachers lasts one year, while the one of the secondary school teachers lasts two years. Each new teacher has a mentor, an experienced teacher who guides and helps the novice to learn about day-to-day practice, rights and responsibilities of the teachers, ways of getting promoted, etc. At the end of this period teachers have to sit for a teaching ability state examination.

Teachers Professional Development

All teachers are supposed to take part in in-service teacher training in accordance with the programme set by the Ministry of Education. Primary and secondary school teachers whose abilities and performances are outstanding may improve their professional status and be promoted to mentors and advisers, which will bring them privileges in salary and work load and enable them to take part in educational authorities' activities.

Since 1992 the Croatian Association of Teachers of English (CROATE), better known as HUPE, which is its Croatian acronym, has been organising annual conferences, publishing the HUPE Newsletter and the HUPE Journal, and gathering teachers in a number of special interest groups. Publications initiated by teachers themselves are quite rare and when there is such an incentive, it is very difficult to get financial support. There is a specialized journal for foreign language teachers "Strani jezici" [Foreign Languages], where teachers can write and read both theoretical articles on various linguistic, language teaching and learning issues as well as suggestions for and examples of successful teaching practices.

Croatian Project of Early Language Learning

Children normally start learning a foreign language in the fourth form of primary school, which is at the age of 9 or 10. However, it is possible to start even sooner. Some time ago, foreign languages were introduced into some pre-school institutions. However, a major innovation has been the introduction of the foreign language into the first form (age 6 or 7) of some primary schools on an experimental basis. This is known as the Croatian Project of Early Foreign Language Learning. The Project started in 1991 and is sponsored by the Croatian Ministry of Education and the educational authorities of the city of Zagreb. The research part is supported by the Ministry of Science and conducted by a group of foreign language specialists from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb. Four foreign languages are being taught: English,

French, German and Italian. The Project is now in its eighth year. The Project children have their foreign language for five periods a week (one period per day) in the first and second grades and four periods a week (a period each day but one) in the third and fourth grades in groups of twelve to fifteen learners. From grade five on they have three periods a week (whenever the timetable allows the periods are spread evenly during the week) and work as a whole class, without splitting into groups. In Croatia, a school period lasts 45 minutes. About 2 000 learners of English, French, German and Italian have been taught in this way in Zagreb. There are also some classes in Rijeka, Split, Pula, and Osijek, with approximately 1 000 more children. It is the hope of the Project experts that when the educational authorities decide to introduce foreign languages into the first grade of primary school on a large scale, they will be ready to offer a rational, minutely elaborated approach as well as syllabi that have been written on the basis of the concrete experience in teaching young learners.

Research Results

The research part of the Project has focused on two specific aims. The first is finding out whether grade one (age 6 or 7) is a good time to start foreign language learning. The second concerns the characteristics of young beginners that contribute to successful foreign language learning from grade one of primary school. Studies carried out on the Project children support the hypothesis that grade one is a good time to start learning a foreign language. Thus, Vilke (1993, 1995) reports that 6-7 year-old children, who are at the stage of concrete operations (Piaget, 1973), are able to deal with the language a limited cognitive way.

Kovacevic (1993), analyzing the performance of 7-8 year-old learners of English by means of semi-structured interviews, found that the children's comprehension exceeded production but their production was characterized by a very high standard of pronunciation and intonation. The self-correction that the children carried out spontaneously suggested that they were aware that the new language had rules of its own. Vrhovac (1993) reports on the capacity of 6-year-old French learners to narrate a story in a face-to-face interaction with a teacher. Mihaljevic Djigunovic (1993) found that at the age of 6-7 the children did not connect the foreign language with its native speakers or culture but thought that it was a good idea to learn the foreign language. Bartolovic's (1993) findings show that foreign language learning did not have a negative effect on the children's success in other subjects. Tests of knowledge administered on several occasions throughout the seven years point to a high language proficiency level of most Project children. The final results are still being processed.

Vilke (1993, p. 21) reports that the observation and results of tests administered in the course of the project on the learners of English seem to indicate that there were several characteristics of children's performance in English as a foreign language that constantly recur in the course of the learning process:

- they can master the phonological system of English with great ease;
- vocabulary items for which they have not developed concepts in their own culture present difficulty;
    - they can understand basic relationships in a sentence, especially spatial relationships expressed by prepositions, and the concept of plurality, etc;
- difficulties in learning structural elements stem from two main sources:
    - interference of the mother tongue (this can be seen in the use of the mother tongue), and
    - immaturity, which makes certain concepts in both the primary and secondary language hard to grasp;
- interference from the mother tongue manifests itself at both the linguistic and conceptual levels.

The possibilities of continuity of the Project once the pupils are in different secondary schools are being considered at the moment. Extra-curricular activities usually take the form of language clubs and are free of charge

Foreign Languages Taught

The foreign languages taught in the Project are English, French, German and Italian. English is by far the most popular language. The percentages of learners of German and French change over time and Italian is very popular in parts of the country (e.g. Istria) with the Italian minority.

Teachers

The teachers in the Project are subject teachers, i.e. language specialists. They are non-native teachers. The teachers chosen for the Project had first been sent to Britain to attend short courses on teaching young learners and, since the Project started, have attended seminars organised by the University of Zagreb research team. The Teacher Training College in Zagreb has started educating future class teachers who will be qualified to teach English or German to young beginners (grades 1-4). It is believed that the best solution for teaching foreign languages to young learners is class teachers with excellent performance in the foreign language courses during the first two years of study: they can then choose to specialize in teaching the foreign language during the last two years of study. The first generation of such teachers of English is soon to graduate: thus, the first 50-60 teachers of English to young learners will be able to take up jobs for which they are fully qualified.

Learners

Generally speaking, the learners in the Project were not selected. Several studies of attitudes and motivation of the Project pupils suggest that "the affective variables of the young beginners show positive trends and desirable characteristics that may be viewed as conducive to successful foreign language learning". (Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 1995, p. 32). Using the same semi-structured interview with the first graders (N=336) and with the same sample when they were in their third grade (N=281), Mihaljevic Djigunovic (1993, 1995) found that they started with and maintained very positive attitudes towards the foreign language, the foreign language teacher and classes. With time they became aware of the native speakers and culture of the language they were learning and had generally positive attitudes towards them, showing that, contrary to Lambert and Klineberg (1967), children before the age of 10 do not necessarily associate "different" with "bad". Their perception of their own achievements in the foreign language became more realistic in the third grade. In a later study Mihaljevic Djigunovic (1998) found that in grade seven the Project children had a very positive self-concept as language learners as well as an understanding of the need to be successful.

Vilke (1995, pp. 5-6) reports on her findings of the following characteristics of children at the stage of concrete operations that can be attributed to the majority of children. She states that these must be accepted as important in planning any activity with young learners:

- children of this age become emotionally attached to the teacher to such an extent that it may become a decisive factor in their attitude towards the foreign language they are learning. As a rule, they either like their teacher very much, or dislike her (him) completely;
- they should experience the process of learning a foreign language as a kind of game to which they are eager to contribute physically, emotionally, and intellectually;
- some children are extremely shy at the beginning, and they must be given an opportunity to join in when they are ready, not when it pleases the teacher;
- seven year olds often show a possessive attitude towards the teacher if they like her, but are not particularly interested in their peers in the class. Some children are not interested in making friends at that age;
- they cannot concentrate on one activity for more than five to ten minutes, after which time they become tired and bored;
- with many children, their imagination has yet to be aroused;
- children of this age, generally speaking, find the foreign language experience unthreatening, challenging and enjoyable enough to keep their motivation. The

pupils' parents are people of various professions and levels of knowledge. They are happy that their children started learning a foreign language in the first form, and they see it as an advantage.

Materials

The situation now is very different from that in 1991. Today there are Croatian materials written specifically for young learners following the Project scheme. These have been prepared by Croatian authors and are approved by the Ministry of Education. The materials contain topics of interest and relevance to young learners: they involve the pupils in different activities through which various language functions and structures are introduced. Teachers are also allowed to use foreign materials for which they can get an approval from the Ministry.

Methods

Teachers of young learners employ an eclectic approach: they use the best of the methods known to them. Topic-based teaching is very often present as a core surrounded by other important teaching principles. The foreign language is used for most of the time. Young learners have often been observed to use the foreign language even out of class (e.g. when they meet their foreign language teacher during the break). The level of learner involvement is very high because young learners learn best when involved in an activity. The Croatian experience in teaching young learners has pointed out the great potential of dramatization of stories that young learners either listen to or read or invent. Role-playing is used very often allowing especially shy learners to express their feelings more freely. The younger the learners are the more game-like the classroom activities are. Various Total Physical Response activities cater for the children's need to be physically active. Technology plays a significant role in the foreign language classroom. Croatian teachers make use of new technology to teach young learners. Video provides one of children's favorite ways of learning. Project teachers have translated fables into one of the four foreign languages taught within the Project and have produced cartoons for teaching. Several teachers have also been experimenting with interactive CD-ROMs.

Assessment

In the first grade learners' progress is graded in a descriptive way only. From the first year onwards they are graded on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the best grade. Learner involvement in making decisions on classroom procedures is generally not very common and mostly depends on the individual teacher's approach to learner autonomy. The Croatian Project for Early Language Learning is just one example of the growth of interest in early language learning. While Croatia still faces challenges in this area, it can point with pride to what has already been accomplished.

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Biographical Information

Lidvina Stokic

Lidvina Stokic has been teaching English at the primary school level since 1982. In 1991 she obtained her MA from Zagreb University. She started working on the Croatian Project of Early Foreign Language Learning in 1991. She has been a member of the research team of the Project as well as one of the practicing teachers in the Project for the past seven years. She has written several articles on teaching English to young learners and collaborated in producing two video recordings on teaching young learners. She is actively involved in HUPE the Croatian association of Teachers of English and has served as Primary School Level Special Interest Group co-ordinator and the secretary of the organisation. Lidvina has been involved in two ECML follow-up projects. One is on learning to learn and the other on collecting data from self-observation in foreign language classes. Both projects are aimed at young learners, i.e. children under the age of 12. Lidvina also participated in several international conferences. As a teacher trainer she has run a three-day-workshop for class teachers teaching English in Vienna, Austria. Being busy does not prevent her from seeing the problems that the teaching profession faces in Croatia today. These mostly refer to an unsatisfactory status of teachers in terms of the working load and relatively low salary. It will take a few years and a well-planned process to solve most of them. Now that Croatia is looking into a brighter post-war future she should like to be an optimist.

Jelena Mihaljevic Djigunovic

Jelena Mihaljevic Djigunovic is an associate professor at Zagreb University. She is a member of the research team in the Croatian Project of Early Foreign Language Learning. After an extensive experience as a teacher of English and Russian to teenagers and adults she obtained a MA and a Ph.D. from Zagreb University. Her main research interest centres on attitudes and motivation in foreign language learning. Jelena has presented papers at many conferences in Croatia and abroad, have written numerous articles on issues such as English for Special Purposes and attitudes and motivation. She has co-authored several textbooks for learning English as a foreign language and has participated in many international projects. Her latest publication is a book on the affective variables in foreign language learning.

Baseline Study on FLT to Young Learners in Italy

Francesca Gattullo and Gabriele Pallotti

Foreign Language within the Italian Educational System

Compulsory education in Italy lasts for 8 years. Italian children enter primary school when they are 6 and leave at 11, going on to so-called "middle school" (*scuola media*) for further 3 years. A reform will be implemented in the near future which will extend compulsory school from age 5 to age 15.

Currently, a primary school teacher's qualification is a college degree achieved in a special school called *Scuola Magistrale*; secondary school teachers need a university degree in the subject(s) they are going to teach. In order to obtain a tenure position, one has to sit a national competition. This system, however, has just been reformed: starting in 2002 a university degree will be necessary for teaching in primary school as well and perspective high school and middle school teachers will have to attend a university-level teacher training course.

Italy has a national curriculum for all school levels. Although teachers are required to adhere to it in general terms, they are left much freedom in adapting it to their specific situations, especially in the primary school. Pupils take exams at age 11 (end of primary school), 14 (end of middle school) and 19 (end of high school).

There is no national standardised evaluation system, that is, there are no standardised tests available to primary teachers, nor are there any official or shared marking schemes or rating scales or common criteria for assessing any aspect of the foreign language at primary level. On going research on classroom assessment, in which Gattullo is personally involved, has cast some light on this problematic area (more details on this project can be found on the web site: http://www.warwick.ac.uk/CELTE/MLPS-Research. The European Commission sponsors the overall initiative). Results have shown that teachers are in great need of and are often willing to acquire a better knowledge of classroom assessment procedures. Teachers believe that assessment has a positive effect on teaching and it is appropriate to carry it out at the primary level. Accordingly, they all devote considerable time to it through a variety of procedures. Classroom assessment concerns both linguistic and communicative as well as non-linguistic aspects (for example, behaviour, effort, interest, sociability, family background). There are significant differences among primary school teachers with respect to their grading methods. The majority of language teachers are quite informal, placing little emphasis on summative evaluation. However, all teachers are to fill in an

evaluation report to be given to families twice a year (called *documento di valutazione*), concerning both the child's general development and his/her achievement in specific subjects; the report includes many aspects, from the pupil's personality and attitudes to interest and motivation, from language competencies to social behaviour, etc.

Foreign Languages in Curriculum and Teacher Training

In the last ten years Italian primary schools have undergone major changes. Of particular relevance to our inquiry is the introduction of the teaching of a foreign language in the primary curriculum, presented in the New National Programmes in 1985. Together with several innovations these programmes outlined a general syllabus for FLT within an integrated approach to language education (*educazione linguistica*). It is envisaged that the mother tongue and the foreign language should be taught in a closely related manner.

English is the most commonly taught language in primary school; other languages include French, German and Spanish. The general educational goals of primary schools are the child's cognitive development and socialisation. As far as foreign language teaching is concerned, global educational aims and specific objectives are considered separately. The former are stated in a 1985 document as:

1. the development of communicative competence;
2. intercultural and human enrichment;
3. enhancement of cognitive development.

The objectives are to be found in a later document, which is used by teachers as a guideline for pupils' evaluation (*griglia di valutazione*): at the end of primary school, the child should be able to:

1. read and understand a simple passage on everyday life;
2. engage in a simple conversation;
3. listen and understand simple messages.

Teacher education is financed mostly by the state. Foreign language teacher training underwent several important changes over the last few years. In 1990 very few qualified teachers were teaching a foreign language in their classrooms, and many more professionals were needed to implement the new programmes. The government decided to recruit for language teachers from amongst those already working in primary schools and ask them to become specialists teaching only the foreign language. A large in-service training scheme was then set up. The introduction of the specialist

teacher is intended as a temporary measure and will be substituted by the normal classroom teacher covering two or more subjects in due course.

In 1992 hundreds of primary teachers were recruited after they sat a written and oral exam at the local level. They immediately began teaching while at the same time attending training courses on language teaching methodology lasting 100 / 150 hours. Those who needed to improve their language skills attended special training (from 200 to 300 hours) and started teaching in 1993. In the same year more in-service teachers were recruited and trained as specialists following the same procedure, and this group began teaching in 1994. This system of recruitment and in-service training is still continuing, with some degree of variation. More and more teachers are being trained to become "specialised" in L2, that is, ordinary classroom teachers having the foreign language as one of their subjects. Most of these teachers, unlike the earlier ones, begin learning the foreign language from a very elementary level or are absolute beginners.

Most training courses and manuals encourage "purposeful speaking and listening", "motivating activities" such as games and role-plays, and the use of language in context. The recommended sequence of language abilities goes from reception (listening and reading) to production (speaking and writing).

After their initial training, foreign language teachers have to attend some follow-up in-service courses every year. These are normally financed by local education authorities; some courses are also organised by universities, private institutions, teachers' associations, and have to be recognised by the Ministry of Education in order to be accepted as valid for in-service training requirements. There are a few conferences and journals in which teachers can exchange ideas, publish their reports and obtain advice of experts.

Young Learners and Foreign Languages

On average, children start learning foreign languages when they are eight and receive three hours of instruction per week. Foreign languages are a compulsory subject; children can choose which language they wish to study, although their requests cannot be always satisfied due to teacher availability. A few children also attend private language schools. The language most widely taught at the primary level is English, followed by French, German and Spanish.

Given the still developing character of foreign language teaching in primary schools, currently there are still both 'specialist' teachers (who teach only the foreign language) and 'specialised' teachers (who teach the foreign language as one of their two or three subjects). The trend is toward having only specialised teachers: the advantages are that language teaching can be better integrated with other subjects in the curriculum and is

carried out by a person who has a good knowledge of the class; a disadvantage is that such a teacher's L2 competence may be rather poor, especially if compared with that of the specialist teacher.

Foreign language education as a compulsory subject is directed to all the children. There is no streaming according to language proficiency, and language lessons are attended by entire classes.

In most of the cases the teacher selects one textbook to be used by all pupils. Textbooks are typically monolingual and are especially designed to meet the needs of young learners. They contain simple dialogues, songs, rhymes, a few pattern exercises, games and lots of pictures. Some teachers also use authentic materials, such as magazines, comics, posters, and in many classrooms there is a corner dedicated to the foreign language and culture taught. The use of tape recorders is quite widespread, with video becoming increasingly popular; computers and the Internet are still a resource beyond the reach of most schools.

The issue of what teaching methods are used cannot receive any simple answer. Teachers are in general left a high degree of freedom with respect to syllabus design and methodology and, to date, there has been no systematic research carried out to ascertain what they actually do in their classrooms. A questionnaire distributed by Regione Emilia Romagna Educational Authority in 1994 to foreign language teachers (Bertacci & Sanzo, 1994) included a few questions about syllabus design, methodology and teaching strategies. As to syllabus design, many teachers outlined a product-oriented syllabus based on language functions and notions, with frequent references to grammar structures. Such recommendations are mirrored in most textbooks, organised along topics and function / notion lists within each topic. As to teaching strategies, the questions were too vague and led to blur results. Most teachers said they follow a "notional / communicative method" or a "mixed approach", but there was no indication of what was meant by this. A research carried out by Gattullo (1998) has tried to fill this gap by comparing teachers' self-perceptions about their own teaching and their actual practices in the classroom.

Challenges and Issues

Language provision for the whole national territory

Despite the enormous effort and investment that has been made since 1992, there are still many children who have not been taught a foreign language. This applies particularly to areas, which are disadvantaged in other respects also, particularly some Southern and mountain areas.

Evaluating the innovation

Three years after the introduction of foreign languages at primary level, the Italian Ministry of Education began an evaluation of the programme. The Ministry wanted to check not only whether foreign languages were actually efficiently and effectively learnt by young learners, but also whether the main aims of developing better inter and multicultural awareness and of enhancing and reinforcing the child's cognitive development had actually been achieved. A formal agreement was signed in 1998 between the Ministry and the Department of Education of the University "La Sapienza" of Rome in order to develop and administer plans for the evaluation. During spring 1999 the administration of a number of previously piloted instruments has been carried out. Children and teachers have been sampled using two different procedures: a school quota sampling for French, comprising 30-35 schools (this sample is not statistically representative, since French is taught in a small number of schools), and a school stratification sampling for English, comprising 170 schools. The total number of children should amount to 3 600, attending the fifth year of primary school (aged 10-11). Instruments ranged from teacher and pupil questionnaires, to language tests (mainly vocabulary and listening), to a metalinguistic test. Analysis of data will be published in due course and will yield a number of interesting results for future language planning, material development and teacher training (more details on the evaluation project can be found in Lopriore, 1997).

Integrating the foreign language subject within the wider curriculum

This issue has been a main one since the introduction of a foreign language in primary school. But despite the national curriculum guidelines and the stress put on them by some trainers and inspectors, it is still far from being accomplished. In particular, parallel work in mother tongue and foreign language could develop a higher pupil understanding of language aspects that may otherwise remain obscure. Some specific subject matter could also be introduced both in the mother tongue and in foreign language, such as basic science and geography, by means of practical experiments and observation. In order for this to be achieved, there needs to be a stronger collaboration between the foreign language teacher and other subject teachers. Such collaboration can only be established through school policy and focused teacher training.

Improving both formative and summative assessment procedures

As mentioned earlier, there is no standardised system of evaluation. And not much attention has been given to the fundamental issue of assessment of foreign language learning in general. Only recently a few projects have focused on it, but with an excessive emphasis on testing for certification purposes. The ongoing research project mentioned before has highlighted the following key points that need to be addressed:

- distinguishing between linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of pupil's performance;
- devising structured ways of assessing oral abilities in pair and group work;
- keeping a record of individual pupil performance;
- improving teacher feedback to individual pupils and provision of remedial work;
- creating marking schemes.

Ensuring continuity

Pedagogical continuity should be ensured across different sectors of education (particularly from primary to middle school) that children experience. Neglecting doing so has frustrating effects for all children. Teachers and parents know that pupils who have spent three or more years in primary school learning a language that is not available in middle school feel demotivated. As Blondin *et al.* (1998) have put it:

> [teachers, teacher educators and school managers] should develop and implement various means of intervention in those domains where discontinuity is apparent. The initial and continuing education of teachers … should enable them to consider in a well-informed way children's progression throughout the entire course of their education and to collaborate with colleagues at … subsequent levels of education.

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Biographical Information

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Francesca Gattullo (MA Applied Linguistics, PhD Experimental Education) is a research assistant in sociolinguistics at the Università of Trieste. In 1998 she completed her doctorate on foreign language teaching and learning in primary school at the Università of Rome "La Sapienza". Since then she has also been a lecturer of sociolinguistics at the University of Bologna. From 1990 to 1995 she taught Italian as second or foreign language, mostly at British universities. She is now involved in a "Training and Mobility of Young Researchers" programme, on foreign language teaching at the primary level sponsored by the European Community, with a research project on classroom assessment and teacher development in primary school. She has presented and published several articles on foreign language teaching and teacher training. She also works as a language consultant and a teacher trainer and is involved in two research projects on adolescents and bilingualism.

Gabriele Pallotti

Gabriele Pallotti (PhD Semiotics) is a high school teacher, currently adjunct to the Università of Bologna for a research project on first and second language writing. Over the past years he has been working on child second language acquisition and is concerned with integrating theory and practice in second language education. He is a teacher trainer, specialising on issues such as second language acquisition theory, child SLA, attention and focus on form, classroom interaction. He is involved in a 'Training and Mobility of Young Researchers' programme, on foreign language teaching at the primary level, sponsored by the European Community, with a research project on interlanguage development in naturalistic and instructed child second language learners. He has published several articles and a textbook on second language acquisition (*La seconda lingua.* Milan: Bompiani, 1998).

Early Language Programmes in Germany

Angelika Kubanek-German

The school system in Germany has a high degree of diversification which is partly due to its federal structure. The responsibility for decisions in the education sector lies with the education authorities of each federal state. The number of schools which charge fees is relatively small. There is quite a number of denominational schools.

The compulsory starting age for children is six years. A slightly younger, gifted child can be admitted. Some parents, however, rather prefer to delay the child's enrolment to make sure he / she gets the maximum of a free and easy childhood experience. The primary stage comprises four years (six in Berlin). There are four basic types of secondary schools (Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium, Gesamtschule). In some states, there is a two-year orientation-stage. Pupils can leave school at the age of 15/16 (nine compulsory years). Pupils, who sit for their Abitur, (A-level), will have spent thirteen years at school. There is some discussion to shorten this time by one year in order to improve German university students' international job prospects. It is well known that on the average, they are comparatively old when getting their degree.

Due to the federal structure there is no national curriculum. This causes quite a lot of extra work for textbook publishers who often have to edit more than five different versions of the same foreign language course. Detailed information can be obtained at http://www.eurydice.org. As a result of demographic changes due to a lower birth rate the number of pupils is expected to drop considerably around the year 2005. It is estimated the enrolments may go as low as 50% of the current figures in some of the primary schools in the eastern German states.

Germany has a long tradition of teaching foreign languages. Leaving aside pre-1945 developments, the following steps which led towards an improvement of foreign language competence need to be mentioned:

- the introduction of English as a compulsory subject for all secondary school pupils at the end of the 1960s, extending the language programme to children attending the basic track schools (Hauptschule). This meant that from then on, all children no matter which type of school they attended started to learn a foreign language from the age of 10/11;
- the renewed interest in the young (8-10-year old) learner;
- the diversification of languages offered, especially at the upper secondary level (especially grammar schools offer a very large spectrum of languages, including

Chinese, Japanese, Czech which are usually selected by older pupils as a third or fourth foreign language);

- the increasing number of partial immersion programmes (very often history or geography in the medium of the other language);
- the increasing number of school partnerships (including job practice in a foreign country);
- increasing pressure from employers to acquire higher foreign language competence.

Enrolments

Statistics from August 1997 gave a total number of nearly 8 400 000 learners in the scholastic year 1995/96 (the figures are higher than is the actual number of pupils, because pupils who learn more than one language are counted more than once). Divided into languages, the figures were approximately: English: 5.8 million; French: 1.5 million; Latin: 630 000; Russian: 230 000; Spanish: 60 000; and Italian: 17 000. The figure for vocational schools and technical Colleges amounted to 784 793 learners.

Teachers

Secondary school teachers usually study one or two languages plus one or two other subjects during their training. Future primary school teachers can in select English as one of their main subjects in some states. The initial training of foreign language teachers takes place at universities or colleges of education (the latter ones exist only in Baden-Württemberg). Depending on the organisational structure of the institution of higher learning, foreign language may be offered either at the English department of a faculty of languages and literature or at the department of education or at a central foreign language institute. The training lasts between seven / eight semesters for primary and lower secondary teachers and around nine to ten semesters for grammar school teachers. An increasing number of students interrupt their course of studies to work abroad as an assistant teacher or opts for 1-2 semesters abroad. Recently, it has become possible to gain an extra qualification as a “Euregio” teacher – who is qualified to teach in two adjacent countries.

Three to four teaching practice periods are usual, the variation being considerable. After the first academic exam, most students start a second training phase as trainee teachers with a lowered teaching load which usually lasts for two years. The current policy in most federal states is to not admit all students into the second phase of training in order to keep down the number of applicants – conditions, however, vary

from state to state. Job prospects are bleak at the moment; an improvement is expected in some years when an disproportionately high number of practising teachers reaches the age of retirement. In-service courses may take place directly at a school, at regional training centres, or at central institutes of a respective state.

Associations the foreign language teacher in Germany might join are: *Fachverband Moderne Fremdsprachen* (more oriented towards the needs of the practising teacher), *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Fremdsprachenforschung* (most members are university teachers) and *Gesellschaft für Angewandte Linguistik*, teacher associations have sub-associations for their language teachers.

Young Learners

Similar to developments in other European countries, Germany has seen a revival of interest in the field of primary foreign languages since the end of the 1980s. At present, most of the 16 federal states offer a foreign language during the primary years. This does not mean, however, that all primary schools are involved. There are financial and personel restraints.

Until now, in most cases a foreign language is offered as of age 8 (grade 3). A trend to integrate the foreign languages earlier by offering some foreign language elements from grade 1 in an integrative way seems to be gathering momentum. The time allotted varies from one to two school periods (45-90 minutes). Guidelines in various states encourage several shorter periods integrated into the curriculum. How to go about this is left to the classroom teacher. In certain contexts, the foreign language might be offered as an optional subject.

There are some language programmes at the kindergarten level, but they still are relatively rare. There certainly is a trend towards lowering the starting age, and private teachers are making offers as well. A time-honoured political initiative dates back to the German-French treaty signed by Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle. For 30 years French has been offered in selected kindergartens and been continued through all four years of a primary school in the same city.

Even though there is agreement on the basic pedagogical principles (holistic, joyful learning), several programme types are adopted at primary level.

Type A. Playful, but relatively systematic approach (for example Hesse, Hamburg)

The curriculum planners preferring this approach usually favour the, albeit not exclusive, use of a child-oriented coursebook. They state that the process of language learning is a sequential one and a carefully contructed textbook is necessary. It should be noted that methodologists who already promoted and investigated early language learning programmes in the 1960s and 70s are among the ones favouring this approach (for example, Helmut Sauer, Gundi Gompf, Peter Kahl).

Type B. Approach based on authentic materials, no systematic progression (for example, Bavaria)

According to the Bavarian curriculum planners a contemporary, child-oriented approach to foreign language learning needs to be different from the textbook and pattern-exercises once common at the secondary level. Secondly, it was felt that primary teachers, through their pedagogical pre-service training, had acquired the ability to create lessons from material they bought or shared. A coursebook might be an impediment to such creativity. The Bavarian model, thirdly, has a strong component of intercultural learning. The integration of such material arises from the context of the respective communicative community of teacher and pupils. Whereas teachers seem to get along quite easily with stories and do include quite a lot of information about other cultures and, in this sense, prove that the suggestion of authentic material was justified, the difficulties of assessing and comparing what children have learned have to be taken into account (see Hunfeld, 1997; Kubanek-German, 1996/97; Macht, 1998; and Andreas, 1998).

Type C. Language awareness proper, talking about language, presenting different languages (see Hermann-Brennecke)

Quantitatively speaking, this approach is the least common one. Depending on the interest and insight of the teacher some such elements might be integrated into other programmes as well. Two issues are being discussed in favour of it. Firstly, children learn about linguistic and cultural pluralism – a chance to somewhat counterbalance the dominant status of English. Secondly, as long as there isn't a sufficient number of primary teachers fluent in English (or another language) a language awareness model might be easier to follow.

Type D. Encounter language / window language (for example, North-Rhine Westfalia)

This approach evolved as a kind of answer to the changes towards a multicultural society taking place in Germany. The planners, therefore, decided that a school may opt for an international language like English, a neighbouring language or a minority language represented in the school population. The approach is topic-oriented and intercultural (see Landesinstitut, 1997; Doyé, 1999; Graf & Tellmann).

Type E. Border-Programmes. Regular Encounters With Peers Speaking The Other Mother-Tongue (for example, along the River Rhine, the Saarland, in certain schools near the Czech border)

Encounters of this kind are taking place close to Germany's border with France and the Netherlands, and increasingly along the Czech and Polish border. Some Bavarian young learners of Italian get a chance to meet peers in Italy. Children meet two or three times a year, usually at the partner school or at a school camp (see Pelz & Weckmann, 1989, Dettmer, and Kaiser & Raasch, 1995). Information on Czech-German initiatives is available via e-mail at: tandem@tandem.org.de. There are a few partial reciprocal immersion schools. Two innovative and successful projects are the Wolfsburg German-Italian School (Reichel, Sandfuchs & Voss, 1997) and the Staatliche Europaschule Berlin which has around 1 500 pupils taking one of several possible language combinations, including German and Russian and German and Turkish (Doyé, 1999). The French bilingual school in the city of Freiburg needs to be mentioned as well as the International and European schools in some large cities. Similar to the situation in other countries, continuity is not ensured. This is one of the problems addressed at many meetings of professionals. Some statistics from recent school years as illustrated in Tables 2 and 3 may illustrate language choice and growth of interest.

Language	Grade 1-4 1995/96	Grade 1-4 1996/97
English	233 183	279 153
French	86 158	95 320
Russian	7 775	7 582
Spanish	346	343
Italian	1 387	3 329
Turkish	1 585	1 808

Table 3: Language Choice in Germany for 1995/96 and 1996/97
Source: Bildung im Zahlenspiegel, Statistisches Bundesamt Wiesbaden, 1997 and 1998.

These figures include pupils from Rudolf-Steiner schools. The figures for Russian can be explained by two facts:

1. this language is possible as of the two obligatory languages offered at Rudolf-Steiner schools from grade 1 (see Jaffke, 1996);
2. Russian is taught at a few schools in the eastern states. In addition to the figures above, 1 281 pupils with learning difficulties (were learning a foreign language at primary level in 1996/97, the figure for English amounting to 1 227).

The most recent statistics from July 1999 are given in more detail in Table 4:

English	*Pupils*	*Type of School*
grade 1-4	274 920	primary schools
	1 603	special schools
	25 831	Rudolf-Steiner and Integrative schools
grade 5	884 782	Total
French	*Pupils*	*Type of School*
grade 1-4	85 476	primary schools
	30	special schools
	13 306	Rudolf-Steiner and Integrative schools
grade 5	20 850	Total
Russian	*Pupils*	*Type of School*
grade 1-4	346	primary and special schools
	7 160	Rudolf-Steiner and Integrative schools
grade 5	1 939	Total
All other langs.	*Pupils*	*Type of School*
grade 1-4	11 900	primary schools
	37	special schools
	282	Rudolf-Steiner and Integrative schools
grade 5	1 833	Total

Table 4: Language Choice in Germany in 1999. Among those other languages Spanish was taught to 307, Greek to 398, Italian to 4 263 and Turkish to 1 744 pupils in grade 1-4. Source: Bildung im Zahlenspiegel, Statist. Bundesamt Wiesbaden, July 1999.

The numbers for French in grade 5 are comparatively low, because French usually appears as the second foreign language in the secondary curriculum. Generally speaking, there are three groups of teachers:

- primary teachers who studied the English language and its methodology in their initial training (for example, Bavaria, Lower-Saxony);
- secondary modern school teachers with a degree in English;

- primary teachers with refresher courses at inservice training institutes and abroad. Some native speakers with a primary school teaching degree are employed as well. The foreign language is offered to all children. So far, their attitudes towards the other language are positive, according to empirical and anecdotal evidence. Parents' attitudes are positive as well, English clearly being their preferred language.

As to materials, there is a great variation. The number of commercial products is ever increasing. Teachers also draw on a wealth of teacher-made materials. The explicit intercultural focus in the recommendations of some states does not lend itself to the textbook approach. Computers are no common foreign language learning tool in the German primary classroom yet, but some teachers are using the medium to find e-pals.

