

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Essex		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 26		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Shaping foreign language learning and teaching in English primary schools		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2011-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Florence Myles	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of Second Language Acquisition	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2011-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2017-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>In 2014, the UK Government introduced a compulsory foreign language teaching policy in primary schools in England. In response to this, and to assist implementation of this policy into practice, Myles created and leads a <b>researcher-practitioner network</b> (Research in Primary Languages; RiPL). <b>RiPL</b> is now the vanguard for foreign language learning in primary schools, unique in championing combined stakeholder support for researchers, practitioners, policy makers and teacher educators, acting as a conduit for policy and practice debate and change, challenging and contributing to debates on government policy. To date, RiPL has directly benefited <b>(a) teachers; (b) teacher educators, (c) policy makers.</b></p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Since 2011, Myles main body of research [R1; R2; R3] investigated <b>how children of different ages learn foreign languages</b>. It compared beginner learners of French aged 5, 7 and 11 respectively, taught by the same teacher following the same pedagogic principles, in terms of learning outcomes and attitudes and motivation towards learning French. The study found that younger children were highly motivated but made slower progress in terms of language learning, especially grammar, and that their cognitive and emotional development during middle childhood affected their motivational profile and their learning behaviour. Age-appropriate pedagogic practices were also found to play a major role in children's development.</p> <p>Myles' research [R3; R4] showed that this age group learns more implicitly and therefore requires (a) adequate classroom time; (b) more repetition as learning strategies are underdeveloped at that age; (c) age-appropriate classroom activities [R2]. Her research also showed that young learners' motivational and emotional profile changes throughout middle childhood, with enjoyment being the prime driver in early stages, and gradually becoming replaced by more instrumental reasons, including a sense of progress and achievement [R2].</p> <p>Myles subsequently contextualised the <b>implications</b> of her findings within the <b>policy</b> landscape prevalent in England [R1; R3; R4; R5], and in particular the introduction in 2014 by the UK Government of compulsory foreign language teaching in primary schools in England. Her research showed that the lack of guidelines in the new policy and the lack of training/upskilling provision for primary teachers with no experience of language teaching, led to schools facing many challenges as well as to very patchy and non-inclusive implementation on the ground.</p> <p>Her work also suggested research-informed solutions for a successful implementation of the policy could be found, based on an understanding of language learning and teaching in this age group [R1; R2; R3; R5]. Myles invited all major national stakeholders to a <i>Primary Languages Policy Summit</i> to discuss research findings, which led to the publication by Holmes &amp; Myles of a <b>White Paper</b> [WP R5]. Informed by Myles and RiPL colleagues' research and discussions at the <i>Summit</i>, the <i>White Paper</i> provides an evaluation of the current state of primary languages education in the</p>		

country, outlining challenges faced by the profession, and proposing a series of 10 **research-informed recommendations to policy makers and practitioners** to overcome these challenges and ensure the successful implementation of the 2014 primary languages policy. These recommendations focus on: allocation of a minimum teaching time to ensure progression; initial teacher training and CPD provision; curriculum planning across phases; transition between primary and secondary school; assessment and reporting to ensure continuity; use of digital technology; importance of school accountability; role of school leadership; research programme to address gaps in understanding; the necessity of creating a national taskforce to address the challenges faced by schools and coordinate the implementation of the national policy.

Myles' body of research on how primary school children learn and how this can and should inform policy [R1; R2; R3; R4; R5] has informed all the strands of work carried out by RiPL with **teachers, teacher educators and policy makers**.

### 3. References to the research [available on request from HEI]

[R1] Myles, F. (2017) 'Learning foreign languages in primary schools: is younger better?' *Languages, Society and Policy*, 1.1, 1-8 <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.9806>

[R2] Myles, F. (2020) Attitudes and Motivation Towards Learning French in Primary School. Content published online on the MOOC Teaching Languages in Primary Schools: Putting Research into Practice, Week One (first delivered July 2020) (available from HEI on request).

[R3] Mitchell, R., and Myles, F. (2019). Learning French in the UK setting: policy, classroom engagement and attainable learning outcomes. *Apples - Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 13(1), 69-93. <http://doi.org/10.17011/apples/urn.201903011690>

[R4] Porter, A., Myles, F., Tellier, A., and Holmes, B. (2020). Supporting languages in an Anglophone world: Implementation challenges in English primary schools. *Language Teaching for Young Learners*, 2:2, 213-239. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ltyl.19013.por>

[R5] Holmes, B., and Myles, F. (2019). [White Paper: Primary Languages Policy in England: The Way Forward](#). RiPL (available on request from HEI).

