

Language Instruction and Prospective Teachers: Preliminary Findings and Recommendations

for presentation at the ILR Showcase
July 29, 2005

Thank you ...

I want to tell you about findings from my Title VI funded research on “Internationalizing Teacher Education...”, and particularly the findings related to foreign language instruction for prospective K-12 teachers. The project is turning out to have two phases. The first phase focused on the training of secondary school teachers and was completed 2 years ago. I’ll be glad to give any of you a copy of that report. Since then, I have been continuing the research, now focusing on the training of the elementary school teacher, and building on the database from the previous phase. I have just begun to analyze the mass of information collected – starting with the foreign language instruction questions, so that I might report to you today.

The data for both parts of the project are from interviews – on 41 campuses – with (85) senior administrators, deans of Arts and Sciences (43) **and** Education (50), faculty in both A&S (89) and Education (86), advisors (15), a few students (more than 20), and some current teachers. More than 30% of the A&S faculty interviewed are in language (and literature) departments. The campuses include research universities (20), comprehensive universities (17), and liberal arts colleges (4) in 19 states and DC. 33 are public and 8 are private. Some follow-up telephone interviews were conducted in the second phase on campuses visited in the first phase, to add the elementary teacher education perspective; a few from phase one even had a second visit.

Most of the interview questions were the same in both phases. However, the interview protocols for each category – in Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education, in Schools of Arts and Sciences, and among Senior Administrators – had different foci, so that along with common questions there was variation in the questions asked that relate to language instruction. And of course the protocol for current teachers is different from the others. I mention this now to explain why there are blank sections on the handout. A final report will include each of these protocols.

Keeping in mind that more than half of the prospective teacher’s undergraduate courses are normally in Arts and Sciences, the data explore the context of the teacher training programs as well as the nature of the programs themselves – and I have considered foreign language

instruction to be an important part of the context. Indeed, I present these findings thinking that for you the context is what interests you, since the findings are likely relevant to many kinds of undergraduate experience.

Even though I now have data from some 400 interviews, the subcategories are many, so the project should still be considered exploratory— certainly not definitive but, hopefully, provocative.

Let me describe some of the findings related to foreign language requirements and instruction. The handout simply provides a first cut at the very raw data relevant to what I'm about to say.

An early question in nearly all the interviews was whether the institution has a language requirement. About half said yes, about 45% said that there is a requirement only for some programs (usually B.A.s), and the remainder didn't know, or said there was none.

What was the requirement? You are probably more knowledgeable than I about the ambiguities involved in a "yes" or "no" answer. Maybe it was satisfied by 2 high school years, or maybe it required two years of college level study irrespective of proficiency on entering university, or maybe students could test out at some level of proficiency. At least one institution with a foreign language requirement for prospective teachers waives it for the students who transfer from a community college – which could have serious implications for teacher training since such an increasing number of students are taking advantage of community college resources, which in turn may not include many options for foreign language study.

I have not yet systematically compared the data from institutions participating in both phases, but do know that at least two have either reduced or eliminated their foreign language requirement in the intervening three years. None had increased it. And when the response about requirements was "some programs only," those programs rarely were for students planning to be teachers.

Another set of requirements to be met by the prospective teacher is for certification, so a question asked for Education interviewees was whether those requirements included foreign language. More than 70% of the respondents reported no foreign language requirement for certification. Given how many requirements crowd the teacher training curriculum, perhaps it is

surprising that as many as 30% did report a foreign language requirement for teacher training preparation. I do wonder whether this might decrease further as education administrators contend with No-Child-Left-Behind.

In contrast, the current teachers, asked whether they think that foreign language study should be included in the training of elementary school teachers, are replying (in data tabulated so far) by a ratio of about 9 to 1 that it should. This is consistent with the data collected three years ago from mostly secondary school teachers.

An important question in the “Looking Ahead” section of the interview was whether a language requirement should be added or increased for prospective teachers. In an ideal world, about 90% would like to. However, the obstacles cited were many, and I’d like to give you a flavor of these responses today. Perhaps as I mention them you will think of some solutions.

