

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Institution: University of Southampton | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics | | |
| Title of case study: 26-02 An Early Start to Foreign Language Learning and Literacy | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: August 2006 – July 2018 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): Rosamond Mitchell Alison Porter | Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Applied Linguistics Lecturer in Applied Linguistics | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: October 1986 – February 2014 January 2015 – present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: September 2014 – December 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |

1. Summary of the impact

Early foreign language (FL) learning in schools is a global education phenomenon but many countries report problems with learner progression and motivation. This is in part due to curricula uninformed by empirical evidence, and a lack of age-appropriate resources, teacher expertise and pedagogic confidence. FL learning research undertaken at the University of Southampton by Professor Ros Mitchell and Dr Alison Porter has:

- A) Informed policy and addressed national implementation challenges:** Mitchell's research informed the rationale and attainment targets of the new FL requirement in the Primary National Curriculum in England, introduced in September 2014. Porter and Mitchell have since engaged with education stakeholders to ensure its sustainability and effective implementation.
- B) Improved classroom practice and school provision:** Since 2017, Porter and Mitchell have worked with teachers locally, nationally and globally, successfully encouraging research-informed primary FL pedagogy in participant schools.
- C) Co-created original FL resources:** The teacher-researcher partnerships have led to the co-construction of innovative FL literacy resources inspired by Porter's research findings. Teachers have evaluated their effectiveness through classroom research supported by Porter and Mitchell.

2. Underpinning research

A) Informing policy and addressing national implementation challenges

Mitchell, as co-investigator, led a local research team as part of a large-scale 2006-2009 research project conducted for the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This collaborative research identified that primary school FL learning can support linguistic progression and learner positivity towards languages [3.1]. Consequently, primary foreign language education from age 7-8 became compulsory in English schools. Mitchell's contribution a) consolidated the position of primary FLs within the 2014 Primary National Curriculum and b) underpinned the commitment to the development of oral and written proficiency in one FL in primary school settings [3.1].

Findings from Porter and Mitchell's research continue to drive initiatives to raise awareness of issues affecting policy implementation. They have found that the sustainability of language teaching/learning in primary schools is predicated upon the commitment of wider education stakeholders including school leadership, teacher education providers and professional development specialists [3.1]. Invested stakeholders often show an understanding of the value of communication in other languages and the support of FL for wider learning [3.2]. Regular, consistent teaching time of 60 minutes per week is likely to optimise learning outcomes by creating time for better quality language use activities [3.1, 3.4]. Teacher pedagogic confidence and access to good quality professional development are also key to successful policy implementation for teachers and school leadership [3.1].

B) Improving classroom practice/provision and C) Creating original FL resources

Mitchell's DCSF research (2007-2009) and a subsequent collaborative project (2009-2011) concluded that younger FL learners were enthusiastic and motivated but that areas of pedagogic practice needed development to sustain motivation and language learning outcomes [3.1, 3.2]. For example, FL literacy pedagogy did not feature extensively in classroom practice, and assessment tools were lacking [3.1, 3.2]. Lessons observed in primary schools showed few opportunities for independent language use and exploration [3.1]. This demonstrated a missed opportunity for both progression and links with the wider primary curriculum [3.1, 3.2].

Impact case study (REF3)

Building on Mitchell's research, Porter's independent investigations (2016-2020) included the design, implementation and evaluation of a literacy-based teaching programme in Years 5 and 6 (ages 9-11) in English schools and the use of multimodality (gesture) to support spoken language in Years R, 1 and 2 (ages 4-7). Porter developed and implemented principles for teaching and learning French literacy alongside spoken language. At the time, it was the only study of its kind in the UK. It found that a) beginner learners of French could make meaningful progress in both spoken and written language proficiency and b) these learners were able to participate in creative and independent, meaning-focused language use [3.4]. Porter's work notes the potential contribution of higher-order literacy activities (i.e. challenging texts, independent and creative language use) to the development of FL literacy and FL progression generally [3.4]. Her research also found that multimodal teaching approaches could support memorisation [3.3]. Porter explored the use of formative assessment in primary FL classrooms, devising and trialling pedagogic activities to informally assess progression [3.5]. She also developed tools for FL phonics instruction in French [3.6]. These pedagogic resources, tools and assessment practices have allowed Porter to advocate for improved FL provision while meeting the needs of teachers in the classroom.

