

Institution: University of Nottingham		
Unit of Assessment: UoA26 Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: Reshaping how language learning and multilingualism are valued and understood		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011–20		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Nicola McLelland	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of German and History of Linguistics	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 4 January 2005–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: September 2013–December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>The importance of language learning and multilingualism for a thriving cultural, social, and economic life in the UK has been desperately undervalued, leading to poor decision-making in national, regional and local policies and practices. McLelland's pioneering research in the history of language learning and teaching has informed influencers, from the OECD Directorate of Education to national trainers and local teachers, enabling them to improve their ability to advocate, support and implement appropriate and evidence-based choices in policy and education. McLelland's research on the sociolinguistics of multilingualism has yielded new narratives on the value of languages and their importance in education and social cohesion, including through the UK's first pop-up World of Languages museum, enriching public cultural life and changing attitudes and values – particularly crucial in Nottingham, the UK's poorest city.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>McLelland's individual (1, 2) and collaborative (3, 4) research has established <i>the history of language learning and teaching</i> as a research focus in the UK, previously a major gap compared to other parts of Europe, and has identified key historical moments and their relevance to practitioners and policymakers now. Her research (1, 2) (funded by [G1, G3]) has provided a vital knowledge-base on the history of choices made in Britain about which languages to teach and learn, who gets to learn, and to what level; on the methods and contents of language teaching, including the teaching and assessing of target language, cultures and histories; and equally crucially, on the history of advocacy and policy-making. She has made explicit how seemingly straightforward choices – about one testing regime over another, for example – reflect the prevailing values and ideologies of their era (1, 2). She shows how challenges and uncertainties felt by teachers today – for example about the methods and goals of language teaching – have longer and deeper roots than current debates may suggest, but she also identifies positive changes, for example in pedagogy and democratization of language learning (2). Her evaluation of advocacy and policy offers case studies demonstrating that some strategies are more successful than others, and differentially so for different audiences (2).</p> <p>McLelland's AHRC network project [G2] stimulated historical research into language teaching in the UK and beyond by bringing together researchers from different language disciplines and backgrounds. It yielded co-edited outputs (3, 4) and an ongoing international network of researchers under the umbrella of the International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA), www.hollt.net, with annual colloquia on historical research into language learning continuing since the end of the AHRC network funding in 2014.</p> <p>McLelland's body of research (1, 2, 3, 4) has provided a foundation in the history of language learning and teaching, including detailed engagement with primary materials. It forms the basis of guidance to improve policy and practice, of materials to improve language teachers' practice [including through G6], and of compelling narratives to help change societal attitudes [G4, G6].</p> <p>Secondly, McLelland has led a programme of research on <i>how multilingualism interacts with, shapes, and challenges standard languages and language variation</i>, through her role as Co-I and Deputy Project leader of the AHRC OWRI-funded project <i>Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies</i> (MEITS, www.meits.org, G4). McLelland's research has identified how standard languages are differently understood in different</p>		

multilingual contexts and by different constituencies, and pinpointed the role of multilingualism in both promoting and challenging standard language ideologies (5). Comparative analysis, moreover, has given us a clearer understanding of the challenges and opportunities that language standardization brings in multilingual contexts. For example, in the case of minoritized or non-dominant languages, we now have a better understanding of the need in education and policy-making to balance the conflicting instrumental and identity functions of language in order to reduce linguistic inequality (5). Her research has, equally pressingly, demonstrated the need for new public narratives about languages, as well as how an awareness of multilingualism can lead to improved policy and practice, also in 'non-linguistic' areas of social life such as law [G5] education, and health (6).

3. References to the research

Key outputs (all peer-reviewed), sole author except where otherwise indicated:

1. Book. **Nicola McLelland**, *German Through English Eyes: A History of Language Teaching and Learning in Britain, 1500–2000* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015, 444 pp.) ISBN 9783447101486 [Gold open access](#)

2. Book. **Nicola McLelland**, *Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages: A History of Language Education, Assessment and Policy in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2017, 263 pp.) ISBN 9780367177911 (supplied on request)

3. Journal special issue. **Nicola McLelland** and Richard Smith (eds., each 50%), *Histories of Language Learning and Teaching in Europe*. Special issue of *The Language Learning Journal* 46.1 (2018) [Gold open access](#), with co-written introduction and article by McLelland, 'The history of language learning and teaching in Britain'

