

Institution: University of Southampton
Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages
Title of case study: 28-03 Promoting Foreign Languages in Primary Schools
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The University of Southampton's research into the teaching of modern foreign languages (MFLs) in UK schools has helped shape government education policy and contributed to an improvement in the way children acquire knowledge of other languages and cultures. By studying teaching methods in the classroom and devising tests to measure how effective they are in giving children the ability to communicate in another language, the researchers contributed to the current widespread acceptance of the importance of introducing language learning at primary level. They have also built a comprehensive set of resources which are being used by teachers and other education practitioners to improve the teaching of foreign languages.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The last decade has seen a dramatic decline in the numbers of young people learning another language. Since 2001 the number of pupils in England taking a foreign language to GCSE level has fallen from 78% to 43%. This trend is a cause of serious concern to the government. The chair of the all-party parliamentary group on modern languages, Baroness Coussins, called in 2010 for a "national languages recovery programme", citing an OECD survey, which found that Key Stage 3 pupils in England spent just 7% of their school time on languages - less than any other EU country apart from Ireland. Southampton's research set out to discover how to construct a coherent national language learning policy, starting in primary school, and how to support teachers in developing effective teaching methods.</p> <p>There were two research projects, both carried out by teams led locally by Ros Mitchell, Professor of Applied Linguistics (at Southampton since 1986), and including Louise Courtney, Research Assistant since 2007. The first project (2006-2009), conducted in collaboration with the Open University and Canterbury Christ Church University, and for which Southampton received a grant worth £178,000, examined MFL learning in 40 primary schools. The study was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, now Department for Education), which wanted to know whether language teaching could or should become compulsory at primary level. Southampton designed the main classroom observation scheme and the assessment tools used to measure the children's language proficiency. This involved visiting the schools, carrying out focus group discussions, observing MFL lessons and testing the children. The researchers concluded that primary schools had managed to develop viable teaching methodologies and saw MFL as key to promoting children's intercultural understanding. They found that the attitude of the children themselves was overwhelmingly positive and that, when a language was taught consistently, the learning outcomes were good. Building proficiency in one language at primary school was key to a smooth transition to MFL learning at secondary school [3.1, 3.2].</p> <p>The second project (2009-11) was conducted jointly with a team led by Professor Florence Myles of Newcastle University. The aim of this project was to assess the learning of French by children aged 5, 7 and 11. The ESRC awarded Southampton funding of £55,900 for this research, in which 38 hours of French instruction were provided for beginners in each age group. Their development was tracked through observation and through language tests. The teaching emphasised oral skills and used active methods to engage the children's interest. Southampton led the analysis of classroom teaching methods and contributed to analysis of children's grammatical proficiency. The findings showed that the cognitive maturity of the 11-year-olds placed them at an advantage for grammar learning, though vocabulary learning was similar for all ages. However, the younger children were considerably more motivated than the oldest group, confirming the motivational advantages of an early start to MFL [3.4]. Mitchell co-edited the resulting film <i>In the Café</i> and Southampton hosts the project's electronic archive comprising the children's speech data and transcriptions.</p> <p>Combined, both projects clearly demonstrated the viability of MFL instruction in primary schools, including the evolution of a practicable teaching methodology and its capacity to motivate and engage children aged 5 to 11, in contrast to motivational difficulties at secondary school level [3.3, 3.5].</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research**Key outputs:**

- 3.1** Cable, C., Driscoll, P., Mitchell, R. et al (2010) *Language Learning at Key Stage 2: A Longitudinal Study. Final Report*. Research Report DCSF-RR198. Department for Children Schools and Families. 169 pp.
- 3.2** Cable, C., Driscoll, P., Mitchell, R. et al (2012) 'Language learning at Key Stage 2: Findings from a longitudinal study', in *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education* 40:4, 363-378. (Peer-reviewed journal)
- 3.3** Mitchell, R. (2011) 'Still gardening in a gale: Policy, research and practice in foreign language education in England', in *Fremdsprachen Lehren und Lernen* 40, 49-67. (Peer-reviewed journal)
- 3.4** Myles, F. and Mitchell, R. (2012) *Learning French from ages 5, 7 and 11: End of Award Report*. ESRC Grant RES-062-23-1545
- 3.5** Mitchell, R. (2013) 'Making the case for the future of languages', in Driscoll, P. et al (eds) *Debates in Modern Languages Education*, Routledge, 203-217. (Submitted in REF2014)

Grants:**A. Project 1 - 40 Schools****Grant title: *Language learning at Key Stage 2: A longitudinal study***

Award holders: Ms C. Cable, Open University; Prof R. Mitchell, University of Southampton; Dr P. Driscoll, Canterbury Christchurch University.

