

CIDREE REPORT

ENGLISH IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS, NORTH-RHINE WESTPHALIA (NRW) AND NORWAY

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1 Introduction

The Cidree primary English project has been running from 2002 until 2007 and has involved participants from the Netherlands, Germany, Norway and Hungary. Its primary aims have been to investigate the teaching of English in the respective countries, comparing similarities and differences in issues such as teacher education, onset age, organisation of teaching, teaching priorities and materials used. Special attention has been paid to the transition from primary to secondary education in each country. It has been the hope that the collaboration between the countries involved will enhance the quality of English at the primary level teaching in each country.

In 2002 network connections between SLO (the National Institute for Curriculum Development, Netherlands) and LFS (Landesinstitut fuer Schule/Qualitätsagentur, Nord Rhein Westphalen) brought together Nina Kampmeier (LFS/NRW) and Han van Toorenborg (SLO/NL), who were both involved in English in primary education in their respective countries. As a result Han van Toorenborg and SLO-colleague Marianne Bodde were invited to participate in a nation-wide meeting on the national implementation of English at the primary level in Kassel, Germany in the same year.

Through CIDREE channels, Ion Drew (then Stavanger University College, now the University of Stavanger) was invited to join the group. In 2003 SLO hosted a tripartite meeting involving NO/NRW/NL in Enschede, welcoming also Gaby Engel from LFS, who was/ is responsible for English in primary education and the appropriate evaluation study in NRW. Information was exchanged, and collaborative plans were made and carried out. A modest writing project was planned. Large scale surveys were carried out in Norway and the Netherlands using mainly identical questionnaires, and results were published in national periodicals. The Enschede report provoked interest from colleagues in Hungary, resulting in the participation of Zsuzsa Nyiro of OKI (National Institute for Public Education), Budapest.

A project plan for a 2004 meeting was filed with CIDREE. After approval, Ion Drew, with the generous support of the Norwegian CIDREE representatives, undertook to host a meeting in Stavanger on 18/19 June 2004. At this point SLO-colleague Bas Trimbos also joined the team. NRW planned a large scale survey in 2005/2006 and In January 2005 there was a brief in-between meeting in Enschede, which was necessary because of changes in circumstances: following Han van Toorenborg's retirement, SLO handed the lead to Lfs. In May 2005 a meeting was held in Soest, at which Gaby Engel reported on the progress of the NRW evaluation study 'English in primary'. The teacher's questionnaire was based mainly on the questionnaire from NL & NO, and has many identical questions, which will allow for an international comparison to be made. The NRW Language Portfolio was another important topic of discussion. In October 2006 the final meeting took place in Budapest, hosted by Zsuzsa Nyrio.

Team members feel that the project work has gone beyond the stage of information sharing. We also presume that distribution of this report is likely to draw in other interested CIDREE members.

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Table 1: Overview of participating countries

	NL	NRW	NO	HU
Primary ages	4-12	5-10	6-12	6-14
Primary grades	1-8	1-4	1-7	1-8
English introduced in primary	1986	2003	1974
English in grades	7-8	3-4	1-7	4-8
Compulsory?	yes	yes	yes	no
Curriculum time	around 80 clock hours in total	2 x 45 min. per week	96 lessons 1-4; 3 x 45 minute lessons a week 5-7	2 to 3 lessons (45 min.) per week
Attainment targets (formulated as minimum requirements for all students)?	no	yes	no	yes
National core objectives (=guide-lines for offerings)	yes	per state on-going work on national standards	Yes, national curriculum for each year. From 2006 for grades 2, 4, 7, 10 and 11.	yes CEF-level A1 for all students by the end of grade 8. A2 for those who study the language in more than the minimum number of lessons
Degree of specification	very low	??	Reasonably high	some
National School leaving test?	no	no	At end of 10th grade	at the end of 12th grade
Subject teacher or class teacher?	class teacher	both	Both. Mostly class teacher in 1-4.	subject teacher
Learning materials	choice unlimited	choice unlimited	choice unlimited	large choice
Teacher training English	no national priority	depending on budget of	Not compulsory. Notion of the	National priority for training foreign

			'general teacher' prevails.	language teachers
In service training	virtually non-existent	yes	6 out of 10 have never attended	Offered by various bodies, pedagogical services, publishers
	NL	NRW	NO	HU
General notion of achievement level of students	Satisfactory in spite of all the weaknesses in the system. Probably due to overwhelming exposure to the language outside school	point of discussion	In general, pupils know a lot of English on entering secondary. Oral skills superior to written ones. High exposure. outside school.	varies from school to school
Perspectives/trends	more autonomy for schools; start in grade 5; immersion programmes; language portfolio	portfolio work on the way in primary	New national curriculum implemented in 2006 based on learning objectives after grades 2, 4, 7, 10 and 11. New national tests at grades 4, 7, 10 and 11. Language portfolio introduced	language portfolio; World language programme
Transition to secondary	deficient, inadequate in many respects. Poor communication with feeder schools. As a result the average subject teacher starts from scratch	- no experience - contact in regions with feeder schools - round table discussions - schoolbook publishers try to support	Not regarded as a serious problem because of national curriculum. In addition, many schools are 1-10 schools.	Inadequate in many respects. There are only a few homogenous groups, so in many cases they start from where the weakest students are

In the following chapters each country will elaborate on the points in the above overview. The final chapter offers conclusions and recommendations for countries who are concerned with the same issue, i.e. the transition of English from primary to secondary education.

2 Primary English in the Netherlands

Bas Trimbos

SLO, National Institute for Curriculum Development

2.1 History of English in primary education in the Netherlands

In 1986 English was implemented as a compulsory subject for grades 7 and 8 (ages 10-12) in primary education in the Netherlands. The introduction of a foreign language at the primary level at this time was not without a foundation. Already in the 1960s proposals were made to introduce English in primary education (Van Willigen, 1971). The Netherlands thus followed a trend from the USA and some European countries. There was also a discussion of which foreign language to teach, i.e. English, French or German. However, the government decided on : "Education of simple English" (1970). In 1968 the so-called "Utrecht-eibo project" (eibo: English in primary education) started. The project developed a teaching method for English. In 1978 activities of the "Utrecht-eibo project" were hosted at SLO (the National Institute for Curriculum Development).

The SLO/Eibo project team was very clear about how English in primary should be offered. Explicitly, they opted for a communicative approach with the final goal of making pupils communicatively competent. "It is of greater importance that the expression used in a context is understandable, rather than linguistically correct" (Stoks, 1981). All the products/materials of SLO with the distinctive profile of a communicative approach have had a relatively great impact on English in primary (Kingsman, 1987).

After this period of development and experimentation, English was implemented in August 1986. From the beginning four conditions were mentioned for English at the primary level:

1. English will become an integrated subject in primary education.
2. There will be a longitudinal learning line from primary to lower secondary.
3. Primary school class teachers will be trained to teach English.
4. Teaching materials for English in primary will be developed.

The last two conditions were met immediately from the start. Up to this date the first two conditions have still not been met.

With the implementation of English in primary in 1986 about 80-100 clock hours became compulsory. This means about one hour of English per week, divided over years 7 and 8. Before implementing English in primary about 16,000 class teachers of primary education were trained to teach the subject. A Teleac- course (Stoks, 1984) was set up and from 1984-1988 with the aim of training primary class teachers. The course had four components:

- 20 hours at a teacher training institution
- 10 hours of television lessons
- 10 hours of radio lessons
- a course syllabus (self-study)

There was no test at the end. Primary class teachers who attended received a certificate. After 1984 training time diminished and in the final two years (1986-1988) team members of the same

school and sometimes complete teams attended the course. The result was that the time spent was more social, but not everyone was motivated to take part in the course.