When the new primary programmes started in the early 90s, there was a marked unwillingness among teachers and curriculum planners to administer tests or describe progress in a systematic fashion. The principle of child-orientation (holistic approach, integrative approach, use of stories, avoidance of anxiety, fostering motivation and intercultural openness) seemed to exclude formal testing. There have been some attempts during the past years to develop forms of observation and assessment which do justice to the child's complex and creative language learning process (Kahl & Knebler, 1996). The trend towards accountability seems to be growing. As the young foreign language learner sector at present is a very dynamic element within the educational system, there have been new developments since the manuscript of this article was handed in. Only a few can be sketched here. The new Bavarian curriculum includes two obligatory hours of English, French or Italian in grade 3 and 4. In Saxony, the "Begegnungssprache" approach (1 hour per week) was modified to allow the inclusion of music and arts and crafts lessons in the foreign language. A new pilot project starting September 2000 introduces a 4 hour per week model in selected schools (English, French, Polish, Czech). The evaluation will make use of various qualitative procedures alongside "hard" data. There are notable efforts in Thuringia, which also did a pilot project from grade 1, similar to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Baden-Wurttemberg plans to introduce the foreign language from grade 1 within the next few years , which calls for massive in-service training, given the large number of schools involved. Due to a political decision, Northrhine-Westphalia is going to abandon the "Begegnung mit Sprache" approach in favour of a more linguistic one. The challenge remains to integrate the important element of intercultural education which was brought to the foreground in the "Begegnung mit Sprache" approach into the new guidelines to be developed. Apart from the primary school sector, there is an increasing interest in kindergarten-level programmes. As, however, administrative responsibility for this sector lies with the Familien-/Sozialministerium, the articulation problem will re-occur sooner or later.

Current information may be obtained from the primary school departments in the ministries of education of the German federal states. (Addresses through: www.dbs.schule.de)

References and Further Reading

Note: Unfortunately, much of what is being published in Germany does not reach a wider audience outside of the country. As there is quite a number of language teaching professionals with a good reading knowledge of German, this bibliography might be a useful source of information.

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Biographical Information

Angelika Kubanek-German

Angelika Kubanek-German is currently at the Catholic University of Eichstaett. After her Ph.D. thesis on the image of the Third world in German EFL-textbooks, she taught at secondary state schools for five years. Since 1990 the primary sector has been one of her main focusses of research, leading to many articles, an edited volume about early immersion and her 500 page second thesis on child-oriented language teaching. This work gives a history of ideas as well as turning to current issues like intercultural awareness. She has given talks and workshops in a number of European countries, advised education authorities and was invited to be the German member of the research team asked to produce a research report about primary foreign languages for the European Commission. She is one of the editors of *PRIMAR*, the journal for German as a foreign and second language in the primary school. Of special interest to her at the moment is the field of intercultural awareness, including longitudinal ways to observe and interpret children's world views on the basis of an hermeneutic approach.

Early Language Learning in Switzerland

Regine Fretz

In Switzerland, four regional languages are spoken, German, French, Italian, and Rätoroman. Through immigration during the second half of the 20th century, an increasing part of the population uses other mother tongues. In Zürich, the highest populated canton, almost 25% of the primary students speak a non-Swiss language at home. In spite of the multitude of languages spoken by the population, Swiss children and teens grow up monolingual. Almost all schools teach one language which is the regional language. During the compulsory school years, students learn one additional regional language as a foreign language; however, the results are not too remarkable, and the knowledge of the second regional language in the average adult population is rather rudimentary, especially in the larger language regions (Bickel & Schläpfer, 1994).

In the language regions, however, where there is a large minority (Italian and Rätoroman), the majority does have some command of the second regional language. But communication across language barriers is not optimal. It is based mainly on listening and reading comprehension of the other regional language. In effect, the conversation partners of two regional languages each speak in their respective mother tongue. Also noteworthy is the special languages situation in German-speaking Switzerland, where two languages of equal value exist. The first language is the Swiss German dialect which exists in a multitude of regional variations and which substantially deviates from the standard German language in regard to vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The Swiss German dialects are exclusively spoken languages, since for all written communication standard German is used. Upon entering schools Swiss German children learn standard German, since all instruction is in this language.

However, the dialects are so dominant that the standard language is almost a foreign language and Swiss German speakers, in the conversational use of the standard language, display speech inhibitions and often express themselves awkwardly, and rather reluctantly, and sometimes even partly incorrectly. Of interest is also that the use of the dialects in spoken communication cannot be connected in any way to social ranking or status. The use of the dialect in daily life hampers communication across regions, because in regions where different languages are spoken, the German standard language is exclusively taught and spoken.

School System

The Swiss constitution entrusts the responsibility for primary education to the cantons. Therefore Switzerland has 25 separate and differing school systems. “Die schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren” (EDK) (the Swiss Conference of the Education Directors of the Cantons) helps co-ordinate educational policies among the school systems. However, since the official authority rests with the cantons this can only be done in form of recommendations.

Primary Schools

School attendance is compulsory after age 6. Time spent in primary school encompasses four, five or six school years according to different cantons. Elementary teachers are trained to teach almost all subjects. Specialists are used for only a few subjects, such as textile handicrafts, religion, and swimming, but not for foreign language instruction. Curriculum for elementary schools is established canton-wide. Also instructional materials for the primary grades, especially for core subjects, are mandated or suggested by the school authorities of the various cantons.

In 1975, the Swiss Conference of Education Directors of the Cantons recommended to establish foreign language courses in elementary schools. Previously, as a rule, foreign language instruction started in the first year of secondary school. According to the recommendations of the Swiss Conference of Education Directors of the Cantons, all students should gain knowledge in a second regional language. In all of Switzerland foreign language instruction starts with fourth or fifth grade (the exception is canton Aargau which starts in secondary school) and entails anywhere from 58.5 to 285 school hours per year. Short, frequent instructional sequences are recommended. Now likely though, is that during the average school instruction time may more likely be divided into one to four or more lessons per week.

In German speaking Switzerland and in the Italian speaking canton, Tessin, French is the first foreign language (there are two exceptions where German speaking cantons, bordering on Italian speaking Switzerland, teach Italian as the first foreign language).

In the French and the Räto-roman language regions, as well as the Italian regions, the first foreign language is German. Foreign language instruction in the elementary schools is given by the classroom teacher; specialists are used only in exceptional cases. Communicative language teaching methodology is the major emphasis, and speech structures are acquired through playful and “authentic” situations. Written language is used as a learning aid, however writing is not a learning goal. Grammar instruction begins at the secondary level. On the positive side, it can be said that the methods used in primary school produce few speech inhibitions and the students, as a rule, show a positive outlook toward acquiring a foreign language. The learning gains are evaluated but in most cantons not graded at the primary level. Foreign language

instruction in a second regional language in the elementary school is not an unequivocal success. Studies done with students, parents, and teachers in French minority language regions gave an unbalanced picture (Büro für Bildungsfragen, 1996). Difficulties arise at the transfer point between primary and secondary school. Many of these difficulties can be attributed to the different methodical approaches at each level. Another issue is the lesser acceptance of the regional languages and a greater desire for the study of English.

Language Policy

In 1997, the decision by the Department of Instruction of the canton Zürich for mandatory English instruction, beginning with grade 7 and a pilot English programme at the start of elementary school gave rise to an emotional discussion in the public and in the press about the value and rationale for the regional languages versus English as a modern "lingua franca". Following this a committee of experts of the Swiss Conference of Education Directors of the Cantons (1998) worked out a suggestion for a language policy for the whole of Switzerland. This made the following main points:

- all students should, during the compulsory school years (nine years), learn, in addition to their regional language, at least one second regional language as well as English. They should be offered the opportunity to acquire a third regional language;
- the ranking of the languages to be learned may differ by region;
- during compulsory school years, English and the second regional language should not compete;
- the cantons should respect and promote the other languages within the school population;
- the acquisition of the first foreign language should start as early as possible, at the very latest beginning with second grade in elementary school;
- different forms of language instruction are to be encouraged;
- within teacher education attention must be given to language teaching and to foreign language proficiency;
- exchange programmes for teachers and students should be broadened.

In a survey of all the cantons these far-reaching, forward-looking language proposals received mixed comments. Altogether, however, they were viewed as long term. The question of the sequence of the language which should have been determined freely by region, was criticised by the French-speaking cantons. In the end, only very restrained preliminary recommendations were submitted:

- obligatory English instruction should start with grade 7;
- pilot early foreign language programmes should be established;
- further study of the language recommendations should be undertaken.

Immersion

Based on recommendations of a working group of the Swiss Conference of Education Directors of the Cantons, immersion programmes may be implemented and expanded especially in two-language or multi-language cantons.

Finding teachers for immersion instruction may be a challenge due to protective hiring practices of some of the cantons. For example, in the Zürich canton foreign language teaching certificates from other cantons are not accepted and teaching personnel of other cantons can only instruct if there are not enough teachers of the Zürich canton available. Especially promising and forward looking is the intent of the canton Wallis to conduct teacher education in both canton languages in an immersion mode.

Bilingual Content-Based Instruction

Even in monolingual cantons, some content-based instruction can be found. Instruction in some subject areas is partly conducted in the target language. A national study has shown that students, who have been exposed to content-based instruction, partly show significantly higher gains in foreign language acquisition (Schweizerische Koordinationsstelle für Bildungsforschung, 1998). It can be assumed that especially for secondary levels, bilingual content-based instruction will increase in the future and that teacher training institutions will concentrate more on this form of language instruction. Also, newly developed teaching materials contain modules for bilingual content-based instruction.

School Experimentation

In public schools changes, as a rule, occur slowly. However, in private schools that offer early instruction in foreign languages, there is more willingness for education experimentation. Starting with the first grade of elementary school, English is partly used as the language of instruction. Teachers try to simulate the natural language gains in the first language by using English as the language of instruction in different curriculum subjects. Another private school initiative – teaching the foreign language

by using the content-based instruction method – is due to begin soon. Students will, it is hoped, gain knowledge of the language through the subject matter. An evaluation of this method is planned after it has been in effect for a specific length of time.

Schooling of Children with Foreign Language Background

A further problem exists in the schooling of children from numerous countries with different languages. There are two main goals:

- language integration, especially in gaining knowledge of the regional language;
- nurturing of the mother tongue and culture.

Courses for the development of the native language and culture of the children of foreign workers are constructed differently by each canton. As a rule, the various national and / or private foreign associations often carry out such programmes. Teachers or persons of the particular mother tongues carry out instruction and some of the mother tongue support takes place outside the normal school day. Attendance is voluntary.

Final Comments

The situation of the foreign language instruction in the elementary schools in Switzerland is fluid. The majority view is that:

- foreign language instruction has to start earlier;
- knowledge of at least one foreign national Swiss language should be mandatory;
- multilingual proficiency is to be desired;
- fundamental knowledge of more than one foreign language is more important than an error-free proficiency in only one foreign language.

There is an on-going extensive and emotional debate on the question of whether the first foreign language taught in public schools should be a national foreign language or if, as a large portion of the population desires, it should be English.

There is also the question of whether two foreign languages should be phased in at the primary level, or if the second foreign language should be introduced at the secondary level. Another question is the role of content-based instruction and the need to implement more such programmes. The drawback to expanding these programmes is the need for high language proficiency, sophisticated methodology and the ability to

integrate language and content instruction. In Switzerland, continued challenge and focus is to work with training and continuing education of our most valuable resources, the teaching personnel.

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Biographical Information

Regine Fretz

Regine Fretz, who at one-time was a primary school teacher, works in the Education Ministry of the Zürich Canton. She is responsible for curriculum and teacher training in the primary schools of Zürich. Her special interest is early language learning and she is working to provide support for these programmes. She is currently involved in a project to bring English instruction to the first grade in Zürich.

Baseline Study on FLT to Young Learners in the Czech Republic

Zuzana Faklova

Educational System

Educational Reform

The Czech educational system has been undergoing an extensive transformation for the past nine years, and is gradually overcoming the problems created during the preceding decades. In fact many of the changes in the Czech Republic itself have their counterparts the country's educational and training systems since 1989. The first stage of the transformation, completed in primary and secondary education in 1994, concentrated on increasing the number of student places and extending the opportunities for free choice in education.

The rapid increase in educational opportunities and the increased diversity of the courses offered were conditional upon a number of fundamental changes:

- an expansion of the educational system by means of new types of education and schools (multi-year *gymnasia*, integrated secondary schools, higher professional schools, and bachelor studies at university level);
- the rise of private education and support for its expansion;
- a legal amendment concerning the financing of schools, whereby the amount of the subsidy awarded to each individual school from the state budget is directly related to the performance of that school, in particular to the number of students it attracts;
- the increased autonomy and responsibility granted to the schools themselves, especially in personnel and administrative matters, as well as in matters concerning the general aims of the school and the content and methods of instruction.

These measures have created competition among schools putting pressure on the schools to establish their identity and on educators to be as creative as possible.

The Role of Private Schools

The education system has been opened to private schools with the expectation that they may bring about innovation to the system as a whole by introducing new curricula, new subjects, new teaching methods and the like. No systematic survey on this point exists, but the general feeling prevails that private schools meet this expectation. The future of private schools depends on their ability to continue to offer better and more diversified curricula than public education and to keep a low number of pupils per class. In 1997/98, there were 51 basic private and church schools and 64 grammar schools in this sector (Statistical Yearbook of the Czech Republic, 1998).

System of Education

The educational system is divided into the following sectors:

- pre-school education (for children aged 3 to 5);
- basic schools (for students aged 6 to 14);
- secondary schools (for students aged 15 to 18);
- special schools (for example, for students with special educational needs);
- out-of-school educational institutions;
- higher educational institutions including universities.

All schools and educational establishments (with the exception of higher education institutions) are either a part of the state educational system, or of the non-state system.

Pre-school Education

Kindergartens accept children from age 3. A child entering a pre-school must be judged sufficiently mature, otherwise acceptance is postponed by a year.

Primary and Lower Secondary Education

Compulsory education lasts 9 years, and it is provided in basic schools. The lower level of basic schools corresponds to the primary education (grades 1 to 5), and pupils receive a grounding in general, physical and aesthetic education. Usually there is one teacher for all subjects.

The higher level of basic schools (grades 6 to 9) corresponds to lower secondary education and provides instruction in the mother tongue, mathematics, natural sciences and civics, supplemented by history, geography, physics, chemistry and other subjects including foreign languages. A different teacher teaches each subject. Talented students

may attend a school with an extended curriculum of languages, mathematics, sports, etc. Pupils are tested by oral and written examinations.

Upper Secondary Education

The upper secondary level prepares students either for various occupations or for further study at universities and other higher education institutions. There are five types of secondary schools:

- *gymnasium* (grammar school);
- secondary technical school;
- conservatory (musical focus);
- secondary vocational school;
- integrated secondary school.

Higher Education

Higher Secondary Professional Schools (non-university sector of higher education) are open to graduates of all types of secondary schools who have passed the school-leaving *Maturita* examination. The basic goal of these schools is to enable the students to attain within at least two years of study a practical qualification for future employment in managerial functions.

Universities, the highest level within the educational system, are granted full autonomy by law. A typical programme lasts five years (six for medicine, veterinary medicine and architecture, and four or five for teacher training). Students are admitted on the basis of an entrance examination and their secondary school results.

National Curriculum

Decisions about the goals and content of teaching, how the subjects should be arranged and how the activities of the teachers and students should be organised have traditionally belonged to the central state body, the Ministry of Education.

Parallel to the conceptual and structural changes in the educational system, changes have also taken place since 1990 in the understanding, processing and implementation of the curricular documents.

An important step towards releasing rules concerning curricula was the decision of the Ministry to give all state directors the right to:

- adjust the curriculum to the extent of 10% of the credit hours;

- adjust the content of the teaching syllabi of individual subjects to the extent of 30% of credit hours;
- create their own educational programme, which must pass the ratification procedure at the Ministry of Education.

The Czech Republic publishes curriculum documents separately for each level of schooling (primary, lower, and upper secondary). The basic normative curricular documents are called *uËební plány*, which set down the obligatory subjects, their place in the school year and a timetable specifying the amount of instruction on a weekly basis. Directly linked to the curriculum are the syllabi, setting down the course of study and instructions for teaching the individual subjects in each school year.

Foreign Language Teacher Education

In order to be qualified for teaching at basic and secondary schools, teachers have to complete their university studies. Teachers of foreign languages receive initial training at pedagogical faculties (institutes of education) or philosophical faculties (arts faculties). All regular teacher-training programmes are concurrent; students follow the language programme in educational theory, psychology and foreign language methodology, and do teaching practice. With the changed political situation after 1989 there was an increased demand for teachers of English and German. The Czech Ministry of Education initiated a nation-wide project aimed at producing a large number of well- trained teachers of English and German. This decision gave rise to the three-year Fast Track Programme. In 1992, nine newly-formed teacher-training centres embarked on the programme of training teachers of English (Griffiths, 1995). This programme was elaborated in co-operation with German and British consultants from the Goethe Institut and The British Council. The graduates are qualified for teaching English and German at basic schools and the lower level of secondary schools. The course leads to a Bachelor's degree. According to the National Curriculum, learning a foreign language is compulsory from grade 4 of basic schools. The schools face a great shortage of qualified language teachers. So far, some pedagogical faculties have introduced newly-formed language courses for Primary teachers.

The usual training course for primary teachers is combined with language education in English or German. According to this innovation, the length of the course has been extended from four to five years of study. The first group of students from Palacky University in Olomouc will graduate in summer, 2001. The pedagogical faculties offer double-subject teacher training courses (a foreign language combined with another subject, e.g. mathematics, music, etc.). The courses last four years and the graduates are awarded Master's Degrees. They are qualified for teaching at lower secondary level.

Professional Development of Teachers

The official support for language teachers is provided by the Regional In-service Education Centres, most of which have foreign language specialists. Considerable support comes from institutions funded by the governments of Great Britain, the United States, Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, and Switzerland through their resource centres, which provide library facilities, hold seminar sessions and workshops, and, together with the Ministry of Education, select teachers for courses and exchange visits to the target-language countries. These activities form a closely interlinked network supported also by modern languages departments at universities. Teachers of English, German, French, and Spanish have their professional associations, each of which holds its annual national conference, publishes newsletters, conducts regular specialist seminars, and contributes to in-service teacher training. Apart from that, there are a variety of courses across the country providing unqualified teachers of foreign languages with language training and modern language teaching methodology.

Many foreign language teachers both qualified and in retraining, have opportunities for educational visits to target-language countries. They can enrol in various European Community programmes under Socrates, such as Erasmus, Comenius, Lingua, etc. There are also opportunities for teachers' initiatives and publications. The Association of Teachers of English publishes a periodical newsletter, which provides information on foreign language teaching, conferences, courses, etc. This journal publishes the contributions of Czech and foreign language teachers. There are also other periodicals such as *Perspectives* published by the British Council in Prague, *Cizí jazyky* [Foreign Languages], *UËitelské noviny* [Newspaper for Teachers], and others.

Foreign Languages

Policy on Language Curricula and Education

After 1989, fundamental changes in the study of foreign languages occurred in institutionalised education. The politically and ideologically motivated position of Russian language study in basic and secondary education ended and was replaced by the language policy of the Council of Europe, of which the Czech Republic became a member in 1990. Students have the right and opportunity to choose one of five foreign languages at basic schools (English, French, German, Russian and Spanish) and from six offered at upper-secondary schools (in addition, there is also Italian). This choice is limited only by the staffing of a given school.

According to the 1995 Amendment to the Education Act, in effect since 1997, the first FL is introduced from grade 4 of basic school (pupils aged 9) as an obligatory subject.

The National Curriculum prescribes three 45-minute lessons per week (for grades 4 to 9).

Curriculum prescribes the structure and content of language teaching. However, at the level of curriculum, the decision of the Ministry of Education allows that up to 30% of the whole curriculum content may be changed by the relevant teacher with the aim of meeting regional and local needs. The curriculum documents for modern languages deal with common aspects of the teaching of modern languages and prescribe standards of attainment for listening, speaking, reading and writing. This includes lists of topics and communicative functions and notions, and outlines the principles of communicative teaching methodology, including the development of students' language awareness and cross-cultural competence.

Czech Education and Europe

In 1999, the Czech Ministry of Education presented two important documents for public discussion. Both of them are aimed at the new concept and principles of education in the Czech Republic:

- the Concept of Education and Development of Educational System in the Czech Republic proposes the main objectives of educational policy of the government. Apart from other principles, the document stresses the importance of co-operation between the Czech Republic and the European Community, especially within the programmes organised by European Community: Socrates, Leonardo, Youth for Europe and Tempus (Czech Ministry of Education, 1999);
- Czech Education and Europe proposes a set of requirements set by the European Community and the Czech Ministry of Education. This document presents an analysis of contemporary Czech education and proposes new principles and priorities for future educational policy acceptable in the European Community. One of the priorities is Modern Language Teaching to Young Learners (Koucky, 1999).

The Czech Republic also participates in two projects organised by the Council of Europe. Both of them are in the process of verification and should be established in 2001 (the European Year of Languages):

- the Common European Framework of Reference for Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Modern Languages. This project is aimed at the objectives, methods and assessment of foreign language teaching and learning as a basis for new language curricula, examinations and teaching materials within the whole Europe;
- fifteen European countries participate in European Language Portfolio. This project is aimed at foreign language competence in Europe.

The Czech version aims to meet the needs of learners aged 8 to 15 in primary and lower-secondary schools. It uses six international language levels suggested by the Council of Europe (Perclova, 1999).

Assessment of Students

All through their primary and secondary education students receive school reports with grades for each subject twice a year. So far there is no system of standardised tests for any subject.

Examinations

At the end of the upper secondary education, the students take the *Maturita* examination (usually at the age of 18). The foreign language examination is compulsory (with the exception of certain specialised schools, where it is possible to choose between foreign language and mathematics).

There are many critical views of the *Maturita* procedure in foreign languages: examinations differ widely between schools and regions; the final grade does not really indicate the level of a student's proficiency in the language; there are no guidelines from the Ministry of Education concerning what should be included in the tests and how to provide reliable scoring of students (Prech, 1995). As this examination does not contain any objective criteria, it is difficult to compare the standards achieved at different schools. At present, the development of a new concept of the *Maturita* examination is one of the most important educational projects.

State Examinations

In the State Language Schools, those interested in a certificate of their language competence can take different levels of the state language examinations:

- Basic State Examination;
- General State Examination;
- Special State Examination with the focus on written translation or with the focus on interpreting.

In the last years, opportunities to take international language examinations in English, German, French, Spanish and Italian have increased significantly.

Since 1992 the British Council has administered examinations in English as a foreign language. These examinations are held twice a year. According to the British Council,

several thousand candidates in the Czech Republic have taken the Cambridge Examinations with a success rate of over 80%.

Young Learners and Foreign Languages

Organisation

At present, the first foreign language is introduced in grade 4 of basic school (pupils aged 9) as a compulsory subject. Although the pupils have the right to choose which foreign language (English, French, German, Russian, or Spanish), the actual choice is balanced between German and English.

The national curriculum prescribes three lessons per week (for grades 4 to 9 of basic schools). The duration of each lesson is 45 minutes. In some basic schools the number of foreign language lessons can be higher, or the children start with learning a foreign language earlier. It usually happens in non-state schools and in schools with an extended language education. The head teachers of all state basic schools can increase the number of hours of foreign language teaching. Their decisions depend on the staffing possibilities, as well as on the interest of the students. The curriculum for basic education stresses mainly oral communication, and considerable attention is paid to the development of clear pronunciation.

Pupils also have the opportunity to attend optional language courses after their regular classes. This type of language education is usually provided by private language agencies, which charge a fee for their services.

Teachers

In 1997, the Pedagogical Institution in Prague carried out research in order to examine the competence of foreign language teachers at Czech basic and secondary schools (Kovaricová, 1998-1999). According to the results, in the school year 1996/97 more than 76% of foreign language teachers at Czech basic schools were unqualified. The research showed that :

- there is a lack of qualified foreign language teachers;
- there is a lack of young teachers (due to low salaries);
- the average age is between 40 and 50;
- there is a very low percentage of male teachers (about 11%);
- learning a foreign language is difficult for pupils with specific learning difficulties;
- the situation is critical at the primary level of basic schools (grades 4-5);

- the number of students in a language class is too high due to the lack of foreign language teachers.

The situation is somewhat better in the upper secondary schools, where over 66% of the English teachers were fully qualified.

Who are the Teachers of Foreign Languages at Basic Schools?

According the research, in 1996/97 there were only 24% of qualified foreign language teachers at basic schools. The rest are the teachers who:

- have a teacher degree in other subjects, and at present take a training course in foreign language teaching at a university level (5.8%);
- have a teaching degree in other subjects, and have passed a state examination in foreign language (15.9%);
- have a university degree, and have passed a state examination in foreign language (7.3%);
- school-leavers of secondary schools (13.4%);
- have no official qualification in foreign language teaching (57.6%).

Some steps have been taken to provide the necessary minimum language training to the primary teachers who are unqualified in foreign language teaching but who volunteered to teach a foreign language. Many of them take courses in the field of foreign language teaching organised by pedagogical centres, district school offices, the British Council, etc. However, the certificates of attendance are not accepted as a qualification in foreign language teaching.

Teaching Materials and Assessment

The curriculum documents stress the principles of communicative teaching methodology. The curriculum for basic education stresses mainly oral communication with considerable attention paid to the development of clear pronunciation.

Textbooks

The 1990 Amendment to the Education Act guarantees teachers and schools freedom of choice in the selection of course books and other teaching materials. At basic schools the choice is influenced by the List of Recommended Textbooks published annually and updated by the Ministry of Education. Basic schools are obliged to provide free textbooks for each subject. Within this prescribed list, the teacher can choose an

appropriate textbook. Each pupil receives textbooks, but must return them at the end of the school year.

There are some differences between the locally produced and foreign textbooks. The local textbooks always contain a bilingual dictionary. The grammar sections are, as most teachers agree, better organised, but in some cases grammar is stressed too much. Most of the local textbooks do not have a separate exercise book, and teacher hand books do not contain detailed methodological guidance; audio cassettes do not contain a variety of listening activities comparable to most foreign course books.

In my investigation of several basic schools in Olomouc, I found out that some teachers of English design special syllabi in order to provide an introductory stage before starting to use a textbook. In this stage English is introduced through listening and speaking. Reading and writing come after the pupils have acquired the spoken form of the basic language. During this stage the pupils become familiar with simple classroom English, they learn basic vocabulary on different topics, e.g. Colours, Family, Numbers, Alphabet, In the Classroom, etc. They also learn some rhymes and songs. Using pictures, flashcards, rhymes, songs and various communicative activities plays an important role in this type of syllabus.

Assessment

Throughout primary and secondary education, students get a school report with grades from 1 (excellent) to 5 (failure) twice a year. In English language teaching the usual practice is for each teacher to evaluate pupils in different activities during the lessons and give them a variety of tests. Many local teachers tend to test discrete areas of language (grammar, vocabulary), and the use of translation is still quite widespread.

Summary

In 1990 the Czech Republic became a member of the Council of Europe and since then it has participated in various projects promoting intercultural understanding among European citizens. It has also contributed to educational and occupational mobility in the new Europe.

The Czech Republic has made good progress over the past nine years in overhauling the system of education. But much work still needs to be done, especially in the area of foreign language. The extension of foreign language education at the primary level will require extensive and intensive training of the teachers, both in pre-service and in-service courses. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for reforms to improve and guarantee the prestige of teachers in the Czech society.

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Biographical Information

Zuzana Faklova

Zuzana Faklova was a teacher of English both at basic and secondary schools in Olomouc. Since 1996 she has been a teacher trainer at the Pedagogical Faculty, Palacky University, Olomouc, Czech Republic. She teaches English as a Foreign Language methodology and is involved in the organisation of teaching practice opportunities for her students.

Foreign Language Teaching to Young Learners in Romania

Carmen-Maria Ralea

Educational System

The national educational system comprises state and private institutions. Pre-university education is subordinated to the Ministry of Education through local school inspectorates whereas higher education is co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education which respects university autonomy.

School Levels

The compulsory starting age for primary school is 7. However, if parents wish, they can enrol their children at the age of 6, which was the compulsory age before 1989. School is compulsory up to grade 8. This includes grades 1-4 in the primary school, and grades 5-8 in lower secondary school, also called *gymnasium* in Romania.

At the end of compulsory education all students must take an achievement examination, a condition for further education. As the number of places in high schools is quite limited, vocational school where reform is underway is largely encouraged as an alternative. Most high schools provide general education, while a comparative few specialise in economics, industrial education, agriculture, and arts. As a recent trend, a place in an economic high school is the aim of more and more students since the job market in this field is growing.

Teachers

Previously, primary school teachers were graduates of the pedagogical college where they studied five years as compared to four, in any other type of college. They were qualified to teach all subjects except foreign languages. Beginning in 1999 primary school teachers will be trained in special post high school three-year colleges. Their training will include the teaching of a foreign language at primary level.

In lower and upper secondary schools subject teachers who are university graduates teach all subjects. There are no special requirements for teaching at the upper

secondary school level. After graduation, all teachers must enter a competition in order to obtain a permanent position in a school, irrespective of its type or level.

Curricula / Examinations

In Romania there is a National Curriculum Board composed of specialists in education, Ministry inspectors, researchers, university professors, and teachers. Their task is to devise the compulsory national curriculum for each subject. It is meant to be a guideline for teaching and for textbook writing since there are now alternative textbooks for each subject. It also forms the basis for evaluation. However, in order to encourage school autonomy and local educational policies, approximately 30% of the curriculum is devised by schools, according to student interests and local needs. Each school offers a range of optional subjects from among which students may choose two or three.

There are two national examinations: the “Achievement Examination”, at the end of grade 8 and the “School Leaving Exam” or the “Baccalaureate Examination” (which is a prerequisite for higher education), at the end of grade 12. The “Achievement Examination” consists of tests in Romanian, or mother tongue for minorities, mathematics, history and geography. The “Baccalaureate” consists of compulsory subjects for all schools (and beginning in 1999, a foreign language) and optional subjects according to the school profile.

Foreign Languages

Background

The teaching of foreign languages has always held an important place in the policy of education in Romania. Romanian is a language of Latin origin together with French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. Traditionally, French was the main foreign language studied in Romania, but between 1948 and 1965 under the strong influence of the Russian educational system, Russian became the compulsory foreign language. Between 1966 and 1978 Romania forged new links with the world and as a consequence, the tradition in foreign language teaching was renewed. Two foreign languages are now compulsory with the first one being introduced in the second grade. Since 1989 Romania has been trying to catch up with progress in the field of foreign language teaching and with good results. Along with “traditional” languages such as French, English, German, Russian, Italian and Spanish, Japanese is also taught in a limited number of schools.

Current Situation

According to current regulations, two foreign languages chosen from those mentioned above are compulsory at pre-university level. The first foreign language is introduced in the third grade to 8-9 year olds. However, in the spirit of local autonomy, schools can offer a foreign language as an optional language to 6 and 7 year olds as early as grade 1. The study of the second foreign language starts in grade 5 at age 11-12. When students start high school they may choose to change their second foreign language and study a third one. They must study the same first foreign language throughout their schooling. French is still studied by the majority of students but there are more and more demands for English from both students and their parents. However the shortage of teachers of English in Romanian schools is a serious impediment.

The objectives of foreign language teaching are:

- to develop basic language skills;
- to equip the students with the vocabulary and grammar necessary to communicate fluently and accurately;
- to enable the students to understand and convey messages, orally and in writing, in a variety of situations;
- to encourage creative use of acquired knowledge and skills;
- to ensure direct access to scientific, technological and cultural information;
- to broaden the students' horizons;
- to help students understand democratic values.

Student progress is assessed by the classroom teacher through oral and written tests, throughout the school year. Grades are from 1 to 10 with the passing grade being 5. Except for the baccalaureate component, there are no national exams in foreign languages.

Private Education

The majority of students study in the state sector of education. There are a limited number of private language schools, based mainly in large towns, that offer courses for students of all ages or levels. A few of them provide courses in English Special Purposes. Taking private lessons is another way of learning a foreign language. As a consequence of the demand (most jobs require the mastery of one or two foreign languages) the number of people who study foreign languages is increasing.

FL Teacher Education and Development

In the third year of their university studies all who are training to be language teachers must take a one semester methodology course followed by teaching practice in a school (ten hours observation of the mentor and four hours teaching). The mentoring system created in the field of foreign languages with the help of the British Council is now operational and considered a model by other subject areas. Occupational standards for mentors have been written, the next step being the recognition of mentoring as an occupation in itself by the Ministry of Education. Most graduates (especially those who have studied the foreign language as their first speciality) are proficient in the foreign language.

After a two-year probation stage the teachers must sit for a *definitivat* examination which will entitle them to hold a permanent position in school. Passing this examination also means upgrading, which brings a rise in the salary. During a teacher's career there are two more optional examinations, the second-degree examination and the first-degree examination, which also imply upgrading.

Besides these opportunities for teacher development there are refresher courses in pedagogy, methodology and literature that are held by university professors or by specialists based in resource centres called Houses of Teachers. These courses used to be compulsory every five years in a teacher's career before 1989. Although they are optional now they are attended by a large number of teachers who feel the need to update their knowledge in the context of the education reform. These courses are free but there is no financial incentive for the teachers who attend them. One such course is the Mettext course, co-ordinated by the British Council, which aims to help teachers understand the methodology in the new textbooks and to successfully use them. General methodology courses are also organised for unqualified teachers (people who did not study the foreign language in university but have a satisfactory command of it) who cover school vacancies in the absence of specialists.

There are also regional and national teachers' associations (such as, for English, The Romanian branch of IATEFL) which organise regional or national conferences. In 1998 Romania hosted the Balkan English Language Teaching (ELT) Conference.

Information about international events is now available in Romania and Romanian teachers have opportunities to contribute papers to them. Financing comes from the Ministry of Education or from other organisations that support reform (e.g. Soros foundation, the British Council, le Centre Culturel Français, Goethe Institut, etc.)

Young Learners and Foreign Languages

Levels

At pre-school level, there is an increasing number of kindergartens that organise courses in a foreign language and parents must pay for them. There are also private kindergartens that organise the entire education in English. At the kindergarten level, there is also no national curriculum. There are broad guidelines from the Ministry that basically include topics and grammatical points to be covered in one 45-50 minute period a week. Teaching at this level is a real challenge, as teachers have to devise their own curriculum and create their own materials. Another challenging issue is the fact that teaching has to be done orally only. The market offers a variety of books, but for most children their price is prohibitive. It is hoped that locally written materials will fill the gap in the near future.

According to the national curriculum, primary school children start the study of the first foreign language in the third grade (age 8-9). They study it in two 45-50 minute periods per week. The number of students in a regular class is 25. Children can start learning a foreign language as an optional subject in grade one if it is included among the school's subject offerings. Parents have the right to take their children to those schools that offer the subjects in which they are interested. As most of them want their children to study English, schools try hard to meet their expectations. This means increased teaching loads for teachers.

