

Assignment 2 – EDUC6282 – A literature review of empirical research articles

Foreign languages learning in primary schools and the effects of transition on students' learning

Introduction

This literature review will compare and discuss a range of empirical research articles, evaluating particularly their findings, but also their methodology and validity. These articles are comparable with one another, because they all consider foreign languages learning in primary schools, or the effects of transition upon the learner – whether it be of languages, or of other subjects, generally. The purpose of this review is to look for consistent themes in the treatment of the transition process from the primary to secondary phases of a student's education, in order to inform our effective practice as educationalists. In the first section, primary-level modern foreign languages provision will be addressed; in the second, the effects of transition upon the learner of languages in particular, and in the third, more universal issues relating to primary-to-secondary transition will be examined.

Transition from one educational stage to another is always a difficult time in a student's school career, with many challenges, particularly for learners of modern foreign languages (Jones & Coffey, 2006; Board & Tinsley, 2014; Burstall, *et al.*, 1974; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Rice, *et al.*, 2011). Careful planning and progression are essential, to avoid duplication or discontinuity, which can lead to demotivation (Galton, *et al.*, 1999 and 2003; McLachlan, 2009) – as well as being a waste of both time and momentum for the student. To create an environment for truly successful modern foreign languages learning in secondary schools, it is essential to start students' foreign languages learning as effectively and as early as possible, and then to manage their transition in the most appropriate way. Such an effective beginning, in conjunction with on-going tailored and high-quality languages teaching in the longer term, is what will be

needed, if the government's hoped-for 'renaissance' (DfES, 2007: 1) in modern foreign languages learning is to come about.

Languages learning in primary schools

Martin (2000a) breaks early foreign language learning programmes into three main categories: *language competence programmes*, whereby students actually learn a foreign language; *sensitisation or encounter programmes*, in which the pupils' own understanding about languages learning is developed through an encounter with one or more languages, but with an emphasis on the child's own interests and cognitive development, and *language awareness programmes*, providing 'education of the ear', and an awareness of language diversity (Martin, 2000a: 5-6). By their very nature, these three categories require varying input and levels of specialism from the teacher. *Language competence programmes* require a high degree of specialism on behalf of the teacher, and can often rely on a visit from an external or peripatetic specialist to deliver the content. *Sensitisation or encounter programmes* are designed to be delivered by the primary class teacher, as they are less demanding in terms of content, but are assisted by specialist external resources or native speaker support. *Language awareness programmes* are designed to be delivered by the primary class teacher, who may have little or no active knowledge of the modern foreign languages in question.

Hunt, *et al.* (2005) adds a further category; that of *cross-curricular language programmes* (Hunt, *et al.*, 2005: 380). These programmes involve the study of new curriculum content through the medium of a foreign language. While CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) (Hunt, *et al.*, 2005: 381; Mehisto, *et al.*, 2008) may aim to improve primary school pupils' performance both in the content being taught and in the foreign language in which it is being taught, the process is an extremely intense and demanding one, for both students and teachers. There is a significant amount of specialist vocabulary, clearly requiring a very high degree of subject knowledge and confidence on behalf of the teacher.

With such a varied range of teaching and learning models, it is to be expected that primary school teachers – many by definition not specialist linguists by training or inclination – will exhibit a range of opinions and attitudes towards languages learning in their classrooms. It is also to be expected that such a diverse range of opinions will also be exhibited by the students.

Barton, *et al.* (2009) sets out to evaluate the comparative success of one particular programme – Discovering Language – a language awareness programme that was launched in seven schools across three local education authorities in September 2004. One of the stated aims of this programme was – among others – “to provide a practical solution to the issue of non-specialist language teachers teaching foreign languages in the primary classroom” (Barton, *et al.*, 2009: 146), offering resources and plans for teachers to explore six different languages in a cross-curricular way, developing students’ intercultural awareness, as well as linguistic ability. Given the importance of teacher confidence in delivering effective modern foreign languages lessons (Martin, 2000; Barnes, 2005 and 2006; Hunt, *et al.*, 2005), and moving towards the requirement by the DfES that modern foreign languages teaching be statutory at Key Stage 2 from 2010 (DfES, 2002, 2005 and 2007), this kind of programme could be seen as an effective solution to bridge the gap.

Conclusions to be drawn from the research carried out by Barton, *et al.*, are that such a language awareness programme is largely successful in promoting students’ extrinsic (Dörnyei, 2001) and intrinsic (Lamb, 2001: 85) motivation to learn languages, and that high-quality languages resources can reassure teachers who have lower confidence in teaching a subject in which they have little, or indeed no, experience (Barton, *et al.*, 2009: 159), thereby boosting their essential confidence levels (Barnes, 2005 and 2006).