[G1] PI Myles. *MOOC: Teaching Languages in Primary Schools: Putting Research into Practice*. ESRC IAA Fund; Joint project with Porter, Southampton; £30,000: £15,000 each institution; 12/2019–07/2020

### 4. Details of the impact

The disconnection between research findings identified in Myles' work on one hand [R1; R2; R3], practitioner need and Government policy on the other hand [R3; R4; R5], led her to set up a series of **RiPL** events during which she established a consensus across stakeholders that a single point of reference was required, to provide reliable information to inform policy and practice from a sound evidence base. Launched in June 2017, and initiated by Myles, RiPL has the dual aims of (1) **supporting schools and practitioners** obliged to implement the UK Government's 2014 policy and (2) **informing policy debates** about the implementation of the statutory requirement to teach Foreign Languages (FL) in English primary schools, on the basis of robust research evidence. Led by Myles, RiPL brings together ten leading researchers (Universities of Reading, Southampton, Oxford, Manchester Metropolitan, King's College London) and one policy influencer (Holmes MBE; *Born Global*), and is unique in bringing together key stakeholders to provide an authoritative and well-informed 'voice for change'. RiPL is central to FL debates [S1; S2; S3] as the **Chair of APPG for Modern Languages** confirms '*The APPG is concerned that there is little in the way of strategic, joined-up support for primary language practitioners in England, and regards the RiPL network and Florence Myles's research as an absolutely key resource in this regard*' [S1a] and as shown by the **adoption of [R5] recommendations** in an influential report *Towards a national languages strategy: education and skills* (2020) [S3d] by British Academy (BA), AHRC, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), British Council, & Universities UK. RiPL is also central to teacher education in this area. In 2020 the highly popular **MOOC Teaching Languages in Primary Schools: Putting Research into Practice** by Myles and Porter, based on their research had 6,353 participants from 140 countries across July and November [S4]. Myles, as RiPL Chair was appointed **Curriculum Partner by the DfE-funded Oak National Academy** for the provision of

online language lessons to primary schools nationally during the pandemic [S1d].

### **Changing the practice of teachers and teacher educators**

Launched in January 2018 the [RiPL network's website](#) contains (1) state of the art review of research on seven themes central to the field; (2) one-page jargon-free summaries of research articles of interest and relevance to practitioners and non-academic audiences; (3) policy documents and reviews; (4) resources for teachers; (5) 'School Focus' best practice; (6) a blog; and (7) relevant events. The **website** is RiPL's main communication tool with professionals and policy makers. The range of resources it provides is being used extensively, as exemplified by teacher trainers in [S5]: *'[...] for MFL in the primary to secondary sessions, we **drew extensively on the website**. We gave the students a 'tour' of the website and then drew up a series of activities for independent study and for group seminars'* (Head of MFL Teacher Education, KCL); *'RiPL work has **directly affected my practice**; I also regularly refer to it in **training** [...] and send primary practitioners to check the website as a reference and for their own knowledge and training'* (Teacher trainer/consultant) [S5]. Between 2018 and 2020 the website had **179,279 visits**, with traffic steadily increasing [S6]. The **summaries of research** and reviews of sub-fields written by Myles and her team are used by **teachers, teacher trainers, journalists, policy makers** and are **reshaping thinking and training** by making research evidence readily available to practitioners [S1; S5; S7; S8]: *'The research summaries have been really valuable within our teacher training'* (Teacher educator, Australia); *'The summaries of research are extremely useful as I would not be able to access the information without them'* (MFL Consultant, Harris Federation); *'I use the website and particularly the research summaries to share research relating to key issues for MFL pedagogy with my students to enable them to adopt research-informed practices in their own teaching. Research from the RiPL website is incorporated into lectures and workshops* (MFL Lead, Northumbria University) [S5]. The **Association for Language Learning** (ALL – who represent Modern Foreign Language teachers in the UK; 3,500 members) regularly features RiPL on its website and its testimony [S5a] concludes *'In summary the contributions of RiPL in various ways to the professional work of language teachers in Primary education, in teacher training, and in Secondary education particularly in the field of transition matters is considerable, and fairly unique in the UK scenario'*.

