

ITT MFL

on-line support for teacher education in languages

**‘Optionality’ and the *Language Trends 2007* secondary survey:
potential strands of inquiry
and research questions**

compiled by Keith Faulkner

with responses from

Norbert Pachler and Steven Fawkes

interactive seminar series: trainee research

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Introduction

This interactive seminar on 'Optionality' is offered in the light of the findings of the joint ALL / CiLT ISMLA surveys on provision and take-up of Modern Languages study in the secondary sector, November 2006 and 2007.

This booklet constitutes guidance in relation to conducting part 4 of the 4-part seminar.

It may prove helpful to download and view the following document from the same page of the ITT MFL website:

optionalityIBL_threelevelsofstimulus.doc

Strands of inquiry

Here are some suggested **strands of inquiry** in relation to 'Optionality': *the consequences for MFL study in key stage 4* effectively raised by the *Language Trends 2007* secondary survey:

Aspects of national policy/ strategy influencing take-up of Languages at key stage 4

Local factors influencing take-up of Languages at key stage 4

The role of marketing and promotions in encouraging take-up of Languages at key stage 4

The role of senior management/ leadership teams in school in encouraging take-up of Languages at key stage 4

Languages as part of the whole-school curriculum

Languages in competition with other curricular areas

Challenges in assessing pupil attainment in Languages study

Research questions

Here are some suggested **research questions** within the aforementioned **strands of inquiry**:

Aspects of national policy/strategy influencing take-up of Languages at key stage 4

Has the Dearing Languages Review progressed or hindered the intentions of the National Languages Strategy?

What tangible achievements are identifiable in terms of the proposals made by the Nuffield Languages Inquiry at the dawn of the new millennium?

Local factors influencing take-up of Languages at key stage 4

Are there significant regional patterns to the take-up of Languages at key stage 4?

Are there significant socio-economic patterns to the take-up of Languages at key stage 4?

To what extent do the needs of local industry influence the take-up of Languages at key stage 4?

The role of marketing and promotions in encouraging take-up of Languages at key stage 4

How assertive are Languages departments in making the case for Languages at key stage 4 in their schools?

What models of promotional activity have been seen to favourably influence the take-up of Languages at key stage 4 in schools?

To what extent are Languages staff able to schedule and execute promotional activity to bring about the take-up of Languages at key stage 4 in schools?

The role of senior management/ leadership teams in school in encouraging take-up of Languages at key stage 4

To what extent do senior management/ leadership teams in school fulfil their political, social and moral responsibilities with regard to the provision of Languages teaching and learning in the secondary sector?

Languages as part of the whole-school curriculum

To what extent are other subjects taught via languages other than English?

Are there identifiable benefits to having other subject areas taught via languages other than English?

How can Languages collaborate with other subject departments or faculties in the planning and preparation of innovative and meaningful whole-school curriculum?

Languages in competition with other curricular areas

What makes Languages ‘difficult’ in comparison with other subject areas?

How are schools’ key stage 4 option mechanisms organised, and do they work for, or against, the uptake of Languages post-14 in key stage 4?

Challenges in assessing pupil attainment in Languages study

To what extent might current assessment models over-value linguistic accuracy in relation to notions of communicative competence?

What are the consequences for the teaching and learning of Languages in an assessment-led curriculum?

Response:

Norbert Pachler

Dr Norbert Pachler is Co-director of the Centre for Excellence in Work-based Learning for Education Professionals at the Institute of Education, London.

Norbert has worked in Languages teaching and learning as teacher, advisory teacher, teacher educator and researcher and has published widely in this and other fields. Among his many publications is *Learning to teach MFL in the Secondary School* which is widely used on teacher education courses and a third edition of which will be published by Routledge in 2008. He also has been joint editor of the *Language Learning Journal* of the Association for Language Learning (ALL) for many years now.



“I think it is important to distinguish between practitioner inquiry and other forms of inquiry. Whilst practitioner inquiry no doubt has great potential for and benefits in terms of addressing important questions relating to personal professional practice within the micro (classroom) and meso (school) level, the extent to which it can illuminate the macro level (national policy) is arguably limited. The strands of inquiry outlined on page 3 of the booklet tend to target mainly questions that relate to the latter, i.e. the macro level. My contention would be that the key research questions in the context of small-scale systematic inquiry, which seems to be the type of inquiry advocated, might be around innovation of situated pedagogical practice and its conduciveness for pupil learning. Furthermore, I would argue that it is important to start with the precept that such systematic inquiry is as, if not more likely to throw up more questions than it is able to answer.”

Can you articulate a further important strand of inquiry, in your opinion, raised by the Language Trends 2007 secondary survey?

“In my estimation the link between motivation and ‘optionality’ is an important one which arguably brings to the fore the importance of the role of new technologies, in particular digital technologies. With reference to the interim Dearing report published some twelve month ago or so now, I would argue the case for research and development projects in the area of ICT with particular emphasis on digital video and social networking tools.”

If you could commission another research question not on this list, and one that might be undertaken by collaboration between Languages teacher trainers, Mentors and their trainees to address aspects of ‘optionality’, what would it be?

“Languages teacher educators, mentors and student teachers could, in my view, work together effectively in developing cases (see Shulman, 1996) that document leading-edge practice, thereby making it shareable and tangible for reflection and evaluation.”

References

Shulman, Lee S. (1996). “Just in Case: Reflections on Learning from Experience” in J.A. Colbert, P. Desberg & K. Trimble (Eds.) *The Case for Education: Contemporary Approaches to Using Case Methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Response:

Steven Fawkes

Steven Fawkes of the *Association for Language Learning* has twice been President of ALL, and is currently Trustee and Membership Officer. He is also Chair of the ALL ICT Special Interest Group, Secretary to *Language Alliance*, and a member of *NALA National Executive*. Steven has been editor of the *Language World* newsletter, Policy Adviser and Education Officer for BBC Learning, and was a member of the *National Languages Strategy Steering Group*.



Do you have a special interest in seeing pursued any of the strands of inquiry identified on page 3?

“The role of marketing and promotions in encouraging take-up of Languages at key stage 4

The role of senior management/ leadership teams in school in encouraging take-up of Languages at key stage 4

Languages in competition with other curricular areas”

Can you articulate a further important strand of inquiry, in your opinion, raised by the Language Trends 2007 secondary survey?

“Something about young adults who have not specialised in Languages, but who now use a[nother] language regularly.”

If you could commission another research question not on this list, and one that might be undertaken by collaboration between Languages teacher trainers, Mentors and their trainees to address aspects of ‘optionality’, what would it be?

“Do students aged 15-19 have advice for policy and curriculum makers on themes (not topics) that pupils in key stage 4 KS4 would like to learn about through a foreign language?”