

Chapter 3

The Springboard to Languages evaluation project: a summary report

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The Springboard to Languages evaluation project was conducted by Dr Amanda Barton and Joanna Bragg from the University of Manchester in five phases between 2006 and 2011. The aim of the project was to evaluate the effectiveness and success of the Springboard to Languages programme which had been introduced at a small number of primary schools in England. This summary is based on the five individual reports that were produced by Barton and Bragg at the end of each project phase, i.e. at the end of the school years 2006–07, 2007–08, 2008–09, 2009–10, and 2010–11.

1. Aims of the Springboard to Languages programme

The main aim of the Springboard to Languages programme¹ is to develop the language awareness – and, by extension, the language-learning abilities – of primary-school pupils through a suitably designed teaching and learning programme. More specifically, the programme is based on the hypothesis that the teaching and learning of Esperanto in conjunction with targeted language-awareness activities can enhance children's metalinguistic awareness, which, in turn, is expected to facilitate the acquisition of other languages. In addition, the Springboard to Languages programme is aimed at fostering pupils' global and cultural awareness via links between English schools and schools overseas that likewise offer the teaching and learning of Esperanto to their pupils.

The purpose of the evaluation project was to assess to what extent these aims were achieved in selected schools that had implemented the Springboard to Languages programme.

2. Research design of the evaluation project

As indicated above, the evaluation project was carried out over a period of five years. Throughout this period, the focus was on School A on the outskirts of a large city. In the first and fourth year of the project, two further primary schools were involved for purposes of comparison, namely School B in the north of England (phase 1) and School C, also on the outskirts of a large city (phase 4). In large parts, the evaluation was essentially an extended case study.

Methodology

The evaluation project combined quantitative and qualitative methods, with greater emphasis on the latter. The main research instruments were questionnaires and interviews (see below for details). In addition, a limited number of classroom observations were carried out. Results arising from these observations did not make a substantial contribution to the findings presented in the five individual reports, so they are not further referred to in this summary.

Participants

The constitution and size of the participant sample varied between project phases, although it always consisted of primary-school children, and often also included a small number of

¹ See chapter **Error! Reference source not found.** for sample materials and activities.

teachers. The focus was on pupils in Key Stage 2, that is, children in Year 3 (age 7–8), Year 4 (age 8–9), Year 5 (age 9–10), and Year 6 (age 10–11) of primary school. The following table summarises the sampling over the five phases of the evaluation as well as the main instruments used. The child interviewees are typically subsamples drawn from the cohorts completing the questionnaire, with the exception of the Year 6 children in phase 3 and the Year 4 children in phase 5.

<i>School</i>	<i>Children</i>				<i>Teachers</i>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Instrument</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Head teacher</i>	<i>Instrument</i>
Phase 1							
A	74	3/4	Esperanto	questionnaire	5	included	interview
A	6	3/4	Esperanto	interview			
B	20	3–6	Esperanto	both	3	included	interview
Phase 2							
A	33	4	Esperanto	questionnaire	5	included	interview
A	2	4	Esperanto	interview			
A	61	5	French	questionnaire			
A	3	5	French	interview			
Phase 3							
A	28	3	Esperanto	questionnaire	2		interview
A	6	3	Esperanto	interview			
A	23	5	Spanish	questionnaire			
A	2	5	Spanish	interview			
A	3	6	French	interview			
Phase 4							
A	45	4	Esperanto	questionnaire	2		interview
A	6	4	Esperanto	interview			
C	28	4	French	questionnaire	1		interview
C	6	4	French	interview			
Phase 5							
A	12	4	Esperanto	interview			

Variables investigated

The two main instruments, questionnaires and interviews, were used to investigate the same four variables in the children: attitudes, metacognition, metalinguistic awareness, and, in the first two phases of the evaluation, knowledge of the foreign language(s) taught. The questionnaire data revealed an overall picture and allowed for some quantitative analyses to be conducted, whereas the interview data yielded more specific insights into children's knowledge and thoughts, as well as into some of the reasons and emotions informing their ideas. Interviews conducted with the teachers focused on one variable only, i.e. teacher attitudes towards the Springboard programme. Interview data were analysed qualitatively, except for phase 5, where both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted.

