



Where language and culture come together

COMMUNITY LANGUAGES AUSTRALIA

Where language and culture come together

185 Faraday Street Carlton, Victoria 3053

Telephone (03) 9347 0379 Fax: (03) 9347 0297

Email: afesa@netsol.net.au

ABN 77 674 760 578

April 27, 2010

LANGUAGES MUST BE PART OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

As the Education Revolution program is being rolled out, the position of languages in the curriculum is becoming a talking point and for some a concern.

The first elements of the National Curriculum are now in the public domain for consultation. English, Mathematics, Science and History are the first areas to be released.

The languages education component maybe some way off with any implementation happening in 2012-2013.

There is wide discussion as to what the new National Curriculum will bring to the languages education area.

The National Asian Language Studies in Schools Program (NALSSAP) is also part of the current discussion with a goal that by 2020 students will be a far more 'Asia literate'

In line with the above, the Ministerial Council on Education Employment Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCCEDYA) Languages Education Working Party is updating The National Languages Plan which is based on the *National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005-2008*. This is now being extended which is a positive step.

These are all important documents, policies and statements which will have some bearing on future programs and policy.

It is on this backdrop that discussions are being undertaken in Australia today, as to where languages education is heading.

What are some of the concerns and arguments?

- Will languages be a key part of the National Curriculum and will it continue to be acknowledged as a key learning area in all jurisdictions?
- Will all languages be given the opportunity to be studied whether through mainstream schools or complementary providers?
- Will only a set number of languages be offered through our systems based on the premise that we cannot provide all languages and ensure quality programs or continuity
- The fact that \$62m extra funding has gone into providing Asian languages (Chinese, Japanese, Indonesia, Korean) will this in fact see an uptake in these languages at the expense of others?

These are all relevant questions .The various positions are being advocated by those who have a commitment to ensuring languages education continues as part of our students' education menu. The question is how to do this?

There are the perennial arguments of continuing, teacher supply, curriculum issues, delivering 40 + languages at VCE - HSC levels and so on.

Community Languages Australia takes the position that languages must form part of the national curriculum and be maintained as a key learning area. All languages must have the opportunity to be delivered through a variety of providers - mainstream schools and complementary providers - (community languages schools, schools of languages and Distance Education.)

This will occur as long as there is a systemic approach to planning, delivery and evaluation. All stakeholders must be part of the discussion process. Students must be able to be assessed in the language on the basis of curriculum frameworks

The aim should be to provide as many languages as possible at VCE-HSC level. Those having being involved in the languages education area would agree that our discussions in this area are cyclical - We have discussions at different periods of time, very often not reflecting on the past as to what has been achieved and what has worked.

Rather than having cyclical discussions which occur for a range of reasons, we should focus on a systemic debate, seeking an outcome that approaches the issues of languages education in a systemic way and putting in place systemic processes based on what has worked.

In any national approach there will always be exceptions. Unfortunately we often use the exception and it becomes the rule, therefore arguing that for this reason we cannot have a systemic processes.

There has been a great deal of research into languages and the overall benefits. The research has provided advice on modes of delivery, advice on how to engage all stakeholders - students, systems, parents, principals, school councils, tertiary institutions etc.

The above mentioned issues of - teachers supply, quality programs, curriculum and other areas have again be the topic on many forums, round tables and consultations. If we need expert advice, Australia has a bank of academics who have written on the subject - Clyne , Lo Bianco, Scarino and others .

So why do we come back to the same questions and issues? Why do we at times want to tamper with policy that is working? This does not mean we should not evaluate, modify and look for flexibility. The rhetorical questions seem to be;

- Is language education important in children's education, and should languages education be part of a national curriculum?
- Should languages be a key learning area?
- Should there be room for all languages?

These in Australia in 2010 should be GIVENS - ACCEPTED as part of normal education processes.

The questions that need to be asked are;

How to improve quality,

How to improve delivery,
How to promote and encourage,
How to improve supply, continuity and processes for monitoring implementation?

I have recently examined the many policies and programs for languages education since 1983. It is interesting to note that in most the *jargon* is similar; issues requiring attention revolve around the matters raised above.

In 1992 the Victorian LOTE Policy at that time seemed to answer many of the questions in terms of how languages should be offered in our schools. There are many other good policies that have been presented.

Put this together with the National Statement on Languages Education and National Plan 2005-2008 and we could have an outcome which could offer a systemic approach. The Australian Federation of Ethnic Schools Association (AFESA) in a national forum asked many of the perennial questions but focussed on finding solutions. Over 700 practical ideas were tabled. Community Languages Australia believes that some of our questions would find a suitable response. No doubt that have been many similar forums.

Some of the main outcomes we should look for are;

- Improved teacher supply, quality programs, continuity and the correct position of languages in the education menu
- A quality assurance framework that allows us to set goals, evaluate and modify programs.
- Increased uptake and retention rates in languages education
- Increase in VCE-HSC participation and retention
- The availability of wide range of languages in our mainstream schools and through complementary provision
- Quelling angst that there may be a downgrading of languages education and the number of languages offered
- Ensure that VCE-HSC opportunities are not marred by suspending languages based on small enrolments
- Engaging communities in the discussion and delivery of languages
- Encouraging communities to take responsibility in their own communities for student and parent engagement

Community Languages Australia uses the 1992 Victorian LOTE Strategy Plan as one example of a realistic and deliverable model which covered all languages ;

Key languages in mainstream schools -

Choices will need to be made and they need to be strategic and realistic.

The balance between Asian and European is required. These languages will also find support in delivery via community languages schools, schools of languages and Distance Education

Languages for priority development

These languages are the ones requiring additional support and development because of their importance to Australia's emerging language needs -

Languages of particular community significance

Some languages have particular importance in a given geographical area. These are languages with significant numbers of speakers in a local community therefore resulting in viable programs in a school or cluster

Other languages

Many of these are the ones being primarily provided by the community languages schools or schools of languages as they do not attract sufficient numbers to provide viable programs in mainstream schools.

Other statements often reflected a similar approach.

In addition to the above another vital area now are our *Indigenous languages*. This area has been neglected and is now growing in national significance. At present the Strategic Plan Indigenous languages is a vital tool for strengthening this area.

Having the many of the above issues on *one part of the page* and adding the Strands of the National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools -2005-2008 , (granted there needs to become evaluation and possible readjustments) together with the practical applications of the forums such at above-mentioned National Languages Forum conducted by AFESA (and no doubt there are many others) , we should be able to come up with a position and strategic plan, a plan that values all languages and ensures that all languages have a suitable place in Australia's education program. **This should feed into the discussions on the National Curriculum.**

There is no doubt we live in the Asian Region and for strategic purposes there needs to be a strengthened focus on Asian education whether it be by studying an Asian language or understanding the culture. NALSSAP has the potential of delivering this. Understanding the European significance in Australia's history and make up is also important.

Our common goal should be to have a balanced approach to languages education, delivering quality programs, ensuring the National Curriculum creates new opportunities for delivering languages education in systemic and flexible ways.

The National Statement on Languages Education has identified the providers as being mainstream schools and complementary providers (community languages schools, schools of languages and distance education). The vehicle with its engine running is there awaiting its driver.

Marry this with the opportunity of having more ,highly qualified teachers, new technologies and strong support from Government and senior bureaucracy , we are well placed to have leading practice and policy in delivering languages education, which values all languages, understands the demand of the region and most importantly provide students the ability to grow intellectually and socially.

Stefan Romaniw OAM
Executive Director
Community Languages Australia