

The need for a transitional class for immigrant children whose mother tongue is not English in Sint Maarten



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ABSTRACT

Primarily caused by the large influx of immigrants and the compulsory education policy, in Sint Maarten there are many immigrant children enrolled in primary education who have difficulty with the English language. The Department of Education intends to explore to what extent a transitional class, which is separated from the mainstream primary education, is a solution for improving the language difficulties of immigrant children. This study used a mixed method design of quantitative and qualitative measures. A total of 177 respondents (principals, teachers, children, parents, members of the transitional class 2004 and members of the Border Protection Service) participated in this study. Although children generally integrate successfully and are included in their social environments upon immigrating in Sint Maarten, this study shows that these children do experience academic difficulties because of their language barrier. In tackling these difficulties, teachers face significant challenges, which are outlined in this study, including that new children enrol in class throughout the year and that parents are hindered by their own language barrier in providing adequate academic support. On a governmental level, revision of existing policies can contribute to improve the language proficiency of immigrant children. Moreover, further alignment and cooperation between the objectives of the Border Protection Office and the Department of Education is required. While the Border Protection Office advocates the reducing of the number of illegal children in primary education, the Department of Education aims to enrol as many of the current illegal children as possible in primary education. Also, the Ministry of Education continues to explore the potential of tailored transitional classes. This study concludes by outlining the characteristics to success of such classes and includes the recommendation to not lose eye on the overall integration process of these children, for instance by limiting the period of a transitional class to several months to a year.

Keywords: Sint Maarten, Immigration, Language Difficulties, Primary education, Compulsory education policy

SAMENVATTING

Kinderen die immigreren naar Sint Maarten hebben moeite met de Engelse taal omdat ze uit landen komen waar Engels niet de voertaal is. Deze kinderen worden, vanwege de leerplicht, in het reguliere primaire onderwijs geplaatst. Dit onderzoek heeft op verzoek van het Departement van Onderwijs in kaart gebracht of transitieklassen, waar kinderen eerst beter de voertaal leren voordat ze geplaatst worden in het reguliere systeem, de juiste oplossing is voor kinderen met een taalachterstand. Het onderzoek heeft gebruik gemaakt van kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve methoden om antwoord te geven op de onderzoeksvragen. In totaal hebben 177 respondenten meegedaan aan het onderzoek. De respondenten zijn directeuren, docenten, kinderen, ouders, docenten van de transitieklas 2004 en leden van de Immigratiedienst. Deze studie resulteert dat kinderen die nieuw zijn in Sint Maarten academische problemen hebben vanwege hun achterstand in de Engelse taal. Kinderen integreren makkelijk in de klas en kunnen zich zonder problemen aanpassen aan een nieuwe omgeving. Docenten ervaren meerdere problemen met het toenemend aantal kinderen in de klas die de taal niet spreken. Ook al ervaren docenten geen betrokkenheid van de ouders, willen ouders zich wel inzetten voor hun kinderen maar zit de taalbarrière van ouders ook in de weg. Op macro niveau moet beleid gemaakt worden dat de taal verworvenheid van de kinderen en de ouders verbeterd wordt. De Immigratiedienst concludeert dat het verminderen van immigranten in basisonderwijs deze problemen zullen oplossen. Het Departement van Onderwijs is ervan overtuigd dat een transitieklas een adequate oplossing is voor kinderen die hun taalachterstand moeten inhalen. Bij het implementeren van transitieklassen, moet rekening gehouden worden met de integratie van deze leerlingen en moet de duur van zo'n programma van zes maanden tot maximaal een jaar duren.

Trefwoorden: Sint Maarten, Immigratie, Taalachterstand, Basisonderwijs, Leerplicht

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Sint Maarten there are many immigrant children from the Dominican Republic, Haiti and China with English language difficulties in primary education, caused by the large influx of immigrants and the compulsory education policy. The Ministry of Education intends to investigate what difficulties schools, parents, children and external organisations experience when children, whose mother tongue is not English, are placed into mainstream education. Also, the Ministry intends to explore to what extent a transitional class, a separate class for children with a language barrier, a solution is for improving the language barrier of children.

1.1 General information Sint Maarten

St Maarten is a small Caribbean island of 87 square kilometres, which is divided into two regions. Since 1948, under the Treaty of Concordia, this island was divided into a Dutch territory and a French territory (Unicef, 2013). The southern part of the Island is Sint. Maarten (34 km²) is part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands but not of the European Union. The northern section, Saint Martin (53 km²), is part of France and the European Union. The capital of St Maarten is Philipsburg, which contains a population of 1.327 people. The entire Dutch side contains a population of 38.247 (Department of Statistics, 2015). The main languages people speak are English, Dutch, Spanish, Haitian, Creole, Papiamento and French. In 2000 a referendum took place and citizens voted to become a self-governing country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 2010, Sint Maarten obtained autonomy and became self-governing. Even though St. Maarten has obtained its independence, the national defence and foreign relations remains under the responsibility of the Netherlands (Unicef, 2013).

1.2 Immigration and emigration on St Maarten

In 2012, the total population of St. Maarten recorded 55,309 residents, exclusive of the non-registered immigrants. According to the statistics of the Civil Registry Office, the population increased from 2010-2012 by 2,100 people. Because the birth- and death rate on St Maarten remained stable, the population growth is particularly the result of immigration, which increased significantly over the past years (Unicef, 2013). Although younger adults are leaving the island for education purposes, there is still a large inflow of immigrants that will work in the tourism sector, in construction, and the cleaning service (Unicef, 2013).

According to the census of the Department of Statistics, in 2011 seven out of ten people on the island were from elsewhere and 118 different nationalities were living on the island. The majority of the population of St. Maarten consists of immigrants, with the highest percentages

coming from the Dominican Republic (12,4%), Haiti (9,2%) and Jamaica (7,9%) (Department of Statistics, 2011; Unicef, 2013). Of these immigrants, 13,3% are children of a compulsory education age (Department of Statistics, 2011).

Many immigrants do not have a legal status and are undocumented immigrants. Undocumented immigrants can be described as 'individuals who are no citizens of the country, do not have current permanent resident visas, and have not been granted admission under rules for longer-term residence and work permits' (Nienhusser, 2013).

1.3 Compulsory education policy

In Sint Maarten, compulsory education was implemented in August 2009 (Compulsory education report, 2014-2015). The compulsory education law is applicable to all children, including undocumented immigrants, between the ages of four and eighteen years. The law specifies a requirement that children are enrolled and attend school. The law also specifies that a child is required to go to school until the youngster has reached the age of 18 or has received a diploma in secondary education. As a result of this policy, the number of immigrant children in primary education increased.

1.4 Public schools – primary education

The state of education report (2012-2014) and the compulsory education report (2014-2015) state that in 2013-2014 there were a total of 4,812 children enrolled in primary education. This study focuses on the public schools as these schools are subsidised by the government, and these schools follow the rules and regulations of the government. In 2013, there were 1523 students enrolled in the six public schools of Sint Maarten¹.

1.5 Immigrants in compulsory education

For the compulsory education report 2014-2015, primary schools were asked to indicate the total number of undocumented students in their school in the year 2013-2014. The schools with the highest number of undocumented students are Ruby Labega (104 students), John a Gumbs School (96 students), Marie Genevieve de Weever (87 students), Dr. Martin Luther King School (85 students) and the Seventh Day Adventist (84 students). Ruby Labega, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Marie Genevieve de Weever are three public schools with the highest percentage of non-registered students in comparison to the total amount of students in their

¹ See appendix 1: Name of the public schools

school. John a Gumbs and Seventh Day Adventist are not public schools but also have a high number of non-registered students. Therefore we cannot conclude that the majority of non-registered students go to the public schools.

1.6. Pilot programs ‘transitional classes 2004-2006’

In 2004 to 2006, a transitional school and classes were implemented for primary school children to provide intensive tutoring for children with learning deficiencies in order to make sure they would be able to perform at age or grade level (B.E.R.P.P.I., 2007). A total of 72 students were given extra guidance to learn the English language in a transitional class before they would immerse into mainstream education. After a year, 53 students were performing at their average age level and were placed back into mainstream primary education. Even though the need for a transitional school was high at that time, the project was not pursued because the funding ended after two years. This program is considered a best practice for children with language difficulties and therefore the Department of Education is considering whether to re-implement this program.

2. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

In order to investigate the opportunities and challenges experienced by external organisations, schools, parents and immigrant children concerning the implementation of the compulsory education policy, the social ecological model of Bronfenbrenner will be used. An overview of scientific literature will first be provided about this topic.