Attitudes

Children's attitudes were examined in terms of their enjoyment of language lessons, whether they thought learning a language was fun, whether they felt they had learned a lot, whether they thought they were good at learning languages, whether they believed they needed to know other languages, whether they looked forward to learning other languages, and whether they enjoyed meeting people from other countries. Thus, questions about

attitudes primarily focused on affective components such as enjoyment, confidence, and motivation, as well as on cultural awareness.

Teachers' attitudes were investigated in terms of their views and perceptions of the Springboard to Languages programme, i.e. whether or not they deemed it suitable for the pupils they were teaching, successful in achieving its stated objectives, and well-resourced.

Metacognition

Children's metacognition was examined by asking them about their metalinguistic awareness, that is, whether they were able to spot patterns in languages and/or whether they understood how languages borrow from each other. Thus, children were effectively asked to assess their own metalinguistic abilities.

Metalinguistic awareness

Children's self-reports were complemented by a number of tasks aimed at examining their actual metalinguistic awareness. The tasks included translation tasks involving known and unknown languages, a cognate-identification task involving vocabulary from known and unknown languages, a task requiring the understanding of basic metalinguistic terminology ('adjective'), and a plural-formation task involving nouns from known and unknown languages. Overall, the metalinguistic tasks placed a strong emphasis on accessing unknown languages.

Knowledge of language(s) taught

In the first two phases of the project, the metalinguistic tasks were complemented by a small number of language tasks based on the language(s) the children were actually taught at the time. These tasks mostly focused on simple, discrete items of vocabulary and grammar, and required, for instance, simple translation into English, plural formation, or answering basic reading-comprehension questions.

3. Findings from individual project phases

In what follows, the main findings arising from the five phases of the evaluation project are summarised.

Phase 1

Phase 1 of the evaluation focused on children and teachers who had been involved in the Springboard to Languages programme for one year. In the context of the programme at School A, the children had learned Esperanto as their first foreign language. At School B, the children were learning both Esperanto and French.

Children's attitudes

At School A, children generally displayed quite positive attitudes. Nearly half of the sample reported enjoying their Esperanto lessons, and agreed with the statement that learning a language is fun. Just over half of the sample also felt that they had learned a lot in their Esperanto lessons, and stated that they were looking forward to learning another language in the future. By the same token, over half of the sample believed that they needed to know other languages.

At School B, children's attitudes were broadly similar, except that the pupils at this school were mostly unsure as to whether they had enjoyed their Esperanto lessons. Nonetheless, 60% of the sample stated that they had learned a lot in those lessons.

Children's metacognition

Children's statements about their own metalinguistic awareness were characterised by some uncertainty. Nearly half of the children in each school were unsure as to whether they were able to spot patterns in languages, and nearly half of the children at School A were

likewise unsure as to whether they understood how languages borrow from each other. By contrast, nearly two-thirds of the School B children claimed to understand this. It is worth noting here that the School B sample included older children (age 10–11) than the School A sample.

Children's metalinguistic awareness

With regard to accessing unknown languages via translation, cognate recognition, and similar tasks, most children showed some facility, successfully translating into English a number of content words in foreign-language sentences, identifying pairs of singular and plural nouns in a variety of languages, identifying the adjective in adjective–noun pairings in a variety of languages, matching sentences for meaning in a variety of languages, and identifying cognates. Nevertheless, a number of children did not attempt these tasks; those who did attempt them coped with them relatively well.

It is noteworthy that the children at the two schools performed roughly similarly on these tasks; one might have expected a superior performance from School B pupils, since these children were learning both Esperanto and French, while the School A pupils were learning only Esperanto.

Children's knowledge of language(s) taught

When tested on their knowledge of Esperanto by means of one-word and two-word translation and plural-formation tasks, children at both schools demonstrated a good grasp of the language they were learning, with the large majority of pupils providing correct responses on almost all of the tasks.

Teachers' attitudes

Teachers' views and perceptions of the Springboard to Languages programme were generally very positive, with the teaching and learning resources being commended. The teacher interviewees felt that the programme had been successful in terms of raising pupils' metalinguistic awareness with a view to facilitating positive transfer between languages. Teachers thought that the regularity of Esperanto might help children develop their literacy skills in English. It was also acknowledged that the learning of a regular language such as Esperanto might be particularly valuable for lower-ability children, since it might raise their confidence with regard to language learning more generally.

