

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: Aston University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics</p>
<p>Title of case study: Changing English Language Teaching in the Global Primary Sector</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research in Aston University on developing effective practices in teaching English to young learners (TEYL) has achieved the following key impacts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Findings from the research have informed international policy discussions on TEYL. For example, the TESOL-Italy mission statement on TEYL includes recommendations derived from the findings (TESOL = Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). 2. The research project led to the publication of a book of teaching resources for primary school teachers distributed globally by the British Council. This book is used by both primary school teachers around the world and teacher educators in the UK.
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The underpinning research was generated from a British Council ELT (English Language Teaching) Research Awards Scheme project, entitled: <i>Investigating Global Practices in Teaching English to Young Learners</i>. The award was for £19,802 and the project ran from to January 1st to December 31st, 2010 at Aston University. It was carried out at Aston by Dr Sue Garton (PI and Lecturer in English, joined Aston March 2000), Dr Fiona Copland (CI and Lecturer in English, joined Aston September 2007) and Professor Anne Burns (CI and Professor of Language Education, joined Aston in June 2010).</p> <p>In many countries around the world English is now compulsory in primary education, affecting millions of children and teachers. However, knowledge and understanding of policy, practice and challenges in areas such as training, materials, and classroom conditions is at best sketchy. This project, focusing on young learners aged 7-11, therefore aimed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discover what policy/syllabus documents inform TEYL practices around the world; • investigate and map the major pedagogies that teachers use; • better understand teachers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities, including the challenges they face; • identify how local solutions to pedagogical issues can be effective and how these may resonate globally; • develop an innovative research tool for transnational research with limited funding. <p>Two research methods were used. A survey, using opportunity sampling, resulted in 4,446 responses from primary school teachers in over 140 countries with responses from all continents. Five case studies, comprising interviews with teachers and classroom observations, were carried out in Colombia, Italy, Korea, Tanzania and the UAE. Data were analysed using a number of tools including a predictive analysis to identify key variables that influence classroom practice (survey closed questions), corpus analysis to classify the range of challenges teachers face (survey open questions) and coding (interviews) to identify cross-contextual themes.</p> <p><u>Major findings (linked to publications in S3)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The predictive analyses revealed a complex picture in which a number of significant factors influencing practice were identified. These were geographical location, age of learners, and teachers' level of English proficiency. • Classroom practices are influenced less by pedagogical theories underpinning government policies and more by the materials and resources available (S3.1). • While teachers' practices are framed within government or institutional policy documents and many are aware of them, the most influential documents reported to underpin practices are the coursebook and teachers' own lesson plans (S3.1).

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- Teachers of young learners face challenges that are generally neglected in the young learner literature. Teaching speaking, motivating learners, dealing with large classes, mixed levels and discipline problems were all identified by teachers as particularly challenging (S3.4,S3.5).
- Teachers themselves are clearly important agents in developing local solutions to the demands of teaching young learners. Observed practices included varying the activities during a single lesson, using different visual and aural resources, introducing meaningful local cultural artefacts, activities that recycle language points, using strategies to control discipline and maintain attention and motivation, and planning for short concentration spans (S3.1, S3.2, S3.4).
- Previous research has focused on teachers' lack of English proficiency. However, this research has shown a far more complex picture in which confidence, attitude, the role of native speaker teachers and the persistent view that achieving native speaker competence is necessary all influence classroom practice (S3.1, S3.2, S3.4, S3.5).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Garton, S., Copland, F., and Burns, A. (2011) Investigating Global Practices in Teaching English to Young Learners: a Project Report. *The British Council*. ISBN: 978-086355-667-8 (<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/biblio/investigating-global-practices-teaching-young-learners>) ***This report publishes the research from which the impact derives. It is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour and is a recognised point of reference of some influence (see section 4).***
2. Copland, F., Garton, S. (2011) Crazy Animals and other activities for teaching young learners. *British Council Publications*. ISBN 978-0-86355-693-7 (<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/crazy-animals-other-activities-teaching-young-learners>)
3. Copland, F. (2011) Teaching young learners in a global context *The Language Teacher*. 35/4. Copy available on request.
4. Copland, F., Garton, S. and Burns, A. (in press *TESOL Quarterly*) Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners: Global Perspectives and Local Realities. Copy available on request.
5. Garton S. (2013) Unresolved issues and new challenges in teaching English to young learners: the case of South Korea. *Current Issues in Language Planning*. DOI:10.1080/14664208.2014.858657

Grants

British Council ELT Research Awards Scheme £19,802, January 1st to December 31st, 2010 at Aston University. Dr Sue Garton (PI and Lecturer in English), Dr Fiona Copland (CI and Lecturer in English) and Professor Anne Burns (CI and Professor of Language Education, who joined Aston on June 1st, 2010).

British Council ELT Research Awards Scheme £ 4,579, April 1st to December 31st, 2011 at Aston University. Dr Sue Garton (P1 and Lecturer in English), Dr Fiona Copland (CI and Lecturer in English).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

This research has had significant and wide-reaching impact for a relatively small amount of research funding (a total of £24,381 over 2 awards). It has had impact on senior policy makers, primary school teachers, researchers and students in two main areas: language policy and teachers' professional development.