The research to ascertain the effectiveness of the programme employed mixed methods: student questionnaires to gather quantitative data about their perceived enjoyment and usefulness of the lessons,

as well as qualitative interviews with head teachers, teachers and students (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 338). The student questionnaire is included in an appendix, offering both transparency (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 220) and evidence of construct validity (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 184). By using a range of closed attitudinal questions in the questionnaires, the researchers generated data that could be analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) data analysis software (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 331-2).

A number of attempts were made to ensure the validity and appropriateness of this research project – several schools from a range of areas, and a significant number of pupils from a range of backgrounds were involved, seemingly offering construct validity and generalisability (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 210; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 137). However, the self-selecting sample of ‘volunteers’ – by definition, those head teachers who responded positively to the invitation to take part were more likely to have been in favour of a multi-lingual approach at the start of the programme (Barton, *et al.*, 2009, 156) – leads to a restricted possibility of generalisation (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 156).

Other potential shortcomings in this report are actually noted by the authors themselves – not least the nature of the qualitative data that they are trying to capture, comparing their situation to that of previous researchers in Alsace (Young & Helot, 2003), in that the evaluation depends on students’ perceptual data: “The researchers observed that the impact of this initiative cannot be quantified in terms of the ‘factual knowledge’ acquired by the children, but ‘rather more in terms of the advancement in the reflection of the children, the development of their awareness, . . . their understanding that whatever culture we belong to, whatever language we speak, we are all part of the same humanity” (Young & Helot, 2003: 242). This impact is impossible to measure, with regard to the changes in attitude, advancement in reflection and understanding of culture, that a programme such as this is intended to engender. While the students’ attitudes towards the programme were evaluated quantitatively, it is not wholly possible to evaluate the impact itself (Young & Helot, 2003: 242; Barton, *et al.*, 2009: 148, 158).

Like Barton, *et al.* (2009), McLachlan (2009) also begins by addressing the forthcoming statutory change for primary modern foreign languages teaching (DfES, 2002, 2005 and 2007), and asks whether lessons have been learned from the previous attempt to introduce languages into the primary school curriculum, and from the evaluative research carried out by Burstall, *et al.* (1974) (McLachlan, 2009: 183). By beginning their research with the question “Was any substantial gain in mastery achieved by beginning to learn French at the age of eight?” (Burstall, *et al.*, 1974: 243), it is McLachlan’s assertion that Burstall, *et al.* (1974), in their evaluation of the previous pilot scheme, ‘French from 8’ (1966-74), was unable to report a conclusion that was anything other than “unequivocally in the negative.” (Burstall, *et al.*, 1974: 243; McLachlan, 2009: 184). Other questions are also asked of the methodology employed by Burstall, *et al.* (1974), with Bennett (1975: 337) pointing out that the experimental and control groups were not comparable, and Hoy (1977: 25) criticising the project’s lack of forward thinking, focussing on an inherently negative retrospective statement. Finally, the question is posed “Indeed, if the research did not have an inherent goal of informing the effective development of language teaching and learning in England, what meaningful and positive purpose could it serve?” (McLachlan, 2009: 185).

By focussing on six key points synthesised from from DfES (2005) and Muijs, *et al.* (2005) – demonstrating agreement with previous findings from Burstall, *et al.* (1974), Hoy (1976), Powell, *et al.* (2000), Martin (2000b) and Driscoll, *et al.* (2004) – McLachlan (2009) aims to upturn the inherently negative research question posed by Burstall, *et al.* (1974), and – in the light of government policy change – ask instead “are we creating conditions that will ensure the long-term success of primary languages?” (McLachlan, 2009: 186).

This work was designed and conducted as an exploratory case study (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 151; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 253) across four schools, with the researcher undertaking classroom observations, attendance at meetings and formal interviews with staff – as well as informal staff-room conversations – over the space of a year. This ethnographical approach (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 156) enables the researcher to

build close relationships with both teachers and pupils, but the exploration of such an insider view may leave the researcher open to questions of bias, thus potentially undermining the external validity of the work (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 156). McLachlan (2009) counteracts this, by citing Burke & Kirton (2006: 2): “The significance of insider research should not be under-estimated. Methodologies that support knowledge production from an insider perspective and at the localized level are of great value in developing more nuanced and complex understandings of educational experiences, identities, processes, practices and relations.” (McLachlan, 2009: 188).

The researcher selected the four primary schools from the same local authority area, but reflecting the national picture, in that each school’s approach to the demands of the 2010 curriculum change deadline were all very different. This enables conclusions to be drawn to a wider scale – giving generalisability and transferability of her findings.

The qualitative data generated by the research was coded and then analysis was carried out, grouping responses according to criteria based upon Hoy’s (1976) original conditions for success. This enabled the researcher to ascertain whether the original conditions were being established, or indeed whether they were still relevant to today’s world of education:

- “1. How effectively is the policy being disseminated to primary schools and does it serve to prioritise the role of languages in the primary curriculum?
2. Is there a shared understanding of the longer-term educational aims of the strategy and are there clear short-term objectives?
3. What do teachers believe to be the educational benefits of languages in the primary curriculum?
4. Are funding streams transparent, and is there sufficient funding to support primary languages effectively?