Teachers at School A reported that pupils' cultural awareness had been enhanced, with children not only developing greater tolerance towards, but also a greater interest in speakers of other languages. This had been facilitated by the exchange of correspondence and photographs with Esperanto-speaking children at partner schools in Germany and Benin.

Phase 2

Phase 2 of the evaluation focused on children and teachers at School A who had taken part in the Springboard to Languages programme in the preceding year. At the time of data collection, the children who had been in Year 3 in phase 1 were now in Year 4 and learning Esperanto for a second year. The children who had been in Year 4 in phase 1 were now in Year 5 and learning French for the first time.

Children's attitudes

The Year 4 children displayed positive attitudes. Around 80% of the sample reported enjoying their Esperanto lessons, and agreed with the statement that learning a language is fun. Moreover, the majority of children were looking forward to learning another language in the future. These results contrast very favourably with the responses given in phase 1. Just under half of the sample felt that they had learned a lot in their Esperanto lessons, and over

half of the sample believed that they needed to know other languages. An overwhelming majority of pupils stated that they enjoyed meeting people from other countries.

The Year 5 children were less positive. Although over half of the sample likewise believed that they needed to know other languages and stated that they enjoyed meeting people from other countries, the majority were not sure whether they enjoyed their French lessons or whether learning a language was fun, and only just over 10% of the cohort were looking forward to learning French in the coming year.

It is suggested by the researchers that the difference in attitudes between the two year groups may have arisen from a difference in the quality of teaching. Compared with the Esperanto teacher, the French teacher was not a language specialist, and had less access to good teaching and learning resources.

Around half of the children in each cohort were not sure whether they were good at learning languages, but more Year 5 than Year 4 children agreed with the statement that they were good at learning languages, thus displaying greater confidence in this respect.

Children's metacognition

Children's statements about their own metalinguistic awareness were still characterised by some uncertainty, as in phase 1. Indeed, Year 4 children were less positive, with greater disagreement with the statement that they understood how languages borrow from each other.

Children's metalinguistic awareness

With regard to accessing unknown languages via translation, cognate recognition, and similar tasks, children in both Year 4 and Year 5 again showed considerable facility, successfully translating into English a number of content words in foreign-language sentences, identifying pairs of singular and plural nouns in a variety of languages, identifying the adjective in adjective–noun pairings in a variety of languages, matching sentences for meaning in a variety of languages, and identifying cognates.

Year 4 children performed marginally better than Year 5 children on several of the tasks drawing on translation and transfer between languages, while Year 5 children outperformed Year 4 children on adjective identification. Overall, children's metalinguistic awareness had improved, compared with phase 1. This was also evident in the smaller proportion of pupils who did not attempt the tasks.

Children's knowledge of language(s) taught

When tested for their knowledge of Esperanto by means of one-word and two-word translation and plural-formation tasks, the Year 4 children demonstrated a good grasp of the language they were learning, as in phase 1. The Year 5 children likewise performed well on a simple reading-comprehension measure, aimed at assessing their knowledge of French.

Teachers' attitudes

Teachers' views and perceptions of the Springboard to Languages programme continued to be positive. The teacher interviewees confirmed that pupils were very enthusiastic in their Esperanto lessons. Teachers continued to believe that the regularity of Esperanto might help develop children's literacy skills in English, and perhaps also their numeracy skills. It was again acknowledged that the learning of a regular language such as Esperanto might be particularly helpful for lower-ability children. However, it was also noted that, once exposed to French, it might be the case that higher-ability children are better able to make use of their knowledge of Esperanto.

Phase 3

Phase 3 of the evaluation focused on children and teachers at School A who had been involved in the Springboard to Languages programme in the preceding year(s). Data were

collected from children in Year 3 who had learned Esperanto for one year in the context of the Springboard programme.

Data were also collected from children in Year 5 and from a small subsample of children in Year 6. At the time of data collection, the children in Year 5 were learning Spanish in their first year after two years of Springboard in Year 3/4 (phase 1) and Year 4 (phase 2). The children in Year 6 were learning French in their second year. They had previously had one year of exposure to Springboard while in Year 3/4 (phase 1), and one year of French while in Year 5 (phase 2).

