

Institution: University of Reading

Unit of Assessment: 25 Education

Title of case study: Enhancing foreign-language listening strategies and motivation

1. Summary of the impact

Research carried out by the University of Reading's Professor Suzanne Graham has had an impact on initial teacher education in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in England, the practice of MFL teachers in secondary schools and universities, and on curriculum and materials development, at both a national and international level. The focus of the research is the strategies (mental processes) that underpin successful listening in a foreign language, how these can be developed in learners, and how teachers can improve learners' motivation for and attainment in language learning in this way. The dissemination of these research findings to practitioners and teacher educators has been delivered in such a way as to improve both pedagogical understanding of teachers and teacher educators, as well as classroom practice.

2. Underpinning research

Graham's PhD (awarded in 1994) focused on issues of transition between GCSE and A level in MFL. Part of this work outlined the link between effective strategy use, listening comprehension and motivation/self-regulation within post-16 MFL study, and produced important findings regarding the role of metacognition/self-regulation and combinations of learner strategies in successful language learning at this level. Issues of motivation, uptake and transition are key to foreign-language education in the UK, which in turn has implications for the country's ability to interact and trade with other nations, as well as for language teacher supply.

This PhD research was followed by a project undertaken at the University of Reading (2001-2003, funded by the Reading University Research Endowment Trust Fund), which explored further certain aspects of motivation among over 600 learners of French in the 16-19 age range (with a focus on listening in a foreign language). The study provided evidence of the extent to which learners' metacognitive awareness, their understanding of how to improve their own learning and their self-efficacy (belief in their ability to complete tasks successfully) are related to their decision and motivation to continue language study after the compulsory phase (reported in Graham, 2002, and more fully in Graham, 2004, 2006a and b). The joint focus on listening strategies and motivation/self-efficacy made a unique contribution to the field of second-language learner strategy research.

The findings led to Graham being invited to be part of a collaborative, ESRC-funded project with the University of Oxford which sought to demonstrate how teachers can improve post-16 learners' self-efficacy for and attainment in listening and writing in French through an intervention study, working with 19 schools, over two years (2003-5). Graham was responsible for the listening and motivation aspects of the project, with Dr Denise Santos (Research Assistant 2003-2005, Lecturer 2005-2007, Independent researcher 2008-). The intervention involved the explicit teaching of listening strategies to learners, combined with approaches to improve their motivation and self-efficacy. In addition, the first phase of the project explored the ways in which listening strategies develop over time and the relationship between these strategies and motivation, resulting in a number of publications.

These findings and publications have fed into two further research projects, which have also served as impact-generation mechanisms. The first, undertaken in collaboration with Santos, has been funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. In its first phase, it has investigated teachers' conceptualisation of second-language listening, how they teach it in secondary schools and how it features in textbooks. In the second phase, it has explored ways of improving language teachers' understanding of how to teach second-language listening comprehension at Key Stage (KS) 3, involving materials development and tracking of teachers' development. The second project is an ESRC-funded follow-on study, entitled 'Professional Development Consortium for MFL', carried out by Graham and the University of Oxford's Professor Ernesto Macaro, which has explored the

extent to which the principles from Graham and colleagues' previous research can be embedded in classroom practice at KS3.

3. References to the research

Graham, S., & Macaro, E. (2008). Strategy instruction in listening for lower-intermediate learners of French. *Language Learning*, 58, 747-783; DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9922.2008.00478.x

International peer-reviewed journal

Graham, S., Santos, D., & Vanderplank, R. (2008). Listening comprehension and strategy use: a longitudinal exploration. *System*, 36, 52-68; DOI: 10.1016/j.system.2007.11.001 **International peer-reviewed journal**

Graham, S. (2007). Learner strategies and self-efficacy: making the connection. *Language Learning Journal*, 35, 81-93; DOI: 10.1080/09571730701315832 **International peer-reviewed journal**

