

THE TEACHERS' VOICE in SAXONY-ANHALT: PERSPECTIVES on TRANSITION from PRIMARY to SECONDARY SCHOOL.

Abstract

Preparation and provision for transition between primary and secondary school get mixed reviews across all subjects. The literature suggests that modern languages is an area deserving particular attention. There are examples of good practice in transition but the general picture is, at best, patchy. Researchers (eg Blondin et al., 1998; Hill et al., 1998; Rosenbusch, 1995) confirm that this is not a country-specific issue but one which crosses borders of countries and continents. The purpose of this article is to report on how schools in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, have dealt with the challenge of transition. The outcomes of semi-structured interviews with 25 secondary schools teachers suggest that many of the problems in Saxony-Anhalt are the same as for other countries, not least in relation to communication between secondary and primary schools and the exchange of information on individual pupils. Our German neighbours offer models of good practice in relation to Continuing Professional Development, clearly defined and understood teaching content and methods and the avoidance of any need for pupils to start their modern language learning experience afresh on arrival at secondary school.

Keyword: transition; Saxony-Anhalt; teachers' voice; primary modern foreign languages; teacher beliefs

Background

The 2000s have been a time of uncertainty for primary modern foreign languages (PMFL) in England. One of the objectives of the National Languages Strategy (Department for Education and Skills, 2002) was the introduction of primary modern foreign languages as an entitlement for all pupils. Before losing the election in 2010, the Labour government offered Key Stage (KS) 2 pupils (ie those aged 8-11, years 3-6 of primary school) languages first as an entitlement as from 2010 and as a statutory subject from 2011. The change to the Conservative-Liberal coalition in 2010 put languages' status in limbo until, following a period of consultation on the National Curriculum, the place of PMFL was confirmed as a requirement on all primary schools' timetables for KS2 pupils as from September 2014 (Department for Education (DfE), 2014).

Transition from primary to secondary school remains a particular challenge in MFL. The findings of Burstall et al (1974), more than 40 years ago, still overlap with more recent research, such as *Language Trends 2013/14* (Board and Tinsley, 2014):

- Insufficient time allocated to language learning in primary schools;
- Teachers' poor levels of MFL competence and confidence;
- 33% of primary schools have no systems in place to monitor or assess pupils' progress in MFL;
- Low level engagement of primary teachers in subject-specific continuing professional development (CPD);
- Diminishing provision of CPD;
- 46% of primary schools have no contact with language specialists in local secondary schools;
- Only 11% of secondary schools request or receive data on pupil attainment at KS2;
- 27% of secondary schools can guarantee that pupils coming into year 7 can continue with the foreign language they learned at primary school;
- Many secondary schools feel that what pupils have learned at primary school provides an insufficient base on which to build, and so start from scratch.

Given this rather gloomy picture, it seemed pertinent to gain insights into the experiences of teachers in another country in relation to transition. Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, was chosen as the initial locus for a study for the following reasons:

- (1) Rather like England, the requirement for pupils to learn English in primary schools in Saxony-Anhalt is relatively new, having been introduced in the academic year 2005/2006 for all pupils from year 3 onwards (i.e. the third of five years of primary school education; pupils are 8 years old).
- (2) The staffing of English classes in primary schools has, in many cases, been problematic (as is the case in England). Specialist teachers of English in the primary sector have been few in number. Where foreign language competence was available, it was usually Russian rather

than English. However, it is now evident that new, young teachers of English are coming through to primary schools, given that English is now a compulsory dimension of university teacher training for primary teachers.

- (3) It is reported (Mechan-Schmidt, 2005) that Saxony-Anhalt adopts a very positive, enthusiastic approach to the teaching of foreign languages in primary schools and so may have something to offer England (and elsewhere) in terms of good policy and practice.
- (4) Saxony-Anhalt is regarded as Germany's poorest state and may therefore have strategies to share in relation to achieving positive outcomes on a limited budget, the challenge faced by many of our schools in England. (See Ward, 2010; Board and Tinsley, 2014.)
- (5) The introduction of English teaching in German primary schools has not been problem-free (see Mechan-Schmidt, 2009, summarised below); it would be enlightening to learn how challenging issues have been dealt with.

It must be recognised, however, that any conclusions drawn from the venture across the border into a province of one of our European neighbours, must be situated in the difference between a country where English is the 'foreign language' (e.g. Germany) and one where English is the 'first language' (e.g. the UK). English enjoys the status of the 'global' language in Germany and most other countries. In the mindset of most native speakers of English in the UK and indeed other countries where English is the 'first' language, foreign languages occupy a more lowly position.

German pupils (and their parents) take for granted (Chambers, 1999) the status of English as the global language and appreciate that, if they are to get on in the world of work abroad and at home, competence in English is *de rigueur* and the higher the level the better. Pupils continue to take English until they leave school. German/French/Spanish learning pupils in the UK (and their parents) do not generally give foreign language competence the same standing. They too recognise the global status of English and, as a result, have less regard for foreign languages.

The literature on transition suggests that the challenges relating to it cross national and international boundaries. Professor Heiner Boettger, reporting on the German context (Mechan-Schmidt, 2009), suggests that 95% of teachers in *Gymnasien* (grammar schools) and *Realschulen* (vocational schools) are unimpressed by the English pupils have learnt in primary school. He accuses the *Länder* (states) of adopting an 'over-eager approach which often failed to provide a proper structure'. Further:

There was also a wide variation in training methods for primary teachers of English.

