

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF STATE SCHOOL ORGANISATIONS  
(ACSSO)**  
The national voice of parents of children in Australia's public schools and  
their school communities

## **LANGUAGES EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA**

Volume One Number Three: 26 April 2007

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<http://www.languageseducation.com/news1070426.pdf>

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Welcome to the third issue of the **Languages Education in Australia Newsletter**: keeping you informed about events, activities and initiatives around the country in this vitally important field of learning and development – one with implications for the future of every student in our schools and for the future of our country in the modern world.

We want this newsletter and the Languages Education in Australia website (<http://www.languageseducation.com>) to become increasingly interactive, building two-way communication and providing a venue for school communities to put forward ideas, discussion topics, suggestions – and a gallery of good news stories and photos about how your school is engaging its community around languages education. **Contact us on:** [info@languageseducation.com](mailto:info@languageseducation.com).

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### **1. Learning another language as easy as ABC**

**Website News Feed** - <http://www.languageseducation.com/news.htm>

Learning another language is now as easy as listening to the radio, thanks to an initiative between University of Queensland's Institute of Modern Languages (IML), the School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies (LCCS), Modern Language Teachers Association (MLTAQ) and radio 612 ABC Brisbane. In what is believed to be the first collaboration of its kind in Australia, the IML, LCCS and MLTAQ have jointed forces with 612 ABC Brisbane to offer a language each month for the next ten months – an initiative which commenced in February 2007.

The idea originated in LCCS, where staff have been working on a range of ways to restore the position of language study in Australia. Professor Roly Sussex, Professor of Applied Language Studies, suggested the idea to 612 ABC Brisbane, with the lead role in realising the idea taken by the IML's Director, Georgiana Poulter.

For a half-hour each Monday at 10.30 am, on Madonna King's radio show, IML teachers discuss common phrases and nuances of languages, starting with Spanish in February and Indonesian in March. Other languages will follow (German, French, Modern Greek, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Latin and an Indigenous language). This has been dubbed Language of the Month, or LotMo, with the involvement of some 25 IML and LCCS staff through the year. Throughout each month, there will also be 30 additional spot-sessions of 90 seconds each, refreshing listeners on aspects of the spotlighted language.

Roly Sussex describes this as a first step in raising the profile of languages in the community. "We're living in a mono-lingual cocoon in Australia, which doesn't augur well for our future business and cultural interactions with other countries," said Professor Sussex, co-host of ABC Radio's ever-popular Language Talkback program for the past 10 years.

"Latest figures show that compared with other states, Queensland is bottom for numbers of secondary students learning a second language in Year 12. For example, more than 20 percent of Victorian Year 12s are learning a second language, compared with just 5.8 percent of their Queensland counterparts. In some European countries, school students learn up to four additional languages. And such students, in countries such as Finland, rank very strongly in international assessments of student competence," Professor Sussex says.

Ms Poulter, herself a learner of six languages other than English, said learning a second language greatly increased cultural awareness and LotMo was a way of reaching out to the community. "Even the different ways people greet each other offers an insight into what is important in that particular society," she said. "For example, in Chinese and Vietnamese, a common greeting translates into 'have you eaten yet?' reflecting the value of food and hospitality. Touching somebody when first meeting them is a real no-no in Sweden, whereas for Spanish speakers, greetings commonly involve a kiss and a hug.

"If you are buying something from a business in Germany, it is perfectly acceptable to conduct the transaction in English, however if you wish to sell something, German is increasingly the language of choice."

Going on current trade trends, Australians should start learning Chinese urgently. After all, there are 300 million Chinese who are learning English, according to Professor Sussex.

Read the Roly Sussex interview with Madonna King at <http://www.abc.net.au/brisbane/stories/s1845596.htm>.

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## **2. Foreign Languages to be Compulsory from Age Seven in United Kingdom**

**By Richard Garner, Education Editor The Independent 13 March 2007**

Ministers will have to reconsider compulsory language lessons for 14 to 16-year-olds, if measures announced yesterday fail to inspire thousands of youngsters to take up the subject. Lord Dearing, appointed by Education Secretary Alan Johnson to head an inquiry into modern foreign languages teaching, said he wanted a 90 per cent participation rate among teenagers by the end of the decade. The current figure is about 50 per cent. His report published yesterday recommended: "Failing a response of that kind from schools, head teachers and language departments, we [recommend] a return to some form of mandatory requirement.

