

modern foreign languages

teaching school subjects 11-19

Candia Morgan, Clare Tickly and Anne Watson

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Modern Foreign Languages

This accessible and thought-provoking book considers what beginner teachers need to know about learning, teaching, assessment, curriculum and professional development, in the context of teaching modern foreign languages. This book will prove an invaluable resource to those on PGCE courses, those in their induction year, and those in the early years of their teaching career. It is also suitable for subject leaders with mentor responsibilities and Advanced Skills teachers undertaking specialist inset and teaching support.

It explores issues to do with subject knowledge in learning to teach, based on the premise that an essential element of a secondary teacher's identity is tied up with the subject taught. The authors show how MFL teachers can communicate their own enthusiasm for their subjects and inspire their pupils to learn and enjoy learning.

The book is divided into three sections:

- Framing the subject – which defines subject knowledge and raises questions about MFL as a school subject;
- Teaching the subject – which looks at pedagogical, curricular and pupil knowledge;
- MFL within the professional community – which focuses on the place of MFL within the wider curriculum and the teaching community.

This book aims to provide stimulating assistance to subject specialists by helping them to find ways of thinking about their specialism, how to teach with it and how to engage with what pupils learn through it.

Norbert Pachler is Reader in Education and Co-Director of the Centre for Excellence for Work-based Learning for Education Professionals at the Institute of Education, University of London, UK. **Michael Evans** is Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Cambridge, UK. **Shirley Lawes** is Lecturer in Education at the Institute of Education, University of London, UK.

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**Teaching School Subjects
11–19**

**Norbert Pachler, Michael Evans
and Shirley Lawes**

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Contents

	About the authors	vii
	Editors' preface	ix
	About this book	xv
	List of abbreviations	xvii
	Introduction: foreign language teaching in context	1
Part I	The subject	5
1	The politics of foreign language learning and the subject knowledge field	7
2	Different categories of foreign language knowledge	23
Part II	Using the subject in the classroom	51
3	Pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge	53
4	Curricular knowledge	81
5	Understanding pupil knowledge	114
Part III	Subject and professional development	141
6	Educational and research literacies	143
7	Wider professional knowledge and professional learning	167
	Recommended books	189
	Recommended journals	191
	References	192
	Index	203



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Editors' preface

This series aims to make sense of school subjects for new teachers at a moment when subject expertise is being increasingly linked to the redefinition of teachers' responsibilities (Whitty *et al.*, 2000). We start from the common assumption that teachers' passion for their subject provides the foundation for effective teaching. But we also take the view that effective teachers develop complicated understandings of students' learning. Therefore we also aim to offer subject specialists a picture of students' learning in their chosen field.

The central argument of the series as a whole is that teachers' professional development in subject specialism turns on their growing appreciation of the complexities of learning. In essence, the subject knowledge that new teachers bring from their experiences in higher education has to be reworked before it can be taught effectively to children. Our contention is that it is the sustained engagement with the dynamics of students' learning that uniquely sheds light on the way that existing subject knowledge has to be reconfigured locally if it is to be taught successfully in schools. What teachers know about their subject has to be reworked on site. And such is teachers' agency that they will always have a key role in shaping curriculum subjects.

Teaching involves a critical re-engagement with existing subject knowledge. This occurs chiefly through contact with children and communities. All new teachers have to learn how to make complicated judgements about the selection, ordering and presentation of materials with particular learners, real children, in mind. Teachers, then, are learners too. So as well as giving a picture of students' learning, the series aims

to offer a sufficiently complicated account of professional development for new teachers to recognise themselves as learners as they take on new responsibilities in their schools. Thus we aim to offer insights into the kind of thinking – intellectual work – that teachers at the early stages are going to have to do.

This series is aimed chiefly at new teachers in their years of early professional development. This includes teachers in their initial training year, their induction year and those in years two and three of a teaching career. In addition to PGCE students and newly qualified teachers (NQTs) working toward the induction standards, the Series therefore also addresses *subject leaders* in schools, who have mentor responsibilities with early career teachers, and advanced skills teachers (ASTs) undertaking subject specialist Inset and teaching support.

