

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 Thirteen: 4 October 2007

Having trouble reading this email? Read it on the web at <http://www.languageseducation.com/news1071004.pdf>

Welcome to 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 aims to inform school communities and other subscribers about events, activities and initiatives around the country related to languages education.

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

Note: Disclaimer - Any products or services mentioned in this Newsletter or on our Website are simply noted for your information; no such mention infers or provides any recommendation, guarantee or indemnity from ACSSO, APC or any of our members or employees in respect of any member of the public who may choose to follow up with that service or product.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF LANGUAGES 2008

ACSSO Briefing by UNESCO:

Dear Mr Macgregor

As stated in the relevant UN Resolution the main objective of the International Year of Languages is to develop and intensify activities aimed at fostering respect for and the promotion and protection of languages and multilingualism.

As lead agency, UNESCO will ensure an advocacy, facilitating and monitoring role, whereas the implementation of concrete activities will be carried out primarily by and within Member States, through diverse multiple partnership schemes.

We are currently finalising the mobilisation plan, which calls for the creation of a Website targeting mainly the members of UNESCO community, including National Commissions, which will in turn mobilise their own national networks and national civil society stakeholders. All possible partners will be invited to participate according to their specific means, objectives and scope of action.

In this context, a possible contribution of the Australian Council of State School Organisations would be highly appreciated.

To ensure the best possible coordination, I suggest you contact the Australian National Commission for UNESCO (02) 6261 2321 austnatcom.unesco@dfat.gov.au <http://www.dfat.gov.au/intorgs/unesco>

I would be grateful if you could keep us informed on the initiatives undertaken by ACSSO during the year 2008

Thank you for your interest and commitment

*Mauro Rosi
Intersectoral Focal Point for Languages
UNESCO*

We will seek to keep you advised of further UNESCO leadership activities at International and National levels, via subsequent editions of this Newsletter - ED

ACSSO NATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE IN DARWIN 22-23 OCTOBER:

MAJOR SYMPOSIUM ON FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR LANGUAGES EDUCATION

A leading theme and focus of this year's National Education Conference in Darwin on 22-23 October will be the future directions for languages education and achieving Australia's language potential.

A range of presenters and panels will address the issues within this broad focusing question:

- What are the things we need to do differently to achieve better outcomes?
- and how can we use the opportunities of the International Year of Languages to start those things moving forward?

Presenters and Panellists include:

Rob McConchie, Director, Solved at McConchie Pty Ltd
Anna Dall, Conducting International Research at University of the Sunshine Coast
Philip Mahnken, Chief Curriculum Designer, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, USC
George Quinn, Head & Senior Lecturer at the Southeast Asia Centre, ANU
Carol Hayes, Southeast Asia Centre, ANU
Anarella Sebbens, NT Health (Indigenous Languages Program, Sanderson HS)
Fiona Mueller, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
Marlene Dingle, Regional Coordinator Languages, VIC Department of Education & Training
Michael Clyne, Professorial Fellow, School of Languages, Monash University
Kathe Kirby, Executive Director, Asia Education Foundation

Places still available. Details and registration: <http://www.acsso.org.au/natconf07>

Languages Going the Way of the Dodo ...

As recently reported in the media, the LivingTongues Institute for Endangered Languages and the National Geographic Society are conducting joint projects to research the situation of critically endangered languages, and in particular to investigate identified key "hotspots" of particular concern – especially in view of the UN's stated purpose for the International Year of Languages 2008.

As stated on the LivingTongues site (<http://www.livingtongues.org.au>):

"Minority languages are being increasingly replaced by various politically, economically, or socio-culturally dominant ones.

Every two weeks the last fluent speaker of a language passes on and with him/her goes literally hundreds of generations of traditional knowledge encoded in these ancestral tongues. This rate of extinction appears to be unprecedented in human history.

Nearly half of the world's languages are likely to vanish in the next 100 years."

Key current projects include in particular

- Language Hotspots Project - A major new global initiative to raise awareness and to direct funding and research efforts most effectively.
- Enduring Voices Project - A recently launched new initiative with National Geographic Society to highlight the most critical areas of linguistic and cultural endangerment and to begin the process of documenting and helping to revitalize these languages and cultures. This will be the subject of a feature in the October 2007 issue of the National Geographic magazine.