English is taught for only one or two periods a week and there is no link to what comes afterwards when pupils enter secondary school. (Mechan-Schmidt, 2009:

<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6010871>)

He concluded:

What's needed are clearly defined targets for teaching English at primary schools, as well as academically trained teachers and a minimum of four or five periods a week. (op.cit.)

Beyond the German context, Blondin *et al* (1998:12), in their review of research into PMFL in various European Union countries between 1990 and 1996, reported enhanced learner confidence, tolerance and attitude, but also identified:

a manifest lack of continuity between the children's experiences at primary and secondary levels, with a tendency for teachers at secondary to fail to build adequately on what children had begun to develop at primary, and also to a lack of metalinguistic emphasis in the teaching at primary.

Beyond Europe, Hill *et al* (1998) reported on worrying evidence of stasis rather than progress in PMFL learning in Victoria, Australia. From the USA, Rosenbusch (1995) described how a 're-starting from scratch' approach in secondary school led to a serious negative impact on pupils' motivation.

Transition in foreign languages between primary and secondary schools clearly remains an issue of international relevance, worthy of further research. (See Barton, 2014.)

Teachers' beliefs

Since the mid-1970s (Brophy and Good, 1974; Shulman, 1986), researchers have acknowledged the importance of teachers' beliefs and the implicit theories which they hold for their teaching practices and, consequently, the attainment, motivation and attitude of their pupils (Clark and Peterson 1986). A clear understanding of teachers' beliefs contributes to the enhancement of teaching and learning. Teachers' beliefs are likely to be shaped and informed by a variety of factors: their educational background; their subject knowledge and perception of their teaching competence; the environment in which they work; the influence of their colleagues, school management and regional and national policy makers (Fang, 1996). The influencing factors can, and often do, result in inconsistency between teachers' description of their practices and the practices which they actually implement (Fang, 1996). In essence, the realities of teaching impinge on their beliefs and theories and force them to develop and implement coping strategies which may not be in line with the beliefs they hold and articulate (Apple, 1988).

For the purposes of this study, it was important to give the teachers in Saxony-Anhalt a voice, to access what they thought in relation to transition and the reality which informed these thoughts, as well as the actions which they took. Only then, could a moderately complete picture be painted.

Research aim and methods

The aim of the study was to examine the variables influencing 25 German teachers of English, in relation to the preparatory work they had done to meet the challenge of transition from primary to secondary school in relation to MFL as well as the transitional strategies they implemented. The following question areas framed the study:

- What had schools done in practical terms to prepare for the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school?
- To what extent had secondary and feeder primary schools collaborated on planning for transition?
- Was information exchanged between the secondary schools and feeder primary schools relating to pupils transferring between them? What sort of information was requested? How was it used to inform transition arrangements and provision in Year 5 (i.e. first year of secondary school in Saxony-Anhalt; pupils are usually 10 years old)?
- What arrangements had been put in place to manage transition? What role did the pupils' previous English learning experience and competence play in informing schemes of work in their first year in secondary school?

These themes were informed by the review of earlier research, policy documents such as, *Improving transfer and transition in Key Stage 3 modern foreign languages: a focus on progression* (DfES, 2005), as well as PMFL-specific publications, such as Kirsch (2008).

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed (see Appendix 1), given that it allows a flexible approach to the in-depth exploration of issues within a structure considered in advance (Wilson, 2009).

The research team contacted the *Kultusministerium* (equivalent of the Ministry of Education but for a given state) in Saxony-Anhalt to gain permission to contact schools who might be willing to participate in the project. Once this permission was granted, written invitations were sent out to schools to contribute to the research. Twenty-five secondary school teachers of English from eight different schools volunteered to be interviewed. Three were men. They ranged in age from 38 to late fifties and had many years' experience teaching English. The schools in which the respondents were based were all *Gymnasien* (grammar schools), apart from two *Sekundarschulen* (the less academic alternative to the *Gymnasium*; parents choose which type of school their children attend). The sample included two schools located in the city centre, whilst the remainder were on the outskirts of the city or in small towns. All schools in the sample were co-educational. (See Appendix 2.)

In line with the wishes of the *Kultusministerium* and the schools which had agreed to participate in the project, the respondents were all volunteers. The sample of interviewees was self-selecting. Participants were fully informed on the nature of the study and the use to be made of its outcomes. They were assured of their anonymity and were given the option of withdrawing from the interview at any time. Nine interviews were recorded: one group interview with ten teachers; seven with two teachers; one with one teacher. Each lasted approximately 35 minutes.

The data were collected in February and March 2012. Once all the data had been collected and transcribed, they were analysed qualitatively. They were read through a number of times to allow the identification of key themes (see 'Findings' below) (Wilson, 2009). This then informed the content of

a coding framework (Heigham and Croker, 2009; Bryman, 2008) for a more detailed, thematically driven analysis. Careful consideration was given to the exploitation of a software package such as NVivo for the next stage of the analysis. This would have the advantage of allowing interrogation of the data in relation to the teachers' age, the number of years they had been teaching, the type of school they taught in. However, in the light of the complexity posed by some of the interviews being conducted in groups and the challenge of identifying which teachers were making a given comment at a given point in the discussion, especially when more than one person was speaking at the same time, it was thought more feasible, on balance, to adopt a pen and paper rather than a software related approach.