2.1. Bronfenbrenner – Social ecological system

Bronfenbrenner developed an ecological model for human development in 1970 (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). The child is in the middle of an ecological web and is surrounded by different systems. The first system is the microsystem, the system that is closest to the child and with who the child is in direct contact, like family or peers. The second system is the meso-system, which consists of interaction between different microsystems of a person. The third system is the exo-system, a setting in which the person is not a direct active participant but that still affects him, for example; the work environment of the parents. The fourth system is the macro-system. This includes the cultural environment in which the child lives and all other systems that influence him, like economy, cultural values and political systems (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2006).

2.2 Micro-level

2.2.1. Academic performance of immigrant children

Students who have immigrated and speak a different language of instruction do significantly face academic problems in school. Data from PISA² show that migrant students who do not speak the language of instruction at home lag behind significantly (Nusche, 2009; Christensen & Stanat, 2007). Results show that migrant students who do not speak the language of instruction at home are roughly one year of learning behind their native peers. Migrant students who do speak the language of instruction at home are about a half-year behind (Nusche, 2009).

A different study (Schnepf, 2004), that also included data from PISA but also data from TIMSS and PIRLS³, highlighted explanatory factors for a lower educational achievement of immigrants. Speaking a different language at home is an important cause of lower academic achievements in English speaking countries. A lower social economic status and family background are important detriments for academic achievement in countries like the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. Furthermore, whether immigrants are segregated in schools, the time immigrants lived in the country and whether immigrants are integrated in the host country are important factors to consider when looking at the academic achievements of immigrants.

2.2.2. Social development of immigrant children

Not only does the language barrier amongst students affect their academic performance, it also affects their social development. Language proficiency is associated with the social and emotional adjustment of these immigrants (Cheah & Leung, 2011; Zhou & Xiong, 2005). Having difficulties in English gets in the way of adjusting properly in school and it minimizes their social opportunities with others (Cheah et al., 2011; Polo & Lopez, 2009). Another important social issue to address is that immigrant children can be discriminated or prejudiced against. Asian and Latino immigrant children in the United States who experience racial discrimination and prejudice from peers are less likely to identify with the dominant group or interact with the

² For PISA, the programs for International student assessment carried out by the organisation for economic cooperation and development (OECD), more than 40 countries participated in which immigrant students with the age 15 were included.

³ Surveys used in study: The Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS), the Programs of International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Programs of International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

mainstream culture than those who do not experience racial discrimination and prejudice (Rumbaut, 1994; Cheah et al., 2011). Moreover, children who migrate from their original country to a new country experience a loss of relatives and friends, as well as homeland and familiar surroundings (Cheah et al., 2011). Often children even have to be separated from their parents for a while because parents choose to emigrate first. Separation from primary caregivers can lead to distress amongst the children, and it can hinder the attachment process to caregivers. Separation from close relatives and friends can lead to sadness (Goodwin, 2002; Cheah et al., 2011).

2.2.3. Challenges of Teachers

Teachers are the most important resource in shaping student learning outcomes (Nusche, 2009). The quality of these teachers can differ, depending on where the school is located and whether the government funds the school. Generally speaking, the better qualified and more experienced teachers are more likely to choose to work for schools in good areas, with a majority of native students. As for immigrant students, they are more likely to be enrolled in underfunded schools located in more deprived areas (Nusche, 2009). Although these students still benefit from relatively high-quality teachers, the quality of education could be lower compared to teachers in private schools in good areas.

Apart from the area in which the school is located, teachers identified a number of challenges regarding immigrant children in their class (Garndara, Maxwell-Jolly & Driscoll, 2005). Among others, instruction time is limited, communication with non-native students is difficult and appropriate tools and materials are not available. Moreover, children have different needs regarding their academic progress in general and their language proficiency in particular, which can be difficult for the teacher to deal with. Also, teachers experience an inability to connect with parents, inform them of standards, expectations and ways to help. As a result, the communication between the teacher and the parent is limited. In addition, teachers may have a stereotypical view of children who do not speak the language (Goodwin, 2002; McBrien, 2005). Finally, teachers can underestimate the abilities of these children because children are generally unable to express themselves sufficiently, which leads to a negative teacher- student relationship.

2.2.4. Parental involvement

Parental involvement has a positive influence on the language acquisition of children and a positive influence on the academic achievement of immigrants (Lahaie, 2008; Nusche, 2009). Parents may have high aspirations for their children but they face difficulties in helping their children because the parents themselves have low educational levels (Cheah et al., 2011). When

they do not acquire the language of the host culture they are not able to help their children with doing their homework or other school related issues (Mc Brien, 2005). Parents are however able to communicate certain values and expectations about education (Nusche, 2009). Parents can stimulate the learning of the new language, but can also be an obstacle in the learning process when they are not proficient in the new language themselves (OECD, 2013), and/or when they think that maintaining their own language is most important (Goodwin, 2002).

2.3. Meso-level

2.3.1. Parent-teacher communication

Parents of a lower socio-economic status and of a different cultural background seem less interested in their children's education (Ramirez, 2003; Guo, 2006). However teachers misinterpret this lack of interest, as parents do want their children to succeed in school. Teachers need to understand the barriers that hinder parents from participating in their children's education (Ramirez, 2003; Guo, 2006). Language has a significant role in the communication between parents and teachers. Parents may be unfamiliar with the school system, may have a different view on education and may experience cultural differences (Ramirez, 2003). It is important to recognize the teachers' biases towards parents with a different cultural background as teachers can have lower expectations of parents and their children.

2.3.2. Discrepancy home and school environment

Immigrant children may encounter discrepancies between their parents' culture and the mainstream culture (Cheah et al., 2011). Children are caught between two worlds, struggling between two sets of norms. This is more of a burden for children when parents hold on rigorously to their own cultural values and beliefs. Furthermore, children face this challenge when the values are contradictory to one another. Because children are able to socialise with students of different cultures in school, immigrant children become more familiar with mainstream cultural norms than their parents (Cheah et al., 2011).

Immigrant children usually become more fluent in English than their parents. This may lead to children having to translate for their parents (Cheah et al., 2011; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). Parents have to rely on their children to communicate with teachers and directors of the school but also in other important contexts. The changes in roles of parents and children may be stressful for the parents and the children (Cheah et al., 2011). Children indicate that they experience being a language broker as stressful, embarrassing and they experience discomfort (Wesskirch et al., 2002).

2.4. Macro-level

2.4.1. Socio-economic background

Children who have immigrated are at a higher risk for poverty than native children. There is a correlation between immigrant families and a higher poverty rate. Explanations for this correlation is that immigrant parents do low wage work, attain less access to benefits, lack full time year round work and have lower educational levels and English proficiency (Cheah et al., 2011).

Immigrants in the US with the same ethnic background tend to live in the same neighbourhood, which results in a highly concentrated area of Hispanic immigrants and a highly concentrated area of Asian immigrants. Natives tend to move away from these neighbourhoods, which results in more ethnically segregated areas (Bolt, van Kempen & van Ham, 2007). Advantages of these neighbourhoods are that immigrants feel support from others and they can share their culture with others. Disadvantages of these neighbourhoods are that they are stigmatised at deprived areas. Furthermore a segregated area does not improve the integration and participation of immigrants in the host country (Bolt et al., 2007).

2.4.2. Integration

Immigration laws and policies influence how integrated immigrants are in the host country. Most countries hold a policy that immigrants should assimilate to the host country (Van Oudenhoven, Ward & Masgoret, 2006): that the immigrant group does not maintain their home culture but seeks daily interaction with other cultures (Berry, 1997). Even though most countries want immigrants to fully adapt to the host country, it is important that immigrants maintain their own cultural traditions and values. If mainstream society and immigration laws welcome immigrants, immigrant families are likely to feel supported (Gandara & Rumberger, 2009).

2.4.3. Language policy

Many countries have education policies to improve the language proficiency of migrant students (Mc Brien, 2005). There are large differences between the methods that countries adopt to reach this objective. Numerous immigrant students who arrived newly are immediately placed into the mainstream classes, where they sometimes receive extra guidance or support to develop language skills (OECD, 2013; Mc Brien, 2005). In other countries, special preparatory classes are used for language training before they transfer the children into regular education (OECD 2013, Mc Brien, 2005). A lot of countries are struggling to meet the increasing demand

for language learning, due to a shortage of trained teachers that are specialised in teaching the native language as a second language and a lack of appropriate teaching material (Field, 2007).

