

The *Speak to the future*¹ view on teaching primary languages across the whole of Key Stage 2

The National Curriculum Review Expert Panel recognises the ‘importance of modern foreign languages’ and recommends that language learning should be part of the new curriculum in Upper Key Stage 2. Although this recommendation is welcomed, we would like to suggest the Government goes further and takes this opportunity to make language learning statutory from the age of 7. It may even wish to consider lowering the age to 5 as suggested by Michael Gove in an interview on the eve of the 2011 Conservative Party Conference.

The last decade has seen many countries around the world lowering the age at which language learning begins. The Eurydice ‘Key Data on Teaching Languages in Europe’ (2008 edition) gathered information from 30 countries and reported the following:

Age of statutory language learning

- 37% Upper Key Stage 2
- 37% Lower Key Stage 2
- 23% in Key Stage 1

The UK and Slovakia were the only countries which did not introduce compulsory foreign language learning in the primary school. Primary languages, however, have been taught successfully to pupils in Years 3-6 since at least 2006 in England and for much longer in Scotland.

Many high performing countries such as Singapore see languages as a key part of the primary curriculum. In Singapore, they are introduced from the first year of primary education and a large proportion of curriculum time (31%) is designated to foreign language learning. Reviewing the National Curriculum presents the Government with the unique opportunity of giving greater prominence to languages to ensure the new curriculum compares ‘favourably with curricula in the highest performing jurisdictions’.

¹ The *Speak to the future* campaign is highlighting the importance of languages, language learning and professional language activities for the UK. The campaign is backed by leading academic, professional and business organisations, including the British Academy and the Chartered Institute of Linguists, who are convinced of the importance of language learning for the future of our society, citizens and economy. More information at www.speaktothefuture.org

Some Frequently Asked Questions about primary languages in England

What evidence is there that languages are already being taught successfully across the whole of KS2?

- An NFER survey (2009²) showed that 92% of schools were offering at least one language in KS2 and that 69% of schools were offering languages to *all four year groups* in KS2.
- Ofsted (2011³) judged the overall effectiveness of Primary Languages to be good or better in two thirds of schools.

Is provision sustainable?

- The NFER survey noted that ‘of the schools already providing languages to pupils, the majority were confident that their current arrangements were sustainable’.
- The Ofsted report noted that ‘Classroom teachers gradually developed their expertise over the period of the survey and schools began to feel more confident in their provision’. It also noted that ‘Teaching was good or outstanding in just over two thirds of lessons observed’ and ‘Class teachers’ understanding of primary methodology and their work with pupils in developing literacy supported the development of the modern language well’.

Do Heads think it is important to teach languages?

- The OU research (2010⁴) noted in its key findings that ‘Head teachers, languages co-ordinators and most teachers involved with languages were enthusiastic and committed. In addition to their intrinsic value, they saw languages as enriching and broadening their overall curriculum provision. They also perceived languages as making a substantial contribution to children’s personal and social development and to their literacy development in English’.

What progress have children in England made so far? (See also appendix 1 for the evidence of benefits of primary language learning from other countries.)

- The OU report in 2010 stated that the focus of the teaching was mostly on developing listening and speaking skills. Children were able to achieve the Y6 outcomes of the Key Stage 2 Framework after 4 years of language learning but writing remained the most challenging area.
- The Ofsted report showed that ‘Pupils’ enjoyment of language learning in primary schools visited was very clear. They were usually very enthusiastic, looked forward to lessons, understood why it was important to learn another language and were developing a good awareness of other cultures’. Boys and girls were equally well-motivated which is not always the case when languages are started at secondary school.

² Longitudinal survey of National Entitlement to Language learning at KS2, Wade, Marshall and O’Donnell. NFER 2009

³ Achievement and Challenge. Ofsted 2011

⁴ Languages Learning at KS2 – a longitudinal study. OU, University of Southampton and Canterbury Christ University, Wade, Marshall et al. 2010.

- CILT, the National Centre for Languages, researched the positive benefits concerning the process and skills involved in learning a new language on children's understanding, development and enjoyment of learning English and received funding from DfE (formerly DCSF) in 2010 to collaborate with 5 local authorities. These local authorities – Haringey, Devon, West Sussex, Brighton and Hove and Solihull – developed case studies in which they worked closely with two schools each to explore the mutually supportive language learning skills. They discovered that:
 - There was an improvement in the children's general motivation for learning. (West Sussex)
 - There was an improvement in the use and understanding of language, both English and the new language. For example in speaking and listening skills, memorisation, use of vocabulary and understanding of sentence structure. (All projects)
 - Children benefitted from the range of teaching styles used to rehearse and internalise key vocabulary and structures. (Haringey, West Sussex, Devon, Brighton and Hove)
 - Children were able to manipulate structures in the new language, generating discussion on language and how it works. This close study encouraged the children to look at English in the same way. (All projects)
 - Children gained in confidence in presentation and communication skills through practice in the new language. (All projects)

