

# LANGUAGES EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Volume Two Number Four: 27 March 2008

Read this on the web at <http://www.languageseducation.com/news1080327.pdf>

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*Welcome to the fourth edition of the Newsletter as we celebrate the International Year of Languages 2008. Features in this edition include:*

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## OPINION

### A language is a window to another world

*Joseph Lo Bianco, The Age, March 26, 2008*

The study of other languages is important as English becomes more prevalent.

In 2004 I took part in a joint conference of the US departments of education and defence. In the wake of 9/11, languages were a major concern: defence personnel wanted educators to fix the language problem, public institutions needed to offer the "right" languages, linguistic skills had to be tied to security and trade, and "heritage" speakers of strategic languages should help the nation catch evildoers.

The participants were sent off to "fix the problem". We talked about teaching and learning, curriculum and assessment, tones, characters, texts and accents. Frustrated by absence of clear, simple solutions, a convener bellowed: "It's not rocket science, you know! It's just a subject!"

It probably isn't rocket science, but languages are far from being just a subject, and English-speaking countries have special problems teaching them. Languages are deeply intellectual and intensely practical.

When you learn a language well, you engage in the deepest manifestations of a cultural system. Few other subjects require cumulative learning of taught material for progress and so languages contribute substance and continuity.

Since the Rudd Government's election, desperately overdue policy work is taking place to restore the flagging fortunes of languages. Our national effort is low by some OECD standards.

One of the peculiar challenges we face is the immense international investment in English, whose dispersion and status worldwide is probably unassailable. In 2005 British Council research estimated that

close to 2 billion people could be learning or know English by 2010; eventually as many as 3 billion, close to half the world's population.

We haven't even begun to think through the consequences of this. If English does serve as a global auxiliary language, then it is in Asia where it is strongest. Research from Hong Kong University colleagues documenting the status of English across Asia speaks of English learning as a national mission.

We need a rationale for languages that makes sense to Australians dealing with a multicultural English-knowing world. We should find the reasons for promoting languages where they have always been, in the universal experience of the intellectual gain that comes from bilingualism and in the unique cultural insight languages offer.

This is why languages should be on all school timetables.

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/opinion/a-language-is-a-window-to-another-world/2008/03/25/1206207099543.html>

*Professor Joseph Lo Bianco is chair of language and literacy education at the University of Melbourne.*

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## **Minding our language**

*John Töns, Online Opinion, 12 March 2008*

On Monday, February 25, the Advertiser ran a front-page item about the imminent release of a report on languages. The report recommends that all children should have access to learning a second language from kindergarten.

While the report has not exactly dominated the opinion pages, those letters that have been published about it have been predictably scathing: South Australians, at least those whose letters get published, fail to see the merit in students learning a second language.

The report is timely. The Government's commitment to an education revolution and to revisit the idea of a national curriculum means that a report like this will at least be part of the mix. However, I have my doubts that it will get very far.

Of course I hope I am mistaken. I hope that this is finally the breakthrough for Australian education and that we will at last shake off the dead hand of our past: a past heavily influenced by an Anglo-centric view of education.

But I doubt it.

In a previous life I wrote many a briefing paper for both state and federal ministers about language education. They were all very well received. Unfortunately that is where the matter ended - I had little evidence that the papers had been read or if read, had been understood.

This report will encounter much the same road blocks.

Read more at <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=7103>

*John Töns is President of the Zero Carbon Network a network established to promote clear thinking about the issues associated with climate change. In addition to operating the only zero carbon boarding kennels in South Australia he is also completing a PhD at Flinders University in the area of Global Justice.*

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## TECHNOLOGY

### Thinking Head helps out language students

*Jennifer Foreshew The Australian March 25, 2008*

AN advanced artificial intelligence program, dubbed The Thinking Head, which can talk, show emotions and maintain eye contact, could be used to teach Australian schoolchildren within two years. Researchers have used complex algorithms and software to bring the program, worth nearly \$5 million, to life, offering a range of facial expressions, gestures and eye contact.

The five-year project is designed to create a computer interface that communicates with humans in a believable way.

It incorporates about a dozen technologies that for the first time are being brought together to create a comprehensive platform for communications research.

Flinders University informatics and engineering school Thinking Head research team leader David Powers said the group had joined with a German university to develop a German-language version of the head. "It will be used in Germany to teach children English, but the main focus is teaching Australian children German," Associate Professor Powers said.

"We are particularly focusing on nine-year-olds, but we will be doing some broader studies from pre-school to university."

Associate Professor Powers said trials of the project in Australian classrooms would begin within two years.

"At the moment, this year we are participating in a workshop with modern language teachers, who will be helping us to develop the lessons. The deployment is then hoped to be in 2010." There was also interest in using the system to teach Asian languages, he said.