The department of education in Sint Maarten wants to implement a program for children with a language barrier. The department of education will influence the educational system and structure, which will affect the children with difficulties in the English language. The language policy will improve the language proficiency of immigrant youth. Although the focus is on improving the language, the focus solely on language is too narrow (Gandara et al., 2009). The focus should also be on integration and content learning; learning relevant information that matters to them. The program should also shift in focus from teacher centered; where information is 'deposited' on the children, to student centered: where students are active learners and actively involved in their own learning process (Freire, 1970).

Based on Vygotsky's theory on constructivism, the cognitive development and the learning process of children are associated with the socialisation process, and cannot be viewed separately (Ozer, 2004). Vygotsky also claims that cognitive development is limited to a certain range at a particular age, but that social interaction and guidance from an adult is needed to develop and understand concepts further. Research also shows that collaborative learning improves the language proficiency and the academic skills of students (DeCapua, et al., 2007). Programs that improve the language proficiency of students should focus on students working together and interacting with each other on various themes. Working together in small groups showed positive results (Hoogeveen, 2014).

2.5. Transitional classes

In the literature there are several terms used for the special preparatory classes for newcomer students, such as 'welcome classes', 'beginner classes' or 'pull out programs'. In this research the term 'transitional classes' is used to refer to a preparatory class for newcomer students. A transitional class is a class for immigrant children where the main focus is improving their language proficiency in English (Nusche, 2009; DeCapua, Smathers & Tang, 2007). Students are either pulled out of mainstream classes or placed immediately in these classes when they are new in the country. These students attain English as a second language, academic skills development, literacy and content area support (DeCapua et al., 2007). Total immersion is when students are placed in the regular classroom but assignments are modified to help the students acquire the language. DeCapua et al. (2007) state that immersion is most effective when an ESL teacher or a trained bilingual professional assists the students.

2.5.1. Advantages and disadvantages of a transitional class

Literature shows that the effectiveness of a transitional class is debatable. On the one hand, research has shown that newcomers can benefit from specialized care in such classes. They generally feel comfortable in the transitional class: it is a safe and structured environment where they learn the language, develop their skills and become familiar with the new educational system and society (Ramaut, 2002). A pilot study in St Maarten showed improvements on academic achievement (B.E.R.P.P.I., 2007), and research in Spain showed that newcomer children who only spent a few months in transitional classes are able to stream into the mainstream classes (OECD, 2013). In the Netherlands, the transitional classes (schakelklassen) are purely meant for immigrants to improve their language skills. According to an evaluative study, the programs are proven effective for these students (Mulder et al., 2008).

On the contrary, several negative effects of transitional classes are pointed out in the literature. First, in many countries, students stay in transitional classes beyond the point that it is helpful for them. For instance, in Sweden children stay in the transitional classes for more than one year, and in Norway 20% of the students never leave the beginners' class (OECD, 2013; Nusche, 2009). Transitional classes should be short and transitory because the separation of migrant students from the native students can have stigmatising effects and reinforce inequalities (Nusche, 2009). Furthermore, studies show that transitional classes barely provide students with extra teaching time (Nusche, 2009), require students to miss parts of the regular curriculum and are often given by less-qualified teachers (Nusche, 2009; Karsten, 2006). In Switzerland, newcomers who spend two years in a transitional class were still considered as not being able to integrate into the normal classes, had a lower than average level of cognitive development and little knowledge of the official language (OECD, 2013). Furthermore, bad communication between the transition teacher and the classroom teacher tends to be a problem (Karsten, 2006). Finally, language development and cognitive development are interconnected and language proficiency seems to work best when learners use language for meaningful purposes (Nusche, 2009).

2.6. Solutions for mainstream education

As it is debatable whether transitional classes are the best solution as keeping or placing children in mainstream education may be a better solution. In England the focus is now on placing children who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) in mainstream classes. All teachers have to provide EAL development opportunities with the help of special curriculum activities. As teachers are underprepared to teach children with a language barrier that are

placed into mainstream education, specialist teachers in EAL provide advice and guidance to teachers on how to include language-learning opportunities in the lessons and content.

In countries that have to deal with a lot of immigration, it is beneficial when language learning takes place within the mainstream classroom (Nusche, 2009). Immersion is most effective when teachers are flexible in providing lessons to a diverse group of students (Teese, Aasen, Field & Pont, 2005). In order to make mainstream teachers better equipped to work with students from various backgrounds, teacher education programs are needed (Field et al., 2007; Mc Brien, 2005). Teacher should develop skills, dispositions and sensibilities with regard to new students, and acquire a basic understanding of tools, materials and techniques that are necessary for giving students ESL (Field et al., 2007; Mc Brien, 2005). Research showed that students obtain better results when their teachers participated in professional development on working with students with different cultural and linguistic background (Field et al., 2007; Nusche, 2009).

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research question of this study is to what extent a transitional class a solution is for children with English language difficulties because English is not their mother tongue. First the difficulties of the schools, parents, children and external organisations due to children with English language difficulties are placed into mainstream education because of the compulsory education policy are investigated. Second, the need for a transitional class for children with English language difficulties is investigated. Third, what needs to be implemented in a program to improve the language acquisition of students is investigated.

4. METHOD

4.1. Schools

First the five Sint Maarten schools with the largest number of undocumented students, according to the compulsory education rapport, were approached for participation in the study. These were the three public schools Dr. Martin Luther King school, the Ruby Labega school and the Marie Genevieve de Weever school and two other schools that are not public: John A Gumbs School and the Seventh Day Adventist. The last two schools did not participate because of lack of interest and lack of children in school who have difficulty with the English language. These schools have a large number of undocumented students that come from countries where the first language is English.

Eventually the other two public schools Leonard Connor School and the Oranjeschool were approached for participation as children who immigrate to Sint Maarten are generally placed in public schools due to the compulsory education policy. The schools Dr. Martin Luther King, Ruby Labega, Marie Genevieve de Weever, Leonard Connor and the Oranjeschool participated in the research.

4.2. Respondents

All 65 teachers in the five public schools were asked to fill in a questionnaire. All of them filled it in, except for teachers from the Oranjeschool, resulting in a total of 59 respondents (90.8% response rate).

A total of 6 school principals were interviewed about the need for transitional classes for children who have difficulty with the English language. Of four schools, 15 teachers were interviewed about the difficulties teachers and children are facing in the classroom regarding children with a language barrier. These teachers were asked about the need for a transitional class. Three members of the Border Protection Service were interviewed to get an overview of the situation of immigrant children in Sint Maarten. Two members of the inspectorate were interviewed about their role for children who immigrate to Sint Maarten. Two members of the former pilot 'transitional classes 2004-2006' were interviewed.

With a total of 87 students, a participatory exercise is done. The exercise consisted of yes and no questions about their school and home environment and was asked to further elaborate on their answer. The exercise was primarily done in two whole classes: group four and group six of the Marie Genevieve de Weever school. Of these two classes, 40 students participated. Of these 40 students, 55% speak a different language than English at home. The majority of the students (37.5%) speak Spanish at home. 7.5% speak Creole at home, 7.5% speak Chinese and 2.5% (1 student) speaks Papiamentu.

Eventually the participatory exercise was done with an additional 47 children who specifically speak a different language at home or children who are new in the class. These students were approached based on the information provided by the interviews of the teachers or the questionnaires of the teachers. These children were at the Ruby Labega School, Marie Genevieve de Weever School, Dr. Martin Luther King School and the Leonard Connor School. Of these students, 6.38% speak Chinese at home (3 students) and 1 student speaks Creole at home. 87.23% speak Spanish at home.

The students with whom the participatory exercise was done ranges from age five to thirteen. The ages of the two whole classes, group 4 and 6, ranged from seven to 11 years. Of the 47 students that also participated, the mean age is 9.67 and the standard deviation is 2.14.

A total of five parents were interviewed about the home environment of the students who have difficulty with the English language. Parents were difficult to approach because the communication between the school and the parent is limited. The Leonard Connor School made it possible to approach seven parents for an interview. A total of five parents responded: four mothers and one stepfather. One mother and the stepfather came to the interview together. Three of the four interviews were done in Spanish and one interview was done in English.