Findings

Four key themes relevant to understanding the transition from primary to secondary foreign language learning and teaching (in this case English) emerged from the interviews. Unsurprisingly, these related closely to the question areas identified earlier:

- Courses on transition and transition-specific staffing;
- Extent of collaboration between primary and secondary colleagues;
- Exchange of information between primary and secondary colleagues;
- Pupils' competences and teachers' subject knowledge.

Quotations have been translated from German into English. The original German versions can be found in Appendix 3.

Summary of the main findings

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Courses on transition and transition-specific staffing

Interviewees were evenly split in relation to opportunities they had to attend courses on transition. Whilst some courses on English teaching were available regionally, it was generally felt that the most useful provision was organised by the teachers themselves:

Yes, there certainly are courses here and there across the state. We think that the best courses are the ones we organise ourselves. (R1) (1)¹

This allowed colleagues to focus on school-specific needs.

There was also a view that such courses were no longer necessary, given a perception that the teething problems of the early years had been resolved:

Well, as has already been said, that was in the early days but since then they have not been needed. (R2) (2)

Only 2/25 respondents confirmed that their school had a member of staff with specific responsibility for transition. Further probing revealed that their understanding of the role was limited broadly to receiving a list of the pupils to be coming to the school and allocating them to classes. In one of the two cases, the secondary teacher made visits, where possible, to the primary schools to gain an insight into the ability of the pupils. Any additional activity in relation to liaison with the feeder primary schools, to access available data on pupil performance or co-constructing schemes of work, was not considered part of the job.

Extent of collaboration between primary and secondary colleagues

Meetings with colleagues from feeder primary schools seemed to be the exception rather than the norm for the sample secondary teachers. Where these took place, they tended to be one-offs rather than a consistent part of a planning strategy for transition:

We had a meeting of the departmental team here at school, including the primary school teachers. We invited colleagues who teach at the primary school. We gave them information on what we needed and what they could do for us, so that we could prepare better. (R4) (3)

One interviewee (R5) regarded such regular meetings as a feature of a bygone age, no longer facilitated by educational, structural reforms which had seen the removal of the *Förderstufe* (a two year block of time dedicated to facilitating a smooth transition between the primary and secondary contexts in relation to the social and learning and teaching dimensions).

Interviewees were asked whether they had spent time in primary schools, observing or co-teaching with primary colleagues. Only 2/25 had done this on an occasional basis. This absence of first-hand knowledge appeared not to be a cause of concern. This resulted, however, in little or no familiarity with primary school materials:

I don't know which textbook they use for English in the primary school or even if they have one. (R9) (4)

In most cases, a lack of time was given as the reason for such visits not having been made. This was determined not only by timetabled commitments but also the number of feeder primary schools they worked with. In this sample this varied between five (the median) and 15.

We have such full timetables, you know. I don't want to use this as an excuse – when you teach 25 lessons, you have to look and see when you can find the time. (R3) (5)

The secondary colleagues who did manage to find the time, found the experience informative:

Nevertheless, I was very, very impressed because the teacher was so committed and could speak English very well and I was really surprised. And the methods she used, the way she taught the children English ... (R6) (6)

One respondent was able to give an example of collaboration with a feeder primary school which combined an enjoyable learning experience (for her) with an opportunity for some diagnostic testing:

Shortly after English was introduced in Years 3 and 4, we arranged an ‘English Day’ with primary school X. We went there and prepared a carousel of activities, where the children could test how much they knew. It was great fun. (R2) (7)

In another school, meetings with colleagues, cross-phase, was an annual event:

... and teachers of specific subjects, the main subjects – Maths, German, English – meet with the primary school teachers almost every year (R1) (8)

In one school, transition appeared to be less of an issue, especially given that primary and secondary were accommodated in the same building. This allowed liaison between colleagues from each phase:

And as a result, we have better links with our primary school colleagues and have the opportunity to speak to them from time to time. (R6) (9)

There was a suggestion from one interviewee that the meetings related more to what the primary schools could do for secondaries than the reverse or even what they might do collaboratively. This impression was given by the following question:

What preparations can you make in primary school to ensure that it [transition] works well? (R6) (10)

(See also quotation 3, page 8, which supports this impression.)

Secondary schools organised Open Days for their new pupils in the course of their final year in primary school. These were not generally subject-specific nor did they include taster sessions, where pupils might participate in a lesson. One exception to this was described by a former teacher-trainer who arranged for her trainees to teach some Year 4 pupils English in the secondary school which they would be attending one year later:

... this ‘English Day’ was a ‘taster day’. The Year 4 pupils came to our school; we divided them between classes and let them take part in an English lesson. (R2) (11)

Otherwise, such Open Days gave primary pupils the opportunity to look at textbooks and other materials, meet their new teachers, observe lessons and, in one case, watch a little English play.

