

## LANGUAGES EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Volume One Number Six: 7 June 2007

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<http://www.languageseducation.com/news1070607.pdf>

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Welcome to the sixth edition of the **Languages Education in Australia Newsletter**. Produced by the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) jointly with the Australian Parents Council (APC), this Newsletter started as a monthly publication and is rapidly evolving to be a much more frequent event through 2007 - to inform school communities and other subscribers with an interest in languages education, 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 our 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 at [info@languageseducation.com](mailto:info@languageseducation.com)

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### LANGUAGES IN CRISIS

#### Group of Eight Releases Plan

The Group of Eight (Go8) consists of the vice-chancellors (presidents) of: The Australian National University, Monash University, The University of Adelaide, The University of Melbourne, The University of New South Wales, The University of Queensland, The University of Sydney and The University of Western Australia.

Go8 today released its plan to halt the decline in foreign language education in Australia. The Go8 policy paper entitled "Languages in Crisis" aims to put this important issue on the political agenda and promote its solutions for discussion.

"Crisis is not too strong a word to describe the decline in foreign language education in our schools and universities," said Go8 Executive Director, Michael Gallagher. "Despite many positive efforts from committed teachers and language experts, the percentage of Year 12 students graduating with a second language has fallen from 40 per cent in the 1960s to as low as 6 per cent in some states in Australia today.

"At tertiary level where Go8 universities are responsible for delivering the majority of foreign language education, the number of languages available has fallen from 66 to 29 in the past ten years.

"Our national deficit in foreign language capability is something we can no longer afford to ignore. It is Australia's great unrecognised skills shortage – and the one most directly relevant to our competitiveness and security in an increasingly global environment."

Read more, including recommendations, at

<http://www.go8.edu.au/policy/papers/2007/Go8%20Languages%20in%20Crisis%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf>

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## National Summit

A **National Summit** was convened in Canberra today (Tue 7 June 2007) at the National Press Club, by the Australian Institute of Humanities jointly with the Group of Eight Universities. Nearly 200 people from right across the spectrum of languages education and from all parts of the country – and internationally – met for discussion of the issues confronting languages education in Australia – in the context of the Research Paper mentioned above.

A formal Communique is being developed and will be issued in the next few days.

Proceedings were sound-recorded and it is intended these will be made available for those keenly interested people in all parts of Australia who were unable to participate in today's event.

Further details will be provided in the next issue of "Languages Education in Australia" Newsletter

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## Languages Education: Shortchanging our Families – and our National Future

To coincide with its presentation to the National Summit, ACSSO today released a **media statement** drawing attention to its perspective on the nature of the crisis facing languages education in Australia.

"ACSSO is in full agreement with those commentators who have described the crisis in languages education in Australia as an international embarrassment and national disgrace.

The challenge now and into the future was put squarely some years ago by General Peter Cosgrove: *"Language skills and cultural sensitivity will be the new currency of the coming world order and provide the keys to participation in the global economy."*

International perspectives affect how we should prepare our young people to take on an effective role in a changing world, in ways that bear directly on their own opportunities in life – and the economic well-being of Australia.

But across Australia the study of languages continues to languish and drift - in the wake of the 2002 decision by this government to discontinue funding the Asian Languages and Studies programme which had encouraged thousands of students to learn one of the four leading Asian languages and their cultural context ..."

Read the full media release at <http://www.languageseducation.com/medrel070607.pdf>

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## ACSSO Presentation to the National Summit

ACSSO was invited to make a **presentation to the National Summit**. That ACSSO also represented the Australian Parents Council, the peak body for the parents of private education system students in Australia, speaks volumes for the perceived significance of this presentation across concerns of "public v private".

"I am here today as Executive Director of the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO. Since 1946 ACSSO has provided a national voice and represented the interest of the parents, families and school communities of the 2.2 million students in Australia's public schools.

Today I also have the honour to represent the Australian Parents Council (APC). For a similar period, APC has been the national representative of the parents and families of the 1.1 million students who attend Australia's non-government schools.