5. Is teacher supply adequate and are training opportunities ensuring a longer-term sustainable supply?

6. Are there pressures on the primary curriculum that may be constraining a more structured approach to language teaching and learning, and to what extent is accountability affecting development of language programmes?”

(McLachlan, 2009: 188)

The variety of responses found by McLachlan (2009) to each of these questions – to a greater or lesser degree – does not give a picture of harmony and unqualified enthusiasm for the government’s 2010 deadline, particularly with regard to primary schools teachers’ confidence in teaching modern foreign languages. The teaching of languages is not seen as a serious educational priority, due to a lack of consistent training and funding, relying in particular on teachers giving up their free time (McLachlan, 2009: 197) and, when comparing the demands of languages teaching with other curriculum areas, “A primary teaching community without secure subject knowledge would be unacceptable in other areas of the curriculum, so what does it say about the priority and status of primary languages when it appears that in this curriculum area it *is* acceptable?” (McLachlan, 2009: 198). Indeed, the attitudes found in McLachlan’s (2009) qualitative study, far from leading to the promised ‘renaissance’ in the secondary curriculum (DfES, 2007: 1), under the current plans and structure, the converse is likely to be the case, with repetition leading to demotivation and negative attitudes (McLachlan, 2009: 202).

Also following on from the rather simplistic assertion by the Nuffield Foundation (2000: 6) that English alone is no longer enough, as it leaves monolingual English speakers at the mercy of the goodwill of others, and that foreign languages learning is important, Legg (2013) takes a look at the attitudes held by teachers in primary schools on the question. This research actually takes place after the introduction of statutory languages content to the primary curriculum in 2010 (DfES, 2002, 2005 and 2007). Beginning with the

assertion that “The position of modern foreign languages in the curriculum has been in question for some time”, Legg (2013: 55) wants to examine whether the findings of the Nuffield Foundation bear closer scrutiny with members of the teaching profession themselves. Conducting qualitative research – firstly a qualitative questionnaire, and then a series of interviews to gauge participants’ opinions regarding to what extent modern foreign languages teaching in primary schools is important and even necessary; how feasible it is to offer modern foreign languages instruction to all pupils, and about primary school teachers’ concerns about the teaching of modern foreign languages (Legg, 2013: 57).

Given the nature of the data, with the range of opinions being explained and described, a qualitative analysis, with the identification of themes arising from the responses – coding according to the teachers’ feelings about different aspects of languages teaching in primary schools – is appropriate (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 348; Punch & Oancea, 2014: 225). Unfortunately, for the transparency and construct validity of this research, Legg omits to include a copy of the questionnaire as an appendix (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 220; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 158).

Legg (2013) is also, however, restricted in scale and scope. By only involving two schools, and interviewing a total of four individuals, it is clearly a very small-scale study - raising questions about construct validity and generalisability (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 210; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 137), though in the conclusion, it is conceded that a larger sample of schools and interviewees would lead to increased generalisability (Legg, 2013, 61). However, efforts are made to ensure that the sample size for the questionnaires is maximised by using all of the teachers in the school (Legg, 2013, 57), and then by selecting candidates for interview using purposeful sampling (Punch & Oancea, 2014, 212), with two taken from each side of the debate.

In spite of the statutory requirement to have languages as a part of the primary curriculum, the findings made by Legg (2013), show that there is a split in the perceived importance of modern foreign languages teaching in primary schools – 33% of respondents described it as “Very important” and 33% as “Not very

important” (Legg, 2013, 58). This would suggest that attitudes are not quite as clearly cut as the Nuffield Foundation (2000) would have us believe. However, there is also the identification of other issues – questioning the necessity of offering modern foreign languages teaching to all students, particularly to those with SEN requirements, or to those who have not yet mastered their own first language (Legg, 2013, 59). Legg (2013) supports the findings made by McLachlan (2009), in that while modern foreign languages teaching is seen in general as being important, it is not seen that way by everyone. Legg (2013) also supports the assertions made by Martin (2000) and Barnes (2005 and 2006), and also outlined by Hunt, *et al.* (2005), that a lack of confidence among primary school teachers – be they language specialists or otherwise – is a significant hindrance to the successful teaching of languages, and to the attitude with which this teaching is approached.

Transition and languages

Primary languages teaching, then, can take many forms (Martin, 2000; Hunt, *et al.*, 2005; Barton, *et al.*, 2009). It is also now statutory in nature (DfES, 2002, 2005 and 2007). However, it would appear that the inconsistent approach from the government itself is not conducive to sparking the expected ‘renaissance’ (DfES, 2007: 1; McLachlan, 2009: 202), and a lack of confidence or curriculum time for primary teachers leads to many of them feeling ill-equipped or unwilling to embrace languages teaching fully in their classrooms (Martin, 2000; Barnes, 2005 and 2006; Hunt, *et al.*, 2005). So, what hope can secondary modern foreign languages teachers have to stop the drop-out at Key Stage 4? It may be the case that the transition between Key Stages 2 and 3 holds the answer. With McLachlan’s warnings about repetition being central from a student’s perspective to maintaining enthusiasm (McLachlan, 2009: 202), how can a successful transition be achieved?