Interviewees were positive in relation to their liaison with colleagues from other subjects within their own secondary school, in an effort to coordinate and organise smooth transition from primary into secondary school. Where this did not happen, time and other organisational problems were cited as reasons. In one case this included a non-subject specific meeting which involved representatives from the feeder primary schools. More common was discussion within the secondary school English team to facilitate sound preparation for the arrival of the new cohort of Year 5 pupils:

As an English team we work really well together. We come to a view on: what we can expect; what knowledge the new pupils will have; where we will collect the pupils from. Then we see what works really well and what works less well. (R2) (12)

In most of the secondary schools in the sample, teachers of English also taught German or worked closely with teachers in the German department. This was deemed to be very useful in terms of explaining grammatical terms in a comparative way in lessons and in obtaining guidance on how a challenging grammatical dimension was approached by German teaching colleagues.

Exchange of information between primary and secondary colleagues

Again, responses relating to information exchange were split. All secondary teachers were provided with primary school reports on each of their new pupils. This provided an overall grade but no qualitative comments relating to, for example, specific skill areas:

We get the report. This only tells us that they have a ‘2’ or a ‘1’ in English² – no further information. (R7) (13)

It was speculated that use of the *European Languages Portfolio* (ELP) (Council of Europe, 2011) might have provided relevant information on pupil achievement which could then have been transferred easily from the primary to the secondary school. All bar three of the interviewees said that the ELP was used in their school. Some found it very helpful and easy to use, given its integration into the textbook. Others did not see it as very important, paid lip-service to it or neglected to use it because of pressure of time.

Some interviewees were satisfied that they were in possession of adequate information to prepare the appropriate scheme of work for the new intake. Others had the information and were happy with it, but were concerned that having prior knowledge of a given pupil’s competence might lead to a certain level of pre-judging. Other respondents did not have any information and were happy to make their own judgements in the light of working with the new pupils:

I think it’s very good when you have no preconceptions. Then you can see how they get on. (R6) (14)

This absence of detail could lead to difficulty for the secondary teacher, given that some pupils had the same grade but, in spite of this, were found to have different levels of competence:

... some pupils are stronger, can identify the vocabulary in a sentence for themselves and work out what it means. Others can’t and need quite a long time to reach the same level of competence, in spite of the fact that they have been awarded the same grade. (R8) (15)

Some schools approached diagnosis of pupil competence mainly through observations and felt that that worked well:

First of all we look at what they can do. Are they good at speaking? Or we listen to them introducing themselves and talking about their pets, their favourite colours And we spend the first four weeks trying to get them all to the same level and I think we do this quite successfully. Of course, you always find pupils who have a little bit more catching up to do than others. (R2) (16)

Pupils' competences and teachers' subject knowledge

Secondary teachers were asked whether their pupils came to their new school with a range of competence in English, depending on which primary school they had attended. Twenty-four out of twenty-five interviewees thought this to be the case, although one attributed this to individual pupil-difference rather than the impact of teaching. The general consensus was that most pupils came to secondary school with relatively good competence in speaking and listening in particular and, to a slightly lesser extent, reading. Their knowledge of cultural background was also reported to be good:

The children are generally well informed about cultural background for example; they have more factual knowledge than our older pupils; they know lots of songs. (R5) (17)

The main discriminating skill area was writing. Some schools clearly attached more importance to this than others:

There are certainly primary schools where the pupils write in English. There are others where this certainly does not happen. And it is obvious which these are. (R5) (18)

Some respondents suggested that differences in pupils' competence might be the result of teachers, non-specialists in English, being trained in a short time by means of accelerated course to do the work of a specialist teacher. Because their training had been accelerated, their subject knowledge might not be as secure as it ought to be:

They have tried to turn them into English specialists. They have had some support for English in their extension courses but it's not really possible to teach everything they need to know for English in such a short time – it just isn't possible. (R3) (19)

In some cases, English was the second or third foreign language after Russian and French. This applied to some older teachers with no qualification in English or English teaching other than a regional *Schnellkurs* (accelerated course). This could result, it was reported, in primary pupils being taught the wrong pronunciation and grammar which then had to be re-taught:

I don't know of any primary school teachers who trained in English. As a result we struggle with pronunciation and writing – these are the areas where we encounter considerable problems at times. (R9) (20)

Respondents acknowledged, however, that Saxony-Anhalt was making a serious investment in providing training in English for trainee primary school teachers, including a placement in England:

Yes, the primary school teachers have lots of courses, possibly more than we have and they also have lots of opportunities to go to England. This is because Saxony-Anhalt was determined that the teachers would be 'equipped' for the job. (R6) (21)

There were also signs that newly qualified teachers, specialising in English, were coming through the university teacher training system:

For a number of years now the first teachers who have studied English for primary school have been starting to come through. (R6) (22)

Responses to questions on whether secondary teachers built on teaching methods from primary school can be attributed to colleagues in one of three categories:

- Those who did not know what methods were used in primary schools

Difficult to say because we are not familiar with teaching in primary schools. (R9) (23)

- Those who did know but struggled to appreciate their appropriateness in the secondary school:

No, I'm not a fan [of primary methods]. We have 'Tiny Tim' in the textbook and you can buy the doll and I've thought about it – but it's not my style. But I know that some teachers in the older classes use it a lot and the pupils reportedly find it "interesting". I just can't imagine it. (R8) (24)

