

**Continuity in Learning Languages :  
Pooling the Expertise<sup>1</sup>**

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**1 Introduction**

Blind Bertie and Moaning Myrtle would have realised that there was something in the pipeline about which to be apprehensive back in the late 1970s. It had been noticed that pre-pubescent children could also learn languages.

So it was decided to introduce the learning of languages to primary schools in a far more widespread manner than hitherto experienced in Australia. Parseltongue may not have been among the language choices, but some of the languages were equally unknown to some educators of the time. The decision was strategic. As the nation arrived at a welcome consciousness, the rampant racism of the previous decades was under siege. Begun well before by Gyorgy Smolicz - who in 2002 won the International Linguapax Award for his accomplishments - and others, action against assimilationist philosophy, policy and practice was on the agenda. The languages chosen would be those of (recently arrived) immigrants (or their children and grandchildren). Thus, it was these youngsters who, for the first time, had the opportunity to learn their languages in mainstream primary schools. The choice was also political in another sense : by introducing these languages, dubbed "community languages", it was intended to place political, parental and community pressure on the languages traditionally taught in the secondary sector : French, German and Latin. The campaign was generally effective.

Continuity in language learning was not yet a major issue. The first battle to be won was that of a change in language choice offered by a secondary school confronted by (the parents of) a range of learners having had prior learning in a different language. Once the desired choice of language had occurred in the secondary school, continuity in learning could be addressed.

It is for the above (and other) reasons that transition or continuity in language learning from primary to secondary schooling did not become an issue for action until the early 1980s. This also raises the question of a definition of continuity, a term used variously. A simplistic view is the continuity of learning the same language. A deeper interpretation is pragmatic continuity in the strategies used and the content covered in learning a language through successive levels of schooling, especially ensuring fluid transition across potential stages of dislocation, such as the primary/secondary interface<sup>2</sup>. It is these aspects that I wish to cover - not the staffing issue of continuity of teachers, although this has become critical to the challenge (Cunningham 2003; Parsons 2003:12; Tolbert 2003:28; Steigler-Peters et al. 2003:32. 36). If the language learned at the primary level is not available to the student upon commencing at the secondary level, the notion of continuity in learning a specific language becomes redundant. On the other hand, continuity is also an issue at any "critical juncture point" (Norris 1999:98), which may include divisions between Years 10 and 11 (ie between the precinct of Frameworks and VCE, or

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on the article, "Twenty Years of Transition with Not Much Continuity", which appeared in *Babel*, 38:3, 2004, pp16-23, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Scarino (2003:4) identifies transition as "a matter of promoting continuity in learning". For Hill (2003:21), "continuity in learning" implies continuity in terms of teaching method, aims, and content". For Reddan (1995:4), "the term "transition" refers to the articulation between primary and secondary schooling. In the case of LOTE, transition issues include the continuity of the study of a LOTE, the methodology and the resources used from primary to secondary school." Steigler-Peters et al. (2003:31) use the term 'transition' to refer to the transfer from primary to secondary schooling, but elsewhere the authors refer to "continuous and sequenced language learning pathways" (p 31), which I believe to be more informative.

equivalent), between the Lower, Middle and Later Years of Schooling, at the secondary/tertiary interface, and so on. In my daughters' primary school, the language program is in the hands of interns, recycled annually (at best), leading to a "new start" in the same language at least every year. For them, continuity is at least an annual concern.

## 2 Early Developments

As a newly-appointed (part-time) regional consultant for languages, I may have been the first to act. Some steps taken were relevant then and still are to:

- organise meetings of primary and secondary teachers of languages within a network (cluster, district, etc)
- create networks of such groups to ensure ongoing cooperation and collaboration - one such network created in Melbourne in 1983 continues to meet 20 years later and has spawned several others
- encourage all to talk with each other and plan longer term for the successful learning by their students across the primary/secondary interface
- invite these groups to identify successful strategies for their students
- share any findings more widely with others through publications, workshops and conference sessions

The synthesis of the collective input garnered through the above steps led to the publication of what appears to be the seminal article on the topic in Australia (Cunningham 1986b). This was complemented by a description paper outlining the steps and strategies taken to establish a transitional bilingual program at Bayswater High School in Victoria (Cunningham 1986a), and the results of a survey of a cluster of schools in Sydney (Langdon 1986). This paper documented issues, but solutions were less a part of the purview. During the decade, a series of policy documents appeared nationally and in states. Some of these devoted peripheral attention to the challenge of continuity.

In the seminal paper, the main innovation was that I concentrated my attention around the primary/secondary interface - in Australia it is the Year 6-7 linkage - making proposals which descend to the first (or early) years of schooling or ascend to the final (or later) years of schooling, culminating in Year 12. The Year 1-12 curriculum does not necessarily have to start with Year 1 conceptually or be determined by final examination demands.

