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Modern languages in the primary school in Spain and Scotland

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INTRODUCTION

This article reports the outcomes of study visits to Spain in June 1998 and June 1999 to consider early language learning. The Basque Country was chosen because of its linguistic diversity in that there could be lessons to be learned for parts of Scotland where a language other than English is also the mother tongue. It also has autonomy in Education and would therefore differ from the situation in what was formerly known as *el territorio MEC*, namely, those parts of Spain which came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education in Madrid. The situation in the former *territorio MEC* would form the second part of the study visit in 1998 when schools and other establishments in the Spanish capital would be visited and in 1999 when establishments in Asturias would be visited.

During the visits there was the opportunity to meet both primary and secondary teachers, headteachers and some of those responsible for early language learning in Bilbao and Madrid and Asturias. We were able to observe classes in Bilbao, Larrabetzu, San Sebastián, Irún, Gijón and Greater Madrid.

THE RECENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This article will not return to previous attempts to introduce a foreign language at an earlier age, most notably those of the 1960s, but will limit itself to the present attempts to introduce a foreign language into the primary curriculum.

In Scotland a national pilot project was started in 1989 following an announcement by the Secretary of State in which it was stated:

He is aware that early experiments in this field were not a success and he considers that a better outcome may be achieved with more careful planning, an adequate supply of trained teachers and appropriate level of resources committed to the project.

(Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, 1989)

This involved some 72 primary schools associated with 12 secondary schools. These schools included rural and urban areas, affluent suburbs and deprived areas. At the same time a number of regional projects were initiated by local authorities. In Spain, in the 1980s, there were a number of pilot programmes in different parts of the country, a situation akin to what is presently the case elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In the case of the Basque Country, for example, the Basque Education Department initiated a pilot in 1988-89 involving a number of schools of different types and with different starting points. There was no national programme at this point.

The pupils

In Scotland it was agreed to start with the final year of primary school before extending it to the penultimate year. However, rural schools and multi stage classes would see some experimentation from Year 1 upwards.

In Spain, at that stage of development, the starting age varied in different parts of the country. In some cases schools would begin with pupils aged 10, others aged 8 and there were a few isolated pilots with an even earlier start. The Basque Country pilot meant some schools starting in year 3 (aged 8) and others in year 5 (aged 10).

The teachers

In the national pilot in Scotland 11 of the 12 projects involved a visiting specialist teacher from the secondary school teaching the language alongside a primary colleague. The latter would have responsibility for consolidating the foreign language work between specialist visits. One of the projects, Dumfries and Galloway, adopted a different model whereby the primary teachers would be given some language training and would gradually take responsibility for language

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teaching supported by a team of trainers who would visit the primary schools involved. Spain would use primary teachers who had specialised in language as part of their initial training. These teachers were also given some language and overall training in methodology to teach at earlier stages.

THE EXTENSION PHASE

In Scotland, the government, encouraged and informed by the successful pilot projects, wished to move further. Thus in January 1993, the Minister announced that:

Building on these foundations, we now propose that all Scottish primary schools should offer teaching in a modern European language: French, German, Spanish or Italian. I intend that SOEID, in consultation with other interested parties, should devise an implementation strategy, including training arrangements, which would bring to larger numbers of primary teachers the linguistic skills they need to introduce a modern language into the primary curriculum. (Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, 1993)

The primary teachers would be given a programme of language training with the first phase of training beginning in November 1993.

In Spain the reform of the education system The *Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo* (LOGSE) introduced in 1990 meant the general extension of primary languages to all pupils aged 8 and over. It also meant that secondary school curricula had to change and assumed the work done at primary. English programmes at secondary level changed and transition into secondary was thus facilitated. Since then there have also been further pilots. In the former *territorio MEC*, for example, 43 primary schools (including 2 in Asturias) have been involved in a pilot in collaboration with the British Council to introduce English to younger pupils. The Basque Government also introduced a pilot project in September 1996 involving 20 schools. All 20 schools had to be Basque immersion models and therefore most children involved were already Basque/Spanish bilingual. These pilots are developed further later in this article.

Which languages?

As in the pilot, the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) decided to proceed with either French or German or Italian or Spanish in primary schools. Perhaps inevitably, French would dominate. In the second year of training, for example, there were 605 volunteers for French compared to 180 for German, 19 for Italian and 28 for Spanish. However, there would be parts of the country where the other language would be taught in both the primaries and the associated

secondary. This was an important point. One of the key factors in deciding which language was to be taught in the primary school was the potential for the pupil to continue with that language in the associated secondary school. Each primary school could decide which language(s) to offer but it would not be possible to volunteer for training in Italian if the associated secondary taught French or German.