4.3. Instruments

4.3.1. Interviews

The interviews with the principals and the teachers consisted of semi-structured questions.⁴ The interviews were set up to gather information on the prevalence of children that are new in the class and the prevalence of children facing a language barrier. The teachers were asked whether these children experienced academic and social problems. The teachers were also asked what challenges they face regarding children with a language barrier in class and what methods they use to deal with these children. Lastly, the teachers were asked whether a transitional class for children who are new in Sint Maarten and speak a different language would be a good solution for these children.

4.3.2. Questionnaires

The questionnaire for the teachers consisted of three open questions, twelve closed questions and three tables with 5-point Likert-scale questions⁵. The teachers were for example asked with closed questions how many children are new in the class, how many speak a different language at home, how many children have difficulties in the class. The teachers were asked with open questions what difficulties they see that children experience because of their English language difficulties and what solutions they think are appropriate. Teachers scored the 5-point Likert scales according to what level of a problem these statements were to them. The problems are rated as followed: 1= No problem at all, 2=Minor problem, 3=Moderate problem, 4=Major problem and 5=Serious problem.

The academic and social problems of students that speak a different language than English at home

The teachers could rate on a 5-point Likert scale four items on academic problems and four items on social problems of children that speak different language than English at home.

⁴ See appendix 4A

⁵ See appendix 4B

The Cronbach's alpha of the four academic items is $\alpha=.86$. The Cronbach's alpha is not higher if an item is deleted. The cronbach's alpha of the four social items is $\alpha=.77$. Statements regarding the academic problems were: children have difficulty with reading and writing in English, children have difficulty speaking in English and children have difficulty understanding the teacher. Four statements regarding the social problems were: these children speak only with children in their own language, these children lack support of parents with doing their homework, these children lack support of parents in learning the language and there is a discrepancy between home and school environment for these children.

The academic problems and social problems of students that are new this year in Sint Maarten

The teachers could rate on a 5-point Likert scale four items on academic problems and ten items on social problems of children that are new this year in Sint Maarten. The cronbach's alpha for four academic items is $\alpha = .97$. The cronbach's alpha for the ten social items is $\alpha =.92$. The academic items are the same as the scale for children that speak a different language than English at home. Six items were added to the social items. Examples of these items are: these children have difficulty making new friends, these children have difficulty with integrating in the class, and these children have difficulty getting used to the new educational system.

The challenges of teachers regarding students who are new this year and children who do not have English as their mother tongue

The teachers could rate on a 5-point Likert scale 17 items ($\alpha =.92$) on the challenges the teachers themselves are experiencing regarding students who are new this year and children who do not have English as their mother tongue.

4.3.3. Participatory exercise

For the participatory exercise, students were first asked yes or no questions on which they could elaborate. The children were asked whether they are new this year and whether they are facing difficulties with the English language. After answering with a yes or no, children were asked to elaborate on their answer. Children were also asked about their home environment. They were asked who helps them with their homework at home and what language they speak at home. They were also asked to give a description of their home environment to gain information about the parental involvement and their socio-economic status.

4.4. Data-analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Afterwards, the information was coded according to various themes: the academic and social problems for children who were new in

the class and children who speak a different language at home, the challenges of teachers and how teachers cope with children with a language barrier. Furthermore the home environment was evaluated and the extent to which parents are involved. Lastly all teachers were asked about their opinion on transitional classes.

With the Likert scale items, the scores are interpreted by calculating the mean and the standard deviation. The scores can be equally distributed and therefore can be compared to the normal distribution. The normal distribution is a probability distribution, which is symmetrical and represented by a bell-shaped curve (Field, 2005).

5. RESULTS

5.1. Micro-level

5.1.1. Academic difficulties for children who have migrated this year

Based on the questionnaires, there are 47 new students in the public schools this year. Teachers scored all the academic problems of immigrant students that are new this year as a major issue (M=3.85, SD=1.33). Results show that reading and writing seems to be a major problem for these students (M=4.00, SD=1.33). The students lag behind from the other students because of their language barrier (M=3.89, SD=1.34). According to the teachers, children that are new this year also have major difficulties with speaking (M=3.78, SD=1.40) and understanding the teacher M=3.74, SD=1.48).

Based on the interviews with the teachers, children who are new face academic difficulties because of the language barrier. A total of 18 teachers and 5 principals said that students lag behind on their academic level because of the language barrier. Teachers also see the trend that these children have to repeat a year because they are lagging behind or these children are placed in a year lower because teachers predict that they will need an extra year to learn the basics.

Children that are placed in group 8 (grade 6) this year have to face doing exams in English at the end of the school year. The children will score low on these exams because of their language barrier. As a result, these children will be placed in a lower level of secondary education.

Teacher: 'They have their exam next month and I am trying to prepare them. I am not going to be there so if they don't understand, they can't ask. So I'm trying that they understand now. I was strict with them but it was for their own good. They are going to be frustrated because of it.'

Of the 47 students interviewed, 16 students are new this year. All students were asked whether they were facing difficulties with the English language. All sixteen students are facing academic problems because of the language barrier. They have difficulty understanding the teacher and they have difficulty communicating in English. Children are afraid of making mistakes and therefore choose not to speak in English. They become very shy.

5.1.2. Academic difficulties for children whose mother tongue is not English

Results from the questionnaires show that 36.2% of the 481 students who do not have English as a mother tongue have academic problems. The teachers rated the severity of the academic problems for the students whose mother tongue is not English. The average scores are lower than for students who are new this year ($M=3.41$, $SD=1.04$). Although the academic problems for children whose mother tongue is not English are still moderate to major⁶, the children that are new this year are faced with bigger academic challenges.

According to the interviews, teachers mentioned that they see a trend that students who speak a different language at home face academic difficulties in class. Children who speak a different language at home do tend to perform below their age level. All the teachers mentioned that children are lagging behind because of the language difficulties the children have.

Teacher: 'The grades are not as high as children who speak English at home. I see a trend there.'

5.1.3. Social problems for children who have immigrated to Sint Maarten this year

Based on the questionnaires,⁷ the social problems for the children who are new this year are scored as moderate problems by the teachers ($M=3.10$, $SD=1.09$). According to the teachers, children have the most difficulty with getting used to the new educational system ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.40$). Children having a lack of motivation because of the language barrier ($M=3.44$, $SD=1.50$) and children receiving lack of support of parents with doing their homework ($M=3.43$, $SD=1.55$) are also scored as moderate to major problems ($3=moderate\ problem$, $4=major\ problem$). Hostile behaviour from other children towards these children ($M=2.07$, $SD=1.27$) and children making new friends ($M=2.45$, $SD=1.43$) seems like minor problems to the teachers.

During the interviews with the teachers and principals, they were asked to describe the social problems of students that are new in the school or class. Overall, children do not experience problems socially. Nine teachers mentioned that children easily integrate in the class and that adapting to the new environment does not seem to be a problem for the children.

⁶ See appendix 2, Tabel 2

⁷ See appendix 2, Tabel 3

Teacher: 'Children generally integrate easily. Most of them adapt. They are usually accepted very quickly.'

Children had different opinions about how difficult it was for them to be new. A majority of the children said that it was not difficult at all. The children in their class make them feel welcome by asking them if they want to play with them or if they want to be their friend. Only some children say that when they were new, they used to cry a lot and they became very quiet and shy. They had difficulty being in a new environment.

Student: 'When I came here, I was very quiet at first. But then students came to me and asked me whether they wanted to be my friend and soon after, I had a lot of friends. Now everybody is my friend.'

Not being able to speak the language does make it more difficult to get into contact with classmates. Some students were afraid at first that other children would say things about them and that they wouldn't be able to understand in English.

Student: 'I am very shy. I get scared to talk to other people but I try though. And I get worried about what they will think about me and what they will say about me. When I think about that, I don't want to talk. Now it is better though because I can talk in English and I can understand what they were saying.'

Even though they are well integrated in the large peer network, they tend to mingle primarily with students who speak their own language. Teachers mention that especially the Spanish students speak Spanish with each other in class and during recess. Seven teachers noticed the tendency to stick together for students speaking the same language. Children who have a language barrier find it difficult to interact with students at first in a different language.

Teacher: 'They are unable to understand the language and they may have different facial expressions and children misinterpret that. This can create an issue.'

A majority of the students agreed with the teachers that they speak in their own language with their friends during recess. One student said that it is easier to speak Spanish because his friends speak it and they can help him translate. Another student said that it is not confusing to mix the two languages - Spanish and English - because they are so used to speaking both

languages. Even though the majority speak in their own language with each other, some students chose to speak in English with their friends so that they learn the language quicker.

Children that are new this year do miss their home environment. They say that they miss their family and friends and that they would prefer to go back. Some even mention that they had a lot more friends there than they do here.

