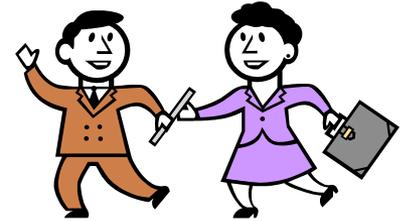


# Primary to Secondary Transition in French: Insights from research

Dr Louise Courtney  
University of Reading

# 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:
  - Galton et al. (1999, 2000, 2003) – focused on English Maths and Science
  - Rainer and Cropley (2013) – Physical Education
  - Braund and Driver (2005) – Science
  - Marshall and Hargreaves (2008) - Music

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)

Year 6	Year 7 (1)
Learning/specific topics (84)	Learning/specific topics (42)
Games/fun (68)	Progress (27)
Songs (45)	Teacher (25)
Creativity (34)	Games (22)
Cultural aspects (25)	Fun (16)
Technology (22)	Speaking (14)
Writing (purpose) (14)	Interaction (11)

# Dislikes....

Year 6	Year 7
Nothing (49)	Nothing (62)
Lack of variety (41)	Writing (19)
Difficulty (33)	Revision (17)
Writing (30)	Difficulty (14)
Lack of progress (20)	Class factors (7)
Songs (16)	Tests (6)
Speaking (13)	Teacher TL (5)
Reading (12)	Other teacher factors (5)

# 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](mailto:l.m.courtney@reading.ac.uk)

Go to [www.pmlresearch.com](http://www.pmlresearch.com) for further  
information on Nuffield funded project

# References

- Blondin et al. (1998). Blondin , C., Calendier, M., Edelenbos, P., Johnstone, R., Kubanek-German, A. and Taeschner, T. (1998). *Foreign Languages in Primary and Pre-School Education: A review of recent research within the European Union*. CILT.
- Bolster, A., Balandier-Brown, C. and Rea-Dickens, P. (2004) Young Learners of modern foreign languages and their transition to the secondary phase: a lost opportunity? *Language Learning Journal* 30, 35-41.
- Board, K. and T. Tinsley. (2014). *Language Trends 2013/14: The State of Language Learning in Primary and Secondary Schools in England*. CfBT Education Trust Publications.
- Braund, M. and Driver, M. (2005). Pupils' attitudes to practical science around KS2/3 transition. *Education* 3-13, 33:2, 20-26.
- Burstall, C., M. Jamieson, S. Cohen & M. Hargreaves. (1974). *Primary French in the balance*. Slough: NFER Publications.
- Courtney, L. (2014). *Moving from primary to secondary education: An investigation into the effect of primary to secondary transition on motivation for language learning and foreign language proficiency*. University of Southampton, Unpublished PhD Thesis
- Galton, M., Gray, J. & Ruddock, J. (1999). *The impact of school transitions and transfers on pupil progress and attainment*. DfEE Research Report No. 131. Norwich: HMSO.
- Galton, M. & Morrison, I. (2000). Concluding Comments. *Transfer and Transition: The next steps*. *International Journal of Educational Research* 33(4), 443-449.

# References

- Galton, M., Gray, J. & Ruddock, J. (2003). *Transfer and transition in the middle years of schooling (7-14): Continuities and discontinuities in learning*. Department for Education and Skills, Research Report RR443, Nottingham: DfES Publications.
- Graham S., Courtney, L., Marinis, T. and Tonkyn, A. (2014). Primary Modern Languages: the impact of teaching approaches on attainment and preparedness for secondary school language learning. The Nuffield Foundation. Unpublished Report
- Marshall, N. A. & D. J. Hargreaves (2007) Crossing the humpback bridge: primary–secondary school transition in music education. *Music Education Research*, 9, 65 - 80.
- 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
- Ryan, S. (2009). Self and identity in L2 motivation in Japan: The ideal L2 self and Japanese learners of English. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.). *Motivation, language identities and the L2 self* (pp.120-143). Bristol, England: Multilingual Matters.