

# AFMLTA's preliminary research results and CLA's annual report data in context

## 1) TITLE

- The AFMLTA community language school teacher survey results and the CLA annual report data, which was collected through CLA's membership associations will be presented.
- As Lo Bianco & Slaughter stated in the 2009 *Second Languages and Australian Schooling Report*: Australia has an "enormous reservoir of latent bilingualism". CLS are important institutions to foster bilingualism, as no one school system can teach the variety of languages that exist in Australia's diverse communities. That is why community language schools play a crucial role in complementing mainstream education, providing languages and cultural education at the community level. It allows individuals to develop complex bilingual identities and to facilitate Australia to be a flourishing multilingual society.

## 2) NATIONAL OVERVIEW

- The following two slides show approximate sums based on data supplied by CLA's state and territory associations.
- Accordingly, there were an approximate 783 community language schools across Australia.
- Over 93 languages were taught in these schools to over 100,000 students.
- Some of these schools received funding through a process of state- or territory-based accreditation, but not all of them. Some of these schools are members of the state or territory associations, but not all of them. There are most likely further community language schools, which operate unofficially and are not captured by this data.

## 3) STATE FIGURES

- Looking at how this data is distributed across states and territories, we see great disparities.
- New South Wales has the most schools, followed by Victoria and South Australia. However, Victoria has more students, which means that on average schools are greater in size (looking after a greater number of students) than schools in New South Wales.
- This might also explain why not all states and territories were equally well presented in AFMLTA's two CL school teacher surveys.
- CLA distributed two CLS teacher surveys on behalf of AFMLTA via its state and territory associations.
- While the survey results appear to cover CLS language diversity to some extent (45 different languages were recorded), it was noted that "not all states and territories were well represented" with "75% of all respondents were based in Victoria, over 10% in NSW, and fewer than 5% in Queensland, ACT, and Western Australia. Two surveys were completed in South Australia, and one in the Northern Territory".

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- On the one hand, this reflects the distribution of CLS across the corresponding states and territories. However, to an extent it also highlights disparities across Australia. State and territory support for CLS might differ, or the demand for CLS might differ. What this data shows in any case is the challenge to nationally coordinate this heterogeneous sector effectively. (*Hinting towards the need for a national languages policy*).
- *Data caveats: All CLA and AFMLTA survey data heavily relied on the state and territory association's contribution to collect data, which is outside of CLA's realm of control. There might also be some teacher groups, who are more likely to respond to a survey request, such as younger, computer-literate teachers, or those, who might have a certain level of education or cultural and linguistic background. This might slightly tilt the responses.*

### 4) THE CLS CLASSROOM

- Based on the AFMLTA's teacher surveys the following can be said about CLS classrooms, which confirms CLA's knowledge of CLS classroom operations:
- There are great disparities between CLS classrooms, depending on student numbers, the availability of teachers and physical classrooms.
- Classes can be taught "from early years through to Year 12 and beyond"
- CLS programs are "typically once a week for approximately three hours (sometimes with expected supplementary home activities)"
- Teachers report that "69% of their community language programs are organised by school year or age level, and 31% are organised by proficiency level (across age or year levels)."
- "Class sizes vary considerably but average class size is 20-25 students per class."
- "The language proficiency of the students in their classes varies considerably, depending particularly on the history of migration to Australia"
- "65% of programs use the ACL or a state version to plan their teaching; 35% develop their own curriculum or use a curriculum model drawn from their home country."

### 5) TEACHER PROFILE

- 83 % of respondents are female
- 88% are born overseas
- "The community languages sector is comprised of a teacher community of very diverse backgrounds and experience"

### 6) CLS TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

- To explain the graphic: "Of those community language teachers **born overseas**, 65% completed a tertiary degree overseas, 35% completed primary or secondary school. 53% have undertaken language study overseas, mostly for four years (as part of their degree). Over 50% of respondents have also undertaken some tertiary study in Australia, typically for two to four years. A smaller proportion,

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36%, have undertaken formal language study in Australia. 45% hold tertiary qualifications in teaching, 33% hold a certificate in community language teaching, 18% hold no qualifications."

- It is worth noting the percentage of teachers holding community language teaching certificates (33%). State and territory community language school associations are usually the ones providing this training.
- It illustrates the need and importance to support CLS teachers with training initiatives organised by these organisations. It also illustrates the potential to develop national initiatives to support those teachers who are in areas with less dedicated CLS support than others.

### 7) CHALLENGES

- In the CLS teacher survey responses there "(...) there was an overwhelming sense of passion, enjoyment, and satisfaction in their role as a community language educator". And "The overwhelming message from teachers' responses is the sense of dedication to what is otherwise a time-consuming but under-compensated responsibility"
- The following CLS challenges were identified by CL teachers in the surveys.
- CLS are subject to high bureaucratic standards (perceived as often similar to mainstream schools) and the need to meet them with very limited resources, which makes good school leadership and administration crucial.
- Uncertain compensation process (this also adds to schools struggling to retain good quality teachers)
- Time issues: CLS teachers commonly experience a lot of pressure to develop and provide a quality program, which is limited to a weekly three-hour lesson. "viewed as insufficient to have a substantial impact on learners' language level". Many teachers describe the amount of preparation and marking time required as unsustainable and insufficiently recognised (also financially).
- Teaching practices are diverse and need to address highly complex classroom settings. There are generational disparities when it comes to teaching practices for example.
- Lack of suitable resources for the local context "age and proficiency appropriate for heritage learners in particular". "In terms of facilities, the cost of renting classroom space is seen as a high cost factor, reducing funds available for resource development (and salaries)." They also specifically mentioned the lack of access to technology.
- Learner diversity in the classroom
- "Teachers constantly refer to the pedagogical challenges of planning and providing engaging, but differentiated learning opportunities"
- "providing meaningful and engaging curriculum to learners of diverse language background and learning experience, and diverse motivation to attend such classes"
- The usual program provision of approximately three hours once a week: "adds to the challenges of quality program provision, and learner progression, especially where the language is not regularly used at home or in the community"

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- "importance of professional learning especially that provided by community school organisations"

### 8) TEACHER ASPIRATIONS

- "In terms of aspirations, community language teachers desire to be valued, to obtain suitable certification, and compensation for their contributions, and to improve their practice in order to motivate and engage learners and encourage them to continue their studies of their home language. Overall they, collectively, seek to build recognition and support for the community languages sector, and for the very important role it fills in supporting bilingualism in individuals and multilingualism in society more generally.
- "teachers reinforce the importance of professional learning especially that provided by community school organisations, or provided by universities for community schools teachers"

### 9) CONCLUDING REMARKS

- CLS are a cornerstone of multilingual Australia
- Allows students to immerse themselves in authentic language-learning in a vast variety of languages offered across Australia
- CLS is a vulnerable and yet resilient sector carried through the passion of teachers who are often under-paid for their time spent preparing lessons for highly diverse classrooms.
- It requires structural support, ideally at a national level that allows communities to establish across the country.