5.1.4. Challenges of teachers

The teachers were asked in an interview and in the questionnaires about the challenges they face when children with a language barrier are placed in the classroom. Four teachers mentioned that they find the different levels in the class a challenge. Results from the questionnaires also show the different levels in their class is a moderate problem for them ($M=3.53$, $SD=1.34$). Because children have difficulty with the language, the teachers place them in different groups. Teachers are not able to meet all the levels. The instruction time becomes less when the teachers have to instruct per level. One teacher mentioned that she has to cope with five different levels in class. As a result the curriculum and the textbook does not match to the different levels of the children.

Results from the questionnaires show that teachers lack specialists in the school and that teachers lack assistants in the school. Lack of specialists in the school is a major problem for the teachers ($M=4.00$, $SD=1.27$). By specialists, we refer to the remedial teachers, ESL teachers, social workers and student care coordinators. The lack of ESL teachers is of main concern for the teachers, as they feel not prepared to provide English as a second language.

Lack of assistants in the school is a moderate to major problem for the teachers ($M=3.58$, $SD=1.37$). Most schools only have two or three assistants for the whole school. This means that assistants have to manage their time in various classrooms. Teachers do not always have the support of assistants, even though four teachers mention in the interviews that they need more support from the assistants.

Results from the questionnaires show that the lack of financial support is a moderately high problem for the teachers ($M=3.75$, $SD=1.31$). Teachers lack financial support because the schools are government owned (public schools). Two principals state that the quality of public education is low. Immigrant children coming in public schools reduce the quality of education even more.

Principal: 'All private schools test the kids first. If children do not meet a level, they do not have education for them. So they have to go to public schools and public schools cannot refuse them. You get what everybody left over with. You are working double and hard and then at the end of the year

you hear that the private schools are the top of the level.'

Lastly two teachers mentioned that they lack the knowledge of different languages so they have difficulty communicating with children who for example only speak Spanish. Results from the questionnaires show that thirty-nine teachers of the fifty-nine speak only English and that fourteen teachers of the fifty-nine teachers speak two languages. Teachers state that bi- or multilingual teachers should educate children with a language barrier.

5.1.5. Coping teachers

The teachers and principals were asked how they cope with children who have difficulty with the language. Seven stakeholders (six teachers and one principal) discussed the importance of differentiation when children need to be placed in different groups. Differentiation is when instruction is primarily given to the entire classroom and then additional instruction is given to the different groups of students. Through differentiation, the teachers can give extra attention to the children who need extra attention.

Teacher: 'I would discuss with the whole group, give an example. And then I would sit with those students and then I would work together with them.'

Five teachers mentioned that they try to meet the individual needs of the students. Four teachers can communicate with the students who have difficulty with the language by speaking in a different language, like French or Spanish. An important way for children to learn the language is that children who have difficulty with the language are paired with native speakers. Four teachers mentioned the importance of this.

Three teachers find it important to use creativity and technology to cope. For example, one teacher uses her computer where she downloads various language-learning programs or where students can watch short educational films. Another teacher mentions that language learning should be done with interactive and cooperative methods.

Two teachers mention that the assistant helps them with dealing with children who need extra attention. Lastly, strategies with parents are discussed in order to improve the academic abilities of the children.

Principal: 'And we invite the parents in after the registration and explain to them all the different ways that they could help after school (if not personally themselves) or to enrol them in different activities after school to help the children.'

5.2. Meso-level

5.2.1. Parental involvement

In the interviews with the teachers, the teachers were asked about the home environment for children whose mother tongue is not English. All teachers find the home environment an important factor for how children are doing academically in school. Unfortunately, a majority of the stakeholders (four principals and eight teachers) are speaking negatively about the involvement of the parents. The teachers are giving the example of parents not showing up at parent-teacher meetings, and parents not helping with the homework.

Students were also asked about whether their parents help them with their homework to get an impression of the parental involvement. Eleven students of the thirty-nine students who responded to this question do not receive help from family (parents, siblings or cousins) with their homework. This is equivalent to 28.2% of the total of number of students who responded. Twenty-four students (61.5%) do receive help from their family members (parents, siblings or cousins). Of these twenty-four students, eight students specifically mentioned that their father helps them and two mentioned that their mother helps them.

The parents that were interviewed indicate that they want to be involved in their children's education, although four non-English speaking mothers indicated to have difficulty with the English language and therefore find it difficult to help. These mothers do have a native partner who can help with improving their children's language. The father that was interviewed is involved in teaching the children English. He helps them with their homework and he teaches them additional English by using books and the Internet. The father has a slogan for the children: 'education is key to good life'.⁸

Father: 'I help her sometimes, she does her homework first and then I correct it. If you don't understand it, look it up on Internet, try it again, just keep on going, going, going'.

5.3. Macro-level

5.3.1. Compulsory education policy in Sint Maarten

As the public schools are subsidised by the government, and the government made education compulsory, public schools are faced with more immigrants than non-public schools. Principals experience the challenge that children who are new this year are placed throughout the year. The schools had children coming in January and even in March. These children do not

⁸ Further information about the interviews with the parents can be found in appendix 3.

speak any English and they are of an older age. This leads to more problems because they have to learn the basics of English and they have to eventually do their exams in English.

5.3.2. Socio-economic background

Principals indicate that children in the public schools are facing socio-economic challenges. It happens often that children are alone after school because parents have to work. Parents often have multiple jobs and children are brought up in a single-parent home. These circumstances at home are generally the case for all children in public schools in Sint Maarten.

Principal: 'Some of them are living in low-income housing. The environment they are living in. The mother and children sleeping in the same room, no privacy. Parents struggling to feed them. The Dutch quarter is crime invested. They have to go home and take care of their siblings. They are angry with that. The teenager should resume to be a teenager.'

In addition, there are neighbourhoods in Sint Maarten where families from the Dominican Republic or families from Haiti come together. This relates to children living in segregated areas, where everyone speaks in their own language and their original culture is maintained. This can however lead to children not integrating in mainstream society.

Principal: 'They live in areas where various families accumulate to each other. Sometimes you get those districts where you see the Haitian people live very close together and the Spanish people as well. But that is the adult's decision but if they spread out and integrate as adults it is better for the child as well. They integrate faster and learn the English quicker.'

5.3.3. Immigration policies

Based on an interview with the Border Protection Service, they want to reduce the number of illegal immigrants in primary and secondary education and are convinced that a transitional class and the compulsory education policy will attract more immigrants. They aim to reduce the number of immigrants by strictly enforcing laws and regulations. With respect to illegals currently staying in Sint Maarten, the Border Protection Office is in favour of tracking down the illegal immigrant children in their schools and subsequently sending them back to their country. The Department of Education objected to this approach and rendered it inhumane. Instead, the Department of Education advocates a solution based on preventing children coming into Sint Maarten. Above all, they want to keep all immigrants in school, also if they are illegal immigrants.

5.4. Transitional classes

5.4.1. Need for a transitional class

According to the quantitative data, 81.4% of the teachers and all five principals think a transitional class is needed. 18.6% did not fill in whether a transitional class is needed or not. Only 32.2% would consider being a teacher for a transitional class. The majority, 61.0%, does not want to be a teacher for a transitional class.

The teachers were asked how many students in their class would need to go to a transitional class because of their language barrier. Of the 1182 students, 142 students (12%) would need to go to a transitional class. According to the questionnaires, there are 481 students who do not have English as their mother tongue. This means that 30% of the students who do not have English as their mother tongue would need to go to a transitional class.

The majority of the teachers also pointed out that a separate school or pulling the children out of the classroom would be more beneficial for the students with a language barrier. One teacher was however convinced that isolating these children would not work. Some teachers did not mind in what way a transitional class is set up, but they find it important that there will be a solution for these students.

The parents discussed the need for transitional classes. Three mothers do think extra guidance for their children is necessary. One mother thinks that a transitional school is necessary, a separate school where the children can focus on the language. The other two mothers find it important that they get extra tutoring lessons, for example in an afternoon school. These mothers however mentioned that they have no money to pay for extra tutoring lessons.

5.4.2. What is needed for the implementation of a transitional class?

The teachers pointed out the practical implications of setting up a transitional class. Firstly, there is no ESL 'English as a second language' program in Sint Maarten. Ten teachers want the ESL programs to be improved so that they know what to do with students who are new in the class and do not speak any English. These teachers also want to be trained in how to teach 'English as a second language' as there is currently no training for these teachers.