Commencing with a rationale, I suggested the following (modified) principles:

- 1 The needs of students, who have learned a language other than English in the P-6 area, should be seriously considered at Year 7 level and beyond
- 2 The degree of consideration should be proportional to the amount of time the student has spent learning the language other than English) including both the number of years and the amount of time in a given year)
- 3 Planning with the relevant secondary school should begin at least twelve months before the student reaches Year 7
- 4 The ability to accommodate the needs of such students should depend on their number
- 5 Concrete and effective liaison should take place between the secondary school and its feeder school(s) to facilitate fluid transition
- 6 To effect more informed transition, Year 6 to Year 7 "Transition Cards" should include details of the student's experience with a language other than English either at home or in school
- 7 The primary and secondary teachers should liaise closely, so that the content and level of the language learned by the student can be built upon at Year 7 level and beyond
- 8 As far as possible, students having had previous experience in a language other than English should be grouped together at Year 7 level for classes involved with the learning of the language
- 9 It is probably inadvisable that this group form a separate class for learning in all curriculum areas

- 10 If the instructor is not linguistically competent, any attempt at transition is likely to be ineffectual
  - 11 The development of any transitional program should involve the cooperation of students, parents, teachers and the school council (and community)
  - 12 Monitoring the effectiveness of the program, in terms of linguistic awareness and gains, as well as social and cognitive development, should be carried out
- (Cunningham 1986b:15)

I sought solutions. Models were in place or followed the publication of my earlier paper (Cunningham 1986b:15-17; Cunningham 1987:9-10).

1 *Bayswater High School example:* Following a successful submission, two supernumerary (or above establishment) teachers were in position to teach transitional bilingual programs in Italian (Year 7) and German (Years 7-8). Characteristics of this program included:

- students, who had previous learning in German or Italian at Bayswater South and Bayswater West Primary Schools, had six 49-minute lessons of instruction in the target language in advanced language, history, and geography
- all lessons were conducted in the target language
- there was close liaison and cooperation between the Italian and German teachers and their counterparts in the local feeder schools
- the progress of the students was closely monitored by a Steering Committee involving: primary and secondary language teachers; academics from universities; the principal; level and language coordinators; the teacher union; school council; parents; students; and the regional consultant as convener
- the students followed the same syllabus in history and geography as other Year 7 (or 8) students; thus, they did not suffer in these curricular areas
- there was a clearly outlined job profile for the teachers, including: project description; duties; rationale; aims and objectives; time allocation; course content; and teaching methods
- since this was an innovative program, there was time allocation for: materials development (12 periods); preparation (8 periods); and liaison with the primary school teacher(s) (3 periods)

2 *Twin-School Supernumerary for Years 5-8:* With the appointment of a supernumerary teacher, schools were able to introduce a transitional program across a local secondary school and a selected feeder school. This placed the emphasis on the Year 6-7 linkage. The teacher would concentrate on introducing a language, possibly bilingually, at the Year 5 level. This program was expanded the following year into Year 6, then into the secondary school the following year.

Close liaison with the local secondary school over the two initial years ensured effective transition into the Year 7 period, then Year 8. At the outset, a great deal of the time allocation would be devoted to materials development, but this would diminish marginally in the second year. Depending upon the number of hours taught, there could be a need to have a second teacher, or aide, as the program proceeded into the secondary level. An additional advantage of having one teacher initially is that she or he would be totally aware of what areas had been covered, and of the state of progress of the learners.

3 *School Cluster Supernumerary Team:* This proposal was a more ambitious version of the previous one. The concentration was at the Year 5-6 level by a team of two or three supernumeraries appointed to develop a program for several feeder schools and the local secondary school. Close liaison took place with the secondary school to effect forward planning and facilitate transition into Year 7 in the second or third year of the program. At the same time, the program could be developed lower down, progressively through to Year 1. Again, the transitional link from year 6 to Year 7 was emphasised initially, leading to an expansion of the program across the Year 1-12 continuum, but from Year 6 down to Year 1, and Year 7 up to Year 12.

4 *Extension of the Brunswick East High School Program:* This was an ambitious undertaking where bilingual and/or language programs were introduced in Italian, Greek, Arabic and Turkish.

5 *Secondary School Down:* Although the viability of some language programs in secondary schools is in question, other institutions consistently maintain excellent programs. Such programs were identified before suggesting to principals, parents and communities of local feeder schools that they consider introducing a program in this language, and decide to employ a supernumerary teacher. By adopting such an approach, the secondary program was supported, enhanced, and even advanced.

The above five models, whether based on existing situations or contemplating ambitious proposals, depended upon the availability of supernumerary teachers. This situation disappeared in Victorian schools in the 1990s, but management decisions at the school level could still include the budgetary allocation and employment of a dedicated teacher (to replace those supernumerary teachers referred to above).

The proposals that follow are, I believe, more practical and present themselves as more feasible. They can be accommodated in most cases within current establishment conditions, or could be considered under a special needs component.

6 *Year 7 -The Homogeneous Class:* If the language learned by students in primary schools is the same as that taught at the local secondary school, then it is possible to group the students according to their language (experience) background to form a separate class, or classes. This group would be taught at a more advanced level in the language, as well as being taught another subject or subjects in the target language, depending upon the teaching methods of the instructor concerned. Such an approach could be continued beyond Year 7.