Myles and Porter (University of Southampton) produced a 3-week interactive online course (**MOOC**) on *Teaching Languages in Primary Schools: Putting Research into Practice* [S4]. This course is based directly on Myles' research on how young children learn languages, for example what activities motivate this age group, what progression can be achieved at this age, or how to introduce increasingly complex language [R1; R2; R3]. The first run in July 2020 attracted **4,931 participants from 140 countries** who scored the course **4.8/5** and testified how the course changed their thinking and practice [S4]. An analysis of the 476 feedback questionnaires received showed that, at the end of the first session based on Myles' research [R1; R2; R3] **81.4%** of respondents agreed with the statement *'I **learnt something new** about how children's learning changes between ages 7 and 11'*, **74.8%** agreed that *'I have **learnt something new** about how changes in the way children learn have implications for pedagogy,* and **78.6%** agreed *'As a result of the MOOC, in future, I will **adapt my teaching** more closely to suit the age of the children'* [S4]. Participants invariably specified in their discursive comments on the questionnaires and in the **14,150 comments** from participants generated during the course, how they had found learning about the research enlightening (*I completely **changed the way I taught** last term. [...] This has been the most useful professional development I have undertaken to date – Japanese primary language teacher, Australia; 'the MOOC [has] been beneficial to my role as subject leader of MFL. I have improved my subject knowledge, and this has **fed into my medium and long term planning'** – MFL subject leader, UK) and how they will apply it to their own contexts (*I have used some of the ideas in my lessons [from the MOOC] [...] and shared them several times whilst **delivering online training**, both on a local level and at a national level – Primary FL consultant, UK*). Many PGCE leads are now including the MOOC in their courses [S4].*

Myles, as RiPL Chair, was appointed by the **Oak National Academy** as a **curriculum partner** to develop 78 online lessons for French and Spanish for Key Stage 2 by December 2020. Oak was set up by the DfE in April 2020 to provide National Curriculum online lessons for children as a national response to the pandemic, and it now provides nearly 10,000 video lessons; there were

578,000 pupil-visits in weeks leading up to mid December 2020. The Chair of the *Oak National Academy* comments *'the connection between RiPL and Oak National Academy is likely to bring evidence led primary MFL teaching to a very wide audience of pupils and to a very large number of primary school teachers.'* [S1d].

Myles' research and expertise has led to invitations to share her research findings with the Minister for Education, APPG, influential professional bodies and policy advisors as well as discussing the research underpinning her policy recommendations at teacher conferences, workshops and training events. Feedback from these events has shown evidence of impact on professionals' thinking and practice [S2; S8], as evidenced by this statement from the Content Manager, **Government Events**: *'Professor Myles' contribution to our events and content has been extremely valuable to the wider professional community [...] In sharing the outcomes of RiPL's research Professor Myles has expanded the horizons of teachers working against an increasingly difficult backdrop, improving provisions for the teaching of primary languages in a range of settings.'* [S5]. Myles research has **shaped public debate** appearing in top **newspapers**: *The Guardian*, March 2019 (circulation 141K); *The 'I'*, December 2014 (circulation 298K) [S7]; *Svenska Dagbladet*, October 2019 (leading Swedish newspaper, circulation print 300K, digital 450K) states *'The summaries of research hosted on the RiPL website were particularly useful, and I used several of them to provide background information, including those on your own research about how children of different ages learn foreign languages, and the implications for language education policy.'* [S7a].

### **Shaping Policy**

Myles research is influencing the development of a **national strategy for languages**, ensuring it includes research-informed primary education recommendations. In 2018 Myles organised the RiPL Policy Summit - a research-informed event about the issues and challenges faced by the primary education sector, and possible solutions, attended by major stakeholders and decision makers nationwide (26 organisations e.g. DfE, APPG Modern Languages, Ofsted, Ofqual, ASCL, British Council, British Academy, Cultural Partners etc.). Input from this event led to the RiPL **White Paper** [R5] outlining 10 recommendations for the implementation of the national policy. The White Paper's impact can be evidenced by a number of testimonies from influential policy makers and language professionals [S1; S5], as well as a series of high profile invitations for Myles to contribute to policy development [S2] and its subsequent contribution to a range of influential national policy documents [S3a-f]:

- British Council (2019). *Language Trends 2019* [S3a].
- All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages (2019). *A National Recovery Programme for Languages* [S3b]. [audience reach in national press 62 million and on national radio 16.3 million; S1a]
- British Council (2020). *Language Trends 2020* [S3c].
- BA, AHRC, ASCL, British Council, & Universities UK. (2020). *Towards a National Languages Strategy* [S3d].
- ASCL/British Council Guide for Governors of Primary schools (2020) [S3e].
- ASCL Transition Toolkits (2020) [S3f].