Graham, S. (2006a). Listening comprehension: The learners' perspective. *System*, 34, 165-182; DOI: 10.1016/j.system.2005.11.001 **International peer-reviewed journal**

Graham, S. (2006b). A study of students' metacognitive beliefs about foreign-language study and their impact on learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 39, 296-309; DOI: 10.1111/j.1944-9720.2006.tb02267.x **International peer-reviewed journal**

Graham, S. (2004). Giving up on modern foreign languages? Students' perceptions of learning French. *The Modern Language Journal*, 88, 171-191; URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3588750> **International peer-reviewed journal**

Graham, S. (2002). Experiences of learning French: a snapshot at Years 11, 12 and 13. *Language Learning Journal*, 25, 15-20; DOI: 10.1080/09571730285200051 **International peer-reviewed journal**

4. Details of the impact

Overall, the research has contributed to **changes in curriculum guidelines for MFL in England**. While other authors (e.g. Grenfell and Harris) have published on language-learner strategies, Graham's work is novel in its focus on listening strategies and on the link between strategy use and motivation within the context of MFL learning at English secondary schools. This is reflected in how the author of the first version of the KS3 Framework for MFL cites Graham (2002) as a study underpinning the thinking behind the Framework as regards learners' strategies and motivation¹. Although published in 2005, this initial Framework was the forerunner to the later one (2009).

The most powerful and extensive impact of the research has been achieved through the two impact-focused projects described in Section 2, one funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the other supported by ESRC Follow-On funding secured by Graham.

In the Esmée Fairbairn project, Graham and Santos wrote continuous professional development (CPD) materials and held workshops for teachers and teacher educators showing how the listening research (Graham et al., 2008; Graham & Macaro, 2008) can be translated into classroom practice. Emails, teacher interviews, classroom observations and CPD reflective journals from teachers involved in the project show how the initial research has had an **impact on teachers' understanding of effective listening pedagogy, and how they develop the listening skills of their learners**. One teacher commented on the 'seismic shift' in her teaching approach that the CPD had brought about. A Higher Education Academy-funded seminar for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Higher Education (HE) tutors, to disseminate the Esmée Fairbairn work further, has contributed to changes in how these tutors teach listening pedagogy to trainee teachers, and how HE language tutors teach listening to language students, covering at least 12 Higher Education Institutions (including Bristol, East London, Manchester, Chichester, Liverpool John Moores, and others) and future language teachers throughout the UK. Feedback emails confirm this impact. The listening work was also disseminated to more than 50 ITE tutors and MFL teachers at Language World, March 2013, the major UK conference for language practitioners.

Impact case study (REF3b)

In the ESRC-funded project, the Professional Development Consortium (PDC) group, working with teachers from local schools, created videos and other materials to show how the researchers' findings, formulated into a number of 'Principles' of language teaching (including those concerning listening, self-efficacy and motivation, from Graham's work), can be used in practice in the classroom. These are housed on a blog (see <http://pdcinmfl.com/>) that has received circa 14,000 hits internationally and were disseminated at seven workshops around the country attended by approximately 240 teachers from 144 schools in 33 English counties, and 34 teacher-trainers from 28 universities². The Education Endowment Foundation has a link to the blog as part of its promotion of evidence-based practice³.