7 *Year 7 - The Split Class:* This is an advantageous improvisation of the preceding model where the same prerequisites apply. In this case, the students involved in the advanced language class would be distributed across other classes when not in sessions involved with the target language.

This would require timetabling considerations, as these classes would need to be scheduled for language sessions at the same time. The students would come together in the one class for advanced language, while the balance of these classes would be taught the same language at a lower level, or another language, in another room. (This concept is similar to that adopted for elective classes which usually begin at the middle secondary school levels.) If other subjects were to be taught in the target language in a bilingual approach, this would be more difficult, as other subject areas would have to be timetabled simultaneously. As with "Model 6", such an approach could be continued beyond Year 7.

8 *The Mobile Secondary Teacher:* As has occurred in some cases, the teacher of languages can liaise with, and visit, a local primary school where the same language is taught. The reasons could be manifold: class observation; linguistic practice; educational awareness; materials and techniques comparison; general discussion; willing contact, etc. Whatever the case, such liaison is valuable in fostering and perpetuating the possibilities of Year 6-7 transition. Furthermore, the secondary teacher could team-teach with his/her primary counterpart, or teach the students alone. In this way, Year 6 students in particular would be familiar with their teacher of the following year in secondary school. This could attenuate any psychological fears in students in coping with transition. Such a model inevitably depends upon the goodwill, generosity and preparedness of the secondary teacher to initiate or accept such a possibility.

9 *The Mobile Primary Teacher:* This is, in effect, the reverse of the preceding model. The primary teacher would spend time in the secondary classroom, teaching (many of the) students she/he had instructed the previous year. The same individual conditions would apply. Given the teaching requirements of the teachers in primary schools, finding the time was difficult.

However, it is a greater possibility for those who are not full-time. For the students, the retrospective link with a teacher they knew is also beneficial. (Such contact across all curricular areas could also enhance the psychological aspects of the students' coping with proceeding to secondary school).

All models were successful to a certain degree but staffing issues became the biggest obstacle over time. All models demanded that languages be identified as a priority, a situation which didn't always continue (eg Bayswater HS), or that additional resources be allocated for supernumerary positions. This, also, did not endure; nor did the enthusiasm of some languages teachers, compelled to give more and more of themselves for longer periods of time.

A year later, further strategies had been identified and were included in a brief article (Cunningham 1987:9-10):

1 *Capitalising upon Modern Technology*: Technological advances rendered soluble the dilemma of the (geographically) isolated small language class or individual, where an alternative to correspondence was sought. The students remained in their place of learning but were "teleported into a class" by one or more vehicles of evolving media: satellite, DUCT, computer, video, telephone, two-way radio, etc. Here, we are talking about distance education solutions being applied to more localised learners who, by their advanced linguistic ability, make of themselves isolated learners. However, it should be stressed that this suggestion should not replace the teacher allocation (for a significant number of students).

2 *The Teacher Aide*: An additional resource in schools is the ethnic teacher aide; she or he can be an invaluable asset to any language program, co-tenant of the classroom with the qualified teacher, taking small groups of students for advanced language work, or helping those who need additional practice. Provided none of the guidelines governing teacher aide allocation were violated, this resource offers potential for team teaching, especially in heterogenous classes. The initial onus on the teacher would be to prepare a watertight submission to obtain an ethnic teacher aide, then capitalise fully upon her/his presence.

3 *The Parent Aide*: The school community continues to be a realm of untapped potential, although various education departments have made significant inroads in the past decades. Often parents are approached to help teachers in the primary classroom, supervising or promulgating reading schemes, for example. Why not capitalise upon this obvious resource for the secondary classroom where the parent, or other member of the community, could provide native language expertise for students who are behind, or ahead of, others? As a result, students of various levels could progress at their own rate. For the option, the teacher would be the one to initiate the entry of the school community into the classroom.

Further models present themselves as we focus upon the learner . . .

4 *Individualised Programs*: Individualisation, a bandwagon of the seventies, was viewed as the panacea for large, heterogenous classes. Perhaps we are confronted by an even greater degree of linguistic disparity now than before - so individualised programs could supply some answers to an increasingly vexed problem. While not the messianic panacea, it is an alternative.

5 *Graded Levels of Achievement*: The negotiation of activities, goals and levels between student, teacher (and parent?), received some justifiable airplay in the past. Such an approach could provide us with answers, without the onus of establishing individualised learning programs. Perhaps none of the preceding possibilities provides insights or inspiration to solve the dilemma of the linguistically proficient languages learner embarking upon the secondary journey . . . Nevertheless, there remain means of improvisation where the learner continues to be "itinerant".

6 *The Vertical (Modular Grouping) System*: While the effects of the VMG system have been found to be detrimental to some languages programs, it appeared (on the surface) to be a boon for the

transitory languages learner. If the vertical system embraced Years 7-10, Year 7 students could participate in modules above their natural age - but perhaps still below their linguistic level<sup>3</sup>. However, it would be an improvement on being placed with total beginners, to be forgotten in the corner . . .