Read more at <http://www.australianit.news.com.au/story/0,24897,23424997-15321,00.html>

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## RESEARCH

### Primary Languages in Initial Teacher Training

*Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills*

During the 1990s there was a growing feeling among educationists that modern foreign languages in schools were in the doldrums. Prompted by this concern, the report of The Nuffield Languages Inquiry identified shortcomings in languages provision in the majority of educational settings, and analysed the effect of this on national capability at all levels.

In response, Languages for all, languages for life: a strategy for England proposed that all Key Stage 2 pupils should be learning a foreign language by 2009/10.

In order to provide the trained workforce needed to implement this initiative, the report identified three main providers for training the required number of teachers:

- those involved in initial teacher training (ITT),
- local authorities and
- specialist language colleges.

In the academic year 2001/02 five ITT providers piloted a languages pathway in their primary training courses. By 2007 the number of ITT providers offering courses had increased to 38. Over the six years, 3,000 trainees have been trained.

A unique element of these training courses is the requirement for trainees to spend four weeks at a primary school in a country where their chosen teaching language is spoken. During the four weeks, trainees undertake similar activities to those carried out during their local school placements but spend increasing amounts of time teaching the curriculum of the host area. The stay also enables them to become immersed in the language and culture of their host schools and countries.

The Primary Languages in Initial Teacher Training survey aimed to evaluate the quality of initial teacher training (ITT) to prepare trainees to implement the National Languages Strategy in primary schools by 2009/10 and the impact of that training on their knowledge and skills. It follows a previous report by Ofsted in 2003 on developing primary languages in ITT.

Provision has greatly increased since then and there are now 30 established providers of these courses. They have paid good attention to the 2003 report and have built its recommendations into their action planning and development.

Download the report at

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/portal/site/Internet/menuitem.eace3f09a603f6d9c3172a8a08c08a0c/?vgnnextoid=f00bd532931c7110VgnVCM1000003507640aRCRD>

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## **NATIONAL NEWS**

### **'Lost in translation' means same in any language**

*Editorial, The Age, March 25, 2008*

Learning another language is essential if Australia is to relate socially, politically and economically to the rest of the world.

It is well known that one of the 178 million people around the world who speak Mandarin Chinese as a second language is Australia's Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd.

At the APEC summit in Sydney last September, Mr Rudd, then opposition leader, welcomed Chinese President Hu Jintao not in the lingua franca of 21 million Australians but in the vernacular of the 873 million native speakers of the world's most widely spoken language.

Despite objections by then foreign minister Alexander Downer, who called Mr Rudd a show-off and said he had learnt French in a fraction of the time it took Mr Rudd to learn Mandarin, the address impressed not only its recipient but all those who watched it on Chinese television.

Mr Rudd, a former diplomat, might have acquired a second language for professional reasons, but he is also shrewd and intelligent enough to appreciate the advantages of doing so, especially given Australia's place in the Asia-Pacific region and the need to communicate in an ever-changing, more prosperous age.

Indeed, six months before last year's federal election, Mr Rudd, lamenting the decline of the teaching of foreign languages in schools, announced a \$68 million plan to revive Asian languages.

His plan, over four years, would involve additional classes, teacher training and support, and a specialist curriculum for above-average students.

Things are moving closer to realisation.

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/editorial/lost-in-translation-means-same-in-any-language/2008/03/24/1206207006745.html>

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## **New focus on language education: Gillard**

*AAP (The Age) 24 March 2008*

The federal government wants to push more secondary students to learn a foreign language.

Federal government research to be released on Tuesday has found students avoid language subjects fearing their university entrance scores will be affected, or because parents and career teachers say foreign languages are not relevant to their futures, Fairfax newspapers reported on Monday.

Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Julia Gillard told Fairfax she was worried a lack of language education would make young Australians less competitive internationally.

She said she has told the new National Curriculum Board to work on ways to standardise language education across Australia.

The board is already developing a nationally consistent curriculum in four key areas - English, maths, science and history.

"We want young Australians to be coming out of school with the tools that they need to work in that modern environment, and increasingly that environment will require them to be able to converse with people in our region in their own language," Ms Gillard said.

Read more <http://news.theage.com.au/new-focus-on-language-education-gillard/20080324-215g.html>

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## **TALES FROM HERE & THERE**

### **Europe: European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008**

Europe is becoming more culturally diverse. The enlargement of the European Union, deregulation of employment laws and globalisation have increased the multicultural character of many countries, adding to the number of languages, religions, ethnic and cultural backgrounds found on the continent. As a result, intercultural dialogue has an increasingly important role to play in fostering European identity and citizenship.

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID) 2008 recognises that Europe's great cultural diversity represents a unique advantage. It will encourage all those living in Europe to explore the benefits of our rich cultural heritage and opportunities to learn from different cultural traditions.