Chambers (2014) reports on the qualitative interviews of a sample of 12 teachers of modern foreign languages, particularly with regard to maintaining the momentum gathered by students at primary level,

and ensuring a smooth transition from one Key Stage to another (Chambers, 2014: 242). The introduction is rooted in a similar place to that of Legg (2013), stating that following the publication of the *National Languages Strategy* (DfES, 2002), significant changes occurred in modern foreign languages provision, meaning that “Languages were made optional post-14 and Primary Modern Foreign Languages (PMFL) were introduced. Currently, the position of PMFL (and indeed other subjects) is unclear, given that the curriculum is under review.” (Chambers, 2014: 242). However Chambers (2014), rather than rejecting Burstall, *et al.* (1974) in the same way as McLachlan (2009), picks up on one of their key findings: “...how pupils, in the main, simply re-started their MFL experience in the secondary school from scratch, regardless of the knowledge and experience they might have brought from primary school.” (Chambers, 2014: 242). This is a practice that is both deleterious and still widespread (Bolster, 2009; Cable, *et al.*, 2010; Evans & Fisher, 2009; Hunt, *et al.*, 2008; McLachlan, 2009) – though there are the occasional examples of good practice to be found, showing most clearly the importance of communication and openness between the primary and secondary levels (Wicksteed, 2008). The purpose, then, of the Chambers (2014) pilot study, was to explore the problems posed by Key Stage 2-to-Key Stage 3 transition, based around a series of five questions:

- “- When had preparation for transition started, and what had schools done in practical terms?
- What information was exchanged between feeder primary schools and secondary schools and vice versa?
- How were pupils’ PMFL experience and competence to be considered in relation to progression in Year 7?
- Were published PMFL policy documents exploited to inform plans and provision for transition?
- Did interviewees have any additional general concerns relating to transition?”

(Chambers, 2014: 246)

Chambers (2014) adopts an interpretivist approach, devising a semi-structured interview schedule, allowing an in-depth and structured exploration of the issues, while providing an opportunity for flexibility and the development of a relationship with the interviewee (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 184; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 352). The interview schedule – including areas for possible follow-up questions – is also included as an appendix, allowing transparency (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 220) and evidence of construct validity (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 184). A range of teachers was interviewed – though the sample of twelve was self-selecting – from a variety of schools. Most schools were comprehensives, though there was one teacher from a single-sex (boys) selective school. One of the schools was identified as being a specialist language college. As a pilot study, this variety of respondents offers a certain degree of generalisability (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 151), and the findings could be considered worthy of further study.

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed, checked and then analysed qualitatively (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 225; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 369), and sorted into main themes – loosely linked to the initial research questions laid out previously:

- “- preparation for transition,
- information sharing (1) between primary and secondary schools and (2) between secondary and primary schools,
- plans in place for managing transition,
- familiarity with and exploitation of PMFL policy documents and
- general concerns relating to transition.”

(Chambers, 2014: 247)

In terms of responses, it can be seen that only the specialist language college really had a structure in place. The school had been working with local feeder primaries for a number of years and there was a

consistent, documented plan for transition, particularly in terms of modern foreign languages. In other schools, the process was less well managed:

“I believe that it is just a mess. That is my major concern. That everybody is doing a different thing, at different times and at different stages. I’m concerned about the quality of what is being delivered, because I think that will vary. I mean, it will in secondary schools, of course. That will vary, and the experiences that the students are getting, and I feel that it needs somebody to get a hold of it and say, ‘look, right this is what is going to happen and this is what you are going to do.’ It could actually be a really good thing to do this in a primary school if it is co-ordinated in a consistent and proper manner, and my impression is that it has not been. (R11)”

(Chambers, 2014: 251)

This lack of clarity – and therefore consistency – harks back to the criticisms found in McLachlan (2009: 202) – if things are approached inconsistently by the government and other stakeholders, then how can teachers have the requisite confidence in their abilities to deliver effective and consistent programmes of learning?

Other lessons to be learned from this study include the importance – and yet apparent lack – of effective communication between primary and secondary schools, and not simply in the area of modern foreign languages transition. Chambers (2014) goes as far as to say that “It leads one to question whether schools had ever been provided with any meaningful support in the area of communication and collaboration.” (Chambers, 2014: 254). It is something that is expected, but has not been formalised and certainly not been supported.

Chambers (2014) closes by stating that the challenges of transition should not be underestimated – and that consistency and a well-managed approach are essential. Even on the basis of such a small-scale study, it is evident that there are significant improvements to be made in the spheres of primary MFL teaching

and the communication between the Key Stages – particularly with regard to shared goals and investment. He goes on to say that “it is hoped that this pilot project might help shape future research on a more significant and therefore more ‘generalisable’ scale, including data collected in the UK and in countries on the European mainland.” (Chambers, 2014: 256).