*7 Timetabling Innovations:* Previously, I signalled possibilities at the Year 7 level. . . But why be myopic? Depending upon the level of the entering students, they could be timetabled simultaneously for language classes with Year 8 - so some or all of Year 7-8 language classes were parallel - to allow for lateral or vertical flux. A severe restraint upon such an option would be sufficient staffing, not to mention a sympathetic timetabler!

*8 Leap-frogging:* This harebrained suggestion will meet with immediate opposition. For decades (or is it centuries?), students have been locked in to educational levels according to their "biological clocks": at a certain age, they're likely to be in a specific grade or level . . . Is it feasible to parry tradition, bypass the norm, and have students from Year 6 leap straight into Year 10 or Year 11 language programs? . . . Social or educational factors could minimise the potential of the dream, but "administrivia" would be a feeble reason to rule it out.

*9 Cross-age Tutoring:* Here, we probably journey outside scheduled class hours. Cross-age tutoring is a prevalent phenomenon, and could be utilised to the mutual benefit of junior and senior students, not only for social and educational factors, but also for linguistic expertise. It is likely that a senior student will have superior written skills, with the oral/aural domain possibly requiring additional practice. Most primary programs are fundamentally oral; thus, the Year 7 student, a beneficiary of up to seven years of (primarily oral) language experience could offer this service to the senior student.

Despite a reduction in personnel and other resources in the aftermath of a period of economic rationalism, some of these models were implemented and remain.

This early work and, no doubt, the emerging view that continuity was a major issue for the learning of languages led to the insightful decision to appoint a project officer to map and explore the situation in Victoria. The analysis of the issues by Barbara Imberger in 1987 and the resultant report (Imberger 1988) was, to my knowledge, the most considerable exploration of the area in Australia. Using survey responses as the informative framework, Imberger not only identified strategies and facilitating forces supportive of continuity - and blocking forces - but she drafted a practical action plan to resolve issues at the local level (Imberger 1988:41-46). The relevance and efficacy of this action plan has lasted the years and remains another excellent starting point.

### **3 Later Developments : the 1990s**

Winning the battle against being subsumed within "language", LOTE (a deficit description to separate languages from English) had emerged as one of the nine frameworks areas in the 1980s. Retaining its integrity (as a Frameworks or Key Learning Area) within the curriculum in the 1990s, languages remained a study for focus . . . also in the context of continuity.

#### **3.1 Languages**

Invited to conduct three workshops on continuity at the National German Teachers' Conference in Adelaide in 1992, I returned to the challenge. In these workshops I focussed on:

- curriculum
- methodology
- issues and strategies

A synthesis of the impact and feedback in these sessions appeared as "Continuity in LOTE Curriculum and Methodology", in the *Language Learning Journal* of the Association for

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<sup>3</sup> It is not suggested here that schools should ignorantly adopt VMG systems. Careful investigation and thorough preparation would be necessary, and the solution to one problem could spawn many others.

Language Learning in the UK (Cunningham 1994). Drawing extensively upon the findings of previous studies (mentioned above), I continued to pursue the quest for successful strategies and distilled some of the critical points to five key areas :

- communication
- cooperation
- collaboration
- curriculum
- classroom methodology

Further brief sorties on the topic followed (Cunningham 1995a; 1995b; Favrin 1995).

A personal perception back in the 1980s was that “transition at the primary/post-primary interface is largely dismissed” (Cunningham 1986b: 13). A decade later, the view had not ameliorated but had been aggravated :

*In 1995, the challenge is far more daunting. This is so, I believe, for various reasons. Among others, these include :*

- *the political impetus at the national and state levels behind teaching a LOTE to young learners from at least Year 3*
- *the introduction of LOTE into the primary classroom at an exponential rate*
- *the rapidity with which this objective is being met*
- *the relative paucity of adequately trained and linguistically competent LOTE practitioners for the primary sector*
- *the use of modern technologies (eg Interactive Satellite Television) to provide ( . . . ) LOTE programs to students otherwise unable to access LOTE*
- *the insufficient level of preparation and activity conducted over the last decade to accommodate adequately the arrival of thousands of students in the secondary sector who have already enjoyed a range (in language, duration and concentration) of LOTE programs and/or learning experiences*  
(Cunningham 1995b: 3)

Unfortunately, this view is corroborated by the conclusions of a later study by Lindy Norris : “the evidence for this report suggests that attempts to provide second language learning pathways through continuous study from primary through to secondary education and beyond have been largely unsuccessful” (Norris 1999:9)<sup>4</sup>.

But again, “this is not to deny the excellent work that has taken place, much of it done at the local level where schools, administrators and teachers have worked extremely hard to address the needs of LOTE students which is, after all, where the focus must lie. Much of this remains undocumented and inaccessible to the wider LOTE educational community” (Cunningham 1995a: 11; 1995b: 3). The recent issue of *Babel* (38:1) is an important step in the process to make available nationally what has been hitherto local (and possibly unknown).

