

LANGUAGES EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

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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

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INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF LANGUAGES 2008

UNESCO Briefs AFMLTA

The Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations contacted UNESCO with a view to finding out whether AFMLTA and similar should and/or could organise events and activities to celebrate and promote next year's International Year of Languages.

Mr Mauro Rosi, of UNESCO's Intersectoral Focal Point for Languages, provided the following answer:

"Please organize whatever events or projects you wish. By end 2007 we will have a web site with downloadable logos, images.

We will be pleased to insert your project in the final report on the initiatives taken during 2008.

Please note that the slogan of the year is "Languages matter!" - meaning that tongues in their plurality are important in a lot of different domains of life (education, culture, development, business, health and so on).

Thank you again!"

ACSSO and APC will work interactively and supportively with AFMLTA on a range of initiatives to achieve the purposes and maximise the opportunities which the Year provides, for the benefit of students, families and school communities in all parts of the country.

We will bring you further information in subsequent editions of this Newsletter.

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RESEARCH

Native Language Governs the Way Toddlers Interpret Speech Sounds

Science Daily October 2, 2007

Toddlers are learning language skills earlier than expected and by the age of 18 months understand enough of the lexicon of their own language to recognize how speakers use sounds to convey meaning.

They also ignore sounds that don't play a significant role in speaking their native tongue, according to a study by a University of Pennsylvania psychologist.

Previously, scientists had speculated that this ability would emerge much later in life, once children had already amassed large vocabularies.

"The results demonstrate that at 18 months children have a rudimentary understanding of the 'sound system' of their language and that knowledge guides their interpretation of the sounds they encounter," said Daniel Swingley, assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Penn who worked with colleagues from the University of British Columbia and the Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics.

The study shows how important the child's first year is in acquiring language. By listening to their parents and learning words, children discover how speech in their language works, a process that is vital for gaining command of vocabulary and grammar.

Read entire article at: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/10/071001172817.htm>

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YOUR STORIES

In this occasional series we highlight innovative and imaginative approaches to languages learning in schools for whom this is an essential element of learning, strongly linked across the curriculum. We invite all schools to contribute "your story" so this can be a regular feature in each future issue of the newsletter and on the Languages Education website.

Aquinas College, Ringwood, Victoria

Anne-Maree Grimaldi, LOTE Co-ordinator

A focusing event for the very active languages program at Aquinas College in Ringwood, is the celebration of LOTE Day. It's an event which happens every 2 years, so that all Year 7 and 8 students experience this once.

This is a day of activities planned around the learning of both French and Indonesian. The activities provided allow for a range of both compulsory and optional activities, some done in class groups, others in interest groups.

The quadrangle is transformed as many balloons and streamers decorate the balconies, with both the French and the Indonesian flags flying proudly side by side.

The students have the opportunity to dress to represent some aspect of French or Indonesian life; all activities are built around aspects of French and Indonesian culture - and cuisine - and much more.

LOTE also runs an incursion morning for our Year 10 French students before they choose their subjects for Year 11, where they watch a movie, listen to ex-students and current students of French in VCE.

They hear about ex-students' experiences with French and they are able to ask current students what it's like. They are then treated to a spectacular French luncheon which is prepared by the Hospitality students at the school.

This school is currently defying the trends for LOTE learning, with 40 students studying Year 12 LOTE which is about 20% of our Year 12 enrolment!

Read more about Lote Day 2007 at <http://www.languageseducation.com/aquinascollege.pdf>

Read more about the College at <http://www.aquinas.vic.edu.au/web/index.asp>

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LANGUAGES. EDUCATION. AUSTRALIA. DISCUSS.

"Should the Learning of Languages have a Higher Priority in Australian Schools?"

This was the focusing question in the October edition of the Independent Education magazine. Three practitioners took on the challenge:

1. Philippa Reid, Head of Languages, Radford College, ACT

Learning a second language offers students a range of rich educational experiences, from the acquisition of a practical tool to the development of thinking skills and the building of understanding and empathy.

Learning to communicate through an unfamiliar language gives students an insight into another culture that is different from simply learning about it.

Language is a principal means for a culture to express itself and, in temporarily shedding their own familiar habits of speech, students can experience the culture directly and from within. Such experiences can break down tribal barriers and enlarge their understanding of diversity.

This is of particular value in a country like Australia, whose geographical isolation does not offer easy access to - and familiarity with non-English speaking neighbours. In addition, being speakers of a (supposedly_ dominant language such as English encourages monolingual thinking and can breed arrogance.