First, from interviewees in Education:

- The most frequently cited issue was time and space in the curriculum. The prospective teacher has few, if any, electives, and, in order to get more teachers into the pipeline faster, state legislatures and/or boards of education seem to be increasingly putting restrictions on the number of credit hours required for graduation. A suggested solution was a focus on university admission requirements, further pushing the burden of introductory language instruction onto the K-12 schools. I’ll come back to this in a minute.
- Some cited what was thought to be the prevailing methodology for language teaching, suggesting that to be helpful for the generalist teacher foreign language instruction should include significant cultural content.
- Several respondents noted that foreign language departments have insufficient faculty to offer the courses that would be needed if requirements were raised – some suggesting that current department faculty themselves are opposed to such requirements because they prefer teaching advanced courses and, if more students are required to study foreign languages, the internal department balance could shift to favor language instruction (rather than literature) specialists. Interestingly, however, the president of an institution which has no language requirement reported that 70% of all its undergraduates elect to take foreign language and literature courses.

- One question raised by several was that even if a minimum foreign language requirement might fit into a teacher education curriculum, the result would be very unlikely to result in any kind of usable fluency – so realistically what would such a requirement contribute to the prospective student’s preparation?
- At several institutions, more advanced language instruction (to attain usable proficiency) is just not available.
- One Education faculty member at an institution with a foreign language requirement for all students commented that neither the (language) faculty nor the students take it seriously.
- Some opined that a foreign language requirement would likely deter applicants who might otherwise become good teachers.

In **Arts and Sciences** interviews many of the same issues were cited, but here the perspectives were a little different.

- One language faculty member lamented that few faculty members see foreign language instruction as a key to internationalization, yet on the same campus it was also noted that it’s been the language faculty who tend to resist having a requirement.
- A dean commented that it would be helpful to find ways for students to actually use foreign language more. Here, parenthetically, I might note that this was one of the many interviews when I had to explain what “Languages across the Curriculum” might entail; fewer than 30% of the more recent interviewees could tell me that it is a possibility on their campuses.
- Another dean, also citing competing interests within foreign language and literature departments, observed no pressure from those departments for a requirement, even though having one would doubtless increase their overall enrollments.
- Staffing issues were cited by several.
- The timing of language offerings was a problem (related to requirements) at some institutions: For example, when introductory language courses meet 5 hours a week, the price of having a requirement is heavy. On the other hand, when language courses meet only once or twice a week, development of meaningful competence is very slow and the value of the investment dubious.

Senior administrators (provosts, presidents and vice-presidents, and directors of offices of international programs) mentioned all of these issues, probably with more emphasis on costs (of all sorts, including availability of needed faculty), the need for better pedagogy, and attention to usage other than literature.

Anticipating, fortuitously, that interviewees might suggest that students should be learning foreign language prior to admission to university (or community college), this project did include a few questions about the undergraduate training of foreign language teachers.

Specifically:

- Education respondents were asked whether teachers are being trained for foreign language instruction at the elementary level. Some did not know, but the majority said no; most certification for foreign language teaching is for K-12 which, I was told, could cover language teaching in elementary schools. Again the responses may be ambiguous. Many also added that schools in their states do not teach foreign languages at the elementary school levels, so the emphases in the K-12 programs for prospective foreign language teachers is really on the secondary level.
- Are courses in foreign language pedagogy taught in Arts and Sciences, Education, or both? Some responded “Education,” likely considering it part of a general methods course. More often than not (and if taught at all), it is taught in the Arts and Sciences, by foreign language faculty. Occasionally I heard of joint teaching for this course, with both A&S and Education. Again, I would guess that the emphasis is on pedagogy for middle and high schools.
- And are foreign language majors encouraged to become teachers? Responses to a series of questions about advising for Arts and Sciences students would seem to indicate that they may not be. Few interviewees reported that students get career guidance from their faculty advisors, although many did suggest that students could get information about teaching as a career goal from their advisors if they asked. Are faculty advisors prepared to help students in foreign language fields discover their vocations for teaching? Most who responded did not know, or said they were not prepared.