Children's attitudes

The Year 3 children displayed positive attitudes. More than half of the sample reported enjoying their Esperanto lessons, and agreed with the statement that learning a language is fun. Moreover, the majority of children were looking forward to learning another language in the future. Overall, the Year 3 children's attitudes were less strongly positive than the attitudes shown by the Year 4 children in phase 2, but generally more positive than the attitudes of the Year 3/4 group identified in phase 1. About two-thirds of the sample felt that they had learned a lot in their Esperanto lessons and believed that they needed to know other languages. Half of the pupils stated that they enjoyed meeting people from other countries.

The Year 5 children also exhibited positive attitudes. Three-quarters of the sample reported enjoying their Spanish lessons, and more than half agreed with the statement that learning a language is fun. No fewer than 80% believed that they needed to know other languages. Furthermore, more than half of the sample were looking forward to learning languages in the coming year, and stated that they enjoyed meeting people from other countries. Overall, the attitudes of the Year 5 children contrast positively with the attitudes of the Year 5 children in phase 2.

It is suggested by the researchers that differences in attitudes may again be attributable to differences in the quality of teaching. Unlike the French teacher who taught Year 5 children in phase 2, the Spanish teacher teaching Year 5 children in this phase was a language specialist with extensive subject knowledge and experience. It is suggested that the teacher's expertise and enthusiasm impacted on children's perceptions.

Half of the Year 3 children and a third of the Year 5 children thought that they were good at learning languages, thus displaying greater confidence than the pupils in phase 2. In response to a new question about whether they felt they did well at school, children showed even greater confidence, with more than half of each cohort responding in the affirmative.

Children's metacognition

Year 3 children's statements about their own metalinguistic awareness were once more characterised by some uncertainty, as in the case of the Year 4 cohort in phase 2 and the Year 3/4 cohort in phase 1. Half of the sample was not sure as to whether they understood how languages borrow from each other. The Year 5 children were more positive in this respect, with more than a third of the sample claiming to understand how languages borrow from each other. In accordance with findings in phase 1, it is possible that slightly older children (aged 9–10 in this case) are better able to make metacognitive judgements of this nature.

Children's metalinguistic awareness

With regard to accessing unknown languages via translation, cognate recognition, and similar tasks, children in both Year 3 and Year 5 again showed considerable facility, successfully translating into English a number of content words in foreign language sentences, identifying the adjective in adjective–noun pairings in a variety of languages, matching sentences for meaning in a variety of languages, and identifying cognates.

Although the children in Year 3 were younger and had less experience of learning languages than the Year 5 children, they often performed as well as the older pupils, and on

one task even outperformed the older group, which is indicative of a positive influence of the Springboard to Languages programme.

The Year 6 interviewees were less successful in the translation exercise than children from the other cohorts. It is suggested that their lower-quality experience of learning French in the previous year may have had a lasting negative impact on their metalinguistic abilities.

Teachers' attitudes

In accordance with the trend identified in phases 1 and 2, teachers' views and perceptions of the Springboard to Languages programme continued to be positive. One teacher mentioned again that the regularity of Esperanto may help develop children's literacy and numeracy skills in English. Once more, it was acknowledged that the learning of a regular language such as Esperanto might be particularly helpful for lower-ability children. Another advantage of Esperanto may be its potential for allowing children to be playful and creative with language.

The Springboard programme was taught by non-specialist Esperanto teachers for the first time in the school year that was covered by phase 3 of the evaluation. The teachers' comments on the quality and availability of teaching resources for the programme were very positive. The teachers felt that they were able to select and adapt materials in accordance with their needs, which suggests that they were indeed suitably resourced.

Phase 4

Phase 4 of the evaluation focused on Year 4 children and teachers at two schools, School A and School C. The children at School A were in their second year of the Springboard to Languages programme; they had also participated in Springboard while in Year 3 (phase 3). The children at School C were likewise in their second year of learning languages. In contrast to School A, the pupils at School C had been exposed to three different languages while in Year 3: Latin, Japanese, and German. These languages had been taught as 'tasters' in the context of a language-taster programme. At the time of data collection, the children were learning French.

