Primary to Secondary Transition in French: Insights from research

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The importance of effective transition

• The introduction of PLs is considered an effective way to generate long-term, and enduring favourable attitudes to language learning and greater uptake and success in KS4

• A critical factor for the success of early foreign language teaching lies in the effective transition of pupils from primary to secondary school
The importance of effective transition

• It is well-documented that poor liaison/transition contributed to the failure of the last major PLs initiative in England (Burstall 1974)

• Research findings into the lack of long-term benefits of an early start can, at least in part, be attributed to a lack of continuity in teaching across phases (Blondin et al. 1998)
Issues of Transition

• Issues related to primary to secondary transition have been well-documented both in the UK and internationally for subjects across the curriculum:
  – Rainer and Cropley (2013) – Physical Education
  – Braund and Driver (2005) – Science

So what are the key issues?
Issues of Transition

• Lack of curriculum continuity and repetition of content
• Discontinuity in pedagogy
• Insufficient cross-phase liaison – lack of mutual observations and pupil information

Leading to:
• A ‘hiatus’ in learner progress – 40% (Galton et al. 2000)
• Decreasing learner motivation
Issues of transition in languages

• Non-uniform and inconsistent nature of primary language teaching
  – Different teaching models
  – Different languages taught
  – Variation in time and teacher proficiency

• Increasingly heterogeneous Y7 in-take

• Compounded by reported lack of assessment data from primary schools
  (e.g. Board and Tinsley 2014)
Continuity across transition

• Lack of continuity in languages is reported as a long-standing issue (Ofsted 2011)
• Lack of continuity can have significant negative effects on learner progression (Hunt et al. 2008) and motivation across transition (Bolster et al. 2004)
• Need consider continuity in terms of:
  – Content
  – Pedagogy
Three recent studies of transition in languages

• Courtney (2014) – Y6-Y7
  – Detailed case study of 26 learners from two primaries into one secondary
  – Progression via assessments, motivation via questionnaires & interviews

• Graham, Courtney, Marinis and Tonkyn (2014) – Y5-Y7
  – 254 learners from nine schools
  – Effect of teaching approach – questionnaires & observations
  – Progression via assessment, motivation via questionnaires
Progression across transition

• Courtney (2014) and Graham et al. (2014) – contrary to previous transition studies, both studies show that learners made small but significant progress across transition from Y6-Y7

• Fine-grained analysis was used to measure linguistic progression:
  – Vocabulary
  – Grammatical development – gender & verbs
Motivation

• Previous studies cited observed decrease in learner motivation
• Need to look at motivation in detail
  – Attitudes in general – e.g. value, attitudes to others
  – Attitudes to language lessons – enjoyment, relevance
  – Perceptions of self-efficacy – learners’ beliefs about their own abilities
Results for motivation across transition

• Attitudes in general:
  – Graham et al. (2014) – positive in Y6, increased sig. in Y7, slight decrease at end of Y7 but remained higher than Y6
  – Courtney (2014) – very positive and stable from Y6-Y7
Results for motivation across transition

• Enjoyment of French lessons:
  – Graham et al. (2014)
  Y6 - 37.8%, Y7(1)-75.7%, Y7(2)-65.9%
  • When asked specifically at beginning of Y7, 89% of learners preferred secondary lessons because ‘we learn more’.
  – Courtney (2014)
  Y6-76.9%, Y7(1)- 68%, Y7(2) – 69.2%
  • Pace of classes, homework, lack of interaction
Likes…(most frequently mentioned items) – Graham et al. (2014)

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<th>Year 7 (1)</th>
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<td>Songs (45)</td>
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<td>Creativity (34)</td>
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<td>Cultural aspects (25)</td>
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<td>Nothing (49)</td>
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<td>Lack of variety (41)</td>
<td>Writing (19)</td>
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<td>Reading (12)</td>
<td>Other teacher factors (5)</td>
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Results for motivation

• Perceptions of self-efficacy:
  – Graham et al. (2014) – related to perceived ability for specific activities (literacy & oracy)
    Y6-65.6%, Y7(1)-88.7%, Y7(2)-90%
  – Courtney (2014) – confidence for speaking in French
    Y6- 88.5%, Y7(1)-96%, Y7(2)-92.3%
Results for motivation

• General findings – end of Year 6
  – Many enjoyed their primary French lessons, but there was some disaffection with lack of progress and repetition of content and activities, dislike of writing and literacy-based activities
  – Almost unanimous agreement on the benefit of primary languages
  – Majority of learners enthusiastic for learning French in Year 7
Results for motivation

• General findings - Year 7
  – No complaints about repetition of content or simply starting ‘from scratch’
  – Learners still considered primary languages to have been beneficial to them
  – In general, self-confidence increased from Y6-Y7
  – Lessons enjoyed less at the end of Year 7
Pedagogic differences across the KS2 and KS3

• Primary – mainly oracy-based with some literacy introduced at upper KS2

• Secondary – predominantly literacy-based with less emphasis on spoken interaction
Learner aims and curriculum goals

- Inconsistency of rationale of language teaching across phases
- Led to an apparent incongruence of learners’ aims and curriculum goals
- Learners did not view French as just another subject (yet!)
- Seen elsewhere in the world where students report on two Englishes (Ryan 2009)
Individual Differences and Teaching Approach

• First language literacy levels all had a significant relationship with outcomes (40% of the variance)
• School related variables second important factor – teaching time, teacher proficiency
• Learners with low L1 literacy levels appeared to benefit from a literacy-based approach in primary school and into secondary school
Individual Differences and Teaching Approach

• L1 literacy levels became increasingly influential on L2 outcomes and motivation

• Literacy-focused and faster paced Y7 French lessons appeared to favour those with stronger L1 reading and writing abilities

• Compounded by lack of observed systematic teaching of French GPCs and spelling in either phase
Conclusions

• There was a notable lack of complaints regarding the repetition of content and learners made progress across Y6-Y7
• Ensuring continuity in content is not enough on its own
• An abrupt shift in pedagogy had a negative effect on learner attitudes and motivation
• Gap between high and low attainers became wider – e.g. need for systematic teaching of GPCs alongside greater differentiation in both phases
Conclusions

• Need for a thorough and systematic information exchange with assessment data
• Need to reflect upon appropriate assessment methods in relation to learner competence
• To ensure the long-term benefits of early language teaching continuity in all aspects is essential
  – Stated and perceived aims of L2 teaching and learning
  – Agreement on content – vocabulary and linguistic structures
  – Pedagogy – to avoid major shifts while aiming to ensure progress for all
Items to consider and discuss:

• What assessment data is available at the end of primary school and what is required/useful for secondary schools?

• How can assessment advantage/disadvantage some learners?

• If learners cannot continue with the same language into secondary school what transferable skills need to be taught?

• What else? What do you think?
Future research needed

• Need to look at the experience of learners with different primary experience
  – No experience
  – Different L2 in primary and secondary
  – Latin

• What else? What do you think?

• Volunteers welcome!
Thank you for listening
Contact me: l.m.courtney@reading.ac.uk

Go to www.pmlresearch.com for further information on Nuffield funded project
References


References


• Rainer, P. And Cropley, B. (2013). Bridging the gap – but mind you don’t fall. Primary physical education teachers’ perceptions of the transition process to secondary school. Education 3-13, DOI: 10.1080/03004279.2013.819026