The Year will feature a small number of flagship projects on a European level, as well as EU support for a national project in each Member State, and a Partner programme aimed at mobilising civil society. The active involvement of civil society will be essential in highlighting good practices and identifying needs in intercultural dialogue. Well-known ambassadors have also been appointed to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of intercultural dialogue

Read more at [http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/home.0.html?no\\_cache=1&L=&redirect\\_url=my-startpage-eyid.html](http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/home.0.html?no_cache=1&L=&redirect_url=my-startpage-eyid.html)

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## **Europe: The Brussels Debates: Shaping Future EU Strategies for Intercultural Dialogue**

In the framework of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, the European Commission, in partnership with civil society stakeholders, will be hosting a series of seven thematic "Brussels Debates" throughout 2008.

The European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Ján Figel', said: "Europe faces many significant challenges that have their roots in intercultural relations. We must meet these challenges head-on, and bring out the best in our continent's cultural and religious heritage. But we will only do this if we break down the barriers of ignorance through dialogue. With the Brussels Debates we will be able to make a useful contribution to the future vision of intercultural dialogue in Europe. "

The first debate, "The Impact of Migration on Intercultural Dialogue", took place on 5 March

The subsequent Debates will shift the spotlight towards other topics, such as —

- Negotiating Difference (2 April 2008)
- Inter-religious Dialogue (14 May 2008)
- Intercultural Workplace (4 June 2008)
- Multi-lingualism (10 September 2008)
- Multi-cultural Education (1 October 2008)
- Multi-culturalism and the Media (5 November)

Read more at <http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/408.0.html>

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## **Canada: Lord's price tag for a more robust bilingualism: \$1-billion**

*Daniel LeBlanc, The Globe and Mail, March 21, 2008*

Ottawa needs to pump \$1-billion into education, immigration and cultural programs to fuel the growth of French outside Quebec and of English in la belle province, federal adviser Bernard Lord said in a report yesterday.

The former Conservative premier of New Brunswick said his recent consultations across Canada highlighted a clear reality: The future of bilingualism rests on better education programs and more focused immigration.

In his role as adviser on "linguistic duality and official languages," Mr. Lord said Ottawa needs to send more French-speaking newcomers outside Quebec to counter negative demographic trends.

"When immigrants arrive in Canada, they have to be able to make choices with a clear understanding of the available options.

There are francophone immigrants who move to some provinces who are not aware of the existence of French schools," Mr. Lord said.

Read entire article:

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/LAC.20080321.LANGUAGE21/TPStory/National>

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## **USA: Bilingual Teachers Wanted**

*The Boston Globe (MA) March 18, 2008*

Boston Public Schools are beginning to recruit Spanish-speaking teachers from Puerto Rico who are certified to teach English as a second language.

Boston recruiter are also looking for other teachers certified in math, science, or special education to address a national shortage of qualified teachers in those subjects areas.

Over the past 40 years, the number of students from Spanish-speaking family background has increased by 36 percent, to more than one-third of students.

Over the next five years, Boston Public Schools hope to hire more than 40 new bi-lingual teachers for Spanish-speaking students.

Read more at

[http://www.boston.com/news/education/k\\_12/articles/2008/03/18/bilingual\\_teachers\\_wanted/](http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2008/03/18/bilingual_teachers_wanted/)

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## **UK: Report on Community Languages shows French Is No Longer Enough**

*The Guardian (UK) March 18, 2008*

Despite the recent increase in multilingualism in Britain, language education in the country tends more toward the teaching of French and Latin than to the teaching of languages commonly spoken in the community.

The four most commonly used languages in England after English are Urdu, Cantonese, Punjabi and Bengali, yet schools and universities continue to focus on European languages. Although degree courses are available in French and Spanish, there are no courses available for the four most commonly spoken languages, according to a new study.

"We need a diversity of language speakers if we are to deal with the diplomatic, economic, technological and cultural situations that occur across the world," said Joanna McPake, a co-author of the study. "A blanket application of French as a second language is no longer helpful."

Khadija Ahmed is a ninth grader taking Urdu classes at her school in East London. She sees the utility of the language for her community. "Urdu is treated equally here - all my friends want to join the class. You can do stuff with Urdu - put it on your record, go into business or translating - everyone should have a go."

A new report published by Ofsted, "Every language Matters" found that in 2007 just 35 individuals were training to teach Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Mandarin, Punjabi, Turkish and Urdu, and that no courses existed for training to teach Gujarati.

The report has turned the spotlight on the position of community languages in our education system. At its heart lies a question of status. Spanish, French and Latin are considered to be prestigious qualifications but community languages are often dismissed as irrelevant or second rate.

