

The Time has Come to Go Forward Together

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It is wonderful to see such a range of people from different backgrounds, who play different roles in the community together, and I think this a very important year.

For the last 10 to 15 years we have seen enormous cutbacks in the kinds of things that we used to take for granted in Australia, particularly in education but also in many other areas. We need to make sure that we don't lose any more of the initiatives that have made Australia a model for the rest of the world.

We certainly are not a model any more. Both internally and externally, we can't allow things to get any worse than they are.

The time has come for a grass roots movement similar to what happened in the early 1970s where people no longer wanted Australia to be an assimilationist, monocultural, monolingual country – they realised it wasn't really that any more. We want people all over Australia to do something about it.

It is our democratic right and even our responsibility to make sure that the kind of Australia we want comes about and that we don't lose those very important advances that have already taken place.

There is so much that we can build on. I think there is a need for a national coalition for languages and it is very good that this impressive activism in favour of languages is happening in Canberra. You have something like 15.2 per cent of the population of the ACT speaking a language other than English in the home. It is much more in Sydney (31.4 per cent) or in Melbourne (27.9 per cent) but why shouldn't Canberra, the National Capital, be the model and example for the rest of Australia? It is a smaller, more manageable place, where so much is possible.

I would like to try and address briefly some of the issues that Mandy has put forward. First of all it is very important for multilingual Australians to enable monolingual Australians to participate in our multilingual Australia.

After all, monolingualism is curable even though most of our decision-makers don't seem to think so. They seem to think that being an Australian citizen one has to be monolingual and if you aren't a monolingual, you should become one. We need to turn that upside-down and say we are a multilingual society and we want all Australians to participate in our multilingual society.

Mandy mentioned contact between the educational field and the multilingual community. It made me think back to a long time ago when I was in the German Department at Monash. When we went over to semesters, we got an extra week which the literature people in the Department could not think of what to do with it. I said we can have a week when we don't have any lectures or tutorials and we will all speak German and the students will all speak German and we will get lots of people in who speak German.

So we invited people from all over the university who spoke German as a first language or spoke very good German, to talk about their jobs or disciplines in a very simple way. The Professor of Medicine who was German came to talk about how the heart functioned; historians tackled political issues – Austrian identity, effects of reunification in Germany and so on. We got a person from the travel bureau to talk about how you can get cheap flights to Europe there were discussions on trade

relations, panels on university life in Australia and Germany. A German-speaking composer talked about his compositions.

We had people from the German, Austrian and Swiss clubs describing their activities; there was a forum about a film, a cake-baking competition, and wine tasting. We held German Week annually. The students had to come to seven out of 20 to 24 functions and at lunchtime they would play Monopoly and Scrabble in German.

Everyone was very happy. At the end of the week they had to write up how it helped their German, so they had to do a bit of introspection.

Another thing – at the beginning of the first year we gave every student a pamphlet on Where to Hear and Speak German in Melbourne. The clubs, churches and social welfare clubs, old people's homes, and radio programs.

In second year, every student who wasn't from a bilingual family speaking German had to adopt an elderly person from the German speaking community. Like many other ethnolinguistic communities in Australia, the majority of German speakers are over 55.

At the end of each semester students had to report to the class about what they had found out through interacting with that elderly person.

It is very important for the schools to prepare students for using the language they are studying within the Australian community. A few years ago we had an ARC linkage grant with two education systems, and part of the job of the research assistants was to develop with the teachers units that prepared students for doing their shopping in Greek or Mandarin; or material for working with elderly Spanish-speaking migrants in senior citizens clubs.

Turning to raising children bilingually, for the past 17 years we have been running workshops for parents bringing up their children in more than one language in Melbourne. There is a video called *Growing up with English Plus*, which is the story of eight families who are bringing up their families in more than one language in Melbourne.

We see how it works in the family, what goes wrong, how they put it right. The last time we had one of these workshops which was about six weeks ago 250 parents took part and we had to turn some others away. There is so much interest in the community, particularly in mixed marriages, where one person is bilingual and the other speaks only English but really committed to their children's bilingualism. They see the value of an Australian child growing up bilingual.

Unfortunately not everyone does. If we look at the recent efforts of the Australian Primary Principals Association, we see a good example of decision-makers who are aggressively monolingual. They have produced a monolingual core curriculum and taken absolutely no notice of responses in favour of languages, and I understand the survey on which they claim their support is based on a very small sample.

What they don't understand – and many monolinguals don't want to understand - is that language is language, the brain does not have separate hemispheres or compartments for different languages, and the brain is not so small - even those growing up in Australia are not so small - to accommodate more than one language.

