

MODELOS DE FORMACIÓN PARA LOS PROFESORES DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS EN ENSEÑANZA PRIMARIA: LAS EXPERIENCIAS ESPAÑOLA Y BRITÁNICA

Models of education for foreign language primary teachers: the spanish and british experiences

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RESUMEN: Existe cada vez una concienciación mayor en todos los países europeos de que los niños necesitan aprender una lengua extranjera a edades cada vez más tempranas. Sin embargo, no podemos dar por sentado que la mera introducción de una lengua extranjera en el currículo escolar los va a convertir en buenos aprendices de una lengua en el futuro. Tampoco podemos asumir que la introducción de una lengua extranjera en la educación primaria vaya a abrir sus mentes hacia la diversidad y lo diferente. Los primeros contactos con otra lengua deben llevarse a cabo con un esmero exquisito si queremos garantizar un aprendizaje significativo más tarde. Todo depende de cómo los enseñemos y especialmente de cómo formemos a sus futuros profesores, pero además también de las medidas institucionales que se tomen para apoyarlos. En este artículo voy a presentar un estudio comparativo de algunos cursos de formación inicial para futuros profesores y de formación permanente para profesores de primaria no especialistas en lenguas extranjeras en España y el Reino Unido con el objetivo de ver si podemos aprender algo para el diseño de nuevos cursos y experiencias de formación.

Palabras clave: enseñanza primaria, lenguas extranjeras, formación inicial de profesores, formación permanente de profesores.

ABSTRACT: There is an increasing awareness in European countries that children need to be introduced to foreign language learning at a young age. However, we cannot assume that the mere introduction of languages into their school curriculum will make them into keen and successful language learners in the future. Nor can we assume that such an introduction will open their minds and hearts to difference and diversity. The first contacts with the target language must be managed with lots of care, if we are

to guarantee a positive approach and further meaningful learning. All depends on how they are taught and, vitally, how their teachers are taught but also what practical and institutional measures are taken to support them. In this article I will be presenting a comparative study of some existing pre-service courses for primary language teachers and in-service programmes for non-specialist language teachers both in Spain and the UK with the aim of seeing whether specific lessons can be learned and can then be used in the design and implementation of new teaching training programmes.

Key words: primary education, foreign languages, pre-service teacher training, in-service teacher training.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is not new to say that there is already an increasing awareness in European countries that children need to be introduced to language learning at a young age. In some countries this awareness has led the introduction of modern languages into the primary curriculum (age 8/9). Regarding the UK some Scottish LEAs are implementing some kind of generalised primary languages from year 6 in some schools and year 4 in other schools. In the rest of the UK, with the supportive attitude to teaching MFL at primary level and the dissemination of examples of good practice, there are now more definite plans to introduce a modern language in primary education and the latest Government National Language Learning Strategy stipulates that by 2010 all 8 eight year olds will be entitled to learn a foreign language. Previous to this, though, there have been local initiatives and some LEAs are already implementing some sort of provision for primary languages. According to the data available there may be up to 21% of primary children that have some taste of a foreign language in England (University of Warwick). Besides, the revised National Curriculum includes advice about the teaching of modern foreign languages in primary schools as a non-statutory element. More specifically Nottingham City LEA is one of the 18 LEAs which was successful in their bid to be involved in the Good Practice Primary Languages Project funded by the Department of Education.

The introduction of primary languages, while in principle welcome, cannot be undertaken lightly as a range of practical and theoretical issues and questions of principle need to be addressed.

Young children have fresh and relatively open minds, minds that are open to new linguistic structures and cultural diversity. However, we cannot assume that the mere introduction of languages into their curriculum will make them into keen and successful language learners in the future (that surely is the lesson of some of the many abortive experiments of the past). Nor can we assume that such an introduction will open their minds and hearts to difference and diversity. The first contacts with the target language must be managed with lots of care, if we are to guarantee a positive approach and further meaningful learning. All depends on how we go about things. How they are taught and, vitally, how their teachers are taught but also what practical and institutional measures are taken to support them. It is now widely recognised that one of the major factors that

contributed to the scaling down and final abandonment of primary French in the 70s was an inadequate training of teachers in Britain (Warwick, 2000). So one of the fundamental issues that needs to be addressed when discussing primary MFL is the need to equip teachers with both adequate linguistic and pedagogical competence for pupils in the 7/8-10 age range. If languages are going to be introduced in primary in a way that it becomes a meaningful cultural and linguistic experience to be continued in secondary education, it cannot be done in a haphazard way leaving it to the personal initiatives of dedicated teachers and head teachers.