The books in the series cover the training standards for NQT status and the induction standards. They use both the training terminology and the structure of the official standards in a way that enables readers to connect the arguments contained in the books with their obligation to demonstrate achievement against performance criteria. And yet the series as a whole has the ambition to take readers further than mere ‘compliance’. It openly challenges teachers to acknowledge their own agency in interpreting ‘competence’ and to see their role in developing the subject, thus shaping their professional identities.

A distinctive feature of the series as a whole is its concern with how the *particular school subjects* have been ‘framed’. Thus the books offer a contrast with much that has been published in recent times, including the well-known *Learning to Teach* series also published by Routledge Falmer. They include substantial material on how school subjects connect with wider disciplines. They are also alert to broad social and cultural realities. They form a response, therefore, to what has been identified as a major weakness in training and teacher support in recent years, namely its preoccupation with generic matters of teaching competence at the expense of paying adequate attention to particular issues associated with subject specialism. The *Teaching School Subjects* series aims to redress the balance.

Those who believe that there is a general ‘science’ of teaching have been especially influential in recent years. There is no denying that the Key Stage Three Strategy, for instance, has had an impact on the preparedness of teachers generally. Further to this, the identification and recommendation of specific teaching approaches and techniques have enhanced

new teachers' technical proficiency generally. Recently, much has been made of teaching 'thinking skills', and such initiatives have raised teachers' all-round performance as well as their professional self-esteem. But when push comes to shove, teaching cannot be sustained in this way. Pupils cannot be taught simply to think. They have to have something to think *about*. If this 'something' is trivial, irrelevant or out of date then the education process will be devalued, and students will quickly become disaffected.

The Secretary of State recognised something of this in 2003 when he launched his *Subject Specialisms Consultation*:

Our very best teachers are those who have a real passion and enthusiasm for the subject they teach. They are also deeply committed to the learning of their students and use their enthusiasm for their subject to motivate them, to bring their subject alive and make learning an exciting, vivid and enjoyable experience.

It is teachers' passion for their subject that provides the basis for effective teaching and learning. These teachers use their subject expertise to engage students in meaningful learning experiences that embrace content, process and social climate. They create for and with their children opportunities to explore and build important areas of knowledge, and develop powerful tools for learning, within a supportive, collaborative and challenging classroom environment.

(DfES, 2003a, Paras 1–2)

The *Teaching School Subjects* series aims to make practical sense of such assumptions by fleshing them out in terms of teachers' experiences. So, as well as looking at the histories of particular school subjects and current national frameworks, we shall also be looking at practical matters through case studies and teachers' narratives. We have noted how new teachers sometimes feel at a loss regarding the very subject knowledge they carry forward from their previous educational experiences into teaching. This feeling may be due to their entering a highly regulated profession where it appears that choices concerning what to teach (let alone how to teach it) are heavily constrained. However, much will be lost that could sustain creative and healthy classrooms if the system cuts off a primary source of energy, which is teachers' enthusiasm for their subject. Good teachers connect such enthusiasm with the students' interests. The series, *Teaching School Subjects*, engages with just this issue. If it has a single,

clear mission it is to encourage the thought in teachers that they do not merely 'deliver' the curriculum in the form of prefigured subject knowledge, but they have an agentive role in making it.

What does it mean, to 'make' a curriculum? This is a huge question, and we do not aim to provide a definitive curriculum theory. However, we note that current accounts of curriculum and pedagogy (e.g. Moore, 2000) tend to emphasise the role of competing interests in deciding the educational experience of students. They offer a complicated picture of curriculum construction by taking in societal, economic and cultural influences. Plainly, no single interest wholly determines the outcome. Additionally, there is a growing agreement among educationists in England and Wales that 'central government control of the school curriculum must be loosened' to release teachers' energies (White, 2003, p. 189). We adopt a position similar to John White's, which is to 'rescue' the curriculum from central prescription and 'to see teachers having a greater role than now in . . . decisions on the curriculum . . .' (*ibid.*, pp. 189–90).