The position of English as a compulsory subject in primary education was a point of discussion twice: in 1991 and 2002. In both cases the lack of continuity from primary to lower secondary education played a key role. The form teachers in primary are obliged to teach English, yet are not adequately trained to do so, or lack motivation. The English subject teachers in lower secondary school are often negative about the quality of English in primary. They argue that the pronunciation of pupils coming from primary is poor, that grammar is not taught, and that pupils have difficulties with their English spelling. With the exception of a few teachers, lower secondary school teachers of English do not go deeply into the problems of English in primary. If they did, they would have known that you cannot expect pupils in primary to write English correctly, for writing is not a core objective in primary education. But also the primary class teachers are negative: "Lower secondary teachers of English will start from scratch anyway" is a frequently heard comment.

On the basis of a periodical assessment of the quality of English in primary (1996), it becomes evident that the level of English in primary has decreased in comparison with the previous assessment in 1991. This is remarkable because the exposure to English had increased during the same period. One would thus expect children to become better at English. However, one may also conclude that less English is offered at school and that the quality of teaching has diminished. Despite these remarkable results, the discussion about the quality of English in primary has not been picked up by the inspectorate, the Ministry of Education, or politicians.

In a publication (Edelenbos, 1993) the transition of English from primary to lower secondary was researched. It was stated that the transition problems from primary to lower secondary were not specifically related to English. The same problems, for example, apply to subjects such as Dutch and maths.

Lower secondary teachers of English think quite differently about improvements in primary education. Their opinions can be placed in three categories:

1. The attitudes of lower secondary teachers of English towards primary school teachers. Almost on one in four of the lower secondary teachers of English mentioned that teachers of English in primary should receive better training, or subject teachers should be used to teach English.
2. More uniformity of the levels reached at the end of primary.
3. Lower secondary teachers of English have the opinion that certain skills should be mastered better, such as simple grammar, and more attention should be paid to writing.

The desire for more communication with regional primary schools was said to be the most important issue. The results of that communication would lead to agreements about what to offer, how to act didactically, and agreements on teaching methods.

It was not until 1993 that a set of core objectives¹ was written for English in primary school. This first generation of core objectives for English was fairly detailed. In the revised set of core

¹ core objectives define in general terms the minimum targets that schools should aim to achieve in their teaching and in terms of the knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils are expected to

objectives (1998), the core objectives were reduced to briefly described core objectives. The reason for this reduction was that the core objectives for other subjects were also brief. So, in order to keep step with the other subjects, the second generation of core objectives became less detailed. The first generation of core objectives for English contributed towards the writing of textbooks and the production of tests. The second generation was so brief that teachers, test makers and authors of textbooks were unable to use them. Instead, they reverted to the core objectives of the first generation. The third generation of core objectives for primary education (2006) was even more global. It should be noted that the degree of specification of the current version of the core objectives is so low that they offer no concrete prospects for what exactly pupils and teachers should do, how they should tackle their work, and to what specific achievement levels they are directed. The core objectives for lower secondary education were also extremely global (2006). The current guiding principle in government educational policy strongly favours school autonomy.

The core objectives for English in primary and lower secondary education give clarity for a longitudinal learning line (the second condition for English in primary, as stated above). However, all three generations of core objectives for primary and secondary education were written separately. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) may be a solution for a longitudinal learning line. In addition, the European Language Portfolio (ELP) may be used as a means of transition from primary to lower secondary education. Both will be discussed in section 2.2.4.

2.2 state of the art

2.2.1 Teacher training

At the same time that English was added to the curriculum in 1986, the subject was also introduced as part of the core curriculum of teacher training courses in order to prepare beginning teachers for their practical teaching. The position of English in teacher training curricula mirrors actual school practice.

In 1999 and in 2003 research was done by 'vedocep' (A network for teachers of English at teacher training institutions). It revealed that only a fraction of time was spent on English. Some teacher training institutions do not even offer English or give a self study package to students who could use this on a voluntary basis. As a consequence of these findings, 'vedocep' has tried to make this an important issue, but the teacher training institutions appeal to their own free choice. The Minister of Education (van der Hoeven) also stated that the teacher training institutions are free to build their own curricula. She has every confidence in them to do this professionally.

In February of 2005 the Inspectorate conducted a survey, and all of the teacher training institutions responded that English was part of the curriculum. It is incredible that this situation has continued for more than 20 years. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that circumstances will change in the near future.

2.2.2 Teacher qualifications

acquire by the end of their primary schooling. Schools are free to determine how much time to devote to each subject, the content and method, provided they meet the core objectives.

From August 1 2006 new objectives for the competences of teacher trainings institutions were implemented. Only one of the seven competences concerns the subject-didactical and subject-content related competence. This does not open the way to spend more time and attention on English, give or take a few exceptions. However, there are a few positive changes. One of them is that a few teacher training institutions use a test in order to examine the English skills of the students. It is clear that improvements need to be made in order to offer a high quality programme to the students.

2.2.3 Materials

Soon after the introduction of English in primary, a large variety of learning materials became available. Over the past years the range has decreased and at present the choice is limited to five major learning packages, some of which show some fine-tuning with materials currently used in secondary.

A questionnaire among teachers was conducted in 2001-2002. One of the questions concerned learning materials.

Table 2 indicates the course-books actually in use in the schools. In primary *Hello World* is favoured by 21% of the teachers. The other packages score between 10-14% each. *Stepping Stones* (36%) and *Interface* (29%) hold pride of place in secondary, with *World Wide* covering 15%. Respondents confirm the prime position of the learning package, saying that they only occasionally introduce other or supplementary materials.

Table 2: Information about curriculum content: number of respondents (N) expressed as percentages (in brackets) or Means and standard deviations (in brackets)

	Primary N=158	Secondary N=147
<i>Usage of teaching packages (N and percentages; packages in ranking order based upon market share)</i>		
Hello World	33 (21.3)	53 (36.1)
Real English	21 (13.5)	42 (28.6)
Junior	19 (12.3)	22 (15.0)
Real English Let's do it	18 (11.6)	13 (8.8)
Bubbles	15 (9.7)	11 (7.5)
Units	15 (9.7)	-
other	34 (21.9)	6 (4.1)
<i>Usage of teaching packages (N and percentages):</i>		
Only the teaching package	73 (46.5)	40 (27.8)
Mostly the teaching package/sometimes own material	78 (49.7)	104 (72.2)
Mostly own material/sometimes the teaching package	6 (3.8)	-
<i>Teaching time spent on different activities (means and standard deviations: means summon to 100%):</i>		
Instruction	35.7 (15.7)	28.1 (10.5)
Exercising	53.2 (15.0)	54.0 (12.7)
	11.1 (7.3)	17.9 (8.1)

Testing		
<i>Teaching time spent on different parts of the language curriculum (means and standard deviations: means summon till 100%):</i>		
Reading skills	18.4 (7.6)	18.8 (7.8)
Listening skills	19.4 (6.5)	14.2 (4.8)
Speaking skills	24.3 (8.9)	14.3 (6.1)
Writing skills	12.9 (6.1)	17.7 (7.2)
Grammar	9.6 (5.3)	18.7 (7.7)
Vocabulary	15.6 (7.3)	16.3 (6.7)
<i>Differentiation in the classroom (N and percentages):</i>		
Same instruction and exercises	98 (66.2)	68 (47.2)
Same instruction, differentiation in the exercises	43 (29.1)	51 (35.4)
Differentiation in both instruction and exercises	7 (4.7)	25 (17.4)
<i>Instructional format in the classroom (means and standard deviations: means summon to 100%):</i>		
Whole-class instruction	49.6 (18.9)	38.4 (18.3)
Individual instruction	26.9 (13.1)	39.5 (15.6)
Group instruction	23.5 (13.3)	22.1 (14.8)
<i>Usage of English as language of instruction (N and percentages):</i>		
Just English	7 (4.5)	6 (4.3)
Mainly English	93 (60.0)	57 (41.0)
Mainly Dutch	53 (34.2)	74 (53.2)
Just Dutch	2 (1.3)	2 (1.4)

The subdivision of teaching time into instruction, practice and testing shows no surprises. The first year in secondary differs only marginally from primary. Secondary teachers spend more time on testing at the expense of instruction time. No allowance is made for mixed abilities in primary as far as instruction is concerned. 95% of the teachers here offer the same things at the same time to all students, whereas one out of three teachers differentiates pupil exercises. Although secondary teachers agree with their colleagues in primary on time devoted to instruction, half of them apply differentiation when students do practice work on the language. As a result lessons in secondary tend to be better geared to the students' individual needs and abilities.

