Early Language Learning: Conditions and Principles of Good Practice

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Slovenia: August, 2008

Thank you for the invitation!

- ELL as a global phenomenon
- Key characteristics of young language-learners
- Large-scale policy development
- Conditions and principles of ELL.

Section 1
A global phenomenon

- Initial policy developments in 1960s
- Resurgence of interest in early 1990s
- Now, China, S Korea, Taiwan, India ……

European developments

- Council of Europe Networks & Seminars
- Council of Europe Portfolio
- EC Action Plan (2001)
- Large number of initiatives across most of Europe
- Two EC-commissioned reviews, plus some excellent individual and group research

Outcomes up to this point?

- Positive attitudes among pupils
- More mixed success in actual attainments in the foreign language
- Some evidence of policy developments slowing down
- Many issues remain to be resolved

The Big Question

- So, why do it?
- What are the reasons for ELL?
    - How convincing or otherwise are they?
- What aims should it serve?
    - Are these aims achievable?
- Is it all worth the expense, the time and the effort?

Section 2
Key characteristics of young learners

- David Singleton's three hypotheses
  - Younger = Better
  - Older = Better
  - Younger = Better in the long run, under certain circumstances
- Naturalistic and instructed contexts
- H. H. Stern
  - Each age brings its own advantages and disadvantages .... Let's avoid false distinctions

Question

- What (if any) advantages do:
  - young beginners have over older beginners?
  - older beginners have over young beginners?

Younger learners: Potential advantages

- Sound system
- Less 'language anxious'
- More time available overall
- Productive links between first and additional languages
- Range of acquisition and learning processes over time, can complement each other
- Positive influence on children's general development: cognitive, linguistic and literacy, emotional, cultural.

Older learners:
Some potential advantages

- Make use of existing conceptual map of the world

- Experienced in discourse, e.g. know how to manage conversations and obtain feedback

- Wider range of strategies for learning, e.g. note-taking; summarising; use of reference materials; searching for underlying pattern

- May have a clearer sense of WHY, WHAT and HOW, to direct their learning

Section 3

- Large-scale policy developments
    - Potential benefits
    - Potential disadvantages

LSPD: Potential benefits

- High status / prestige
- Additional resources
- Collaboration across schools and borders
- Fit into approved, broader educational thinking and policies
- May be associated research and evaluation

LSPD: Potential disadvantages

- May be based on popular but dubious assumptions
- May offer 'quick fix' but supply may dry up as other policy priorities arise, so development may become unsustainable
- May be too 'different' from busy teachers' current practice and thinking, so aims and processes may be distorted to fit existing preconceptions
- May promote an over-standardised model of teaching, implicitly discouraging alternative approaches

Factors and Outcomes

SOCIETAL	PROVISION	PROCESS	INDIVIDUAL	**OUTCOMES**
• Exposure to TL • Business Need	• Time • Intensity	• Teaching • Instruction	• Age • Literacies	**• Plurilingual proficiency**
• Dominance of English	• Information • Innovation	• Learning • Acquisition	• Ethnicity • Prior languages	**• Proficiency in a particular language**
• Treatment by the media	• Place of Ls in the curriculum	• Problem-solving • Networking	• Gender • Prior attainments	**• Examination Attainments**
• Internet • Globalisation / Localisation	• Supply, Training and CPD of teachers	• Communication • Interaction	• Socio-economic background	**• Identity • Sense of self • Transferable skills**
• Political will • Parental Demand	• Teacher clusters and networks	• Assessment • Evaluation	• Attitudes and Motivation	**• Citizenship • Mobility**
• Attitudes to particular languages and communities	• Policies and support (transnational / national / local)	• Planning • Management • Administration	• Personality • Cognitive style • Learning strategy	**• Autonomy • Intercultural competence**
• EU citizenship (e.g. basic right to mobility)	• Infrastructure for continuity across sectors	• Innovation • Development • Research	• Confidence • Anxiety • Self-esteem	**Teachers • Job satisfaction • Career prospects**
• Fast capitalism / elite bilingualism	• Evaluation • Research	• Fund-raising • Profile-raising	• Values • Beliefs	**Schools • Ethos&Reputation • Performance**

Provision: Three models

MLPS/FLES Drip-feed

- Few minutes each day
- Either as 'subject' or as 'embedded'
- Sometimes teachers not very fluent in the AL
- Tends to be the model that is generalised by national policy
- In several cases, very large special funding involved, e.g. for teacher supply and training or development

Intensified

- Various forms of immersion or bilingual education
- Much higher time and intensity
- Learning of subject-matter through the AL
- Teachers fluent in the AL

Awareness

- Sensitisation to languages (local …. international), to language-learning and language-use.