An example of this excellent work was coordinated by Michael Clyne. Building upon *An Early Start : Second Language at Primary School* (Clyne 1986), he published the findings of extensive research as *Developing Second Language From Primary School : Models and Outcomes* (Clyne et al. 1995). In it, he focuses on student learning and devotes a section to “continuity/transition” and concludes that : “Even in higher years, mixing of groups had the effect of keeping back the ex-primary students and of discouraging the secondary beginners to such an extent that they did not continue with the language. It is therefore recommended that, as a matter of priority, every effort be taken to teach beginners and students with substantial primary school background in the language in separate classes for at least three years and, in any case, design a program catering for the ex-primary children. Such a program should utilise the competence in receptive skills and communicative competence but introduce a strong analytic component” (Clyne et al. 1995:165).

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See also Norris 1999:92ff.

Concurrently, we saw the publication of *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* (Rudd 1994). While not a policy, it drove policy and language choice as significant funds were attached for the introduction and teaching of Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean. This rendered the languages scene even more complex, as some existing (and excellent) programs disappeared in preference for one or more of these four languages.

### 3.2 The Curriculum

While the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages, the retention of languages as a "separate" stream within the curriculum smorgasbord brings with it some pitfalls. One of these is that we, as educators of languages, can fall into the trap of believing our challenges are ours alone. While the teaching and learning of languages harbour particular challenges not experienced by teachers of other areas of the curriculum, identifying successful strategies for continuity in learning is not one of them. Every area of the curriculum taught across the primary/secondary threshold is similarly challenged<sup>5</sup>. Witness the focus of *Idiom*, journal of the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) in 1995: "Transition" (VATE 1995).

The message is clear : while we must retain the integrity of our curriculum area, we can work with colleagues across the curriculum (in secondary schools) to share, devise and effect successful strategies for continuous learning. Early and current work on integrating the curriculum can also provide answers. I don't believe we have benefited, in general, as much as we could from the expertise surrounding us in teachers of other curriculum areas, so this is another avenue to be explored.

Some of us vividly recall the action taken to develop a national curriculum in Australia in the early 1990s. We received and scribbled on successive versions of "statements", "profiles" and "course advice". The attempt failed for a number of reasons - an impossible timeline, hastily prepared drafts and later versions as whole as Gouda cheese<sup>6</sup>, the reluctance of educators in states to resile from their jealously guarded positions, etc - but a positive legacy was the notion of profiling (student learning) which enabled us then, and still does, to track student progress longitudinally . . . and from primary to secondary education.

### 3.3 The National Scene

Continuity in learning across the curriculum from primary to secondary schooling has, I believe, been problematic since the establishment of educational institutions which arbitrarily demarcate learning around the age of eleven. Why not eight or fourteen? Outside and in schools, there is a range of issues which confront the youth coping with puberty : personal, social, hormonal, . . .

The realisation of the obvious led to a focus on "the middle years of schooling" in the 1990s, as the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) produced a series of project papers (Schools Council 1992, 1993a, 1993b). This led to a major shift of focus for education, a focus on the very years of schooling where continuity has been a challenge.

## 4 Recent Developments : 2000 and Beyond

### 4.1 Languages

As the preceding millennium receded into the past, new players - too few! - emerged in the field of continuity in language learning. The main contributor of late, however, is Sue Tolbert. She has devoted considerable time to the challenge, conducting research, producing reports (Tolbert 2000a; 2000c), presenting papers (Tolbert 2000b), while making her findings available on the web ([www.discover.tased.edu.au/lote/teaching/transition.htm](http://www.discover.tased.edu.au/lote/teaching/transition.htm)). Another is Maria Puddu, who continued the work of her colleagues, Joe Favrin and Silvana Zennaro, and published an excellent article, "Transition : Strategies for Primary and Secondary Teachers". This article

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<sup>5</sup> See also Talbot 2003:26.

<sup>6</sup> The authors of the successive drafts should not be held accountable for this, as the "consultative" and drafting process was not allocated sufficient time for the task to succeed.

(Puddu 2001) produced what its title promised and was reprinted elsewhere. Despite the fact that her paper comes a generation after my initial work in the field, there are similarities between her findings and mine. The significant difference is, of course, in the use of evolving technologies to assist the process:

*Across-school activities suggested by teachers include:*

- *email correspondence across schools*
- *correspondence with use of videotapes*
- *LOTE camps, designed to immerse students in the language while engaging in cultural activities*
- *joint excursions at the end of a LOTE transition unit*
- *interviews involving students across different levels, e.g. Year 10 students interviewing Year 6 students about a topic of interest*
- *cultural days involving students in Years 6 and 7*
- *writing and performing plays to younger students*
- *concert nights, including students' performances of plays in the LOTE*
- *group activities with a clear language focus*
- *peer assessment*

(Puddu 2001:17)

The Languages Continuity Initiative (LCI) of the DET of NSW, as detailed by Steigler-Peters et al. (2003), is a heartening move for a system to resource investigation of the issue, just as Imberger's 1987 year-long study. The recent issue of *Babel*, which I found to be excellent, would hopefully become a milestone in discovery and revelation.