Special Classes

For grades 3-4 schools may organise intensive classes, which mean one more period per week and the splitting of the students in two groups, working with two different teachers. In these schools a native speaker may be hired (for example, a Peace Corps volunteer) to teach one of the three periods per week. The salary is offered by the Ministry of Education, and the parents have to pay for accommodation. The students who attend the intensive classes are usually selected at the beginning of their first school year, through an aptitude test in the mother tongue.

Another way of increasing the number of foreign language classes is for schools to offer an optional specialised subject in the foreign language (for example, drama, creative writing, songs, etc.). Students from different classes can form an interest group to study it in one to two periods a week, alongside their regular classes.

Generally speaking, Romanian children are very motivated to study foreign languages and most of them have the full support of their parents. The adults seem to be aware of the importance of foreign languages in the present-day and future world and manage to transmit this idea to their children.

Curricula / Evaluation

There are National Curricula for all foreign languages, for grades 3 and 4. They have in common the general objectives and the reference objectives and differ in contents to be taught. The National Evaluation Board has also written evaluation standards for all subjects, for each school year. For the foreign language there are now four levels of performance in the four skills, indicated by four grades: insufficient, sufficient, good, very good, which replaced the 1-10 scale.

Materials and Methods

Starting with 1997 Romanian teachers can choose from among three textbooks for each school year, selected by an Evaluation Board and approved by the Ministry. The offer comprises not only books published by Longman, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Heinemann but also books written by Romanian writers. The money for these books comes from World Bank, and they are offered free to the students who must transmit them to the next generation of students at the end of the school year. The other components of the teaching set are bought by the students (the activity book) or by the school (teacher's guide and cassettes). Besides the chosen textbook which is compulsory, the teachers are free to use any other materials they consider useful and appropriate.

The communicative approach dominates Romanian foreign language teaching at present and is illustrated by the new materials. This derives from the general aim of foreign language teaching which is to prepare the students for the real world in which they will need the foreign language primarily to communicate.

Conclusion

The teaching of foreign languages at primary level is undergoing a period of radical change, welcomed by both teachers and parents and students. Given the fact that a sound basic education is essential for the progress of Romania's children, like elsewhere in the world teaching young and very young learners is an important issue. Romanian teachers perceive this as a professional challenge and do their best to contribute. They are aware of the specific benefits of foreign language learning for this age group as well as the complexity involved in language teaching. Romanian foreign language teachers welcome any form of training, co-operation, experience and exchange.

Biographical Information

Carmen-Maria Ralea

Carmen-Maria Ralea is an English teacher in grades 2-8 in primary school and lower secondary school. She is also a teacher trainer for Bucharest teachers and runs two courses per year in language teaching methodology for both specialist and unqualified teachers. As a mentor she co-ordinates the teaching practice of about ten students each year. She was the co-ordinator of the group who devised the curricula for the English language at primary and lower secondary level in Romania. Since 1998 she has part-time worked as manager of the Teachers' Resource Centre at the British Council – Bucharest.

Foreign Language Teaching to Children in Bulgaria

Nadya Berova and Lydia Dachkova

This paper attempts to describe some general and specific issues of foreign language teaching (FLT) to young learners in Bulgaria. This is done within the general educational environment in this country and the specific foreign language teaching environment.

The main characteristic features of the foreign language teaching environment in Bulgaria are:

- the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science has identified that proficiency in foreign languages is essential to effective manpower development within the present context of political and economic restructuring, as well as for the developing links with the rest of the world;
- the Ministry wishes to extend foreign language teaching to the majority of pupils from an early age;
- the demand for access to foreign languages in Bulgaria, especially English, has become acute. The government has recognised the central role of English as an international language;
- English has emerged as the most popular choice for a first foreign language (students have a choice of a first and second foreign language);
- education authorities are under pressure to provide more foreign languages, especially English, on the school timetable;
- the growing market for private teaching to learners of all ages has led to the development of many private language schools;
- educational opportunities for young Bulgarians are dependent on proficiency in foreign languages.

Educational System in Bulgaria

Both traditions and changes characterise the educational system in Bulgaria. The Ministry of Education and Science is entirely responsible for the state policy of education in both the state and the private sectors.

School System – Structure

According to the new Law for Public Education of 1991 the compulsory starting age for primary schools is 7; the optional starting age is 6. The levels of schooling in Bulgaria are primary education: grades 1-4, lower secondary education, grades 5-7/8, upper secondary, grades 8-11/12.

The types of schools in Bulgaria are:

- *primary schools:* grade 1-4;
- *basic Schools:* grade 1-7/8;
- *General Comprehensive Schools:* grade 1-6/7;
- *specialized schools (for example, Foreign Language Medium Schools):* grade 8-11/12;
- *vocational schools:* grade 9-12.

The specialized schools admitting students after grade 7 are highly selective. The students sit for two entrance exams (for example, Bulgarian language and literature, and mathematics for the Foreign Language Schools).

As of 1997 about 60-70% of the secondary school graduates continue their education in Colleges for Higher Education or Universities.

General Structure of Teacher Education

The certification programmes for teachers are of several different types and levels:

- classical type of universities – five years, MA;
- pedagogical universities – four years, BA;
- higher education institutions – four years, BA;
- pedagogical colleges – three years, teaching certificate (affiliated with universities or independent).

The last two programmes usually prepare teachers for pre-school and primary education.

National Curriculum

There is a compulsory National Curriculum. New compulsory subjects were introduced since 1989 resulting from the new social, political and economic conditions in Bulgaria. For example, Russian is no longer a compulsory subject and the teaching of

the mother tongue has been reintroduced as an elective for children from ethnic minorities groups such as Turkish, Armenian, Hebrew.

The Structure of the National Curriculum covers three types of subjects: compulsory (core), optional and electives.

- *core subjects* – general compulsory subjects for all students;
- *optional subjects* – providing a specialized training. The students are obliged to choose a certain number (for example, two to three) out of a variety of options. Once chosen these subjects become compulsory;
- *elective subjects* – provide additional training depending on the student's interests.

These changes in the curricula are based on the priorities announced by the Ministry of Education and Science.

According to the Amended Law of Education passed in 1998, all students take exams in Bulgarian language and mathematics at the end of their Basic education in grade 8. They take three exams (Bulgarian, mathematics and an optional subject) at the end of their secondary education.

Foreign Languages

Before World War II, French, German, English, Russian, Italian were the most widely studied foreign languages. Since then, the most widely taught foreign languages have been Russian, English, French, German, Spanish and Italian.

In contrast to the practice in other former socialist countries Bulgarian students did not have to face the choice of either Russian or another foreign language. Russian was introduced for all students from grade 3 to the end of their secondary education, with about two to three hours a week. However, another foreign language was introduced at a later stage in grade 5, with an average of three hours a week till the end of their secondary education. At present students can choose among six foreign languages: English, Russian, German, French, Spanish and Italian.

Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum

In 1998 the Ministry of Education and Science announced its priorities. Teaching foreign languages from an early age beginning at grade 1 in primary school has become the first priority, followed by information technologies and civic education.
The Ministry set out its policy for foreign language education in Bulgaria:

- the overall objective is to extend foreign language teaching to the majority of pupils in Bulgarian schools;
- a new curriculum for foreign language teaching will be established with a view to provide a working knowledge of at least two foreign languages. Students would be able to choose from English, Russian, French, German, Spanish or Italian;
- the first foreign language is to be mastered at a general or advanced proficiency level according to the type of school the student attends;
- the second foreign language is to be mastered at a "limited" proficiency level;
- foreign language teaching in technical / vocational schools should also provide some teaching of foreign languages for specific purposes.

According to the existing National Curriculum students have a choice for both the first foreign language and the second foreign language from among English, Russian, German, French, Spanish and Italian, and normally start studying the first foreign language from grade 5 onwards, four hours a week. The second foreign language can be chosen as an elective beginning at grade 7.

In 1998 the Ministry of Education and Science initiated a curriculum development project for Early Foreign Language Teaching in Bulgaria. The curriculum is in place and has already been distributed to schools.

The number of students studying a specific foreign language very much depends on the number of teachers available.

Table 4 shows the number of students in Bulgaria who studied foreign languages for the 1998/99 academic year.

FL	Pre-school	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	TOTAL per FL
English	340	12 874	5 718	4 881	4 453	28 266
German	129	2 586	1 169	947	741	5 572
French	0	1 734	449	473	368	3 024
Russian	0	1 455	1 574	242	2 000	7 171
Spanish	0	134	96	88	78	396
Italian	0	75	25	57	51	208
Other FL	0	127	96	109	127	459
TOTAL per class	469	18 985	9 127	8 697	7 818	45 096

Table 4: Number of Bulgarian students studying foreign languages in 1998/99: National Institute for Education

The total number of students grade 5-8 in the state schools in Bulgaria for the same academic year comes up to 296 257.

Table 5 shows the total number of students in state schools who studied a foreign language for the 1997/98 academic year and their preference for specific languages.

FL	English	Russian	German	French	Spanish
FL1	327 674	120 966	98 846	89 254	8 251
FL2	37 843 (25.6%)	61 233 (41.5%)	28 200 (19.1%)	16 228 (11%)	4 126 (2.8%)

Table 5: Languages Studied in Bulgaria during the 1997/98 Academic Year: Ministry of Education and Science

Assessment is considered a crucial though still unsolved problem. There is a National Centre for Assessment of Education that is part of the National Institute for Education. The centre prepares tests related to the three levels of education at grades 4, 8 and 12. It also prepares Bulgarian language tests.

The Role of the State, Private Sector and Other Stakeholders

The majority of students in Bulgaria attend state schools. Therefore, the state has a major stake in foreign language teaching. The Ministry of Education and Science is entirely responsible for state education policy. According to the Amended Law of Education, Regional Inspectorates are beginning to play a major role that is aimed at decentralization of education in the country.

In the last five to six years many private schools have appeared, mainly of the Primary and Basic type. All of them offer foreign languages, and most of them offer English. There are also a great number of private language centres that offer English, German and French. Their courses are aimed at a wide range of age groups, from young learners to adults.

The existing foreign Cultural Centres in Bulgaria and The British Council, The Goethe Institute, The French Cultural Centre, and the BBC Centre also offer Foreign Language courses, mainly for adults.

Teacher Education Programmes

The present economic conditions in the country have led to a worrying drain of talented teachers from state schools. Most left the profession during the period of transition. Teachers are still underpaid and their social status is low as contrasted to their high

status at the beginning of the century. On the whole there is no clearly outlined state policy for teacher training. There are three main types of programmes.

- Pre-service programmes:
  - university language departments such as the Department of British and American Studies and the Department of German Studies at Sofia University;
  - primary and pre-school education and a foreign language programmes offered in the Faculty of Pre-School and Primary School Education at Sofia University beginning in 1997;
  - foreign language teaching in primary and lower secondary schools, in the Department of Applied Linguistics at New Bulgarian University in Sofia beginning in 1997.
- In-service programmes: In-Service Teacher Training Institutes (INSETT):
  - there are three Institutes responsible of the In-Service Teacher Training in Bulgaria: the central Institute for INSETT (Sofia) affiliated with Sofia University; INSETT Institute (Stara Zagora) affiliated with the Plovdiv University; and INSETT Institute (Varna) affiliated with Shumen University. Following the new priorities set by the Ministry of Education and Science all three INSETTs organised additional training courses for teachers of young learners during the last two years. About 300 teachers are being trained per year at courses lasting from one to two weeks throughout the academic year as well as during the summer vacation;
  - the British Council, the Goethe Institute and the French Cultural Centre run a range of joint programmes for teachers and teacher trainers, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science and major foundations. The programmes are based at the three In-Service Teacher Training Institutes, throughout the year and during the summer vacation. Some of these programmes provide a short module at a language centre or university in the country of the respective language. A major programme of the British Council is the “Train the Trainer” project establishing a network of teacher trainers all around the country. They are actively involved in running the INSETT based training. Some of these trainers are specially oriented to Teaching Young Learners. Similar networks are established among the French language teachers and the German language teachers;
  - there are various consecutive and integrated programmes which provide various in-school activities, including open days, observations, discussions, and small-scale research opportunities;
  - there are 1-year retraining courses at universities.

During the 1998/99 academic year the New Bulgarian University organised a retraining programme for primary teachers to become certified foreign language teachers in primary schools. In addition to the language module (840 hours), the programme also offers a methodology module including: "Methods of teaching foreign language to young learners" (60 hours), "Analysis and creation of teaching materials" (15 hours), "Assessment and testing" (15 hours), "IT" (15 hours). The programme provides 15 hours of observation and 60 hours of teaching practice.

Because of the great interest it will be offered again during the 1999/2000 academic year. The programme is closely connected with two pre-service programmes offered at New Bulgarian University: pedagogy of teaching two foreign languages and Primary and pre-school pedagogy and a foreign language.

Competencies of Teachers

Language proficiency of teachers

There are several categories of teachers currently teaching at schools:

- university graduates: there are teachers with a foreign language major or minor; they have completed a four/five year university course;
- non-graduates:
    - *certified/qualified teachers:* they have undergone a 3-year course in colleges and are licensed to teach ages 6-14. In most of the cases they are deficient in foreign language performance and their spoken English is often not fully adequate for classroom purposes;
    - *retrainees*: they are university graduates with other major/s such as Russian or Engineering enroled in a one year intensive university retraining course aimed at foreign language teaching;
    - *temporary teachers:* they are unqualified teachers, mainly graduates of foreign language medium schools who have a high level of language proficiency. There teachers represent a stopgap solution case and they are appointed for one year only. Their teaching is restricted to the lower age groups.

Table 6 shows the qualification of the practicing foreign language teachers for the academic year 1995/96. (N.B. The information given below and in the whole paper refers to the state schools only unless specially indicated):

FL	Total number of teachers	University degree	College degree	High school degree
English	3 547	2 129	575	843
Russian	2 667	2 025	524	118
French	1 958	995	702	261
German	1 557	1 042	340	175
Spanish	93	84	-	9
Italian	34	31	2	1

Table 6: Qualifications of Practicing Foreign Language Teachers in 1995/96: National Institute for Education

Syllabuses and Materials

According to the national standard for acquiring teaching qualification published in February 1998, teachers must have a Bachelor of Arts degree and must study a minimum 3 400 academic hours over four academic years.

The courses taken are classified in three subgroups: compulsory, optional and electives. The compulsory courses provide the fundamental training and the optional courses provide specialized training. The undergraduates are obliged to choose a certain number of optional courses. Once chosen these courses become compulsory. The electives provide additional training depending on the undergraduate's interests.

There are three main modules for the compulsory courses. Undergraduates with Bulgarian language and foreign language major have to take the following courses:

- general philological module: introduction to general linguistics (60 hours), introduction to literary theory (60 hours), classical language (45 hours), classical and western European literature (75 hours), Russian literature (75 hours). Total: 315 academic hours;
- Bulgarian studies module: theoretical course of contemporary Bulgarian language (240 hrs), Bulgarian literature (240 hours), historical linguistics (150 hours), Bulgarian folklore (45 hours). Total: 674 academic hours;
- foreign languages module: theoretical course of the respective foreign language (210 hours), cultural studies (45 hours), literature of the foreign language (210 hours), practical course in the foreign language (960). Total: 1 425 academic hours.
- Psychological, educational and methodological module: psychology (45 hours), pedagogy (60 hours), audio-visual and information technology (15 hours), methods of teaching Bulgarian language (60 hours), methods of teaching literature

(60 hours), methods of foreign language teaching (60 hours). Total: 300 academic hours.

The compulsory courses total: 2 715 academic hours.

Undergraduates with a major in two foreign languages have to take the following courses:

- general philological module: introduction to general linguistics (60 hours), introduction to literary theory (60 hours), classical language (45 hours). Total: 165 academic hours;
- teaching of two foreign languages: theoretical course in a foreign language (180 x 2 = 360 hours), cultural studies (45 x 2 = 90 hours), literature (80 x 2 = 360 hours), practical course in the foreign language (840 x 2 = 1 680 hours). Total: 2 490;
- psychological, educational and methodological module: psychology (45 hours), pedagogy (60 hours), audio-visual and IT (15 hours), methods of teaching of the two foreign languages. (120 hours). Total: 240 academic hours.

This gives an overall total of 2 895 academic hours.

Universities must organise teaching practice as follows: visits of teaching hours (45 hours), current teaching practice (90 hours), teaching practice at the end of the final year (160 hours). These visits include observation and analysis of lessons or other forms of teaching under the direct guidance of a university lecturer. The current teaching practice includes observation of lessons and other forms of teaching with a view to prepare the university students for their teaching practice during the final year. During the final year the student does autonomous teaching under the guidance of a teacher and a university lecturer.

Teachers' Professional Development

There is a National System for Teachers' Professional Development and Qualification. Financial incentives are symbolic. They are paid in addition to the salary and don't form a part of it. Sources are entirely budgetary.

The structure of the updated National System (1997) consists of 5 levels:

- Level 5, 4 and 3: school based, aimed at developing general skills;
- Level 2: getting a Second Class Qualification Certificate (after exams);
- Level 1: getting a First Class Qualification Certificate (after research and thesis defended at INSETT).

On the whole, education authorities cannot provide financial and other incentives to persuade graduates to enter the teaching profession and encourage them to improve their qualification.

There are associations of foreign language teachers for the respective foreign language. They all organise annual conferences and events. Besides that their initiatives are very much dependent on financial support from external bodies: foreign cultural institutes in the country and some local foundations (for example, the Open Society Foundation-Sofia). There is a national branch of IATEFL (the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) organising annual conferences. Issues of its newsletter are sponsored mainly by the British Council. The German language teachers also have a national organisation. Their newsletter is published much more regularly and is sponsored by Goethe Institute.

There is a single Foreign Language Teaching local magazine for all foreign languages. Its publication during the last two years became possible due to the financial support of the Open Society Foundation-Sofia.

Young Learners and Foreign Languages

Organisation

There have been some good traditions and pilot projects in teaching foreign languages to young learners in Bulgaria. They have been mainly outside of school.

There is an organisation with centres in Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna known as Alliance. It was established by Alliance Française before World War II. The initial courses in French as a foreign language were followed by courses in German and English starting with children from kindergarten, students and adults. Up until 1989 locally developed and published textbooks were used following a specific curriculum. Later on foreign textbooks were also introduced.

Prior to 1989 there were foreign language courses for pre-school children and primary school children in centres based at institutions called Chitalishta. These are specific cultural institutions that exist all over the country and offered courses in different Foreign Languages at very modest prices. The curriculum and the textbooks for the Alliance course were used. Some of these centres still exist and provide courses.

A pilot project for teaching foreign language to young learners was run by the Research Institute of Suggestology in Sofia starting from grade 1 and 2. The languages offered there were English, French, German and Russian for grades 2 to 8, in addition to the courses for adults. There was a curriculum with special textbooks written under the

guidance and supervision of Professor Georgi Lozanov and applying the suggestopaedic approach. The Ministry of Education and Science approved the textbooks and the curriculum. A certain number of schools round the country used these textbooks. The Institute was closed in 1991.

As far as the state schools are concerned, in 1993 the Ministry of Education and Science approved two types of curricula for foreign language teaching to young learners. According to the first curriculum, first foreign language is introduced in grade 1 and is taught through to grade 12. A second foreign language begins in grade 2 and also runs through to grade 12.

An alternative curriculum is approved in 1994. In it the first foreign language is introduced in grade 1 and second foreign language is introduced in grade 5. Both first and second foreign languages are taught through grade 12. The intensity of foreign language classes in this curriculum is shown in Table 7.

Grade	1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
FL 1	3	4	5	5		5	5	4	4	4	4	5	
FL2						4	4	4	4	4	4	5	

Table 7: Number of Language Classes per Week in Bulgaria: Ministry of Education and Science

The length of each class for grade 1 is 35 minutes. For the rest of the grades it is 40-45 minutes.

Languages Taught

There is a strong movement to introduce foreign language study in the primary school. According to the statistics for 1996/97, out of 431 790 students in the primary schools 33 571 (7.78%) study a foreign language starting from grade 1. The number of students per foreign language is as follows: English, 21 478; Russian, 7 041; German, 2 687; French, 1 896; Spanish, 367; and Italian, 102.

According to information supplied by the Ministry of Education about 10% of Bulgarian students studied a foreign language beginning at grade 1 during the 1998/99 academic year.

The Teachers

In general, foreign language teachers are not native speakers of Bulgarian. They are often unqualified, part-time and appointed for one year only as they are non-certified. They are rarely class teachers.

There is no doubt that teachers' positive attitude is an important factor for efficient teaching and learning. Teachers in Bulgaria have an active interest in current ideas in the foreign language methodology. They take part in seminars, workshops and courses and contribute in motivating their learners.

The Learners

The learners are highly motivated. They are actively involved in the teaching-learning process. The parents want their children to be part of the united Europe.

A recent study outlined the following Foreign Language situation in Bulgaria:

- 4% of the population aged 18-65 can use a foreign language as a tool for working communication;
- 20% of the university graduates have a working knowledge of a foreign language (most of them have attended a foreign language school);
- 70% of the parents would like their children to have a working knowledge of English.

Materials Used

The Ministry of Education and Science is the only body authorized to approve and recommend a list of foreign and local textbooks to be used for every grade and type of school. The schools then select among the listed textbooks, which generally fit into three main categories: textbooks written and produced locally; foreign textbooks licensed for publishing in Bulgaria; and original foreign textbooks offered on the Bulgarian market by representatives of the publishers.

The situation with teaching materials varies among the different foreign languages. No local textbooks for the teaching of French, Spanish and Italian are available for the primary school. There are local textbooks for German and Russian language for grade 1. There is a choice of two course book sets for the teaching of German for grade 1-3 and one course book for grade 4. A new course book written and published in Bulgarian was expected to be available in September 1999.

The foreign textbooks licensed for publishing in Bulgaria are mainly for higher grades. Mainly textbooks from the UK and France that are used for the teaching of English and French, while the Spanish Embassy provides textbooks for Spanish.

English language teaching materials available on the Bulgarian market that are recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science are:

Grade 1-4 (Early Foreign Language Teaching – English)

BBC:	*Muzzy in Gondoland; Muzzy Comes Back; Animated Alpha*bet.
Heinemann:	*Bravo 1-4; Wizz Kids 1-3, Jacaranda.*
Longman:	*English Together 1-4; Parade/English Parade 1-4; Go! 1-3, New Stepping Stones; Splash.*
Oxford UP:	*Get Ready; Chatterbox; English Today; You and Me, Zig-Zag, Spy.*
Phoenix ELT:	*Buzz 1-3, Superbuzz.*

Methods Used

Contemporary foreign language methodology is used in the classroom. Techniques like brainstorming, discussion, problem solving are also applied.

Theme-based and task-based teaching is present applying pair work, group work and individual work. Learners are genuinely involved in the process of teaching. In general schools lack technical equipment. Tape recorders are used, videos rarely. IT, computers and multimedia are rarely available except in some private schools.

Teaching conditions desperately need to be improved by the provision of more up-to-date textbooks and audio-visual aids. School libraries should be developed to provide information on the contemporary world.

Assessment

As mentioned before there is normative and criteria assessment present in Bulgaria, with still a strong emphasis on the normative one. Measuring of progress is a common teaching practice. There is both formal and informal assessment.

Formative assessment is applied in primary foreign language teaching. At the end of grade 1 children receive a certificate.

Challenges

In conclusion, we would like to summarize the challenges faced by foreign language teaching to young learners in Bulgaria.

- There are not enough qualified foreign language teachers.
- Language competence is often a problem for teachers of young learners (language is not seen a being a priority at that level of teaching).
- There is a lack of financial incentives for teachers resulting in the low status of the profession.
- There is a lack of communication and co-ordination between the Secondary and the Tertiary level of education.

- There is a need for greater national co-ordination in teacher training, curriculum development, syllabus design, textbook writing and publishing.
- Pre-service teacher training is currently only conducted at universities with only small number of hours for teaching practice.

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Young Language Learners in Poland

Hanna Komorowska

The Educational System

The School System-Organisation and Finance

The Polish system of education consists of the following levels: kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and higher education. Six-year-olds start their compulsory education in grade 0, which can exist either as the highest class of the kindergarten including children aged 3-7 or can exist as the lowest class in the primary school, which includes children from the age of 7 to 15. The primary school lasts eight years and is compulsory for all students. Every child starts school during the year of his seventh birthday and continues until completion of primary school, but not past the age of 17. Three percent of primary school children are enroled in institutions of special education.

Ninety-eight percent of graduates from primary schools proceed to various forms of post-primary education, and around 80% of the population complete post-primary education. Some post-primary schools comprise full secondary schools giving the right to enter universities. These are 4-year general secondary schools, 4- or 5-year vocational *lycees* and full secondary technical schools. Some post-primary schools are non-full secondary 3-year basic vocational schools. Approximately 25% of primary school graduates enter general secondary schools, while about 27% enter vocational *lycees* and full secondary technical schools. Almost half of the population enter 3-year basic vocational schools.

Kindergartens, primary schools and most of the secondary schools are established and supervised by regional authorities with curricula and educational supervision provided by the Ministry of Education. In 1989 it became legal for private schools to be created and now there are more than 500 such schools, most of which are non-profit fee-paying institutions.

Eighteen percent of students continue education in institutions of higher education working toward a 3-year BA/BS with a 2-3-year MA follow-up or toward a 5-year MA/MS at free day courses as well as at fee-paying evening or extramural courses of state universities. More and more enrol in newly opened private institutions of higher education and in state and private 2- and 3-year post-secondary vocational schools.

Teacher Education

Until 1990 5-year MA University diplomas automatically carried a teaching qualification, though not much actual teaching preparation was included in academic programmes. Since then for all subject areas except for foreign languages, qualifications for teaching at the primary level can be obtained from 3-year teacher training colleges. Qualifications for teaching at the secondary level can be obtained through participation in 5-year MA programmes that include a pedagogical component.

National Curriculum

Core curricula are uniform for the whole country, but schools may create their own curricula and submit them for Ministry of Education approval. Three school levels divided into four stages will soon be introduced within the framework of the new educational reform. Each stage will aim to achieve a prescribed set of competencies or key qualifications. This will partly determine the selection of the teaching content and the choice of approaches adopted though basic flexibility of authoring programmes and methods will be preserved. The outline of the educational reform and its implications for the early start, syllabus design, language teaching methodology as well as examination and testing will be discussed in the next section.

Foreign Languages

History of Foreign Language Teaching

Until 1990 Russian was taught beginning in grade 5 of the primary school, while a Western foreign language was taught at the secondary general level only (15% of the age cohort). English was taught according to a linear, grammatical syllabus within the frames of the modified audiolingual approach characterised by everyday topics and meaningful exercise. Western languages were introduced into the primary curriculum in 1990 when all languages were granted equal status. This made it possible to teach English to 11-year-olds in state schools and 7-8 year olds in many of the fee-paying schools. Thus considerable methodological change in the direction of the communicative approach were called for.

Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum

The new common core curriculum requires primary schools to offer two hours of foreign language instruction per week in grades 5-8. The common core curriculum gives a very general outline for the teaching of foreign languages stressing motivation and interest within approaches oriented towards listening and speaking. There are no

formal pre-determined lists of topics, vocabulary and structures that would determine selection and gradation of the teaching content. Most of the primary schools teach within the official framework of two hours per week financed by the state, though many schools finance an additional hour from the Parent-Teacher Association budget.

The Role of the State and Private Sectors in the Teaching of Foreign Languages

As has been previously stated, the state minimum guaranteed by the Ministry is two hours of a foreign language per week starting from grade 5. State education has made an effort to provide a choice of languages (English, French, German and Russian) in grade 5, though in many rural schools the selection is determined by the availability of teachers. This means that Russian still prevails against the wishes of learners and parents. In order to introduce English, parents have to finance private teachers who offer additional paid tuition on the school premises. In these kinds of programmes there is no uniformity whatsoever. The same happens if parents want an earlier start or more contact hours than the state-financed minimum. Further diversification of the educational context took place when regional self-governments became responsible for school finance. Since the financial potential of regions varies considerably, in some regions it is possible to finance all or part of what is elsewhere financed directly by parents.

Most of the non-state schools (profit and non-profit) offer four hours of one foreign language throughout the whole of the primary and two hours of another language in grades 5-8 or 6-8 and are thus the only context of true early start. This, however, again depends on individual school finance.

Teacher Education Programmes for Foreign Language Teachers

A teaching qualification can be obtained in three different ways:

- by obtaining an MA philological diploma with a pedagogical curriculum component at a 5-year course of studies offered by universities;
- by obtaining a diploma from a 3-year teacher training college with or without a BA from a university supervising the college;
- by obtaining a diploma of any higher school, a diploma of Cambridge First Certificate (Cambridge Certificate of Advanced English (CCAE) from the year 1998) and a certificate of completing a 270-hour methodology course organised by a university.

It is to be noted that teachers taking a short-cut to qualification have to pass Cambridge examinations as regular examinees paying their own fees since there is no system of state proficiency examinations for language teachers. Teachers in 3- or 5-year courses

pass proficiency examinations offered as part of the regular course of studies. College exit language examinations are comparable with the Cambridge CAE, while university exit examinations are comparable with Cambridge Proficiency in English.

All the above mentioned ways give the right to teach a given foreign language in both primary and secondary schools throughout Poland. There is, therefore, no division in the teacher profession related to age groups. Relatively more unqualified teachers are employed in primary schools, and relatively more unqualified teachers teach English. Due to the parental pressure to have English offered in school, principals find it hard to provide fully qualified teachers for so many groups of students.

Teachers' Competencies

Competencies developed within a 3-year college programme of teacher education comprise:

- linguistic skills;
- general pedagogical skills;
- skills related to language teaching;
- reflective skills as well as academic skills enabling professional development and further education.

They are developed within four components of the college programme, i.e. within a block of language education, a block of psycho-pedagogical education, a block of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) methodology and teaching practice, and the so-called block of background studies (literature, culture and linguistics). Teaching young learners does not form a specific course. Some issues are discussed in EFL methodology classes.

Teachers Professional Development

Graduates from teacher training colleges can enrol in follow-up MA courses at Departments of Philology and / or Departments of Cultural Studies (2- or 3-year programmes depending on a given university). Programmes of this kind are typically run as extramural weekend courses for practising teachers.

For those who want to develop but are not interested in a degree programme a special in-service teacher training programme has been developed by the Ministry of Education and the British Council aiming at the provision of afternoon, week-end and summer courses of English language and culture as well as English teaching methodology for both unqualified and for qualified practising teachers. There are

eleven In-Service Teacher Training Institute regions each with its leaders based at a local teacher training college.

Young Learners

Organisation of Language Teaching and Language Taught

Languages are taught as separate subjects usually twice per week starting in grade 5. Early start language teaching happens quite often in kindergartens and lower grades of primary schools, though no statistics are available due to the fact that these lessons are paid individually by parents on an optional basis. English is a dominant language in early start classes due to parental pressure; German comes second with relatively few groups learning French. Russian does not form part of the early start and enters the curriculum of primary schools that cannot find teachers of Western languages as late as in grade 5 (age 11). Foreign language lessons are conducted by language specialists who very often work in isolation from the classroom teacher. There is a tendency, however, to promote various forms of co-operation. Due to low levels of language skills among graduates from pedagogical departments on the one hand, and to one-subject studies at teacher education departments on the other hand, there are practically no classroom teachers offering English within the framework of integrated programmes. Certain attempts at integration are made by college teachers specialising in teaching young learners and are related to lessons given by trainee students within their teaching practice.

In 1997/98 English as an obligatory subject was taken by 1 146 200 students of the primary, 904 300 in urban areas, and only 241 900 in rural areas. This means that English in the primary takes up 31.3%, Russian 15.2%, German 16.1% and French 1.9% of all primary school students (components do not add up to 100 as some primary school children do not learn any foreign language at all – especially in grades 1-3. Also some students take two languages).

When learning English both as an obligatory and as an optional subject is taken into consideration vis-à-vis all the other foreign languages the following percentages can be given: 47.9% learners of a foreign language take English, 24.7% take German, 23.3% take Russian and 2.9% take French. There are, however, huge differences between urban and rural areas with 56.3% students learning English in urban areas and only 33.1% in rural areas.

Teachers

Teachers of English at the primary level often come from the group of unqualified teachers or teachers being currently retained. This is due to a relatively low prestige of

primary education, difficulty of work at this level and to attractive market offers for qualified teachers. A lot of teaching at this level comes from students at philology departments or teacher training colleges working part-time, as well as from former Russian teachers who have graduated from 3-year teacher training colleges.

Materials

There is no obligatory set of materials for the primary schools. Teachers choose from a wide variety of coursebooks published by two major Polish publishers and leading British publishers. Materials are typically sold with teacher's books, workbooks and cassettes.

The most recent and popular Polish package prepared by Anna Wieczorek for the PWN Publishing House (Polish Scientific Publishers) is entitled "Bingo" and is characterised by highly motivating songs, story-telling and games with stress on pair work, group work and project work. The program has a definite competencies approach and a systematic self-evaluation component entering the coursebook every fifth lesson accompanied by parallel teacher's evaluation of the child's progress.

Some schools have access to video and, therefore, use video materials, most schools use audiotapes as access to tape-recorders is not a serious problem for most of the primary schools.

Methods

Methods mainly depend on teachers' qualifications. No systematic research has been carried out on the problem, though plenty of qualitative and informal data come from workshops organised by In-Service Teacher Training Institutes, from contacts of colleges with their graduates and from statements by active teachers participating in follow-up MA programmes at universities. The only systematic, though small-scale data comes from MA research projects done by those teachers as partial fulfilment of MA requirements. Conclusions from the data thus described show that unqualified and less qualified teachers often rely on frontal work, textbook based lessons, reading aloud and filling in workbook exercises. The younger and more qualified ones introduce a lot of listening and miming, activity based approaches, story telling, games, songs and rhymes. Since most of the primary work done under the age 11 level is done within the framework of private tuition, there is rarely any methodological supervision or counselling other than that given by private institutions (language schools) sending their teachers to teach at primary schools. Methods are sometimes negatively influenced by parents who often tend to think that using video means play rather than work or that teaching English /without reading and writing means their money is being wasted. This seems to be especially difficult for the young teachers to cope with.

Assessment

Assessment in grades 5-8 is based on oral production and written class-tests which are individually prepared by particular teachers often basing their work on examples of tests provided in teacher's books accompanying the coursebook. Assessment is done according to a 1-6 scale used for all the subject areas with 6 as the best mark. Most of the fee-paying schools use descriptive scales rather than the 1-6 scale at least in the first four years of primary education.