4. Edited book in 3 vols. **Nicola McLelland** and Richard Smith (eds., each 50%), *The History of Language Learning and Teaching*. 3 vols: Vol. I 16th–18th-Century Europe; Vol. II 19th–20th-Century Europe; Vol. III Across Cultures (Oxford: MHRA/Legenda, 2018, JSTOR ebook, paperback 2020). Hardback ISBNs 9781781886984, 9781781887004, 9781781886991. Introduction [gold open access](#) (rest supplied on request)

5. Journal special issue. **Nicola McLelland** (ed.) 2021, but papers published 'online first': *Standard Languages, Language Ideologies and Multilingualism*. Special issue of *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, including McLelland's 9k-word introduction 'Language standards, standardisation and standard ideologies in multilingual contexts', <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1708918>

6. Journal special issue. Zhao, H. (50%), **McLelland, N.** (25%), and L. Henderson (25%), (co-eds.), 2020, *Language inequality in education, law and citizenship*. Special Issue of *Language, Society and Policy*, with 5 short policy papers and 2 opinion pieces. <http://www.meits.org/policy-papers/collection/language-inequality-in-education-law-and-citizenship>

Six research grants:

G1. 2011. AH/I021930/1. AHRC Fellowship 'German through English Eyes: German language and culture(s) in language textbooks for British learners (1680–2000)'. £41,305 (PI McLelland).

G2. 2012–2014. AH/J012475/1. AHRC Research Network 'Towards a History of Modern Foreign Language Teaching and Learning'. £26,191 (PI McLelland).

G3. 2015. British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship, 'A history of modern language education in the UK, 1600–2000'. £97,591 (PI McLelland).

G4. 2016–2020. AH/N004671/1. AHRC OWRI-funded project, 'Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies'. Funding to the UoN £341,979 (total award ca. £4.5m) (PI Bennett, Cambridge; McLelland was the UoN lead and one of two Deputy Project Leaders).

G5. 2019. VP1-2018-029. Leverhulme Trust Visiting Professorship 'Language and the Law' for Prof. Douglas Kibbee (incoming to UoN). £23,125 (PI McLelland).

G6. 2020–2021 (with COVID-affected extension to June 2021). AH/T002263/1. AHRC Follow-on-Funding 'Using the History of Language Learning and Teaching to Engage the Present and Improve the Future'. £72,638 (PI McLelland).

4. Details of the impact

McLelland's research has (1) informed decision-making in national and international policy and practice, (2) enhanced language teachers' capacity to adapt to curriculum and policy

changes and to act as languages advocates, and (3) increased young people's and the wider public's understanding of language learning and multilingualism, and of their value.

(1) Informing national and international decision-making in policy and practice

McLelland's historical insights into the what, who and why of language learning (1, 2, 3, 4) have enabled policy-makers and shapers, for the first time, to draw on robust research on past policy and practice to inform contemporary policy recommendations. In 2019 McLelland was one of a 20-strong international group of experts invited to support the development of the OECD 2024 Foreign Language Assessment (FLA) Questionnaire Framework, part of its flagship Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) series of educational studies. Her historical expertise, especially on teaching outside Europe (4) enabled the PISA FLA to enhance its conceptual framework for investigating factors '*influencing foreign language learning of 15 year-old students around the world*' [A]. In the UK context, the 2019 Higher Education Policy Institute report, *A Language Crisis?*, used McLelland's work to conclude that current problems '*should not be treated as a very recent failing but rather as a methodological and pedagogical debate which has gone on since the beginning*', and that there are '*narratives of progress and optimism to be found alongside those of crisis*' — an important perspective for supporting language advocates working in the face of prevailing narratives of decline and loss [B].

Meanwhile, as the UK increasingly looks to its global connections, McLelland's participation in round tables and conferences has given a new research- and evidence-based understanding of the past to language advocates and opinion-makers in HE, schools, major libraries, and beyond, to inform their lobbying and decision-making. For example, in 2018 McLelland critiqued the role of schools and universities in meeting Chinese language needs of the UK business community at a high-level round table at the House of Lords. At a 2018 British Academy hosted event, McLelland reviewed progress against the goals of the 1918 Leathes Report on languages, '*enhancing understanding of how MFL has developed as it has over the last century*' (participant comment) [C].

