

**How can primary and secondary schools work together to maximise the impact of PMFL at KS2?**

**Name of researcher**

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**What were your original aims?**

One aspect of my AST outreach work has been to provide a series of 'transfer lessons' in French for Year 6 pupils. This has involved me working closely with our 8 feeder primary schools. The effect of these lessons on pupil confidence and progress on entry to secondary school in Year 7 was noticeable in class, and feedback from primary colleagues, parents and pupils was extremely positive. I also taught some French at KS1 in my son's primary school and observed the enthusiasm and eagerness of pupils as young as four to copy an accent, sing songs and recite nursery rhymes in a different language.

Then, in December 2002, the Government launched the Primary Languages Strategy stating that, by September 2010, every child should have the opportunity throughout KS2 to study a foreign language.

This is a great vision, but the failure of the primary French project in the 70s and my discussions with primary school

teachers warned me of the massive implications this has and the hard challenges primary and secondary schools will face, particularly if we are to fulfil the government's promise of 'access to high quality teaching and learning opportunities'. Through my BPRS project, I wanted to research current PMFL provision on the Furness peninsula and its effectiveness. I also wanted to work collaboratively with primary colleagues and the LEA to build competence locally to deliver the government's PMFL strategy in an effective and achievable way.

My original research question was rather woolly, concentrating on the effects of ELL generally as well as examining the successes and failures of PMFL projects elsewhere in the country. It was only towards the end of the research period that I narrowed down my wide focus of 'What are the implications of the PMFL Strategy for primary schools, secondary schools and the LEA?' to the following:

**'How can primary and secondary schools work together to maximise the impact of PMFL at KS2?'**

Year 7 in 2003/4 were therefore my original target group, as their very different experiences of PMFL would enable me to analyse the successes and failures of different delivery methods. However, from September 2004, as the focus of my research changed, Year 3 in a local primary school became the 'new' target group, using the results of my Year 7 research to inform planning and teaching methods.

### **In what ways did you refine your aims?**

As my original research question was far too wide, the following helped me to focus my research:

- Feedback from primary colleagues on my teaching and information from pupils entering Year 7 with a wide variety of experiences of PMFL highlighted the problems of introducing ELL without adequate training, a common SoW and dialogue between primary and secondary schools.

- Once local primary schools became aware of my AST status and interest in PMFL, the temptation was to simply 'buy me in' to teach some French, while the class teacher got on with some marking, which was not providing a long-term solution, nor acknowledging the importance of the primary teacher's expertise with that age group and the very different methodology used at KS2. Observation of KS1 & 2 teaching by myself and of KS3 teaching by primary colleagues made it clear we had much to learn from each other and needed to plan and teach together to ensure the language level and teaching methodology were appropriate and effective.

Once I'd analysed the Year 7 questionnaires and also evaluated the views of local Head teachers in a second questionnaire, I decided to find a 'buddy' primary school teacher with whom I could work to devise a KS2 PMFL course which would combine a secondary MFL teacher's expertise, resources and research with a primary teacher's knowledge of their class and KS2 teaching methodology. This way, we could both learn from each other and provide the best course possible for the pupils in our new target group, Year 3 in 2004/5.

### Research processes I found useful

- **Questionnaires** completed by all local primary school Heads on their current PMFL provision and concerns about meeting the 2010 deadline highlighted the needs of local primary teachers, i.e. resources, support and training.
- **Questionnaires** completed by Year 7 pupils on their experience of PMFL enabled me to evaluate the successes and failures of different approaches to PMFL and build on these in my planning for Year 3.
- **Mutual lesson observations**, watching primary colleagues in action, and receiving constructive feedback on my delivery of PMFL to different age

groups helped me to adapt KS3 methodology to KS1 and 2 and to better understand what kind of activities would work in a primary classroom.

- **Attending PMFL conference / reading CILT literature.** This gave me information on how PMFL was being developed nationally and also provided ideas for activities in the classroom.
- **Action-planning** each term and **constructive feedback** from 'critical friends' (tutors and fellow researchers) at the termly BPRS meetings focussed my thoughts as I had to justify my decisions to a non-MFL specialist audience.

### Research processes my pupils found useful

- **Questionnaires** helped the Year 7 pupils assimilate what they had learnt in PMFL and think about how this could help them with learning a language at KS3, even if it was a different language to that done at primary school.
- **The lessons themselves:** the Year 3 children's growing confidence and enjoyment of the activities was evident from the positive feedback from parents and children alike.
- **'Being special' for Year 3:** because they were part of a 'new project' and were the first class in the school to do it. It also gave them a link to 'Big school' very early on.

### What were the learning points you gained from undertaking the research and what were your findings?

1. That good PMFL provision requires collaboration between primary and secondary colleagues, since PMFL worked best where primary and secondary colleagues worked together. In schools where PMFL was not

taught collaboratively, it was having a negative effect on pupils' enjoyment of languages and instead of motivating children, it was actually turning them off languages even before they got to secondary school.