Provision models: Outcomes

MLPS/FLES Drip-feed

- Can promote very favourable attitudes
- Can promote language awareness
- Only limited evidence of development of creative proficiency in the AL
- Much evidence of prefabricated chunks, whether phrases or learnt-by-heart stories
- If 'continuity' into secondary not established, benefits may seem to disappear, e.g.Burstall and other.

Intensified

- Can lead to fluent, confident use of the AL
- Can have no evident loss of subject-knowledge acquired through the AL
- Evidence of natural internal development of a language system (Systemturbulenz)
- But original methodology refined to promote greater control, e.g. by different forms of feedback, including negative evidence, and encouraging learners to monitor and refine their own output.

Section 4: Principles

- What can go wrong?
- Getting it right:
  - Philosophical principles, based on values
  - Principles of EL pedagogy
  - Principles of ELL pedagogy
  - Conditions for successful implementation

What can go wrong?

- The policy-makers may lose their enthusiasm or change direction
- Some teachers may feel that ELL brings threats to other areas of the curriculum which they value
- There may be insufficient time available in which to do the job well, and insufficient resources
- Some teachers may feel that ELL is just one more additional burden
- Some teachers may become anxious if there is a native-speaker or highly fluent speaker available to work with them
- Some teachers may feel they lack the language and cultural proficiency to do the job well
- There may be a lack of teacher supply or teacher professional development
- Some parents may feel the school is teaching the wrong language
- Teachers at secondary school may de-value what has been achieved at primary school

Philosophical principles

- Principle of inclusion
- Principle of equality of treatment
- Principle of linguistic interdependence
- Principle of community participation
- Principle of positive attribution

Principles of EL Pedagogy

- Sound, negotiated planning (both short-term and longer-term)
- Orderly but relaxed atmosphere
- Exploiting key learning points for benefit of whole class
- Questions take account of range of abilities in the class
- Varied but purposeful use of technological aids

Principles of EL Pedagogy

- Careful organisation of group-work
- Embedding of content in children's general learning
- Pupils discuss their work with each other
- Pupils are encouraged to reflect on / monitor their own learning
- Teacher encourages pupils to avoid false, negative attributions

Principles of EL Pedagogy

- Teacher is happy to show herself also as a learner
- Teacher creates an ethos that is supportive but also challenging
- Teacher seeks to give pupils opportunities for expressing their diverse (multiple) intelligence
- Teacher values the range of cultures and social backgrounds represented in the class
- Teachers work as a team, across different year-groups, and link with secondary schools

Principles of ELL Pedagogy

- Creating a languages-friendly environment within school and with parents
- Use of ICT to help young children participate in wider community, interacting with pupils and their teachers in other schools
- Good arrangements within primary schools and with secondary schools, to ensure continuity of learning experience and progression in language and other development

Principles of ELL Pedagogy

- Talking in a fluent, natural, recursive way at or just above the pupils' comprehension level
- Encouraging class to 'notice' particular features of the input – 'form' as well as 'meaning'
- Encouraging development of pupils' metalinguistic knowledge
- Ensuring that pupils have regular access to negative as well as positive feedback about their performance, but in both cases offered in a supportive way

Principles of ELL Pedagogy

- Introduction of reading and writing from an early point
- Encouraging pupils to develop strategies for L, S, R, W
- Encouraging strategies for:
  - handling anxiety
  - developing willingness to communicate
  - self-motivation
- Encouraging pupils to reflect on, to share, to adapt and improve these strategies

Principles of ELL Pedagogy

- Encouraging pupils to use the language out of class/school
- Encouraging pupils to exploit and further develop the language of their home and local culture
- Explicit strategy for transferring concepts about language from first or national language to the foreign language
- Encouraging pupils to use their language spontaneously as well as in prepared chunks

Conditions for generalised success

- Long-term policy planning in order to achieve sustainable development as opposed to short-term 'fixes'
- Providing an adequate supply of well-trained teachers
- Supporting the professional development of teachers
- Maximising the key factors of 'time' and 'intensity' whatever the model that is adopted
- Ensuring continuity of learning experience from the start through primary and secondary education
- An explicit strategy for relating the learning of the target language to:
  - the child's first language
  - the learning of other subject-matter
  - transnational intercultural experiences (both 'real' and 'virtual') which go beyond language itself.

'Virtual' links

- A new additional 'logic' for language learning might arise which is not primarily linguistic in essence.
- Primary schools in different countries develop strong 'virtual' links with each other
  - Students co-operate on joint projects, e.g. social, historical, geographical, economic, artistic, cultural
  - Access each other's teachers and local or virtual communities
  - Communication in two or more languages can be seen as an excellent way of facilitating such projects.

Political will and long-term approach

- In many cases there will be substantial cost implications in meeting these conditions, hence the fundamental importance of securing clear and strong political will and of developing a consensual long-term approach.