Learning a second language is challenging. It requires the acquisition of a range of skills, from acuity of listening and versatility of sound production - through to building a knowledge base and developing skills of analysis and manipulation of language structure.

Students experience a steady build up of incremental learning, akin to practising a musical instrument or playing sport, as well as problem solving disciplines such as maths. In doing so, they develop their literacy skills and gain a deeper understanding of the structural base and vocabulary of their own language.

Learning a second language, therefore, does not only develop a practical skill in an increasingly internationalised world - but also opens and expands the minds of young people. The intellectual and intuitive understanding and variety of skills it develops should earn it a valued place in the curriculum of Australian schools.

2. Sherryl Saunders, President, Modern Language Teachers Association of Queensland

Asking a professional language teacher association whether we believe language education should receive higher priority in Australian schools is like asking a question in which we state the obvious. Rather than just answering "yes", I believe it is important to understand why it is so. In the early 90s, Queensland was the envy of many states in terms of languages education.

The rationale for language education was grounded in the reality of living in rapidly changing times, with its increased need for effective communication across and between peoples of the world for a variety of purposes - trade and other economic benefit, knowledge of and harmony within the world. Turning the rationale into a teaching and lived experience was supported by a broad curriculum picture

and vision for students being able to access a quality language learning experience from Year 4 - if not earlier.

However, over time, the implementation of languages education has been seriously eroded, without any serious engagement as to whether the assumptions of the rationale have significantly changed. Rather, perspectives about perceived benefits - based on little experience and less knowledge - influenced the making of short-sighted decisions.

MLTAQ believes that the rationale underpinning current documents such as the National Statement and Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools (MCEETYA 2005), continues to support - and, indeed, provides further rationale for - languages education in Australian schools receiving the highest priority.

3. Denise Fittler, O'Connor Catholic High School, Armidale

Languages need to be given a greater priority in Australian schools, as we live in a global world, where Australians travel throughout the world for work and leisure.

Traditionally, Australians have devalued languages because of our geographical isolation. We have not had the exposure to foreign languages as the European and Asian peoples have.

I was the typical Aussie who thought that everyone else should learn English - until my husband and I lived in Indonesia for two years in the eighties. When we first moved to Indonesia we became involved in the local expatriate community. I remember clearly my astonishment when I realised that the European expatriates actually thought that those of us from English speaking countries (Australia, England, America) were inferior as we only spoke one language and struggled to learn Indonesian.

During this time I worked in the local expatriate pre-school. The European pre-schoolers would arrive already speaking at least three languages and would quickly learn Indonesian.

As the world becomes more accessible with modern technology, Australian students need to learn to appreciate the culture and beliefs of other people.

There is no better way to show our appreciation of other people than to speak their language - or at least show a willingness to try to learn their language.

Through learning a foreign language, students can open their minds to different belief systems that are very different from ours. These are the skills our students will need to develop as the world becomes more accessible to all.

Languages need to be given a greater priority in Australian schools because adolescents usually do not see the value in choosing to study a language - many choose soft options that are fun and require little effort. If we are to increase the number of students leaving school with competent skills in a foreign language, we need to offer incentives to encourage students to choose a language. For example, universities could give preference to students with language in their Year 12 results.

National Need for a New Deal in Languages Education

Brisbane Courier Mail 22 September 2007

Now that China is Australia's top trading partner, renewed focus has been placed on teaching Asian languages in schools. More than 300 million Chinese students are studying English, yet fewer than 15 per cent of Australian Year 12 students are learning any second language at all.

Queensland's figures are even worse: fewer than 6 per cent of Year 12 students are studying a language other than English. But if Kevin Rudd becomes prime minister, things are likely to change.

Rudd stole the show at APEC earlier this month when he spoke in Mandarin to Chinese President Hu Jintao, chatting about family life and living in China. Under a Labor government, Rudd says, a national Asian languages program would be implemented as a national priority, to prepare young Australians to compete with their geographic neighbours.

The present Federal Government provides funding to states and territories - \$112 million from 2005-2008 to teach a Language Other Than English (LOTE) in schools.

Each state runs its own language show and, in Queensland, some schools offer courses as early as Year 1, while others start their LOTE programs in Years 2, 3 or 4. "Most do it in Years 5, 6, 7 and 8 and after that it really becomes optional and once that happens not a lot of students take it up," says Queensland University of Technology language studies lecturer Julia Rothwell.

