

LANGUAGES EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Volume One Number Eight: 3 July 2007

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Welcome to the eighth 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 on:** info@languageseducation.com

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NATIONAL SUMMIT IN CANBERRA 7 JULY 2007: "LANGUAGES IN CRISIS"

Communique from National Summit

The National Languages Summit was convened by the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Group of Eight Universities as a strategic contribution to a developing national discussion on the urgent need for policy leadership and action on Australia's language capability.

It brought together over 150 leaders from across the Australian community with an interest and expertise in language learning, including teachers, academics, public servants, the media, members of the defence forces, and representatives of industry and ethnic communities.

The Summit agrees that the development of Australia's language capability is firmly and urgently in our national interest. Australia needs a comprehensive, coordinated languages plan to develop this capability in a sensible fashion. This policy should be broad-based and should involve a range of languages including Australian Indigenous languages, as well as Asian, Middle-Eastern and European languages.

Languages should be taught for all the well-established reasons: cultural insight, intellectual development, curiosity and exposure to literature and history. These are as important and relevant today as ever. Language education can have a substantial transformative effect on students – particularly children – who develop a confidence in negotiating life in a diverse global community. It is a powerful tool for social cohesion through the positive effects of language learning on cultural understanding.

Read more at <http://www.languageseducation.com/summitcommunique.pdf>

ACSSO Media Release

Time to get serious about rebuilding Australia's language capacity

After a dismal decade characterised by lack of political will or purpose, by indifference, procrastination and neglect at too many levels, the need for sustained transformative action across the country in languages education cannot be further ignored.

We are at a point where the redevelopment of Australia's present and future language capability is central to our national interest. This is a critical issue that affects the future opportunities of all young people and the ongoing prosperity of our country.

While the rest of the world has sought to advance their language capacity progressively through this decade, we have been aimlessly adrift. We once set a target of 20% of Year 12 students to have language skills by 2001 – but nothing happened and we continue to bump listlessly along from year to year around 13%.

"Australia's school students spend the least time on second languages of students in all OECD countries. Language studies have collapsed from 40% of year 12 students studying a second language in the 60s – to fewer than 15% today" notes Professor Tim Lindsay.

Read more at <http://www.acsso.org.au/MR070703.pdf>

Group of 8 National Discussion Paper

Languages in Crisis – A Rescue Plan for Australia

Launched immediately prior to the Summit, this paper notes that Australia has a proud reputation in many areas of education, research and training. Languages education is no longer one of them. Urgent action is required if Australia is to avoid the serious educational, national security and economic consequences of becoming monolingual.

Decades of policy neglect and inaction mean Australian school students now spend less time learning a second language than students in all other OECD countries. The percentage of Year 12 students graduating with a second language has fallen dramatically from 40% in the 1960s to 13% today.

The language crisis Australia is experiencing cannot be solved by one sector of the education system alone. A co-ordinated national approach involving schools, community groups, universities and state and territory governments is required.

This paper sets out the need for a national policy on languages education, and recommends a range of measures to assist in the framing of a "rescue plan" to progressively turn the present situation around.

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

THE VIEW FROM THE UK

Richer, happier, Sexier: The Benefits of Learning a Foreign Language

A recently published report commissioned by Michael Thomas, the Hollywood language teacher who has taught celebrities such as Doris Day, Emma Thompson and Woody Allen, highlights some interesting benefits brought to those who learn a foreign language.

According to the report, Britons who learn a foreign language are richer, happier and are regarded as sexier than those who can only speak English.

People who learn a foreign language earn an extra £3,000 a year - a total of £145,000 over their lifetime. Companies are prepared to pay workers earning the national average of £25,818 as much as 12% more if they speak or learn a foreign language. For higher earners, the figures are even more startling. Those earning £45,000 could see a potential cash boost of 20%, amounting to an extra £9,000 a year or £423,000 over a lifetime.

In addition, a survey of 270 dating agencies found that people who learn or speak a foreign language are also more attractive to the opposite sex. Britons who speak a foreign language were rated more highly because they are easier to match with partners as they are considered to be more intelligent and sexier.

So for those who could do with some more disposable income and a more exciting romantic life the message is clear: Learn a foreign language!

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OPINION

Learning languages in Australia - too much like hard work?

This trenchant article appeared in 2003 – Has anything changed much since?

by Fiona Mueller

Languages learning could be seen as one of the great failures of modern Australian education. Since the release of the National Policy on Languages (1987), dozens of Commonwealth and State reports and policy statements have emphasised the importance of foreign language studies for all young Australians. However, this rhetoric has not translated into any increase in the number of students committing themselves to long-term (and therefore meaningful) language programs.

Indeed, participation rates at Year 12 level across Australia hover around 12% at best, and are far lower in some States and Territories. In some States over 30 languages are offered at Year 12 level, although it is obvious that most of these courses were introduced for political rather than pedagogical reasons. The latter 1990s saw a dramatic increase in the number of primary school language programs, mainly due to dedicated Commonwealth funding, but a national evaluation of school-based language programs in 1998 concluded that: "*Although ... bottom-up programmes may provide a surge in language enrolments in the post-compulsory years, there is no evidence that this is happening yet.*" (1)

The States and Territories vary enormously in terms of the value placed on language learning in the compulsory years of schooling. In New South Wales, for example, all schools are required to provide 100 hours of study of one language in one 12-month period in order to allow students to meet the minimum requirements of the School Certificate. The study of a language is not a core element of the primary curriculum, but appears as an optional component of the Human Society and Its Environment K-6 Syllabus.

In the other States and Territories, the provision of language study varies widely, particularly between government and non-government systems, with the general expectation being that students will participate in a language course at some stage during the compulsory years of schooling. In Queensland, language study is compulsory in Years 6-8, in Western Australia from Years 3-8, and in South Australia from Reception to Year 7. There are no compulsory programs in the Northern Territory.

In the ACT most primary schools offer language courses and most students in Year 7 are required to study a language at government schools.

Read more at <http://www.languageseducation.com/mueller070703.pdf>

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AWARDS & PRIZES

38th Annual Japanese Language Speech Contest – 4 August 2007

The Consulate-General of Japan presents the Victorian state finals of the 38th annual Japanese language speech contest.

Students in years 11 and 12, and recent school leavers are encouraged to enter. There are four divisions to compete in, including Senior, Open Beginners, Open and Background Speaker.

First place winners will proceed to the Australian National Finals in Sydney where they will compete for return air tickets to Japan.

Visit http://www.melbourne.au.emb-japan.go.jp/jicc/speech_contest.html for eligibility details, guidelines, application form and hints.

Registrations close 25th July 2007.

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Reminders

Conference: Australian Society of Indonesian Language Educators , 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/>

Applications close for 2008 Endeavour language Teacher Fellowships, 20 July 2007. http://www.endeavour.dest.gov.au/language_teacher_fellowships/

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