New Developments: The Polish Educational Reform

The Structure of the School System and the Timing of the Reform

The educational reform introduces two types of schools as a replacement for the pre-reform primary school embracing learners aged 7-15. These are:

- the primary school (for children aged 7-12) with two stages, integrated education taught by the classroom teacher, and systematic education taught by various teachers;
- *Gymnasium* (for students aged 13-15).

The reform will enter the school system the following way:

- curricula for the first stage of the primary (grades 1, 2 and 3) will be introduced from 1 September;
- grades 5-6 – schools can choose to follow either the new or the old curricula;
- grade 7 – schools will follow the old curricula;
- non-promotion will move the student to grade 1 of the *gymnasium*;
- non-promotion a year later will move the student to a specially formed class for non-promoted students or to grade 2 of the *gymnasium*.

The Structure of the Curriculum and the Place of Foreign Language Teaching in the Reformed Primary

To analyse the number of hours designed for foreign language teaching, we have to consider the obligatory curriculum and the leeway it gives to school principals for the introduction of additional subjects.

Stage l of the primary requires 20 hours a week in grade 1, 21 hours a week in grade 2 and 23 hours a week in grade 3, plus 2 hours of optional religion or ethics. It gives

additional possibilities of curricular changes within this number in the form of three contact hours at the disposal of the school principal in grade 1 and 2, and four contact hours at the disposal of the school principal in grade 3. Most of those hours are likely to be allotted to language education.

Foreign languages enter the curriculum from grade 4, i.e. at the second stage of the primary. Stage 2 of the primary requires 25 contact hours in grade 4, 5 and 6, plus two hours of optional religion or ethics. But additional possibilities of curricular changes are bigger here as within this number we have five contact hours at the disposal of the school principal in all three grades.

With three hours allotted for foreign language teaching the principal is likely to give more time to the first foreign language and, depending on the number of teachers in his school and their qualifications, either to the second foreign language or to computer literacy. This is likely to intensify the teaching of English as a first foreign language in stage 2 and increase the probability of English or German as a second foreign language in stage 2.

Syllabus Design and Language Teaching Methodology in the New System

Every teacher can prepare his / her own syllabus as long as the syllabus includes all the objectives and content from the core curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education. The syllabus should include:

- an introduction including the presentation of the syllabus, its origin, information about its authors, characteristics of the students for whom it is suitable and minimum requirements related to school equipment indispensable for implementation;
- a set of objectives and exit competencies;
- teaching contents;
- procedures of achieving objectives – recommended methods and techniques;
- suggestions for formative and summative evaluation of the educational attainment;
- possibly, also examples of lessons and / or tests.

Four aspects of the primary educational reform seem crucial for language syllabus design:

- integrated subject areas which are likely to support the idea of content-based instruction and cross-curricular topics in the teaching materials;
- no obligatory segmentation of content into subjects, which will open the way for the so-called language providers, i.e. classroom teachers with no formal language

qualification who might introduce some language within the frames of global classroom teaching;

- descriptive evaluation which calls for changes in teacher's books to help teachers arrive at an informative but realistic format of descriptive assessment and changes in activity books and student's books to include elements of self-evaluation;
- end of school tests to function as a diagnostic instruments for *gymnasium* teachers (*gymnasia* have to take all the students on a regional basis).

This has clear implications for syllabus design and teaching methods. Syllabuses more likely to be approved by the Ministry are those which stress integration and cross-curricular contents and activities, are prepared by teams of teachers (e.g. a foreign language teacher and a classroom teacher) and which include clear practical suggestions related to teaching and evaluation with sample lessons and sample tests.

Examination and Testing

A Central Examination Committee has just been nominated of which I am a member responsible for post-*gymnasium* (as well as post-secondary) external testing.

External testing will be introduced, though in the beginning it is likely to play a diagnostic function vis-à-vis the new primary system rather than that of assessment. Most probably assessment will embrace three components:

- student's mark in grades 5 and 6;
- student's portfolio;
- student's external test score.

International examinations will definitely play an important role as another source of information about the student. It is not yet obvious whether any international exam would be formally recognised to replace external testing.

The first examination at the end of primary school will take place in three years' time (2002) and will include children from this year's (1999) grade 3. Criteria should be published two years before the first examination.

School Starting Age and the Early Language Start: Plans for the Future

An interesting aspect here is a growing tendency to lower the school starting age from 7 to 6. The idea will most probably be implemented very soon in a gradual way. More and more 6-year olds will be starting their education in grade 1 on the basis of school readiness tests administered by school psychologists or local educational centres. This can and will affect the language start as well as language teaching methodology, most

probably first in fee-paying schools which usually start language education from grade 1 and then in state schools where languages are introduced on the initiative of parents' committees and paid for by the committee.

As for the language start, the Ministry is analysing four possible scenarios of lowering the starting age for language learning:

Scenario 1 – start in grade 1:

- grade 1 and 2 taught by the classroom teacher (20 minutes each day);
- grade 3 and 4 taught by the language teacher (three contact hours per week).

Scenario 2 – start in grade 2:

- grade 2 taught by the classroom teacher (20 minutes each day);
- grade 3 and 4 taught by the language teacher (three contact hours per week).

Scenario 3 – start in grade 1:

- grade 1 and 2 taught by the language teacher (two hours per week);
- grade 3 and 4 taught by the language teacher (three hours per week).

Scenario 4 – start in grade 2:

- grade 2 taught by the language teacher (two hours per week);
- grade 3 and 4 taught by the language teacher (three hours per week).

Each scenario is also analysed from the point of view of its implementation. The question is whether to introduce a given scenario throughout Poland or whether to introduce it gradually with decisions in each case made by the school principal.

Introducing language education through classroom teachers does not seem probable because of the shortage of staff and finance. Difficulties are also connected with the network of schools.

In 1999 there are 19 500 primary schools in Poland and 2 000 of these will be closed. Introducing language education according to any possible scenario is difficult as 8 000 primary schools have less than 100 students and 1 500 schools have less than 30 students.

True promotion of language education that later influences the level of advancement at gymnasium level depends on those schools. It should also be noted that Poland has 2 000 schools with only three grades, which today means schools providing stage 1 of the primary education only. This makes scenarios 3 and 4 highly improbable in these cases.

Language education will almost certainly follow scenario 3 and 4 in private and in fee-paying schools. There is high probability that scenarios 1 and 2 will be implemented gradually depending in grades 1 and 2 on the language level of classroom teachers and in grades 3 and 4 on the local educational authorities budget.

The highest probability, however, goes to a scenario not listed in the early plans of the Ministry. Let us call it scenario 5. This scenario is the one which, according to the recommendations by the Council of Europe, is based on language providers, who are classroom teachers with a relatively good knowledge of the language, introducing some English in grades 2 and 3 in stage 1 of the primary with a regular follow up organised by the language teacher from grade 4 on (in line with the requirements of the educational reform in stage 2 of the primary).

If scenario 5 is to be followed with the classroom teacher offering 20 minutes of a foreign language in grade 2 and grade 3 and the language teacher taking over from grade 4, Poland would need 10 000 primary school classroom teachers who have enough English to function as language providers (possibly also 6 000 teachers with German and 1 000 with French). This causes practical problems connected with:

- pre-service education of classroom teachers (a new foreign language component);
- in-service teacher training including a language and methodology course;
- procedures of recognising qualification to function as a language provider.

Financing the reform in terms of staff provision must be based on a diagnosis of the present state of language teaching in the primary as well as the needs in this field. Promoting obligatory language teaching is expensive considering staff provision. Promoting optional language teaching on a local basis is usually easier in towns where some of the costs are more likely to be covered by the regional administration.

Research on Young Learners within the Framework of the Graz Seminar

A new curriculum component has been developed by the author for pre-service teacher training programmes in the form of two modules:

- a one-semester practical component entitled “Teaching English to Young Learners”;
- a one-semester follow-up entitled “Second Language Acquisition and Learning at the Primary Level”.

Both modules have been tried out at Warsaw University in the academic year 1997/98 and at in-service teacher training seminars organised within the framework of the INSETT system.

From the year 1998/99 they have been introduced into the curriculum of the Warsaw University pedagogical component.

The first module has been designed as a practical course in English as a foreign language methodology for those who want to work with young children. It introduces problems of child learning vs. teenage and adult language learning and concentrates on methods and techniques of teaching pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary and grammar as well as on developing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills with some time allotted to the role of songs, games, visuals story-telling and drama. The module has been adapted for use at teacher training colleges. As college students receive more English as a foreign language methodology hours than university students, more project and teamwork has been expected from participants. Groups of four persons prepare microteaching sessions for each topic, which then form basis for class discussions. Adaptation of the module for in-service teacher training will stress selecting, evaluating and adapting materials.

The second module has been designed as a more theoretical follow-up to the first one. Its first half introduces problems of first and second language acquisition and learning, learning strategies, communication strategies, sources and types of error, mechanisms of interference and the whole area of problems forming a theoretical basis for course planning. More practical problems of curriculum construction and syllabus design, as well as teacher-made materials and evaluating them, form the core of the second half of the course. The module is being adapted for teacher training colleges and will form two different subjects at the third year of studies, i.e. Second Language Acquisition and Syllabus Design. Adaptation of this module for in-service teacher training will reduce the theoretical part and extend the syllabus design part to cover content-based teaching, problems of integration and continuity. This presents the situation in Warsaw. In the year 1998/99 this component has been tried out in its college form outside Warsaw at the University of Bialystok which runs a 3-year college programme leading to a BA.

As the modules have been widely promoted, most universities and colleges will now offer some of them as options for students who want to specialise in teaching specific age groups.

The Future of Teaching English to Young Learners: Conclusions

The main challenges for the Polish language education with regard to the teaching of young learners are the following:

- to guarantee language choice at the age of 10, i.e. open up possibilities of learning Western languages not only in urban but also in rural areas;
- to lower the starting age for language learning;

- to integrate language teaching with the primary school curriculum.

To achieve this we need to:

- train more qualified teachers of all the foreign languages to provide choice in the primary school;
- provide in-service training for unqualified teachers to raise the quality of language education in the primary school;
- introduce and promote teaching young learners modules in pre- and in-service teacher training to help teachers deal with this particular age group;
- encourage school-based syllabus design to adjust syllabuses to local needs.

All the above steps are in line with the new school reform to be implemented on 1 September 1999 and with the recommendations of the Council of Europe. Success, however, will largely depend on national budgetary provision and on local resources.

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Foreign Language Teaching in Primary Schools in Belgium

Alex Housen

Introduction

Multilingual competency is a valued quality in Belgium and for part of the population a necessity of daily life. Not surprisingly therefore, foreign language learning is a fundamental component of Belgian education and is begun in primary school. This paper describes the system of foreign language education in Belgian primary schools, starting with a sketch of the linguistic and political background against which this system has been implemented.

The National Situation

Belgium is a trilingual federal state comprising three linguistically determined communities (Dutch, French and German-speaking) and five geopolitical regions, each with specific language legislation (Baetens Beardsmore, 1993):

- the monolingual Dutch region of Flanders (pop. 5.8 million) in the north of Belgium, operating a unilingual education system in Dutch;
- the monolingual French region of Wallonia (pop. 3.2 million) in the south, with a unilingual education system in French;
- the bilingual Dutch-French capital of Brussels (pop. 1.1 million) in the centre of the country, with parallel unilingual education systems run in Dutch and French;
- the German-speaking area in the east of Wallonia, known as the Eastern-Counties (pop. 66 000), where German is the primary medium of instruction but where a parallel French-medium system serves the need of French-dominant inhabitants;
- several linguistically mixed areas around Brussels and along the language border separating Flanders and Wallonia where one of the national languages has official status but where protected linguistic minorities enjoy certain language facilities, including primary education in another national language, but not secondary education.

This complex organisation is the outcome of a long process of constitutional reform and extensive linguistic legislation designed to create equality between the Dutch and French-speaking communities in Belgium.

Note that Belgian constitutional legislation only recognises three national language communities, thereby ignoring the presence of non-indigenous language communities. These occur particularly in urban centres, with an overwhelming concentration in the capital of Brussels where immigrants comprise 25% of the population (Byram & Leman, 1990).

Language Policy with regard to Education

Compulsory education in Belgium consists of primary schooling from ages 6 to 12 and secondary schooling (general, technical or vocational) from ages 12 to 18, with subsequent voluntary further education.

Public education is offered by three parallel subsidised school networks which follow comparable programmes:

- the state network operated by the three linguistic communities;
- an independent network operated primarily by the Catholic Church;
- a network operated by the local authorities (municipalities, provinces).

The independent network attracts the largest proportion of pupils at present and operates, like the state network, from primary to university level.

Policy with respect to language in education differs from region to region and is determined by the national Language Law of 1963. This law mandates that education is to be strictly monolingual in the official language of the region, according to the principle of territoriality: Dutch in Flanders, French in Wallonia, either French or Dutch in bilingual Brussels and in the areas with protected linguistic minorities, and either German or French in the Eastern Counties. Choice of linguistic regime in the bilingual regions and protected language areas is largely a matter of self-definition, with the individual selecting the language in which he or she wishes to be educated.

Since legislation prohibits the use of another language as medium of instruction (i.e. for teaching subjects other than language per se), it follows that bilingual education is illegal in Belgium, European Commission directives and Council of Europe recommendations to the contrary notwithstanding. The only statutory exception are the Eastern Counties where part of the curriculum (maximum three subjects) may be taught in the other national language from the 3rd grade of primary school onwards (i.e. French in German-medium schools or German in French-medium schools). Otherwise

the principle of monolingual education is strictly adhered to. Exceptions are only permitted under ministerial authority for experimental schools and "parsimoniously attributed" (Baetens Beardsmore, 1993, p. 16). Other exceptions include a small number of non-subsidised private schools and other schools which are not subject to Belgian national law, such as the intergovernmental European Schools.

The present antagonism of the Flemish authorities towards bilingual education can be accounted for by past experience with Dutch-French dual-medium classes which operated in many Belgian cities until the 1930s. Contrary to original intentions, this form of bilingual education did not educate for a stable bilingualism but, instead, contributed to a language shift to the detriment of Dutch. A similar resistance of many Francophone Belgians towards French-Dutch bilingual education and towards learning Dutch in general is accounted for by strongly held ethnocentric sentiments and the limited international scope and perceived utility of the Dutch language (Baetens Beardsmore, 1980).

Although the use of a second language as a medium of instruction is illegal, the teaching of foreign languages as a subject forms an important component of education and is also regulated by the 1963 Language Law. Depending on the region, different regimes prevail. In Flanders and Wallonia a "second language" may be introduced for a maximum of three hours per week in grades 5 and 6 of primary education. In Flanders, the second major national language (French) is mandatory. In Wallonia, a choice exists between Dutch, German or English. In the bilingual regions and the areas with protected linguistic minorities, the situation is somewhat different. Here second language teaching is optional for two hours per week in the first two grades of primary education, and becomes compulsory for three hours per week in grades 3 and 4 and five hours per week in grades 5 and 6. The second language in question must be the other major national language, that is, Dutch and French in respectively French-medium and Dutch-medium schools in Brussels and the protected linguistic areas, and German and French in respectively the French-medium and German-medium schools in the Eastern Counties.

The second language remains a compulsory subject throughout secondary education with the amount of instruction varying from two to five hours per week depending on grade level, type of education (comprehensive, technical, vocational), and orientation (for example, mathematics, sciences, economics, modern languages).

In Wallonia, where a choice exists as to the second language, Dutch is taken up by 97% of all primary school pupils. This contrasts with secondary school where 36% choose English instead of Dutch as a second language (Baetens Beardsmore, 1993; Baeten & Verdoodt, 1984).

A "third language" is introduced in the first year of secondary school for three periods a week. This is English in Flemish schools, and either English, Dutch or German in

Wallonia. Its compulsory character and the amount of instruction again depend on grade level, type of education and orientation. Finally, a "fourth language" can be chosen in the last three grades of secondary schooling in certain orientations (economics, modern languages). It can be any of the languages mentioned above plus Spanish, Italian, or Russian.

Despite their official designation as "second language" or "third language", all languages, be they national or foreign, are taught as foreign languages, even in the bilingual areas.

Foreign Language Programmes in Primary School

Objectives

Belgium does not have a national curriculum, nor is there a single national programme for the teaching of foreign languages. Each school network in each region has its own programme. A first step towards the development of a general curriculum has recently been taken by the Flemish authorities with the implementation of the Decree on Final Levels of Attainment (cf. Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 1995). This Decree defines minimum objectives for teaching and learning in Flemish education, including the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

The linguistic objectives for the teaching of French as a second language in primary education are formulated in terms of language "functions" and "notions" along the lines of the Council of Europe's Threshold Levels (cf. van Ek & Trim 1990), all this from a "communicative perspective which builds on the daily communicative needs, interests and socio-cognitive maturity of the child" (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 1995). Language functions in French which Flemish pupils should master by the end of their primary education (age 12) include: acquire and give information; express and understand desires, feelings and emotions; singing, playing, rhyming, participate in role-play, description, narration; establish and maintain social contact. Language notions are grouped in "themes" such as Myself, My family, My house, My school, The World Around Me, Leisure and hobbies. These functions and notions have been further solidified in a series of "Final Levels of Attainment" which are organised in terms of the four linguistic macro-skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). For example, "Final Levels of Attainment – Speaking" includes the ability to provide and ask for information concerning one's age, name, address, well-being, preferences, the price of goods in shops, the ability to give directions, apologise, greet and take leave, express lack of understanding, and so forth. Final levels of attainment for writing are limited to the ability to copy frequent terms and expressions.

The Decree also defines socio-affective objectives. Flemish pupils should "develop an immediate readiness to communicate in French" and should "feel communicatively confident with the limited linguistic means at their disposal". Their interests and motivation should be stimulated so that they "experience pleasure and success in their language learning efforts" (ibid.).

Curricula

Each of the three school networks in each of the three linguistic communities has its own curriculum for foreign language teaching (with the Flemish curricula currently operating parallel to the regulations mandated by the Decree on Final Levels of Attainment). Comparison of the various curricula reveals considerable variation in both content and philosophy.

The prevailing curriculum of the Flemish Catholic network, French Second Language for Primary Education, dates from the early 1970s and reflects the principles of behaviourist learning theory and audio-lingual language teaching methodology (cf. Centrale Raad van het Katholiek Lager Onderwijs, 1974). This curriculum gives primacy to spoken language, the development of oral-aural skills, and to question-answer sequences as the primary manifestation of spoken language and the optimal context for language learning. The following staged teaching / learning procedure is prescribed:

- listening to and comprehending spoken language (dialogue);
- reproduction of spoken language;
- production of spoken language;
- looking at and comprehending written language (silent reading);
- oral reproduction of written language (reading aloud);
- copying single words and simple sentences;
- systematic evaluation (oral skills only).

Listening, imitation, repetition, rote-learning, pattern-drilling and substitution exercises are central teaching-learning activities. There is no analytic grammar teaching; instead, pupils should be led to induce the relevant grammatical features of French themselves. Use of the mother tongue (Dutch) during the French lessons should be avoided; instead the exclusive use of French is prescribed "to establish a direct association between the situation and the foreign language" (ibid.).

The curriculum outlined above contrasts markedly with that of the Flemish state network and the French-speaking Catholic network for the teaching of respectively French and Dutch as foreign languages (cf. Ministerie van Onderwijs, 1987; Conseil

Central de l'Enseignement Maternel et Primaire Catholique, 1989). These two curricula date from the mid-80s and are based on the communicative and functional-notional principles of foreign language teaching with some features of the audio-lingual and direct methods. Both curricula take as their starting point the socio-affective disposition and specific communicative needs of the pre-pubescent child, who is to be stimulated "to use the foreign language creatively and autonomously". To motivate pupils, teachers should organise their teaching around authentic oral language situations that relate to the child's experiences. They should "apply appropriate didactic techniques to create a relaxed, playful learning atmosphere". The teaching syllabuses are organised around a number of "language functions essential for communication with the environment" (for example, time reference; asking and giving directions; describing people; greeting and leave taking; expressing discontent and preference). Receptive skills precede productive skills and oral-aural skills precede literacy skills. The recommended didactic procedure is as follows (Ministerie van Onderwijs, 1987):

- motivation of pupils and contextualisation of new language material;
- presentation and global comprehension of new language input, using a variety of formats (for example, songs, dialogues, rhymes, plays, picture description, poems, stories);
- exploration of the input (i.e. explanation, elaboration and partial memorization), ultimately leading to cognitive integration;
- production (guided, semi-guided, free) of the integrated language material, using a variety of communicative activities and techniques (for example, conversation, role-play, games, poetry, singing, narration);
- evaluation through continuous informal assessment.

Both curricula stipulate that grammar should be presented "indirectly and inductively". The French-speaking Catholic curriculum also calls for some analytic grammar work in the 6th grade to pave the way for a more systematic approach to the study of Dutch grammar in secondary education. Both curricula further stress the importance of incorporating knowledge about the target language culture into the language lessons through the use of authentic materials, media and contacts with native speakers. Finally, both curricula insist on the exclusive use of the target language as medium of instruction. In this respect the Flemish state curriculum stresses the importance of the "impeccable quality" of the oral input provided, which ought to be "accurate, fluent, clear, natural and authentic".

None of the curricula provides details about the actual content, methods, strategies, techniques, or materials for teaching. They merely present general principles and broad guidelines for foreign language instruction, leaving considerable room for personal interpretation and application by the individual schools, teachers or textbook designers. Although there has been no systematic research to date on how these broad guidelines are implemented in actual classroom practice, analysis of course materials and

observation of a restricted number of sample lessons give some idea of teaching practices. This will be discussed in the next section which, for reasons of space and surveyability, will concentrate on the situation in primary schools in Flanders.

Methods

An unpublished survey produced for the Flemish Department of Education in 1995 reveals that, considerable differences between their respective curricula notwithstanding, all three school networks in Flanders employ essentially the same methods and materials for the teaching of French as a foreign language. These materials have all been specially developed for the Flemish market. More than 80% of all schools use a course called Eventail (Decoo & Preckler, 1988). This very popular course strictly adheres to the principles of the grammar-translation method and explicitly rejects those of more communicative methods. New language material is introduced in the form of spoken or written dialogues and narrative prose. Vocabulary and grammar are considered the prime agents in the language learning process. Grammar is presented explicitly, systematically and deductively. The syllabus is structurally organised; each teaching unit is built around a grammatical structure (for example, the indefinite article *un / une*) which is formally presented, explained, illustrated, memorised and finally practised by means of pattern drill, substitution and cloze exercises. Translation is also an important teaching activity. All four skills receive more or less equal emphasis, with special attention to the correct pronunciation and spelling of French. Speaking activities mainly consist of individual and choral repetition. Learning activities are strongly teacher-dominated, leaving little room for pupil initiative and autonomy. *Eventail* strongly recommends the use of the mother tongue (Dutch) as the medium of instruction. References to French-speaking life and culture are minimal. To induce and sustain pupils' interest and motivation, the units in *Eventail* are built around two popular Flemish comic-strip characters.

Two other courses, *Dans le Vent* (Dewaele & Van Loo, 1986) and *Passerelle* (Housiau & Van Vreckem, 1986), together used in 15% of Flemish primary schools, reflect a rather different approach to foreign language teaching. Both courses are rooted in the communicative tradition, more specifically the functional-notional method, with some elements of audio-lingualism. Their syllabuses are content and activity-based and designed around a series of themes with associated language functions and situations (for example, at home, at school, on the phone). New language material is introduced in a variety of text formats (for example, recorded dialogues, stories, songs, rhymes, comic strips, jokes, riddles, crosswords, poems). Emphasis is on oral comprehension, expression and fluency, with attention to basic lexis and grammar. Writing is kept to a minimum. More traditional techniques such as choral repetition and substitution exercises are also used. Although there is no systematic focus on grammar pupils are encouraged to note down useful expressions, structures or other striking linguistic features in a special copy book. This, the course designers hope, will help pupils to induce their own rules and construct their own grammar of the foreign language. Both

methods also aim to develop a favourable affective disposition towards French. However, references to French-speaking life and culture, be it Walloon or French, are minimal. Instead, a variety of child-attuned teaching activities and techniques are applied (for example, singing, acting, story-telling, games, drawing). Finally, both courses strongly advocate the use of the target language as the sole medium of instruction.

In summary, traditional rationalistic-analytic teaching practices appear to prevail in French-foreign language classrooms in Flemish primary schools, partly because of the spread of one particular method (*Eventail*). French is taught strictly as a foreign language, without recourse to the multilingual reality of Belgium. This observation is confirmed by an informal survey which indicated that exchange or correspondence programmes with French-speaking schools are not part of standard teaching practice, nor are visits to the French-speaking regions or inviting French native speakers into the classroom (this survey was conducted for the purposes of this paper in 25 randomly selected schools in Flanders (five in each Flemish province) and in 15 schools in Wallonia and Brussels). The same survey suggests that a similar situation prevails in the foreign language classes in French-medium schools in Wallonia and Brussels.

Evaluation

The various curricula and the Flemish Decree on Final Levels of Attainment stipulate that evaluation should take the form of continuous, informal and formative assessment rather than summative assessment and formal achievement testing. Specifics about the format, content or frequency of evaluation, however, are not given but left to individual schools and teachers. A survey indicates that most teachers rely on the evaluation materials included in the course books. Given the differences between the various courses, similar differences can be expected in evaluation practices. These may range from informal assessments of oral comprehension and expression to formal written testing of knowledge of selected lexical and grammatical forms.

Pupils' performance in foreign language lessons in primary school is sanctioned with a separate mark. Unsatisfactory performance can hold a child back as the grade moves up since the mark for the foreign language is included in the computation of the overall average mark. This grading practice is inspired by the prevailing view that the principal task of foreign language instruction in primary education is to bring pupils up to the level required for the systematic study of the foreign language in secondary school.

Teachers and Teacher Training

Foreign language instruction in primary education in Belgium is the responsibility of the regular class teacher. This contrasts with secondary education, where foreign language instruction is left to specialist teachers.

Legislation excludes teachers from teaching their native language as a foreign language in schools belonging to a different linguistic community from the one where they obtained their diploma. Teachers are only allowed to teach in another linguistic regime if they pass a special examination before a state board. As a consequence, Dutch is usually taught by native French-speaking teachers in French-medium schools, while French is usually taught by native Dutch-speaking teachers in the Dutch-medium schools, even in the bilingual region of Brussels.

Primary school teacher training in Belgium is organised by teacher training colleges. The training programme is spread over three years and offers theoretical and practical pedagogical training as well as general education, including a "second language" course (typically two or three hours a week in the first two years of the programme). Special training in foreign language teaching is available for secondary school teachers only, not for primary school teachers. Special in-service training for primary school teachers, too, is virtually non-existent (OESO, 1991; Soetaert & Van Heule, 1995).

The lack of special training helps to explain why many primary school teachers feel insufficiently prepared for their foreign language teaching duties. Also the overall quality of foreign language teaching, both in pedagogic terms and in terms of the teachers' linguistic proficiency, is felt to be inadequate by both the inspectorate and by the teachers themselves (Inspectie, 1995; Van de Craen & Soutaert, 1997).

Outcomes

No systematic research has been conducted to appraise the linguistic and socio-affective outcomes of foreign language instruction in Belgian primary education and to explain the processes by which they have been achieved. As a result, current knowledge about the input and output of foreign language education in Belgium is fragmentary and largely impressionistic, making it difficult to formulate general statements. While some studies rate the general level of foreign-language proficiency in Belgium as considerably higher than in neighbouring states (Baetens Beardsmore, 1980), other studies, including those conducted by the inspectorate, judge ultimate levels of foreign language proficiency at the end of compulsory education as low (Inspectie, 1995). This coincides with the general public opinion that foreign language education in Belgium fails to prepare pupils for the requirements of life in a bilingual country and for the requirements of the employment market, which, on top of professional ability, often demands "perfect bilingualism" in the two major national languages and high levels of functional proficiency in English and German. Only pupils in the Dutch-medium schools in Brussels are felt to obtain high levels of proficiency in their second language (French) though this specific outcome is mainly attributed to the predominance of French in the immediate out-of-school environment (Baetens Beardsmore, 1993).

Conclusion

The picture of foreign language instruction for young learners in Belgium sketched in this article points to potential conflicts and paradoxes. On one hand there is the general impression that current foreign language instruction at school fails to meet the needs (perceived or real) of the target population. In addition, there is a shortage of qualified language teachers, a lack of uniformity and co-ordination of objectives, curricula and methods employed, and the use of teaching methods which often ignore the sociolinguistic status of the target language in the country. Several initiatives are currently under way which may redress this situation. The recent implementation of standardised objectives in Flanders has already been cited as a first step towards the development of an integrated curriculum. The French-speaking community is currently investigating the possibility of a complete reform of teacher training programmes, which would include a uniform teacher training programme at university level for all levels of education and specialized training for primary school teachers. Similar initiatives are being considered by the Flemish authorities. The most important development, however, is the Ministry of the French-speaking Community Decree of July 1998 which makes it easier for primary French-speaking schools to obtain temporary special dispensation of the Ministry of Education to organise, on an experimental basis, full or partial immersion in English, German or Dutch. At the moment of writing, 22 primary schools have obtained permission to organise such *expériences d'apprentissage précoce d'une seconde langue* (21 offer English immersion, one offers Dutch immersion). This ministerial permission is granted for one year only and has to be re-applied for every year.

Such recent initiatives by the French-speaking authorities notwithstanding, it is clear, on the other hand, that current Belgian legislation severely constrains the implementation of more efficient alternatives to current foreign language education, such as content-matter teaching through a second language or other forms of bilingual education. This is paradoxical given the official multilingual status of the country, the multilingual reality of several domains of life, and the public demand for such alternatives (cf. Baetens Beardsmore, 1993). The rigidity of current legislation has not deterred the other stakeholders (school boards, teachers, parents) from taking their own initiatives. For instance, an increasing number of French-speaking parents in Brussels are sending their children to local Dutch-medium primary schools to give them immersion experience. This practice, however, will prove untenable in the long term; in some of the Dutch-speaking schools involved French-speaking pupils already outnumber their Dutch-speaking peers. The consequences of this situation for the academic and linguistic development of both the French-speaking and the Dutch-speaking pupils are not yet clear. Other local initiatives include provision of extra foreign language classes after regular school hours, organisation of extra-curricular and extra-mural activities in a foreign language, and co-operation and exchange programmes with schools from the other language regions. Still other non-official initiatives, involving the use of the second national language for short periods during

regular school hours (for example, during breaks), border on the illegal and face official sanctions.

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Biographical Information

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Alex Housen has studied Germanic Philology (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Applied Linguistics and Teaching English as a Second Language (University of California at Los Angels) and has a PhD in Linguistics (Vrije Universiteit Brussel). He is currently Postdoctoral Fellow with the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research and is affiliated to the Centre for Linguistics (CLIN) and the Department of Germanic Languages at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels where he has taught courses in linguistics and language acquisition. In addition to second and foreign language teaching and bilingual education, his publications deal with bilingualism and second language acquisition, particularly the acquisition of grammar by young second language learners in educational contexts.

Early Language Teaching in Estonia

Tuuli Oder

Educational System in Estonia

The first schools in Estonia were opened in the 13th century, but the history of our public schools goes back to the 17th century when the first schools that educated children in their mother tongue (Estonian) were opened in 1686 under the patronage of the Swedish king Karl X. The Republic of Estonia was founded in 1918, and after 50 years of Soviet occupation it regained its independence in 1991.

The general education schools in Estonia are unified; each year of study is directly based on the previous and enables a transfer from one school to another without hindrance. Today general education schools according to the Law on Education are: kindergarten-primary schools, primary schools, basic schools, secondary schools. Schools are organised according to 4 levels: grades 1-3, grades 4-6, grades 7-9, and grades 10-12. According to our Law on Basic Schools and Gymnasiums every child who becomes 7 years old by October 1 of the current year, has to go to school and must attend school until he / she completes the basic education requirement through grade 9, or becomes 17 years old. The vast majority of schools in Estonia are state-run, and there are only about 14 private schools that give primary education.

During the 1998/99 school-year there were 722 general education schools in Estonia, 594 Estonian-medium, 110 Russian-medium schools and 18 mixed schools. In 1998 there were 217 577 students in our general education schools; out of these 1/3 were in Russian medium schools.

During the Soviet occupation (1940-1991) a Russian-medium schools network was established in Estonia for the Russian-speaking population. These schools are now treated as part of a unified education system together with the Estonian-language-medium schools (for more information on school populations, see http//:www.ee./HM/yldharidus/index.html).

Foreign Languages Learnt at Schools

According to data from the Ministry of Education the foreign languages taught are known as A, B and C-languages. The first foreign language (A-language) begins in

grade 3 and the second (B-language) begins in grade 6 and the third (C-language) begins in grade 10. The following are the percentages of school children who learn each language:

English	77.5%
German	20.1%
French	1.5%
Hebrew	0.5%
Finnish	0.2%

According to the National Curriculum the time distribution of foreign languages in grades 1-3 is three to six 45-minute lessons per week of A-language. In grades 4-6 students receive eight to eleven 45-minute lessons per week of A-language and three and four 45-minute lessons of B-language per week.

The situation is a bit different at the Russian-medium schools where the first language other than their mother tongue is Estonian as the official state language, beginning in the 2nd grade. The first foreign language (mostly English) begins in the 6th grade, but since the autumn of 1996 Russian-medium schools have the right to start with an A-language in grade 3 with three lessons per week.

Primary Schools

Primary school can be a separate school which has grades from 1 to 4 (or 1-6), but in most cases primary schools are part of either a basic school or a gymnasium. The National Curriculum (official since 1997) is compulsory for all schools. Every school compiles its own curriculum on the basis of the national curriculum. In ordinary schools children are not streamed and teachers teach mixed ability classes. Children are given marks, with the best being 5 and the lowest being 1. The reports are given four times a year. There are no exams at the primary level.

The parents can choose which language their children take as the first and which as the second foreign language. The choice is made in grades 3 and 6. The maximum number of children in a class is allowed to be 36 and if the class is bigger than 25 children. It can be divided into two groups for foreign languages lessons.