How will we train enough staff to teach across the whole of KS2? (See also appendix 2)

- The OU et al report in 2010 noted that training (funded) had been significant in the development of provision. Another of the key success factors for the primary languages initiative has been the existence of local co-ordinators who acted as a point of reference for schools and teachers. These local co-ordinators were supported by a national framework⁵ and training.
- The study also showed that funding had supported training of language co-ordinators in 92% of LAs and that, in 86% of LAs, funding had supported training of teachers who were not co-ordinators.

Do we need specialists to teach languages in KS2?

- The NFER survey showed that most often the teaching was being provided by class teachers with a background in languages (44%) or by a class teacher who had received training (37%).
- The Ofsted survey noted that visiting specialist teachers were not necessarily the most effective way to provide the teaching. 'If too much work was done by an external teacher, the modern languages work was often not followed up effectively by classroom teachers.'
- Figures from the TDA show that by 2011, almost 6,000 teachers had been trained to teach primary languages during their initial teacher training.

⁵ Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages. DCSF.

How can we fit languages into a crowded KS2 curriculum?

- The NFER study showed that most schools (92%) had managed to fit languages into their curriculum and that the average time was 40 minutes of discrete teaching plus extra for cross-curricular reinforcement.
- Pupils need at least 4 years in order to make progress to NC level 4 which will be recognised by secondary schools (in practice less work is done in Y6 as schools focus on SATs – the NFER study shows the percentage falls from 92% in Y3 to 84% in Y6).
- The OECD data⁶ shows that languages are started before the age of 9 (Year 5) in most other European countries – and that in most other countries the number of hours devoted to language learning is greater than in England.

What is still to be done if languages are to be compulsory across the whole of KS2?

- There is a need to continue the differentiated training aimed at both primary teachers and secondary teachers. Training for primary teachers would support them to improve their language skills and understanding of other cultures as well as to helping them to develop appropriate pedagogy. For secondary teachers, training is needed to make sure the primary context and the challenges of teaching younger children are understood.
- It is important that schools are encouraged to continue working with other schools in order to support the development of Primary Languages.

⁶ 'Education at a glance' OECD 2011

Appendix 1

What does research tell us about the benefits of primary language learning?

Much has been written about the cognitive benefits of early second or third language learning at primary school. Some of the most cogent arguments are presented in America by the Duke University Talent Identification Programme (TIP), both in articles and newsletters which present comprehensive and convincing arguments for early second language acquisition. It is stated that:

'Foreign language programs are often one of the first items to be scrutinized and cut when elementary, middle, and high schools in the U.S. face poor performance evaluations or budget crunches. However, many studies have demonstrated the benefits of second language learning not only on students' linguistic abilities but on their cognitive and creative abilities as well. Duke TIP interviewed several experts in the field about the advantages of foreign language learning for children.'

See:

<http://www.tip.duke.edu/node/866> and

<http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=4724>

'*The Effect of Second Language Learning on Test Scores, Intelligence and Achievement - An Annotated Bibliography*' also presents good arguments for second language acquisition at an early stage. For example:

'Children in foreign language programs have tended to demonstrate greater cognitive development, creativity, and divergent thinking than monolingual children. Several studies show that people who are competent in more than one language outscore those who are speakers of only one language on tests of verbal and non-verbal intelligence. (Bruck, Lambert, and Tucker, 1974; Hakuta, 1986; Weatherford, 1986). When children are adequately exposed to two languages at an early age, they are more flexible and creative (Bamford and Mizokawa, 1991), and they reach higher levels of cognitive development at an earlier age than their monolingual peers (Hamayan, 1986).'

Research summaries from this publication continue at:

<http://www.utm.edu/staff/bobp/french/flsat.html>

Similar arguments are also available from Australia

(<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/promobenefitslanguagelearning.pdf>) which also note the benefits of developing intercultural understanding and of the economic case for language learning.

There are some useful ideas about supporting literacy through the teaching of English, Welsh and another language available in the document 'Supporting Triple Literacy' published by the Welsh Government and available here:

<http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/12033/1/111017literacyen.pdf>

Appendix 2

Quality of Workforce for primary languages

In 2009, over 92% of primary schools offered languages within the curriculum (Wade and Marshall, 2009), which marked a substantial increase in provision from 2002/3 when only 44% of schools taught primary languages (Driscoll *et al.*, 2004). The shortage of well qualified teachers with appropriate subject knowledge and pedagogic skill to teach young learners effectively presented a significant challenge for head teachers, governors and parents. Many primary teachers have had limited experience of studying languages themselves (Driscoll *et al.*, 2004) and with the continuing downward trend in numbers of secondary students studying languages at Key Stage 4 (CILT, Language Trends 2010-11), this scenario will take some time to reverse.