3. References to the research

- 3.1** Cable, C., Driscoll, P., **Mitchell, R.**, Sing, S., Cremin, T., Earl, J., Eyres, I., Holmes, B., Martin, C. & Heins, B. (2010). *Languages Learning at Key Stage 2, A Longitudinal Study: Final Report. Research Report DCSF_RR198*: Department for Children Schools and Families. <https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/143157>
- 3.2** Myles, F., **Mitchell, R.**, & David, A. (2012). *Learning French from ages 5, 7, and 11: An Investigation into Starting Ages, Rates and Routes of Learning Amongst Early Foreign Language Learners* (RES-062-23-1545). Report to Economic and Social Research Council. <https://ripl.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/EOA-Report-RES-062-23-1545.pdf>
- 3.3** **Porter, A.** (2016) 'A helping hand with language learning: Teaching French vocabulary with gesture'. *Language Learning Journal*: 44(2), 236-257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2012.750681>
- 3.4** **Porter, A.** (2019) 'An early start to foreign language literacy in English primary school classrooms'. *Language Learning Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2019.1632918>
- 3.5** **Porter, A.** (2019) 'Assessment in the primary FL classroom' in Rixon, S. & Prošić-Santovac, D. (eds.) *Integrating Assessment into Early Language Learning and Teaching Practice*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters. Available on request.
- 3.6** **Porter, A.** (2020) 'The development of French sound/spelling links in English primary school classrooms'. *Euro-American Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 71(1), 78-107. <https://doi.org/10.21283/2376905X.11.187>

Key Grants: 2006-2009 Department for Children, Schools & Families: Language Learning at Key Stage 2 – A longitudinal study. 2009-2011 ESRC: Learning French from ages 5, 7 and 11: An investigation into starting ages, rates and routes of learning amongst early foreign language learners. 2010-2013 ESRC: An early start to French literacy: Learning the spoken and written word simultaneously in English primary school

4. Details of the impact

A) Influencing policy and implementation

A i) Informing the 2014 Primary FL Curriculum in England:

Mitchell's collaborative research projects contributed to the inclusion of FLs in the Primary National Curriculum. The rationale and attainment targets introduced with the Primary National Curriculum in September 2014 are linked to this research [5.1] Firstly, the curriculum calls for "substantial progress in one foreign language". This statement is supported by the findings from Mitchell's collaborative research that children aged 8-11 made meaningful progress in FL listening, speaking, reading and writing. Secondly, curriculum aims recognise the value of communication in a FL and the potential for FL education to have a positive influence on wider academic and social development. Mitchell et al.'s findings from stakeholder interviews had previously shown these beliefs were widely held in schools committed to FL policy implementation.

A ii) Addressing national implementation challenges

Porter and Mitchell contributed to the Research in Primary Languages (RiPL) policy summit at the British Academy in November 2018. RiPL is a national network of FL researchers and stakeholders

Impact case study (REF3)

which supports FL education and the implementation of primary FL education policy through evidence-based decision-making; Porter and Mitchell are RiPL board members. The summit was attended by 40 education professionals, government representatives, cultural associations and language education advocates [5.2]. Porter and Mitchell led research-informed discussions of their research including their work with primary school teachers to show how researchers are supporting schools and teachers with developing FL pedagogic expertise, teacher confidence, FL resourcing and classroom research training. These sessions influenced the professional activity of delegates, with the Director of Social Mobility & Vulnerable Learners at the Education Policy Institute commenting *“At EPI we are formulating research questions on language education (equal access to) and curriculum, funding and staffing more generally. The research will help guide our future priorities.”* An attending primary languages teacher stated, *“The summit has highlighted the importance of leadership in the success of developing MFL in the classroom at primary level. From what we have heard we have been able to start our action plan going forward for the next year. In this will include ideas and resources we have learnt about in the summit”* [5.3].

The RiPL White Paper arising from the summit [5.4] presented ten recommendations for successful policy implementation. Porter and Mitchell’s research led to two recommendations on age-appropriate pedagogy and curriculum planning. This document was distributed to key parliamentarians and civil servants and has been accessed online 2,682 times (14.10.19). It was discussed with Department for Education (DfE) advisors in October 2019 but further initiatives, including a proposed contribution to an All-Party Parliamentary Group meeting in late 2019/early 2020, were postponed due to COVID-19.

An additional RiPL event was attended by school leadership and practitioners at the Institute of Education in November 2019 to further explore implementation of primary languages policy. Porter co-led an input a round table discussion on linguistic outcomes by the end of Key Stage 2. 37 attendees completed questionnaires which showed evidence of changes in thinking (95%) and practice (100%) linked to the RiPL White Paper [5.5].