Lord Dearing announced a series of measures to give language teaching in schools a boost and avoid a return to compulsory lessons up to 16.

Participation at GCSE level plummeted from 80 per cent to 50 per cent after the Government's decision to make the subject voluntary - a policy which Mr. Johnson admitted had gone "dramatically wrong". The key recommendation of the inquiry - accepted by Mr. Johnson - was that languages should become compulsory for all children from the age of seven. This will be introduced in 2010 as part of a review of the primary school curriculum and be gradually phased in for seven to 11-year-olds over a four-year period. The report says this could lead to more schools starting language teaching earlier. Mr. Johnson said: "The earlier you start learning a language, the better. Making languages compulsory from seven to 14 will give pupils seven years to build up their knowledge, confidence and experience."

However, the drive in primary schools will be coupled with measures aimed at making languages a more attractive option for secondary school pupils. In particular, Lord Dearing's report urges exams advisers to consider the introduction of new international business languages GCSE - which would allow budding entrepreneurs to study a wider range of languages in less depth than if they had opted for French, German or Spanish on their own.

He also wants an inquiry to determine whether - as suggested by research from Durham University - it is harder to achieve good grades in language GCSEs than in other subjects." This needs to be resolved one way or the other by a definitive study, because the present widely held perception in schools is adversely affecting the study of languages through to GCSE," the report says.

Lord Dearing also confirms the recommendation that the languages offered should be widened to include Mandarin, Urdu and the languages of ethnic minority groups in the UK. He calls for a £50m a year budget to improve the training of language teachers.

The idea that language learning should start at the age of seven received almost universal approval last night. However, Nick Gibb, the Conservatives' schools spokesman, warned: "When Labour came to power 77 per cent of 15-year-olds were studying a modern foreign language to GCSE. Now, as a direct consequence of decisions taken by Education ministers, this figure is just 51 per cent. "Dearing's report is attempting to deal with the symptoms of the decision to end compulsion to study a foreign language from 14. It does nothing to tackle the underlying causes of the problem."

Sarah Teather, for the Liberal Democrats, added: "The Government is right that the optimum time to introduce pupils to foreign languages is when they are young." But currently, there simply aren't enough modern language graduates going into teaching. Even with any new recruitment drive it will take years to get the necessary workforce into our classrooms."

The main recommendations

- Languages to be compulsory for all seven-year-olds from 2010
- Number of specialist language colleges to be increased to 400
- An inquiry set up to determine whether languages GCSEs are harder than any other subjects
- £50m a year boost to language teaching to train more teachers
- Target of 90 per cent of all 14-year-olds to study a language from 2010
- Range of languages offered to seven to 14-year-olds to include Mandarin, Urdu and other ethnic-minority languages

- New languages "ladder" promoted - so pupils can take grade exams at any age, as in music
  - "Open School for Languages" to teach languages in schools without trained staff
  - If all this fails to increase participation at GCSE age, a return to compulsory lessons for that age group should be considered
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### **3. Bilingual Classes 'Raise Results'**

#### **BBC News (UK) March 15, 2007**

BBC News reports on a new study that suggests bilingual children who learn in their family's language as well as English do better at school. What is more, the report suggests even second and third generation immigrant children with English as their stronger language could benefit.

A team from Goldsmiths, University of London, analyzed some primary school children in England using two languages in math and English lessons. They found that, far from confusing them, having two languages deepened their understanding of key concepts; children who led bilingual lives could access their lessons through both languages.

"Learning a mathematical concept in Bengali and English, for example, deepens understanding as ideas are transferred between languages. Or children can compare how metaphors are constructed in a Bengali poem and its English equivalent," said lead researcher Dr. Charmian Kenner.

"The children in our project expressed a strong desire to use their community language in school and teachers were able to tap into their pupils' full range of cultural knowledge."