For a paper last year, I examined discrepancies among responses at the same institution on a few questions, and one of the issues I looked at was whether the institution has a university-wide

foreign language requirement, of any sort. The consensus response at that point seemed to be that 11 do and 23 do not. However there was total agreement (either yes or no) on a surprisingly small number of campuses – in this instance, 12 out of the 34 campuses visited at that point – and the agreement and/or disagreement appeared at all types of institutions (research universities, comprehensive universities, and liberal arts colleges) and at any size institution. Faculty respondents, in both Arts and Sciences and Education, were a little more likely to be in disagreement – in other words, probably poorly informed – than either deans or senior administrators. And these are the people doing much of the advising...

Indeed, another question was asked about how to improve the advising system. It was an open-ended question, to which a considerable number answered that more training and workshops on advising would be helpful. Advisors get their information, I was told, in a variety of ways – primarily e-mails and memos, department meetings, and/or a handbook, word-of-mouth, and the website – when they do get it. Foreign language faculty were similar to others in their responses (or lack thereof) on this point. Better information exchange about students' options is surely needed.

Interestingly, when asked how, if additional funds were available for internationalization, the interviewee would like to use them, NOT ONE PERSON – in any category of respondent – suggested anything directly related to foreign language instruction, unless “more study abroad” or “faculty development” might be so construed. I would urge you all to think about what can be done to make foreign language instruction an integral part of increased internationalization in both the K-12 and postsecondary curricula. More than sympathetic hand-wringing (and requests for government funds) is needed!

My report of 2 years ago included many recommendations and I'm sure that the next report will too. Among the last recommendations related to foreign language instruction were –

- For teacher accrediting agencies, to include requirements for international exposure, through... foreign language study... in the accreditation criteria for teacher education programs.
- For institutions of higher education generally,

- to strengthen requirements for foreign language training to a minimum of two full college years, with a goal of attaining at least conversational proficiency in a second language;
- to provide training on international needs and student options for both faculty and professional advisors; and
- to foster development of internationally oriented curricula, through individual faculty grants.
- For Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education,
 - to add requirements for significant foreign language competence to the preparation of teachers,
 - to require that prospective foreign language teachers have at least a semester of overseas experience in an area where “their” language is spoken, and
 - to expose Arts and Sciences students with international interests to the challenges of teaching careers.

For the coming report, all of the above seem relevant. In addition, I would like to add a recommendation for certifying bodies that a separate certification or licensure category be established, for K-6 foreign language teachers – in the hope that others will push for more foreign language instruction at the elementary level, where teaching approaches should surely be different from methods in the higher grades, and where it may be a better place to interest students in foreign language.

What do you think? I would be pleased to have your questions and advice.

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Language Instruction and Prospective Teachers: Related Research Findings - Preliminary

	Entire Project (n=386)	Total (n=214)	Phase 2		Education (n=99)	current teachers sec.ed./el.ed.
			Sr. Admin. (n=54)	A&S (n=61)		
Institution's language requirement	139	85	22	25	38	
- university wide						
- for some divisions	123	84	31	29	24	
- none		34	2	5	27	
Institution has LxC options	70	63	16	16	31	
Study abroad is an option for prospective teachers		198	54	60	84	
Foreign language for study abroad is required	13	5	*	0	5	
depends on the program	79	53	34		19	
Elementary education curriculum includes foreign language or does not					26	
					58	
State certification requirements specify foreign language competence or not					5	
					77	
Foreign language study should be required for prospective teachers or not						52/18 7/2
Foreign language requirements should be added	128	92	20	24	48	
or increased	111	75	27	28	20	
or neither		27	5	2	20	
Foreign language major can get certified to teach or not, don't know				40		
				15		
Prospective elementary education teachers are instructed about teaching students with limited English					71	
Teachers are trained for foreign language teaching in elementary schools or not or K-12 certification covers it				34		
				39		
				28		
Courses on teaching foreign language are offered in A&S or Education or both	105	57		20	37	
	72	50		19	31	
	24	19		8	11	
Advisors are trained about international exposure needed by elementary school teachers or not					19	
					48	
* Advising system might be strengthened by advisor training	102	73	18	20	35	
* Time constraints, curricular demands prevent adding or increasing foreign language requirements	79	63	15	17	31	
* How would you want to have outside incentive funding targeted? Foreign language instruction	0	0	0	0	0	*
						3/3

* Responses to open-ended question