In August 2020, Oak National Academy, an online school funded and led by the DfE approached a small RiPL team including Porter to support primary FL teachers to design and develop an online primary FL curriculum as part of a national online curriculum. Porter’s research and expertise contributed to the development of the curriculum map and FL pedagogic principles for Key Stage 2, the recruitment of two out of four teachers and to the review of teaching videos. The materials will be launched in January 2021 and will be available free of charge to all primary schools in England. It is believed that these resources will remain available beyond school closures as a means of supporting schools who have primary FL staffing/provision challenges [5.6]

B) Improving classroom practice and school provision

B i) Formation of the Southampton University Primary Languages partnership (SUPL)

Many surveys and government-facing policy advice (e.g. AHRC Policy Briefing on FLs, APPG Recovery Plan for FL education in England) have noted a dearth of training for pre-service primary school teachers and in-service professional development opportunities. In 2017 Porter and Mitchell founded the Southampton University Primary Languages research/practice partnership (SUPL), which provides collaborative opportunities for professional development to local teachers. SUPL has enabled Porter, supported by Mitchell, to work with school leadership and teachers in developing face-to-face and online training informed by their research to improve classroom practice and school-level curricula.

B ii) Local changes in FL teaching practices through SUPL face-to-face teacher workshops

Porter and Mitchell have engaged growing groups of practitioners in unique professional development opportunities to build confidence, develop practice and encourage classroom research. Starting with smaller-scale activities, they eventually scaled-up the SUPL model of research-practice teacher engagement to a whole-day workshop in July 2019 for 45 teachers and teacher educators (Biii). The teacher workshop evaluations demonstrated the following [5.7]: *“Sharing both your professional expertise and the exemplary practice of my fellow teachers has been a privilege”* (Teacher 3 - 24.07.19). Teachers found the research methods element of the workshops useful: *“Love the research element...these sessions help me and inspire me to try new things, research new methods or ideas”* (Teacher 8 – 29.11.18); *“...it was worthwhile carrying out action research about children’s preferred methods of vocab learning”* (Teacher 3 – 05.02.17).

Impact case study (REF3)

The courses caused teachers to change their classroom practice. They reported overcoming fears about accuracy and learner confidence, to promote challenge and creativity in the FL classroom. In particular, they used Porter's research findings relating to FL phonics instruction and the importance of working with unfamiliar language/challenging texts in their subsequent practice: *"I'm more confident to innovate and explore. I've been inspired to try something new in the classroom - I have experimented with phonics and linked phonics to written outcomes/writing from memory"* (Teacher 18 - 29.11.18); *"I've been inspired to try new reading books in Spanish with the classes and it's great challenging their reading at text level"* (Teacher 6 - 29.11.18); *"The analysis of how children embed new vocabulary was particularly useful and I intend to use this style of approach with KS2 pupils in the next term"* (Teacher 1 - 29.11.18). The courses also led to school-wide changes in practice. An Executive Headteacher of a Federation of participating schools (n=2) noted *"...(teacher name) has already implemented changes to our curriculum in response to these rigorous, evidence-based training workshops"* [5.8]

B iii) National changes in FL teaching practices through the 2019 SUPL teacher conference

This FL Literacy in Primary Practice event was led by Southampton researchers, SUPL teachers who had attended prior workshops, and guest speakers. The SUPL teachers designed their interactive sessions with support from Porter and Mitchell. These SUPL members showed how they had embedded ideas from Porter and Mitchell's research findings, and had developed confidence in their FL practice through presenting examples of SUPL pedagogic principles and sharing their adapted practices with their peers. One teacher explained: *"Your confidence in my ability to present to the conference was a real boost to my self-belief... I have grown so very much as a FL teacher."* The teachers and teacher educators who attended the SUPL whole-day workshop also reported benefits from working with Porter and Mitchell's research. A survey of participants demonstrated that most found it helped them to reflect on and evaluate their current practice in FL literacy (mean 4.56/5.00) and thought it would influence what they did in their future work (mean 4.39/5.00). Teachers reported that the workshop had greatly supplemented their understanding of the role of FL literacy in supporting beginner FL learning (mean 4.44/5.00). Individual comments noted that the workshop was an *"eye opening experience that gave me loads of things to think about as well as lots of hands on practical activities to implement."* (Teacher M). *"An informative and engaging day. Lots of ideas to amend and enhance my practice within school. A great day to share and discuss different activities allowing discussion on progression and assessment."* (Teacher E) [5.9].

B iv) Global changes in teaching practices through SUPL online primary FL course

Porter led the development of the SUPL model further to become part of a 3-week massive online open course (MOOC) with collaborators at the Universities of Essex and Reading. Teaching Languages in Primary Schools: Putting Research into Practice (TLiPS) offered primary languages CPD on a global scale, and included examples of professional practice contributed by SUPL teachers. In July 2020, 4,657 participants in 139 countries and in October 2020, 1422 participants in 90 countries, registered to join [5.10]. This quick repeat of the MOOC aimed to fill a gap for online initial teacher education (ITE) provision in the context of global social distancing measures. Currently two ITE providers have reported that this MOOC will form a compulsory part of their PGCE programmes for both primary and secondary trainee teachers; one teacher has confirmed that her whole school FL curriculum will be adapted [5.11]. The MOOC will continue to run beyond 2021 and three cycles per year are planned. TLiPS built a community of practice around Porter's research principles. Participating teachers were asked to share their examples of practice through Padlet walls. As of July 2020, participants from across the world had shared 245 examples of practice with one another [5.12].