- Those who knew and found them appropriate in support of transition:

It's important that we build on the methods that the primary school pupils are familiar with, of course. (R2) (25)

Pupils come to secondary school with a range of competence. Similarly they come with a range of motivation. In some cases this is encouragingly high:

They are highly motivated and it's far from difficult to satisfy their thirst for knowledge. (R2) (26)

In other cases, however, the motivation is low, possibly as the result of a perception based on their primary school learning experience that the new language is difficult:

Their motivation is not what it was. They know where they have problems and they might think, "that's a subject in which I have already had difficulties" and that marks the end of any positive attitude they may have had. (R6) (27)

The same respondent suggested that there might well be a link between a loss in motivation and some teachers' failure to build on primary school methods as part of the transition to more 'traditional' methods (see above):

Yes, the transition. The children come here [from primary school] and in the interim have lost their motivation, because they are used to a game-based approach. Yes and then they have to cope with a substantial amount of work at secondary school. I don't know how much they [the teachers] take that into account. (R6) (28)

Another suggested a relationship between low level competence in the first language and low motivation to learn English:

Yes, and then several have problems with the mother tongue. That then poses problems with learning a foreign language. (R6) (29)

Discussion

International research on transition in MFL between primary and secondary school (Mechan-Schmidt, 2009; Blondin et al., 1998; Hill et al., 1998; Rosenbusch, 1995) reflects a picture which is far from perfect. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Saxony-Anhalt also receives a mixed review.

Where Saxony-Anhalt scores highly is in the area of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The importance of the place of English on the primary school curriculum is accepted. Pupils and their parents accept that English competence is a requirement for a successful career and personal fulfilment, in terms of travel, making friends and experiencing wider cultural opportunities. It is acknowledged that primary school pupils need good teachers of English, who can offer a good model of competence, so that the foundation on which secondary teachers build is sound. To address this, since the inception of English on the timetable of all primary schools in Saxony-Anhalt, this state has made a serious investment in the training of primary teachers, including placements in England.

In relation to CPD, Fullan (2006) and Dufours (in Fullan, 2006) stress the importance of the formation and use of communities of practice in the successful management of change. The findings from this project provide some evidence of such communities in Saxony-Anhalt. This took the form of professional development meetings between teachers from primary and secondary schools arranged regionally and discussion and exchange of ideas on good practice. It is also noteworthy, however, that such meetings were no longer as common as they once had been, a source of regret for this sample of experienced teachers.

On a 'within-school level', communities of practice were better established and more commonplace, in that they most often involved a collaborative working relationship between the foreign language department (i.e. English) and the 'first language' department (i.e. German). Such communities of practice and the collaborative liaison and discussion of teaching approaches which they offered, were facilitated by the fact that it is quite usual in Germany for teachers to combine German and English as their teaching subjects. The Overseas Council for Economic Development (2009) reported that in-house, CPD provision is the rule rather than the exception in many countries, has a positive impact on teachers' beliefs and encourages collaboration and cooperation between colleagues. In turn, this then enhances educational effectiveness. The challenge for Saxony-Anhalt and other countries (Chambers, 2012; Hill et al., 1998) is establishing and maintaining the collaboration between secondary and primary school colleagues.

There were few examples of secondary teachers spending time in primary schools, learning about approaches to teaching, familiarising themselves with materials or collecting data on pupil achievement. Findings from this sample (and elsewhere, e.g. Chambers, 2012) suggest that approaches to assessment might well merit attention. The use of the *European Languages Portfolio* (Council of Europe, 2011) was very patchy.³ Even where it was used and other assessment data and related information were available, the secondary schools did not always consider this but preferred to

make their own judgements when the new pupils arrived with them. This avoided any pre-judging or labelling of pupils in advance of coming to their new school. What German secondary teachers had, (which their English counterparts do not, (Chambers, 2012)) was the school report on each pupil from the primary school. This included a grade for English but no further details on the individual's strengths or areas requiring attention. Some of the sample teachers complained that even this grade was not reliable and that the criteria applied to it were inconsistent.

A variety of approaches to diagnosis of pupils' competence was adopted in the secondary schools including testing a few weeks into the first term at the secondary school and/or focussed observation over the course of the first term.

It appears that teachers in Saxony-Anhalt were still becoming accustomed to having pupils in their year 5 classes with experience of learning English in primary schools. Their beliefs were based on the experience they have had up to now and the evidence suggests that they were reluctant to move too far from the practice with which they were familiar, from the pre-PMFL days, to address the differentiated needs of their new pupils.

Lack of collaboration, exchange of information on attainment and other pupil-specific aspects and/or little or no time spent in primary schools should not come as a surprise. The teachers' working reality, with their heavy teaching timetables and often a large number of feeder primary schools with which to deal, rendered the required investment of time and effort, to achieve what appears to be an ideal, unfeasible. This is in line with earlier research which confirmed that what teachers believe in and the practices they would ideally like to implement are influenced by the constraints of the environment in which they work (Paris, Wasik and Turner, 1991; Roehler and Duffy, 1991). This impact on teachers' practice may ultimately shape pupils' attitude to the subject being taught, their perception of it and their motivation to work hard on it. The teachers interviewed in Saxony-Anhalt reported that whilst some pupils' motivation was high, in other cases it appeared not to be what it had been. Why might this be the case? Some respondents linked it to a perception of the work being harder and/or teaching methods being less game-based. What follows suggests other possible influential factors, however, such as the teacher's 'knowledge'.