Teachers FL

The foreign languages at primary level are taught either by subject-teachers (specialists with a university degree in foreign languages) or class teachers who have taken special re-qualification courses in languages. Re-qualification programmes end with

examinations, and teachers get diplomas which allow them to teach up to grade 9. The shortage of qualified teachers is the common problem for all foreign languages.

In-service training is offered by several institutions such as universities, International House, and the British Council. For example the British Council launched a professional development programme in 1992 under which eleven qualified teachers from Estonia were trained in England as teacher trainers and after returning they started organising workshops on up-to-date teaching methods throughout Estonia. There are eleven Language Centres all over Estonia which offer in-service training.

Materials

Teachers are free to choose the teaching materials from amongst the materials approved by the Ministry of Education.

Methods

As to English language teaching methods, no information is available to find out the most prevailing method of teaching English in Estonia, though elements of communicative approach are widely used by the majority of teachers.

Task-based approaches are also quite popular. Much attention is paid to oral work in lower grades, including a lot of games and songs and visual aids.

Conclusion

Due to the changed political situation and openness of the world, the motivation to learn other languages is high in Estonia. Teachers have a wide range of modern teaching materials for all levels and they are free to make their choices.

As I have tried to demonstrate, Estonian children are getting opportunities to develop their competence in other languages.

Biographical Information

Tuuli Oder

Tuuli Oder is a teacher of English at Saue Gymnasium, a teacher trainer at the British Council and a teacher of Business English at Estonian Business School, which is a private university. She graduated at the Tallinn Pedagogical University as a teacher of English and German in 1983 and since then she has been actively involved in teaching English.

Since teaching English to young learners is one of her main interests, she has taken part in several international workshops on this topic, works actively in teacher training in this area. At the moment she is involved in preparing a curriculum of in-service courses for teachers of English. She has been at several refresher courses in Sweden, Denmark, Austria, and England. She took part in IATEFL-East 1998 Conference in Romania, where she delivered a paper on her experience as a teacher trainer.

English as a First Foreign Language for Young Learners – Sweden

Kerstin Sundin

Since the mid 50s English has been taught as a compulsory subject for all children from grade five and then gradually from grade four. From the late 60s English was introduced in grade three, when the children were nine years old. In the early 70s Sweden like many other countries in Europe, the USA and Canada seemed to be very keen on early foreign language teaching which was very interesting and motivating for a small country with only 8.5 million people. I myself was then involved in a research project called EPÅL, starting with English from grade 1 with seven-year-old students. The EPÅL project started in 1970 and went on for a decade. This "longitudinal" study was undertaken to evaluate the relative merits of starting to learn English in either the first year of primary school with seven-year-olds or in the third grade with nine-year-olds. In the final report Lars Holmstrand (1982) points out that there is no negative effect on starting with seven-year-olds.

The main reason for not starting English in grade one was a shortage of primary school teachers trained well enough to teach English. To remedy the situation The National Board of Education launched an in-Service Teacher Training Institute course called Junior English Teaching (JET). The aim was to train primary school teachers in English, in language skills as well as in language teaching methodology. However, the findings and results of early language projects, for example, Claire Burstall's (1974) French from Eight in the UK or The EPÅL-project in Sweden, were evidently not too convincing either and the interest in early language learning seemed to die out in Sweden as it did in many other countries in Europe.

In the 80s we were back to introducing English from grade four again. The National Curriculum laid down that English should start in grade three, but the start could be postponed for one year by local decision. Now we seem to have an interest in early foreign language learning again not only in Sweden but all over Europe. In Sweden English is laid down as the first foreign language and it is compulsory for all children. A second compulsory foreign language is introduced in grade 6. There is a choice of German, French, Spanish and home languages. Pupils who cannot cope with another foreign language can take an extra course in English or if necessary take an additional course in Swedish. In grade 8 the third foreign language is introduced.

School System

In Sweden school is compulsory for all children between the ages of seven and sixteen. There is a nine-year compulsory school and a voluntary upper secondary school. Compulsory schooling is free of charge, and no payment can be charged for educational material, school lunches or school transport. The term primary school covers grades 1-6 mainly. There are very few private schools in Sweden. The school-starting age is seven, but from July 1, 1997 municipalities are obliged to accept all six-year-olds wanting to start school. All children are entitled to at least one year of pre-school education before starting primary school.

For years Swedish schools were heavily centralized. Through legislation, regulations and curricula the state issued instructions and rules for the conduct of school activities. Now the decision-making power is decentralized. Responsibilities are divided between the state and the municipalities in such a way that the state defines the goals for schooling and education and also follows up the achievements by national tests. More than 95% of compulsory school leavers go on to the three-year upper secondary school, which offers both vocational and academic programmes.

General Structure of Teacher Training

The study programme for primary level teachers focusing on grades 1-7, takes 3.5 years of higher education. For admission a three-year upper secondary education is required. Students will have had English for about nine years during their own schooling.

There are two alternative study programmes one for grades 1-7 and another for grades 4-9. Student teachers can specialize in mathematics / science or Swedish / social subjects. There is a combination of separate courses that together will fulfil the national requirements for a university diploma in education for the compulsory school, grades 1-7. The study programme is a vocational education preparing students to teach all subjects in the first three grades and an in-depth education in either science or social subjects for the higher grades. In addition to this there is a third subject which is optional. The choice is between art, English, music and physical education.

For teachers teaching grades 4-9 there is a longer study programme. It takes 4.5 years. The alternatives are: languages, social sciences, mathematics / natural sciences and practical and artistic subjects, plus another subject, for example, English or mathematics. A combination of two subjects is possible. At Uppsala University two languages can be studied for 1.5 year each.

An important part of the programme is to integrate educational theory, methodology and subject content studies. These skills are applied in the student teaching experience comprising about 20 weeks of supervised teaching practice spread out over the 3.5 to 4.5 years. At the Department of Teacher Training 1.5 year of the study programme takes place in close co-operation with other departments at the university.

Teacher Training Programmes for FL Teachers

Swedish primary school teachers will either have English in their pre-service education, which means they have a 15-20-week study programme or they take equivalent additional courses at the university as in-service training. Courses in English combine practical language courses with literature courses and courses in social studies. At Uppsala University all foreign language students involved in teacher training take a five-week stay in the country where the target language is spoken. The students of English are sent to Canterbury or Cheltenham to finish their course in Social studies.

Class teachers teach English as a first foreign language to children in grades 1-6. Subject teachers can teach English from grade 4 and the second or third foreign language from grade 6. The teachers are non-native speakers of the different foreign languages.

Teachers' Professional Development

The municipalities are responsible for In-Service Teacher Training Institute courses for their teachers. They might fund language teachers to go abroad on language and methodology courses. Local In-Service Teacher Training Institute programmes vary a lot. In some schools teachers will get local financial support. In other places teachers will apply for grants or financial support from the National Agency for Education or other bodies willing to sponsor them. The Agency includes a field organisation of eleven regional offices to monitor and evaluate the school system, and to propose and take part in educational development and measures. The Agency also arranges training programmes for head teachers and to some extent in-service training for teachers and other school staff. There are publications for teachers published by the unions and by teacher associations.

Society

Swedish society is quite influenced by the English language through TV, films, music and computers. On televison there are Swedish subtitles but young children cannot read them, so their listening comprehension is quite good. They get used to pronunciation and intonation, something we lack in German, French and Spanish. We do not have so much contact with these languages in everyday life. In a way this early English influence prepares pupils linguistically and even culturally for foreign langauge learning, at least when it comes to English.

On the whole the motivation in Sweden to learn foreign languages is quite high. It has a high status to be able to use English. For example, there are a large number of borrowed words and expressions among educated people. You often hear “sorry”, “cool”, “no problem”, etc, used instead of the Swedish expressions. The general aims of foreign language learning are attractive to children, parents, teachers and administrators.

National Curriculum

In 1995 a new National Curriculum came into operation in Sweden and this means that English as a first foreign language is taught from grade 1, 2 or 3 and in some schools from grade 4. The local school can decide when to start and how to distribute the time allocated to English in the compulsory school, grades 1-9. The minimum guaranteed time for English is 480 hours. The National Curriculum defines the underlying values and the basic objectives and the guidelines of the school system. For each individual subject there is a nationally defined syllabus in addition to the curriculum.

According to the *Syllubus for English in the Compulsory School* published by Swedish Ministry of Education and Science in 1994, communicative language skills as well as intercultural understanding are stressed. Targets that pupils should have attained by the end of the fifth and ninth year in school are also stated here. National tests in Swedish, English and Mathematics are obligatory in grade 9 and most schools also use national tests in grade 5.

Organisation and Motivation

When starting with English in grades 1-3 pupils have about 30-40 minutes per week of English. Often this time is split into 10 to 15 minute-periods per day. The foreign language is usually integrated into the normal school activities. From grade four the pupils might have two or three classes of 30-40 minutes per week depending on local

arrangements. All children in the compulsory school have English as a compulsory subject. The classes are fairly large and there are 25-30 children in each class. They are not set, streamed or selected.

On the whole the motivation to learn foreign languages in Sweden is quite high. For children at the primary level the pleasure of learning how to communicate in another language is great. The pleasure of playing with a new code is tantalizing from a linguistic as well as a semantic point of view. To find out how a new language works is fascinating to most children in the primary school. Pupils' motivation and curiosity is of course the best basis for learning. To promote learning activities which are motivating, interesting and fun is a great challenge.

What Materials are Used?

In most beginner-classes the teacher will use materials already in the classroom such as dolls, puppets, pictures, cards, etc. Videos, television and computers are also used. There are several publishers of materials for English as a foreign language. A new generation of materials has been brought into use in task-based learning, self-directed learning, and learner training to name but a few of the new ideas in education. The familiar array of materials used in English classes though would be a coursebook with pictures and texts, audio materials for listening comprehension, video materials and disks to create a range of contexts for language in use. In some schools computers are used. There the pupils work with Kidlink and other programmes on the Internet and communicate with key-pals all over the world.

What Methods are Used?

The communicative approach is laid down as a norm by the wording in the National Curriculum. To communicate orally has first priority, but also communicating in a simple way in writing is important. Teachers are encouraged to conduct the language lessons in the target language. The students should also get the opportunity to speak as much and as often as possible. To accomplish this teachers use pair work and group work to be sure that all children have a chance to speak and to make themselves understood.

The beginners enjoy songs, rhymes, riddles, stories and fairy-tales. They are interested in other countries, customs and various aspects of daily life. Teachers try to integrate the learners' everyday experience as well as other subjects in the school curriculum. These are very good as means of teaching languages as communication. Linking English teaching to the general curriculum can reinforce concepts the children are

working with in their mother-tongue, in mathematics, arts, etc. This helps to provide continuity between the learning process established in learning English and the rest of the curriculum. It includes thinking strategies such as comparing, classifying, predicting and problem-solving. If the curriculum is topic-based and activity-oriented there is an enormous potential for reinforcing the children's learning process, focusing their attention on meaning rather than form and grammatical accuracy. Analysing the language and thinking about language per se comes in later when the pupils have the mental maturity to benefit from such a process of reflection.

The written word is not a primary aim of early learning of English, but you cannot ignore it. When learning to read in Swedish a purely phonic method is used to begin with and it might be a bit confusing for the beginners to read in English. Of course texts and books give chances for greater varieties in the classroom as well as opportunities for children to work more on their own.

Other issues emphasized in the National Curriculum are pupils' influence and responsibility. Teachers try to put it into practice by working with topics the pupils are interested in and by giving the pupils the opportunity to plan and work on their own. Teachers should also try to make children aware of their own learning process and their own strategies for more effective learning. "Learner-centred" teaching will encourage pupils to take the responsibility for their own learning to develop their autonomy. The concept of learning to learn is important for us in Sweden for the moment.

Assessment

In Sweden pupils do not get grades till grade 8. On the other hand teachers, parents and pupils meet to discuss the pupil's progress twice a year. In grade 5 there is a national test in Swedish, English and mathematics.

This assessment is repeated in grade 9. Standardized achievement tests in the basic subjects are obligatory for all children at the end of the ninth year. In English the pupils are tested in listening comprehension, reading, writing and oral communication.

Challenges for the Future

The challenges we face in Sweden are to educate good language teachers, to create good learning environments for the pupils and to make use of good teaching materials, whatever they are.

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Biographical information

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Kerstin Sundin is a senior lecturer in foreign language methodology, English, at Uppsala University, Department of Teacher Training, working with pre- as well as in-service training of teachers. She is also a textbook writer of English course material for beginners, grades 1-7. In the 70s she worked with the EPÅL project. She has worked as an expert on curriculum development work in Sweden and in Sri Lanka. She has taken part in the Council of Europe project Language Learning for European Citizenship, New-style workshops 8A and B, 1991-95. The theme was Foreign Language Education in Primary Schools (age 5/6-10/11). Her special concern in this project was with teacher training. She has participated in several international conferences and workshops.

Modern Languages in British Primary Schools

Patricia Driscoll

In this paper I shall attempt to sketch out the general state of modern foreign languages (MFL) in primary schools in Britain. Firstly, I shall outline the general structure of schooling in England and Wales, secondly I shall describe modern languages in the secondary school curriculum as a context for primary modern foreign languages. I shall then describe the extent of the provision of modern languages teaching in primary schools, and finally, give a brief description of my own research in this field.

The School System in England and Wales

During the post-war period the school system was reformed, education was made both free and compulsory for all pupils, and schooling was divided into two phases, primary and secondary. At the secondary stage, pupils were allocated places at one of three different types of schools on the basis of a selection test. The Grammar School provided education for the academically able irrespective of socio-economic background, the Technical School provided a more vocational curriculum and the Secondary Modern School catered for the academically less able. All of these schools were intended to have parity of esteem but in reality, an educational "elite" was established because the Grammar Schools became the main source of university material and the majority of pupils who attended the Secondary Modern Schools were destined for manual occupations.

The Department of Education and Science (DES) was responsible for the overall implementation of the Government's policy but the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were responsible for the administration of the system, the management of schools and the payment of teachers. The schools themselves were responsible for the organisation and content of the curriculum. This system of school management brought about considerable local diversity and variation both between neighboring schools and between local authority areas.

In recent years there has been a sharp trend towards centralization; the power of the education ministry (currently the DfEE) has increased and the powers of the Local Education Authorities have been curtailed. Despite this shift, a considerable degree of regional diversity remains. The new Labour Government has just published its first White Paper setting out proposals for a new framework which includes three new

categories of schools, community, aided and foundation to incorporate all current Local Education Authority and Grant Maintained schools (DfEE, 1997).

The Education Reform Act of 1988 and subsequent legislation has had the effect of making the education system more accountable to its customers. These provisions were represented in the form of a Parents' Charter in 1994. Parents are permitted to send their children to the school of their choice if there is space, rather than to schools within a geographical "catchment area" near to their homes. To help them effect the "best" choice they are given information on the school's performance, such as their assessment and examination results and the official inspection report of the standards within the school. Schools are inspected every four years by the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED), who report on the quality of educational provision and the effectiveness of the school measured against national standards.

Parental power has also been strengthened through a requirement to include a greater number of parents on schools' governing bodies. Although the Head teacher and staff run the school, the governing body provide support and advice, to ensure good quality education is provided for the pupils. The membership of governing bodies depends on the size of the school but includes parents, people appointed by the Local Education Authorities, teachers and co-optees, who represent a balance of interests. The creation of these new powers has led to the operation of market forces in which governing bodies have been asking for the implementation of modern languages in primary schools in order to reflect the interests of parents and other members of the community. Parental pressure is cited as a key factor in the rapid increase of primary modern foreign languages (CILT, 1995). In some areas where schools are unable to respond to parental desire, or if parents are dissatisfied with the provision, children attend a languages club. In recent years there has been a major expansion of private, fee paying, language clubs, for pre-11 learners.

At the same time as schools have greater freedom to manage their own affairs there has been a greater centralization of what is taught in schools with the introduction of a National Curriculum in 1988. The advent of a tightly prescribed subject-based curriculum has brought about radical changes to the task of teachers in primary schools who have been accustomed to teaching all subjects. The extent and complexity of subject knowledge in the curriculum has dramatically increased, and issues such as planning, assessment and progression of learning have been highlighted. There have been strong recommendations (Alexander & Woodhead, 1992) that every primary school should have direct access to subject expertise in the form of semi-specialist and specialist teaching to help the generalist classroom teacher across all National Curriculum subjects. The semi-specialist teacher teaches her subject (to one or more classes), but is also a generalist class teacher and the specialist teacher teaches her subject full time in the primary school.

National Assessment and Examinations

Compulsory education in Britain is divided into four Key Stages and formal national assessments of pupils' performance mark the end of each Key Stage at the ages of 7, 11, 14, and 16 (Key Stage 1, 2, 3 & 4). At the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, English and Mathematics are assessed and, at the end of Key Stage 2 and 3, Science is also assessed (Welsh is also included in the assessments in Wales). Pupils and parents receive the individual results together with the teachers' assessment of pupil's progress. Schools' overall results are a matter of public record. There has been concern about the value of publishing overall school results; although they may help parents to choose the most "effective" school for their children they have also created what some see as an unhelpful climate of competitiveness between schools.

At the age of 16, at the end of Key Stage 4, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is the most common qualification taken by pupils as a means of assessing their attainment at the end of compulsory education. The General Certificate of Secondary Education examination is taken in individual subjects, the majority of pupils take five or more General Certificate of Secondary Education. There are also Short Course General Certificate of Secondary Education qualification in certain subjects, such as modern foreign languages and information technology, which take about half the time of the standard General Certificate of Secondary Education courses.

Types of Schools

Compulsory education begins at the age of 5 in Great Britain (although there is an increasing tendency for schools to take pupils at the age of 4 if parents want it), in Northern Ireland pupils start school at the age of 4.

The term primary education is used to refer to the period of schooling between the ages of 4/5 and 11 and normally consists of:

- infants schools from aged 4/5 to 7;
- junior schools from 7 to 11;
- primary schools (infant and junior) 4/5/ to 11.

The usual age of transfer from primary to secondary is at the age of 11, although in Scotland the transfer age is 12. There is also a system operating in some areas where children attend First Schools until the age of 7/8, followed by Middle Schools to the age of 13 and, finally, Upper Schools until the age of 16 or 18.

Secondary education begins at the age of 11, is compulsory to the age of 16 and is extended for many pupils until the age of 18. In recent years certain secondary schools have specialized as Language Schools or Technology Schools which allows them to select a percentage of their pupils with aptitude. These schools are usually resourced with subject specific equipment and the pupils are allocated a greater percentage of the curriculum study time in their specialism.

The Comprehensive School

In the 60s and 70s Comprehensive Schools were introduced to take all secondary age pupils in a defined geographical area and provided a much wider curriculum which meant that, for the first time, Modern Languages was taught across the ability range.

The Private Sector

Separate from the Local Educational Authority schools or Grant Maintained schools are the private schools. They are also known as fee paying schools, independent or public schools. Most independent schools are secondary but there are preparatory schools for pupils aged from 8 to 13, with the transfer at the age of 13. About 7% of children in England and Wales attend independent schools.

Higher Education

The number of students in higher education engaged in studying for a degree or equivalent qualification has more than doubled in the last twenty years to approximately 1.6 million (Dearing, 1997). The Government's long term strategy is to increase participation in higher education from 35% to 45% of the age cohort.

Teacher Education

Almost all school teachers complete a training course provided by a higher education institution. Non-graduates normally qualify for teacher status by following a subject course and professional training for three or four years. Graduates usually take a one year Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course.

Although a degree in primary education with modern languages is not possible at the present time, some students obtain a first degree in modern languages followed by a one year primary Postgraduate Certificate of Education course, thereby emerging with the specialism in modern foreign languages; but this is rare. Very few institutions offer modern languages as a foundation subject for primary student teachers, but some colleges offer opportunities to learn about modern languages teaching as an optional modular course.

Modern Languages in the Curriculum

Language teaching has changed radically since 1974. The grammar translation and audio visual methods which have grammatical structure as the main focus have been replaced by the communicative approach which gives priority to meaning over structure. A significant proportion of lessons are conducted in the target language to promote the social and purposeful aspects of language learning. The expansion of the communicative approach together with the introduction of comprehensive schools and the availability of new materials and technology enabled modern languages to be time tabled across the ability range, rather than viewed as an elitist subject only for the brightest pupils. But it wasn't until the implementation of the National Curriculum after 1988 that at least one modern foreign language was made available to virtually every secondary pupil.

Modern languages is the only subject in the National Curriculum that starts at the age of 11. All other subjects start at the age of 5 and continue to the end of compulsory schooling at the age of 16 (apart from Welsh schools where Welsh is a designated curriculum subject). At the time of writing, the National Curriculum consists of three core subjects, English, Mathematics and Science, and seven foundation subjects – History, Geography, Technology, Art, Music, Physical Education and a Foreign Language.

Each subject has a specific programme of study and pupils' performance is described by attainment targets which define knowledge, skills and understanding. Standards of pupil performance are set out in eight level descriptions of increasing difficulty (DfEE, 1995). The programme of study for modern languages is divided into two parts, "Learning and using the target language" and "Areas of experience". Part one, "Learning and using the target language", sets out the type of learning opportunities the pupils should be offered and the skills they should be taught including developing language learning skills, and language and cultural awareness. Part two, requires that pupils explore five areas of experience including personal and social life and the world around us (short course programmes include 4 of the 5 "Areas of Experience").

Diversification

Traditionally there has been a predominance of French in the curriculum, but since the late 80s there has been an increase in language diversification in secondary schools (McLagan, 1995). Most schools now offer German or Spanish alongside French although the majority of pupils do not continue to study two foreign languages to GCSE level or GCE A level.

The Office of Standard Education in English has found that many schools have been obliged to modify or abandon diversification arrangements because of difficulties in

finding qualified staff (office of Standards in Education, 1997). The experience of French in the primary school also appears to be affecting the diversification programme adversely. The teachers and the parents desire to capitalize on the pupils' learning experience of French in their primary schools was cited by many secondary schools as the main reason for the decline of language diversification (McLagan, 1996).

Modern Languages in the Primary School (Primary MFL)

As yet there is no Government initiative to introduce foreign languages into the primary school in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but there have been strong indications of official interest and support from various government bodies (Dearing Report, 1994; The National Curriculum Modern Languages Working Group, 1990; SCAA, 1997). A recent survey investigated the scale and nature of modern languages provision in Local Education Authority maintained primary schools and the findings showed that there has been a definite resurgence of interest in the early teaching of modern languages. An overall 21.8% of schools within the sample offered some form of foreign language provision (CILT, 1995). In Scotland, following a successfully completed pilot phase in 1993, there has been an extension programme to include modern foreign languages in all primary schools.

These current initiatives represent a fresh start for primary modern languages. The 60s attempt to incorporate modern languages into the primary curriculum was abandoned due to the unfavourable evaluation of the primary French Pilot project, conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and published in 1974. The report concluded that there was "no substantial gain in mastery achieved by beginning French at the age of eight" (Burstall, Jameison, Cohen & Hargreaves, 1974, p. 243). The evaluation was not without its critics (Gamble & Smalley, 1975; Buckby, 1976) yet the majority of Local Education Authorities discontinued teaching French and there has been little evidence of expansion until now.

There is no standard formula for the teaching and learning of modern languages; provision varies not only from one Local Education Authority to another but between individual schools within a locality. This lack of uniformity tends to complicate an already problematic area of education with great diversity in the teaching aims, the approaches to instruction, the starting age, the allocation of curriculum time, teaching materials and resources. Programmes combine these different elements in a variety of ways. However, the two most significant factors are the teaching aims and the approaches to instruction. These two elements are fundamental and therefore determine the nature of the other characteristics within any programme.

Teaching Aims

The aims of modern language provision in British primary schools range from those which are concerned with sensitization or language awareness to ones which concentrate on language acquisition. Language acquisition programmes focus more specifically on the beginning of language learning, which aims to increase the yield of linguistic competence at some later stage. Sensitization programmes constitute an apprenticeship in language learning skills and promote an elementary competence in one or more language.

Implications of the Aims

The amount of curriculum time allocated to modern languages is to some degree dependent on the aims adopted. Language acquisition programmes tend to be allocated more curriculum time to enable pupils to benefit from the linguistic instruction, to complete the more extensive programme of study and master complex language structures. The sensitization programmes by contrast demand less curriculum time; proficiency is not at the core, so pupils may be exposed to more than one language as a taster for future learning and are able to build up greater perceptions of the nature of language. Curriculum time in Britain varies from approximately ten minutes to a maximum of 120 minutes a week (CILT, 1995).

Some schools introduce modern language provision from the age of 5 whilst others start at the age of 10; a common starting point, is the age of 9. Language acquisition programmes tend to start later in primary schools to facilitate and ensure continuity and progression of learning. Although French is the pre-dominant language taught in 93% of those primary schools that provide modern languages; German, Italian and Spanish are also significant (CILT, 1995).

Difficulties of continuity and coherence in provision across the primary secondary boundary are not simply confined to the question of the core aim or which language is taught, but also include the matter of the approach to instruction. The majority of secondary schools in the country timetable modern languages in a traditional way as an additional subject in the curriculum, whereas a variety of approaches to instruction exist in the primary sector (Johnstone, 1994).

Approaches to Instruction

The approach to instruction falls basically into two categories, overt teaching programmes and those taught holistically (Rixon, 1992). The holistic approach, integrates the target language in a variety of ways into the traditional primary curriculum (Sharpe, 1992; Johnstone, 1994). Usually the areas of experience and sequencing of topics is more random than with the overt teaching model. An argument

in favor of the holistic approach is that it is more economical in terms of curriculum time than the more traditional overt teaching approach, particularly where language acquisition is the predominant aim. In Scotland for instance, the modern language initiative aims for linguistic acquisition using an embedding approach which interweaves the foreign language into the existing primary curriculum.

The overt teaching approach, is more structured and systematic as a language learning programme. Language structures and vocabulary are organised into topic areas and programmes of study, and the provision tends to be more of a bolt on extra rather than feeding into and feeding off the existing primary curriculum.

Teacher Expertise

Language classes are teacher-led, the more complex the concepts and more detailed the subject matter, the greater are the demands on teachers' subject knowledge. In other curriculum areas the "subject" is often supported to some extent in the world outside the school walls but in modern languages, frequently the only exposure the pupil has to a foreign language is within the classroom. The teacher therefore, plays a vital role in creating an environment which stimulates the pupils' desire to communicate in the foreign language as well as to learn about the language and the culture.

My Study

The impetus for my research arose from issues about teacher expertise raised by a number of official and quasi-official reports, for example, the advice from the Government's Working Group on Modern Languages which stated that very few teachers in primary schools are equipped to teach modern languages (DES, 1990).

The assumption that primary teachers are not equipped to teach modern foreign languages presupposes criteria for good practice which is framed to a large extent by experiences other than that of primary teachers teaching a foreign language in their classrooms. Although there is an abundance of diverse practice around Britain, as yet there has been no large scale evaluation which might tell us about the range, quality and effectiveness of these initiatives. In order to explore the nature of relevant expertise which equips teachers to teach modern languages in the primary school I chose to investigate two contrasting schemes of primary modern foreign languages, both initiated and sponsored by the Local Education Authorities. In one Local Education Authority, the specialist peripatetic teaches French in a time tabled slot, for up to 120 minutes a week; in the other, the teacher is a generalist who incorporates French for approximately 25 minutes a week into the traditional primary curriculum.

The data was gathered using observation and interview techniques in an ethnographic comparative case study. Rather than using a controlled research strategy where existing

theories about teaching in the primary school were the starting point, I have attempted not to prejudge the importance and relevance of events but to interpret classroom activities, using a qualitative, open-ended research strategy so that an implicit theory of instruction is not built into the research instruments.

Below I have outlined briefly some of the key differences between the specialist approach and the generalist teachers approach to teaching.

The Specialist Teacher

The specialist teacher clearly has the advantage of being able to use her knowledge of the language and culture, her fluency and the quality of her pronunciation as a major resource in the classroom. The teacher's extensive use of the target language is a dominant force in the classroom: to organise tasks, to praise children, to discuss events, to recount tales and so on, which means that children encounter a rich and varied experience of the foreign language. Pupils are required to scan for gist both in listening to the teacher and to taped recordings; the teacher supports their understanding with visual aids, mime and variations to the tone and pitch of her voice. The specialist teachers' lessons were speckled with both factual and personal references about the target country which conveyed their affection and understanding of the country and the people.

The specialists' knowledge of the language learning journey as a whole enables them, to diagnose the meaning of linguistic difficulties and respond more productively to pupil error; to scaffold pupils' learning and understanding so they can make longer utterances and more sustained listening exercises and to tackle progressively more complex tasks in an organised manner. This brings a certain pace to the lessons. This long term perspective also informs their planning and assessment strategies. The specialists tend to be much more preoccupied with pupils' performance and measurable outcomes in the language in comparison with the generalist teachers who focused on developing a more general and basic competence and cultivating positive attitudes to language learning; outcomes were usually discussed in terms of pupils' enjoyment and motivation rather than their linguistic performance.

The Generalist Teachers

The difference between the specialist and generalist teachers' linguistic proficiency was most apparent in the general classroom interaction, as the generalist teachers lack the relaxed facility to communicate spontaneously and confidently with the children. However when the language was the message or the subject content of the lesson both the generalist and specialist teachers "pitched" the language more at the pupils' level to enable them to participate fully in the lesson. The generalist teachers are supported by a video to help deliver the content of the lesson and teachers notes to help plan the

activities. The teachers also draw useful information about France, the way of life and the people from the video, and frequently highlight commonalties and differences between the countries.

The generalist teachers have a wealth of knowledge to teach a range of complex processes and concepts in nine other National Curriculum subjects and considerable expertise to organise and transform the knowledge, so that pupils across a wide ability range can understand what is being taught, find meaning in the experience and are stimulated to learn. The generalist teacher is well placed to integrate the foreign language throughout the day and link it to other curriculum subjects but needs support and high quality resources to help her exploit these opportunities. The generalist teachers' knowledge of the pupils' achievements in other subjects and of their other interests and concerns allow them to tap into the pupils' conception of the world and adapt the programme to meet the needs and aptitudes of all pupils with their relatively limited linguistic expertise. As a learner in the early stages of language learning herself the teacher is more able to empathise with the difficulties the children encounter on the learning curve and work with them.

The generalist teachers rarely use exaggerated theatrical movements, mime or facial expressions, nor change the pitch or volume of their voices, to carry across the meaning of the foreign language. Instead, if children have difficulty in following the meaning of a "chunk" of language the teachers frequently translate the sense, taking a few words or a phrase at a time.

The generalist teachers have greater freedom and ownership over the time tabling and the resources in the classroom so they are able to respond spontaneously to events and to facilitate pupils' activities in learning the language at the most appropriate time of the day using a wide variety of resources. The children spent considerable time actively engaged in language based games which required them to be out of their seats. In comparison the specialist teachers planned for quieter more controlled language activities which required relatively less movement such as paired role play.

The findings of my study suggest that the teacher's subject knowledge has a powerful effect on the teaching processes and is a key factor in determining the nature of provision. It is highly likely that as primary MFL initiatives continue to increase, the generalist teachers will predominately be asked to take responsibility for teaching foreign languages. There are indications that there are advantages to both the specialist and the generalist approaches. However, the expertise of the specialist teachers derives from years of commitment to linguistic excellence and personal involvement with the target country which affects their beliefs and attitudes to the subject and informs the way they teach. This expertise I believe, cannot be synthesized and handed to the generalist teacher in a kit form.

The generalist teacher's expertise derives from a different culture and point of reference, and whilst teacher's subject knowledge is fundamental for effective teaching we need to be clear about the essential ingredients of the primary practitioner's knowledge, pedagogic expertise and position in the school. This will help us to identify the type of language and cultural competences that are likely to be of most value and will enable the teachers to include foreign languages into their repertoire and ensure the high quality of provision that children experience in other subjects. I hope that my study helps generate a greater understanding of the nature of expertise needed by teachers to implement primary modern foreign languages and contributes to the growing body of knowledge about the teaching of modern languages in the primary school.

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Biographical Information

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Patricia Driscoll has taught modern foreign languages in secondary schools and also English as a foreign language across the full age range. She has also worked for a number of years in industry both in Britain and abroad. Since 1995 she has been engaged in research in the primary modern foreign language field in connection with her PhD at Canterbury Christ Church University College, a central focus of which is the relationship between teachers' knowledge and their pedagogy. She is currently interested in pursuing further research into the impact of teacher expertise on learning outcomes.

Second Language Education in Canada: A Focus on Core French in Elementary Schools

Miles Turnbull

Second language education is highly valued in Canadian schools. Consequently, elementary school children have the opportunity to learn many different languages (for example, Spanish, Cantonese, Ukranian, Cree), depending on the province or territory and school board. However, most young Canadians study French as a second language, reflecting the official status of French in our vast country. Canadian schools principally offer three types of French as a second language programmes: core French, early immersion, and late immersion. In this paper, I begin by defining and describing these three French as a second language programmes. I then focus on core French, the programme in which about 90% of young Canadians who study French are enroled (Goldbloom, 1998).

Early and Late French Immersion

French immersion, an optional intensive programme designed for non-native speakers of French, exists in all ten Canadian provinces and both territories. It has grown steadily since its beginning in 1965 and continues to expand; the national increase for 1997-8 was estimated at 1.4%, with total enrolment at 317 351 (Goldbloom, 1999, pp. 126-127). The curriculum in immersion programmes rests on the principle of offering a variety of school subjects taught in French; French is therefore the medium and not the object of instruction. Early immersion programmes begin in either kindergarten or grade one, depending on the jurisdiction. Late immersion programmes typically begin in grade 7. In the first two or three years of early immersion and late immersion, the instruction occurs largely or totally in French (near 100% in early immersion and about 80% of the time in late immersion). Over the course of the programme, the amount of English instruction increases and the French instruction decreases accordingly. By the end of grade 8, a typical early immersion programme results in over 6 000 hours total accumulated instruction in French. Students in late immersion programmes accumulate between 1 200 and 2 000 hours in French. At the secondary level, French immersion students from both early immersion and late immersion typically take only a few subjects in French each year, often in addition to a course in French language arts. A typical French immersion student accumulates between 1 000 and 1 500 hours of high school courses taught in French.

Core French

Core French is a basic programme in which French as a second language is taught as a subject in class periods that vary between 20 and 50 minutes a day (LeBlanc, R., 1990, p. 2). The general aims of core French include developing:

1. basic communication skills;
2. language knowledge;
3. an appreciation of French culture in Canada and in other parts of the world.