2. That secondary MFL teachers cannot simply transfer methodology from KS3 and 4 to KS1 and 2. Teaching at primary level requires very different skills, resources and classroom management. Teachers of PMFL need to be aware of what the children can achieve in numeracy and literacy in their mother tongue at that age (e.g. counting up to 10 forwards and backwards, addition and subtraction) as well as in MFL. Furthermore, a more multi-sensory approach was required with this age group, using toys, teddies and song/actions to a much greater extent than at KS3 and 4. Keith Sharpe summarizes the findings of my research very succinctly when he states: 'Primary French tends (and needs) to be more primary than French.' (2001)
3. That in order to ensure continuity from KS2 to 3, communication between primary and secondary schools is vital. Information about language taught at KS2 can be shared by the exchange of KS2 / 3 SoWs and individual record-keeping systems such as the ELP.
4. That the emphasis at primary level should be on developing Speaking and Listening skills and that reading and writing in the T.L. at this age tended to hinder rather than help their language skills and motivation. Indeed, children at the start of KS1 are only just learning to sound out and write words in English. Primary

colleagues also appreciated the emphasis on developing pupils' listening and memory skills, which they felt had become somewhat neglected with the advent of literacy.

5. In order to maintain concentration and ensure pupils assimilated the language taught, 'little and often' was the best method. A standard secondary school -length lesson each week was far too long, as pupils were sat 'on the carpet' and the activities demanded a great degree of concentration and participation, which was impossible to sustain for long periods at this age. Also, many different activities were required to teach each new structure to ensure the language was thoroughly 'embedded' and all the children could use the phrases confidently
6. That PMFL, if taught effectively, raises pupil confidence in general as it gives even weaker pupils a feeling of success and is 'fun'.
7. That LEAs will need to provide INSET training for primary school teachers if the strategy is to be successful, as well as helping secondary schools adapt to receiving pupils at varying degrees of linguistic competence in perhaps even a variety of languages! Time and resources will need to be found, AST time monopolised and a common framework 'The Cumbria PMFL Model' decided upon by the LEA.

### **What evidence relates to this learning and your findings?**

1. Analysis of a questionnaire completed by Year 7 pupils in their first term at Dowdales revealed that 100% of those taught using a collaborative method

(secondary AST + primary colleague in Years 5 and 6) felt positive about learning French in Year 7. Only 73% of those taught using a non-collaborative method felt the same. Interestingly, in a control group who had had no PMFL, 100% still felt positive about learning French in Year 7.

2. Cross-curricular observation of primary colleagues, my reading of *CILT* literature and attendance at the PMFL conference gave me some ideas for teaching at primary level, as did my experience as a mother of primary school aged children. Likewise, primary colleagues' observation of my own teaching and brainstorming of ideas when putting together the SoW gave them a better insight into current MFL teaching methodology at KS3.
3. My evaluation of the Year 7 questionnaire showed that those pupils taught using a collaborative method understood much better how to approach language learning and were much better motivated in language lessons than those taught using a non-collaborative method, who could not see any continuity (because there was none!)
4. Evaluations of my early lessons showed the amazing ability of young children to copy accents and also showed the motivation of all pupils was at its highest when they were speaking or responding to what they had heard. PMFL was originally part of the 'Excellence and Enjoyment in Schools' document and it was important that all pupils experienced success and enjoyment, including lower ability pupils struggling with reading and writing. The SoW we put together was therefore very oral / aural with lots of 'touchy feely' spoken activities involving soft toys and lots of songs and nursery rhymes; isn't this the way young children learn English?

5. With Year 3, evaluations and feedback showed a maximum of 20mins worked best, building up to 30mins in Year 6. The language could also be revised at register time each morning or used as a 'filler' at the end of the day, and the classes that did this were found to assimilate the language much quicker than those who did not.
6. PMFL having a positive effect on their children's general confidence was a feature of the parental feedback. For example, a very shy Y2 girl in danger of becoming a school refuser said the French course was the only enjoyable thing she'd done in school that year. She'd taught her parents all the songs and then insisted on ordering the bread each morning in the 'boulangerie' on holiday. Normally, she was painfully shy and would hide behind her mum.
7. Questionnaires showed very few local schools (6/23) already offered PMFL, but almost all wished to. Many Headteachers pointed out they 'lack the skills and staff' and the vast majority of schools were keen to attend INSET to build expertise. There was also concern expressed about fitting it in to an already packed primary curriculum.

### **What are the questions for your future practise?**

- How can I best disseminate my findings, resources and SoW to other primary schools so that all local schools benefit from my research and collaborative planning, rather than just the one target group?
- How can I find the time to build on the Year 3 SoW and devise a Year 4 SoW, while still supporting the Year 3 teacher next year.

### **What are the questions for your school?**

- How can we adapt / differentiate the current Year 7 SoW to accommodate PMFL so that continuity is assured.
- Once the LEA withdraws it's financial support for AST outreach work, how will schools find the time and resources to plan and implement PMFL.

### **Are there any questions for future research?**

- Does earlier exposure to language learning improve performance and motivation at KS4?
- How does the Primary Languages Strategy fit into the recently launched KS3 framework, which presumes pupils have had no experience of PMFL?

### **How did you disseminate your findings?**

- Cascaded information to my department at departmental meetings, and to primary colleagues at the target school at a whole-staff meeting.
- Gave a presentation to primary Headteachers in our feeder schools at a primary / secondary liaison meeting.
- Gave a presentation on my research findings at a BPRS meeting to an audience comprising of both primary and secondary teachers.
- Reported to fellow ASTs at an LEA PMFL working group meeting.
- Provision of LIN INSET and LEA QA INSET courses for interested primary colleagues in the Spring Term 2005.
- As part of the EDP Raising Standards Project, my report will be disseminated to all primary and secondary schools in Cumbria LEA.
- Sending a copy of my research findings to NACELL.
- Submission of BPRS report on the teachernet website.

**Hayley Martin**  
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