The significance of the issues and of these projects is reflected in a Discussion Paper "Language Hotspots: Linking language extinction, biodiversity & the human knowledge base" (Anderson, GDS & Harrison, KD, 2006):

Human languages, like plant and animal species, are globally unevenly distributed and face uneven extinction risks. Adapting a model that has become prominent in conservation biology, we identify and map a set of global "language hotspots" for prioritisation and further investigation.

Hotspots are defined as geographic areas with the greatest linguistic endangerment and diversity. They are based on qualitative and quantitative criteria such as linguistic (genetic) diversity, degree of endangerment, and [low] level of scientific documentation. ... This research will significantly enhance our knowledge of how language – the primary example of a culturally transmitted cognitive system –can change over time and disperse across space.

Much (if not most) of humankind's accumulated knowledge of the natural world is encoded solely in languages that have never been written down or documented and are now facing extinction. With language extinction comes an unprecedented erosion of human knowledge about the natural world."

Read the full discussion paper at:

http://www.livingtongues.org/docs/Hotspots_whitepaper%20copy.pdf

A Comment from the Northern Territory on Indigenous Languages

Alex Kelly, Alice Springs – in Canberra Times 23/9/07

The Northern Territory has been identified this week as the global hot-spot for language loss by an international study conducted by National Geographic.

This rapid loss was also identified in the Australian Government's 2005 National Indigenous Languages Survey.

NSW Director-General of Education Michael Coutts-Trotter announced this week that teaching indigenous languages in high schools in NSW will become compulsory under a state government strategy to improve Aboriginal retention rates and literacy standards.

This is because teaching indigenous languages in schools keeps more indigenous students at school.

In the current context of the NT intervention and emphasis on school attendance it would seem logical to acknowledge both the intrinsic value of languages and the clear benefit in supporting them and teaching them in schools.

NSW is the only state in Australia which has an indigenous languages policy.

There is no national legislated recognition of languages and only minimal government funding to support them.

There is no declared national policy.

Indigenous languages remain adrift in Australia and this must be immediately addressed for the benefit of all Australians.

Mandarin a Must for Some

The Sydney Morning Herald, September 21, 2007

Anna Patty reports that the study of Mandarin is set to become compulsory in some New South Wales (NSW) public schools beginning next year.

There are currently 40 schools in NSW that teach the language to year 10 students and 70 schools offer it to senior students, but government officials are stepping up their efforts to encourage students to study the language.

For example, federal Labor has announced a \$69 million national Asian languages and studies program, which would promote the study of languages, including Mandarin, in schools.

"Mandarin is a good choice, but so too would be Japanese, Korean, or Bahasa Indonesian," said the NSW Minister for Education, John Della Bosca.

Read the whole article at: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/mandarin-a-must-for-some/2007/09/20/1189881683386.html>

=====

THE WORLD IN REVIEW:

This selection is drawn from media around the world. Not much from Australia. But we know there are a great many exciting and positive languages learning initiatives going forward in schools around our country. So: let's tell people about these great local activities that provide fulfilling language opportunities for young people that will benefit their whole lives. It's your newsletter: let's publish your story! – ED.

Polishing Their Language Skills

East Lothian Courier (Scotland) September 28, 2007

The East Lothian Courier reports that the woman behind East Lothian's first Polish/English language school has had an unexpected response to her services - from Scottish people wanting to learn Polish!

Earlier this month, tutor Ania Robson launched her Haddington-based school to teach English as a second language to the growing number Polish immigrants to the county.

Mrs. Robson said, "Since I started the school, I've had inquiries from a variety of different nationalities. It would be fair to say that it has opened up one or two surprise doors."

Robson also hopes at some point in the future to establish the first Polish cafe in Haddington to act as a focus for the county's Polish community, now believed to be several thousand strong.

Read entire article at: <http://www.eastlothiancourier.com/article.php?sec=1&id=15693>

The View from USA: "The Times They Are A' Changing!"

Our Classroom - Our Passport to the World

In recent years, west-metro students interested in languages other than mainstays like Spanish or German ran into roadblocks as schools' language offerings became victims of budget cuts.