Depending on the province or territory and the school board, core French may be offered as an optional or a compulsory programme. Core French is required for elementary students in six provinces (Ontario, Québec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island) and in both territories (Yukon and Northwest Territories). It is offered as an optional programme in most elementary schools in all other provinces (British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta). Core French typically begins in grade 4 or 5. However, in New Brunswick, Canada's only officially bilingual province, and in English-language schools in Québec, it is introduced in grade 1. Core French is introduced in kindergarten in the Northwest Territories. School boards in other provinces often begin offering core French before grade 1, but this is not required by provincial or national legislation. Table 1 provides an overview of core French programming in each province and territory in Canada. The amount of core French instruction in elementary schools varies substantially, depending principally on teacher availability and qualifications. However, most provinces and territories aim to provide students with approximately 600 hours of core French instruction by the end of grade 8. Core French is typically offered as an optional subject in most Canadian high schools. For example, students must study French in grade 9, their first year of secondary school, in Ontario, Canada's most populous province. Almost 2 million students (1 951 455) are registered in core French programmes at the elementary level (Goldbloom, 1999). Slightly more than 1 million (1 028 567) young Canadians are registered in secondary core French programmes (Goldbloom, 1999).

Province or territory	Core French is mandatory	Typical starting grade for Core French	Recommended class periods in elementary grades
Alberta	Locally determined option	Grade 4	30-40 minutes/day
British Columbia	Locally determined option	Grade 5	30 minutes/day
Manitoba	Locally determined option	Grade 4	30 minutes/day
New Brunswick	Grades 1-10	Grade 1	40 minutes/day
Newfoundland	Grades 4-9	Grade 4	4-6: 30 minutes/day 7-9: 40 minutes/day
Northwest Territories and Nanuvut	Grades K-12	Kindergarten	40 minutes/day
Nova Scotia	Grades 4-9	Grade 4	40 minutes/day
Ontario	Grades 4-9	Grade 4	40 minutes/day
Prince Edward Island	Grades 4-9	Grade 4	4-6: 30 minutes/day 7-9: 40 minutes/day
Québec	Grades 1-Secondary 5	Grade 1	40 minutes/day
Saskatchewan	Locally determined option	Grade 7	20-40 minutes/day
Yukon Territory	Grades 5-8	Grade 1	K-3: 20 minutes/day 4-7: 30 minutes/day

Table 8: Core French across Canada

Note: The information presented in this table is based on available information and may vary considerably within the same province or territory. It is also common for English language schools in Québec to offer core French for one hour per day. In British Columbia, students from grades 5-8 are required to study a second language, but not necessarily core French. However, core French is the most common second language option offered by schools.

Reform of Core French: The National Core French Study

In 1985, the Canadian government granted funds to the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) to conduct a major research project to examine how core French could become more effective. A major impetus for this study was the groundswell that French immersion programmes had created. core French advocates wanted to learn from and improve on what had been discovered from immersion research and classroom practice to establish Core French as a viable educational alternative to immersion. As a result, Canadian Association of Second Language Teaching commissioned H.H. Stern to conduct the National Core French Study. Poyen (1990, p. 22) suggested that the National Core French Study (NCFS) was “perhaps the most wide-scale national project to be undertaken in Canadian education.” Unfortunately, Dr. Stern did not see the end of this national project due to his untimely

death. The final National Core French Study report (LeBlanc, 1990), however, was dedicated to his memory, not only for his role as founding director of the study, but mostly because his convictions on second language teaching served as inspiration for the soul of the project. In fact, Stern's multidimensional model (1982, 1983b, see also Stern, 1992) for second language teaching, including four syllabuses – communicative activities, language, culture, general language education – was the principal theoretical basis of the Leblanc report. The National Core French Study reflects Stern's belief (see, for example, Stern, 1970, 1974, 1980, 1983a) that any understanding of second language teaching must be founded in the disciplines of linguistics (and related fields such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics, etc), psychology, sociology, anthropology and pedagogy, and must take the social and cultural, as well as the structural, nature of language into account. The basic premise is that a multiple perspective is a more effective approach for second language teaching than one focussed unidimensionally on grammar.

Since the publication of the National Core French Study report in 1990, educational authorities have allotted a great deal of time and money to the implementation of the recommendations of the report (see Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 1994). Ministries of Education across Canada have integrated the recommendations of the National Core French Study, either explicitly or implicitly, into their guidelines for core French (see, for example, British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1995; Prince Edward Island Department of Education, 1996). Furthermore, provincial working committees and publishers have created teaching materials based on the National Core French Study; schools are presently using these materials at all grade levels. In the next section, I summarize the pedagogical approach prescribed for elementary Core French programmes.

The Pedagogical Approach in Elementary Core French Programmes

The methodology, and the way teaching units are organised, characterize the pedagogical approach that the National Core French Study and the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers recommend for core French (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 1994). Students' active participation in educationally valid projects should drive the core French curriculum. The project is to be clearly defined at the beginning of a unit of work so that students and teachers can choose the most relevant activities and tasks to prepare the students to complete their project. More generally, the curriculum should be based on fields of experience (Tremblay, Duplantie & Huot, 1990) or themes that consider the learners' life experiences, intellectual development and interests. The chosen fields of experience must have educational value and should broaden the students' experience, thereby contributing to their general education (Tremblay *et al.*, 1990, p. 25). The authors of the National Core French Study propose drawing from the following five dimensions for content choice in core French teaching units:

- *Physical:* this relates to the survival of individuals and their physical well-being encompassing fields of experience like nutrition, physical exercise and self-protection;
- *Social:* this dimension refers to the students' social life including fields of experience like school, friends, family, relationships and social activities;
- *Civic:* this pertains to human rights and social responsibilities and includes fields of experience such as consumerism, substance abuse, the environment, crime and violence, and volunteerism;
- *Leisure:* this dimension relates to students' use of free time and includes fields of experience like clubs and associations, travel and outdoor activities;
- *Intellectual:* this involves fields of experience relating to "activities of the mind" like the sciences and the arts.

Activities included in a unit of work are needs-based (Canadian Association of Second Language Teaching, 1994, p. 8) in the sense that they are meant to prepare students for the completion of their final project. Elements of Stern's language syllabus (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) are to be integrated into the teaching unit explicitly, based on the communicative and linguistic requirements of the students' final project. Culture is considered an integral part of the L2 curriculum. The cultural focus in core French is on developing educational experiences to help students learn about present-day French-speaking culture, with an emphasis on the French element in Canada. In addition, teachers are to encourage students to make comparisons with their own culture, and to think and talk about ethnic diversity and cultural stereotypes. Where possible, the objective in core French is to offer a French-speaking perspective on the topic of the students' educational projects. Teaching units may also be organised so that the educational project has a cultural focus. Consider for example a unit related to local French-speaking (for example, Acadians for students in the Atlantic region of Canada, franco-Ontarians in Ontario). Students would be responsible for preparing an oral and written presentation on the way of life of a group of young French-speaking. General language education is also integrated, where possible, within the activities that prepare students to complete an educational project. These activities might include reflection on learning, self- and peer-evaluation, and the use of learning and communication strategies.

French is intended to be the language of communication in core French classes. Learning activities should provide an appropriate balance of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the beginning stages of core French programmes, the curriculum emphasizes listening and speaking, especially in grades 4-6. In grades 7 and 8, while the main focus is still listening and speaking, there is an increased emphasis on reading and writing.

Expectations for Elementary Core French Students

In this section, I present the expectations (or anticipated outcomes) for core French students at the end of elementary school in two Canadian provinces, Ontario and British Columbia, as a way of understanding the average core French student's L2 skills and knowledge before entering secondary school.

Ontario

Core French is mandatory in all Ontario schools from grades 4 to 8. The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (OMET) (1998, p. 20) expects that before students enter core French in high school in grade 9, they will be able to:

1. "listen to and talk about simple oral texts in structured and open-ended situations";
2. "express ideas, feelings, and opinions in conversations and discussions, using learned language structures and a variety of vocabulary and expressions";
3. "read a variety of simple materials, 400 to 600 words long, and demonstrate understanding";
4. "write in a variety of forms, adjusting language to suit the audience";
5. "identify and use the vocabulary and grammar and language conventions appropriate for this grade level." (for example, pronouns: *y*, *en*, *o*n; verbs: *passé composé* of regular and irregular verbs; adjectives: comparative and superlative forms, partitive article with negation; formation of adverbs with adjectives; basic vocabulary associated with careers, transportation, clothing, music, films, travel; use of basic sounds and their related spelling pattern; knowledge of cognates; use of some generalizations about spelling; use of resources to check spelling) (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1998, pp. 20-21).

British Columbia

All elementary students in British Columbia (BC) must study a second language from grades 5 to 8. School boards are free to choose which language(s) to offer. Nevertheless, 70% of students in British Columbia study are enrolled in core French (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1998). By the end of grade 8, the British Columbia Ministry of Education (1995, pp. 38-47) expects that core French students will be able to:

1. "participate in short conversations";
2. "share information about activities and interests";

3. “ask for information and permission”;
4. “participate in familiar activities (real and simulated) using simple French”;
5. “extract and process information from age-appropriate French resources”;
6. “view, listen to, and read creative works with visual and contextual support, and respond to them in a personal way”;
7. “recognize and use common patterns [in language]”;
8. “adjust [oral / written] message in order to use known expressions and vocabulary”;
9. “use graphic organisers to support oral and written expression”;
10. “reflect on learning”;
11. “identify and share school and community traditions”;
12. “identify elements of French-speaking cultures in the world”.

Consulting empirical assessments of core French students’ knowledge, skills and performance can offer a different perspective on the objectives and outcomes of core French. Harley, Lapkin, Scane and Hart (1988) developed and piloted “communicative”, standardized proficiency tests for listening, speaking, reading and writing in grade 8 (and 12). The tests reflect both receptive and expressive aspects of communication in French. Harley *et al.* (1988) also paid careful attention to the objectives and emphases outlined in drafts of the National Core French Study. More than 500 grade 8 students from six provinces and one territory completed these tests. A validated database now exists, making programme comparison possible.

Core French Teachers

There are two types of core French teachers in Canadian elementary schools: integrated and itinerant. Integrated core French instructors are responsible for teaching French, along with most other subjects, to their own homeroom class. Integrated core French teachers frequently also teach French to students of colleagues who do not have knowledge of French. Itinerant core French instructors are second language specialists who teach exclusively core French in one or more schools. Few statistics exist to describe the integrated-itinerant profile of core French teachers in Canada. Through personal communication, I have discovered that there is great variation in core French teacher profiles across the country. For example, 97% of core French teachers in New Brunswick are itinerant (personal communication, Gerry Pelletier), whereas in Manitoba, there is an equal number of integrated and itinerant teachers. (see also, Calman & Daniel, 1998, pp. 289-293, for a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of both staffing models).

There is also great variation in training and hiring practices for core French teachers. In some provinces (for example, Ontario, New Brunswick), teachers must have specialized training for French as a second language teaching. In others (for example, Nova Scotia, Yukon Territory, Manitoba), no specialized training is required (personal communication, Windsor-Myers, Klaassen-St. Pierre, Sotiriadis), but educational officials strongly recommend an excellent command of French and knowledge of current L2 pedagogy.

Research in Core French

Relatively few studies have been conducted in core French programmes, even though they have been a part of most mainstream curricula in Canada for many years (see Foley, Harley & d'Anglejan, 1988, for a bibliographic review of about 100 studies conducted; Lapkin, 1998; Lapkin, Harley & Taylor, 1993). In contrast, since the establishment of the first French immersion programme in St. Lambert, Québec, in 1965, hundreds of research projects have been conducted related to these programmes to examine questions like the effectiveness of immersion as compared to regular core French programmes, the degree to which immersion students' French is native-like, and more recently, how to improve immersion pedagogy and resulting French proficiency of the students (see, for example, Genesee, 1987; Harley, 1993; Lapkin, Swain with Shapson, 1990; Lyster, 1994a, 1994b, 1987; Swain, 1996; Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

Core French has indeed become *l'enfant pauvre* (Stern, 1985) of French as a foreign language teaching and research in Canada. This imbalance in research attention is probably best attributed to the excitement created by the newer immersion programmes. Many studies completed prior to the National Core French Study compared core and immersion French programmes (for example, Barik & Swain, 1975; Genesee, 1981). A few examined issues like time allotment per day in core French (Lapkin, Harley & Hart, 1995; Pawley & Bonyun, 1981; Stennett & Issacs, 1979), programme supplements such as cultural exchanges in a French-speaking region (for example, Gardner, Smythe & Brunet, 1977; Hanna, Smith, McLean & Stern, 1980), student characteristics (Bialystok & Fröhlich, 1977; Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978), factors affecting enrolment in core French (for example, Durward, 1983; Heffernan, 1981), teacher characteristics (for example, Marrin-McConnell, 1978; Shapson, Kaufman and Durward, 1978), and development and validation of tests and materials (for example, New Brunswick Department of Education, 1979; Stern, Ullmann, Balchunas, Hanna, Scheiderman & Argue, 1980).

In 1993, Lapkin, Harley and Taylor (1993) proposed research directions for Core French in four main topic areas: programme design, programme objectives and outcomes, curriculum issues and teacher education. Lapkin *et al.* (1993) questioned:

1. whether existing programme objectives and outcomes are accurate reflections of what can be achieved in core French programmes;

2. how programme designs that would allow for more intensive, initial exposure to French instruction, might affect student outcomes and attitudes towards core French;
3. if a "strong, well implemented culture syllabus" (p. 491) will make students more empathetic with, and understanding of, French Canadians;
4. the "distinctive" features of core French teacher education;
5. the level of French proficiency required to deliver core French programmes which reflect the principles of the National Core French Study;
6. whether an experientially based (or project-based) multidimensional core French curriculum leads to improved language proficiency compared with a traditional grammar-based approach;
7. whether the experientially-based multidimensional approach leads to more satisfactory outcomes with respect to other core French curriculum goals (affective, cultural, strategic, experiential);
8. the most appropriate balance of experiential and analytic language content for core French programmes. Lapkin *et al.* (1993) also indicated that research is needed to examine how teachers actually implement thematically organised, experientially oriented L2 texts and materials in the core French classroom (p. 500).

I now turn to research studies that have addressed some of the questions posed by Lapkin *et al.* in 1993. Lapkin, Hart and Harley (1998) reported on a case study that examined the effects on achievement and attitudes of two compact core French programmes – a half-day model, providing a half day of core French over ten weeks; the other included 80 minutes core French instruction per day over five months. Lapkin *et al.* compared these more compact models with the typical 40 minutes a day, for the whole school year, model. Some results (test scores) suggested that the more compact models of instruction had more positive effects on student proficiency. In addition, students in the more compact classes reported that they liked the longer periods and assessed their progress in French more positively than students in the 40 minutes per day class.

Lewis (1995, 1998) offered an interpretation of nine core French teachers' experiences and knowledge as they made sense of a new communicative-experiential curriculum over a two-year period. The researcher constructed these nine teachers' narratives based on:

1. an individual interview at the beginning, middle and end of the study;
2. transcriptions and field notes from five meetings with the whole group;
3. field notes reflecting two visits by the researcher to each participant's classroom.

The participants also visited each others' classrooms; articulating reactions from these visits became part of the group meetings. Lewis reported that the implementation of the new curriculum in core French required these teachers to continually integrate and reassess their beliefs about the mandated programme, their personal life experiences and their personal theories and practices about language learning and teaching. Lewis (1998, p. 253) referred to the teachers being "a little off balance in the midst of certain tensions". These tensions related to the continual challenge to their assumptions about what learning French was all about; working within a communicative-experiential core French curriculum meant a much more complex role for teachers and students. Lewis and her participants concluded that working within a communicative-experiential curriculum may require teachers to pay more attention to the affective factors in language learning. Ongoing tension was reported surrounding the teachers' attempts to take risks in order to create more effectively engaging contexts for language learning in their classes. This involved a change in practice for most of the teachers. They reported that this was perhaps the most important aspect of the new curriculum but it was also challenging to implement effectively. Lewis also reported tensions relating to the complex meaning of negotiation which evolved. These teachers talked about recreating the curriculum based on real negotiation with students about evaluation processes and learning activities, designed to engage the students and make them more interested in their learning. Lewis also reported that these teachers found themselves struggling with their new and more complex roles; they were required to take risks and commit themselves to change as they shared control of their classroom with students.

Vandergrift (1995) examined core French documents in all provinces and territories in Canada to identify commonalities in the rationale, philosophy of language and language learning, standards and outcomes, assessment measures and learning resources. He found that there was considerable agreement among the provinces and territories in terms of "the rationale for learning French, what it means to know language (functional communicative ability), what needs to be evaluated (sampled) in order to assess that ability" (1995, p. 25). Vandergrift also found that the provincial and territorial documents demonstrated agreement that language learning strategies, language awareness and culture were important components of core French curriculum design. He also found that all provinces and territories were interested in student outcomes in core French; however, there was considerable variation in the ways these documents articulated how these outcomes are best achieved. He found that some provinces and territories gave their teachers little guidance about core French content, methodology, assessment and resources, while others were very prescriptive. Vandergrift also found that provincial and territorial core French documents varied in the degree to which they reflected the recommendations of the National Core French Study.

Hart, Lapkin and Harley (1996) evaluated the extent to which the new multidimensional project-based (MPB) curriculum in core French (introduced in September, 1993) was being implemented in Alberta. This study surveyed both administrators and teachers involved in the implementation of the new core French

programmes, based on the National Core French Study. Participants in the survey indicated a wide range of opinions and acceptance of the new programmes. A near majority of the teachers were uncertain about whether the programme was improving student learning. Similarly, many of the teachers surveyed were quite uncertain about whether students liked the new programme more than the former one.

Turnbull (in press a, in press b) reported the results of detailed observations conducted in four grade 9 core French classes during one school semester in one school district in Eastern Canada. He also compared students' results on general French proficiency and achievement tests, the latter based on the objectives of a multidimensional project-based instructional unit all four teachers used during the study. Results from classroom observations suggested that the four teacher participants were implementing multidimensional project-based teaching in different ways. Two of the teachers organised their teaching around a final project. Students from these classes (the multidimentional project-based classes) obtained higher test scores on some components of the French proficiency and achievement tests, as compared to the other two teachers' students (non-classes); these non-multidimensional project-based teachers did not choose to teach towards a project, but did many of the prescribed activities. It was not possible to conclude with certainty that project-based multidimensional teaching was the single cause of superior test performance by the students from the multidimensional project-based classes. Teachers' use of French and English, student involvement in curriculum decisions and a dual form-meaning focus were discussed as possible confounding factors.

The Future for Core French in Canada

Core French Teachers and teacher educators are currently concerned with issues such as exceptional students (for example, new immigrants whose English skills are limited, students with learning difficulties), outcomes-based teaching and assessment, technology in core French, multigrade classes, the use of French and English in core French and availability of resources. In addition, many itinerant core French teachers who travel from one class to another have concerns about energy levels and their abilities to deliver quality programmes under such circumstances. More administrative attention and research are clearly needed on these issues. More process-oriented studies are needed to document teacher practice where multidimensional project-based teaching is successful. Teacher research conducted by core French teachers who have experienced success with topics such as multidimensional project-based instruction, multigrade classes, integration of exceptional students into core French, would offer valuable insights into classroom processes in core French. Additional process-product studies, be it other case studies or classroom-based experiments, are also needed so that sufficient data are available to investigate the relative influence of teaching approach on student outcomes, as compared to other factors like L2 use by teachers and student input in curriculum decisions. Future research should also include in-depth interviews with teachers, maybe conducted by teacher researchers, to understand what factors

influence curriculum decisions such as teaching towards a project, use of French and English, integration of technology, and outcomes-based assessment techniques. More interprovincial collaboration is needed to create curriculum documents, to develop assessment tools and to promote ongoing professional development (Lazaruk, 1994). Regular opportunities to share with second and foreign language educators in other countries are also needed. Core French educators in Canada have lots to share and lots to learn.

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Early Language Learning in the USA

Helena Curtain

The United States has been experiencing a resurgence of interest in language education. National organisations and commission reports have called for an increase in foreign language study and for the beginning of such study as early as possible in the elementary school. Various states have mandated language instruction beginning earlier than in high school which it has been the most. The federal government has launched various initiatives in which schools and universities can apply for funding to further the cause of early language learning. An organisation called the National Network for Early Language Learning has been established and has thousands of members across the country.

The federal government is considering a funding competition to encourage further development of early language learning programmes. Listed below are excerpts from the proposal for the Elementary Secondary Education Act released on May 19, 1999. It is not known if the proposal will receive funding, but it itself it is an encouraging step.

> Our proposal establishes a national goal that 25% of all public elementary schools should offer high-quality, standards-based, foreign language programmes by 2005, and that 50% should offer such programmes by 2010. These programmes would be tied to challenging standards and focused on developing student language proficiency, not simply exposing students to the language or culture. Finally, our proposal would support transitions between elementary and secondary school foreign language programmes.

This attention to language is much needed since the United States has consistently lagged behind the rest of the world in requirements for learning other languages. Unfortunately, it is easily possible to complete an entire educational sequence from kindergarten through advanced degrees at many universities without language study of any kind. Language study is required for entrance by about 25% of the post-secondary institutions and is required for graduation by 58% of these institutions in some or all of their degree programmes. Approximately 42% of colleges and universities do not have language requirements. (Robson, 1996, p. 126) Even though there is a strong mono-lingual tradition, the country was founded by immigrants speaking many different languages. Table 1 lists the top 25 languages spoken in the USA. Due to this English tradition and due also to the relative isolation of the country, language education has not been a priority. In fact, languages are very often not considered part of the academic core of subjects including mathematics, science, social studies and English. Languages have often been considered an extra subject and even as a “frill”.

The total number of United States residents 5 years old and over speaking a language other than English at home in 1990 was 31 845 000 (14% of the 230 446 000 residents 5 years old and over). This is an increase of almost 38 percent over the 1980 total of 23 060 000.

Language used at home	*Total speakers over 5 years old*		*Percentage change**
	1990	*1980*	
Spanish	17 339 000	11 549 000	50.1%
French	1 703 000	1 572 000	8.3%
German	1 547 000	1 607 000	- 3.7%
Italian	1 309 000	1 633 000	- 19.9%
Chinese	1 249 000	632 000	97.7%
Tagalog	843 000	452 000	86.6%
Polish	723 000	826 000	- 12.4%
Korean	626 000	276 000	127.2%
Vietnamese	507 000	203 000	149.5%
Portuguese	430 000	361 000	19.0%
Japanese	428 000	342 000	25.0%
Greek	388 000	410 000	- 5.4%
Arabic	355 000	227 000	57.4%
Hindi, Urdu and related	331 000	130 000	155.1%
Russian	242 000	175 000	38.5%
Yiddish	213 000	320 000	- 33.5%
Thai	206 000	89 000	131.6%
Persian	202 000	109 000	84.7%
French Creole	188 000	25 000	654.1%
Armenian	150 000	102 000	46.3%
Navajo	149 000	123 000	20.6%
Hungarian	148 000	180 000	- 17.9%
Hebrew	144 000	99 000	45.5%
Dutch	143 000	146 000	- 2.6%
Mon-Khmer	127 000	16 000	676.3%

Table 9: Top 25 Languages Spoken in the USA. Source: United States Census Bureau. Calculations are from numbers before rounding.

There is no official policy in regard to the teaching of foreign languages, although various states have instituted such policies. The responsibility for schooling in the United States rests with the individual states and not with the national government.

Status of Language Learning According to a Recent Survey

Good news regarding the status of early language learning has emerged from a survey (Branaman and Rhodes, 1998) that provides valuable information about the status of language information in the USA. In addition to the survey the Centre for Applied Linguistics has also established a partial directory of early language learning programmes. To date over 3 000 programmes are listed in the directory. In the United States, approximately 52% of high school students (usually grades 9-12), 36% of middle school students (usually grades 5-8 or grades 6-8) and 31% of elementary school (usually grades kindergarten through 5 or 6) students receive foreign language instruction. Of the elementary school programmes approximately 45% (Branaman & Rhodes, 1998) are programmes which may lead to some language proficiency, while the remainder are exploratory programmes which most likely do not have proficiency goals. In 1997, over four million elementary school students (out of 27.1 million) were enrolled in foreign language classes across the country. Over two-and-a-half million students were in public schools and one-and-a-half million in private schools. In the public elementary schools that taught foreign language, approximately half the students were provided foreign language instruction.

Amount of Foreign Language Instruction in Primary Schools

According to Branaman and Rhodes (1998), during the past decade, foreign language instruction in elementary schools has increased by nearly 10%. In 1987, just over one in five (22%) elementary schools reported teaching foreign languages; by 1997 the percentage had risen to 31% (approximately one in three), a statistically significant increase. (The percentage of secondary schools teaching foreign language remained fairly stable – 87% in 1987 and 86% in 1997).

Among the one-third of elementary schools that offered foreign language study, the majority (79%) of them provided programmes aimed at various kinds of introductory exposure to the language, while 21% offered programmes having overall proficiency as one of the goals. This means that only 7% of all elementary schools (increased from 3% in 1987) offered instruction in which the students were likely to attain a high level of fluency, as recommended in the goals of the national standards.

Early Language Learning in Various States

State leadership has propelled the growth of high-quality foreign language programmes at the primary school level. Currently, 35 out of the 50 states have policies or mandates for secondary school foreign language programmes; seven states, Arizona, Arkansas,

Louisiana, Montana, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Oklahoma, have foreign language mandates for their elementary schools.

Branaman and Rhodes (1998, p. 5) assert that a number of positive trends are evident from the survey results:

- language classes for native speakers have increased dramatically at both elementary and secondary levels;
- the teaching of less commonly taught languages has increased at the elementary level for Japanese and at the secondary level for Japanese and Russian;
- computer-based instructional tools were used by a significantly greater percentage of schools in 1997 than in 1987 (although we have no data on the effectiveness of technology in the language classroom);
- staff development and in-service training has increased significantly in the past decade in both elementary and secondary schools;
- teachers at the secondary level are using the target language more in the classroom;
- about half the schools teaching foreign languages said that their teachers were aware of national and/or state language standards; of those, over half the schools changed their curricula due to this awareness.

Languages Taught at the Elementary Level

Spanish and French continue to be the most common languages of instruction in elementary schools. Spanish instruction has increased significantly from 68% of schools in 1987 to 79% in 1997, while French instruction has decreased. 41% of the elementary schools offering foreign language instruction taught French in 1987 versus 27% in 1997, a statistically significant decrease. In fact, all other languages remained stable or decreased during the decade except for four – Spanish for Spanish speakers (up to 8% from 1%), Japanese (up to 3% from 0%), Italian (up to 2% from less than 1%), and Sign Language (up to 2% from less than 1%).

Languages Taught at the Secondary Level

Spanish instruction also increased significantly at the secondary level over the past decade – from 86% to 93% of secondary schools with foreign language programmes. French instruction remained fairly stable over this time period (66% of schools in 1987 vs. 64% in 1997). Instruction increased for Spanish for Spanish speakers (up to 9% from 1% in 1987), Japanese (up to 7% from 1%), and Russian (up to 3% from 2%), while all other languages remained fairly stable or decreased in frequency (Branaman, Rhodes & Rennie, 1998).

Secondary schools usually offer courses ranging from Level 1 to Level 4, reflecting the number of years of instruction, with some schools offering levels 5 and 6. As in the last survey, 1997 secondary schools with foreign language programmes offered a variety of levels of foreign language instruction, and the majority of these classes tended to be taught in a non-intensive manner. The most common length of class-time for almost all of the languages was five hours of instruction per week (Branaman, Rhodes & Rennie, 1998, p. 13).

Scheduling

In high schools, foreign language instruction occurs in rather consistent blocks of time, usually five 45-55 minute periods per week for a four-year sequence. In middle schools there is less consistency due to the variations in grade configurations and the initial grade in which languages are offered. A frequently used pattern is to provide a year of language on a daily basis in grade 8, or to provide two years of language on an alternating day basis in grades 7 and 8. In elementary schools there is no consistency in the amount of time available for instruction or in the time of onset for the programme.

Assessment

Assessment of students is done on a state by state or school district by school district basis. Recently voluntary foreign language standards (National Foreign Language Standards Project, 1996) have been agreed upon by a consortium of language-based professional organisations and by 1998, 19 states had developed foreign language standards (Branaman & Rhodes, 1998). Recently also the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages has completed Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners.

Teacher Qualifications

As expected, secondary school foreign language teachers were more highly certified than elementary foreign language teachers. 82% of the responding secondary schools said that their foreign language teachers were certified to teach at the secondary level, while only 19% of the responding elementary schools reported that all their teachers were certified for foreign language teaching at the elementary level. These results reflect the lack of available teacher training and certification programmes geared toward the elementary foreign language teacher. In addition, many states do not yet require licensure or endorsement for elementary school foreign language teachers.

Types of Language Programmes in Primary Schools

Programmes at the elementary level vary according to the grade level at which the language is introduced, the number of times the language is taught per week, and the length of time per language teaching session. Elementary school language classes may meet between two and five times per week, in sessions ranging from 20 to 70 minutes, with a minimum of 75 minutes per week being scheduled in many programmes. Recommendations exist for minimum time allotments, but these recommendations have not always been followed. More discussion on the issue of time follows the description of programme models. Also Table 10 shows the various programme types.

Programmes that are Continuous •Sequential • Cumulative • Continuous • Proficiency-Oriented • Part of an Integrated K-12 Sequence		
Programme Type	**Percent of Class Time Spent in FL per Week**	**Goals**
TOTAL IMMERSION Grades K-6	**50-100%** (Time is spent learning *subject matter* taught in FL; language learning *per se* incorporated as necessary throughout curriculum)	- To become functionally proficient in the foreign language; - To master subject content taught in the foreign language; - To acquire an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures.
TWO-WAY IMMERSION Grades K-6 *Also called Two-Way Bilingual and Dual Language, Developmental Bilingual Education*	**at least 50%** (Time is spent learning *subject matter* taught in FL; language learning *per se* incorporated as necessary throughout curriculum) Student population is both native speakers of English and of the foreign language.	- To become functionally proficient in the language that is new to the student; - To master subject content taught in the new language; - To acquire an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures.
PARTIAL IMMERSION Grades K-6	**approx. 50%** (Time is spent learning *subject matter* taught in FL; language learning *per se* incorporated as necessary throughout curriculum).	- To become functionally proficient in the foreign language (although to a lesser extent than is possible in total immersion); - To master subject content taught in the foreign language; - To acquire an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures.
CONTENT-BASED FLES Grades K-6	**15-50%** (Time spent learning language *per se* as well as learning subject matter in the FL).	- To acquire proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing the foreign language; - To use subject content as a vehicle for acquiring foreign language skills; - To acquire an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures.

FLES Grades K-6	**5-15%** (minimum 75 minutes per week, at least every other day). Time is spent learning language *per se.*	- To acquire proficiency in listening and speaking (degree of proficiency varies with the programme); - To acquire an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures; - To acquire some proficiency in reading and writing (emphasis varies with the programme).
Programmes that are Non-Continuous and not usually part of an integrated K-12 sequence		
FLEX Grades K-6 *Frequent and regular sessions over a short period of time • OR • Short and/or infrequent sessions over an extended period of time*	**1-5%** (Time spent sampling one or more languages and/or learning *about* language--sometimes taught mostly in English)	- To develop an interest in foreign languages for future language study; - To learn basic words and phrases in one or more foreign languages; - To develop careful listening skills; - To develop cultural awareness; - To develop linguistic awareness.

Table 10: K-8 Foreign Language Programme Goals. Source: Nancy Rhodes, Centre for Applied Linguistics, 1985. Adapted and revised by Pesola and Curtain, In Languages and Children: Making the Match, Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman, 1994.

Immersion and Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES)

Elementary school foreign language programmes which lead to language proficiency can be classified into two major types: immersion programmes and other early language learning programme of called “FLES” (Foreign Language in the Elementary School) programmes. FLES has sometimes been used as a general term to describe all foreign language programmes at this level. However, it is most often used to describe a particular type of elementary school foreign language programme, one that is taught two to five times per week for class periods of 20 to 60 minutes or more. Some FLES classes integrate other areas of the curriculum and employ content-based or content-related instruction; others focus on the second language and its culture (Curtain & Pesola, 1994; Rosenbusch, 1991). Gradually the term FLES is being replaced by the term “early language learning” or the term “early start”.

Content-based instruction, an important component of many elementary school language programmes allows schools to combine the goals of the second language curriculum and the regular curriculum so that foreign language learning can also become the vehicle for developing general skills and knowledge. In content-based instruction the regular school curriculum or content areas are taught through the second

language. The success of immersion programmes, which are by definition content-based programmes has spurred interest in bringing the benefits of content-based instruction to other types of elementary school foreign language programmes.

FLES programmes are intended to be part of a long sequence of language study leading to continuing courses at the secondary level. This means that a student studies a single language throughout the programme sequence in the elementary school, middle school and high school. (This does not imply that only one language is offered throughout the school district, or that students might not begin the study of another language later in the sequence. If students wish to study another foreign language, the ideal would be to offer continuing classes in the language begun in the elementary school and to offer beginning classes in another language at the middle school or high school level).

In the amount of time dedicated to language study, FLES programmes fall midway between immersion programmes (which provide instruction in the target language up to 100% of the day) and exploratory programmes (which provide minimal language exposure). In immersion programmes the usual curriculum activities are conducted in a second language. This language is the medium as well as the object of instruction. The second language is used for 50-100% of the school day throughout the school experience. The focus is on subject matter, but language learning per se is incorporated as necessary throughout the curriculum.

Organisation of Early Start programmes

FLES programmes have a time allotment of 5-15% in the student day. Time is usually spent learning language per se. The goal of FLES programmes is functional proficiency in the second language. The degree of proficiency students obtain varies with the programme, depending on the amount of time available for language instruction and the quality of instruction that the students receive. In FLES programmes, proficiency goals are most often concentrated on listening and speaking. Students are also expected to acquire an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures, and to acquire some proficiency in reading and writing.

In content-enriched FLES programmes, functional proficiency in the second language may be possible to a greater degree than in regular FLES programmes because there is often greater programme intensity, more time actually spent using the language, and there may be a broader range of topics covered in the course of instruction.

