

'Progression' in early language learning: a one language vs. a multilingual model

Ofsted guidelines: 2019: Key phrases

- *Progression is an alteration in long term memory: knowing more and remembering more*
- *Progress should not be defined by meeting standards or hitting the next data point.*
- *If pupils learn within a well-sequenced, well-constructed curriculum, they are making progress.*
- *When new knowledge and existing knowledge connect in pupils' minds, this gives rise to understanding*

Progression concepts in language learning

Complexity: Looking back at the excellent 2005 Primary Languages Framework coupled with the 'levels' of the Asset Languages Ladder, linked to the Common European Framework levels, still used in the EU, progression in early language learning was chiefly expressed as moving from: **sound to word, to phrase, to sentence** and then to increasingly longer texts. Such progression could be assessed in four areas: Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing and could be summarised under the title of Complexity.

Increasing complexity remains a very valid aspect of language learning progression and fulfils several of Ofsted's criteria (above), requiring alteration in long term memory and the connection of past and new knowledge. The programmes mentioned above were/are also well constructed and sequenced and thus good progress could be made working within their frameworks. Such programmes continue to influence many of the published resources for Primary Languages

Understanding: As Ofsted describes, understanding arises from making connections between existing and new knowledge and this skill is widely required to make progress in languages (few connections = frequent forgetting!) Connections can be linked back to English or other mother tongue languages both in vocabulary and grammar. Connections can be within language families eg French and Spanish: *blanc/blanco* English/German: *house/Haus*. Understanding is also important in recognising memory strategies to support 'alterations in long term memory': frequent repetition, mnemonics, word lists, rhyming words, cognates, dictionary use. Understanding (empathy) is also crucial for appropriate language use in culturally specific contexts.

Confidence: Successful language learning relies on more than mastering and understanding a complex code. Language is a communication tool and, in order to communicate successfully, the language learner must demonstrate increasing confidence in their memory, their vocabulary and their capacity to communicate either orally or through script.

A traditional one language for four years approach prioritises the **Complexity** aspect of progression working towards increased chunks of language. This approach would be at home in a **knowledge-rich** curriculum delivered by skilled linguists in this one language. Often there is less emphasis on comparison back to English with fewer opportunities to make connections and use knowledge and strategies across wider languages.

A multilingual model, with strong links back to English (maximising non-specialist teacher skills), gives greater opportunities to show progressive **Understanding** and **Confidence**, as languages change, requiring multiple transferable skills and strategies. A multilingual model will provide fewer (but not insignificant) opportunities for longer, more complex utterances in a single language. This model would seem to fit within a **knowledge-engaged** or **skills-led** curriculum

Which model? In deciding which model to follow, KS2 management teams will need to look at curriculum and community priorities as well as staff skills. KS3 transition is also of high priority. If a high school can guarantee to build on the high level of progression made in one language then that can be an excellent approach. However if a high school is receiving a great variety of language models, a primary school will be serving pupils very well by following a rigorous, well sequenced and progressive multilingual programme, laying strong foundations for KS3-5. The way the curriculum is structured and the sequenced in a multilingual approach is in fact the progression model.