Trends towards communicative competence are more clearly visible in primary, where oral skills predominate. Writing is at the bottom of the list. In the first year of secondary, attention to the various skills and sub skills is more equally balanced. Grammar and vocabulary take about one third of learning time available, and so do reading and writing on the one hand and speaking/listening on the other. One remarkable finding of the survey is that relatively little attention is paid to using the target language for instructing and socializing. Over half of the lower secondary teachers limit themselves exclusively to the mother tongue, whereas in primary this applies to roughly one third of the teachers.

2.2.4 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and European Language Portfolio (ELP)

*I CAN DO IT!**A European Framework of Reference and a Digital Language Portfolio for primary education*

Already in primary education, English lessons can benefit from a more competence- and skill-oriented teaching approach. In the digital language portfolio for primary education the levels A1 and A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) are described in terms of so-called ‘can-do-statements’. These are short statements on what pupils of that age group can do in English (or any other modern language). The following will provide a short introduction to the CEFR and the digital language portfolio for primary education, and cast a glance at the influence of this approach on motivation, differentiation, learning outcomes and the transition to secondary education.

A European Framework of Reference for languages

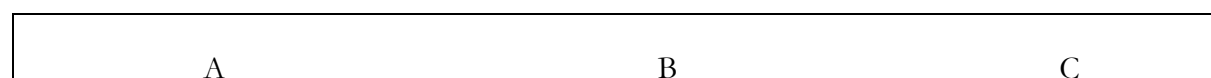
A conference in Switzerland in 1991 resulted in the decision that a so-called ‘Common European Framework of Reference’ should be developed, which was supposed to describe the different levels of competence in a modern language. The document was to make comparisons between different countries possible and consequently stimulate collaboration among all kinds of European educational institutions. It was to offer a common framework for the assessment of language qualifications (diplomas, certificates) and the development of curricula, educational resources and test materials. All parties involved in language education – pupils, students, teachers, developers of educational resources, institutes of educational measurement and educational managers – were to benefit from it. In order to achieve this aim, a system of levels for language proficiency was developed, which was to be used everywhere in Europe.

Six levels, five language skills

The CEFR describes language competence on the basis of five language skills: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing. For those language skills six levels of competence were described in the European document, which got the following names:

- * Breakthrough
- * Waystage
- * Threshold
- * Vantage
- * Effective operational proficiency
- * Mastery

When we try to link these levels to the classical categorisation of a basic, an intermediate and an advanced level, we get a branched system starting with a first division into three broad levels A, B and C. These are further subdivided into A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. The coherence between the different levels can be illustrated as follows:



basic user		independent user		proficient user	
/	\	/	\	/	\
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Breakthrough	Waystage	Threshold	Vantage	Effective Proficiency	Mastery

The first level only requires starter's knowledge (A1). After that, the level climbs up to C2, which describes an all but perfect mastery. These levels are applicable everywhere in Europe, thus making an international comparison of language levels between learners in the different countries possible.

General description of the language skills at the six levels

The table below presents a general description of the levels. These descriptions give a general picture of a language learner's competences after reaching a certain level. All skills are represented.

Proficient user	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent user	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Basic user	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Further clarification through descriptors

A further clarification of these general levels of language proficiency is elaborated in the general and detailed descriptors. These are directly derived from the general levels of proficiency as formulated for all language skills. This is how a coherent system of objectives for modern language education in Europe is created. Moreover, the levels are cumulative, which is to say that proficiency at a certain level implies proficiency at all the levels below.

Language profiles

In 2003, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science commissioned a more detailed description of competence levels, in the form of concrete can-do-statements, in order to ensure the realisation of a curricular strand for modern languages at the CEFR levels. The project resulted in the publication 'Taalprofielen' (language profiles), which was validated by the Dutch National Institute for Educational Measurement (CITO). The publication gives a survey of all levels of the CEFR, illustrated with can-do-statements and examples of concrete situations of language use.

Spoken interaction A2

Detailed descriptors and examples

All the examples relating to A2 imply that the participants in question are in direct interaction with each other, and that everybody speaks loudly and clearly. The initiative is generally taken by one of the other conversation partners.

1. Informal conversations

In everyday situations I can address acquaintances and strangers in a simple way, I can greet them and apologise for something.

Example:

Call for the waiter in a restaurant and ask him something

Apologise for bumping into another person

Address somebody in the street to ask for information and thank him/her.

I can say in a simple way what I like and dislike, and can express an opinion on familiar everyday topics.

Example:

Compliment a friend on his/her way of dressing

Express the wish to take part in a game or assignment

Tell the shop assistant that you don't want to buy the product

Tell what kind of food you like and ask others what their favourite food is

Tell in a vacation job or in a practical that you find the work too heavy or too difficult

Examples for two can-do-statements relating to the general descriptor 'Informal conversations' at level A2 spoken interaction (from *Taalprofielen*, p.57).

CEFR in Dutch language education

From 2007, the Common European Frame of Reference will play an essential role in the second stage of secondary education (upper secondary) in the Netherlands. On request of the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science, the very generally formulated attainment targets for the new examination programmes for modern languages have been linked to the reference levels of the CEFR. Therefore pupils taking their senior general secondary examination in English will primarily get reading assignments at level B2, with some additional ones at level B1. At the same time, on request of the professional Association of Teachers of Modern Languages, the core objectives of the new lower secondary curriculum have also been formulated in line with the CEFR.

It seems more than logical that primary education will also have to take the Common European Framework of Reference into account when developing a curricular strand conducive to the transition from primary to secondary education. The core objectives for English in primary education are not formulated in line with the CEFR, but provisional intermediate targets and strands have been developed, which are geared to the levels of the CEFR, as in the following example:

Core objective 13

Description:

The pupils learn to acquire information from simple spoken and written English texts.

Clarification:

[...] This concerns simple everyday topics and contexts with an increasing volume, structure and degree of difficulty from group 1 to group 8 (...).

The envisaged level of speaking and participating in conversations at the end of primary education is level A1 of the Common European Frame of Reference for languages (CEFR). Level A1 serves as a guideline, a basic level attainable for all pupils for a limited number of topics.

(1)'I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly'.

(2) I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.

(these examples are taken from the A1 level of the self-assessment grid for listening and reading)

Example from the SLO project 'Tussendoelen en Leerlijnen' (intermediate targets and curricular strands) – <http://tule.slo.nl>

The European Language Portfolio

The European Language Portfolio is a document to enable students to illustrate and document their modern language skills in a simple and internationally understandable manner.

The European Language Portfolio was introduced Europe-wide in 2001, the European year of languages. During the last few years, different models of language portfolios have been tried out in many European countries. There are language portfolios for all age groups: for pupils in primary, secondary and vocational education, including adults.

In a pilot project in the Netherlands different language portfolios have been developed for different age groups and school types. Since 2004 all versions have been brought together in one digital web-based version (see <http://www.europeestaalportfolio.nl>). At present this is the only *interactive* language portfolio online; pupils have the possibility not only to keep track of their own progress, but also to do assignments at their own level and to save these in the form of text, audio- or video recordings. The digital language portfolio is meant to be used for lifelong learning; by switching a profile pupils can transfer the data of their portfolios to a version in whatever subsequent form of education they embark on, and thus simply proceed from where they ended up at the end of year 8 in primary education.