English language teaching policy in the primary sector

The research has had impact on policy through the publication of research findings in the research report, *Investigating Global Practices in Teaching English to Young Learners*, which has been distributed globally by the British Council and is available to download on its website. The findings have led to invitations to the researchers to participate in international policy debates on teaching English to young learners. The original research report was designed, at the British Council's request, to inform policy-makers internationally. To date, the web-link to the report has been shared 2,611 times, including 829 emails, 698 Facebook shares and 208 tweets (see S5.1). The report has been 'right clicked', which usually means downloaded, 329 times. The report describes the issues surrounding the introduction of English into primary curricula globally from the teachers' perspectives, highlighting in particular key challenges that need to be addressed to improve English language teaching in this sector.

The report was used to inform and influence TESOL-Italy's mission statement on Teaching English to Young Learners presented at the annual conference in Rome in November 2011 (see S5/2) at a time when the Italian Ministry of Education is carrying out reforms to teacher education. TESOL-Italy acts as an influential government consultant on language policy.

Copland and Garton were invited by the British Council in Lebanon on March 2nd 2012 to present the findings from the project at a seminar on English at Primary level. The seminar was to inform and influence the Ministry of Education in Lebanon as they embark on a programme of educational reform of the form and content of English teaching to young learners (S5.3). The audience included school heads, English coordinators, University ELT department heads and Ministry officials not only from Lebanon but also from Egypt and Jordan. It was featured on MTV Lebanon and broadcast to 38000 people (see URL in S5.4). It was also featured in the British Council newsletter, TalkingEnglish, sent out to 800 English language contacts.

Copland and Garton were invited by The Guardian to respond to Minister of Education Michael Gove's plans to teach modern foreign languages to young learners in primary schools. Their article was published on Friday October 14th 2011 in the "Comment is Free" section and sparked an intensive debate on The Guardian's discussion board (see URL in S5/5). Of the 134 comments, a number demonstrated raised awareness and understanding of the issues in teaching languages in the UK context to young learners.

Copland has recently been invited to take part in the influential ELT Journal/Oxford University Press debate at the IATEFL conference in 2014, where she will speak for the motion, *'This house believes that primary ELT does more harm than good'* (S 5.10)

Teacher professional development

A second grant was awarded by the British Council in 2011 to elicit activities used by primary school teachers around the world. We contacted all those who had responded to the original research questionnaire and left contact details (around 2,000 teachers globally). Approximately 200 teachers sent in activities and the result was a book called *Crazy Animals and Other Activities for Teaching English to Young Learners*, edited by Copland and Garton and published by the British Council in March 2012, with 50 activities from teachers in 28 countries. The book was launched by the British Council at the annual conference of the IATEFL in March 2012, and is available for free as a hard copy or a digital file on the British Council website (see S5/6). Details from the website show that to date, there have been a gratifying 7239 'shares' of the book, including, 3969 Facebook shares, 543 tweets and 1475 email shares. The book has also been 'right clicked' 1,711 times. A web search reveals that the book has been shared on sites in many different countries including Russia, Armenia and Italy. The book is now being used not only by individual teachers, but also by teacher training centres for professional development purposes thereby showing impact through changing teacher behaviour.

Feedback from teachers using the book has been very positive. Email comments include: *I think this is a very useful almost unique book for busy teachers – beginners as well as qualified; [the children] like the activities very much, they help structure the lesson in a creative way; It means a lot to me, because I know that all the activities in the book are offered by real teachers from real*

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classes just like me; the book that helps me and my colleagues to have fun in the classes and better results with the children at school.

The English Lead at the British Council Bucharest has distributed 100 copies of the book to primary school teachers and reports that it is very much appreciated (S5/7). A leading Italian teacher trainer wrote that she believes the book would become the best resource currently available for primary school teachers of English.

Feedback from academics at the universities of Birmingham, Leicester, Leeds and Warwick has also indicated that the resource is being introduced into their programmes and modules in teaching English to young learners. For example, the book has been used on the PGDipEd course, rated outstanding by Ofsted, at the University of Birmingham (S5/8), while both the book and the report are used on the TEYL MA module at the University of Warwick (S5/9).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

We have corroborative feedback from the following sources:

1. BC website evidence of sharing report
<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/global-practices-teaching-english-young-learners>
2. TESOL-Italy, Executive Committee member and Ex-president.
3. British Council, Lebanon, English Project Manager.
4. Report on Lebanese TV http://mtv.com.lb/Family/Joann_Deeb
5. Guardian article and comments:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/oct/13/foreign-language-teaching-young-children-flawed>
6. BC website evidence of sharing activities book
<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/crazy-animals-other-activities-teaching-young-learners>
7. British Council, Bucharest, English Lead.
8. University of Birmingham, PGDipEd course leader secondary English
9. University of Warwick, Centre for Applied Linguistics, Associate Professor.
10. ELT Journal announcement.