Beattie (1995) identifies 'personal practical knowledge', as an important dimension of the teacher's information set. This relates to knowledge of students' learning styles, strengths, areas for development (see above regarding the limitations of the school report) and interests. Without this knowledge it is difficult to meet pupils' needs. It may well be the case that pupils' awareness of the teacher's absence of knowledge of how they learn best, the teaching approaches to which they were accustomed and the areas in which they needed developing, might well have led to a diminution in their motivation.

Secure subject knowledge is a *sine qua non* for the teacher. Interviewees in Saxony-Anhalt suggested that the English competence of primary colleagues was variable. (See Barton, 2014 and

Board and Tinsley, 2014, relating to the UK context.) Some had English as a second foreign language after Russian. Some had experienced fast-track training in English to equip them to teach it in their schools. This varied competence led to some pupils, it is reported, joining secondary school having learned the wrong pronunciation and with little experience of writing in English. An awareness of their teacher's insecure subject knowledge or the realisation at secondary school that what they had learned at primary school was incorrect, is very likely to have led to a reduced level of motivation.

Conclusion

In the 'Background' section, I stressed the difference in status between, on the one hand, English in Germany and, on the other, foreign languages in the UK. 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. They are perceived as difficult to learn. When pupils have the option to learn languages or not, they tend not to.

Beyond the attitudinal and motivational dimensions, teachers in England and Saxony-Anhalt face different challenges, as reflected in the findings above. The German secondary school teachers encounter only one MFL which their pupils have learned at primary school, ie English. Primary schools use a limited number of textbooks and all follow the same scheme of work as required by the *Kultusministerium* of Saxony-Anhalt. By contrast, English MFL secondary teachers (Chambers, 2012) have in their Year 7 class (first year of secondary school in UK; pupils are usually 11 years old) pupils who may have had experience of French (the most likely foreign language) and/or Spanish and/or German and/or other languages. (See also Board and Tinsley, 2014.) They may or may not have used a textbook. They may or may not have followed a scheme of work. The variation in the pupils' experience is considerable.

Against this background, the findings from Saxony-Anhalt provide both reassurance and guidance. The reassurance relates to the confirmation that challenges posed by MFL-specific transition cross regional, national and international boundaries and these are not unique to the UK. Our colleagues in Saxony-Anhalt also cope with PMFL taught by teachers with limited competence in the foreign language. The exchange of information between primary and secondary schools, especially in relation to assessment, is not all that it could and should be. Liaison and collaboration involving colleagues from primary and secondary schools are not what they once were, in spite of the benefits these are recognised as bringing. Saxony-Anhalt provides more of a feel of community of practice but this tends to be localised. Both the German and English contexts could do more to develop these communities and this would help foster collaboration, cooperation and change in teacher beliefs, where change is needed and/or awareness needs raising that practising what one believes is not always possible in the face of our teaching realities.

The guidance relates to the seriousness with which PMFL in Saxony-Anhalt is taken. Primary teachers in English all receive training which includes time spent in England. Saxony-Anhalt has a common language taught in primary schools (English), a common scheme of work which has to be approved by the *Kultusministerium*, a common pedagogy and a limited number of textbooks available, each of which has to be approved for use by the *Kultusministerium*. Some (e.g., Barton, 2014) might regard this as an approach which is too ‘concrete’, lacking in flexibility and obstructing diversity and imaginative creativity. This may be true, at least to a certain extent, but it is an approach which provides secondary MFL teachers with a fairly smooth, consistent and uniform foundation on which to build. It obviates any need to consider starting the PMFL learning process again from scratch because the challenge of differentiation seems insurmountable.

In September 2014, PMFL’s gestation period entered its final stages and is now a statutory subject in English primary schools. Whilst we should rejoice at this birth, we should be concerned that the conditions for the growth and development of this new entity are not ideal. We should continue to review the practice of others, who have gone through a similar painful labour before us, have fostered and cared for PMFL and watched it grow and prosper, and benefit from their experience.

Notes

1. R1 i.e. respondent 1. No distinction is made between groups of respondents and individual respondents, in order to maintain anonymity. 1 i.e. Reference to original German quotation in Appendix 3.
2. ‘1’ is the highest grade of six awarded; ‘2’ is the second highest grade.
3. See Barton, 2014 regarding similar findings on the use of the *Languages Ladder* (DCSF, 2007) in the UK context.