In a subsequent study, Chambers (2015) does indeed venture onto the European mainland to look for evidence of good practice, looking at the experience of German teachers of English in response to the demands of the transition period. In previous work, Barnes (2016) evaluates and analyses the impact and effectiveness of this research, particularly in terms of the methodology and transferability of the findings to a United Kingdom context – the attitudes towards the learning of languages are simply different in different countries, for a number of reasons. Barnes (2016) picks up on Chambers’ (2015) closing assertion:

“In Germany, English is given high status and high importance. In the UK, given the global position of English in the world, foreign languages tend generally to have lower status and lower importance. Where pupils have the option to learn languages or not, they tend not to.” (Chambers, 2015: 13)

This being said, Chambers (2015) obtains findings that are largely consistent with his United Kingdom-based research – and sets out the foundation for his wider research programme.

In his study, Barnes (2016) also discusses a second research project to take place away from the British mainland. Jones (2010) looks at the impact of transition upon students in Jersey. Set in the Bailiwick of Jersey, Jones’ (2010) project faces the same issues of transferability to the mainland UK system as that of Chambers (2015). By necessity, attitudes to learning French in Jersey – with its proximity to France and the shared history to which is referred in the introductory section (Jones, 2010: 177) – must be seen as being

fundamentally different to those towards learning French in the rest of the UK, just as learning German in England is different to learning English in Germany.

Chambers (2016) returns to the United Kingdom, to examine the attitudes held by students towards their transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. Chambers (2016) chooses to build from an awareness of the assertion made by Hunt, *et al.* (2008), that “not learning from past experience has the potential to be damaging.” (Chambers, 2016: 2), explaining that how transition is managed determines the success of the whole primary MFL experience – though the voice of the student remains comparatively unheard in recent literature.

Just as with his previous studies, Chambers (2016) is structured around semi-structured qualitative interviews, offering flexibility and adaptability (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 184; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 352). The interview schedule – again including areas for possible follow-up questions – is once again included as an appendix, allowing transparency (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 220) and evidence of construct validity (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 184). The sample of 18 students – from four different primary schools, offering a range of different backgrounds – was interviewed once in 2012, when they were in Year 6, and then the same students were interviewed again the following year, during their first year at secondary school, Year 7.

Chambers (2016) develops his research questions along the lines of the consistency and effectiveness of primary MFL provision, as well as students’ own awareness of data that is shared between the schools about their performance. The final research question centres around the students’ enjoyment of the subject – and any factors that may cause an increase or decrease in that enjoyment. The findings showed that primary MFL provision was not consistent, but that that majority of students, at least, continued with one or more of the languages that they had started at primary level. Timetabled provision for languages at primary level though, was at least consistent, with all of the schools having a timetabled allocation for MFL each week. In terms of transition preparation, all the students visited their secondary school for open

evenings, but engaged in activities in other subject areas than modern languages. Regarding their experience in Year 7, the students – for the most part – seemed to be enjoying their languages lessons even more than they did previously, in spite of a move towards seriousness and formality, and away from the songs, games and fun of their primary studies. All 18 of the students questioned preferred their secondary school languages learning experience to their primary languages experience (Chambers, 2016: 9).

A sense of purpose and progression is seen to be of great importance, with students realising, retrospectively, that perhaps the familiar routines and structures of their primary schooling were not as purposeful as they were perhaps enjoyable: “The sample Year 6 pupils in this study pointed to a shared focus on fun, with little time spent on writing. Most seemed relatively happy with these activities but, looking back, one year later in Year 7, they articulated some disgruntlement on going over the same material repeatedly, with little sense of progression.” (Chambers, 2016: 10). Allied to this is the sense of monitoring and assessment. When the students have a better idea of how they are performing – at secondary school – then they appreciate the new-found “seriousness” (Chambers, 2016: 10).

So. Students need to feel that they are progressing. They need to feel that what they are doing is serious. They need to appreciate that the work they are doing is ‘real’ – and that they are being taught by professionals who are trained to do so, and who are invested in it. But to what extent is this simply a problem that is restricted to modern languages? And what can languages teachers learn from the approaches employed by teachers in other subject areas?

Transition in general

While it is clear that these modern foreign languages-specific problems need to be worked around, it is also clear that they are a mere part of a much bigger issue – if a lack of communication and a common framework is seen to be a part of the problem for modern foreign languages transition, then surely the

same must be said of primary-to-secondary transition generally. Equally, while it would be possible that a 'one size fits all' solution may be found within the modern foreign languages subject area, by looking at literature on the effects of primary-to-secondary transition on pupils generally, it may be possible to obtain some further guidance as to the best way forwards.

