

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: 25 - Education
Title of case study: Improving Foreign Language Teaching in England
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research by Macaro and collaborators since 1999 led to the distillation of eight principles regarding foreign language pedagogy, and to the development of video- and paper-based materials to support the application of these principles in teacher pedagogy and in teacher education programmes in England. The application in Schools and Higher Education Institutions was facilitated through an ESRC-funded impact project involving language teachers and teacher educators, and it was extended and sustained through the creation of practitioner clusters based on the research. Teachers report that changes have taken place in their modern languages departments following engagement with the research, with benefit to student learning; these changes have included much greater, and better quality, interaction in the foreign language, and a greater focus on processes and strategies in skills development. Teacher education programme providers have incorporated the research-based principles into their programmes, with impact on their student-teachers' practice.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Oxford Team: Professor Ernesto Macaro (employed by Oxford since 1999), Dr Lynn Eler (Research Officer Sept 2002-2004 and Feb 2006-2009), and Dr Robert Woore (Research Fellow from Sept 2007, Departmental Lecturer from May 2012).</p> <p>The underpinning research focused on two key areas of Foreign Language (FL) learning: (1) teacher-learner interaction, and (2) language learner strategies.</p> <p>(1) In a number of research-based publications, beginning with research published in 2001 [R1], Macaro's findings pointed to the fact that exclusive use of the target language by the teacher did not lead to greater target language use by learners; that learners benefited from first language explanations of new lexical items [R2]; and that pedagogy should thus focus on quality interaction in the target language, rather than its exclusive use. These findings challenged national and international foreign/second language policies of the 1990s, which argued for exclusive use of the target language. Macaro is now considered an international expert on the subject of 'principled teacher codeswitching' (limited first language use for justifiable pedagogical functions).</p> <p>(2) Macaro also co-led a research project on Language Learner Strategies (LLS), the learners' strategic use of their linguistic knowledge in tasks, through an international research network on LLS (International Project on LLS) and also a national network (UK Project on LLS). Specifically for the UK, the Oxford team, led by Macaro, found that many learners demonstrate poor strategic behaviour when faced with learning tasks [R3] and that they become demotivated when they are unable to modify their strategic behaviour [R4]. Important findings by the team included young learners' poor decoding ability, and the observation of a significant lack of progress with decoding between years 7 and 9, indicating that beginner French learners are faced with a process akin to dyslexia because of the complex relationship between the graphemes and phonemes of French, compounded by the transfer of that relationship from their first language (English). Very importantly, a link was found between poor decoding ability, a lack of decoding strategies, and a lack of motivation to continue with language learning at KS4 [R5]. This LLS research led to interventions in reading strategies [R6], and, in collaboration with Suzanne Graham (University of Reading), interventions in listening strategies [R7], all of which showed signs of being successful in bringing about change in strategic behaviour, and hence attainment.</p> <p>A recent research project (ESRC, 2010-11) brought the two areas of research together and demonstrated that learners appear to use inadequate strategies when faced with teacher second language input (see: ESRC Report 2011; Hennebry, Macaro, Rodgers & Murphy, 2014 forthcoming).</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>[R1] Macaro, E. (2001a) Analysing Student Teachers' Codeswitching in Foreign Language classrooms: Theories and decision making. <i>The Modern Language Journal</i>, 85/4. 531-548.</p> <p>[R2] Tian, L. and Macaro, E. (2012). Comparing the effect of teacher codeswitching with English-only explanations on the vocabulary acquisition of Chinese university students: A Lexical Focus-on-Form study. <i>Language Teaching Research</i>.16/3, 361 – 385</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

- [R3] Macaro, E. (2007) Do beginner learners of French have any writing strategies? *Language Learning Journal*. 35/1, 23-36.
- [R4] Macaro, E. (2001b) *Learning Strategies in second and foreign language classrooms*. London: Continuum.
- [R5] Erler, L. and Macaro, E. (2011). Decoding Ability in French as a Foreign Language and Language Learning Motivation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95/4. 496-518
- [R6] Macaro, E, and Erler, L (2008) Raising the achievement of young-beginner readers of French through strategy instruction. *Applied Linguistics*. 29/1, 90-119.
- [R7] Graham, S. and Macaro, E. (2008) Strategy instruction in listening for lower-intermediate learners of French. *Language Learning*. 58/4, 747–783.

[R1, 2, 5, 6, & 7] are articles in international peer-reviewed journals of the highest quality and have been cited extensively by other researchers both nationally and internationally. The 2001 book [R4] has become a standard textbook in many teacher education institutions.