This fall, however, Orono is offering a state-of-the-art world language lab that students can use to independently study almost any language. Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Korean and Tagalog are some of the choices.

The lab - made possible by a \$100,000 gift last year from Orono parents Richard and Jennie Goelz - is used by more than 700 students in Orono's language courses and English language learner programs.

The lab has 37 new computers loaded with interactive language software teachers can use for computer-based exams, practice lessons and recording and storing digital audio files.

"It's fabulous," said Marilyn Pederson, chairwoman of Orono High's world language department. "This is our crown jewel."

Orono Spanish teacher Kelly Hanly said with the addition of the lab, manual tape recorders, paper-and-pencil vocabulary quizzes and other tools once used to gauge language skills are practically obsolete.

Read entire article at: <http://www.startribune.com/west/story/1440921.html>

Dual Benefits of Language Immersion Program

Mail Tribune (Oregon, USA) September 25, 2007

The Spanish immersion program at Phoenix Elementary School in Oregon, is coveted by native English-speaking parents because it gives their children what other elementary schools in Jackson County don't: bilingualism.

What is more, native Spanish speakers in the program benefit from being able to climb academically in their native language while learning English.

For the last seven years, 90 percent of instruction in the program was delivered in Spanish, but that changed this year after school officials determined that some native Spanish-speaking pupils weren't learning enough English to succeed at the secondary level.

Beefing up English instruction is expected to help native Spanish speakers to transition with more ease to middle school, where they can expect significantly less language assistance than at the elementary level.

"Some Latino parents were worried their children aren't listening to English at home and wanted to make sure when they get to middle school and high school they're able to do their work in English," said Laura Millette, Phoenix Elementary liaison to Spanish-speaking parents.

Read entire article:

<http://www.mailtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070925/NEWS/709250312>

Schools Ramp Up Foreign-Language Options

Orlando Sentinel (Florida, USA) September 20, 2007

Susan Jacobson reports that the sounds of Chinese, Russian, and Arabic are becoming more common in U.S. classrooms as globalization shrinks the world and schools try to give their students an edge in college and the international marketplace.

And in Central Florida, schools are expanding their language offerings in an effort to better prepare students for jobs in the 21st century. Seminole and Volusia counties added Chinese this year, for example, while Polk is trying Arabic.

"If we're not out there speaking the languages and knowing the cultures of the countries we're trying to sell our goods to, we're not going to be competitive," said Marty Abbott, director of education for the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. "We just can't expect them to deal with us in our own language."

Read the whole article at: http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/education/orl-languages20sep20,0,7031000.story?coll=orl_mezz

Local Bi-lingual School Provides Multiple Perspectives

InsideBayArea.com (California, USA) September 8, 2007

Kristin Bender profiles Ecole Bilingue de Berkeley, the oldest bilingual school in the East Bay area (CA), which teaches the same subjects as public schools and other private schools, including physical education, gardening, and music, but the curriculum is taught in French.

What is more, by the end of the first grade, most students can speak French far better than many high school students who graduate with four years of language training.

"Our students learn two perspectives on history, two approaches to math, and it broadens their horizons," said Head of School Frederic Canadas.

"Bilingual children know that each culture has its own way of looking at the world, and so not only are they comfortable with diversity, but they instinctively look for multiple perspectives in any situation."

Read the entire article http://www.insidebayarea.com/dailyreview/localnews/ci_6837320

American Schools Go Global in French, Chinese, Spanish, Creole

The Associated Press (New York, USA) September 1, 2007

There is a growing national trend to teach American children subjects like math, social studies, and science in a foreign language.

Not to be confused with controversial bilingual education designed to mainstream non-English speaking children, subjects taught in a foreign language are designed to make a child fluent in speaking and writing two languages.

This fall, several hundred thousand youngsters across America are headed to taxpayer-funded classes taught in Spanish, Hebrew, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, and other languages.

In a global economy where about 1 billion people speak Chinese, and almost 400 million Spanish, the two languages are at the top of the list of classes taught in a foreign language at more than 300 public schools nationwide.