(2) Enhancing language teachers' capacity to adapt to curriculum and policy changes and to act as language advocates

Through training sessions, McLelland has given teachers and language advocates the capacity to make critically and historically informed interventions in curriculum and policy, and has equipped them to respond to the challenges they face, including major curriculum changes such as the introduction of languages at primary level in England, more demanding GCSEs, and the continued decline in uptake at secondary level. McLelland's training, provided to ca. 150 PGCE Modern Languages students at the University of Nottingham since 2015, is especially important in a region such as Nottingham and the East Midlands, with high poverty and low social mobility (East Midlands ranked lowest in the UK in 2017), factors which correlate with low language learning uptake beyond Year 8 (e.g. *Language Trends*, 2020, p. 12). A newly-qualified teacher from the University of Nottingham who looked back on McLelland's training commented, '*I have felt more comfortable approaching new methods with a critical eye and asking questions about the proposed objectives of new material*' [D]. Her training has bolstered trainee teachers' resilience to cope with future change via insights into the social and political forces that have shaped educational policy and practice historically: '*An understanding of how policy has evolved, and that it will continue to do so, has prepared me for inevitable change in the future*', said one [D]. Under McLelland's guidance, teachers have become more confident language advocates. One newly-qualified teacher reported that '*the lessons learned [...] will see me more effectively promoting language learning to the wider school body and to prospective students and parents – something which, in the era of Brexit and declining pupil numbers, will prove invaluable in keeping the passion for language learning alive in my school*' [D]. As the cultural capital of languages study increasingly risks becoming the preserve of an elite, such advocacy for languages in culturally relatively impoverished areas is critical.

McLelland's work to incorporate the historical dimension previously lacking in languages teacher training has now been rolled out at other HEIs in the UK and internationally. McLelland has delivered seminars and sessions to teachers and trainees in numerous venues, including

at the UoLiverpool's Centre of Teaching Excellence for Language Learning, where 17 of 18 respondents agreed that an awareness of HoLLT had given them a better understanding of language teaching today [E]. In 2018, when UoWarwick established a 'Developing Teaching in Languages' (LN306) module (still running) on the BA in Modern Languages, the convenor 'found (4) hugely useful in supporting the design of this new module [as] Nicola's work helps us to understand the past in order to plan more effectively for the future' [F]. Beyond the UK, the convenor of an MA for Swiss language teachers at the UoFribourg cites (3) as 'an important inspiration' for one strand of the content of the MA (which reaches ca. 25 students annually) [G].

Responding to the strong evidence of appetite for accessible materials to embed a historical dimension in training and CPD, McLelland obtained AHRC follow-on funding [G6] to transform the reach of her work by developing stand-alone teacher-training resource packages. The project has been significantly delayed (COVID-affected), but the first of five packages was piloted (not yet professionally filmed) in September 2020. Initial feedback (e.g. a teacher-trainer's comment, 'This is brilliant! [...] I have just watched the video and will use some of the tasks from the Participant Handbook to set the scene when we start discussing differentiation/meeting pupils' needs') confirms that the packages address a real need [H].

(3) Increasing young people's and the wider public's understanding of language learning and multilingualism, and of their value

In addition to her work with teachers, McLelland's work on the importance of multilingualism for generating social cohesion (5, 6) has also inspired young people and the wider public in Nottingham and the East Midlands to learn a language, to value their own languages, and to be more open to other languages around them. The Pop-Up World of Languages (funded by G4) is central to this endeavour, as the UK's first languages museum, consisting of fifteen hands-on activities in the style of a Science Museum. Between October and December 2019 the museum toured Cambridge, Belfast, Edinburgh, and Nottingham.** Of the 595 pupils who accessed the museum nationally as part of a school visit, almost half – 265 (45%) – did so in Nottingham; 76.9% of those 265 came from the wider East Midlands region. Crucially, up to 52.3% of pupils who attended in Nottingham receive Free School Meals; this opportunity helped counter the trend of cultural deprivation correlated with social deprivation [I].

Over 40% of 145 Nottingham and East Midlands pupils who provided feedback appreciated the opportunity to learn new words and phrases, significantly from non-European languages and British Sign Language, not covered in their usual curriculum. The museum also enabled pupils to reflect, perhaps for the first time, on the social meaning and cultural benefits of language learning: 'every language is a different vision', said one; 'people are not always what they speak', said another [I]. The Museum received 3,108 visitors nationally. In Nottingham alone, over half (55%) of the 138 adult visitors who left feedback reported that the museum changed their thinking about speaking more than one language, and almost a third of these applied this to their own lives, inspiring them to learn a new language or pick up an old one: 'It makes me want to learn some more' [I]. A further 28% said the museum reinforced their existing commitment to language learning: 'The [museum] made me realise how multilingual I already am / we are' [I]. With positive impact reported in over three-quarters of adults' feedback, the Pop-Up World of Languages thus provided a compelling proof of concept which we expect to form the basis for further development of the World of Languages, filling a major gap in public cultural amenities. Teachers (15 in total) from the Nottingham school visits praised the museum for enhancing accessibility to languages, and 14 out of the 15 expressed the need for a permanent languages discovery museum of this kind in the UK [I].