The aim of this article is to see whether, by presenting a comparative study, specific lessons can be learned from existing pre- and in-service training programmes for language teachers both in Spain and the UK. I will be looking at pre-service courses for primary language teachers and in-service programmes for non specialist language teachers both In Spain and the UK.

2. THE SPANISH MODEL OF PRE-SERVICE PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION

The Spanish Educational Reform of 1990 (LOGSE) made it possible for all primary schools in the country to provide a foreign language at the age of 8. Yet although it is not compulsory to that age, most autonomous regions are introducing it at the age of 6, the beginning of compulsory primary education. In some Spanish autonomous regions and individual schools a foreign language has also been introduced at nursery level (ages 3-6) in a non-statutory experimental way. For example during the academic year 1997-98, 62.093 nursery pupils did a foreign language (21,81%). (Morales Gálvez, C. et al 2000). The choice of 8 for starting languages seems sensible. It is now widely accepted that learning a FL in primary contributes to overcome the egocentrism and localism characteristic of children's representation of the world. Nevertheless lowering the starting age to 4 can have further advantages as children at that age are not only more free of their mother tongue linguistic habits but also will be in a situation to develop better their attitudes of tolerance and acceptance to the other.

In Spanish schools, during the early years when English is not compulsory, the objective is that pupils should come into contact with the language and thus achieve a progressive awareness of it. In this way when they get to Key Stage 2, when the FL is compulsory, they will already have some degree of knowledge of words and will be familiar with the phonetics of the language. (Morales et al, 2001)

From the age of 8 and until the end of the primary education, the state curriculum establishes that there should be a minimum of 170 hours per key stage (2 years), which is then distributed differently in the different autonomous regions, for example in the Basque Country and Catalonia they have 2,5 hours per week each year while in pupils in the rest of the autonomous communities have three hours.

In 1991, once the MEC (Ministry of Education) had decided to introduce languages, mainly English, in primary education in Spain and once the new primary language curricula had been drawn up, the «Universities Council» established the general guidelines

for B.Eds. with seven different specialisms: Infant Education- 0-6-, Primary Education, Foreign Languages, PE, Music, Language and Special Education. The Schools or Faculties of Education from all the universities in the country, that have traditionally run a three year B.Ed., started to work on new syllabuses to train this needed workforce of primary teachers who were going to be specialists in a foreign language as opposed to being generalist teachers.

Pre-service Primary curriculum

During their three year course, students can take a minimum of 180 credits and a maximum of 270 depending on the specific syllabuses of each university. Out of these, 128 correspond to core subjects compulsory to all students. Out of these, 28 credits are dedicated to the specific training in the target language and its methodology (approximately 30% of the total), 40 to general child psychology and pedagogical education (approximately 55%), 28 credits to general knowledge and 32 are dedicated to teaching practice (10 weeks on TP in primary schools (15%)).

At the University of Salamanca, Avila School of Education, the specific syllabus that forms the linguistic education for primary English specialists is composed of the following subjects:

English Language and methodology I
English Language and methodology II
English Language and methodology III
Phonetics of the English Language
Semantic and Syntax of the English Language
English Literature
English Children's Literature
Socio-cultural Aspects of English speaking countries
Cinema

At the moment universities are currently involved in revisiting these curricula.

3. UK: PRE-SERVICE PGCE PRIMARY LANGUAGES

Traditionally there has not been pre-service course for primary teachers which included a foreign language, as languages have not been part of the statutory subjects in the National Curriculum. But since 2001 a growing number of teacher training institutions have been offering initial teacher training specialising in languages, particularly after the recent government's National Language Learning Strategy decision that all 8 years olds are entitled to learning a FL. So in this current climate of things, the Teacher Training Agency has been piloting PGCE courses with French as a specialism for the

last two years. There are now currently 13 institutions providing primary French. The scheme is expanding to include Spanish and German next academic year. These new initial teacher training courses can be undergraduate courses (3 or 4 years) or an one-year postgraduate course (PGCE). One of the most innovative elements of the programme is that in each case, the course must include a four-week school based placement in a foreign country where trainees can develop their teaching in the target language and culture. To achieve this the Teacher Training Agency is:

- a) establishing partnerships with the French, the German and Spanish governments, so that the experience can be reciprocated with pre-service training courses in the respective countries.
- b) funding the scheme and paying the Initial Teacher Training institutions to cover the cost of the placement abroad, administration and assessment.

The institutions involved in this scheme are linked with their foreign partners so that they can establish reciprocal arrangements, roles and responsibilities. The Faculty of Education at Nottingham Trent University will be hosting a PGCE with Spanish for primary from next academic year.