To prepare for this paper, I canvassed widely at the national level. Some comments received are less than positive :

- "the absence of (some serious research in the area) may mean there is NO suitable answer??? What a devastating thought!"
- continuity "is my greatest nightmare, as it has been for our local authorities ever since the LOTE initiative got started. I am still looking for a good model to emulate myself!"
- "there was overwhelming evidence that the 'free for all' situation was causing (and still is) an impossible situation for language learning with no continuity from primary to secondary schools, little if any control of quality, impossible staffing situations, impossible staff continuity situations, and so on"
- "I genuinely feel that the teaching of LOTE in primary is largely counter-productive to secondary student retention and to enhancement of the public perception of languages teaching"
- "the thing is, most of my students want to go on with LOTE (. . .) but too many then find that the high school they go to revisits baby content in their LOTE and kills their interest"
- and from Germany, "it is not the transition as such which causes problems, but the negligence on the part of secondary teachers to accept and honour what has been done prior to their own teaching" . . .

Some personal comments! The focus of this paper and others is to identify strategies or indicate where they can be found, thus answering the first two comments above. I was and am an avid supporter of linguistic diversity and multiculturalism, so have difficulty in accepting or promoting a reduction in the choices available. The solution here lies in teacher supply, a challenge which has been allowed to become a problem, as a former Federal Minister for Education was often quoted as saying there would be no teacher shortage in his time. The Federal view has changed remarkably in a couple of years, now accepting reality. Further, I don't believe that the teaching of languages is counter-productive if the needs of students are addressed effectively. On the following points, I said many years ago that this situation is untenable and should not occur:

(. . .) students with significant past experience in a language other than English (are) being placed in a group with total beginners. In some cases such students are told to be quiet and wait until the other students catch up! This unfortunate eventuality is already occurring and demands immediate attention.

(Cunningham 1986b:14)

It is disappointing that we still encounter it (Parsons 2003:12; Purvis & Ranaldo 2003:13; Steigler-Peters et al. 2003:32). A critical premise for successful teaching is to respect, value and build upon prior learning (Purvis & Ranaldo 2003:18; Hill 2003:21; Tolbert 2003:25; Steigler-Peters et al. 2003:34). As a result, we would expect to witness advances in student proficiency<sup>7</sup> (Steigler-Peters et al. 2003:31), motivation (Tolbert 2003:26), attitude (Parsons 2003:10; Tolbert 2003:26, 29) and continued choice of the language as an elective (Parsons 2003:10; Steigler-Peters et al. 2003:31)<sup>8</sup>.

#### 4.2 The Curriculum

Effective strategies have emerged for successful continuity across the curriculum, especially in the context of profiling. As the focus has shifted over the last 10-15 years from teaching per se to assessment of student learning, matrices have been established to map student progress against specific learning outcomes within each of the eight Key Learning Areas. Databases have been developed to facilitate this flow of information longitudinally.

#### 4.3 State/National Moves

Carried on the coattails of funding through NALSAS (National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools), programs have proliferated in four languages, in particular, since 1995. These have supplemented - or swamped - other existing or recently introduced programs. Ignoring language choice temporarily, we can survey the complexity of the scene by reading Jane Crawford's article (Crawford 2003). Finding solutions in this patchwork is not easy, but there are solutions to be found.

In Victoria, for example, the authorities undertook a serious analysis of the languages scene. Among other issues, continuity emerged. The authors of the report, *Languages for Victoria's Future* (2002), were not happy with merely identifying the issues, they offered solutions:

##### **Recommendation 8**

*Frameworks be developed, and demographic data and professional development be provided to Regions and school networks to assist them in developing Network Language Plans (NLP), which over time :*

- *provide students with a choice of European and Asian languages*
- *provide at least one language which is significant in the local community*
- *develop meaningful communication skills in students*
- *provide continuity in the language from primary school or choice of a different language at secondary school*
- *provide pathways for studying languages to VCE level, which may involve collaboration with the VSL (Victorian School of Languages), ethnic schools and/or non-government schools*

(VDET 2002:26)

#### 5 Overseas Developments

The emergence of the European Union (EU) to include 25 member States has led to specific challenges related to learning languages. While the generally agreed "policy" is the teaching of the mother tongue plus two other languages, the Council of Europe has prepared for continuity in language learning within the different contexts of the member States by developing the European Language Portfolio (ELP). The focus is on the learner as progress is made through six stages of learning (ie A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) within the areas of Understanding (listening, reading), Speaking (spoken interaction, spoken production) and Writing. The ELP framework

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<sup>7</sup> This is contested by Hill, who cites the results of some studies which found that student results did not evince significant progress over time (Hill 2003:20-21).