The Co-Chair of the **APPG** testifies how RiPL and the White Paper have influenced its work: *'the APPG participated in RiPL's Primary Languages Policy Summit [...], which fed directly into the APPG's National Recovery Programme for Languages [...] In providing critical reading, the APPG MFL was able to draw on RiPL's research to better frame its priorities for primary languages in the wider context of improving languages policy in the UK.[...] The RiPL White Paper provided important evidence which the APPG MFL used to justify calling publicly for a statutory entitlement to languages education from age 5. [...] The APPG MFL has subsequently held meetings with the DfE and with Ministers drawing on Florence Myles's research to argue for the development of primary language policy.'* In its concluding statement, the testimony states that the APPG is continuing to draw on the work of RiPL and states *'[RiPL] is unique in providing a national network for primary-focussed practitioners and experts along with focussed academic research which in*

turn leads to a development of policy recommendations.’ [S1a].

The **Lead Fellow for Languages at the British Academy** writes ‘*Professor Myles’ research and her leadership through RiPL have **informed ongoing debate** about Primary Languages Policy in England in important and constructive ways. That is why the White Paper is referred to four times in ‘Towards a National Languages Strategy’, which **echoes some of the White Paper recommendations**, and is targeted at policymakers as well as stakeholders. [...] my **own understanding** of some of the issues has been improved by Prof. Myles’ research on how primary age children learn and on what motivates them.*’ [S1c]. The **Chair of the DfE Review of Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy**, who regularly advises the Government on MFL policy, chairs the Oak National Academy and is the incoming Chair of Ofqual, comments on the Policy Summit which led to the White Paper as a ‘*rare and important opportunity for research and thinking to be mobilised into proposals which those responsible for curricular decision making in schools can engage with, and, indeed, influence policy*’ [S1d]. Evidence of further shaping of policy at a national level is provided by the MFL Consultant at **ASCL** (Association of School and College Leaders) in the two documents they published in 2020, who used RiPL’s research and the White Paper as evidence in support of their work [S1b]. Myles’ policy paper [R1] continues to attract attention with 62,898 [2/12/2020] unique views since its publication in May 2017 (the most viewed paper ever from this policy journal with well over half of its total views for all papers) [S1e].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

**[S1]** Testimonials from **policymakers** outlining influence on policy initiatives as a result of Myles’ interventions and the White Paper from: **[S1a]** Baroness Coussins, Co-Chair of APPG for Modern Languages; **[S1b]** Suzanne O-Farrell, MFL consultant at ASCL (Association of School and Colleges Leaders); **[S1c]** Prof Neil Kenny, British Academy Lead Fellow for Languages and **[S1d]** Ian Bauckham CBE – Chair, Oak National Academy; author of Modern Languages Pedagogy Review; DfE Advisor; incoming Chair of Ofqual; **[S1e]** statistics from ASCL.

**[S2]** Collated **invitations** for Myles to take part in initiatives towards the development of a national policy

**[S3]** **National policy documents** acknowledging White Paper/RiPL contribution: **[S3a]** [Language Trends 2019](#): Language teaching in primary and secondary schools in England. Survey Report; British Council; APPG Modern Languages. (2019) p2; **[S3b]** [A national recovery programme for languages: A framework proposal from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages](#); **[S3c]** [Language Trends 2020](#): Language teaching in primary and secondary schools in England. Survey Report. British Council; British Academy, Arts and Humanities Research Council, Association of School and College Leaders, British Council, & Universities UK. (2020) p2; **[S3d]** [Towards a national languages strategy: education and skills](#); ASCL/British Council p14-16; **[S3e]** [Guide for Governors of Primary schools](#) and ASCL **[S3f]** [Transition Toolkits](#) (2020).

**[S4]** Impact evidence of **MOOC** (analysis of questionnaires and comments)

**[S5]** Testimonials from **teachers and teacher educators** detailing how they have benefited from the MOOC and RiPL resources (e.g. summaries of research) in their own practice and in training, and used [R5] to change the policy in their school; **[S5a]** Testimonial from **professional body** Association for Language Learning

**[S6]** Analytics showing website statistics from January 2018 to December 2020 for [www.ripl.uk](http://www.ripl.uk)

**[S7]** Collated **media articles** and **[S7a]** **testimonial** from journalist

**[S8]** Collated feedback from **attendees at following policy, outreach and training events**