Much of the above research stemmed from ESRC funded grants with Macaro as PI: *Learner strategies in reading and writing* (01/10/02-30/09/04): Rated 'outstanding'; led to [R3, 6]. *Strategy training in year 12 French* (01/10/03-31/12/05): Rated 'outstanding'; led to [R7]. *Decoding French, learner motivation and language learning* (01/02/06-30/04/07): Rated 'outstanding'; led to [R5]. *Teachers' use of first language in second language classrooms* (01/07/09-31/07/10): 'very good'. These projects were submitted as evidence of quality when making a successful ESRC application for follow-on funding to promote further impact (with University of Reading).

4. Details of the impact

Macaro and collaborators have distilled 14 years' worth of findings (including R1-R7) from the two extensive areas of research (interaction and learner strategies) into eight key pedagogical principles accessible to end-users: language teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers/advisers in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) [C1]. The impact process began with the generation and communication of pedagogical research-based principles, moved through the creation of resources (video and paper) and generation of professional development through practitioner workshops, to stimulate wider practitioner engagement. Each stage was documented and evaluated. To give this impact process greater focus in 2012, Macaro and collaborators obtained ESRC follow-on funding to carry out and evaluate impact activities resulting from the research outlined above.

1) Impact on teachers' pedagogy and that of their departments

A 'Consortium for Professional Development in MFL' was established in 2012, initially comprising teacher educators from Oxford and Reading, and teachers from Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Herefordshire and Cambridgeshire, but with the aim of creating a 'snowball effect'. Development materials, illustrating how to address the eight key principles, were refined and produced (March-May 2012). The principles and materials were then used by members of the Consortium (teams of researchers and school teachers) at 7 national workshops (June 2012-March 2013) attended by over 300 teachers and teacher trainers as well as representatives of government agencies (Department for Education; Ofsted). In addition, Macaro and Graham were invited to work through the principles and connected pedagogy with practitioner members of the Harris Federation Academies (a group of 27 primary and secondary academies, educating 20,000 pupils in and around London) in October 2012. Two Consortium members were invited to present at a conference for MFL department heads run by Leeds Learning Partnership (Feb 2013). The Consortium established and is continually developing a website [C1] through which practitioners can access, discuss and contribute to the principles and the materials, and, importantly, which they can then use to work with their department teams, or teacher education teams. As of 31st July 2013, the Consortium website and blog had received over 10,000 hits.

As a result of the workshops, 219 teachers agreed to implement the pedagogical principles in their respective school departments. The Consortium provided follow-up support for these departments (via email, the website and in some cases through face-to-face contact). Questionnaires, complemented by interviews and reports gathered from many of the schools who undertook to implement the principles, indicated a statistically significant increase in teachers' favourable attitudes to the principles pre- and post-workshop, an increase in part sustained by a third

Impact case study (REF3b)

questionnaire administered six months later [C2].

In April 2013, 102 teachers who had implemented the principles voluntarily reported success in changing or developing FL pedagogy in their departments [C2], including much greater and better quality second language interaction, and a greater focus on process/strategies in skills development. In a subsequent additional survey (N = 40):

- 92% had used some or all of the principles in their pedagogy;
- 85% had made or were intending to make changes to their curriculum based on the principles;
- 64% reported greater use of quality second language in teacher-students oral interaction;
- 54% reported improved reading skills among students.

Teachers from the schools where the principles have been implemented describe changes to their pedagogical practice, developing practical applications, “being inspired”, and sharing their own development with colleagues in their departments. Examples include:

- *“I’ve found the principles have given me a fresh look at different aspects of my pedagogy... Most excitingly, it has spurred me on to further develop reading and writing.”*
- *“I have changed the way I ‘correct’ pupils in my Year 7 class – I have actively encouraged them to use their fledgling German for ‘genuine’ communication (i.e. effectively get a message across) [...] I am astonished at how a ‘little and often’ focus on key structures in Year 7 combined with actively promoting them to re-use these structures in all kinds of contexts, often unrelated to the work at hand, has had a great effect on their ability to write confidently and enjoy using ‘real’ German.”*
- *“I used the ‘Hiding Out’ text idea and created stories (attached if they’re of interest) to fit in with their topics, with French/Spanish inserted so that we can work on inferring meaning – they love being ‘language detectives’! From there, they have grown increasingly confident to tackle whole sentences in the target language in the same way.”*
- *“[We are] rewriting the schemes of work with a focus through the eyes of the principles.”*
- *“I certainly bought into it (the principles) on the course, and then my faculty have really bought into it...”*

Teachers also report changes in the way students approach language learning:

- *“Overall it has really improved some of the students’ abilities – especially reading.”*
- *“Students are more aware now of how to go about their tasks and what processes they need to go through in order to help them learn something.”*
- *“Students are more open to longer and more challenging texts, the strategies we identified have been very useful for them.”*
- *“Very positive levels of engagement from students, across different ability levels [...] Teaching the strategies explicitly was a success.”*
- *“Students said they liked the challenging nature of the texts and that they enjoyed the responsibility of working more independently [...] they achieved a good understanding of the texts. Many indicated that they were pleasantly surprised that they could access the material and that it had given them confidence going forward.”*
- *“Many of them gained confidence and a better oral fluency in Italian.”*