Teachers who engaged with the MOOC opt-in questionnaires have reported changes in learning, understandings and teaching practices:

| As a result of the MOOC, I... | Week 1 233 respondents | Week 2 126 respondents | Week 3 111 respondents |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ..have learned something new | 188 (81%) | 93 (74%) | 96 (87%) |
| ..have developed understandings | 179 (77%) | 94 (75%) | 86 (78%) |
| ..will change my teaching practice | 186 (80%) | 63 (50%) | 92 (83%) |

Respondents also submitted 2,426 comments to open-answer questionnaire items which refer to changes in practice and understanding directly related to Porter's MOOC research content [5.13],

Impact case study (REF3)

for example: *“I would tend to read the book first, but I was interested to see how teachers would introduce the theme and some vocabulary which can then help engage the learners... It has made me think about how I can adapt my plans to have a go at this”, and “I hadn’t really thought before about how important literacy is in helping children to develop their own knowledge independently, e.g. by looking up a word in the dictionary and feeling confident in how to pronounce it, or being interested in tackling a more challenging text on their own. This is a simple thing, so I don’t know how I had missed it, but it is really important!”*

Participant comments from online MOOC activities (steps) were analysed (n=12; 3,011 comments from a total of 49 steps with 17,903 total comments). These show developing understandings about learning processes in FL classrooms and enacted or planned changes in teaching practices. Evidence of impact as changes in practice, understandings and reflection on teacher/pupil learning is summarised as [5.14]:

Total instances of change = 2,982 counts (99% of comments analysed)

Change or development in teacher understanding = 1,755 instances (58% of comments analysed)

Planned or Enacted change in practice = 610 instances (20% of comments analysed)

C) Co-creation of original FL resources through teacher collaboration

Porter and Mitchell’s research has identified that there are limited resources for teachers to engage in the kinds of literacy activities they recommend. SUPL teachers initially reported that they felt slightly uncertain about their confidence in engaging with creative writing (3.00/5.00). They seldom incorporated independent, extended writing into their practice (1.86/5.00). They rarely encouraged reading aloud (2.57/5.00) or used formative assessment (2.57/5.00) [5.15]. To build teacher confidence in these areas, Porter and colleagues (Nelson & Clerc) designed original FL texts with links to other areas of the curriculum such as History (Ancient History), Music (recognising genre) and Science (nature). To Porter’s knowledge, there are no similar commercially available resources. Original phonics resources incorporating spelling and writing activities in French and Spanish were also developed.

The DfE Centre for Excellence in MFL Pedagogy requested SUPL FL phonics resources to inform their training and dissemination sessions with secondary schools. This initiative, funded by the Department for Education, aims to support innovative FL pedagogy to increase FL uptake after age 14 (when FLs become optional in English schools) [5.16]. These FL texts and phonics resources were also disseminated through a SUPL SharePoint site. By October 2019 the site had logged 218 visits over 90 days and had 44 registered users. These resources are now hosted on the www.ripl.uk website so that a global audience can access these pedagogic tools which formed part of the MOOC content. As at 31.12.20, 343 downloads of SUPL resources and 526 downloads of summaries of Porter’s research articles have been recorded [5.17].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

-
- 5.1 Evidence of influencing policy/curricula – extracts from the Primary FL National Curriculum.
 - 5.2 Evidence of attendees at the RiPL Policy Summit: list of attendees.
 - 5.3 Evidence of changes in practices at the RiPL Policy Summit November 2018: feedback data.
 - 5.4 RiPL White Paper, Primary Languages Policy in England – The Way Forward 2019.
 - 5.5 Evidence of participant questionnaire responses from RiPL Policy/Practice November 2019.
 - 5.6 Evidence of RiPL involvement with Oak Online Academy.
 - 5.7 Feedback following SUPL workshops (2017-2019).
 - 5.8 Letter evidence from Liphook Federation.
 - 5.9 Evidence from SUPL National Conference – July 2019.
 - 5.10 MOOC demographic data.
 - 5.11 MOOC feedback from ITE providers and one school.
 - 5.12 Examples of shared practices on Padlet walls in September 2020.
 - 5.13 MOOC off-platform questionnaire responses.
 - 5.14 MOOC on-platform comment analysis data.
 - 5.15 SUPL workshop data teacher initial perceptions of FL practices.
 - 5.16 Email from National Centre for Excellence in Languages Pedagogy – SUPL resources.
 - 5.17 Screenshot of SUPL resources page for MOOC participants on RiPL website.