This is not to say that the government has no role at all. Few would want to return fully to the arrangements before the 1988 Education Reform Act, when the curriculum experience of students was almost entirely in the hands of teachers and other interest groups. It is surely right that the elected government should regulate what is taught – but not that it should prescribe the curriculum in such an inflexible manner that it stifles teachers' initiative. Teachers play an active role in shaping the curriculum. They make professional decisions given, as White puts it, their 'knowledge of the pupils on whom the curriculum will be inflicted'. We argue that it is here, in deciding what to teach and how to teach it, that teachers' knowledge and creativity are of cardinal value. Teaching is quintessentially a practical activity, and teachers' performance matters. But we also know that behind the creativity in teaching lies a form of intellectual work. Our starting position is that intellectual effort is required at every stage of teaching and learning if it is to be worthwhile.

Knowledge of the pupils is a fundamental component of curriculum design. Effective teachers are in secure possession of just this kind of knowledge of their pupils where it informs their decisions about the selection of content and the choice of methods. However, the Series also makes it plain that knowledge of the pupils on its own is an insufficient basis for working out what to teach and how to teach it. Secure subject knowledge is equally important. Further to this, we take the view that an essential element of a secondary teacher's professional identity is tied

up with a sense of their subject specialism. It is generally true that effective teaching requires a deeper grasp of subject than that specified by the syllabus. What is more, pupils frequently admire teachers who 'know their stuff'. What 'stuff' means is usually larger than a particular topic or a set of facts. Indeed, the way that an effective teacher makes a particular topic accessible to the pupils and enables them to progress often relies on their having a good grasp of the architecture of the subject, what the main structures are and where the weaknesses lie. You can't mug this up the night before the lesson.

It is widely recognised that PGCE students and early career teachers frequently turn to school textbooks to fill the gaps. This is fine, inevitably there will be aspects of the subject that the specialist has not covered. Many now use the internet proficiently as a rich source of information, data, images and so on. Also, fine. But what teachers also need to do is to make sense of the material, organise it and sift it for accuracy, coherence and meaning. The Series helps new teachers to do this by taking you into the relevant subject debates. The authors introduce you to the conceptual struggles in the subject and how these impinge on the making of the school subject. Through debating the role of the school subject, and showing how it hangs together (its 'big concepts'), they also show how it contributes to wider educational aims. Such a discussion takes place in the context of renewed debate about the future of school subjects and the subject-based curriculum. Though the Series serves the needs of subject specialists, it does not take as given the unchanging status of school subjects, and the authors will take up this debate explicitly.

Current notions of subjects, as inert 'contents' to be 'delivered' grate against learning theories, which foreground the role of human agency (teachers and pupils) in the construction of knowledge. For the teacher, good subject knowledge is not about being 'ahead of the students', but being aware of the wider subject. Teachers might ask themselves what kinds of knowledge their subject deals with. And, following on from this they might also ask about the kinds of difficulty that students often encounter. Note that we are not concerned with 'correcting' pupils' 'misconceptions' about what they get in lessons, but with what they actually make of what they get.

The Series has a broad, theoretical position that guides the way that the components of the individual books are configured. These components include lesson planning, classroom organisation, learning management, the assessment of/for learning and ethical issues. However, there is no

overarching prescription, and the various volumes in the series take significantly different approaches. Such differences will depend on the various priorities and concerns associated with particular specialist subjects. In essence, the books aim to develop ways of thinking about subjects – even before readers set foot inside the classroom.

We doubt the adequacy of any model of teaching and learning that reduces the role of the teacher to that of the technician. Teachers mediate the curriculum for their students. Further to this, there is an urgent justification for this series of books.

It is the ambition of the series to restate the role of subjects in schools, but not in a conservative spirit that fails to engage with substantial change and developments. For some commentators, the information explosion, together with the still-quickening communications revolution, spells the death of subjects, textbooks and the rest of the nineteenth century school apparatus. We do not share this analysis. But we acknowledge that the *status quo* is not an option. Indeed, subject teachers may need to become less territorial about curriculum space, more open to collaboration across traditional subject boundaries and more responsive to what have been called ‘unauthorised subject stories’ – student understandings, media representations and common-sense views of the world. In such an educational environment, we would argue, the role of disciplinary knowledge is even *more* important than it was a decade ago, and teachers need to engage with it creatively.

Teaching School Subjects aims to support new teachers by helping them discover productive ways of thinking about their specialism. The specialist authors have tried to maintain an optimistic, lively and accessible tone, and we hope you enjoy them.