Children's attitudes

Compared with their responses in the previous year (phase 3), as well as with responses from earlier cohorts on the Springboard to Languages programme at the same school (phase 1 and phase 2), the pupils at School A displayed somewhat less positive attitudes overall. Only a third of the sample reported enjoying their Esperanto lessons and believed that learning a language is fun; the majority of the cohort was unsure about these two points. Around 40% of the sample felt they had learned a lot in their Esperanto lessons, believed that they needed to know other languages, and were looking forward to learning languages in the coming year.

As in previous phases, the researchers suggest that the quality of teaching may be at least partly responsible for this pattern of results. The Year 4 cohort was taught together with Year 3 children who were exposed to Esperanto for the first time. In addition to learning in a large class of mixed age and ability, the teacher interviews suggest that lessons may have been less creative and interactive than in the previous year. The interviews with the children further indicate that personal learning preferences may not have been met in some cases, although it is not possible to generalise these individual comments to the entire cohort.

Cross-cultural contact with Esperanto-speaking children in Hungary and Germany, similar to what was reported in the context of phase 1, allowed for communication with pupils abroad. Perhaps because of this, a large majority of children stated that they enjoyed meeting people from other countries. The response was more positive than in the previous year (phase 3), although it is similar to the response from the pupils at School C. Otherwise, the pupils at School C displayed slightly more positive attitudes than their peers at School A, although

differences are not particularly marked. The only exception is that more than half of the School C cohort believed that they had learned a lot in their French lessons.

Pupils from the two schools also showed broadly similar response patterns in terms of their confidence as (language) learners. About half of each cohort was not sure whether they were good at learning foreign languages, and about two-thirds of each cohort believed that they did well at school more generally. The Year 4 children were thus less confident about their language-learning abilities than they had been in the previous year (phase 3).

Children's metacognition

The School A cohort's statements about their own metalinguistic awareness were more positive than in the previous year, and indeed also more positive than any of the other cohorts' statements in previous years. Just over half of the sample claimed that they understood how languages borrow from each other. The School C children were much less sure in this respect, however, with less than a third responding positively.

Children's metalinguistic awareness

With regard to accessing unknown languages via translation, cognate recognition, and similar tasks, children from both samples again showed considerable facility, successfully translating into English a number of content words in foreign-language sentences, identifying pairs of singular and plural nouns in a variety of languages, identifying the adjective in adjective-noun pairings in a variety of languages, matching sentences for meaning in a variety of languages, and identifying cognates.

On several of the tasks, the School A pupils showed an improvement compared with their performance in the previous year (phase 3). Moreover, the School A pupils occasionally outperformed the School C pupils. This suggests that two years of the Springboard to Languages programme may have been more successful in developing metalinguistic awareness and a readiness to access unfamiliar languages in the children than one year of the language-taster programme plus one year of learning French.

Teachers' attitudes

In accordance with the trend identified in the preceding phases, teachers' views and perceptions of the Springboard to Languages programme continued to be positive. It was again acknowledged that the learning of a regular language such as Esperanto might be particularly helpful for lower-ability children. At School A, the Springboard programme was taught by non-specialist Esperanto teachers for the second year. As in phase 3, teachers' comments on the quality of both resources and support were very positive.

Phase 5

Phase 5 of the evaluation focused on a small group of Year 4 children at School A. At the time of data collection, the children were in their third year of the Springboard to Languages programme.

Children's attitudes

In general, the children displayed positive attitudes, with most interviewees stating that they enjoyed their Esperanto lessons and that learning a language is fun. Similar to the Year 4 cohort from School A in the previous year (phase 4), no more than a third of the interviewees felt that they had learned a lot in their Esperanto lessons. By contrast, nearly all the children interviewed were looking forward to learning languages in the coming year, and stated that they enjoyed meeting people from other countries. Reflecting the relative lack of confidence of the cohort in the previous year (phase 4), only one-third of the interviewees felt that they were good at learning foreign languages.

Children's metacognition

The interviewees' responses to the question of whether they understood how languages borrow from each other broadly reflected the positive pattern of results obtained from the School A cohort in the previous year (phase 4).

Children's metalinguistic awareness

With regard to accessing unknown languages via translation, cognate recognition, and similar tasks, the children interviewed showed good facility, successfully translating into English a number of content words in foreign-language sentences, identifying pairs of singular and plural nouns in a variety of languages, identifying the adjective in adjective–noun pairings in a variety of languages, matching sentences for meaning in a variety of languages, and identifying cognates. Overall, their performance was similar to or better than the mean performance of School A children in previous years who had participated in the Springboard programme.