In Spain, although there have been some instances of other languages being taught in primary schools, almost all schools teach English. Thus, the continuity of language problem does not occur in most areas of Spain. The dominance of English was clearly evident when an English lesson in a primary school was observed in Irún within sight of the French border. However, at secondary level they have to continue with the first FL but may opt for a second.

Language awareness or linguistic competence

The Spanish have opted for development of linguistic competence rather than language awareness.

The Scots have the similar aim of increasing the number of years of study of the same language with a view to developing the child's competence in that language. What was apparent was that there was greater attention paid in Spain to cultural awareness than is evident from the Scottish project.

Which age group?

In Spain the general pattern now is for all pupils aged eight to begin the study of a language. However, there have been additional significant pilots. The *ex-territorio MEC*/British Council pilot has seen the introduction of English to pupils from the age of 3 in some of the 43 chosen schools. In the Gijón school, for example, the 3 to 4 year olds received 45 minutes daily. The 5 to 6 year olds received an hour every day and the 8 year olds received 3 hours in addition to time given as a result of the LOGSE. 80% of Asturian primary schools now offer some English in nurseries due mainly to parental demand.

The Basque pilot gave the following 3 options:

- a) *Introducción precoz de la lengua extranjera, en el tramo de 4 a 8 años.*
- b) *Enseñanza de contenidos en lengua extranjera, en el tramo de 8 a 12 años. Esto supone que, además de las horas reglamentarias de lengua extranjera, se impartan ciertos contenidos de una o varias asignaturas en la citada lengua.*
- c) *Enseñanza de contenidos en lengua extranjera, en el tramo de 12 a 16 años. Esto supone que además de las horas reglamentarias de lengua extranjera, se impartan ciertos contenidos de una o varias asignaturas en la citada lengua.*

(Basque Ministry for Education, 1996)

Thirteen of the chosen centres opted for the 4-8 years old project with 3 opting for additional time for 8-12 year olds. Four centres opted for

“The Scots have the similar aim of increasing the number of years of study of the same language with a view to developing the child's competence in that language”

additional time for 12-16 year olds.

In June 1999 the Spanish MEC website signalled an intention to start at an earlier stage than age 8: *Reforzar la enseñanza del inglés en educación primaria con vistas a su inicio en una etapa más precoz que la establecida actualmente, con su ampliación al primer ciclo de educación primaria o, incluso a la Educación Infantil.* (Ministry of Education, 1999)

This is stated as a result of the increasing demand with 36,992 pupils receiving FL teaching below age 8 in the year 1996/97. The vast majority of these (98.38%) were taught English "*seguidos a gran distancia por el "Francés" y el "Portugués"*. (Ministry of Education, 1999)

In Scotland the extension model continues with the final two years pattern established in the pilot. There may be variations as stated in Advice for Schools 1995.

Stages at which the foreign language is to be taught

The MLPS programme is based on the understanding that a foreign language will be introduced into the curriculum of pupils at P6 and P7.

The position is however complicated by two factors:

- *the fact that some of the FL-trained teachers will be the classteacher of pupils at an earlier stage; and*
- *the existence of composite classes involving P6 or P7 pupils, together with pupils from P5 or, in the case of multi-stage composites, with younger pupils.*

In the first case, the FL-trained teacher might wish to introduce, at an appropriate opportunity, a song or a game in the foreign language to these younger pupils, for example in a topic looking at the celebration of Christmas in other countries. The training programme has not however had the intention of providing sufficient trained teachers for the formal FL programme to be extended beyond P6 and P7, and the introduction of some elements of a foreign language to classes at P5 and below are likely to be the exception. (Scottish Office for Education and Industry Department, 1995, 18-20)

The teachers

As stated earlier Scotland embarked on a training programme for primary teachers. The role of the secondary specialist teaching in the pilot primary schools would be gradually reduced as the primary teachers gained linguistic confidence and competence. The other schools would come on board in cluster groups through a phased programme of training. In Spain the primary language teachers continued their involvement. In addition, the British Council introduced native speaker trained primary teachers from the UK into their 43 pilot schools.

Los profesores del programa son todos de

nacionalidad británica con títulos equivalentes al de magisterio y con varios años de experiencia enseñando el inglés como una lengua extranjera. Algunos se han desplazado de Gran Bretaña a España para participar en el programa mientras que otros ya vivían aquí. (Ciudad Lineal, 1997)

In the case of the Basque Country all primary teachers are current civil servants who volunteered and received specific training and support to teach their age groups.

The training

In Scotland, a national training programme was devised based on a series of competences which had been identified. These competences include such aspects as: the language for self; descriptive language; for the classroom, e.g. daily routine; organising activities; for basic art and craft; PE activities; for games, songs, stories and so on. The training programme lasts 27 days (160 hours) spread throughout the year. Supply cover is provided and the volunteer teachers attend courses during the school day. The major focus of the training is the development of linguistic competence for specific purposes. It is not the intention to produce specialist linguists but instead to give the primary teachers sufficient linguistic competence within specific areas. The other main aim of the training is to increase teachers' awareness of appropriate methodology for teaching a language to primary age children.