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Appendix 1. Semi-structured interview schedule

- Wer leitet oder koordiniert den Wechsel der Kinder von der Grundschule auf Ihre Schule?
Wird das fachkollegiumsmässig organisiert? Oder für die ganze Schule?
Do you have a colleague with specific responsibility for transition? Is this organised by subject or cross-school?
- Arbeiten Sie eng mit anderen Kollegen zusammen?
Do you work closely with other colleagues on transition?
- Gibt es in Punkto Wechsel oder Übergang Weiterbildung für die Kollegen?
Are courses on transition available for colleagues?
- Und wenn, wie war diese Weiterbildung – und wo?
If so, was this professional developmen useful? Where did it take place?
- Gibt es auf Landes-, Bezirks- oder Kreisebene einen Erfahrungsaustausch oder Netzwerk für die Kollegen, die für den Übergang Grundschule-Oberschule verantwortlich sind?
On a local or regional level is there a formal network for exchange of information for those with responsibility for transition?
- Wieviele verschiedene Grundschulen schicken Kinder zu Ihnen?
How many feeder primary schools do you have?
- Haben Sie oder Ihre Kollegen in jenen Grundschulen mal Englisch unterrichtet?
Have you or your colleagues taught English in these primary schools?
- Haben Sie oder Ihre Kollegen mit den Kollegen in der Grundschule in Punkto Englischunterricht zusammengearbeitet oder zusammen Materialien produziert? Oder zusammen konferiert?
Have you or your colleagues collaborated on teaching English or worked together to produce materials? Have you consulted with each other about teaching English?
- Wie gut kennen Sie das Unterrichtsmaterial für Englisch in der Grundschule?
How familiar are you with the materials used in primary schools?
- Bekommen Sie von der Grundschule Informationen über die Leistungen und die Noten der Kinder im Englischunterricht?
Do you get information from the primary school on the attainment and marks of the pupils in English?
- Spielt die europäische Sprachportfolio eine Rolle in Ihrem Unterricht?
Do you use the European Languages Portfolio in your teaching?
- Kommen Ihre künftigen Schüler in den letzten Wochen der Grundschule zu Ihnen in die Schule, um ihre neue Lernsituation besuchsweise zu erleben und kennenzulernen?
Do your future pupils come to you in the last weeks of primary school to get a flavour of their new learning context?

- Wenn, dann gibt es spezielle Unterrichtsstunden, die einen Vorgeschmack der neuen Schule vermitteln?

If so, do you provide taster lessons?

- Gibt es grosse Unterschiede in den Vorleistungen Ihrer Schüler in Englisch? Gibt es grosse Variationen in ihrem Lernebnis in Englisch in den verschiedenen Grundschulen? Wie kommen Sie mit solcher Problematik zurecht?

Do you notice big differences between the pupils in terms of their competence in English? Are there big differences of the English learning experience they have had in the different primary schools? How do you deal with this challenge?

- Haben Sie je in einer Grundschule hospitiert?

Have you ever spent time observing in a primary school?

- Inwiefern bauen Sie und Ihre Kollegen auf den Kindern schon vertraute Methodik und Materialien, wenn Sie in der 5ten Klasse Englisch unterrichten?

When the year 5 pupils come to you for English, to what extent do you and your colleagues build on the teaching methods and materials with which the pupils are familiar?

- Inwieweit gibt es auf Landes- oder Bundesebene Möglichkeiten für die Sprachenlehrer zum Erfahrungsaustausch mit Fachkollegen? Gibt es Dokumentation zum Übergang Grundschule-Oberschule?

To what extent are opportunities provided at national and state level for teachers of languages to exchange experiences? Are there policy documents relating to transition from primary to secondary school?

- Arbeiten Sie als Englischlehrer mit den Kollegen für Deutsch zusammen? Sind Sie mit den Methoden und den Materialien für Deutsch vertraut? Auch mit denen der Grundschule?

Do English teachers collaborate with teachers of German? Are you familiar with the teaching methods and materials used in German lessons? Does this also apply to those used in primary schools?

Appendix 2. Interview sample

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Appendix 3. Original German quotations from the interviews

Ja, es gibt sicherlich auf Landesebene vereinzelte Fortbildungen. Die beste Fortbildung ist vermutlich die, die wir selber organisieren (1)

‘Also, wie schon gesagt, das ist in den Anfangsjahren gewesen und das ist inzwischen nicht mehr notwendig.’ (2)

‘Und wir hatten schon ein Meeting, auch mit den Grundschullehrern, wo wir eine Fachschaftsitzung hier an der Schule hatten, wo wir die Kollegen, die an der Grundschule unterrichten, eingeladen haben. Feedback haben sie von uns bekommen, was brachen wir und was sie können sie noch für uns leisten, so dass wir uns besser vorbereiten können.’ (3)

Ich weiß auch nicht mit welchem Englischbuch da in der Grundschule gearbeitet wird. Ob da überhaupt ein Lehrbuch verwendet wird? (4)

Wissen Sie, wir haben so volle Stundenpläne. Ich will das jetzt nicht irgendwie so rausreden, einfach so 25 Stunden arbeiten, man muss da also gucken, dass man erst mal die Zeit findet. (5)

Aber ich war trotzdem sehr, sehr begeistert, weil die Kollegin war sehr, sehr engagiert und konnte auch gut Englisch sprechen und ich war richtig überrascht. Auch über ihre Methoden, wie sie die Kinder in Englisch unterrichtet hat. Muss ich sagen. (6)

Kurz nachdem dieser Englischunterricht in der 3./4. Klasse eingeführt wurde, haben wir also dann mit der Grundschule XXXX z.B. einen Englischtag gemeinsam veranstaltet. Da sind wir in die Schule gegangen und haben so einen Stationsbetrieb vorbereitet, wo die Schüler halt ihre Kenntnisse, was sie schon können, testen konnten. Und das hat immer sehr viel Spaß gemacht. (7)