However, it is worth bearing in mind that, unlike the children in previous years, the interviewees did not complete the tasks in questionnaire format, so any superiority in performance could be attributable to the fact that the questions were read out by the interviewer, and that the tasks were completed in a one-to-one situation.

4. Summary of main findings

Summarising the main findings arising from the five-year evaluation project, it appears that, overall, the Springboard to Languages programme has achieved its main aims of enhancing primary-school children's metalinguistic awareness as well as fostering some cross-cultural awareness.

With regard to metalinguistic awareness, the pupils who were assessed throughout the five phases showed, on average, considerable facility when confronted with metalinguistic tasks requiring them to access unknown languages or to transfer knowledge between languages. Tasks targeting these skills included translation from different languages into English at word and sentence level, the identification of cognates in different languages, the matching of pairs of sentences in different languages for meaning, the identification of singular and plural nouns in different languages, and the identification of the adjective in adjective–noun pairings in different languages.

When comparison groups were available, it was found that children who were participating in the Springboard to Languages programme often performed as well as – and on occasion even outperformed – peers who were older, had more experience of learning languages, or had been exposed to a language-taster programme. This finding suggests that Springboard was successful in raising pupils' metalinguistic awareness, although it should be borne in mind that any comparisons with other groups of children must be interpreted with caution, since variables such as children's general ability, their home background, or the specific characteristics of the teaching context were not controlled for. It should also be acknowledged that the research design used does not allow for conclusions as to whether the teaching and learning of a language other than Esperanto, in conjunction with targeted language awareness activities, would have led to similar results.

In respect of the (limited) information available on children's cross-cultural awareness, it appears that pupils generally developed a positive attitude towards speakers of other languages, especially when the Springboard to Languages programme was combined with activities such as correspondence or exchanges with pupils in primary schools abroad. Children generally believed that they needed to know other languages, and often reported that they enjoyed meeting people from other countries.

With regard to children's attitudes more generally, an overall positive picture emerged over the five phases of the evaluation. More often than not, a majority of the children who

had experienced the Springboard programme reported enjoyment of their language lessons, thought that learning a language was fun, and looked forward to learning other languages.

It is noteworthy, however, that there was some fluctuation in attitudes in evidence, both for Springboard cohorts and pupils learning other languages. On occasion, a minority of pupils had positive attitudes, with a majority opting for a 'not sure' response instead. This was particularly the case with respect to the question of whether they felt they had learned a lot in their language lessons. Reasons for this fluctuation in attitudes are not immediately apparent, although the researchers suggest that the quality of teaching and the quality of learning resources had an important role to play, especially in the cohorts learning languages other than Esperanto.

Questions relying on children's metacognition – i.e. questions which effectively asked pupils to assess their own metalinguistic awareness – often resulted in uncertainty, especially in the first three phases, where it appeared that slightly older children (age 10) might be better able to make the required judgements. Nevertheless, the responses from the Springboard cohorts in the last two phases, though given by younger children (age 8–9), were generally more positive. There are no obvious reasons for this pattern of results.

Children's knowledge of the language(s) taught was only assessed in the first two phases, and to a very limited extent. On average, pupils performed well on the tasks they were given. However, bearing in mind the research design of the evaluation project, it is not possible to say whether participation in the Springboard to Languages programme had any influence on pupils' performance.

The views and perceptions of teachers who were involved in the Springboard to Languages programme, or (as head teachers) had sanctioned its implementation, were generally encouragingly positive. Overall, the teachers interviewed felt that the programme was fulfilling its aims. They believed that the regularity of Esperanto helped with the development of children's literacy and even numeracy skills; they had the impression that lower-ability children in particular might benefit from the learning of a regular language such as Esperanto; and they praised the quality of the teaching and learning resources as well as the support available to them.

It is worth noting that non-specialist language teachers coped well with teaching the Springboard to Languages programme. The programme is intended to be usable by non-specialist language teachers, whose positive comments indicate that the teaching and learning materials provided enabled them to deliver Springboard lessons with confidence.