The digital language portfolio for primary education

In 2005 the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) developed the digital language portfolio for years 7 and 8 in primary education. Both layout and language use, as well as the choice of practical examples for the use of language in particular situations, based on the CEFR can-do-statements, take into account the young learners' perception of their living environment. The language portfolio for primary education confines itself to the levels of A1 and A2 for all skills, since this is a starter's level.

The language portfolio for primary education is also available in English.

What can I find in the European Language Portfolio for Primary Education?

Conforming to the guidelines of the Council of Europe, the digital language portfolio for primary education consists of the following parts:

In the *language biography* the pupil can record his/her own experiences with language learning. What languages he/she speaks at home, with his/her family and friends, on holidays, whether he/she was enrolled in a primary school abroad, whether he/she received instruction in a foreign language.

Nederlands | English

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- [My languages](#)
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- [Manual](#)

personal details
languages spoken
school
languages at school
subjects

contacts 1
contacts 2

Bas Trimbos

Language biography

Here you fill in which languages you speak and who you speak them to. Type "-" key if something is not relevant to you (for instance: you have no brothers or sisters).
You can also indicate what other things you can do in a language.

I speak ... to my mother:


I speak ... to my father:

I speak ... to my guardian(s):

I speak ... to my brother(s) and sister(s):

I speak ... to my grandparents:

log out



COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE
European Language Portfolio
Portefolio européen des langues

Electronic Language Portfolio
 Accredited model No. 89.2007
 This model conforms to common
 Principles and Guidelines Steering
 Committee for Education - ELP
 European Validation Committee

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In the language progress the pupil can estimate his/her level of language proficiency and plan language activities to improve his/her level.

Nederlands | English

Bas Trimbos
English - Spoken interaction - A1

Planning :
 23-07-2007 up to and including 23-07-2007
 Change

Mark here what you are able to do already, or just a little bit or not yet.
 Do not forget to click on <Save ...> (below).
 Last calculated score : 100% (20-07-2007) [?]

I CAN... Score: 100%

I can ask for something I need. ★ ★ ★
 Example(s) →

	Ask for a souvenir in a certain colour in a shop.	Not yet <input type="radio"/>	YES! <input type="radio"/>
	Order a ticket at a window.	Not yet <input type="radio"/>	YES! <input type="radio"/>

Electronic Language Portfolio Accredited model No. 89.2007 This model conforms to common Principles and Guidelines Steering Committee for Education - ELP European Validation Committee

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the primary level. Primary class teachers are free to choose from a number of possibilities how to end year 8 in English, for example with a musical. Because of the fact that the third generation of core objectives is very brief and not very useful, the Dutch examination institute (CITO) wanted to provide the basis of reaching a minimum standard by developing a test for year 7 (2006-2007) and a test for year 8 (2007). The test was based on only core objectives 13 and 15. The levels and themes of these tests correspond with the five mostly used methods. CITO has also used the levels A1 and A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference as a guideline.

The tests cover reading, listening and vocabulary. Primary schools are free to use these tests, as there is no compulsory school leaving test for English.

2.2.6 Curriculum

In a project called "tule" (<http://tule.slo.nl/Engels/F-KDEngels.html>), the core objectives of English have been made more concrete (in terms of pupils' activities, teachers' activities, examples, and so on), also using the levels of the CEFR (Bodde, 2006). The same applies to lower secondary education. The core objectives have been made more concrete with the help of the CEFR (Trimbos, 2006). Even the attainment targets of higher secondary education have been made more concrete and have been linked to the CEFR by SLO (Fasoglio and Meijer, 2007). The final central examinations for all foreign languages have also been linked to the CEFR by CITO. All of these measures ensure a clear learning line from primary education to university. This will help schools to build their own curriculum, as schools are highly autonomous in the Netherlands.

2.3 Conclusion

Although there is still much to be done in English in primary in the Netherlands in areas such as teacher training institutions, in-service training, longitudinal learning line, the status and quality of English in primary education, there are also some interesting and powerful movements from schools, teachers and parents. The conference 'Early English: a good start!' held in 2006, can be seen as the beginning of a new future for English in primary. Early English can be a great impetus for English in grades 7 and 8. The CEFR and the European Language Portfolio have contributed to our insight into the process of learning a foreign language. These tools should be used to the fullest to improve learning, teaching and assessing a foreign language, in this case English in primary education.

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3 English in Primary Schools in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW)

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3.1 State of the art

The efforts of the European Union and the European Council to encourage language learning in schools have been particularly successful in primary schools. Across Europe it is clearly becoming the trend to start learning a compulsory foreign language at an earlier age.

In Germany there were several attempts to introduce English into primary schools already in the 1960s and 1970s, and the discussion about the early start of foreign language learning came alive again in the 1980s and 1990s. Since the beginning of 2000 more and more states in Germany have introduced English in primary schools.

Primary education in NRW spans years 1 to 4, with the starting age now at five. Since 2003/4 all pupils in NRW have started learning English from the third year onwards. From the outset, the aim of introducing English into the primary level was to make it a ‘proper’ subject, together with the other subjects, with two lessons a week on the timetable. This required a curriculum, which was designed in preliminary form in 2003. It presupposed that the teachers were qualified to teach English to young learners, the compulsory qualification being an academic training (a degree) for primary teachers and either a degree in English or a C1 language certificate according to the CEFR (*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*). Teachers who lacked a degree in English were offered a 60-hour extensive region-wide further education course on the didactics and methodology of English teaching in primary schools. 6000 teachers attended this in-service- training. Recently the government of NRW has announced that starting from 2008/9 all pupils will learn English from year 1 onwards (at the beginning of the winter term).

3.2 Evaluation

At the end of 2004 the Ministry of Schools and Education commissioned an evaluation of English teaching in primary schools. Together with academic experts, the former State Institute for Schools in Soest developed a study design. The main goal of the evaluation was to collect information about how primary schools in NRW had dealt with the challenge of integrating comprehensive English lessons into their curriculum in such a short space of time. Another aim was to establish the competencies and limitations of young learners after two years of English lessons. This empirical information would be used as one of the most important factors in deciding how to further develop English teaching from year 1, and for the revision and expansion of the curriculum for years 1-4.

3.2.1 Aims

The aims of the study included providing information about:

- Strategies and models for lesson organisation
- Linguistic and didactical-methodological qualifications of teaching staff and the basic principles of qualification requirements and didactic-methodological strategies of foreign language lessons for very young learners
- The meaning of foreign language learning for children with an immigration background and those with learning difficulties
- realised learning outcomes (results) in comparison to the specified curricular standards

3.2.2 Concept and procedure

The extensive study comprises four parts:

- A state-wide survey of senior management in schools
- A survey of English teachers
- Lesson observation by means of appropriately developed criteria as well as structured interviews with teaching staff
- Tests - assessment of achievement levels

Right from the outset the project group was supported by six academic specialists from different universities, most of them with specialization in EYL. The main investigation took place in 2005 and 2006 after nearly two years of experiences with English. The broad base of the survey and the wide variety of sources from which the data has been collected guarantees it a high level of validity and gives a wealth of opportunities for correlations, which can provide interesting insights and perceptions.

Survey of senior management

The standardised online questionnaire comprised 12 questions on topics such as lesson organisation, facilities and teacher training. Questionnaires from about 68% (of 3461 schools) were returned.

Survey of teaching staff

500 teachers from 250 schools spanning five different local councils took part in the survey. The teacher's questionnaire was extremely comprehensive, with 75 questions to be completed online. The questions covered issues such as personal data (e.g. qualifications and experience), the content and methodology of English teaching, learning materials, the meaning of foreign language learning for pupils with a mother tongue other than German, and cooperation with secondary schools. The design of the survey was partly based on similar questionnaires used in the Netherlands and Norway. In fact several identical questions were included from these questionnaires, thus making a comparison of results from the three countries possible.