The Consortium website [C1] hosts teaching resources developed by teachers who worked with the principles, ranging from multimedia activities to worksheets, writing tasks, reading materials, and display ideas (<http://pdcinmfl.com/resources-made-by-you/>). Following a visit to one of the schools implementing the principles, the Chief Executive of the National College for School Leadership noted how the research-based principles had been “shared ... round the school and the results were going up” [C3]. Ofsted have been kept updated of the work of the Consortium, and encouraged to make teachers aware of the website materials. In recently published Ofsted guidelines “Judging the Use of the Target Language by Teachers and Students” (2013), the language used to describe “good” and “outstanding” practice is very similar to that used in the oral interaction section of the principles, published on the project website.

By March 2013, the snowball effect intended had become evident. The active Consortium expanded from 10 to 35 members by enlisting the help of teacher educators and other leading figures in the world of language education. This created not only the desired snowball effect but a consolidation and, above all, greater sustainability of the changes, accomplished through

Impact case study (REF3b)

engagement with the research. As a result, from February 2013, the 'original' Consortium helped the 'expanded' Consortium set up 'local clusters' of teachers from different schools and teacher educators, whereby they rolled out the principles and the materials to other schools in their locality, including those in Birmingham, Walsall, Nottingham, Derby, Cheltenham, Reading, Abingdon, Oxford, West Oxfordshire, Newcastle, Lincoln, Sussex, Portsmouth, and Durham. For example, in Portsmouth, following a successful initial cluster meeting, the PGCE MFL course leader (Portsmouth University) set up a Google Group where teachers share resources related to the principles. Macaro and collaborators continue to support the clusters and have applied for additional resources with which to do this as effectively as possible.

2) Impact on MFL Language Teacher Education Programmes

The principles have been adopted in teacher education programmes such as at Nottingham University, Sheffield Hallam University, Sussex University, Portsmouth University, Birmingham City University, Newman University, Birmingham University, and Newcastle University. This adoption of the principles has resulted in hundreds of future MFL teachers experimenting with the distillation of the research in their teaching practice. For example, at Nottingham University, according to the PGCE MFL course leader [C4], the principles have been incorporated into the conceptual model of the course; while at Sheffield Hallam University they have led to "a permanent change in the way that we think about language teaching and language learning", reflected in the fact that tutors "actually rewrote the session to draw on the more strategic approach that had been flagged up in the workshop." [C5] A teacher trainer from Newman University emphasises that "the principles and materials provide a strong framework from which student teachers in particular can interrogate their understanding of how modern language teaching is delivered in schools. It supports them in questioning the status quo and in evaluating the quality of pupil interactions in the classroom." [C6] Another PGCE tutor (Nottingham University) comments on the portability and sustainability of changes achieved in light of the principles: "I am moving over to Teach First and will be embedding the above in my teaching sessions and in conversations at school with the student teachers and their mentors."

The President of the Association for Language Learning (ALL) [C7], who is also a teacher, sums up the impact of this research as follows: "I think this project has done more to bridge the gap between research and teaching than any other project I know of. Perhaps this is because the principles distil succinctly some key methodological pointers and describe them in such a way that teachers can immediately take hold of them[...].I have no doubt that the [workshops] day was instrumental in seeding the changes that I have witnessed in my project colleagues over the past year." The Languages Professional lead at the CfBT Education Trust (and former ALL President) adds: "this project, involving a wide range of teachers across a whole spectrum of schools, has been [...] very effective in terms of the impact that it has had. It is very clear, from the teacher responses I have seen, that the eight Principles and their associated pedagogical materials have been very well received and have pushed teachers to interrogate and alter their practice." [C8]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[C1] Eight pedagogical principles, via the Consortium for Professional Development in Modern Foreign Languages (PCD in MFL): <http://pdcinmfl.com>.

[C2] Impact evaluation dataset (integrating 309 questionnaires completed by teachers and teacher educators post-workshops, 67 questionnaires completed by participants 6 months after workshops; 14 transcribed interviews with participants) (copy on file).

[C3] Speech by the Chief Executive, the National College for Teaching and Leadership (13 June 2013) <http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/index/events/conference2013/conference2013-charlie-taylor-a-school-led-system.htm>).

[C4] PGCE Modern Foreign Languages course leader University of Nottingham (statement on file).

[C5] PGCE Modern Foreign Languages tutor, Sheffield Hallam University (statement on file).

[C6] PGCE Modern Foreign Languages tutor, Newman University (statement on file).

[C7] President of the Association for Language Learning (statement on file).

[C8] Languages Professional Lead, CfBT Education Trust/ past ALL President (statement on file).