Sponsor: Department for Children Schools and Families

Period of the grant: August 2006 - December 2009

Value of the grant: £629,910 [of which £178,000 awarded to Southampton]

B. Project 2 - Starting Ages**Grant title: *Learning French from ages 5, 7 and 11: An investigation into starting ages, rates and routes of learning amongst early foreign language learners***

Award holders: Prof F. Myles, Newcastle University/ University of Essex; Prof R. Mitchell, University of Southampton

Sponsor: Economic and Social Research Council

Period of the grant: October 2009 - September 2011

Value of the grant: £269,414 [of which £55,900 awarded to Southampton]

4. Details of the impact

The impact of the research has been two-fold, informing government education policy on MFL and helping practitioners improve the way languages are taught in schools. The first project was commissioned by a previous government, which saw its conclusions as an endorsement of its plans to make MFL compulsory in the primary school curriculum from 2011 [5.1, 5.2]. The researchers regularly communicated their findings to the DCSF, including in a formal seminar in spring 2010 for teacher educators, advisers and other professional leaders. The project's advisory board included Dr Lid King, Director of the National Languages Strategy for England (2002-10). Dr King has commented in some detail: "The development of a programme for primary language learning 7-11 was a central element in the National Languages Strategy for England [...]. The research carried out by your team played a critical part in convincing Ministers of the viability and importance of primary languages and in establishing the necessary conditions for success. In my view it had a direct impact on the subsequent 'Rose Review' of the primary curriculum in which for the first time languages had an important place. In particular we used your findings to develop realistic but challenging learning outcomes in the proposed programmes of study [...]. This review of the primary curriculum was adopted in its entirety by the previous government and was due to be implemented from September 2011. Although the change of administration delayed this process, primary languages will become statutory in 2014 and the Longitudinal Study has been an important factor underpinning this significant policy change". [5.1, 5.6]

With the change of government in May 2010, however, a further major review of the primary curriculum was commissioned, which, as Dr King indicates, left the status of MFL unclear. Mitchell nevertheless continued to advise government, meeting schools minister Nick Gibb in autumn 2010. She has made submissions to the ongoing consultations for the curriculum review, most recently in April 2013. She is also a member of the board of The Languages Company, an independent lobbying group set up by Dr King to promote MFL in education. The most recent government proposals to make the teaching of a single foreign language statutory throughout Key Stage 2, as set out in the final National Curriculum documentation published in September 2013, following drafts published throughout 2012 and 2013, are substantially in line with the recommendations from Southampton's first project [5.8]. Most notably, the 'subject content' detailed for languages reflects closely the findings of Southampton's research regarding children's achievement, in terms of both grammar and language skills. Bernardette Holmes, immediate Past President of the Association for Language Learning (ALL) and government adviser on the new statutory National Curriculum, says: "Findings and recommendations from this authoritative study continue to inform decisions around effective pedagogy, strategic planning of the curriculum and support structures for professional development. In preparation for September 2014, when language learning from the age of 7 will become statutory, ALL is setting up primary hubs across the country to support teachers to meet the practical challenges involved in teaching a new language. The research report gives us an invaluable source of reference to sharpen our understanding of the issues involved in developing appropriate, age-related learning with realistic outcomes. It also draws attention to the essential conditions of leadership, staffing and resources which must accompany successful language learning in primary schools at local and national levels." [5.3]

The findings from both projects were also disseminated to MFL practitioners. Mitchell ran sessions for trainee primary MFL teachers in Southampton in 2009, 2010 and 2012. She gave presentations on pedagogy, on children's attitudes and on learning outcomes arising from these projects at major teachers' conferences: ALL conference, March 2010 (plenary presentation, 200 delegates); Deal/Medway/ Kent Language Teachers conference, June 2010 (plenary, 100 delegates); Links into Languages conference, Cambridge, September 2010 (25 attendees); and Primary Languages Show, London, March 2012 (30 attendees) [5.4].