As can be seen from the preceding descriptions, there are great variations among elementary school foreign language programmes according to the length and frequency of instruction, the grade levels at which the programmes start, and the types of instruction that are offered. Given the complete array of options and combinations available, it is very difficult to synthesize information on the language outcomes of these various programme options.

Exploratory

Many elementary schools offer exploratory programmes which are usually limited to introducing students to language and culture, with the intent of arousing interest in further language study. They are set apart from true foreign language programmes in that they usually do not have any degree of language proficiency as an intended outcome, and they are not always part of an articulated sequence.

In some exploratory programmes the students explore several languages in order to get a taste of language learning and in order to help them make a decision about later language study. This type of a programme poses three problems:

- staffing can be a serious concern because it is difficult to find teachers who are able to teach two or three languages. Often one teacher who is fluent in one language is assigned to teach the exploratory programme for two other languages in which the teacher has absolutely no competence;
- the second problem is that the curriculum for courses in which more than one language is taught tends to be very similar. Sometimes students learn the colors, numbers and alphabet of one language after the other. This does not provide a motivating language learning experience and goes against the goals of language as purposeful communication;
- while such a programme does allow students see that there are different languages, it does not allow for a meaningful language learning experience that can be the foundation for later language experiences.

Staffing

Staffing is one of the most important components in the elementary school foreign language programme. Although it is vital that teachers working within any of the staffing models described below have excellent language skills and they have had training and experience in working with elementary school children, this is not always the case. When enough certified, qualified teachers cannot be found, secondary teachers or persons who have fluency in the language are hired and given provisional teaching license.

Instructional Practices in Early Language Learning Programmes

While strategies and activities used in elementary school foreign language methodology are extremely diverse (as is the methodology used for teaching any curriculum at this level), there are several common elements. First, elementary school foreign language programme methodology emphasizes communication. Teachers seek

to conduct classes in the target language. Second, teachers emphasize an activity-oriented approach which takes into account the developmental level of the students. And third, teachers seek to integrate elements of language instruction with the aims of the regular curriculum.

Emphasis on Communication

In promoting communication as the main goal, teachers use the target language as the primary means of interaction, so that children are immersed in an environment where the language is used naturally as a real means of communication. The teacher helps the student understand the target language through use of gestures, visuals, and concrete examples, and through the routines and rituals of the lesson and the school day. Teachers use their acting abilities, as well as concrete objects, to illustrate meaning. In most language classes, students are surrounded by language that is made meaningful because of the concrete, accessible nature of the context and because of the way the teachers speak to them. This language of the classroom environment is assimilated by students and later drawn upon when they are ready to express messages of their own in the target language.

Research in second language acquisition suggests the need for early language experiences that provide many opportunities for listening comprehension, especially at the early stages (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982). Activities that encourage listening skills include such strategies as active physical involvement, during which the students must respond to verbal commands by performing certain actions. Other activities that encourage listening skills are teacher demonstrations (with the teacher making use of props, pictures, and pantomime to aid comprehension), descriptions, and telling or reading a story. In the beginning stages of instruction teachers emphasize listening, but reading and writing activities also flow out of listening and speaking activities. The amount of allocated time devoted to reading and writing activities varies according to the age and grade level of the students.

Activity-oriented Approach

Instruction in early language learning programmes also emphasizes concrete experiences and the use of visuals and physical activity. This emphasis is crucial since the children in these programmes are at concrete stages of cognitive development. Games, partner activities, experience-based approaches to reading and writing, experience-based culture activities, crafts and cooking activities all help motivate students to communicate and provide situations in which communication is concrete, natural and meaningful. Other frequently used strategies involve children's literature and folk and fairy tales and participation in storytelling and re-telling, puppetry, role-play, games and action songs.

Integration with the Regular Curriculum

A third emphasis in elementary school foreign language curriculum is some degree of integration of the foreign language curriculum with the regular curriculum. As early language teachers plan their lessons, they look for ways to integrate the foreign language into other subject areas. For example, if students are learning the names of foods, they may use the food vocabulary in order to plan a nutritious lunch based on the food pyramid, or they may use the names of animals to talk about animal habitats. The reason for this approach is three-fold: first, it provides a meaningful topic for communication; second, it meets the needs of the foreign language programme and reinforces concepts from the regular curriculum; and third, such an emphasis helps to deal with the issue of how much time to allocate to early language learning programmes. Touching on topics from the regular curriculum gives some assurance that time allocated to language learning is not completely "lost" to the regular curriculum.

Issues and Challenges in Early Language Learning Programmes

A useful way to summarize the desired characteristics of high-quality early language learning programmes is to examine the recommendations made by a national group of experts convened to try to achieve consensus on such programmes (Rosenbusch, 1992). This group of programme administrators, researchers, teacher educators and practitioners recommended that students study a single language throughout the sequence, and that programmes for young learners be articulated vertically throughout the entire sequence. They also recommended that classes should meet all year within the school day (at least every other day), for a minimum average of 75 minutes per week. They recommended that teachers should have both language proficiency and the professional knowledge and skills necessary for effective foreign language instruction at the elementary school level. Finally, they recommended that the goal should be for students to be able to comprehend and produce meaningful messages and not simply learn isolated vocabulary words and structures.

The Issue of Time

In any programme, learning outcomes are associated with how much time is actually available for learning, and how that time is actually spent. The general belief is that "the more time students spend working communicatively with the target language under the guidance of a skilled and fluent teacher, the greater will be the level of language proficiency they acquire." (Curtain & Pesola, 1994, p. 31).

Curtain and Pesola differ from the national group mentioned above in that they recommend that a minimum time allotment for early language learning programmes should be 30 minutes three times per week. They also recommend that the programme begin as early as possible. Despite the fact that both of these minimum recommendations are extremely low, they are not always followed. As has been stated, there are many variations in programme models. Some which label themselves "FLES" offer languages once a week for 20 minutes; some offer it three times a week for 30 minutes; still others offer it every day for 45 minutes. Some begin language instruction at kindergarten, others at grades 2 or 3, still others at grades 4 or 5 (Brown, 1994; Grittner, 1991; Lipton, 1988; and Rosenbusch, 1995). Some programmes continue through grade 8, while others are offered only in the elementary school with no connections to the secondary levels, so that students must start language study again when they reach the middle school or high school. Some programmes are offered in alternating languages to give students a choice and to satisfy parent requests for certain languages.

Of course, this great variety in programme design does not allow for a focused standardized approach to early language learning. While some programmes follow the guidelines established by the national group of experts documented by Rosenbusch (1992), others have paid no attention to such minimums. Grittner (1991), relating an account of visiting a programme in which there was only 24 hours of contact time in a year, criticizes such practices:

> Twenty-four hours per year – the equivalent of a few days' visit to a Spanish-speaking country! A total of seventy-two hours, over a three-year period. And according to government estimates, it takes eight times that (600 hours) to bring well-motivated adults to the point where they can "satisfy basic survival needs and meet minimum courtesy requirements in Spanish." Clearly, the expectations of these FLES programmes were totally unreasonable simply in terms of the allocated time provided. We should not have implied that fluency would result. (p. 183)

Teacher Education

Elementary school foreign language programmes are currently facing a shortage of foreign language teachers that is even more serious than the shortage of foreign language teachers in general. This is due to the success of elementary school foreign language pro-

grammes and the fact that very few teacher preparation programmes exist. This is an area of concern since good teachers are the key to the success or failure of any programme.

The Branaman and Rhodes survey also provided information about staff development and in-service teacher training which has increased significantly in the past decade. In 1997, over two-thirds (67%) of elementary schools that offer foreign language classes reported that their language teachers had participated in staff development or in-service training during the past year compared to only half (53%) in 1987. At the secondary level, over three-quarters (76%) of schools with foreign language programmes reported that their teachers attended staff development or in-service training, a statistically significant increase over 1987 (69%).

Schultz, (1998) clearly summarizes the situation in regard to teacher training. “The majority of language teachers receive instruction in language and culture and pedagogy. Their language skills vary from extremely fluent to minimal. Minimal fluency may be a result of the fact that language teachers may be certified in some areas with as little as a minor in language study.” (21 credit hours, or 315 hours of instruction.)

In most states teachers are required to continue earning academic credits in order to renew and maintain their teaching licenses.

Within the United States, curriculum is set at the district level and thousands of individual school districts make thousands of individual decisions regarding the nature of such programmes. As has been mentioned, the plus side of this situation is that school districts have not had to wait for a federal or state mandate to start their programmes. The negative side is, of course, that there is no consistency, and sometimes no continuity, in FLES programmes.

Branaman and Rhodes (1998) report that most of the elementary and secondary schools teaching foreign language reported having an established foreign language curriculum or set of guidelines for their programme (elementary = 70% in 1997 vs. 64% in 1987; secondary = 88% in 1997 vs. 85% in 1987). More high schools than middle school / junior high schools reported that there was an established foreign language curriculum. The curricula at all school levels tended to be developed by the teachers at the school (Branaman & Rhodes, 1998). There are few commercially available early language learning materials produced in the United States. Those that are available are primarily in Spanish. Most school districts develop their own curriculum in order to meet the needs of their particular students and in order to co-ordinate with the regular curriculum. Publishers are now beginning to pay attention to the growing market in this area and more commercial materials are in the process of being developed. What is especially needed are ready-made thematic units relating to the school curriculum. These units could be adapted by the teachers so that each teacher would not have to create their own materials starting from point zero.

Challenges

The challenges facing early language learning programmes in the United States have been mentioned throughout this article. A summary is listed below.

- *Choice of programme model which will lead to language fluency and be part of a long sequence of instruction.*
  Early language learning programmes need to be standardized so that minimum expectation for time allotments are followed. It needs to be made clear to parents and administrators who often have unrealistic hopes about how little actually be accomplished in programmes with minimal time allotments. It also needs to be made clear to parents and administrators that exploratory produce significantly fewer gains than programmes directed at developing proficiency. Unfortunately according to the Branaman and Rhodes survey roughly 71% of elementary language programmes in 1997 were exploratory.
- *Articulation (continuity / sequencing).*
  With increasing numbers of elementary schools offering a foreign language, continuity with middle and secondary school programmes is a pressing issue. Unfortunately very few secondary schools take previous language achievement into account when assigning students to classes. To make matters worse twenty-six percent (Branaman & Rhodes, 1998) of elementary school respondents (down by 5% from 1987), indicated that their districts place students who have studied foreign language in elementary school in beginning level foreign language classes along with students with no prior knowledge of the language.
- *Funding:* to establish and to maintain early language learning programmes is a serious problem. Early language learning programmes mainly depend on specialist teachers who are added to the school's budget allowance for staff. In other words, an extra teacher is needed. Funding for this extra teacher or teachers must be found. Often when budget funds are decreased, foreign language learning may be the first to be eliminated.
- *Unrealistic goals and expectations.*
- *Shortage of teachers:* because of the lack of importance placed on languages in the United States, there is a corresponding lack of teachers trained in this area, this lack if even more serious at the elementary school level. Elementary school teachers very rarely study languages as part of their general training. The teacher shortage could be eased if language fluency were one of the requirements for obtaining a teaching license.
- *Inadequate in-service training:* there are few formal places for training early language learning teachers and minimal opportunities for in-service training. Most university pedagogical trainers do not have experience in this area.

- *Ratio of students to teachers:* one of the serious problems in early language learning programmes concerns the high numbers of students, that early language learning teachers must teach, sometimes as many as 500 or more per week. Another problem is that they often must teach 12 to 14 classes in a day. Finally, the early language learning teacher is often also the curriculum and is responsible for providing curriculum materials. Teacher "burn-out" has become a serious issue. After a few years of such a grueling schedule, teachers of young language learners look for other less stressful positions.
- *Lack of quality materials:* as has been mentioned there are not sufficient materials to meet the demand.
- *Lack of sufficient allocated time and sufficient intensity to produce quality programmes.*

Conclusion

In summary, while there have been many successes in early language learning programmes, there are also many challenges that remain. The good news is that more and more schools are deciding to offer such programmes, and more and more state governments are paying attention to this issue. Branaman and Rhodes speak eloquently to this situation.

> Despite these positive trends, there is still reason for concern about the limited number of K-12 long-sequence language programs that are designed to educate students linguistically and culturally to communicate successfully in the US and abroad. Well-articulated elementary and secondary programs are still the exception rather than the rule, and intensive instruction that aims at a high level of proficiency, as outlined in the national standards document, is scarce. (p. 5)

Curtain

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SCHULTZ, R. "Foreign Language Education in the United States: Trends and Challenges". *The ERIC Review, 6* (1), 6-12.

Appendix

Sources For Further Information on Early Language Learning

Books:

MET, M. (Ed) (1998) Critical Issues in Early Second Language Learning. *Building for Our Future.* Glenview , IL: Scott Foresman.

Internet:

Ñandutí: www.cal.org/earlylang

CAL (Centre for Applied Linguistics): http://www.cal.org

NNELL (National Network for Early Language Learning): http://www.educ.iastate.edu/nnell/

Bilingual Families Web Site: http://www.byu.edu/~bilingua/

Listservs:

Ñandu: Listserv for elementary school foreign language educators **(**See Nandutí web site)

FL Teach (Foreign Language Teaching Forum) Listserv for secondary school foreign language educators. http://www.cortland.edu/www/flteach/flteach.html

Related Internet Sites:

NCBE (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education): http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/

TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages): http://www.tesol.edu

ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages): http://www.actfl.org

AATG (American Association of Teachers of German): http://www.aatg.org/

AATF (American Association of Teachers of French): http://aatf.utsa.edu/

AATF (American Association of Teachers of Spanish): http://aatf.utsa.edu/

Biographical Information

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Helena Curtain is currently at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and prepares ESL and foreign language teachers in grades K-12. Previously she co-ordinated the ESL and foreign language programmes in the Milwaukee Public Schools, and taught at the elementary, middle school and high school levels. She has won several national awards and is the author of a variety of publications. She has broad experience teaching and conducting workshops throughout the United States and internationally.

Teaching English to Young Learners in Hong Kong

David R. Carless and P. M. Jennie Wong

Considerable effort and interest has been invested in the teaching and learning of English in Hong Kong, due both to its historical status as a former British colony and the instrumental power of English as the international language of business, commerce, technology and academia. With its geographical location at the southern tip of China and its historical links to both Britain and China, Hong Kong is a rich and fascinating sociolinguistic entity, of interest to researchers and practitioners both within and beyond the Asia-Pacific region.

The focus of this article will be to explore the current state of English language teaching in Hong Kong for primary school pupils aged from 6-11. Firstly, we will briefly introduce the Hong Kong education system, in particular as it relates to primary education. Given the importance of language in education in Hong Kong, we will then provide some background information on the role and status of the three main languages used in Hong Kong, namely Cantonese, English and Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese). We will move on to describe the primary school context and the primary English teaching workforce. We will conclude our survey by examining the primary English curriculum and drawing out some of the main challenges relevant to the teaching of young learners in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong Education System

The Hong Kong education system is overseen by the Education Department, a body of full-time civil servants including administrators, curriculum developers and inspectors. Education policy derives not from the Education Department, but principally from the Education Commission, an appointed body with a wide composition, including civil servants, senior personnel in non-educational fields and representatives from different educational sectors, such as primary and secondary school heads, and academics. Education Commission Reports (ECR) have served to set the agenda for educational developments in Hong Kong, since the publication of the first report in 1984.

Since 1978, students in Hong Kong have been entitled to 9 years of compulsory and free education from the ages of 6-15. Even before the age of 6, most children in Hong Kong have already had 2-3 years of education at kindergarten level. Although attendance at kindergarten is voluntary, 85% of the relevant age group are enrolled

(Education and Manpower Branch, 1994). At the age of 6, students start their 6 years of primary education.

After primary school education, students will progress to a three-year junior secondary course. Allocation of secondary school places is based on the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) system. This selective system exerts a strong influence on the primary school curriculum (Biggs, 1996) and is therefore described briefly below. Before leaving primary schools, learners have to sit for an academic aptitude test (AAT) which consists of two papers, verbal reasoning and numerical reasoning. This test is used for scaling learners' performance in their internal school assessments. Based on the results, individual student's learning aptitude is assessed and these students are divided into five different gradations of aptitude, called bands, with band 1 being the best performing group and band 5 the worst. Based on this banding, together with parents' choice of secondary schools, each learner is allocated a secondary school place. After the three compulsory years of junior secondary education, around 90% of students stay on for another two-year senior secondary course. They then sit for the major high-stakes public examination, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination at the age of 17.

Role and Status of Cantonese, English and Putonghua in Hong Kong

The teaching of English to young learners in Hong Kong is influenced by various contextual and sociolinguistic factors. This section will discuss triglossia in Hong Kong, focusing principally on English and relating the discussion to the primary school situation.

Cantonese

As the mother tongue of at least 95% of the population, Cantonese serves the role of everyday spoken communication. It also provides a sense of identity and gives Hong Kong citizens a sense of integration and unity (Education Department, 1989). Cantonese is, however, only a spoken dialect used mainly in the southern part of China and is different from Modern Standard Chinese which fulfils the purpose of written communication throughout Chinese-speaking communities worldwide. Cantonese therefore has a high status as a social language, but a relatively low status as a language of wider communication or as a medium of academic discourse.

English

In comparison with Cantonese and written Chinese, the use of English in Hong Kong is limited yet relatively important. English in Hong Kong shares some characteristics of

both a second language and a foreign language (Evans, 1996; Luke & Richards, 1982). Lowe (1997, p. 8) describes English as a "prestige language in a society that mostly speaks another tongue." Luke and Richards categorize English as an auxiliary language, "a non-native language which is reserved for certain restricted functions in society and for use by a restricted section of that society" (1982, p. 55). The uses of English are mainly for instrumental purposes. Firstly, it is still used within the government as one of the official languages and indeed up until 1974 when Chinese became an official language, English was the sole governmental language. English is also used within the vocational field to do business with non-Chinese speakers. During the last two decades, Hong Kong's status as an international trading and business centre has given rise to an increasing demand for employees who are proficient in English. As a result, English is highly valued in Hong Kong society, particularly in governmental and business domains. Capable and talented individuals, fluent in both Chinese and English, are highly sought and are likely to seek careers in business-oriented fields rather than in education.

English is also used widely within the academic field for study purposes in local secondary and tertiary institutes, and also overseas where many local students pursue their studies at some stage. For Hong Kong learners, a good command of English has almost become a pre-requisite for further study and the key to better job prospects. As Fu (1987, p. 29) observes, "English is the passport, it is the prestige, it is the profession, and parents want their children to get on the boat early and to stay there". Under parental and instrumental influences, attitude surveys also report positive orientations amongst students to the learning of English (Axler, Yang & Stevens, 1998; Pennington & Yue, 1994; Pierson, Fu & Lee, 1980). Bickley (1990) suggests that the desire to acquire English language skills as a means to material benefits is a long-term and stable characteristic of the Hong Kong population.

Given these feelings about the instrumental value of English, there has been strong pressure from parents, particularly since the late 1970s, for their children to be educated through the medium of English at the secondary level. By this, we mean that subjects, such as Mathematics, Geography, History would be taught through the medium of English using English language textbooks written in Hong Kong. Chinese and Chinese history would be the only subjects taught exclusively through the mother tongue. A vast majority of secondary school during the last 20 years consequently claimed to be English-medium although, in practice, this has often meant mixed code i.e. the use of English textbooks being explicated mainly through Cantonese (Boyle, 1997a; Chan, Hoare & Johnson, 1997; Johnson, 1991). The amount of mixed code varies according to the English ability of the pupils (and teachers).

The transition from mother tongue instruction at primary level to a nominally English medium secondary education is a major challenge for many pupils and has contributed to the emphasis on English as a subject in primary school. Many difficulties have been encountered and the government has tried throughout the 1990s to encourage schools

to adopt Chinese as the official medium of instruction at secondary level (Education Commission, 1990, 1995). Parental preference for English medium education, or in practice mixed code as outlined above, has inhibited the introduction of Chinese as a medium of instruction. The change of sovereignty seems though, to have added some political will to the strong educational arguments supporting instruction through the mother tongue. Starting from September 1998, only about 25% of secondary schools with appropriate student intakes and staff are being permitted to remain English medium, the remainder are required to teach all subjects (except English language) through the mother tongue. To mitigate societal concerns about an associated drop in English language standards, the Education Department is concurrently expanding the use of native speakers as English teachers in secondary schools with a NET (Native-speaking English Teacher) scheme involving more than 350 teachers recruited from English-speaking countries worldwide.

Putonghua

In view of the political change of Hong Kong from a British colony to a Special Administrative Region of China on 1st July 1997, Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) has begun to play a more significant role, both in Hong Kong society as a whole and in schools. Putonghua is the official language of China and shares the same written form as Modern Standard Chinese. Long before the change of sovereignty, it had already been suggested that greater attention should be given to the teaching of Putonghua in schools. ECR No. 4 (Education Commission, 1990) proposed that more schools should be encouraged to teach Putonghua and in ECR No. 6, the importance of teaching Putonghua was restated. It is suggested that "in the long term, Putonghua should be part of the core curriculum for all primary and secondary students" (Education Commission, 1995, p. 21). In the short term, however, the development of Putonghua as a school subject is inhibited by a shortage of trained teachers (Pierson, 1998) and a curriculum that already devotes a lot of time to languages (Adamson & AuYeung Lai, 1997).

Despite this growing significance of Putonghua, the importance of English has remained unchanged. Although Hong Kong is now under Chinese sovereignty, the status of both English and Chinese as the official languages in Hong Kong is guaranteed by the Basic Law, drawn up by Britain and China. A survey, discussed in Boyle (1997b), found that when given a choice between proficiency for their offspring in only Putonghua or only English, 75% of parents opted for the latter. This may reflect a pragmatic and materialistic stance for commerce over politics in that as Pierson (1987) suggests, the likely roles of the three languages in the future of Hong Kong are Cantonese as the language of intimacy, English as the language of technology, business and development, and Putonghua as the language of politics and administration.

The Primary School Learning Context

Most primary schools are publicly-funded and are operated by non-profit-making voluntary organisations which receive funds from the government. The government directly manages only a small number of primary schools (Hong Kong Government, 1997). Given the limited availability of land in Hong Kong, the majority of primary schools operate bi-sessionally, with two separate schools coexisting in the same premises. Pupils are either enrolled for the morning session from about 08.00-12.45 or the afternoon session from about 01.00-05.45. Whole-day schooling for all primary students is regarded as a long-term governmental goal (Board of Education, 1997; Hong Kong Government, 1997).

Chinese is the medium of instruction in almost all primary schools and English is the only other language commonly taught as a timetabled subject in primary schools. Only a few primary schools, catering mainly for expatriates, use English as the language of instruction or teach additional second or foreign languages. In kindergarten, most children have already had the chance to learn the English alphabet and some simple vocabulary. Therefore when they progress to primary schools, they have already made a start in English language.

Class sizes in primary schools are usually around 35-40 and classrooms are cramped with little storage facilities. This difficulty is exacerbated by noise pollution from traffic and ubiquitous construction work. Teachers often use microphones to enable themselves to be heard clearly. Most classes are taught using predominantly traditional teacher-centred, whole-class methods. Teachers have tended to see their main role as to impart knowledge to pupils, who are generally expected to sit quietly and absorb information. One of the contributing factors to this teaching style may be the influence of traditional Chinese culture which tends to value attentiveness and patience. Another major factor is the constraints of the learning environment, mentioned above, given that background noise and teacher use of the microphone are likely to have a negative impact on pupil participation. In addition, large class sizes and cramped classroom conditions often make the management of group activities problematic. Younger teachers, however, particularly those who have been trained recently, are more likely to understand and adopt more progressive pupil-centred approaches, although at times they may be discouraged by peer pressure from older or more traditional-minded colleagues.

Teaching is often textbook-dominated. Ng (1994, p. 82) observes that “many teachers, perhaps as a result of perceived or actual pressure from the school or from parents, try to ‘finish the textbook’ with little regard to the ability of the students”. In the context of English teaching, this reliance on the textbook is also related to the fact that many teachers lack confidence in their own English proficiency and so the textbook becomes a crutch on which to cling. A large amount of homework is set and primary student may face two or three hours of homework every day. Pressure from tests and

examination is extreme and failure with subsequent demotivation is common. A primary learner will have at least one test and one examination for each subject every school term. This pressure from the examination-oriented culture has led both students and teachers to see the main goals of learning English as to prepare learners to pass internal school examinations and eventually the public examinations at the age of 17 (Richards Tung & Ng, 1992). The pressure of tests and examinations undoubtedly has a negative effect on the interest and enjoyment of young learners in Hong Kong.

For the majority of primary students in Hong Kong, their only contact with the English language is through their English lessons at school since outside the English classroom, they are unlikely to need to use the language as their families and the community mostly speak Cantonese. In the school, contact time given to the English subject is about seven to nine English periods each week and each period lasts for about thirty-five minutes. As observed by Ng (1994), the English language periods are often compartmentalized into periods of English grammatical usage, composition, reading, dictation, listening and speaking. Teachers are encouraged to use the target language as much as possible but in practice, mixed code is common.

The Chinese Confucian study ethic places great societal importance on education, with an emphasis on effort and will-power (Lee, W. O., 1996). Despite this factor and strong parental encouragement for the learning of English, pupil performance in the language has been somewhat mixed. Many pupils quickly become discouraged, due mainly to the following reasons:

- uninteresting textbook-based teaching methods;
- a surfeit of homework, exams and tests;
- a perceived or actual lack of success;
- pupil reticence and anxiety (cf. Tsui, 1996).

The Primary English Teacher

Teacher education

Pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes, at mainly sub-degree level, are provided by the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), the main supplier of teacher education in Hong Kong. BEd and MEd degrees are also awarded by the two oldest and most prestigious universities, the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In the primary sector, the majority of teachers qualify via two-year or three-year HKIEd teaching certificate courses. Primary student teachers are trained to teach the core subjects of Chinese, mathematics and general studies, and are also required to opt for a fourth elective, such as, English, music or art. Once they start

work, most teachers usually teach two or sometimes three subjects. The HKIEd is currently undergoing a major long-term upgrading exercise and a four-year BEd (primary) was started for the first time in September 1998.

Teacher characteristics

The Hong Kong primary teaching workforce is mainly made up of dedicated and hard-working teachers, faced by difficult teaching conditions and heavy workloads, especially in terms of marking. However, concerns about the quality of the teaching profession have been voiced frequently in Hong Kong, particularly during the last two decades (for example, Education Commission, 1990, 1992; Llewellyn, Hancock, Kirst & Roelffs, 1982; Tsui, 1993). Amid widespread societal perceptions that English language standards are falling, much criticism has centred on the proficiency and competency of language teachers. A recent survey of the attitudes and opinions of Hong Kong primary teachers by Lee, I. (1996) revealed that they lacked confidence in their English language proficiency, were slightly more confident about their classroom teaching skills, and had low self-esteem as professionals. We will indicate below that this lack of confidence derives in part from the prevalence of non-subject trained and non-graduate teachers.

Due to the large primary school population and the fact that English is a compulsory subject for all primary learners, there has tended, in recent years, to be a lack of trained English teachers. According to a recent survey, 55% of primary English teachers are not subject-trained (Education Department, 1997). The untrained language teachers tend to experience two main difficulties. Firstly, their own language proficiency is insufficient for them either to be a good model of language use or to teach consistently through the target language. Secondly, their lack of awareness of appropriate language teaching methodology inhibits pupil learning and has a negative impact on the teachers' own professional development.

The non-graduate qualifications of teachers is another issue that has been widely debated in Hong Kong. As mentioned above, most primary teachers are trained at the HKIEd which provides mainly sub-degree teacher training courses. Education Department (1997) statistics show that only 3% of primary English teachers are graduates, and it is government policy that more graduate positions be created in schools. The Hong Kong Chief Executive has announced a policy aim of graduate positions making up 35% of all primary school teaching posts by 2001. The stated long-term aim is for an all graduate teaching profession.

Benchmarking

Given the problems discussed above, ECR No. 6 recommended that, in order to ensure adequate teaching competence and language proficiency, minimum language

proficiency standards should be specified for all new teachers and that all language teachers should be "encouraged to gain a formal language teaching qualification in addition to their basic teaching qualification" (Education Commission, 1995, p. 48). In addition, "First Aid" advice should be available for language teachers who have no language teaching qualification.

Falvey and Coniam (1997), the English language consultants for the benchmarking project, indicate that the competencies to be benchmarked will be:

- language ability;
- subject content knowledge / language awareness;
- pedagogical content knowledge / teaching ability.

Given the large scale of the benchmarking initiative, testing will be staged in phases. From 1999, pre-service students will need to pass the relevant benchmarks before being permitted to enter the profession. In-service teachers will take the tests at a slightly later date. In-service teachers who are unable to reach the required standard will be offered additional training and support before retaking the tests. A timetable by which all teachers will need to have passed the appropriate benchmarks is being developed.

The Primary English Curriculum

In contrast to the previous syllabus (Curriculum Development Committee, 1976) which focused heavily on grammatical form, the 1981 primary syllabus, (Curriculum Development Committee, 1981) proposed the introduction of a communicative approach to the teaching of English in Hong Kong primary schools. This syllabus was officially introduced but not actually implemented in the classroom to a very wide extent. This phenomenon of a mismatch between curriculum intentions and classroom realities has been frequently found in Hong Kong (see Morris, 1992, 1995). The Education Commission (1994) suggests that in this case, the reasons for the failed implementation of the communicative approach include:

- teachers' lack of confidence in using English;
- the preference of many schools for using traditional approaches to teaching;
- large class sizes, inhibiting communicative practice of language items.

In order to involve pupils more actively in their learning and to align assessment with teaching and learning, ECR No. 4 (1990) proposed the development of a large scale target-related, task-based curriculum initiative for use in Hong Kong schools. This project initially known as Targets and Target-Related Assessment (TTRA) was originally scheduled for introduction in May 1993 but had to be postponed following

widespread criticism from teachers and principals, concerning mainly the lack of resourcing and insufficient teacher training (Carless, 1997; Morris, 1995). The curriculum was repackaged as the Target-Oriented Curriculum (TOC). Topic Oriented Curriculum is a cross-curricular initiative designed to be implemented initially in primary schools for the subjects of Chinese, English and Mathematics. Future extension to include all subjects in primary and secondary school is planned. Topic Oriented Curriculum is described by Morris *et al.* (1996, p. 240) as "probably the most comprehensive and radical attempt at curriculum reform ever undertaken in Hong Kong". As the current Hong Kong primary English curriculum (Curriculum Development Council, 1997) is now based on Topic Oriented Curriculum, we will briefly review its concepts below (see also, Carless, 1997, 1998; Clark, Scarino & Brownell, 1994; Morris, 1995; Morris *et al.*, 1996).

Topic Oriented Curriculum is made up of three main conceptual elements, targets, tasks and task-based assessment. The learning targets provide a common direction for learning for all schools in Hong Kong and facilitate the planning of schemes of work or text-books and the evaluation of progress towards the targets. Tasks are defined as purposeful and contextualised learning activities through which pupils progress towards the targets. Criterion-referenced task-based assessment evaluates pupil progress towards the targets and enables information to be recorded and reported to relevant parties, such as parents. This alignment of targets, tasks and assessment forms an integrated curriculum framework, linking teaching, learning and assessment in a recursive way.

The main premise of Topic Oriented Curriculum is that pupils should be actively involved in their own learning and in the construction and development of knowledge and ideas. Topic Oriented Curriculum postulates that students learn through five fundamental intertwining ways of learning:

- *communicating* through receiving and sharing meaning;
- *inquiring* through questioning or testing hypotheses;
- *conceptualising* through organising knowledge and identifying patterns;
- *reasoning* through logical argument and by deducing or inferring conclusions;
- *problem-solving*, including identifying, justifying and evaluating solutions.

Topic Oriented Curriculum also proposes that more attention should be paid to the individual learning needs of different pupils, so that variations in pupil learning styles, speeds and abilities can be better catered for.

Topic Oriented Curriculum is, to a large extent, congruent with "international good practice", based on current knowledge about how children learn and with respect to English language teaching, Topic Oriented Curriculum has much in common with communicative methodologies (Carless, 1998). It is however, innovative within the

Hong Kong context where teacher-centred, whole-class teaching styles predominate and teachers tend to emphasize the transmission of information and knowledge. “It is a tradition of the education system in Hong Kong that didactic teaching is a superior mode because of constraints of public examinations and unwillingness of teachers to change” (Wong 1996, p. 92). Overall, the focus in Topic Oriented Curriculum on task-based learning and more individualized learning styles represents a radical change for the majority of Hong Kong teachers, accustomed to carrying out traditional approaches (Carless, 1997).

Topic Oriented Curriculum is being implemented progressively, according to the enthusiasm and state of readiness of schools. Around 10% of primary schools started in primary 1 in September 1995, 61% claimed to be carrying out Topic Oriented Curriculum in the 1996-7 academic year and by September 1998 88% of schools had officially adopted. Initial experiences with Topic Oriented Curriculum have been mixed. Some schools and/or teachers have made good progress (see Carless, 1998) while for others implementation has been more problematic, particularly in terms of workload associated with the recording and reporting of pupil progress. The findings of an initial evaluation report, Morris *et al.* (1996) included the following observations:

- Topic Oriented Curriculum has had a beneficial impact at the organisational level in primary schools in that teachers’ professional development has been enhanced through increased collaboration and teamwork;
- many teachers had a limited understanding of Topic Oriented Curriculum so were unable to operationalise its concepts;
- there was a clear need for more extensive and effective in-service teacher education.

Given that educational change is a complex and long-term process, it is too early to provide a more definitive evaluation of the Topic Oriented Curriculum initiative.

Conclusion

Because of its instrumental value, the high status accorded by Hong Kong society to English seem likely to be maintained in the post-1997 era. Hamlett (1997, p. 11) observes, “it seems clear that English will continue to flourish and prosper in Hong Kong – it may even benefit from the loss of the colonial connection”. Given this expected continued interest in the learning of English, what are the main present and future challenges facing the teaching of English to young learners in Hong Kong? It is suggested that the following areas are central to the development of quality primary language education in Hong Kong:

- competitive salaries and incentives which attract and retain high quality English teachers, including improved working conditions and promotion prospects;
- the implementation of the benchmarking initiative in a way that contributes to the above and permits appropriate rewards for high achievers in the benchmark assessments;
- continued teacher education and resourcing support for the Topic Oriented Curriculum initiative so that the early momentum of the innovation can be maintained until it successfully takes root in schools.