Lesson Observation/Interviews with Staff

Lessons were observed in 60 of the 250 schools which had already taken part in the teaching staff survey. The observations made it possible to correlate the different types of data.

The schools were chosen by the local school authorities, who were asked to cater for a balanced proportion of urban and rural schools as well as schools with a higher number of immigrant children.

In total 88 lessons were observed, after which interviews were conducted. The lesson observation and the interviews were carried out with the help of criteria-based, standardised forms.

Standardization of the criteria was an important pre-condition to avoid subjective impressions, and instead acquire valid data. The observation teams, each consisting of two specialists from LfS and a university, as well as a representative from the school administration, attended a workshop at which they were prepared for the school visits and became familiar with the standardized material. The research aims of the observations and interviews included acquiring data on learning and teaching methods, possible differences between girls and boys (gender aspect), integration of children with immigrant backgrounds, the language of communication used in class, and cooperation with other schools.

Assessment of achievement level – listening, reading comprehension, speaking

The tests were carried out in the 4th form in late spring, i.e. after nearly two years of learning English. Once again, the chosen were those in the schools whose teachers had already been involved in the other parts of the research (survey, observation, interviews). About 1.800 pupils took part in the test, which were conducted by the specialists. The test results were expected to provide information about the extent to which the demands of the curriculum were achievable and what pupils were capable of doing in English after two years of learning the language. Furthermore they were expected to provide valuable control knowledge for the revision and drawing up of the curriculum for years 1-2 and 3-4.

Test materials and the corresponding evaluation instruments were developed with the cooperation of academic specialists. The test was made up of parts for listening and reading comprehension, each with two tasks and with each task containing between 8 and 14 items. The pupils had 45 minutes to work on the tasks, answering multiple choice reading and listening comprehension questions. The topics and vocabulary were matched to the primary school syllabus.

The listening comprehension tasks, spoken by a native speaker, were played from a CD. The first part began with 12 individual sentences, each of which was played twice to the pupils. For each sentence there were four pictures, each showing various situations. The children had to decide which of the situations depicted matched best with the sentence they had just heard. There was only one correct answer for each sentence. In the second listening task, a complete story of around 170 words was played through twice to the children from a CD. The story is about a witch who lives in a forest with her cat and two ghost friends. Since all the animals are afraid of the ghosts, one of the ghosts one day asks the witch to help them to remove their fear. The children were able to demonstrate their understanding of the text through the multiple-choice questions. Since this part of the test aimed to examine listening comprehension, the items were set in German. For this task, there was also only one correct answer.

In the first part of the reading comprehension test, the pupils were given 14 sentences which they had to match with one of four previously given choices. The children had to either understand and logically combine clauses, or identify at least two features within a sentence.

In the second task, there was a one-to-one relation of pictures to sentences which made a story. The children then had to find the matching picture for each sentence. This task format was well known to the children, since it is used in most textbooks.

The speaking test was performed some weeks later. From each class, six pupils spanning three different ability levels, completed a speaking test. In total approximately 500 pupils took part in the test on a voluntary basis. The speaking test had two parts: in the first part the specialist held a dialogue with the pupil about his/her age, hobbies, family and so on, and the pupil had to ask vice versa. This created an authentic situation because they neither of the participants knew each other. The second task consisted of a description of a picture. The pupils were shown a scene from a schoolyard. They then had to describe everything that they could see in the picture, in complete sentences if possible. All instructions were given in German as well as English.

3.3 Initial Results

3.3.1 Organisation

It was clear from both surveys that the English lessons in school involved were mostly a well-established part of the timetable and were taught by well qualified staff. According to the information provided by school heads, there are 5925 subject teachers for English employed in the participating 2533 primary schools, as well as 139 prospective teachers (trainee teachers). 61% of the English teachers in primary schools have completed studies in primary education, whereas 31% have completed studies in primary- and secondary-level education. 36% of them have postgraduate studies of English. This does not necessarily mean teaching experience of English, as the subject has been a compulsory subject in primary schools only since 2003. 78% have a C1-qualification and 91% attended the 60 hours of comprehensive methodological didactical training. The majority of teachers had chosen English because they were interested in the subject and enjoyed teaching it.

3.3.2 Lessons

The content and methods used for teaching English in primary schools are based on the interests of very young learners, and this is reflected in the syllabus. The teaching is principally in English. Teaching is vivid, varied and demonstrative. Activities considered important in primary English, such as story telling, TPR (total physical response), using hand puppets and visual stimuli, were frequently observed. The acquisition of oral skills and vocabulary are also considered of utmost importance.

Lessons give priority to the acquisition of communicative skills and competencies. Listening comprehension occupies the biggest portion of lesson time. Speaking also plays an important role, as a general rule in the form of imitative speech, for example choral repetition, speaking games, and mini-dialogues learnt by heart. Independent speech production and attempts at forming constructions e.g. in role plays, are more unusual to encounter. The speaking tests and lesson observation, however, make it clear that here there is untapped potential, at least among some pupils. Reading, and especially writing, play a minimal role in English lessons in primary

schools at present. Teachers, however, are convinced that writing can have an important supportive function, although they relatively rarely put this into practice.

It is striking that almost all children are highly motivated to learn a foreign language. The fact that foreign language lessons mean a new beginning for **all** of them has a positive effect on the attitude towards learning of children from immigrant backgrounds as well as children with learning difficulties. Teachers notice no difference between the motivation of children from immigrant backgrounds and those whose mother tongue is German. Approximately 55% of teaching staff say that they allow mother tongue expressions in their lessons, and provide pupils with the opportunity to discover differences and similarities between German, English and mother tongues in the classroom.

At the primary level there is no distinct difference between girls and boys regarding attitudes towards learning and skills and competencies. This is surprising in view of what happens further in secondary education, which shows that on the average more girls seem to be motivated to learn modern languages.

The text book and study materials play a considerable role; almost nine out of ten teachers work regularly, and many exclusively, with textbooks. This is understandable on the one hand, because English is firstly a new subject and it is natural for inexperienced teachers to seek guidelines. On the other hand this harbours the danger of lessons becoming rigidly structured, often leaving little room for the use of authentic materials and more flexible teaching methods. Whilst audiovisual materials are widely used (pupils' listening comprehension is well trained), the digital media, authentic software and the Internet seem to play almost no role. Although there were campaigns to implement new technologies into schools years ago, primary schools seem to make little use of them.

3.3.3 Assessment of achievement level (tests)

Listening and reading comprehension

An important indicator for the success of foreign language lessons is the development of the linguistic skills of the pupils, especially listening comprehension and speaking. The test results indicate that the implementation of EFL lessons at the primary level school was a successful measure. Compared to the predictions of the teaching experts, almost all of whom deemed especially the story (listening comprehension) and related tasks as too difficult, the results are definitely positive to observe. Pupils performed well in both the listening and reading tests. Only 1% of pupils scored under 25%: almost 50% achieved up to 74% and 34% achieved results of 76-88%. This shows that they possess good skills in reading and listening comprehension, in line with the compulsory standards of the curriculum. They were in a position to both understand the content of sentences and short texts, and to work out individual details on the surface of the text. In addition to this, a number of children managed to draw conclusions from short texts, and to make references which were not explicitly mentioned in the text. Taking part in the tests was a new experience for the pupils, and one to which they largely reacted to in a positive way.

Speaking test

Task 1 – Dialogue – Getting to know another person

The majority of pupils from the different learning groups and schools achieved a positive result. They were able to understand the questions and react with appropriate answers. However, they were less successful in their active conversational role. In very few cases did a complete dialogue develop, since about only every tenth pupil posed questions independently, and at the most only one or two questions.