The teachers are convinced that bilingual or multilingual teachers are necessary to teach the students in a transitional class. The teachers should be able to translate for the students. The teachers were asked what languages they speak in the questionnaire. Results show that there are no Chinese-speaking teachers in the public schools of Sint Maarten.

Two members of the former pilot in 2004-2006 were asked about whether the re-implementation of a transitional class would be beneficial for students with a language barrier. The members do think a transitional class is needed for these students and that a class will lead to beneficial academic results. From their own experience, they mentioned factors that are important to consider when implementing a transitional class. First children should be placed in small classes. Teachers should be trained and the material needs to be adjusted to the child. Children were not allowed to speak in their own language as speaking in their own language would delay their process in learning the language. Furthermore the two members highlighted the importance of parental involvement within this program. One member mentioned that parents had to sign a contract for parental involvement and commitment. If the parents did not come to the school, the member would visit the parents at their job or late at night at home.

Former pilot member: 'I am naughty. Sometimes the children said: my mother finishes work at 11, so then I would be by the house at 11. So 11 a clock in the night, I just wait until they come out. When parents get to know that this school manager is not one who is going to let you, they cooperate and they are the nicest people in the world.'

5.5. Other solutions

Teachers were also asked if, according to them, other solutions would be appropriate for children who have a language barrier. Teachers find it very important that these children receive extra guidance in order to improve their language. One teacher mentioned that the school day could be extended for these students. A few teachers do think a pull-out program can be beneficial for these students. Students will be taken out of the classroom for a few hours per day. One teacher wants to work with the parallel teacher so that one teacher focuses on students with the lower levels and the other teacher focuses on the students with a higher level. Remedial programs are also necessary and needs to be improved. Many children in Sint Maarten already go to afternoon classes so teachers see the importance of children who have the language barrier going to those afternoon classes as well.

6. DISCUSSION

In Sint Maarten there are many immigrant children with a language barrier in primary education, caused by the large influx of immigrants and the compulsory education policy. The Ministry of Education intends to investigate what difficulties schools, parents, children and external organisations experience when children, whose mother tongue is not English, are placed into mainstream education as opposed to transitional classes aimed at removing a language barrier. Also, the ministry intends to explore to what extent a transitional class is a solution for children with a language barrier.

A transitional class is a preparatory class for newcomer students. It is a class for immigrant children where the main focus is improving their language proficiency in English (Nusche, 2009; DeCapua et al., 2007). A possible alternative to a transitional class is to immerse children in mainstream education.

6.1. Problem analysis social ecological model

6.1.1. Micro-level

In Sint Maarten, children in public primary education face academic problems because of their language barrier. Children lag behind compared to other students and many students have to redo exams or repeat a year. Moreover, during the last year of their primary school, children take part in exams that determine their level for secondary school. Due to their language barrier, these children are more likely to start their secondary education at too low a level. This is supported by data from PISA that show that migrant students who do not speak the language of instruction at home are roughly one year of learning behind their native peers (Nusche, 2009).

Research shows that the language barrier of students can get in the way of adapting and integrating in a new environment (Cheah et al., 2011; Polo & Lopez, 2009). Teachers indicate that students have difficulty getting used to the new educational system. Language proficiency is associated with the social and emotional adjustment of these immigrants (Cheah et al., 2011; Zhou et al., 2005). Students however indicate that they integrate easily in class. Making new friends is generally easy for them. Some students do find it difficult to adapt to a new environment. At first they become quiet, shy and afraid because they do not know how to communicate with peers and teachers in English. However, all in all because many peers come from the same country or speak the same language, adapting and integrating in Sint Maarten is generally not a problem for immigrant students.

Various researches describe challenges of the teachers regarding children who are placed in their classroom, as described above in the introduction to this research (Garndara et al., 2005; Nusche, 2009). These challenges also surface in this study. Teachers in public education are faced with children who have different levels in class and they find it difficult to adjust to these different levels. Teachers experience a lack of educational specialists and assistants in school as a burden because they feel that they are faced with this problem alone. Moreover, teachers experience that quality of education is lacking because minimal to no resources are provided by the government to support the increase of non-English speakers in class. More specifically, they lack financial aid for appropriate tools and materials for these non-English-speaking children.

Although teachers experience difficulty with children whose mother tongue is not English, they use various techniques to adjust their teaching methods to these children. Examples include the adjusting of their instruction to the needs of the children and asking other students to help their peers in other languages. Teachers also indicate that they use programmes they found on the Internet. Although teachers identify different ways to deal with these children, there is no comprehensive or consistent English-as-a-second-language (“ESL”) programme that the teachers could use. The government does not provide schools with such materials or tools, nor are there any guidelines for the teachers how to deal with these children.

6.1.2. Meso-level

In general, parental involvement in education leads to better educational results of students (Lahaie, 2008). Children with a language barrier are thus likely to improve their language proficiency faster when aided and stimulated by their parents. This study shows that four principals and eight teachers signalled a low level of involvement of the parents. According to them, parents do not show up at parent-teacher meetings and parents do not help with homework. Notwithstanding this experience of the principals and teachers regarding parental involvement, this research shows the majority, 61,5%, of the total number of students interviewed replied that family members do help them with their homework. Half of this group specifically referred to the parents helping them.

The parents who were interviewed also indicate that they want to be involved in their children’s education, although four non-English speaking mothers indicated that they had difficulty with the English language and therefore found it difficult to help. These mothers do have a native partner who can help with improving their and their children’s language. Even though the findings in this study regarding parents’ perspective on parental involvement are limited, this study underlines that parents may encounter obstacles to fully support their children in succeeding in school (Ramirez, 2003; Guo, 2006).

6.1.3. Macro-level

Principals of the public schools highlight the socio-economic challenges of immigrants in Sint Maarten. Parents who have immigrated to Sint Maarten often work in the tourism sector and have to work multiple jobs to provide for their family. Also, children are often brought up in a single-parent home. The correlation between immigrant families and poverty can be explained by the fact that immigrant parents frequently have low-paying jobs, have less access to financial benefits, have season-bound work, are generally low educated and not fully proficient in the native language (Cheah et al., 2011).

On a government enforcement level, the Border Protection Service and the Department of Education – two authorities actively involved in the immigration process – oppose each other with respect to the education of children illegally staying in Sint Maarten. The Border Protection Office wants to reduce the number of illegal immigrants in primary and secondary education and is convinced that a transitional class and the compulsory education policy will attract more immigrants. They aim to reduce the number of immigrants by strictly enforcing laws and regulations. With respect to illegals currently staying in Sint Maarten, the Border Protection Office is in favour of tracking down the illegal immigrant children in their schools and subsequently sending them back to their country. The Department of Education objected to this approach and rendered it inhumane. Instead, the Department of Education advocates a solution based on preventing children coming into Sint Maarten. Above all, they want to keep all immigrants in school, including illegal immigrants, thereby creating a lockdown situation with the Border Protection Service.

6.2. Transitional classes

Principals, teachers, students and parents experience multiple challenges regarding immigrant children entering primary education because of the compulsory education policy. For this reason, a solution needs to be provided by the Department of Education. This study investigates to what extent is a transitional class the best solution for this problem.

The majority of the principals, teachers, students and parents are in favour of a transitional class because they think it will benefit these students. A total of 81,4% of the teachers who filled in the questionnaire think a transitional class is needed for children who have migrated to Sint Maarten and have a language barrier. According to the teachers, of all the students who do not have English as their mother tongue, 30% would need to go to a transitional class. These teachers are enthusiastic about transitional classes because these can, in their view, reduce the amount of challenges teachers experience with these students and can increase their overall academic performance. Some of the advantages identified by teachers are

that transitional classes become smaller, given by skilled and specially trained teachers, and offer appropriate and tailored programmes.

Even though there are benefits to a transitional class and research has shown these programmes to be effective (OECD, 2013; Mulder et al., 2008), a transitional class also has its drawbacks. A class environment separate from the mainstream education does not promote integration amongst students with different cultural backgrounds. Interaction with the host country culture and traditions is limited. Also, from a language point of view, in a transitional class children whose mother tongue is not English would be separated from English-speaking students. Also, the separation of migrant students from the native students can have stigmatizing effects and reinforce social inequalities (Nusche, 2009). As described above, language barriers often do not impede children from integrating in a new environment. Hence, it is important to realise that language programmes should not solely focus on improving the language proficiency or the academic performance of the children: their overriding goal is to aim for successful integration and social inclusion, which are significant factors in the fruitful development of immigrant children.