The second research project featured a conference in July 2011 in Newcastle at which the main results were presented, with Mitchell leading on presentation of MFL pedagogy. Attendees were 30 language teachers, teacher trainers and other education professionals. Evaluation forms showed 94% felt the conference 'addressed my interests' 'well' or 'very well', and 100% said it was 'good' or 'very good'. This was also the occasion for the first showing of the 20-minute, professionally produced film, *In The Café*, documenting the oral teaching approach which Southampton found to typify current good practice in primary school. The response to the film and the findings was very positive, with an average approval rating of 4.72 out of 5 [5.4]. *In The Café* has been distributed to teacher training institutions concerned with primary MFL and is available from websites at Southampton and Essex. Teacher educator Alex Woodgate-Jones comments: "The film made the notion of primary MFLs much more accessible and imaginable and I have had many requests since then to make the film available so trainees can watch it in its entirety. I think it is an extremely effective resource to encourage teachers to engage with primary MFLs and see how much can be achieved." [5.5, 5.9]

Other presentations of the research and film showings were organised by Mitchell and Myles at a University of Southampton Public Engagement Day in September 2011, at the University of Cambridge in November 2010, a school in County Durham in November 2011, at the Essex Language Conference for Teachers in September 2012, at a plenary session for 160 trainee teachers at the University of Southampton in October 2012, and at a public lecture at the University of East Anglia in November 2012. Similarly positive feedback was received (e.g. at the Essex event, 80% of respondents gave top rating to the primary research/ film session). There is ongoing demand from teachers and teacher trainers for advice on foreign language teaching to young learners (leading to upcoming events planned in York in February 2014 and Umea, Sweden in June 2014). Mitchell and her colleagues have continued to work with ALL to create web resources for the teaching profession on best practice for MFL teaching in primary school.

Impact case study (REF3b)

The wider interest in the subject sparked by the research was reflected in a report in the *Times Educational Supplement* of 23 February 2010: "Primary children are at the forefront of a culture shift in favour of language learning, a three-year study has shown. The major academic investigation concluded that the Government's long-standing policy of compulsory language teaching in primary schools may be helping to change a widespread national cynicism towards learning foreign languages such as French, German or Spanish." [5.7] Other media coverage of the research includes a live interview with Myles on BBC Radio Essex on 4 November 2011 and a video presentation by Myles made for the University of Essex [5.10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Dr Lid King, The Languages Company: to corroborate policy-related commissioning of Project 1.

5.2 John Hopper, Languages & Geography Team, Department for Education: to corroborate influence of Project 1 on decision making about inclusion of languages in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum, plus Mitchell's engagement with various DFE consultations following completion of Project 1.

5.3 Bernardette Holmes, ALL Past President, Languages First Programme Director and National Curriculum consultant: to corroborate Mitchell's engagement with teachers groups arising from Project 1 and influence of project findings on subsequent National Curriculum programmes of study.

5.4 Therese Comfort, Lead for Languages Education (Primary), CfBT Education Trust: to corroborate Mitchell's engagement with teachers' groups arising from Project 2, and for evaluation of contribution to Primary Languages Show 2012.

5.5 Alex Woodgate-Jones, Education School, University of Southampton: to corroborate use of film *In the café* in teacher education programmes.

5.6 Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum: Final Report (2009): the 'Rose Review'. Document available from: <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/pdfs/2009-IRPC-final-report.pdf>

5.7 <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6036324>: Press commentary on Project 1 in *Times Educational Supplement*: to corroborate positive impact of Project 1 on attitudes toward feasibility of primary languages.

5.8 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-languages-programmes-of-study>: the September 2013 version of the National Curriculum for languages, to corroborate correspondence of learning targets with findings of Project 1.

5.9 www.flloc.soton.ac.uk: to access teacher training film *In the café*.

5.10 <http://vimeo.com/55090703>: interview with Prof Florence Myles (Lead researcher for Project 2) for general public on significance of findings of Project 2 for primary languages.