Ferguson & Fraser (1998) carried out a longitudinal study in Australia (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 276), considering a range of environmental variables with regard to changes occurring as students transfer from primary school to secondary school. Included among these variables were student gender, and school size pathway: small-to-medium, medium-to-medium, small-to-large, medium-to-large and within school (Ferguson & Fraser, 1998). Following analysis of the quantitative data generated by the research, both of these factors were seen as influential, regarding student perceptions of their learning environments.

For Ferguson & Fraser (1998), the atmosphere for pupils in-class in secondary schools was perceived in a more positive way than that of their primary schools (particularly with regard to friction in class and competition), but the quality of teacher-student interaction was perceived to suffer in transition. Through the findings of the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI; Wubbels, 1993), teachers were perceived on the whole to be less authoritative, yet simultaneously less approachable and less understanding. Students' own levels of responsibility also suffered in this assessment (Ferguson & Fraser, 1998: 381).

However, these changes in perceptions across transition were also seen to vary with student gender and school size pathway. For example, perceptions of class satisfaction across transition worsened for girls, but improved for the boys (Ferguson & Fraser, 1998: 381). Clearly, given the perceived nature of modern foreign languages as a traditionally 'feminine' subject, these findings have implications for everyone involved in transition or an interest in helping to set students on the correct flight path for their secondary studies.

The pupils' learning environment within the school was measured and quantified using the long-established My Class Inventory (MCI; Fisher & Fraser, 1981) and Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI; Wubbels, 1993), gathering quantitative information about a range of categories (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 299). Data were gathered on two occasions: once towards the end of the pupils' time at primary school, and once again after they had been in secondary school for a short period, to assess their first impressions. Quantitative data was also supplemented with qualitative data, collected in interviews with teachers and students (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 182), giving construct validity (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 138).

The sample was substantial, comprising 1,040 students from 47 feeder primary schools and 16 linked secondary schools. A range of schools was selected, in terms of size, and location. All the schools were coeducational, with a similar proportion of male-to-female students. All the schools were located in Tasmania, Australia. The sample size and the care taken to ensure a range of comparable schools shows that consideration has been given to external validity (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 136) and generalisability – though the question arises here, as it does with Chambers (2015) and his German study, and with Jones (2010) and research on Jersey – to what extent can we generalise the results of this study outside of Australia? (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 137).

More recently, Zeedyk, *et al.* (2003) describes the results of a survey undertaken in the UK, in which the views of primary school pupils, secondary school pupils, their parents and their teachers about the transition process were gathered. Of particular interest were the concerns and expectations of the respondents, and also the extent to which the views of the four groups corresponded with one another:

“- Aspects of secondary school to which children looked forward.

- Pupils' concerns about secondary school.

- Parents' concerns about secondary school.

- Skills that were perceived to be useful for the transition.

- Suggested means by which schools could facilitate the transition.”

(Zeedyk, *et al.*, 2003: 69)

The sample size was considerable: a total of 472 respondents completed the survey – 192 final year primary pupils, 128 first year secondary pupils, 119 parents of primary pupils, 11 primary teachers and 19 secondary teachers (Zeedyk, *et al.*, 2003: 70). The parent group was mainly mothers, though the gender split of pupils was roughly equal: 48 per cent girls and 52 per cent boys, offering strong external validity (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 302; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 136). Grouping and coding was carried out on the qualitative responses, and the data analysed accordingly.

As with Ferguson & Fraser (1998), results showed that bullying was a major concern for all groups, followed by fears of getting lost in a bigger school, a dramatic and intolerable increase in workload, and a deterioration in peer relationships. The concerns of these British pupils and their parents were broadly similar to those reported in the literature for pupils in other countries (Ferguson & Fraser, 1998; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Newman, *et al.*, 2000; Schnepf, 2002; Pietsch & Stubbe, 2007). The views of primary school pupils and their parents were similar, and if the pupil experience of transition is to be ameliorated, it may be necessary to focus efforts on both of these groups in particular. Counterintuitively, teachers rarely identified children’s individual abilities as making a difference to the transition process, focusing instead on institutional initiatives – an approach which may have a deleterious effect on the experience for some individual pupils (Zeedyk, *et al.*, 2003: 77).

A shift to transition being a more complete process, rather than a one-off event, would help – open and ongoing communication between schools about pupils’ likes, dislikes and abilities, as well as more support between the schools over a longer period, would foster a feeling of evolution and development, rather than an overnight chop-and-change, which is how the process is perceived at the moment. Similarly, for

subject areas such as modern languages, this would enable more organic growth of skills and ability, rather than simply having to start again from scratch – the dreaded repetition, noted by McLachlan (2009: 202).

Marshall & Hargreaves (2007) explores the process of transition from primary to secondary school in the subject area of music. In the first phase of the qualitative study, 75 pupils from five schools were interviewed in small focus groups of five during their last few weeks in primary school (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 186). In the second phase, follow-up semi-structured interviews were carried out on 68 of the original pupils – representing 13 schools – one year on, following a full year in their secondary school (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 184; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 352). While the sample size is not large, the number of schools represented is appropriate, thereby ensuring a range of experiences – which is good for external validity and generalisability (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 136).