All in all, transitional classes meet with enthusiasm and have the potential to significantly contribute to the lowering of children's language barrier. Nonetheless, in designing these classes special attention should be paid to the overall integration process of these children, for instance by limiting the period of a transitional class to several months to a year.

6.3. Recommendations for program development

The research question of this study does not fully extend to suggestions for a successful language program. Teachers and the former members of the pilot provided several suggestions for a successful program. Academic literature could additionally be useful in shaping such a course, as it identifies a number of characteristics that a language support program has to have in order to become successful.

6.3.1. Content of the program

To integrate language and academic learning it is important that content-area curricula for second language learning are developed (Christensen et al., 2007). Moreover, the programs would have to be time-intensive and need to be offered in a continuous way throughout primary and secondary schools (Christensen et al., 2007). The programs should also include collaborative learning, which improves the language proficiency and the academic skills of students by them working together and interacting with each other on various themes (DeCapua, et al., 2007, Hoogeveen, 2014).

Although the focus should be on improving the language barrier of the students, the psychological and social development of the students should also be considered. Students can only focus on their academic skills when they are not hindered by their social problems like moving to an unfamiliar place, having missed out on education, having to live in poverty circumstances at home (DeCapua et al., 2007). An integrative approach where the different needs of the students are met, is required.

6.3.2. Children participation

Instead of teachers depositing knowledge onto the children, children can be active participants in the learning process (Freire, 1970). Freire's theory on problem posing education breaks the traditional dynamic between teacher and student and holds a more equal relationship. The students learn through dialogue with other students and with the teacher. Students should be active participants and learn about things that are relevant to them.

The learning process of students is associated with the socialisation process. Based on Vygotsky's theory on constructivism, social interaction and guidance from an adult is needed to develop and understand concepts further (Ozer, 2004). Collaborative learning improves the language proficiency and the academic skills of students (DeCapua, et al., 2007).

6.3.3. Family participation

Parents need to be involved when a programme is implemented for their children. This accounts for better outcomes for the academic performance of the students but also for the communication between parents and teachers. The members of the pilot 'transitional classes 2004-2006' in Sint Maarten prove that parental involvement amongst immigrant families is possible when teachers take the initiative to improve the communication between teacher and parent. Related to parent participation is that programs should also aim to contribute to the language acquisition of the parents.

Programs with a participatory didactic approach in which personal and family life is the starting point for learning, have showed promising results for this target group. A good example of a certain that is used in the Netherlands and Sweden is the IDEAL-program (Integrating Disadvantaged Ethnicities through Adult Learning), in which 'the teachers shared the same background as the participants and served as role model facilitators and social brokers' (Nieuwboer & van 't Rood, 2016, p.1).

6.3.4. Teacher training

Teachers highlight the importance of an English as a second language for students who have English as a second language. Teachers are not trained in providing English as a second

language programs. Either the teachers receive training or skilled trained teachers from other countries are recruited. Further research needs to be done on effective programs for English as second language learners. Moreover, a good cooperation between the classroom teachers and language teachers is essential (Christensen et al., 2007).

6.3.5. Governmental involvement

On a governmental level, revision of existing policies can contribute to improve the language proficiency of immigrant children. Last but not least, public schools are known for being underfunded by the government and are often located in deprived areas (Nusche, 2009). Resources, like funding and teaching staff, are needed to improve programs for children with a language barrier. Without such government involvement, language-training programs remain a pipe dream.

6.4. Limitations

Children who speak a different language at home are a homogeneous group. Children either moved to Sint Maarten a couple of years ago or they moved recently. Children may be born in Sint Maarten but speak a different language at home. Furthermore children may be born in Sint Maarten, move to their home country and return again a couple years later. It is not possible to make conclusions for children whose mother tongue is not English. We cannot generalise that all children who speak a different mother tongue at home have problems with the English language. Future research should make the target group more specific to draw better conclusions about a heterogeneous group.

The data gathering process and subsequent analysis of this research mainly focuses on the teacher perspective; it is this group that was interviewed and asked to fill in a questionnaire. As the Department of Education wants to investigate what solutions would be appropriate to implement in the school environment as a whole, other stakeholders should be included in further research. These stakeholders include students and parents, in particular focussing on the home environment. Only a sample of five parents was included in this research, which still provides some insight in the parents' perspective and in the challenges they face. Nonetheless, more parents should have been interviewed to draw the general conclusions.

Getting in contact with the parents was difficult, as the school environment and home environment hardly overlap. For instance, teachers and parents hardly communicated with each other and parents generally do not pick their children up from school. The Leonard Connor school made it possible to successfully approach some parents. Unfortunately, this contact with parents occurred when my stay in Sint Maarten was nearly over, which gave me too little time to systemically make appointments and build trust.

Generally, further research that specifically addresses ESL-programs and curriculum is required. This study aimed to investigate whether the need and the call for a transitional class is strong enough to set it up. Now that this seems to be the case, it is up to the government to follow-up and take the first step in setting this up.

7. LITERATURE

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8. APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Name of the 6 public schools

1. Dr. Marie Genevieve de Weever school
2. Leonard Connor school
3. Dr. Martin Luther King school
4. Oranjeschool
5. Ruby Labega school
6. Prins Willem Alexander school

Appendix 2: Quantitative data

Table 1: the academic problems for children who have immigrated to Sint Maarten this year, rated by the teachers

Variable	N	Mean	SD
1. Understanding the teacher	27	3,74	1,48
2. Reading and writing difficulties	28	4,00	1,33
3. Speaking difficulties	27	3,78	1,40
4. Lagging behind from other students	28	3,89	1,34

Note. M= 3,85, SD=1,33. Range scores (Min=1, Max =5)

Table 2: the academic problems for children whose mother tongue is not English

Variable	N	Mean	SD
1. Understanding the teacher	54	3,35	1,17
2. Reading and writing difficulties	54	3,81	1,21
3. Speaking difficulties	55	3,15	1,24
4. Lagging behind from other students	55	3,35	1,34

Note. M= 3,41, SD=1.04. Range scores (Min=1, Max=5).

Table 3: the social problems for children who have immigrated to Sint Maarten this year, rated by the teachers.

Variable	N	Mean	SD
1. Making new friends	29	2,45	1,43
2. Speaking only with children in their own language	28	2,82	1,42
3. Difficulties with integrating in the class	29	3,07	1,41
4. Lack of motivation because of the language barrier	27	3,44	1,50
5. Lack of support of parents with doing their homework	28	3,43	1,55
6. Lack of support of parents with learning the language	29	3,28	1,44
7. Getting used to the new educational system	29	3,55	1,40

8. Getting used to the new culture	29	3,21	1,37
9. Discrepancy between home and school culture	28	3,36	1,37
10. Hostile behaviour from other kids towards them	28	2,07	1,27

Note. Range scores (Min=1, Max=5)

Table 4: the social problems for children whose mother tongue is not English

Variable	N	Mean	SD
1 Speaking only with children in their own language	56	2,61	1,56
2 Lack of support of parents with doing their homework	55	2,93	1,18
3 Lack of support of parents in learning the language	55	3,64	1,37
4 Discrepancy between home and school environment	56	3,18	1,30

Note. Range scores (Min=1, Max=5)

Table 5: the challenges teachers' experience

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Rank
1 Language barrier of students	47	3,43	1,44	6
2 Lack of resources	47	3,53	1,40	4
3 Curriculum doesn't match to the children with different needs	44	3,32	1,52	8
4 Lack of material	49	3,39	1,30	7
5 Lack of financial support	44	3,75	1,31	2
6 Lack of support of the school board	46	3,30	1,53	9
7 Lack of support of the principal	47	2,43	1,50	15
8 Lack of support of other teachers	47	2,13	1,26	16
9 Lack of support of care coordinator	44	2,55	1,50	14
10 Different levels of education in your class	49	3,53	1,34	4
11 Too many cultural differences	48	2,79	1,34	12
12 Difficulties in the placement of children	44	2,80	1,36	11
13 Difficulties in communication with parents	49	3,49	1,21	5
14 Classes are too large	48	3,08	1,57	10
15 Lack of educational assistants	48	3,58	1,37	3
16 Lack of specialists	46	4,00	1,27	1
17 Lack of manpower: what kind of man are you missing?	32	2,75	1,63	13

Note. Range scores (Min=1, Max=5), Ranking (1=Biggest problem, 16=lowest problem)

Appendix 3: Home environment

Almost all mothers that were interviewed came to Sint Maarten for their partner, who was already living in Sint Maarten. One mother came to Sint Maarten for economical reasons. Two of the four mothers moved to Sint Maarten and left their children in their home country, with family. After three to four years, the children reunited with their mother.