A compulsory, properly funded and enforced LOTE program is needed across state schools, says Modern Language Teachers Association of Queensland spokesperson Helen Best.

Learning a second language, she says, broadens children's outlook, improves their literacy and expands their view of the world beyond the experiences of Anglo-speaking Australia. "It's never been mandated in Education Queensland schools to do a language after Year 8," Best says.

Federal Labor would take expert advice from a yet-to-be-created National Curriculum Board on whether, and in what years of school, languages should be made compulsory, says Opposition education spokesman Stephen Smith.

But not everybody relies on governments to help their children become bilingual. Accountant Ian Schubert takes six-year-old daughter Crystal to Spanish classes on Saturdays at Alpha Tykes language school in Kenmore. Crystal has been learning Spanish for 18 months and Ian says she's well on her way to becoming fluent.

"She is now coming home and singing songs in Spanish and she's quite comfortable reading it," he says. "I'm sure it has helped her confidence in other areas too because her personality type is quite shy."

Ian says he and his wife Lisa believe being bilingual is a way to reduce barriers between people of different nationalities and cultures. "I'm not looking for Crystal to be the world's most successful person because she's learning Spanish, but if I could find a way to make the world a better place by reaching out to people, that's a good thing," he says.

Experts have long advocated children learning a second language. Alpha Tykes managing director Leann Webb says the golden age of learning for children is before the age of five, when their minds absorb knowledge more rapidly than at any other time in their lives.

Read more at <http://www.languageseducation.com/courier070922.pdf>

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THE WORLD IN REVIEW

South Africa: Mandarin to be Taught in 50 High Schools

Business Day (South Africa) October 3, 2007

Fifty South African high schools will soon teach Mandarin, the most widely spoken language in China, after an agreement reached during Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka's recent visit to that country. China's growing global influence made learning the language a sensible thing to do, said Thabang Chiloane, spokesman for Mlambo-Ngcuka.

Under the agreement, China would provide teachers while the education department decides on the logistics, including selecting the schools that will offer Mandarin. China has 1.31 billion people, so it

made sense when looking to the future "to understand a language spoken by a quarter of the world's population," Chiloane said.

SA is China's biggest trading partner in Africa , exporting R14bn worth of products to China and importing commodities valued at R47,7bn.

Under the agreement, China would provide the teachers while the education department decides on the logistics, including selecting the schools that will offer Mandarin

Read entire article at <http://allafrica.com/stories/200710030151.html>

UK: Lack of Spending on Learning Languages "Costs Billions"

Western Mail (Wales) October 2, 2007

Billions of dollars are lost to the British economy each year because of a lack of investment in language learning, a Welsh academic said recently.

A report by Professor James Foreman-Peck, of Cardiff Business School, said that investing more in teaching foreign languages to improve people's ability to speak French, Spanish, or German, would save businesses about \$18 billion a year.

Language skills are shown to be closely related to the exportability of firms and national economies. And Foreman-Peck said under-investment in languages is leaving the UK and its businesses at a significant disadvantage.

"Language complacency has a significant negative effect on British exports," he said. "Other nations' propensity to learn English is not enough to compensate for our own under-investment in language skills."

Instead, companies are over-estimating the economic advantages of speaking English. And because of their over-reliance on English and a lack of foreign language speakers, they are unable to access vital information about foreign markets and their competitors overseas.

Read the entire article at: http://icwales.icnetwork.co.uk/0300business/0100news/tm_headline=lack-of-spending-on-learning-languages-8216-costs-billions-8217&method=full&objectid=19878990&siteid=50082-name_page.html

USA: North Georgia Degree Programs Aim to 'Revolutionize Language Training'

The Gainesville Times (GA) October 9, 2007

North Georgia College & State University has begun to ramp up foreign language instruction, from new majors on campus to a possible "World Language Academy" collaboration with Hall County schools.

Chinese classes were offered at the college in 2006 and, starting this fall, they make up a new language minor. German language studies returned this year, also as an academic minor, after a seven-year absence.

"There's a big interest in languages right now, particularly in strategic languages," says Brian Mann, head of the Department of Modern Languages.

A new international affairs bachelor's degree offers the flexibility for students to pick a region and study a combination of the region's language, politics and history.

"At North Georgia, we're trying to kind of revolutionize language training so that it fits with the needs of a competitive global community," says Dlynn Armstrong-Williams, who led the development of the new international affairs program.

Read the entire article at:

<http://www.gainesvilletimes.com/news/stories/20071009/localnews/197236.shtml>

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