Underpinning all of the above is the need for quality pre-service and in-service teacher education. As Sze (1998) argues the key to improving language teaching is a corps of professionally trained teachers who have received quality teacher preparation and are dedicated to lifelong teacher development. Although Sze is referring specifically to Hong Kong, this statement is also likely to carry resonance in other contexts.

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Foreign Language Teaching in Australian Primary Schools

Penny McKay

Introduction

Foreign language teaching in primary schools in Australia has expanded rapidly in the past 10 years, to the point where by the year 2000 it is planned that almost every primary child in Australia will undertake two or more years of foreign language study before they move on to secondary school.

More than 90 different languages are spoken in Australia, and approximately 14% of children in Australian schools speak a language other than English at home (Clyne, 1988, p. 22). Language teaching (often called LOTE, Languages Other Than English, in Australia) is seen as reflection of Australia´s diversity as well as a means of promoting the pluralism that we aim for. We therefore have a large number of community language programmes in schools (those programmes which teach the home or background languages of the children), and ethnic school programmes (language maintenance programmes which are run by the ethnic communities, usually on Saturday mornings), especially where migrant populations are large, as in Melbourne and Sydney, and to a lesser degree in other capital cities.

Languages are also taught in Australia because of the continuing recognition of the intellectual and educational benefits of learning language, and this has been tied, in the past, because of our inheritance from British education, to the languages of Europe.

A more recent reason for the teaching of languages, and, in fact, for the strengthening of language teaching, has a sense of urgency attached to it. For a number of years now, Australia has been re-aligning and re-identifying itself as a country within Asia, and the result has therefore been a push towards an expansion of Asian language teaching in schools.

The Federal Government in Canberra has addressed the challenge of the expansion of Asian language teaching in schools and universities through two national language policies, several major reports (for example, Lo Bianco, 1987; Department of Education, Employment and Training, 1991; Coalition of Australian Government, 1994), and a number of high level committees (National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Taskforce, NALSAS). A large amount of funding has been

allocated to Asian languages in schools and tertiary institutions. The key Asian languages, nominated by the Federal Government, are Japanese, Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian and Korean.

This shift in language teaching emphasis is "expanding our horizons" rapidly, some would say too rapidly, and is having a major influence on the language programmes delivered in schools. Policy makers and programme implementers insist that the teaching of traditional European languages is not to be replaced by Asian languages, but that rather the general growth in language teaching is adding Asian languages to the repertoire. Some teachers are not convinced of this, and my own observations are that there has been a marked degree of change in language teacher staffing in schools. The proportion of our trainee teachers at Queensland University of Technology who are Asian language speakers has increased rapidly over the past few years – many of these wonderful students are of a new breed of what I call "international Australians" who have completed a degree in Japanese or Chinese or Korean or Indonesian and then lived in that country for a year or more teaching English before returning to train to be a teacher. We are also training an increasing number of teachers who are native-speakers of these languages, often trained teachers in their home country who have married an Australian or who hope to attain a job as a resident after they have paid for their Graduate Diploma in an Australian university. At present graduates with Asian languages are more likely than any other teaching applicant to get a job. They will probably teach across both primary and secondary age groups in a "cluster" of schools (of which I will say more later).

The move towards Asian languages has been a national phenomenon, arising out of the power of the Commonwealth government to allocate large amounts of funds collected through the taxing system. It is the responsibility of the five states and two territories to implement these changes as well as to continue to administer current programmes (the Commonwealth does not have responsibility for teaching). All states have their own central and regional advisory teams. There has been some co-ordination across states, though in the final analysis states do have autonomy over their education system. This leads to both innovation as well as the "reinventing of the wheel" from time to time.

Children commence primary school in Australia at around 5 years of age, and remain in primary school until year 6 or 7 (depending on the state), around the age of 12. At present, most primary language programmes commence in mid- to late-primary school, in years 3 to 6.

The following rationales given for expansion of language teaching into primary schools reflect the range of influences on primary language teaching I have mentioned earlier:

- primary language teaching contributes to multicultural Australia by fostering intercultural understanding: "The multicultural and multilingual nature of Australia's society makes primary school language learning essential as a means of

maintaining and developing the languages and cultures of the Australian community" (Ingram, 1992);

- primary language teaching contributes to a base for future learning: "There is evidence to support the view that the early introduction of primary school language learning is likely to make subsequent learning more efficient" (Ingram, 1992);
- primary language teaching provides more chance for successful language learning: "Perhaps the strongest justification for commencing the learning of another language as early as possible in the school system is that this facilitates the attainment of higher levels of proficiency" (Ingram, 1992).

Age of Commencement of Study

Various policy edicts in various states / territories have ruled on the age of commencement of primary language learning. Recent moves in Queensland have meant that most primary children will study a language beginning at year 6 (at 11 years of age); this is the first stage towards the introduction of primary language study for all students at year 3 (or 7 years of age), which will come into effect shortly.

Table 11 provides an overview of state and territory LOTE Policies, and Table 12 shows the degree to which each state and territory has made language learning compulsory in schools.

Australian Capital Territory	- All students studying a LOTE in years 3 to 8 - 50% studying a LOTE in years 9 & 10 - 25% of students studying a LOTE in years 11 and 12
New South Wales	- All students studying a language K to 12
Northern Territory	- LOTE contributes to a broad and balanced education for all students - Encouragement of the expansion of LOTE programmes
Queensland	- All students studying a LOTE in years 6 to 8 - Elective study in years 9 and 10 - Optional below year 6
South Australia	- All primary students studying a LOTE - All secondary students have access to a LOTE programme (Under review)
Tasmania	- All students in years 3 to 10 will have the opportunity to study a LOTE

Victoria	- All students in Prep to year 10 will studying a LOTE - 25% of all year 11 and 12 students will be studying a LOTE
Western Australia	- All students in years 3 to 10 studying a LOTE

Table 11: Overview of state and territory LOTE Policies in Australia.
Data supplied by Ms. Anne Wait, Northern Territory Department of Education

Australian Capital Territory	- years 3 to 10 by 2000
New South Wales	- All students in kindergarten to year 12 by 2010
Northern Territory	- Not compulsory but strongly supported
Queensland	- years 6 to 8 by 1994 (achieved)
South Australia	- All primary school students by 1995 (achieved)
Tasmania	- Not compulsory but strongly supported. Targets set but schools and districts determine compulsory nature of programmes
Victoria	- All students in Prep to year 10 by 2000
Western Australia	- All students in years 3 to 10 by 2000

Table 12: Compulsory Provision in state and territory LOTE Policies.
Data supplied by Ms. Anne Wait, Northern Territory Department of Education

Languages Taught

The choice of language or languages taught in schools is generally made by each school with reference to the "priority languages" nominated by the state, in consultation with parents, and with consideration of the languages taught in the secondary schools in the area. Queensland's priority languages (those which are targeted for priority development) are Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Korean, whereas the Australian Capital Territory's are Chinese Indonesian Japanese and Korean. Table 13 shows state and territory priority languages.

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
Aborig. Langs			✓		*	*		✓
Arabic		✓					✓	
Auslan						*		
Chinese	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	*	✓	✓
French		✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	✓
German		✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	✓
Indon.	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	✓
Italian		✓	✓	✓	*	*	✓	✓
Japanese	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓	✓
Korean	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
Modern Greek		✓	✓		*		✓	✓
Russian		✓					✓	
Spanish		✓			*	*	✓	✓
Thai							✓	✓
Viet.		✓			*		✓	✓

*Table 13: State and territory Priority Languages. Priority languages, key languages or languages for priority development. *Languages for which support is offered*

Table 14 illustrates the extent of recent growth in numbers of primary school students studying a language in Victoria from 1991 to 1995. Table 15 shows the percentage of students who are studying each language in Victoria.

1991	18%
1992	24%
1993	27%
1994	46%
1995	62%

Table 14: Growth in Primary School Students Studying a Language in Victoria from 1991-1995. Programs Provided Through Face-To-Face LOTE and PALS (Directorate of School Education, Victoria: 23)

Italian	32.50%
Indonesian	23.30%
Japanese	21.80%
German	8.70%
French	5.65%
Chinese (Mandarin.)	2.50%
Modern Greek	2.10%
Spanish	1.10%
Vietnamese	0.60%
Turkish	0.60%
Arabic	0.40%
Auslan	0.20%
Korean	0.10%
Macedonian	0.10%
Serbian	0.10%
Croatian	0.10%
Hebrew	0.10%
Dutch	0.00%

Table 15: Percentage of Students Studying Each Language in Victoria (Directorate of School Education, Victoria. 1996:26)

The picture of primary language teaching in Australia is therefore variable according to the state, though there is, clearly, growth across all states and territories.

Issues in Primary LOTE Provision

There are many issues in the provision and teaching of languages in Australian primary schools, many of which I am sure you will recognise. The following are some of the major issues which I will mention only briefly.

Teacher Availability and Teacher Proficiency Levels

The push for a growth in language teaching has meant that there have not been sufficiently qualified teachers to fill the need for LOTE teachers, especially in Asian languages. Whilst many teachers are proficient and highly competent in language teaching methodology, some teachers with low proficiency in the language have been employed, or have been "retrained" without sufficient time for proficiency development in the language, so that some programmes are, some say, worse than none at all. Some states have introduced language proficiency assessment for language

teachers to at least improve the general standard of teacher proficiency. The Queensland Government, for example, has interviewed all language teaching applicants (over and above their regular interview for a teaching position), and assessed and rated their language proficiency and their understandings of LOTE teaching methodology. This move, the first of its kind in Australia, has had an immediate and positive impact on university LOTE teacher training, with universities paying closer attention to the development of these skills.

In order to cater for all students in the expansion of provision of language teaching, most LOTE teachers will be expected to teach in a cluster of schools, that is, they are based at a central school and travel to surrounding schools, both primary and secondary, to deliver lessons. This clustering system helps to spread LOTE teachers across more schools, and helps with continuity of programmes from primary to secondary. The clustering system means that teachers need skills to teach in both primary and secondary schools, and a new issue is whether teachers, often trained and experienced in teaching secondary age students) have the necessary skills and training for primary LOTE teaching.

Continuity of Programmes

It is not always possible for students to study their chosen language through from year 1 to year 12 because a number of primary schools, teaching a range of languages, feed into a regional secondary school which can only deal with a smaller number of languages, or already teaches different languages. The establishment of cluster schools has helped to alleviate this, because the community will negotiate the languages for the primary and secondary schools, states have also tried to deal with continuity by giving priority to the development of a limited set of priority languages, as you have seen.

The transition from primary to secondary school can be problematic for primary language learners who sometimes find themselves learning in multi-level classes alongside beginners, and find themselves virtually starting the language again. This can be very frustrating for junior secondary students, and attrition can be high after two years at secondary school.

Contact Time and Proficiency Gains

A major report in 1991 (Coalition of Australian Government, 1994, p. 91) found that 75% of primary school children learn a foreign language for less than one hour a week. Ingram (1992, p. 16) reports that there is considerable evidence that this is “less than effective” in terms of second language learning. The current recommendations (Kirkpatrick, 1995, p. 22) are that for effective language learning children from years 3 to 10 should learn a language for at least 2.5 hours a week, and for three hours in senior secondary. It is believed that this amount of time will enable children to meet standards

of “minimum social proficiency” and “minimum vocational proficiency” (Ingram and Wylie, 1989) respectively by the time they finish school.

David Ingram (1992, p. 12) argues (sensibly) that planners should first establish the proficiency levels they hope students will achieve by the end of school, and then work back from this to the contact time needed in primary and secondary school to achieve these levels. He is frustrated that often principals and language planners work on a “this is all we can do in the circumstances approach”, making decisions on contact time according to the availability of time in the school programme and the availability of teachers (Ingram, 1992, p. 12). This idea is acceptable if the main purpose for primary programmes is proficiency development in the target language, but some would say that language and cultural awareness is a key aim at early primary levels. The tension between language learning for language proficiency or for cultural awareness in primary schools is an ongoing one.

Motivation

Since I began writing this paper, I have talked to several primary language teachers, and asked them what the issues are for them at present. Worryingly, more teachers than I expected said that motivation is becoming a key issue for them. There is, in some schools, a feeling amongst some students that learning languages is a waste of time, and this seems to be an issue particularly in rural and lower socio-economic areas. Not only these students, but also their parents, don’t always see the value of language learning. Some principals and other teachers do not see its value and resent the compulsory inclusion of languages in the primary curriculum. As you can imagine, these attitudes come directly out of distance and isolation, as well as, in some, a resentment of the changes towards a more multicultural society in recent years.

Unmotivated students cause problems in classes, and keen students can be held back and can eventually drop out from boredom. An issue here is that it can become impossible to motivate some students to take responsibility for their own learning or to learn by heart, which is essential for the study of languages. When this happens, the classes can spend a lot of time just playing games and doing simple activities designed to help students retain basic elements of the language. Communicative use of the language is pushed back and may rarely happen for some students because of this.

Distance

The Australian historian, Professor Geoffrey Blainey wrote in 1966:

> Distance is a characteristic of Australia as mountains are of Switzerland. By sealanes or airlanes most parts of Australia are at least 12,000 miles from western Europe … The coastline of Australia also stretches for 12,000 miles and the coast encloses as much lands as the USA, excluding Alaska. The distance of one part of the Australian coast

> from another, or the distance of the dry interior from the coast, was a problem as obstinate as Australia's isolation from Europe.
>
> Australians have always recognised that distance or isolation was one of the moulds which shaped their history …
>
> (Blainey, 1966).

Distance is certainly a challenge in language teaching in Australia.

Languages in remote primary schools suffer to some extent from the appointment of less qualified and experienced teachers, or from the lack of availability of language teachers altogether. Students in remote areas have had the opportunity to learn languages for many years through distance education units use work packages, with radio or telephone link back-up. More recently, two innovative types of distance education programmes have been introduced using satellite and computer-based links.

In Victoria, the PALS (Primary Access to Language via Satellite programmes) operates for the teaching Indonesian, Italian, German and French. And in New South Wales, a similar programme, ALS (Access to Languages via Satellite) teaches Japanese and Chinese (Mandarin).

Both these programmes involve interactive television, through satellite, where teachers try to approximate face-to-face lessons. Broadcasts are presented by a teacher (rather than a professional actor) in twice weekly, 30 minute broadcasts. Students have the opportunity to interact with the studio during the broadcasts, through telephone and fax. The classroom teacher (not proficient in the LOTE) at the receiver site helps students to do the activities set up by the teacher on television. The central team provide support material kits, and encourage links with partner schools to do extension activities.

Another approach to overcoming distance is through telematics. Telematics is a computer-based programme where students are linked to the same computer screen in different classrooms miles away from each other. Teacher and students communicate across telephone-links (sometimes sending faxes) while they have the same screen in front of them. The material on the computer screen is selected from a CD-Rom and controlled by the teacher, though students can manipulate the screen from each site. My student, Deleect Batt, is studying the nature of the interaction in telematics classes, researching 5 classes through a case study approach, using interviews, audio and video taped recordings analysed through the Coalition of Australian Government Observation scheme (for example, Spada & Frohlich, 1995). She is only just beginning to see patterns in her findings, but one clear trend is that teachers and students take a long time to complete activities and exercises, and many of these activities seem to be games around vocabulary items.

Two Major Initiatives

I would now like to turn to two major curriculum-related initiatives which have occurred in the primary and secondary language teaching area in Australia. These two initiatives will, I think, give you an idea of the directions which the language teaching field is taking, or trying to take, in relation to curriculum development and classroom teaching.

The Australian Language Levels Curriculum Framework

The first of these two initiatives occurred in 1985 when unusually, a national curriculum project in languages teaching began. The Australian Language Levels (ALL) Project ran for around six years, with a small central team in Adelaide, of which I was one of the officers (fresh out of the classroom). The project team worked with teachers across Australia travelled thousands of miles in those five years developing an across-language curriculum framework for languages and ESL, from kindergarten to year 12. While we were developing this framework, we were also conducting professional development, so that the two went hand in hand. Out of this work came The Australian Language Levels (ALL) Guidelines (Scarino, Vale, McKay & Clark, 1988) and a range of other materials, including Pocket ALL (Vale, Scarino & McKay, 1991). The ALL Project has been highly influential in developments in languages curricula in Australia. Its influence continues in more recent curriculum documents and guidelines, both explicitly, with acknowledgement, and implicitly where it is easy to see that the project's directions have been internalised and incorporated.

To summarise in a few key points what the ALL Project was about, I will discuss some of the key touchstones of the curriculum framework. The goal of the project was to help teachers to move towards a more co-ordinated and articulated approach to programme provision, and a more communicative methodology in classrooms. The ALL framework was never intended to be imposed on schools, but rather was a resource for teaching. However, a number of national and state curriculum documents have developed out of the ALL framework, with Federal and state funding, including national curriculum guidelines for primary schools in Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Vietnamese (National Curriculum Guidelines, 1993) and state syllabus and materials in a range of languages, Asian and European.

ALL Touchstone 1: the Curriculum Jigsaw

The curriculum jigsaw provides an overview of the language teaching curriculum, and helps teachers to see that:

- no one part of the curriculum jigsaw can exist in isolation;
- all parts are inextricably interrelated;

- a change to any one part of the curriculum will have an effect on all other parts. A change in assessment practices, for example, will inevitably lead to changes in classroom practices, just as changes in the content of a language learning programme will logically lead to changes in assessment procedures (Scarino *et al.*, 1988, p. 5).

ALL Touchstone 2: the Framework of Stages

The Framework of Stages is a mechanism proposed by the ALL Project for the organisation of language programmes. It is a framework of progressive, interlocking and age-related Stages which are applicable to the teaching of all languages in Australia. Each Stage is elaborated into a set of suggested content (see Scarino *et al.*, 1988, Book 3), outlined according to the ALL curriculum framework. This suggested content can be further elaborated into specific languages (this has indeed happened, in a number of languages).

Briefly, students in Stage A have little or no background in the language, whilst students in Stage C have a background in the language (most likely because their parents / grandparents speak the language at home). Students in Stage 1 are beginners with no background in the language. Progression is generally upwards towards the top right Stages, where students at Senior Secondary are learning and being assessed according to their learning and experience in the language. Transition from primary to secondary school is facilitated by the same Stage being taught in both learning sites. Teachers need to be aware, even when they have only one class, that they might have students in three different Stages in their class, and need to refer to the appropriate Stage and teach accordingly.

The aim of the Framework of Stages is to provide a common reference point for curriculum development in Australian schools, across languages, which will help to ensure transition through from kindergarten (or other entry points) to year 12, to recognise and build on previous learning (and experience) of the language, and to provide administrative convenience.

ALL Touchstone 3: the Principles of Language Learning

Eight principles of language learning were developed with reference to the literature, and in consultation with teachers across Australia.

Learners learn a language best when:

1. they are treated as individuals with their own needs and interests;
2. they are provided with opportunities to participate in communicative use of the target language in a wide range of activities;

3. they are exposed to communicative data which is comprehensible and relevant to their own needs and interests;
4. they focus deliberately on various language forms, skills, and strategies in order to support the process of language acquisition;
5. they are exposed to socio-cultural data and direct experience of the culture(s) embedded within the target language;
6. they become aware of the role and nature of language and of culture;
7. they are provided with appropriate feedback about their progress;
8. they are provided with opportunities to manage their own learning.

ALL Touchstone 4: the Five Goals

The ALL Framework proposed five goals that are relevant to all language programmes at all Stages of language learning:

- communication goals;
- socio-cultural goals;
- learning-how-to-learn goals;
- language and cultural awareness goals;
- general knowledge goals.

These goals are not discrete, but integrated with each other. Because of the nature of language learning, the communication goals will predominate in the majority of programmes.

ALL Touchstone 5: the Activities Base

The activities-base of the ALL framework comes out of the adoption of the principles. The framework distinguishes between activities and exercises, and takes the activity as its organising unit for curriculum development.

> An activity involves the purposeful and active use of language where learners are required to call upon their language resource to meet the needs of a given communicative situation.
>
> An exercise focuses on one or more elements of the communication process in order to promote learning of the items of language, knowledge, skills and strategies needed in communication activities.

The place for both in language teaching and planning is recognised in the framework, though the exercise is used to support the use of language in an activity. Teachers have learned to use this touchstone to evaluate their own programmes as well as textbooks and the use of other resources.

The ALL Guidelines and Pocket ALL have given curriculum developers and teachers a framework and models for curriculum development. It has directed language teaching towards a more communicative approach, with a recognition of the need for an integrated focus on language (as in the principles). It has brought some consistency across different languages and from K-12, and a common reference point for discussion and for planning.

The interpretation of the ALL activities-based curriculum guidelines into the classroom is done through a combination of top-down curriculum development in specific languages, and bottom-up teacher planning, where the teacher plans for the particular context and the particular group of learners. That is, teachers are still expected to take responsibility for a major part of the classroom-level planning. Few materials and syllabuses have been developed in primary LOTE in Australia which provide teachers with a step-by-step course. This protection of teachers' professionalism needs to be based on a strong pre-service and professional development programme, and while this has been strong in all states, there is always a need for more.

National Profiles in Australia

A more recent, national initiative in foreign languages in Australia has been the development of national profiles for languages. The politics behind these are to bring some control over and consistency to curriculum across Australia, to monitor growth, and perhaps eventually, to (though this is not often stated explicitly) monitor schools for accountability. The LOTE profiles (Curriculum Corporation, 1994) use the ALL Guidelines as a base, with integrated macro-skills in its strands, and with a communicative base.

The "national curriculum" in Australia consists at present of Statements and Profiles developed at the national level in eight key learning areas. The states and territories have the choice to take up these statements and profiles, and in LOTE all States have done so, and are now undertaking curriculum and materials development, and implementing reporting and monitoring strategies around them.

There are no standardised assessment tasks tied to reporting students' progress on the profiles. Teachers assess through observation over a range of tasks in the classroom, reporting students as being on a particular level. Samples of work in different languages and at various stages are included to help teachers to rate students. Some valuable developmental work in different states has resulted in a collection of further task exemplars for teachers, and moderated samples of work, which help teachers to

rate students' progress more reliably. For example, the Australian Capital Territory (Canberra) has published sets of written and video samples of oral language at levels 1 to 8 in a range of tasks selected / devised by classroom teachers, and in eight languages. This kind of elaboration is needed to make the profiles, which are very concise in their description more accessible to teachers.

Research Directions in Australia

Finally, in this overview of primary language teaching in Australia, I will briefly touch upon research directions.

Because of a range of co-ordinated LOTE curriculum initiatives, we are a long way down the track in Australia in curriculum development with a number of common, communicatively-based understandings and materials about primary (and secondary) language teaching. However, we need to do a lot of work to substantiate what people are saying about primary language teaching, and to back-up the decisions administrators are making, for example, about an earlier and earlier starting age for language learning.

All areas of primary language teaching need investigating. The field is almost as young as its learners. Areas needing research and development include the following (a number of these points are taken from Ingram, 1992):

- the language development of children learning a language (including Asian languages with different scripts):
    - how much do children actually learn in the time available and how much they could be expected to learn with various amounts of contact time?
    - what are the effects on language learning and other developmental and educational factors of introducing language learning in the earliest years of primary school, including the effect of the concurrent introduction of two reading and writing systems in years 1 and 2?
    - what is the effect of language difficulty of starting at different ages?
    - what is the best age to start learning a language?
- the investigation of more effective methodology for primary schools:
    - what are the strategies and interaction patterns of successful classrooms? (for example, McKay, 1993; Clyne, Jenkins, Chen & Wallner, 1995)
    - in what ways can we cater more effectively for children with a background in the language?
    - in what ways can we integrate languages across the primary school curriculum?

  - how can we best cater for multilevel classes in primary and secondary school language teaching?
  - how effective are the distance education modes we are currently employing? (for example, to what extent is effective communicative interaction taking place?) (for example, Batt, current PhD thesis);
  - how effective are immersion programmes for primary learners? (for example, De Courcy, 1992);
- the development of new syllabuses / curricula to meet changing secondary school needs (as a result of growth of languages in primary schools);
- the development of valid and effective assessment instruments for primary children;
- teacher preparation:
  - the development of accelerated language learning programmes for teachers in order to raise teacher proficiency;
  - to what extent do cultural mismatches of native-speaking teachers in Australian classrooms interfere with learning? To what extent does native speaking background counteract these differences for learners? (for example, Parkinson, current PhD thesis proposal).

Perhaps the most urgent research we need to undertake is the monitoring of the more recent national curriculum profiles within the primary classroom. Professor Michael Breen at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia has been co-ordinating a project doing this in the ESL area in Australia, and the results of this study will be very useful for further studies in other teaching areas.

In Australia, as elsewhere, primary language teaching needs to be informed by more classroom-based research my personal experience with my own research is that when systematic classroom-based research is carried out in classrooms like their own, teachers are extremely interested to hear about it. Classroom-based research like that being carried out by my Ph.D. student, Deleece Batt will tell us exactly what is happening in classrooms in a systematic, theory-based way. This gives us a knowledge-base for future, informed decisions about programme implementation, teacher education and in-service, and resource allocation.

Conclusion

Australia's diversity is her strength, and also her challenge. Her distance and distances have always been a challenge, and you have seen that we can be innovative in dealing with those challenges. Primary language teaching in Australia reflects all these

influences, as I hope I have shown. Australia's proximity to Asia is certainly a challenge which is being forcefully felt in the teaching of languages in schools.

I do believe we may be coming to a "plateau level" (cf. McKay *et al.*, 1993) in primary LOTE where the current expansion into the lower primary years needs careful planning and monitoring. Perhaps the problem of decreasing student motivation in the upper primary years will be lessened if students start at younger levels and see language learning as a natural part of school life. I am not sure how the recalcitrant principals, parents and teachers are to be won over. This is related to a broader societal issue of acceptance of multiculturalism and change. It would seem sensible if research was directed to the careful monitoring of these changes.

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Note: In addition to these sources, readers are referred to the Journal of the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Association (AFMLTA), *Babel*. Editor: Mr. David Vale, 2 Rubida Grove, Aldgate South Australia, 5154.

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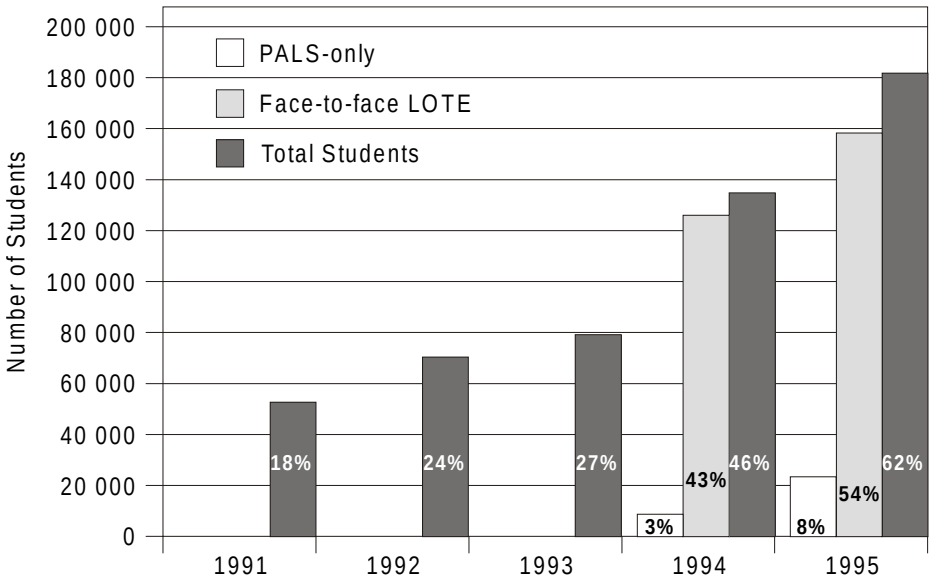
Penny McKay is a senior lecturer, and co-ordinator of the M.Ed. (TESOL) at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. Her interest in the teaching of foreign languages extends back to her role as a national project officer on the national Australian Language Levels (ALL) Project from 1985-1989, and to her PhD studies into classroom interaction in foreign language classes in Australian secondary schools. She has served on advisory committees on curriculum development in primary and secondary schools and has been involved in pre-service and in-service training of foreign language teachers, though her primary role in these areas is currently in TESOL.

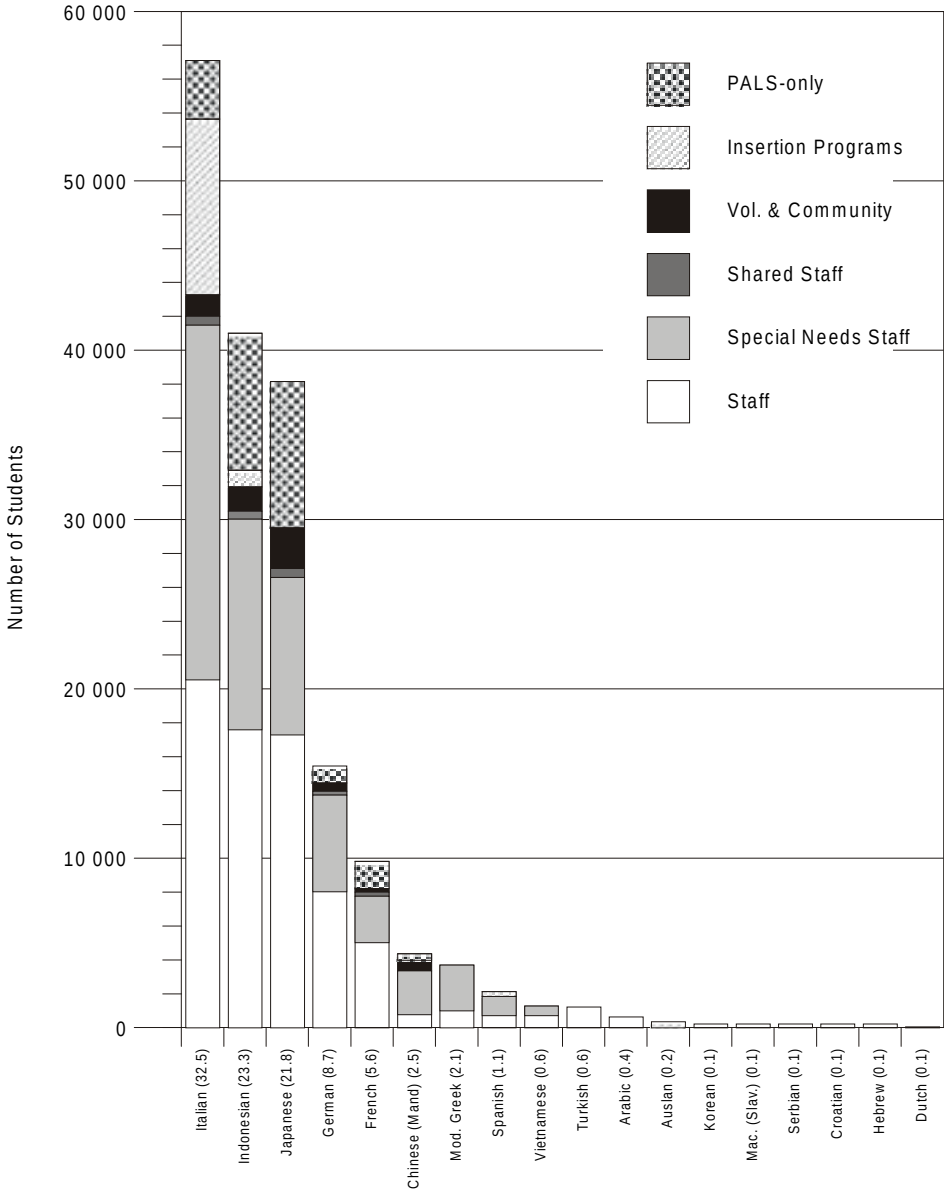
Appendix 1

Number and percentage of primary school students studying LOTE, 1991-1995, Victoria (directorate of School Education, Victoria. 1996: 23).



Appendix 2

LOTE enrolments in primary schools, by language and method of provision 1994. (Directorate of School Education, Victoria. 1996: 26)



Appendix 3

Extract from *The LOTE Profiles* (Curriculum Corporation, 1994).

L2 Communicating in LOTE			
Oral Interaction *At level 2, a student*: 2.1 Interacts in predictable social exchanges and structured learning situations using phrases or short sentences that contain familiar language patterns. *Evident when students, for example:* ▪ Respond to classroom instructions ▪ Imitate intonation, rhythm and pronunciation modelled by the teacher. ▪ Respond to simple questions, needing repetition and simplification. ▪ Use intonation to convey questions or statements.	**Reading and Responding** *At level 2, a student:* 2.2 Reads short, repetitive texts of one or two sentences containing familiar language and identifies single items of information. *Evident when students, for example:* ▪ Use contextual clues to infer meaning (identify initial letters or characters to guess the meaning of words). ▪ Make connections between illustrations and written text. ▪ Respond verbally or non-verbally to simple oral questions about written texts.	**Writing** *At level 2, a student:* 2.3 Writes phrases or short sentences using well-rehearsed language to convey simple information. *Evident when students, for example:* ▪ Reproduce basic print and punctuation conventions of written language. ▪ Show an awareness of sound symbol relationships by attempting their own spelling of words. ▪ Use models to create their own simple texts (labels, simple captions for pictures and photographs).	**Level 1 outcomes:** 1.1 Interacts in simple social exchanges and structured learning situations using single words and formulaic expressions. 1.2 Reads short sentences and identifies letters, characters or words. 1.3 Writes letters, characters or words using a small repertoire of well-rehearsed language. **Level 3 outcomes:** 3.1 Interacts in predicable social learning situations, incorporating new language items into well-rehearsed patterns. 3.2 Reads short texts of several linked sentences containing familiar language and identifies main ideas and some supporting information.

▪ With teacher support, use some socioculturally appropriate language (use and respond to forms of address, greetings and courtesy phrases) ▪ Make simple request using learned sentence patterns. ▪ Listen to short spoken texts and identify single items of information.	▪ Read aloud, with near approximation of correct pronunciation, rhythm, tone and stress. ▪ Use knowledge of letters and sounds to read new words ▪ Find key words in a text. ▪ Understand basic print conventions when reading (pause at full stops).	▪ With teacher support, write short texts on familiar topics.	3.3 Writes two or three linked sentences using well-rehearsed language to convey simple information.

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