... und andererseits treffen wir uns auch, Kollegen aus bestimmten Fächern, den Hauptfächern Mathe, Deutsch, Englisch, fast jedes Jahr mit den Kollegen der Grundschule. (8)

Und dann ist es auch so, dass wir mit den Kollegen aus der Grundschule hier noch besseren Kontakt haben und natürlich zwischendurch manchmal auch mit ihnen reden. (9)

Was könnt ihr vielleicht in der Grundschule schon vorbereiten, damit es läuft? (10)

..... dieser Tag, ‚Englischtag‘ das war ja schon so ein ‚Schnupperunterricht‘. Und dann kamen ja Schüler auch hierher, so aus den 4. Klassen an unsere Schulen und die haben wir dann auf diese Klassen verteilt und haben dann mal eine Stunde Englisch mitmachen dürfen.’ (11)

Also innerhalb der Fachgruppe arbeiten wir schon gut zusammen. Also wir, denke ich, stimmen uns ein. Was können wir erwarten? Mit welchen Kenntnissen werden die Schüler kommen? Wo werden wir die Schüler abholen? Dann gucken wir mal, was läuft wirklich gut, was läuft weniger gut? (12)

Das Zeugnis kommt hierher. Da steht aber nur im Fach Englisch die Zwei oder die Eins, und keine Informationen, mehr nicht. (13)

Ich denke, dass es sehr gut ist, wenn man nicht voreingenommen ist. Dann kann man erst mal gucken, wie das läuft. (14)

..... sind die einen Schüler cleverer und können die Wörter von sich aus schon auseinander nehmen und wissen, was das heißt. Und andere eben nicht, also die brauchen ganz lange, trotz dem sie meinetwegen dieselbe Note haben, um das abliefern zu können. (15)

Wir gucken erst mal, was können sie denn? Was können sie gut sprechen? Oder eben hören und sich vorstellen, über ihre Haustiere, über ihre Lieblingsfarben erzählen..... Und wir werden also wirklich die ersten 4 Wochen versuchen, sie so auf ein ‚Level‘ zu kriegen und ich denke, das gelingt uns eigentlich ganz gut. Es gibt natürlich Schüler, die müssen ein bisschen mehr machen als andere, aber das sieht man dann schon. (16)

Die Kinder sind in der Regel sehr gut informiert, z.B. über Landeskunde, da kennen die dann wesentlich mehr Fakten als unsere älteren Schüler., können viele Lieder. (17)

Aber es gibt offensichtlich auch Grundschulen, die auch schreiben. Und es gibt Grundschulen, die aktiv überhaupt nicht schreiben. Und das merkt man. (18)

Man hat versucht, sie zu Spezialisten zu machen. Sie haben da so ein bisschen Hilfestellung erfahren, im Studium für das Fach Englisch und das kann eigentlich so nicht wirklich funktionieren, in der Kürze der Zeit eine Fremdsprache umfassend zu vermitteln, das geht gar nicht. (19)

Ich kenne keinen von der Grundschule ausgebildeten Englischlehrer. Wir haben eben halt immer mal ein bisschen zu kämpfen, mit der Aussprache und der Schreibweise, da haben die dann von Zeit zu Zeit große Schwierigkeiten. (20)

Ja, die Grundschullehrer haben viele Fortbildungen gehabt, vielleicht sogar mehr als wir und die hatten auch viele Chancen gehabt nach England zu fahren. Weil das Land Sachsen-Anhalt das unbedingt wollte, dass die Lehrer auch ‚fit‘ sind. (21)

Jetzt gibt es ja seit einigen Jahren die 1. Lehrer, die Englisch für die Grundschule studiert haben. (22)

Das ist jetzt schwer zu sagen, weil ich wirklich den Unterricht an der Grundschule nicht kenne (23)

Nein. Da bin ich nicht so ein Verfechter von. Wir haben ‚Tom Tiny‘ im Buch und man kann diese Puppe kaufen und ich hab’s auch überlegt...und es ist nicht so mein Ding. Ich weiß aber, dass das auch teilweise sehr viel auch bei oberen Klassen benutzt wird und die das ‚angeblich‘ interessant finden. Kann ich mich nicht so vorstellen. (24)

Und was ganz wichtig ist, die Methoden, mit denen die Schüler in der Grundschule vertraut sind, die werden dann natürlich weitergeführt. (25)

Da sind die wirklich hochmotiviert und das ist auch gar nicht schwierig, diesen Wissensdurst zu stillen. (26)

Die Motivation ist weniger geworden. Sie wissen, wo sie vielleicht schon Probleme haben und dann wissen sie vielleicht: “das ist ein Fach, was mir vorher schon Probleme gemacht hat’ und dann ist die positive Einstellung gleich am Ende. (27)

Ja, der Übergang. Die Kinder kommen hier her und verlieren zwischenzeitlich richtig die Lust. Weil sie sind ja nur den spielerischen Umgang gewöhnt. Ja und die Schularbeit ist ja auch sehr viel. Ich weiß nicht, wie stark sie das berücksichtigen. (28)

Ja und dann haben manche auch mit der eigenen Muttersprache Schwierigkeiten. Dann ist es auch schwierig mit einer Fremdsprache. (29)