Graham and Macaro delivered a shortened version of the workshop at the Harris Federation Training Day (October 2012), a professional development event run for 13 schools around London, which are attended by approximately 16,000 students. In the questionnaire administered after each workshop, 219 teachers and 17 teacher-training providers agreed to implement the Principles in their teaching/training. Six months later, 11 ITE tutors and over 100 teachers reported (via questionnaires, interviews, reports or emails) using the Principles in their teaching or training (with 64 referring explicitly to being influenced by those relating to listening and 47 by those concerning feedback and self-efficacy/motivation). Reports from ITE tutors show the degree of impact on the training of teachers across England (e.g. at the University of Nottingham, where the Principles have been incorporated into a model of language learning used on the course; and at HEIs such as Sussex, Newman and Portsmouth, where the listening research has changed tutors' approaches to how they teach listening pedagogy). The ITE MFL course leader at Portsmouth University comments 'I have been greatly influenced by (...) Suzanne Graham's work on listening strategies. The research (...) has made me review the way in which I present strategies for enabling young students to access reading and listening to my trainee teachers and forms part of my training programme'. Graham has also disseminated information about the PDC materials to teachers in Scotland and in the US (via a colleague, Professor Jason Rothman). Local school clusters, whereby workshop participants promote use of the Principles with other schools, have been established in a range of locations across the country, including Walsall, Nottingham, Derby, Cheltenham, Newcastle and Portsmouth, reaching a wide range of schools (e.g. 12 in Portsmouth). Local Authority advisors have run CPD events based on Graham's research. The work of the PDC has been presented to the Teaching Agency and the Department for Education (DfE) and Graham has joined the MFL Expert Panel, a body which meets at the DfE to consider changes to the MFL National Curriculum (NC). The PDC blog will be part of the materials issued by this group for teachers to support the new NC. Graham held a conference call with the DfE (4 March 2013) advising them of the PDC work, with the Department agreeing to make it known to their ITE review group, and describing in an email the model of professional development the PDC enshrines as 'empowering the profession'. They showed particular interest in the underpinning listening research. The PDC has devised a **system of assessment for language learning** to replace the current national curriculum attainment targets in MFL, which has been forwarded to the DfE as part of the national curriculum review consultation

In addition, there is evidence that Graham's work is cited in practitioner guidelines in other countries (e.g. in a Europe-wide guide for teachers⁴, reaching thousands of teachers internationally), and impacting on teaching practice (e.g. in Academic Language courses in Japan and the US⁵). The work on metacognition and self-efficacy, as well as listening, is cited as evidence for the need for curriculum changes in the US and has informed debate about ML curriculum design there⁶.

Graham's publications on listening and motivation have been widely downloaded from the University of Reading's research repository, by readers from over 58 countries. They appear on ITE MFL reading lists (e.g. London Metropolitan, Cardiff and Chichester), reaching hundreds of trainee language teachers, and inform practice-based investigations (e.g. Yan, 2012, based on Graham, 2007) into how to improve language learning in international contexts such as China and the US. Graham's research has also fed into In-School Training Services she delivered to Guernsey schools (3-4 sessions a year in 2006-2011), as MFL Advisor there, and into a lecture tour at the Harbin Institute of Technology, China, for language teachers and lecturers (2011), where the research has underpinned changes to teaching on their *Speaking and writing as a Scientist* course. A leader of that programme comments in an email that they now pay more

Impact case study (REF3b)

attention to developing students' listening strategies and 'to the link between strategy use and learning outcomes in our course'.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. (Lee, 2002, p. 7 – available upon request)
2. <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/ES.J010286.1/read/reports>
3. <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/approaches/feedback>
4. http://www.redbiogeo.com/encuentro/images/stories/lici_handbook_fr.pdf (pp.32-35)
5. <http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/resources/studentcentered.html>
6. see <http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/pdfs/TransitionsFinalWeb.pdf> (p.2) and <http://www.cal.org/resources/languageframework.pdf> (p.30)

The following individuals can corroborate the impact detailed (contact details provided separately):

Teacher of French, Maiden Erlegh School, Reading - impact on teachers' understanding of effective listening pedagogy, and how they develop the listening skills of their learners

Teacher of German, Abingdon School, Abingdon – impact on teaching of listening in schools

ITE/PGCE MFL Course Leader, University of Portsmouth - impact on the training of teachers across England and PDC clusters

ITE/PGCE MFL Course Leader, Newman University College, Birmingham - impact on the training of teachers across England

ITE/PGCE MFL Lecturer, University of Nottingham - impact on the training of teachers across England.