John Hardcastle and David Lambert
London, January 2004



About this book

Over the last ten or fifteen years there has been a significant growth in books aimed at supporting the initial and early professional development of foreign language (FL) teachers. Most of these books have taken as their framework of reference the competences or standards imposed by government for the award of qualified teacher status (QTS), the requirements of the National Curriculum for modern foreign languages and a growing number of other government initiatives ostensibly aimed at improving the quality of FL teaching and learning. This approach has necessarily prescribed the nature of the content and, to some extent, the assumptions and principles upon which such books are premised. What we have set out to do is to put to one side, although not entirely ignore, government requirements and to consider FL teaching and learning and FL teacher professionalism in a scholarly way. We seek to engage critically but constructively with prevailing orthodoxies in the field as well as with national policies and prescriptions. The book draws on findings from international research into second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language learning (FLL). We aim to promote a principled and evidence-informed approach to FL pedagogy that, despite references to the English context, addresses a much wider audience beyond our national borders.

In this book we have taken on the task of trying to distil into one volume what we consider to be areas of professional knowledge that are essential to the FL teacher who is seeking to know more than what to do in the classroom and how to do it, but who wants to begin to understand the theories and principles that inform practice. This book might, therefore, be seen as an advanced introduction to the field of FLs in



education for readers who have some knowledge both of practical FL teaching and learning as well as of the professional and pedagogical literature in the field.

In the face of an increase in the UK in central prescription of FL content and methodology under the banner of school effectiveness policies, the book explores alternative ways of conceptualising the knowledge bases involved in FL teaching, not, of course, in deliberate juxtaposition to government-endorsed interpretations of subject knowledge and related fields, but in order to present contesting views and to encourage our readers to see both policy and practice as open to critical discussion and debate and not merely conformist implementation. We would argue that the true professional does not adopt unquestioningly government policy – or any other methodological or pedagogical approaches for that matter, but seeks to make informed judgements based on a firm foundation of theoretical and conceptual knowledge, carefully thought-out professional principles and values as well as practical experience. Among other things, we seek to initiate new teachers into the spirit of critical engagement and debate of competing ideas about FL teaching and learning in the firm belief that this approach to teacher professional development is the hallmark of FL teacher excellence.

Norbert Pachler (London), Michael Evans (Cambridge)
and Shirley Lawes (London), June 2007



Abbreviations

ALL	Association for Language Learning
ASTs	Advanced Skills Teachers
BECTA	British Educational Communications and Technology Agency
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BPRS	Best Practice Research Scholarships
CALLA	Cognitive academic language learning approach
CBI	Content-based instruction
CEF	Common European Framework
CILT	National Centre for Languages/(Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research)
CLT	Communicative language teaching
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
CORI	Concept-orientated reading instruction
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPS	Centre for Policy Studies
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EEC	European Economic Community
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FIPF	Fédération internationale des professeurs de français
FL	Foreign language
FL2	Second foreign language
FLA	Foreign language assistant
(F)LAC	(Foreign) languages across the curriculum

FLL	Foreign language learning
GCSE	General Certificate in Secondary Education
GTC	General Teaching Council
GTP	Graduate Teacher Programme
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICT	Information and communications technology
IDV	Der Internationale Deutschlehrerverband
INSET	In-service training
IPPR	Institute of Public Policy Research
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
IWB	Interactive whiteboard
KAL	Knowledge about language
KS3	Key Stage Three
KS4	Key Stage Four
LEAs	Local Education Authorities
LLS	Language learning strategies
MFL	Modern Foreign Language
NC	National Curriculum
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NQT	Newly qualified teachers
NVQs	National Vocational Qualifications
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PGCE	Post-graduate Certification in Education
PoS	Programme of Study
PPD	Postgraduate Professional Development
PPP	Presentation–practice–production
PSHE	Personal, social and health education
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QTS	Qualified teacher status
SLA	Second language acquisition
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching
TDA	Teacher Development Agency for Schools
TL	Target language
UCET	Universities Council for the Education of Teachers



Introduction: foreign language teaching in context

In recent years, foreign language (FL) teaching and learning in schools have gone through a somewhat turbulent period of change at the level of policy that has led to a reassessment of their place in the school curriculum. It could be argued that, although at a rhetorical level FL learning has rarely enjoyed such levels of support, in practice the effect of recent policy initiatives seems to have undermined the subject area.