In the second, more coherently answered speaking test section (reacting to a picture), it was observed that the pupils drew on a good number of words, but mainly nouns. They referred thoroughly and correctly to aspects of the picture, although mainly with chunks, one-word utterances, and sentence fragments. The formation of complete individual statements and combinations of statements was only identified among a distinct minority of the tested children (less than 10%).

As with the listening and reading comprehension sections, it was also evident in the spoken test that the children were highly motivated to tackle the tasks they were confronted with. Consequently, both the high and low achievers tried to make themselves verbally comprehensible. Most of the children wanted to respond in a very detailed and sophisticated way, but it was obvious that they did not have a grasp of the necessary verbal skills in order to fulfil their own spoken intentions. They only had a rather limited repertoire of verbs and of grammatical words such as pronouns, prepositions and adverbs. As a result, only a few pupils managed to construct complete sentences.

Most of the children seem motivated for language activities and keen to use this new language to express themselves. In their creativity they are willing to take risks and make mistakes: *"I can see two kids, they are 'loafing' home (from German: laufen), or: "The boys are 'gambling' football"*. This not only shows their eagerness to communicate in English, but also that they have understood basic grammatical principles about the language. Their willingness to experiment with the new language was extremely useful for their acquisition of language. Nevertheless, it is important that the teaching they are subjected to offers the necessary resources and appropriate situations for action-oriented learning.

3.3.4 Immigrant background children

Regarding the introduction of obligatory English classes for all primary school children, the frequently discussed presumption is that children who grow up speaking two or more languages, namely children for example whose ancestors are not German, would be disadvantaged through the learning of another language(s). However, this did not turn out to be the case.

The test achievements do show differences between children with German heritage and children with other backgrounds, but these differences are not marked. Children from German-speaking families (1336 children) achieved an average score of 30.5 out of 45 points on the tests. Children who, according to the subject specialists, grew up bilingual homes (174 children) attained 28.5 points on average; children with other native languages (238 children) achieved an average score of 25.7. A comparison between the two largest groups (Turkish and Russian) shows that the children with Russian backgrounds achieved the highest scores of those from these two minority backgrounds (27 points). Children with Turkish as their native language scored below average, with 24.9 points. The results of pupils in mixed ability classes shows, as expected, that their average score of 21.5 clearly falls under the overall mean scores.

3.4 The new curriculum

To meet the new start in English from year 1 onwards in 2009, a new curriculum has just been developed, having considered the results of the survey. Following the international trend of standard and outcome orientation, new core curricula were developed for secondary education in 2003. The core curriculum for modern languages is geared to the competences and standards of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*. The new curriculum for English in primary has been developed on the same basis, which hopefully also cater for an appropriate transition into secondary. Though the communicative oral approach will remain a leading principle in primary education, reading and writing will necessarily play a more important role within the three and a half years pupils learn a foreign language at primary school.

Excerpts from the first and third chapter of the new curriculum:

Tasks and Aims

“The foreign language teaching in the primary school (...) develops the possibilities of the school children of the primary school in dealing with certain life styles through their own linguistic and cultural diversity, and grappling with the variety of cultures within and outside of their own country. (...)

Therefore, the teaching of English opens the door to multilingualism and puts a vital emphasis on the development of the individual’s own language biography.

The English teaching already targets, among other things, the acquisition of basic linguistic resources as well as concrete communicative skills and abilities. Secondary schools can build on this reliable foundation of linguistic skills with their English teaching from class 5 onwards, and also offer further languages later on in school. (...)

Competences

In order to develop subject-related competences, the English lesson offers the possibilities to develop skills and abilities, attitudes and knowledge.

The following objectives are laid as a foundation for the attainment of basic education standards in English:

- *the development of interests and enjoyment in language learning and in foreign cultures and lifestyles*
- *the acquisition, experimentation and consolidation of elementary linguistic resources*
- *the accomplishment of simple language operation situations in the English language*
- *the acquisition of learning and working methods as well as effective strategies of language learning*

At the end of form 4 the pupils gain the standard A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, whereas in terms of listening comprehension and speaking (inter) actions, the level can be exceeded.

3.5 Summary and conclusion

English teaching in primary schools in NRW are heading in the right direction. The pupils are highly motivated and have achieved a high level of success in relation to the compulsory level required by the curriculum. The positive results seem to confirm that one of the advantages of

starting at an early age is the lack of reservation and the open-mindedness/openness of young learners towards learning a new language. As far as speaking skills are concerned, it can be established that there is still undoubtedly more development potential, which should be particularly exploited.

The teaching of English, with its focus on achievements in comprehension and the reproduction of pre-formulated language elements, has proved its value as the results of the listening and reading comprehension tests demonstrate. However, the school children also show willingness and skills when dealing with the construction of language elements. In order to keep the joy, enthusiasm and ambition of young learners alive, it is important to provide them with more opportunities to discover and experiment with the language. Teachers should be encouraged to give more attention to the creative and productive learning processes. Mistakes should not be seen as a demotivating factor but rather be looked upon as indicators of the learning process. They should be used constructively and productively in the language acquisition process, and as a reflection of the learner's needs.

Primary teachers are usually faced with an extremely heterogeneous group of children in terms of their levels of development. They therefore need to be very skilled to meet all the individual demands and needs among their pupils. In addition to a good training, they need high quality appropriate materials. Learning packages should rather be seen as scaffolding than fixing the teacher to a rigid teaching plan, which does not leave any room for alternatives. The teaching material should offer a wide range of different options. Teachers need materials that offer support for open learning arrangements. The material should be authentic, motivating, challenging and geared to the interests and horizons of young children. It should offer the chance for self contained and constructive learning in meaningful scenarios. Interdisciplinary aspects should also be taken into account.

The transition into secondary education is a rather a sensitive point. There are only a few schools at the different levels that have regular contact and exchange information with each other. Although many secondary schools have been informed through a special brochure about English teaching and learning in primary schools, they obviously have difficulties in coping with this new situation. Many secondary teachers simply do not take into account what the children have been learning for the two years prior to starting the secondary level; they often overload pupils with the kinds of tests they are not used to and which are not adapted to the skills and knowledge of the primary learner. This leads to frustration and uncertainty on the part of the learners, as well as the teachers.

Now with the even earlier start in year 1, an exchange of information and a constant cooperation between both school forms is essential if learning a foreign language from an early age on is to be sustainable in the long run. Secondary schools need to be aware of how teaching and learning English takes place in primary schools, and what is distinctive about it. English teaching and learning in primary schools is not an early secondary-level English lesson *en miniature* – it is a learning arrangement in its own right, geared specifically to primary education and oriented to the abilities and skills of young learners. Children should be encouraged and taught in a way that suits their age and ability levels.

In order to maintain the good quality of English teaching in primary thus far, suitable advanced training must be offered to teachers. At present, the materials developed for the first advanced training course are being revised, being amended to include the requirements of age-groups 1 and

2. When this process is finished, schools will receive adequate advanced training offers. Meanwhile we are also now seeing the first teachers who have completed studies specifically for primary-level English. There are, however, still too few foreign language departments in universities which offer suitable studies for specialisation at the primary-school level. Some graduates who have not studied English expect that their chances of getting a teaching position in a school will be greater if they take a post-graduate course in the language. A few years ago the situation was unproblematic, as courses were only offered by respectable institutions. However, meanwhile there has been a growing market of what are sometimes quite dubious offers of further education to teachers in need of the C1 qualification. It is essential to further safeguard the linguistic and educational quality of specialised English teachers.