More than two-thirds are in Spanish, according to the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC, a private nonprofit organization that researches issues related to language in a society.

What is more, about 14,000 children are taking classes in French - including in Chicago, Miami, Boston, and Washington, says Fabrice Jaumont, the education attaché at the French Embassy in Manhattan.

"This is a competitive country, and if Americans want to compete globally, they won't be first any more if their language skills are not good."

First Steps = Primeros Pasos - Dual Language Program

Delaware Online (USA) September 27, 2007

Summer Harlow reports that at the new First Steps Primeros Pasos early learning center in Georgetown (DE), lessons are being taught in both English and Spanish. Signs and posters around the classroom are bilingual, and two of the three instructors are native Spanish speakers.

According to a preschool policy brief from the National Institute for Early Education Research issued in March, a "pattern of disparities" continues throughout Hispanic students' education.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows more Hispanic fourth-graders and eighth-graders scored below the basic level in math and reading than did non-Hispanics.

"We deal with integration here," said Executive Director Lynne Maloy. "We're teaching our Spanish speakers English and our English speakers get to learn Spanish. We want everyone to have an equal chance to succeed, because education is the name of the game."

Read entire article at:

<http://www.delawareonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070927/NEWS/709270382/-1/NEWS01>

New Chinese, Arabic Language Focus in N. Va Public Schools

Falls Church News-Press (Virginia, USA) August 30, 2007

With new programs being launched this year in three counties, Northern Virginia is not wasting any time staying at the forefront of the new national trend to teach Chinese and Arabic languages in its public schools.

In Falls Church, new staff has been added that will provide classes in Mandarin Chinese and Arabic to all students in grades 8 through 12.

Fairfax County launched the FLES (Foreign Language in Elementary Schools) program last year, which teaches an array of foreign languages in district elementary schools.

What is more, Arlington County schools were selected to be among a handful of beneficiaries of grants from the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland.

Their grant was used this summer for special exploratory and enrichment camps for Arabic and Chinese.

Complete article at:

http://www.fcnp.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1734&Itemid=33

Language of The Future Sounds Like Chinese

The Hartford Courant (USA) August 27, 2007

China's growing global economic and political influence is fueling increases in teacher and student exchanges in Connecticut schools and driving a statewide push to educate children on all things Chinese.

The number of public school students enrolled in Chinese language courses statewide has soared from 300 to nearly 3,000 in the past three academic years, according to Mary Ann Hansen, world language consultant with the state Department of Education.

Nationally, the number has risen from 5,000 seven years ago to between 30,000 and 50,000, according to the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

What is more, the College Board in May administered its first advanced placement test in Chinese, and educational ties between the two nations are growing stronger.

"I think September 11 put languages in the fore," said Hansen. "President Bush in 2006 gathered university presidents and said we need to get going with [Kindergarten through college] language programs ... [that are] critical to our national security and economic interest. And Chinese is one of those languages."

Moreno Valley Program is Making Preschool Parents Teachers Too

The Press-Enterprise (California, USA) September 25, 2007

Melissa Eiselein reports that children too young for kindergarten are getting an early introduction to attending classes at Sunnymead Elementary School in Moreno, California.

A pilot program offered only to 3- and 4-year-olds who will attend Sunnymead will teach them lessons about the five senses, reading, and coping with separation from their families.

It aims to chart the success of English-language learners and to determine whether early intervention is making a difference in their ongoing education, officials said.

The 10-week kindergarten-readiness class, taught in English and Spanish, is part of the PROMISE Initiative co-sponsored by the state Department of Education's Language Policy and Leadership Office.

PROMISE, or Pursuing Regional Opportunities for Mentoring, Innovation, and Success for English Learners, also seeks to increase parent involvement among children in the program, offering a Web site that gives parents a place where they can discuss their child's progress and share ideas with other parents.

"Parents are their kids' first teachers," said Gloria Borjon, Sunnymead's community liaison and program teacher. "... We're teaching the parents how to teach their students at home," she added.

Read entire article at:

http://www.pe.com/localnews/inland/stories/PE_News_Local_R_rprek25.6b57a4.html

=====

To unsubscribe click here: mailto:webmaster@acsso.org.au?subject=le_unsubscribe