<sup>8</sup> In this context, I hope that one interpretation of Hill's statement is not a recommendation : "under these circumstances, the easiest thing to do is start everyone back at the beginning" (Hill 2003:22).

allows for mapping progress across the relevant (primary and secondary) levels of schooling and includes:

*The **Language Passport** section provides an overview of the individual's proficiency in different languages at a given point in time; the overview is defined in terms of skills and the common reference levels in the Common European Framework; it records formal qualifications and describes language competencies and significant language and intercultural learning experiences; it includes information on partial and specific competence; it allows for self-assessment, teacher assessment and assessment by educational institutions and examination boards; it requires that information entered in the Passport states on what basis, when and by whom the assessment was carried out. To facilitate pan-European recognition and mobility a standard presentation of a Passport Summary is promoted by the Council of Europe for ELP's for adults.*

*The **Language Biography** facilitates the learner's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress; it encourages the learner to state what he/she can do in each language and to include information on linguistic and cultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts; it is organised to promote plurilingualism, i.e. the development of competencies in a number of languages.*

*The **Dossier** offers the learner the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experience recorded in the Language Biography or Passport.*

(Little & Perclova 2000: 1)

The Language Passport is student-based, where components include:

- a profile of language skills
- a self-assessment grid
- a summary of language learning and intercultural experiences
- details of certificates and diplomas
- details of examinations offered by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE)
- a chart to record courses taken at language schools which are members of the European Association for Quality Language Services (EAQUALS)

Further north, studies have been undertaken in Scotland while the UK in general has had a couple of years to digest *Languages : the Next Generation*, the report and recommendations of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry (Nuffield 2000). As a foundation for recommendations for the future promotion, teaching and learning of languages, "continuity into secondary education is a cornerstone of success, and diversity should not be allowed to dissolve into confusion" (Nuffield 2000: 42). This is later articulated within Recommendation 6 :

*The government should declare a long-term commitment to early language learning by setting up a national action programme for languages in primary school education, within the framework of the national strategy for languages.*

*The national action programme for early learning should:*

- 6.3 *ensure the international primary schools offer languages other than French and reach agreement with a partner secondary school or schools to ensure continuity;*
- 6.5 *offer financial incentives for primary and secondary schools to form groups to agree a common local pattern of provision for early language learning, including the choice of languages and arrangements for continuity into secondary school.*

(Nuffield 2000: 89)

Here in New Zealand, Gail Spence in particular has been instrumental in bringing to life the excellent *Learning Languages: A Guide for New Zealand Schools* which, among other critical issues, addresses continuity. Although produced independently, the writers of this guide arrive at similar conclusions to my earlier findings (Cunningham 1994, 1995a, 1995b) :

*Providing continuity of learning may be a particular challenge for secondary schools that enrol students from a wide range of contributing schools. Each of these schools will have established their own priorities. Teachers can gain a clear understanding of the nature, status, and operation of the language-learning programmes in each school by:*

- *communicating with other schools and key personnel*
- *co-operating to form meaningful working relationships that address the issues affecting students, continuity of language choice, and progression of learning*
- *collaborating to share professional development and other useful processes*
- *co-ordinating the curriculum according to shared understandings about course content, resources, and expectations*
- *acknowledging differences in approaches to teaching, both in pedagogical strategies and techniques and in classroom organisation.*

(Ministry of Education (New Zealand) 2002: 35)

The writers elaborate further:

*Strategies that support and sustain continuity of learning may include:*

- *enabling exchanges and observation visits between schools*
- *working as a cluster of schools to employ specialist assistance, such as a language assistant*
- *involving parents across the sectors in developing policies and supporting programmes*
- *arranging visits between students, for example, arranging for senior secondary students to visit year 7 or 8 classes*
- *sharing experiences and performances associated with the programme and other curriculum areas*
- *sharing professional development workshops*
- *reporting information about students' achievement*
- *exchanging and sharing teaching and learning resources*
- *joining local language association groups*
- *working together with language advisors to map realistic pathways between schools*

*Many issues that affect students at times of transition between schools are common to all areas of learning. These may include:*

- *different learning environments*
- *different conventions in timetabling*
- *different seating arrangements*
- *increasing expectations*

*At the secondary level, teachers place increased emphasis on written competencies, conceptual and analytical skills, and individual responsibility. While these changes recognise the students' own development, they may also present considerable challenges for some. Teachers need to be aware of these issues and provide a staged process that enables all students to become familiar with different approaches.*

(Ministry of Education (New Zealand) 2002:35)

*The need for continuity of learning and teaching concerns students, parents, teachers, school communities, and all groups interested in language learning. Since language learning is cumulative, students can best maintain and develop their proficiency when there is natural progression from years 7 and 8 into the secondary school. Students, their parents, and whanau need to feel confident that their students can build on the foundations they have laid and can progress when they move between schools. Research indicates that secondary school students maintain their commitment to a language when they experience a significant degree of success and can see that they are making progress. Secondary schools will wish to avoid repeating introductory courses, where these are no longer needed, and may plan for transition to a full programme, one that enables their students to reach levels of achievement that satisfy them and equips them to meet the standards specified for senior school qualifications.*

(Ministry of Education (New Zealand) 2002:34)

Equally valid ideas and instruments to assist us with continuity could come from research and practice in other countries.