On this issue we speak with one voice. So here I represent some 5 million parents. We communicate with them regularly. They are very sensitive on issues bearing upon their children's learning, personal development and future prospects. And occasionally they do remember to vote.

ACSSO and APC and our members have been particularly concerned about the prospects of languages education since the 2002 decision by this government to cease the funding of the National Asian Languages and Studies program. Established in 1996 as a co-operative venture between the States and Federal governments, over a number of years this program invested some 300 million to enable thousands of young people to access one of the four leading Asian languages and learn about their culture. In 2002 this vanished – except a remnant annual \$1m to the Asian Education Foundation to keep the tattered flag flying ..."

Read the whole presentation at:

<http://www.languageseducation.com/npcpres070607.pdf>

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## Modern Language Association

Founded in 1883, the Modern Language Association of America provides opportunities for its members to share their scholarly findings and teaching experiences with colleagues and to discuss trends in the academy.

MLA members host an annual convention and other meetings, work with related organizations, and sustain one of the finest publishing programs in the humanities. For over a hundred years, members have worked to strengthen the study and teaching of language and literature.

The following two recent statements published on the site raise issues of importance in the Australian context:

- **Statement on Indigenous Languages of the World**

"Throughout the world many indigenous languages have been so depleted that their survival is now in a critical state. The United National Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People declare that a primary objective

is 'the education of indigenous and non-indigenous societies concerning the situation, cultures, languages, rights and aspirations of indigenous people'.

Preserving and revitalising Indigenous languages must be central to that objective. Therefore, the Modern Language Association recommends that institutions should, whenever possible, support the study of and research in Indigenous languages and literatures worldwide and devise means for native speakers of Indigenous languages to fulfill foreign language requirements with their Indigenous languages."

Read more at [http://www.mla.org/statement\\_on\\_indigenous](http://www.mla.org/statement_on_indigenous)

- **Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World**

In the context of globalisation and the post 9/11 environment, the usefulness of studying languages other than English is no longer contested.

The goals and means of language study continue to be hotly debated. Divergent views concerning language and its many functions are reflected in differing approaches.

At one end, language is considered to be principally instrumental, a skill for communicating thought and information.

At the opposite end, language is understood as an essential element of a human being's thought processes, perceptions and self-expression – the core of translingual and transcultural competence.

Read more at <http://www.mla.org/mlaissuesmajor>

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## **SCHOOL FOCUS**

*As schools tell us about their approaches to languages education, we will feature them in this Newsletter and on our Website as an expanding gallery of good practice examples and ideas that may assist other schools...*

### ***St Aidan's Anglican Girls' School - Brisbane***

St Aidan's recognises the study of a language as an integral part of a student's education, and offers the study of Chinese, French, German and Japanese right through from prep to Year 12. Each year we have approximately 75% of our school population enrolled in and studying a Language other than English.

In the junior school (P-7) the students are exposed to each of the four languages on a rotation system. From prep – Year 2, students study each language for 6 months each (as a result some are studied for a further 6 months).

As studies and surveys have suggested that only studying languages for a short period of time is not helpful to language learning, the rotation system allows for students in Year 3 and 4 to study a language for a full year.

Then, in Years 5-7, students choose one language and study it for the full 3 years.

In the senior school, students choose one language in Year 8, and then all four languages become electives in from Year 9-12.

Each language offers opportunities for acceleration and extension. A student may be accelerated if they demonstrate a higher level of proficiency than is expected at their current level. This usually happens in Year 8 (when they join a Year 9 class), where they may have had prior learning and have already covered all parts of the Year 8 curriculum.

It may also happen when a student demonstrates that they are progressing at a pace much faster than the rest of the year level. If the student continues with their language into senior, they effectively graduate from the Year 12 language course at the end of Year 11. This then opens up opportunities for them to enrol in another subject (such as an extension subject) or enrol in a university subject.