Research shows how the thinking patterns of people growing up bilingually are different from those growing up monolingually.

There are two prime fallacies. One is the crowded curriculum fallacy – how many times have you heard 'we don't have time for another language, because it takes time away from other subjects that are more important?'

There is no area of learning more important than language and literacy. They say that themselves, they just don't understand that literacy can be acquired in more than one language and can be acquired in any language. After all, there are people all over the world who can read and write quite well, and didn't acquire that capacity in English. You only learn to walk in one language and to read and write in one language, once you have done it you have done it and you might need to make certain adjustments for different writing systems.

We only have to look at the Victorian statewide testing that the Education Department conducts one or twice a year; we look at the way the test results pan out. They have like schools – schools that are comparable because of similar socio-economic status, proportions of Australian born people from different walks of life and settlement patterns.

When you link those schools, the main bilingual programs in the Victorian Education Department produce better results than those of the like schools. For instance, the bilingual schools have children learning through the medium of English for seven and a half hours less than the like schools, yet almost invariably the results of the children in the bilingual program are better in English than those of the like schools who learn the curriculum for an extra seven and a half hours in English. To say a LOTE takes time away from literacy is wrong even in terms of the Education Department's own statistics.

In Victoria we have a LOTE bonus – roughly speaking, all children get 10 per cent extra of the LOTE mark in the score that enables them to apply for university entrance. This applies across the board in languages. In Victoria 47 languages have been accredited as Year 12 subjects, the same in South Australia and NSW. Of the 47 five have been suspended because the candidature is so small, we still have 42.

As I understand it in the ACT only a small number of languages count for University Entrance. You need to get that changed. At the moment if a person has a background and is learning Mandarin, German, French or Italian, they get subjects for university entrance. If their language is Turkish, or Urdu or Tamil or Filipino they don't get it. But if they were in another state they would get it.

It is very important for the ACT to join the Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Framework for Languages. It doesn't cost very much. You will have to have exams in those subjects but they can come to you from another state.

The other thing that would be very advisable would be to have a School of Languages; this is an institution within the State Education Department. They exist in Victoria (Melbourne has had one since 1935), NSW, South Australia and the Northern Territory, other states are thinking of introducing one.

The teachers are appointed by the Department, paid by the Department, they have to be qualified; if they are not fully qualified they get in-service. This is something that takes place on Saturdays, particularly at secondary level, so that it does not compete with existing ethnic schools.

Some arrangements can be made for the top end to be taught by the School of languages, and the rest by an ethnic school, or you can have the two operating side-by-side, which happens to some degree in Victoria.

The Victorian School of Languages operates from 39 schools in Melbourne and some provincial towns, and each school has about 8 to 12 languages depending on local needs. The School of Languages can prepare students for the Year 12 examination.

I wonder in those statistics that Mandy has shared with us how many students in those schools that have five to seven languages are actually allowed to take more

than one language other than English. Do you know what the percentage of students taking two languages other than English in Year 12 in Victoria is? Remember Victoria is supposed to be ahead of the other states. It is 0.0044 per cent. I don't think you will find this anywhere else in the world because in most European countries, certainly in the EU, it is policy that all children should do two languages other than their first language, and the same applies to many Asian countries.

Australia is out of step with the rest of the world. A recent report by David Graddol an English linguist, and commissioned by the British Council, states that within the next 10 to 15 years in most countries of the world, English will become a basic skill for educated people, so people speaking English will no longer have a great advantage. The advantage will come to those who speak several languages, certainly English and at least one other language, but preferably two or three languages.

In many parts of Europe they are now following a new program called Eurocom, where you learn one language in a particular language family and through that you learn receptive skills in the whole family of languages. So material is now being produced for both Romance and Germanic languages. Chinese is being introduced quite widely in some part of Europe. All over Europe Spanish is becoming a very important second language. David Graddol's comment is that in the future, monolingual English speakers will be severely disadvantaged.

Another question that comes to mind is why German is doing so much worse than French in the ACT. I would be interested in talking to anyone who can tell me why this is happening.

Mandy mentioned our pamphlets. Please feel free to use them. It would be great if they could be shared with school principals. We sent them out to all school principals in Victoria and a rather unexpected result was when I was in Norway a few months ago, someone gave me a copy of a Norwegian pamphlet that was a translation and adaptation of ours. They got the original from the Austrian Ministry of Education, so it is going round the world!

I hope this forum will be the beginning of something important, a model and process for change, not just for Canberra but for the whole of Australia.