Mother: 'I moved here three years ago. My children have lived in Santo Domingo with my father. My children live here in Sint Maarten now for four months'

Four of the five parents were working in the tourism-sector. They indicated that the tourism-sector in general pays better than other jobs, but that it is also an uncertain sector because they are dependent upon tips.

Father: 'Last year I could make 120\$ tips a day. Now you make 20-30\$ tips'

One of the four mothers could speak in English. With her, the interview was in English. Three of the four mothers could not speak English, but all of them indicated that they wanted to learn the language. With these three mothers, the interview was in Spanish. Two of the mothers were following online courses in order to learn the language. Unfortunately, they had difficulties managing their time to pursue this regularly.

Mother: 'I know very little English and I want to learn, but I have to work, I have to cook and do housework.'

Three of the mothers mentioned that they were in a relationship with a partner from Sint Maarten. The children can practice their English with their stepfather. The father that was interviewed is involved in teaching the children English. He helps them with their homework and he teaches them additional English by using books and the Internet. The father has a slogan for the children: 'education is key to good life'.

Father: 'I help her sometimes, she does her homework first and then I correct it. If you don't understand it, look it up on Internet, try it again, just keep on going, going, going'

One mother and stepfather that were interviewed are a good example of that stimulation of learning the language at home leads to good results at school. The two girls are now top of the class.

Appendix 4: Research instruments

A. Interview Principals and teachers

We are doing our research on the need of children whose mother tongue language isn't English. These children either speak a different language at home but grew up in Sint Maarten or they speak a different language because they have migrated here.

1. How many children in total do you have in your class?
2. How many children speak a different language at home?
3. How many children have migrated here and therefore speak a different language?
 - a. What languages do they speak?
4. Do children with a different mother tongue score lower than the natives?
5. Of these children, how many have difficulties in your class?
 - a. What kind of difficulties do these children experience?
 - i. Academically
 - ii. Social
 - iii. Psychological
6. What goes well? In your class but also the children themselves. In what do they show no difficulties?
7. What problems do you face regarding these children?
8. What kind of trends do you see in your class regarding these children?
9. The children are going to middle school soon. What do you think the difficulties are for these children when they transfer to a different school?
10. What recommendations do you have for them?
11. What do you see as the best solution to help these children?
12. What do you think about the implementation of transitional classes?
13. What do you think about transitional schools?
14. What needs to happen in order to realise transitional classes?
 - a. What practical implications can be made?
 - b. What resources do you need?

B. Questionnaire for teachers

Thank you for filling in this questionnaire. I am doing research about children whose mother tongue isn't English and children who have migrated here to Sint Maarten. For my research I am investigating what difficulties these children face and whether the implementation of transitional classes are necessary. Your input will be very helpful to create an idea about how many children need a transitional class and what the primary focus should be in these classes. A transitional class is a separate class for children who have difficulties with the English language.

1. Which grade do you teach?
(Dutch system please: grade 4 is group 6)

2. Where were you born and raised?

3. What languages do you speak?

4. How long have you been teaching?

5. How many children do you have in total in your class?

6. How many children are in your class who do not have English as a mother tongue?

7. What languages do they speak?
 - a. How many children speak Spanish?
 - b. How many children speak Creole?
 - c. How many children speak French?
 - d. How many speak Chinese?
 - e. How many speak a different language?

8. How many children are new this year in your class because they moved from another country? Which countries did they come from?

9. Do you see differences between children who don't speak the English language at home and children who do? What differences?

10. How many students experience academic difficulties because English is not their mother tongue?

11. What kind of academic and social problems for children whose mother tongue isn't English? *(Please do not take the children who have migrated here this year and don't speak the English language into account because the next question concerns these children)*

a. *Please rank from 1 - 5 (1= no problem at all, 5 = big problem, 3 = in between)*

Academic problems	Ranking				
Understanding the teacher	1	2	3	4	5
Reading and writing difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
Lagging behind from other students	1	2	3	4	5
Social problems	Ranking				
Speaking only with children in their own language	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of support of parents with doing their homework	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of support of parents with learning the language	1	2	3	4	5
Discrepancy between home and school culture	1	2	3	4	5

a. Other difficulties these children face?

12. What kind of academic and social problems for children who migrated here this past year and therefore don't speak the English language?

Academic problems	Ranking				
Understanding the teacher	1	2	3	4	5
Reading and writing difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
Lagging behind from other students	1	2	3	4	5
Social problems	Ranking				
Making new friends	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking only with children in their own language	1	2	3	4	5
Difficulties with integrating in the class	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of motivation because of the language barrier	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of support of parents with doing their homework	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of support of parents with learning the language	1	2	3	4	5
Getting used to the new educational system	1	2	3	4	5
Getting used to the new culture	1	2	3	4	5
Discrepancy between home and school culture	1	2	3	4	5
Hostile behaviour from other kids towards them	1	2	3	4	5

13. What difficulties do you face as a teacher regarding these children?

Problem	Ranking				
	1	2	3	4	5
Language barrier	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of resources	1	2	3	4	5
Curriculum doesn't match to the children with different needs	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of material	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of financial support	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of support of the school board	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of support of the principal	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of support of other teachers	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of support of care coordinator	1	2	3	4	5
Different levels of education in your class	1	2	3	4	5
Too many cultural differences	1	2	3	4	5
Difficulties in the placement of children	1	2	3	4	5
Difficulties in communication with parents	1	2	3	4	5
Classes are too large	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of educational assistants	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of specialists (e.g. child psychologist)	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of manpower: what kind of man are you missing?	1	2	3	4	5

14. Do you think transitional classes should be implemented for children who are new in the class and don't speak the language?

- a. How should the class look like? What is needed?

- b. How many children in your class would need to go to a transitional class?

- c. Would you like to be a teacher for a transitional class?

C. Statements for the target children

Description: Children are asked questions and they have to respond with yes or no. They can use cards with yes and no and hold those in the air. When they have done that, further questions are asked about the topic to get an idea how it applies to them and what affect it has on them.

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 1. I have moved here in the past year? | Yes/ No |
| 2. I have moved here 2 years ago? | Yes/ No |
| 3. What language do I speak? | |
| a. Spanish | |
| b. English | |
| c. Creole | |
| d. Dutch | |
| e. Chinese | |
| f. . Other | |
| 4. I find English hard/ difficult? | Yes/ No |
| 5. I don't understand the teacher | |
| a. Often | |
| b. Sometimes | |
| c. I always understand the teacher | |
| 6. I find it difficult to respond to the teacher? | Yes/ No |
| 7. I find it difficult to talk to my friends in English | Yes/ No |
| 8. I find it difficult to be in a new place? | Yes/ No |
| 9. I miss my old friends in the country where I lived? | Yes/ No |
| 10. I speak in my language during recess | Yes/ No/ Sometimes |
| 11. I speak in my language at home | Yes/ No/ Sometimes |
| 12. I have difficulty keeping up in class | Yes/ No |
| 13. I do English homework at home | Yes/ No |
| 14. I do other homework at home | Yes/ No |
| 15. I get guidance from care coordinator to learn English | Yes/ No |
| 16. I get tutoring lessons | Yes/ No |
| 17. My parents help me with learning the language | Yes/ No |
| 18. My parents help me with homework | Yes/ No |
| 19. My parents work a lot and are often not at home | Yes/ No |
| 20. My mother has two jobs or three | Yes/ No |
| 21. My father has two jobs or three | Yes/ No |
| 22. My parents are still together | Yes/ No |
| 23. I play with my friends in my neighbourhood in English | Yes/ No |

D. Questions for parents who have migrated

1. When did you move to Sint Maarten?
2. How many children do you have and how old are they?
3. Why did you immigrate to Sint Maarten?
4. What language do you speak at home?
5. How was moving for the family?
6. Family reunification?
7. What difficulties did you experience in Sint Maarten?
8. What difficulties do your children experience?
 - a. Any language difficulties?
 - b. Academic?
 - c. Social problems
 - d. Get an idea about socio-economic status
 - e. Work – how much work/ how many hours
9. Parental involvement.
 - a. How do they help their children with the language barrier?
 - b. How do they learn the language?
 - c. Do they know English?
10. Preference for individual classes?
11. Preference for regular classes with additional support?