During the post-Second World War period, when FLs became seen as a desirable pursuit for the most able learners, they were not generally regarded as an essential part of every child's educational experience. Indeed, until the introduction of comprehensive education in the early 1970s, FL learning was very much the preserve of the educational elites who either went to a selective or independent school. Even within the comprehensive system, some pupils were often 'selected out' on the basis that it was considered that they were better off improving their English. Nevertheless, there has always been a fairly strong 'languages for all' lobby that has promoted the wider benefits of FL learning for *all* pupils. The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 bestowed on FLs an apparently secure place within the school curriculum to the extent that the subject area enjoyed compulsory status at Key Stages Three and Four for a relatively short period in the late 1990s. For a brief period, knowing a FL was seen as part of what it means to be educated, and an experience that every secondary school child should have. This elevated status of the subject area was short-lived, however, and it was soon to be relegated to optional status at Key Stage Four (KS4) following the publication of the National Framework for Languages in 2002, which provided for the gradual introduction of FL learning in the primary school.

Responses to this policy have ranged from a warm welcome by advocates of early FL learning, to treating those who considered that more was being lost than gained by abandoning compulsory status at Key Stage Four as ‘Cassandras’. In fact, within a year, 70 per cent of state schools made FL learning optional after Year 9, exam entries plummeted, and it has become clear that something has to be done to revive what has quickly become a beleaguered area of the school curriculum. Policy-makers have begun to realise that, although the longer-term strategy of offering an *entitlement* to learn a FL to every primary school child by the end of the decade may begin to have an impact, it cannot compensate for the loss of status of FLs in the secondary school curriculum. Indeed, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) as was (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families), in apparent recognition of some misjudgement of the effect of allowing for optionality post-14 years, have expressed the wish for at least 50 per cent of schools to offer FLs as part of the KS4 curriculum.

In 2006 the DfES carried out a review of the 2002 Languages Strategy (see Dearing and King, 2006, 2007) in which a number of important recommendations are made, not least that of a more diverse range of languages to be made available by schools including Mandarin and Arabic, the reaffirmation of FLs becoming a part of the statutory KS2 curriculum and the suggestion that the GCSE be reformed.

How well-equipped are FL teachers to meet the new challenge of winning the argument for their subject area? How susceptible are twenty-first century learners to the arguments made to them for the value of FL learning? Could it be that, over recent years, the focus on the development of excellent practical classroom skills on the part of the teacher and the acquisition of functional language ‘skills’ on the part of the learner has resulted in a neglect of the intellectual and cultural value of both the teaching and the learning of FLs? The future of FLs is ultimately in the hands of the teachers, and it is an exciting and worthwhile challenge that lies ahead.

What is needed now is a confident reaffirmation by FL teachers and other professionals that FLs *matter*, and that given the dominance of English as the global language of communication, functional and instrumental arguments for FL learning are unlikely to be effective with young people in England. Although personal vocational aims and economic benefits have become the traditional argument for justifying FLs to learners, they are but one argument, and certainly not the essential justification for

FLs in the school curriculum. They provide a limited view of what knowledge of a FL could give young people. Moreover, arguments that seek to make an economic justification for FL learning actually miss the real point about why languages are important. Knowledge of other languages will always be of importance as a cultural achievement whether, or not it is economically important as English becomes the global language of business. The study of FLs has the potential of favouring the universal over the particular in a unique way, of providing a window on the world by enriching people's lives and opening them up to other cultures and literatures.

A confident reaffirmation of the value of FL learning *for its own sake*, as part of every child's educational experience, rather than for instrumental economic reasons, requires teachers who are able to mount both a professional and intellectual defence of their subject area and who believe passionately in the value of FL learning. Such teachers need to be skilled classroom practitioners, but they need to be much more than that. They need to have an excellent knowledge of their subject and of the underpinning theoretical principles of how FLs are learned, and an understanding of themselves as professionals and their professional role, set in the broader context of education. They need above all to believe in the intellectual and cultural value of FL teaching and learning. A sound intellectual purchase on all these matters is achieved through reading, questioning, discussion, debate and critical reflection. This book sets out to provide a basis for such questioning, discussion, debate and critical reflection, which we believe to be vital both to teachers and to the future of FLs as a subject area.

