



Northern Ireland
Assembly



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Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland



Transition from Primary Language Programmes to Post-Primary Language Provision

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Learning Intentions

1

Share knowledge of current modes of delivery of primary languages;

2

Understand recent research into transition in modern languages in Northern Ireland from KS2 to KS3;

3

Understand a research-informed vision for primary modern languages in Northern Ireland which you can translate into policy.

Das ist Felix.
Felix ist ein Frosch.
Und das ist sein Haus.
Felix ist im Haus.



Das ist Franzi.
Franzi ist eine Ente.
Felix und Franzi sind Freunde.



Das ist Felix.
Felix ist ein Frosch.
Und das ist sein Haus.
Felix ist im Haus.



Das ist Franz.
Franz ist eine Ente.
Felix und Franz sind Freunde.



Das ist Felix.
Felix ist ein Frosch.
Und das ist sein Haus.
Felix ist im Haus.



Franzi ist eine Ente.
Felix und Franzzi sind Freunde.



‘Where a school **promotes**, values and supports **languages** effectively as a core element of the curriculum, pupils make **good progress**.’

[ETI Chief Inspector’s Report, 2010-12]

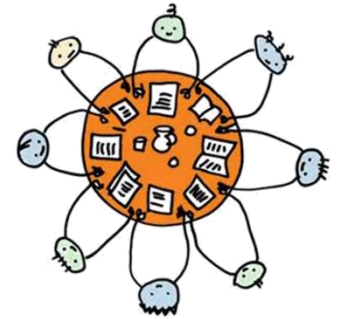
‘The continued low uptake of modern languages remains a major concern and challenge for Northern Ireland. Learning another language contributes well to promoting mutual understanding , improving community cohesion and enabling young people to enjoy the economic , social and cultural benefits of living in a global society.

More needs to be done to encourage pupils in post-primary schools to study languages beyond Key Stage 3. It is regrettable that the well-received Primary Modern Languages Programme has not been built upon in a more strategic manner. Northern Ireland is the **only part of the United Kingdom** where there is no entitlement to languages in the primary curriculum’

[ETI Chief Inspector’s Report,
2014-16, p23]



Current Provision in Northern Ireland



- ★ 'Patchwork' (Purdy et al., 2010) of primary schools teaching languages with no joined up thinking;
- ★ Various modes of delivery: class teachers, language assistants, local post-primary teachers, sixth-formers, external companies (Collen, McKendry and Henderson, 2017).
- ★ A far cry from current policy in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.



Research Study



- Research team: Ian Collen, Eugene McKendry and Leanne Henderson
- Qualitative Approach
- Based in four post-primary schools
- 24 Year 8 children participated in focus groups
- 4 principals participated in semi-structured interviews.

Findings

- The 'Status' of Languages in primary schools
- The Teacher of Primary Languages
- What Children Learn
- How Children Learn

The Status of Languages

Year 8 pupils see languages at primary as having a low status:

‘In the primary school, it wasn’t like a proper subject.’



‘I done [sic] Spanish in P6 and P7 but missed it for the transfer test.’



The Status of Languages

In Year 8, the pupils appreciate the higher status attached to languages. Commenting on the specialist teacher in the post-primary:

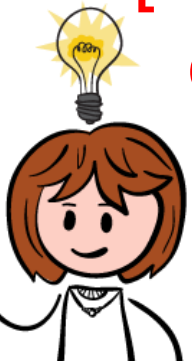
‘Because they actually teach the language, like they actually work here and they’re not just voluntarily coming in to teach you’



The Status of Languages

There is no evidence of effective transition in any of the four schools. One pupil commented

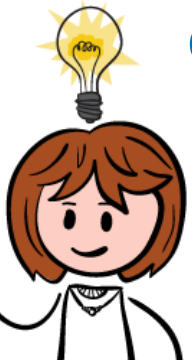
‘[in the post-primary school] we go over everything we did in primary school.’



The Teacher of Languages

75% of pupils in the research were taught languages by an 'outsider'

'Outsider' : sixth form pupil, teacher from a neighboring post-primary, language assistant, parent, commercial company.



- Lack of common experience.
- 'a big fat Spanish woman in a flowery dress'

What Children Learn

Resonating with research in England (Chambers 2014, Courtney 2014) the children revealed a clear bias in primary languages for speaking and listening skills.

'I learned how to pronounce things in primary school, but I didn't know how to spell it'.



How children learn languages

- Absence of assessment in primary languages
- Concerns about teacher competence
- Low status of languages at primary could be doing more harm than good.

The way forward

Primary Languages are nothing new, but, if the (new) NI Government wants to move forward with language learning, we have to get it right and learn from the failures of the past.

Transition from KS2 to KS3 is a key area of concern

Local expertise is to be found in post-primary schools

Cross-phase collaboration is key to success



The way forward

Politicians need to work with the Minister for Education to make languages a priority for all pupils and put languages on programme for government.

Primary Languages need to become statutory to bring Northern Ireland into line with all other parts of the UK and Ireland.



Plenary: What have we learned today?

1

The decline in GCSE and A-level entries in Modern Languages must be reversed if NI is to remain competitive.

2

Northern Ireland needs Primary Languages to bring it into line with the rest of the UK and Ireland.

References

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- Purdy, N., Siberry, L. and Beale, G. (2010) 'Primary Languages in Northern Ireland: Too Little, Too Late?' *The Language Learning Journal*, 38(2), pp149-158.





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