We started the year with a 'bang' and held an inaugural 'Celebration of Languages Dinner', open to all language students from Years 5-12 and their families.

The night was structured as a dinner, with everyone experiencing taste sensations from each of the target countries of the languages offered here at St Aidan's AGS.

Students from our Hospitality course at St Aidan's AGS were involved in the set up and service of the dinner, which went towards the 'competencies' they are working towards in this vocational education subject. We ordered all of the food from local restaurants.

While eating and enjoying the meals, everyone experienced traditional performances from Japan, Germany, France and China. These were a taiko drum and bamboo flute display from Japan, Alpenrosen (bells and dance) from Germany, an accordion player from France and a lion dance from China.

We also ran a trivia quiz throughout the night, which consisted of 20 questions (five per target country).

Read the entire article at: <http://www.languageseducation.com/gorrie070607.pdf>

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## **THE VIEW FROM THE UK**

### **Schools import China's teachers for lessons in 'language of tomorrow'**

*Richard Garner, The Independent 24 May 2007*

All of Britain's 250 specialist language schools have been told they should put Mandarin on the curriculum as "the language of tomorrow" a senior adviser said. Sir Cyril Taylor, chairman of Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, said Mandarin should be seen as the key language for future generations to learn, replacing European languages.

The Trust, which represents 90% of nearly 3,000 state secondary schools, has clinched a deal with the Chinese government to send 200 teachers a year to Britain to teach mandarin in schools. Student exchanges are also being arranged.

Taylor told MPs, "I want all language colleges teaching Mandarin. It is a strategic world language. The difficulty in the past has been getting the teachers. However, exchanges between our schools and Chinese schools will help to change that. We learn from them and they learn from us." About 4,000 youngsters in Britain are studying Chinese at Year 12 – but most of these are of Chinese origin.

Independent school Brighton College became the first school in Britain to make the language compulsory for all its pupils and has introduced it from the age of three. Headmaster Cairns said he believed it would replace German in the pecking order of languages.

Taylor said "the state of modern language teaching in this country means we need to do a lot more to promote it. I'd like to see all language colleagues having Mandarin on the curriculum soon, and to extend it to a number of other schools as well.

A recent government enquiry successfully argued that ministers should drop the requirement for all schools to teach a European language from age 11. Instead, they should be allowed to include Mandarin, Arabic and Urdu on the list of languages that could be taught.

Read more at: <http://education.independent.co.uk/news/article2578493.ece>

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## **THE VIEW FROM THE USA**

### **New languages will help students thrive in a 'smaller world'**

**Chinki Sinha, NY Observer Despatch 29 May 2007**

Students will benefit this fall when New Hartford and Whitesboro schools begin offering Mandarin instruction — New Hartford in high school and Whitesboro in elementary grades. "Mandarin is a trend," New Hartford School Superintendent Daniel Gilligan said. "It is about opportunity — cultural and economic."

The new courses reflect how many school districts in the region have begun to revise their foreign language course offerings in order to keep up with world economic trends. Increasingly, German and French may be giving way to Chinese, Arabic or Hindi. "Students are going to find themselves in a smaller world," Gilligan said. "It is a necessity."

One big part of stepping into the future will involve speaking more than one language, he said.

Research shows that exposure to a foreign language at an earlier age helps kids sustain an interest and also learn faster, said Linda Zee, associate professor of Spanish at Utica College. It also helps kids perform better in other subjects because learning a language increases their cognitive and reasoning skills, she said.

"It's important to expose students to other languages and cultures, and the earlier the better," she said. "Students' brains are like sponges until the age of 11 or so, and they can readily learn new information much more easily than adults."

Elsewhere in the world, students start to learn one or more foreign languages when they are about 5 or 6 years old, and by the time they are adults, have often mastered several languages, Zee said. But the size of the United States, plus what Zee characterized as an American conceit that "everyone speaks English" keeps us from making the effort, she said.

Read more at: <http://www.uticaod.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070529/NEWS/705290321/1001>

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## 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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