Read the whole article at:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/6447427.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/6447427.stm)

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### **4. Activities for Children Speaking Two Languages at Home**

In celebration of Canada's National Francophone Week, Invest in Kids, a Canadian charity dedicated to strengthening parenting knowledge and skills, has several suggestions for parents that they can use to help their child become bilingual or even multilingual.

These tips are based on Invest in Kids' "Comfort, Play & Teach: A Positive Approach to Parenting," a framework designed for parents to support their child's development.

View the resources at

<http://www.investinkids.ca/ContentPage.aspx?name=CPTipSheet%20>

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## **5. An Open Letter to Kevin Rudd MP - and Other Political Leaders**

**from the Association for Learning Mandarin in Australia Inc**

Dear Mr. Rudd

### **Languages Education in a National Curriculum**

The Association for Learning Mandarin in Australia Inc. (ALMA) is a community based non-profit organisation which has been promoting the learning of Mandarin Chinese in the Australian community for more than 20 years.

I am writing to advise that ALMA would be happy to contribute to the development of a languages strategy as part of your party's education policy for the forthcoming Federal election. ALMA believes a concerted effort at national level is needed to more effectively engage the developing Asian economies. The current debate on proposals for a national curriculum provides an opportunity to promote such an effort.

We note, however, that there is almost no mention of languages education in this debate. Education in languages other than English not only provides social, cultural and economic benefits for the individual and the country as a whole, it enhances understanding of the English language and improves literacy levels. In addition, learning one or more other languages fosters general intellectual and educational development, and thus can enhance other areas of the curriculum.

In May 2005, the Ministers of Education of all Australian States and Territories announced their commitment to 'quality language education for all students' in the National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools. The development of a national curriculum would be an excellent opportunity to put into practice the policy set out in that document and to progress the National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005-2008 that Ministers agreed to at the same time.

Languages other than English (LOTE) has been a nationally agreed Key Learning Area for some years. However, as the Federal Minister for Education pointed out in her speech to the Languages Education Seminar in Canberra on 30 October 2006, this is not reflected in schools in terms of status, curriculum time and support. A telling example of this lack of support is the curriculum framework currently being trialled in ACT schools, wherein LOTE has been largely ignored in the core curriculum.

We noted with mixed feelings the announcement by the Prime Minister during his visit to Vietnam in November 2006 that Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) is now the most widely spoken foreign language in Australia, an illustration, he said, of Australia's natural, comfortable and permanent part of the Asian region. Alas, such linguistic resources are mainly restricted to immigrants who bring their languages with them.

It is surely an indictment of our educational system at all levels that Mandarin or another language of global and community importance is not an integral part of every Australian child's education. Certainly the Government's decision to cease funding the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy in 2002/03 did nothing to encourage the teaching of Asian languages in mainstream schools.

We urge you to consider the importance of languages education in the overall school curriculum as you develop your education policy for the forthcoming election. Your role in the development of NALSAS encourages us that you will regard languages as a core part of primary and secondary school curricula.

Our Association has an extensive network of contacts who are keen to promote language learning in schools, and we have developed a number of practical, inexpensive proposals that could assist the implementation of a national languages education policy. Details of our aims and activities can be found on our website at <http://alma.anu.edu.au>.

I can be contacted at the address below or at [mandy.scott@anu.edu.au](mailto:mandy.scott@anu.edu.au). We look forward to hearing from you.

As ALMA is a non-partisan community organisation, I am writing in similar terms to other major parties.

Yours sincerely

Mandy Scott

President

Association for Learning Mandarin in Australia Inc

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**6. Reminders**

Conference: "Moving the boundaries of classroom learning", Spanish Teachers Conference, 23 June 2007, Adelaide, SA.  
[maurene.mcewen@nmhs.sa.edu.au](mailto:maurene.mcewen@nmhs.sa.edu.au)

Conference: Australian Society of Indonesian Language Educators biennial conference, 5-8 July 2007, Sunshine Coast, Qld.  
<http://intranet.usc.edu.au/wacana/asile/>

Conference: "The Language Connection", Modern Language Teachers Association of Western Australia, 11-14 July 2007, Perth, WA. <http://www.mltawa.org/>

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