## 6 Current Context

We have had twenty years to identify successful strategies for continuity in learning languages from primary to secondary schooling. Still, not enough has been accomplished. Twenty years on, continuity remains a challenge. This has been exacerbated by the legacy of economic rationalism, as more demands are made of teachers: increased class sizes, larger allotments, curricular change, professional development requirements, the advent of ICT, administria, duty of care, accountability, system targets - in addition to teaching per se, assessment and report-writing. Amid the change, research has informed practice more extensively in coping with a range of levels in the classroom (or differentiation), multiple intelligences and pedagogy.

However, I would like to be more optimistic . . . while not ignoring reality. There may be less time to devote to the collaborative planning identified previously (Cunningham 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Ministry of Education (New Zealand) 2000:35; *Babel* 2003), but this action has occurred, and continues to take place effectively.

Networks have taken on a different status, formalised within K/P-12 clusters which embrace management, the curriculum and pathways from education to employment. They may exist under such names as "Schools for Innovation and Excellence - Middle Years", "Local Learning and Employment Networks" (LLENs) in Victoria or elsewhere. Or, they may have a specific curricular focus, such as the Network Language Plans being developed in Victoria currently (VDET 2002). Whatever the name or nature, they may provide a (mandated) infrastructure for closer collaboration and effective planning for primary and secondary education in local areas. This is both an opening and a requirement for teachers of languages, especially in the case of Network Language Plans.

At the same time, we continue to move through further phases of education which have a focus on student performance against established criteria. The terminology of this outcomes-based approach to education (eg outcomes, targets, stages/levels of learning/achievement, standards, etc) is largely irrelevant. What is important currently is (assessment of) student learning; effective teaching strategies and curriculum content are implicit. Such an approach allows us to map or profile student progress against agreed criteria for all levels of learning, as it is presumed that not all students in a given year level are at the same level of learning. This is not new :

- Elaine Wylie and David Ingram used descriptors to delineate levels of performance in the original *Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR)* in 1978 - now the *International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR)* (Wylie & Ingram 1999)
- Angela Scarino, David Vale and Penny McKay published the *ALL Guidelines* a decade later (Scarino et al. 1988); they identified five/or seven stages, (also accommodating different entry points) while providing an excellent theoretical framework and pedagogical initiatives
- the *English Profiles Handbook* (1991) identified nine levels, while providing excellent ideas on teaching strategies to achieve success
- the *Mathematics Profiles Handbook* (1992) stuck with the year levels of schooling, retaining thirteen levels
- the *Language Other Than English - A Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools* (1994) identified eight stages, reflecting the thrust of the problematic push for national statements and profiles
- the *Curriculum & Standards Framework* (1994) in Victoria reduced the number of levels to seven, and later to six (CSFII: 2000).

There is a message here. The number of levels into which we identify progress in learning (languages), doesn't really matter. What we have is a profiling approach, where the "profiles (would) provide a framework which can be used by teachers in classrooms to chart the progress

of their students, by schools to report to their communities and by systems reporting on student performance as well as being amenable to reporting student achievement at the national level" (*A Statement on Languages Other Than English for Australian Schools* 1994: 23). Subsequently, Angela Scarino "explored the SACSA Framework as a common basis for programming (scope) and setting expectations (standards)" (Scarino 2003:5).

This may or may not be adequate, but (languages) educators felt that more was required to refine interpretation of the descriptors. To arrive at a consensus, "moderation" was required to ensure an agreed interpretation of student achievement as, irrespective of the degree of refinement, final interpretation ran the risk of being subjective. A critical aid to neutralise subjectivity was the notion of annotated work samples. Consequently, the series of *Communicating in LOTE : Writing* (MLTAACT et al. 1995) appeared in the ACT. Victoria was later, with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority publishing initial annotated work samples in 2002 (VCAA 2002). There are, no doubt, others across the globe of which I am not aware.

## 7 The Future

As we move through a period where the focus is on student outcomes - or assessment - it was predictable that the place of assessment would be seen as a solution and goal, "both in evaluating the success of the primary language initiative and facilitating optimum learning outcomes" (Hill 2003:30). It was also informative to learn that, in one study, "there was little obvious discrepancy between the marks given by primary and secondary teachers" (Purvis & Ranaldo 2003:16)<sup>9</sup>. However, I expect that in the near future we will return to an emphasis on student learning and what successful strategies can be used - ie teaching - to ensure that the student attains the specified proficiency goals.

As the strategies identified in the past to achieve successful continuity in learning languages from primary to secondary education have not come to wholesale fruition - as we continue to seek the Philosopher's Stone - we must work collaboratively and smarter to ensure that they occur in as many locations as possible, despite the more demanding conditions on teachers that we witness in many areas. For some, what we have will be "as good as it gets", but many of the answers are there globally and locally, as we have seen. If we place the students first - a logical premise in education - it is easier for us to be successful if this is deemed a priority by the key stakeholders, such as systems, (whole) schools, principals, teachers, administrators, etc. From there, appropriate decisions and action follow.

To assist in this process, cross-curricular structures and networks are being established which provide new hope for a return to the challenge with a supportive focus on education, viz. the profiling of student progress in the learning of languages and the other Key Learning Areas.

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the demarcation of different "cultures" within the primary and secondary sectors is more of a furphy than a reality . . . once we communicate and cooperate!

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