Head teachers, therefore, have had to find creative ways of staffing languages. Across the country there are different configurations of practitioners who provide languages, including class teachers, head teachers, teaching assistants, visiting teachers from secondary schools, native speakers from the community and primary specialist teachers (Driscoll 2000; Driscoll *et al.*, 2004; Muijs *et al.*, 2005; Edelenbos *et al.*, 2006; Wade and Marshall, 2009). Over the last decade head teachers have enabled their staff, who lack confidence and/or competence to teach, to attend a range of training sessions such as one day workshops, twilight language upskilling, and language and pedagogy courses run by higher education institutions, local authorities, and nationally organised courses. Funding, from agencies such as The British Council, has also been accessed for staff to visit countries where the foreign language is spoken in order to enhance their linguistic and cultural competence.

The ideal teacher is the primary specialist who is able to combine their own language proficiency with a conceptual knowledge of the subject and with a deep understanding of what, when, and how languages should be taught to learners of different ages and stages. They model pronunciation and intonation well and they are perfectly placed to make connections and links between languages, English and other Foundation subjects. They are able to maximise opportunities to embed languages into daily classroom practice and whole school events which creates a rich learning environment where children are able to view a world beyond their own horizons. As members of the school staff they can also influence timetables and teaching spaces, and ensure that languages are woven into the fabric of the school ethos.

Recent evidence confirmed that specialist teachers provide languages in 20% of schools, however, only 9% of these are trained *primary* specialist teachers (Wade and Marshall, 2009). Specialist language teachers external to the school, clearly provide a good language model however, their lack of experience of teaching young learners can potentially impact on the quality of learning (Chesterton *et al.*, 2004). Their limited control over teaching spaces and the timetable restricts the potential for creative teaching (Driscoll, 2000); and their limited knowledge of primary pedagogy and what is taught in the rest of the curriculum can make it difficult to capitalise on making links with other subjects (Low, 1999; Ofsted, 2005). Additionally their restricted relationships with children in the class and their partial understanding of individual learning needs can lead to behavioural issues and unfavourable attitudes to the subject which affects children's progress and motivation to learn (Driscoll, 2000).

With a view to augmenting the number of trained primary linguists, in 2001, The Training and Development Agency (TDA), (now known as the TA), launched a specialist language route in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). A bilateral teaching placement in France, Germany Spain or Italy was included as part of the ITE training programme. This placement abroad, provided student teachers with opportunities to improve their linguistic and cultural skills as well as their critical professional reflection (Newman, E., Kirsch, 2008, Driscoll and Rowe 2012). Their experiences of teaching in primary schools in partner countries offered opportunities for them to develop links with partner schools once they were qualified. And their cultural experiences of teaching children abroad enabled them to promote intercultural understanding by drawing comparisons between schooling, lifestyle and interests of young learners in both contexts. In addition a number of these teachers have developed inter-school links with their placement schools abroad.

Up to 2011, when the programme was abandoned, approximately 6,000 teachers were trained as primary specialists (Nunn, 2010). These teachers from the earliest stages of their careers deliver lessons to their own and other classes, monitor progress across the school, and provide professional development for their generalist colleagues. However, there are too few of them to lead and maintain curriculum reform across the 17,000 primary schools in England.

Language learning has great potential in primary schools but 10 years is too short to change a nation's practice. Strong foundations have been secured through the hard work and commitment of head teachers, teachers, policy makers and academics. Primary specialists are a rich resource for primary schools but they are not the only teachers who can teach languages. Many teachers have developed their expertise through a series of professional development opportunities and personal dedication and with continued government support for CPD and ITE language programmes the next 10 years will see languages as the heart of primary schools in the future.

References

CILT Language Trends 2010-11 (accessed 28.2.12)

http://www.alllanguages.org.uk/uploads/files/Press%20Releases/Language%20Trends%202010_Final%20Report.pdf

Kirsch, C (2008) *Developing Intercultural Competence*, Links, Issue 38 (Winter 2008). London, CILT

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

Newman, E., Taylor, A., Whithead, J., and Planel, C (2004) You just can't do it like that- it's just wrong! Impressions of French and English trainee primary teachers on exchange placement in primary schools abroad: the value of experiencing the difference. *European Journal of Teacher Education* 27 (3) 285-298

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

Woodgate-Jones, A. (2009). The educational aims of primary MFL teaching: an investigation into the perceived importance of linguistic competence and intercultural understanding. *Language Learning Journal*. Vol 37, No.2, July 2009, 255-265.