The data about the research into primary English in NRW will probably be published in 2008 as part of a collection of articles on early EFL teaching in Europe

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4 English in primary education in Norway

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4.1 The history of English in Norwegian primary education

English was introduced into the primary level following the curriculum reform of 1974 (*L74*). At the time pupils started their primary education at the age of seven and English was implemented in the fourth grade. Since primary education embraced grades 1 to 7, pupils received three years of English, with three lessons a week, before moving on to lower secondary school. The *L74* curriculum was heavily based on the audio-lingual approach and behaviourist ideas. The focus of teaching was on promoting the oral skills, although communicative methods were little in use at the time. With the curriculum reform of 1987 (*M87*), there was a greater emphasis on communication and creativity. However, the focus was still on oral language, with pupils still being taught English three hours a week from grades 4 to 7.

The most radical change within primary English occurred with the curriculum reform of 1997 (*L97*). The reform changed English at this level in two main ways: firstly it introduced English into the first four grades, allocating 95 lessons of English to these four years, but allowing schools the freedom to choose in which grade teaching would commence. In practice the vast majority of schools (8 out of 10) started English in the first grade (Drew 2004a). Grades 5 to 7 continued with three lessons of English a week. The second major change was attaching as much weight to promoting the written skills as to promoting oral language. The ambitious aims for reading, for example, were reflected in the range of genres and suggested texts which pupils were expected to read. Pupils' reading was to be the source of inspiration for texts that they would themselves produce.

The most recent curriculum reform of 2006 (*Kunnskapsløftet*) has reinforced the balanced focus between oral and written language that was characteristic of the *L97*. The major difference between the present curriculum and its predecessor is that *Kunnskapsløftet* is a curriculum primarily based on learning aims, which are specified after grades 2, 4, 7, 10 and 11. These aims, in turn, are strongly influenced by 'Can dos' and the Common European Framework of Reference.

It is important to note that the fact that Norway has had national curriculum guidelines since 1974, and even before, has facilitated the transition from primary to secondary education in all subjects, English included. The different curricula provide, for instance, the lower secondary school teacher of English with a clear picture of what pupils are expected to have achieved before entering lower secondary school. However, there was no formal exam or test in English at the end of the primary period prior to 2005, when national tests in reading comprehension and writing were introduced for the first time, only to be discontinued the following year. The future of these exams is at present uncertain.

4.2 Teacher training and qualifications

English teachers can be trained in two ways in Norway. Either they take a Bachelor of Education, a four-year general teaching degree consisting of a number of compulsory and optional subjects, or they obtain a university degree with a following post-graduate certificate in education (now one-year). The majority of teachers at the primary level have a general teaching degree. Within this degree English has always had the status of being an optional subject, usually of half a year or a full year. According to a survey of primary teachers in 2003 (Drew 2004a), only 2 per cent of the teachers who responded to a questionnaire had studied English for more than one year.

There has been an enormous discrepancy between the demand for English teachers at the primary level, especially after 1997 when the subject was taught from grades 1 to 7, and the actual numbers of graduate teachers who have studied English as part of their teaching degree. The consequence has been that an alarming number of teachers, as many as seven out of ten in grades 1 to 4, and every second teacher in grades 5 to 7, have been teaching English without any formal qualifications in the subject (Lagerstrøm 2000, Drew 2004a). The situation is more favourable at the lower secondary level, but even here one out of five English teachers lack formal qualifications in the subject. In contrast to reforms leading to increasingly more ambitious curricula for English at the primary level, no matching reforms have taken place for English in teacher education. The large numbers of practising teachers of English without formal qualifications at the primary level is a major weakness in the system of English education in Norway, only symbolically compensated by the advantages of having national curriculum guidelines.

4.3 Teaching materials and methods

There is a strong tradition for using textbooks in Norwegian schools, and English is no exception. As many as 7 out of 10 teachers base their teaching on textbooks frequently or all of the time (Drew 2004). These textbooks have evolved from the constructed audio-lingual texts of the 1974 curriculum period, to containing increasingly more demanding texts on a wide range of subjects and genres. A typical textbook for the 6th grade (*A New Scoop 6 Textbook*) contains texts on the British Isles, schools in Britain, animals, sports and games, families, amazing facts and world records, Robin Hood, and Roald Dahl's *Danny the Champion of the World*. Publishers have recently also supplemented their textbooks with accompanying websites with, for example, simplified versions of the texts, extra tasks, and Internet links.

The survey of primary teachers in 2003 (Drew 2004a) showed that many teachers still emphasised oral language at the primary level in spite of the written skills being attached more weight in the curriculum in force at the time (L97). More teachers gave priority to speaking and listening than to reading and writing and 8 out of 10 considered it important to foster a positive attitude towards learning how to communicate in English. The potential to promote literacy skills among the primary learners of English was largely being underexploited (Drew 2004a).

4.4 Recent developments

In addition to the introduction of national tests in 2005, and a new English curriculum influenced by the Common European Framework of Reference in 2006 (*Kunnskapsløftet*), a Language

Portfolio including English as one of several languages was designed for optional use at the lower secondary level in 2006, and a Language Portfolio for use at the primary level has been introduced in 2007.

4.5 Norway and the Cidree project

Norway became involved in the Cidree project in the autumn of 2002 following an enquiry by Han Van Toorenborg of the Dutch SLO to L ringssenteret (the central Norwegian educational authorities). Van Toorenborg was interested in expanding the network that was already in place comprising representatives from the Netherlands and Germany. Ion Drew, a member of the English Department of Stavanger University College, now the University of Stavanger, was approached by the late Anne Karin Korsvold of L ringssenteret about participation in the project, and agreed take part as the Norwegian representative. Drew had extensive experience of teaching English in Norwegian schools, was an experienced teacher trainer, and showed particular interest in research into English as a foreign language at the primary level.

4.5.1 Contact and meetings

Drew corresponded frequently with Han van Toorenborg throughout the spring of 2003. He attended his first Cidree meeting in Enschede in May 2003, which was also attended by Nina Kampmeier and Gaby Engel, representing the Nordrhein – Wesfalen ‘Bundesland’ in Germany. The meeting was the beginning of a constructive and fruitful cooperation lasting until the present.

Drew hosted the next Cidree meeting, which was held in Stavanger in June 2004. In addition to Han van Toorenborg, Nina Kampmeier and Gaby Engel, the meeting welcomed Bas Trombos, Han van Toorenborg’s successor at the Dutch SLO, and Zsuzsanna Nyiro from Hungary, as members of the Cidree group.

Drew attended all the subsequent Cidree meetings: Enschede (January 2005), Soest (June 2005) and Budapest (2006). It came as a surprise and disappointment to learn in 2005 that Norway had withdrawn from Cidree. Drew nevertheless decided to continue his collaboration with the Cidree group with support from his institution and private fundings. He considered the nature of the Cidree project and his collaboration with its members too important to withdraw from in spite of the fact that Norway no longer had any official connection to Cidree.

4.5.2 Research and dissemination

Through the continued correspondence with Han Van Toorenborg in the spring of 2003, Drew had learned about the Dutch survey among primary school teachers of English in 2002 (Oostdam and van Toorenborg, 2002), and began to compile a questionnaire in Norway of a similar nature. The questionnaire contained 52 questions covering the following main areas:

- Teachers’ qualifications and experience
- The organisation of English teaching at the primary level
- In-service training
- Use of English in the classroom
- Teaching priorities
- Classroom methodology

- Use of technology
- The transition from primary to secondary school

The questions on use of English in the classroom, teaching priorities and the transition from primary to secondary education were identical to the questions used in the Dutch questionnaires. This made it possible to make a direct comparison between the two countries in these areas.