The programme is designed to give the primary teacher sufficiently high levels of knowledge and skills to operate in defined contexts. It will provide opportunities to develop grammatical accuracy and a good accent. The linguistic competence will enable the teacher to introduce the foreign language naturally and confidently into the daily rhythm of the primary classroom and develop it from within suitable contexts in the primary curriculum. The programme will provide primary teachers with opportunities to develop their awareness of the appropriate methodology in teaching a foreign language to young learners. (Scottish Office for Education and Industry, 1993)

Residence abroad is not built in to the Scottish programme and depends on local authority arrangements and Lingua funding.

In Spain training takes place at pre-service. There is a minimum of 3 hours per week during all 3 years at the *Escuela de Magisterio*. The training develops all four skills and also has theoretical components. Normally only French or English are available as foreign languages during pre-service. Residence abroad is not built into the training but a high percentage of Spanish nationals do some residence in the foreign country. In the Basque Country there is also in-service training for teachers involved in the pilot projects. It includes

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annual periods of residence abroad and regular seminars. Supply cover is provided.

The pre-service position in Scotland is patchy with each institution offering different provision. To address this the Guidelines from SOEID state:

New teachers with the interest and aptitude should have been trained in the knowledge, understanding and skills required to teach modern languages in the primary school. (Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, 1998)

At the time of writing a Ministerial Action Group on Languages has received a written report on pre-service provision from one of the authors and will shortly be making recommendations to the Scottish Education Minister.

In the classroom

The amount of time devoted to the teaching of second language in Spanish schools is variable. In some cases it can be quite extensive. In one of the British Council project schools visited the 3-year-olds were being given 3 half hour blocks per day. Given that one can also add a lot of incidental language ("Hello children", "Take off your anoraks please", "Sit down on the mat" etc. etc.) the time devoted is significant indeed. Likewise, the Basque pilot also devotes considerable time. English is initially taught for 2 hours per week in 30 minute blocks and this is gradually increased to five blocks of 45 minutes duration.

In Scotland the time devoted could vary from 30 minutes to 140 minutes per week in the forty-one schools visited by 1995. To address this the document *Advice for Schools 1995* made the following statement:

In those classes where the class teacher is the FL trained teacher the opportunities for incidental use of the FL in the daily work of the class will increase the exposure to the foreign language; in those classes where the FL is being taught by a teacher other than the classteacher such flexibility will not be readily available. Experience during phase 1 would seem to show that around 60 minutes FL teaching per week is most common, with schools either allocating two x 30 minute blocks per week or a single block of 60 minutes. It will be important that the timetabled time available to all pupils at a particular stage is approximately the same, so that learning outcomes may be broadly similar for all pupils. (Scottish Office for Education and Industry Department, 1995, 18-20)

In Scotland there is no national material for use in the classroom. It is true that a lot of the training materials can be re-used with the children e.g. games, songs, comptines, stories etc. It is also the case that there is no recognised commercial course which is widely used, probably because not many exist, while the larger market elsewhere in the UK does not yet exist. The teachers are

able to make use of local authority materials in some instances but many also adapt ideas used in mother tongue teaching of infants.

In Spain, there are materials which have been created by local authorities. In the case of the Basque pilot, for example, coordinators deliver the material almost completely prepared. Thus, the teachers will receive copies of stories in English with cassettes and a series of related activities.

In the case of the British Council, the native teachers bring with them a wealth of experience and resources for teaching very young children. In both cases, the teacher has the linguistic competence to adapt and modify the material. Unlike in some countries, it is not a question of a resource-led programme where the teachers have variable linguistic competence but are simply required to deliver an agreed programme of resources.

In addition to local authority materials there are, of course, many commercial materials existing for the teaching of English. The teacher in Spain has a much wider range of resources available from which to select.

CONCLUSION

Both Spain and Scotland had different kinds of pilots. Both countries went on to extend the provision of languages to younger pupils. Both have the same aim: the development of linguistic competence. However, the Spanish have been more ambitious. Their general starting age is 8, they have extended their pilots and the teaching of infants is much more widespread.

The Spanish have obviously gone mainly for one language and they have a large pool of teachers because of pre-service training. Methodology is similar in both countries with pupils aged eight and above. However, it is obviously different with the pupils aged 3 or 4.

The timeframe is also more extensive in Spain. It is true that the pilots for pupils below eight have not been "generalised" across Spain. Nevertheless, one could not help but be struck by the listening abilities of these younger pupils and their comfort in the language. Developments there will be of interest to all involved with early language learning.

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