The Pop-up World of Languages was partly so successful among schools in Nottingham because it built on three years of work with local schools in smaller creative writing workshops conducted with Year 7 and 11 pupils in partnership with Nottingham Writer's Studio and the City Council's IDEAL team (supporting the Identities of pupils with EAL, i.e. English as an Additional Language). Drawing from the heart of McLelland's research on the sociolinguistics of multilingualism, these workshops (8, from 2017 to 2020) encouraged pupils to reflect on multilingualism's challenges and opportunities, including contesting hierarchical perceptions of languages based on monolingual standard language ideologies. The last of these workshops took place during lockdown and provided a significant opportunity for young

people, some of whom had only arrived in Nottingham shortly before lockdown, to reflect creatively on their developing identity as part of a multilingual community in Nottingham.

After the workshops, first-language English speakers reported new-found respect for their multilingual classmates (*'I have realised how hard it must be for people to learn a language such as English'*), and, when asked whether they thought people in the UK would be interested in their languages, 50% of EAL [=English as an Additional Language] students, who had initially responded 'Don't know', afterwards 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'. Both groups recognized that knowledge of more than one language (in the words of one student) *'means we have empathy with different people'*. Post-workshop, students were more likely to identify as multilingual and to take pride in that identity (*'Now I feel really proud about speaking different languages'*) and to express a desire to take languages study further (*'I understand now how good it is to be multilingual – I might want to develop my language so I can speak it better'*) [J]. One EAL workshop participant was identified to contribute a chapter to *How Languages Changed My Life* (2020), an accessible collection of 26 stories exploring the importance of languages in shaping the lives of individuals and communities, to which McLelland also contributed a chapter. The book is now *'an important point of reference at the start of the Modern Languages (ML) PGCE Course'* while *The Martian's Guide to Nottingham* produced by pupils in the IDEAL workshops is now *'used by the ML PGCE students in partnership schools to build on the diverse linguistic skills of pupils in their schools and to promote the plurilingual approach to language learning that underpins the ML PGCE at UoN'* [J].

Finally, the partnership with the Council's IDEAL team allowed them *'to provide more effective support to EAL learners in Nottingham, and to raise their profile in schools and the city more widely'*. It has, moreover, influenced the way the team works, *'encourag[ing] us to continue to engage [...] with local recognized groups and bodies to support the achievement of EAL and minority ethnic learners'* [J].

**Project-wide scoping and discussions with a museum educator and a designer involved all project members including McLelland, but the leadership for, and the selection, design and professionalization of, fifteen activities to museum standard was undertaken in Cambridge; Nottingham research directly underpinned one of the fifteen activities and informed refinement of one other. The Nottingham-based activity was, pleasingly, ranked in the top three most popular activities in feedback from Nottingham schools and pupils.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[A] Email testimonial from OECD Directorate of Education and Skills confirming McLelland's contribution to OECD Directorate of Education report (to be published 2021)

[B] HEPI report 'A Languages Crisis?' and email from its author. Listed in the Acknowledgements and output [2] cited in Higher Education Policy Institute report, *A Languages Crisis?* (published January 9, 2020 <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/01/09/action-needed-to-avert-the-growing-crisis-in-language-learning/>), welcomed by the British Academy, and featured in press coverage, e.g. Guardian Jan 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jan/09/learning-foreign-languages-should-be-compulsory-says-report>

[C] Email and feedback from British Academy Leathes event, 2018

[D] Evaluation of written feedback from participants in the UoNottingham PGCE sessions (2015–2019) delivered, and testimonials from newly qualified teachers looking back

[E] Feedback from McLelland's seminar at UoLiverpool Centre of Teaching Excellence for Language Learning (January 2019)

[F] Email from UoWarwick convenor of module LN306

[G] Email from Institute for Multilingualism, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

[H] Email from UK-based teacher-trainer responding to piloted teacher-training package

[I] Evaluation report from Nottingham Pop-Up Museum of Languages

[J] Nottingham IDEAL Workshops Report and Testimonial from Achievement Consultant within Nottingham City Council's IDEAL team