In the spring of 2003 the questionnaire was sent to 418 primary schools throughout the country, a representative selection of schools provided by Statistisk Sentralbureau (The Central Statistics Agency). It was answered by 153 teachers of English in grades 1 to 7, a response rate of 36.6%, and formed the basis of a 43 page report entitled *Survey of English Teaching in Norwegian Primary Schools* (Drew, 2004a), in which the background for the questionnaire and its findings were presented and discussed. The report included a section comparing the Dutch and Norwegian systems, and revealed both similarities, for example weaknesses in the system of teacher education that led to a high ratio of unqualified teachers of English at the primary level in both Norway and the Netherlands, and differences between the two countries, for example a much earlier start in Norway and a national curriculum that facilitated the transition from the primary to secondary levels. The transition from primary to secondary in the Netherlands appeared to be one of the weakest features of the system of English education in the country.

The data from the Norwegian and Dutch primary questionnaires was presented at a seminar conference for teacher trainers of English in Sogndal, Norway, in the spring of 2004. The data was also used as the basis for the article 'Comparing primary English in Norway and the Netherlands' in the Norwegian language education journal, *Språk og Språkundervisning* (Drew, 2004b). The article compared and discussed the main findings from the related questionnaires in the two countries. At a later point of time, Van Toorenburg, Oostdam and Drew decided to collaborate on writing a joint article for an international journal based on the primary questionnaires in Norway and the Netherlands, as well as a secondary school questionnaire in the Netherlands. After a long process of reviewing, the article, entitled 'Teachers' experiences and perceptions of primary EFL in Norway and The Netherlands: A comparative study', was accepted for publication in 2007 by the *European Journal of Teacher Education* (Drew et al. 2007).

In April of 2005, the Department of Cultural Studies and Languages at the University of Stavanger hosted the *Symposium on Literacy Studies*, attended by scholars from Norway and Scotland in connection with Masters in Literacy Studies programme that had recently started at the University of Stavanger. Drew's contribution at the symposium, inspired by the Cidree project, was a paper entitled 'Reading and writing in Norwegian primary EFL education and how it compares with the Netherlands' (Drew 2005). The aim of the paper was to discuss the extent and manner in which reading and writing were practised and promoted in Norwegian primary EFL education compared to the Netherlands. The paper concluded that Norwegian children are clearly exposed to much more reading and writing at the end of primary than their peers in the Netherlands. However, it was argued that the case in both countries was one of unfulfilled potential and that improving teacher competence was a matter of urgency.

Inspired by the Dutch secondary school questionnaire, in 2005 Drew compiled a questionnaire for secondary school teachers of English on similar lines to the primary school questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to 500 schools, a representative selection of schools provided by Statistisk Sentralbureau, and was answered by 242 teachers, a response rate of 48.4%. As with the primary questionnaire, the questions were designed to extract background information about the teachers, for example teacher qualifications and experience, teaching priorities, and classroom

materials and practices used in the teaching of English. Many of the questions concerned the frequency with which materials were used or activities practised in the classroom. On the basis of some of the findings from the Norwegian primary and secondary questionnaires, Drew gave a paper entitled 'Literacy practices in L2 English in Norwegian primary and lower secondary education' at the the ISCHE 28 Conference, *Technologies of the Word: Literacies in the History of Education*, at Umeå University, August 2006. In essence it was argued that reading and writing are practised far less at the primary level than intended by the curriculum, and that although more focus is given to these skills at the secondary level, oral language is still given priority over written language.

A further product of the Cidree project in Norway was a Masters thesis, completed in 2006, which was a part of the Literacy Studies degree at the University of Stavanger (Vigrestad, 2006). The thesis compared the written English of 7th and 10th graders in Norway and the Netherlands, based on a study of 198 picture narratives from pupils in the two countries. The texts were analyzed to compare selected measures of fluency and complexity. The thesis was only possible because of the cooperation of Han van Toorenborg and Bas Trimbos, who kindly acquired texts from Dutch pupils.

The results showed obvious benefits, according to a number of the writing criteria investigated, of the early EFL start of the Norwegian 7th grade pupils compared to their Dutch peers. The Norwegian 7th graders scored higher than their Dutch peers in most measures included in the study. However, the differences were significantly reduced by the 10th grade.

In the discussion, the results were linked partly to similarities and differences between the pupils' first languages and English. They were also linked to different issues concerning EFL in Norway and the Netherlands, for example the importance of teacher qualifications, the usefulness of national curricula, the challenges of continuity from the primary to secondary levels, as well as some thoughts on how today's EFL teaching can be improved. Central to the discussion were new trends in language teaching and learning, especially the Common European Framework (CEF), and how it has influenced curricula and testing.

4.6 Summary

Participation in the Cidree project has been extremely fruitful for the Norwegian representative and for research into EFL in Norway. It has led to long-lasting and ongoing collaboration with associates in the Netherlands, Germany and Hungary. It has led to comprehensive surveys among Norwegian primary and lower secondary school teachers of English. It has further led to the publication of a comprehensive report on primary English teaching in Norway, and articles comparing primary English in Norway and the Netherlands in both Norwegian and international journals. Papers based on the research in Norway have been presented at a national seminar and international conferences/symposia. Finally a Masters thesis has been written comparing the written English of Dutch and Norwegian 7th and 10th graders. Drew's participation in the Cidree project has inspired him to focus his research on primary English, with ongoing projects involving monitoring the language development, especially reading and writing, of young Norwegian learners. There is also the strong possibility of a future research project involving

collaboration between Drew and Gaby Engel into the testing of language skills among primary level learners of English in Norway and North Rhine-Westphalia..

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5 General Conclusion

Collaboration between the countries involved in this Cidree project has been fruitful and productive. It has firstly revealed differences and similarities in the systems of primary EFL education in the different countries. For example, although the starting age for primary English varies considerably in Norway and the Netherlands, both countries share similar problems and challenges in terms of inadequate teacher qualifications for many of the teachers who teach at this level. In contrast, when NRW introduced English at the primary level in 2004, it ensured that all teachers had a minimum level of competence both in the language itself and in the methodology of teaching English as a foreign language. With regards to continuity, Both the Netherlands and NRW share similar challenges from primary to secondary, which leaves great room for improvement in both countries. In contrast, the continuity from primary to secondary seems far less problematic in Norway, partly because primary English spans seven years, and partly because of the National Curriculum, which clearly stipulates what learners are expected to have achieved before entering secondary education.

One of the most productive elements of the collaboration between the countries involved has been its snowball effect on research. The Netherlands was the first of the countries involved to conduct a national survey among its EFL teachers. This survey inspired a similar survey to be conducted in Norway, in fact using many of the same questions that had been used from the Dutch survey. Research of this nature had been sorely lacking in Norway and one could argue that it only happened as a direct consequence of the Dutch research. At a later stage, NRW conducted a teacher survey that was inspired by the Dutch and Norwegian surveys, and which also used many of the same questions. A comparison of the Dutch and Norwegian surveys has resulted in both national and international publications. A future comparison of comparable the data in the Dutch, Norwegian and NRW surveys is possible and would certainly be fruitful.

The collaboration has also led to an increased awareness of the issues involved in primary EFL education in the respective countries. The Netherlands faces challenges and decisions concerning the scope and quality of its primary EFL education. Norway has started a process of research into primary EFL, and certainly needs to continue and expand this, as many aspects of this education can be improved. Both the Netherlands and Norway can learn from the comprehensive research that has followed the implementation of primary EFL in NRW. In the Netherlands and Norway it was simply a case of implementing primary EFL without following up in terms of ensuring adequate teacher competence and research into the effects of its primary EFL programmes. This was evidently an unacceptable policy in NRW, which followed up the implementation of primary EFL with both quality assurance of its teachers and research into the effects of its programme.

There is a feeling that the collaboration between the countries should not end at the present, but that mutual benefits can be gained from its continuation. Areas such as starting age, curricula, the content of methods of teaching, testing, teacher qualifications, the language portfolio, continuity and of course the Common European Framework of Reference, may form the basis for future collaboration and help to enhance the quality of EFL primary teaching both in the countries involved and in other countries.