Like modern languages, music is a subject area that requires – at least at present – some revisiting at secondary level, as there is inconsistency between primary and secondary curricula across the country; an area for focus in the future. Marshall & Hargreaves (2007) looked at students' experiences of classroom music lessons at primary school and at secondary school, and whether there was any evidence for the continued existence of the five negative approaches to the introduction of music in the secondary school suggested ten years previously by Mills (1996). These approaches include the creation of groups of students according to superficial testing; ineffective questioning of students, simply to find out what they had already learned; the repetition of content from scratch, disregarding any previous experience of music; indiscriminate praise, and a lack of practical hands-on music-making experience in lessons (Marshall & Hargreaves, 2007: 69; Mills, 1996). All of these approaches could be – and often are – transferred from the subject area of music to that of languages with similar effect, and clearly have echoes with McLachlan's views on repetition and variety in the field of modern foreign languages (McLachlan, 2009: 202).

Just as for modern foreign languages, this study suggests that continuity in music from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 has not been improved by the introduction of the national curriculum. Again, just as is the case with languages, information that is transferred from one school to another about students' abilities and interests is patchy, though it seems that anxiety about the move to 'big school' is less of a problem now than it was in the past (Marshall & Hargreaves, 2007: 79). This study also concludes with an interesting statement, which is seemingly very transferrable to other subject areas:

"Transfer is clearly a major event in the life of any child and the anxiety it causes must be seen as significant, although possibly only experienced for a brief period of time. Transition, however, is a constant and enduring process of challenge, growth and adaptation. Ultimately, primary-secondary transition in music appeared to work best when teachers viewed it as a 'process', and not as an event. That is, to 'transfer' to a new school is an event which happens quickly, but to 'make the transition' from primary to secondary school is a process which may take far longer."

(Marshall & Hargreaves, 2007: 79)

Just as noted earlier, it is tempting to think as 'the transfer' and 'the transition' as the same thing – but, for this researcher at least, it is essential to keep the two separate.

Evangelou, *et al.* (2008) presents the findings of a study on transitions, which was undertaken as part of a much larger project: Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 (EPPSE). The project is longitudinal (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 276), and investigates the influence of pre-school, primary school and secondary school on the development of children. The study carried out by Evangelou, *et al.* (2008) examines transition practices, in particular what might help, and what might hinder a successful transition from one Key Stage to another. Like in Ferguson & Fraser (1998), a number of variables are taken into account, including the socio-economic status of students, as well as gender.

The researchers adopted a mixed-methods approach (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 339) to investigate the issues related to transition for four specific stakeholder groups: local authorities, children, parents and schools. During the first phase, officers in six local authorities were given semi-structured interviews about the way transition was dealt with in their authority areas. In the next, children in their first term at secondary school completed a questionnaire on their thoughts and experiences of the transition they had just experienced. Thirdly, parental opinions were also sought. Finally, twelve case studies were selected from respondents, selected because of their positive experiences of the transition. These involved more in-depth interviews with the children involved, as well as their primary school and secondary school teachers, in order to collect further information on the transition process. This multi-pronged approach is good for construct validity (Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 138).

The sample was large, as respondents were drawn from the wider EPPSE project. 1,190 pupils from the EPPSE sample made a transition from primary to secondary schools at the end of the 2005-6 academic year, and so were invited to take part. Responses were received from 46% of the children, and 48% of the parents, from six local authority areas across England. Children were selected for involvement in the case studies by means of stratified selection (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 302; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007: 111). Further to this, a range of further data from the main study was also used to complete the analysis. Questionnaires, interview schedules, case studies and data collection protocols are all included as appendices to the report, offering both transparency (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 220) and evidence of construct validity (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 184).

The report's findings suggest how the transition experience could be improved to enhance continuity and a smooth move between primary and secondary school. Firstly, it was apparent that many schools used a variety of different strategies, such as visits, booklets, talks, joint social events and taster days. With 84% of students feeling 'prepared' on their entry to secondary school, due to their family and teachers addressing their concerns and giving advice, the remaining 16% who were 'unprepared' for their move to

secondary school were largely happy by the end of their first term (Evangelou, *et al.*, 2008: 21). Several things were identified as being indicative of a successful transition: new friendships boosting self-esteem and confidence in pupils; settling in well; an increased interest in school and academic work; organisation, and curriculum continuity (Evangelou, *et al.*, 2008: ii). Furthermore, those students who felt they had received a lot of help and support from their new secondary school were more likely to have a successful transition.

As for aspects of a less successful transition, if children had experienced bullying at secondary school – fears also noted by Ferguson & Fraser (1998) and Zeedyk, *et al.* (2003) – then they were more likely to have a more negative transition experience. Other difficulties included problems with dealing with different teachers and subjects or making new friends. Lower socio-economic status was also found to have an association with less positive transition (Evangelou, *et al.*, 2008: ii).