4. IN-SERVICE TRAINING IN SPAIN

It is important to train future teachers, but it is also vital to count with the existing teachers and provide them with new skills or in our case a new foreign language. In Spain, in 1984 Teachers' Centres, based on the British model were open. They were conceived as platforms for the work of groups of teachers of all levels. They were considered as the preferred instruments for inset training, professional development, the development of innovative teaching activities and the vehicles to disseminate good practice. The activities carried out in the centre are in most cases what the specific teachers' working groups identify as necessary, but also include the implementation of institutionally driven teaching development programmes, as outlined by the local administration. Educational research is also encouraged in order to know better the teaching context and the resources available.

Within that overarching context, a specific example relevant to our concerns today is what happens in the CPR (Teachers' centre) in Ávila. Among other different types of activities, this centre organises a course for non-specialist primary language teachers in partnership with the University of Salamanca of a duration of 600 hours across two academic years. These 600 hours are distributed as follows:

- 250 hours: development and consolidation of linguistic skills:, mainly spoken language, the main need for this group of non specialist language teachers
- 150 hours: classroom methodology (drama, songs, young learners...) and resources
- 100 hours: TP in primary schools
- 100 hours: linguistic and cultural immersion in the UK (Chester)

5. IN-SERVICE FOR PRIMARY NON SPECIALIST LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN THE UK: AN EXAMPLE

As part of the Good Practice Primary Language Project the NTU (Nottingham Trent University), in collaboration with the University of Salamanca has been providing a program of Spanish during which primary teachers have been prepared linguistically and culturally for teaching the language. In Year 1, participants received 50 hours of tuition (2 hours per week over 25 weeks) which focused primarily on developing competence in Spanish. In year two, following their return from an intensive course in Ávila, a further 50 hours of tuition were offered, combining Spanish language tuition with a program of workshops and seminars which enabled participants to share experience and develop materials suitable for use with young learners.

Further funding has now been secured from a Nuffield grant to NTU to develop and implement a consolidation course for primary teachers in the Nottingham area for 2003-2004.

6. THE CHALLENGE FOR UNIVERSITIES WHEN ORGANISING COURSES TO EDUCATE PRIMARY LANGUAGE TEACHERS. CONCLUSION.

It is essential that the introduction of a Modern Language in the primary curriculum is successful if the experience is to be consolidated and continue to yield fruit during secondary education. An example of this success, although not without its own problems, is the implementation of primary languages in Spain. After the early years of the Spanish experiment, some initial the results of the evaluation of the experience are already available. There are two set of data that I found interesting and show this initial success: the perception of the pupils and exam results. According to this data, 50% of pupils in year sixth say that they like learning English «a lot» and other 40% say they like it «quite a lot». Next I include a table with the exam results according to the age of beginning a FL in primary

	Exam average scores	Before 6	At 6	At 7	At 8	At 9
2 ESO	48%	59%	54%	46%	48%	41%
4 ESO	49%	62%	55%	51%	49%	44%

I will not say that it is easy to transfer models or programmes of education or training from one country to another. They need to be context specific and respond or be adapted to the specific circumstances of the different countries, yet I think that we need to be open to learn from each other's past successes and failures.

To conclude then I think that to achieve positive results, not only during the primary years but also during secondary education we need to make sure of the following:

- 1) That we have a well trained cohort of teachers. Although the new ITT programmes in languages is a laudable start, it must not end there. The TTA and the universities must be sure that, before languages are introduced across the board in primary, they have a permanent force of language specialists in schools both designing and implementing in- and pre-service courses. Counting on bilingual mothers or members of the community to deliver the FL is, in my view, a recipe for disaster. Languages is a difficult subject whose teaching needs careful planning, delivery and evaluation, and that can only come from a well trained cohort of teachers.
- 2) That the training of teachers does not neglect the European context in which our children will be growing up.
- 3) That we establish clear reference guidelines for programs for prospective language teachers.
- 4) That we offer a curriculum for teacher education which contemplates three aspects in an interrelated way: a) the linguistic (use and usage of the language); b) the intercultural and c) FL teaching methods, strategies, techniques, etc.

So to finish I want to emphasise the real need and opportunity for universities to design or accommodate courses for graduates who may want to become primary language specialists and also to provide, in collaboration with LEAs and schools, in-service courses for practising teachers so that schools and teachers can meet the new challenges posed to them. Neena Bhandari (May 2000) reminds us of Chris Woodhead's words (recent Annual Report «(Her Majesty's) Chief Inspector of School) *'if standards are to rise further in primary schools, then primary teachers must have better access to high quality training designed to deepen their own subject knowledge'*. I think that this aim can only be achieved by providing generous political and economic investment in teacher education based on a belief in the human potential rather than on short-term cost-effective policies.

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