Once again, the reader's attention is drawn to the importance of solid links and communication between primary and secondary schools, and curriculum continuity.

West, *et al.* (2010) begins with the premise that the importance of school transitions for pupil adjustment – and particularly their impact on later well-being and attainment – remains contested. The research gathered quantitative data from a longitudinal, school-based study of over 2,000 Scottish pupils (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 276). Pupils were first surveyed in primary school, at the age of 11 (in 1994), and followed up in secondary school, at the ages of 13 and 15, and then finally at the ages 18/19, after leaving school in 2002/3. The time frame for this research is clearly very long, and a very large number of data points was collected over this time, for a very large sample size (Punch & Oancea, 2014: 301).

According to the research, at the end of their first year in secondary school, a majority of pupils recalled having had difficulties of adjustment to school structures and friendship groups at the beginning of secondary school. While the primary schools – but not the secondary schools – played their role, personal

characteristics of the students were seen to be much more important in a pupil's adjustment (West, *et al.*, 2010: 21).

For West, *et al.* (2010), those students of lower ability or self-esteem experienced more difficult school transitions, whereas those students who were more anxious, were less prepared or had experienced victimisation, poorer friendship-group transitions. The research also showed that the impact of these different kinds of transition also went beyond secondary education. In this research, at the age of 15, a student who had experienced a more difficult school transition was predicted to have higher levels of depression and lower levels of attainment. A student who had undergone a more difficult peer transition would have lower self-esteem, but lower levels of anti-social behaviour (West, *et al.*, 2010: 39). In fact, similar results extended to later in life too, after leaving school. For West, *et al.* (2010), the effects of a traumatic transition can be compared with those associated with gender and school disengagement. The importance of successful transition for later mental well-being and academic attainment is clear – it is not simply a matter to be addressed and resolved during Key Stage 3.

While these findings would appear to be very striking, because of the sample size, large range of data points, and long follow-up period, not least because they extend out to age 18 or 19 and beyond, the authors acknowledge that there are limitations to the study: no data were collected on the concerns and anxieties held by students, nor on individual schools' primary-to-secondary transition policies, so it is impossible to see this particular study as a critique of the transition process; the data on transition was not collected until the students had begun their second year of secondary school, by which time, the students' testimonies must be seen as out-of-context and retrospective, and the fact that the findings can only possibly be of historical value. As the researchers put it themselves, "the 11-16 sample experienced their primary-to-secondary transition over a decade previously, in 1994/5, and as such things will have changed significantly since then." (West, *et al.*, 2010: 46-7).

West, *et al.* (2010) also makes a statement similar to the one made by Marshall & Hargreaves (2007) and in other literature: “However, this in turn raises the almost unanswerable question as to whether transition is an episode, with a beginning and end point, or a continuing process.” (West, *et al.*, 2010: 46).

Conclusion

There are a number of conclusions to be drawn from this literature, if we are to pursue the hoped-for 'renaissance' in modern languages learning at Key Stage Four (DfES, 2007: 1).

Firstly, to start our students off correctly at primary level – given the statutory requirement to include languages in the primary curriculum from 2010 (DfES, 2002, 2005 and 2007) – it is essential that students are taught appropriate content, by practitioners who are both enthusiastic and confident in their abilities. Simply insisting that teachers include language content in their curriculum, and then offering neither instruction as to how they should do this, nor resources to enable and empower them, offers the worst of both worlds. Modern foreign languages cannot realistically be pursued as being fundamentally important to the curriculum (Nuffield Foundation, 2000; DfES, 2002, 2005 and 2007) and then given a status right at the bottom of the list of priorities (McLachlan, 2009; Legg, 2013).

Secondly, communication needs to be improved between Primary and Secondary level, particularly with regard to the sharing of expertise to boost confidence among non-specialist languages teachers at primary level, as well as to the expectations held by the secondary schools as to what content will be covered in primary languages, and in what way. Primary practitioners are specialists at what they do, and secondary modern foreign languages teachers are specialists at what they do. Dialogue must be engaged in, in order to promote the best possible outcomes for the pupils (Evangelou, *et al.*, 2008; Barton, *et al.*, 2009; McLachlan, 2009; Jones, 2010; Legg, 2013; Chambers 2014, 2015 and 2016).

Thirdly, it is essential that the transition process be managed effectively, so that students do not lose momentum in their studies – either through needless repetition of content (Marshall & Hargreaves, 2007; Evangelou, *et al.*, 2008; McLachlan, 2009; West, *et al.*, 2010; Chambers 2014, 2015 and 2016), or through unfounded fears of the unknown, and what 'big school' may bring (Ferguson & Fraser, 1998; Zeedyk, *et al.*,

2003; Marshall & Hargreaves, 2007; Evangelou, *et al.*, 2008; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; West, *et al.*, 2010; Rice, *et al.*, 2011).

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