Read more at <http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,2266120,00.html?gusrc=rss&feed=8>

Download the Ofsted report at

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/portal/site/Internet/menuitem.eace3f09a603f6d9c3172a8a08c08a0c/?vgnnextoid=dc4398cadf128110VgnVCM1000003507640aRCRD>

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## **USA: Bilingual Education**

*The Olympian (Washington) March 17, 2008*

Evergreen Elementary School in the Sheldon School District is one of the few schools within the state that offers a bilingual program in Spanish and in English.

According to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, more than half of the school's students are Latino.

Special bilingual features from this program include the following characteristics: English-speaking teachers are required to pair up with Spanish-speaking teachers, translators and headsets are used at PTA meetings, and all students work together to help each other learn two languages.

Principal Steve Warner stated "At some point every day, every (Evergreen) student is a second-language learner."

Cassi Styke, a fifth-grader who speaks English at home, said, "You get to learn a second language and experience a lot more than if you went to another school."

Read more at <http://www.theolympian.com/120/story/390456.html>

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## **CONFERENCES AND EVENTS**

### **Reaching for Words: Language Education and Socio-Economic (Im)mobility**

*25-26 April 2008, University of Texas, Austin, USA*

The Texas Foreign Language Education Conference (TexFlec) was first held in 2000 at the University of Texas at Austin.

It is an annual conference that brings together researchers and educators in the fields of foreign language education, TEFL/TESL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language or Second Language), linguistics, and applied linguistics.

This year's keynote speakers are Dr Suresh Canagarajah from Pennsylvania State University and Dr Judith Liskin-Gasparro from the University of Iowa.

Read more at <http://studentorgs.utexas.edu/flesa/texflec/tex2008/>

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### **Language Education in Transition**

*5-6 July 2008, Kinki University, Higashi Osaka, Japan*

The Japan Association for Language Teaching, College and University Educators Special Interest Group (JALT CUE SIG) will hold the CUE 2008 Conference at Kinki University in Higashi Osaka with the theme "Language Education in Transition."

CUE consists of approximately 400 members throughout Japan. Our goal is to provide a forum for the presentation and discussion of educational activities, ideas and research of broad interest to College and University Educators. If you are involved in tertiary education and are committed to professional development, you are CUE, too!

Universities in Japan are facing several challenging issues such as the declining number of students and students' decreasing academic abilities, changing student and societal needs, and the increasing importance of information technology. What choices will language educators have to make in the era of transition?

Read more at <http://jaltcue-sig.org/>

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## Media in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

*4-7 December 2008, Singapore*

The 3rd CLS International Conference - CLaSIC 2008

Media have always played a substantial role in the history of education, including of course the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

With the rapid advances achieved in technology in the last few decades, the range of media available to educationists and teachers as well as their significance for teaching and learning have seen phenomenal growth.

CLaSIC 2008 has thus chosen to focus on the use of media in foreign language education. "Media" is defined in the context of the conference in a broad sense and encompasses not just the hardware (such as the blackboard, CD player, computer or even mobile devices) and the software (such as a film, newspapers, an interactive computer programme or the Internet), but also the symbol system or code, through which the message, here the learning content, is represented.

CLaSIC 2008 aims to provide a platform for the critical consideration of the role of media – be it traditional or electronic media, news or entertainment media – in foreign language education and its feeder disciplines, including especially second language acquisition and linguistics.

It hopes to engage participants in an insightful and rewarding discussion of the use and potential of media in providing effective and motivating learning opportunities both within and beyond the confines of the language classroom.

Read more at <http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/cls/clasic2008/>

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## REMINDERS

2-5 April - 42nd Annual TESOL Convention & Exhibit - New York, USA - [http://www.tesol.org/s\\_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=1518&DID=8281](http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=1518&DID=8281)

9 May - Celebrating the International Year of Languages - Melbourne - <http://www.mltav.asn.au/content/view/168/>

15-16 May - Open Road 2008 - Melbourne - <http://www.openroad.net.au/conferences/2008/>

22-23 May - Engaging with Languages Education in the 21st Century - Indooroopilly -

<http://www.aisg.qld.edu.au/CalendarBook.aspx?category=1&element=23&PKID=447>

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31 May-1 June - Central Association of Teachers of Japanese Annual Conference Madison, USA -  
<http://imp.lss.wisc.edu/catj2008>

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30 June-11 July - LingFest 08 - Sydney - <http://www.lingfest.arts.usyd.edu.au/>

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6-9 July - New Zealand Language Teachers Biennial Conference - Wellington, New Zealand -  
<http://www.nzalt.org.nz/conference>

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9-12 July - Australian Council of TESOL Associations International Conference - Alice Springs -  
<http://www.tesol.org.au/conference>

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7-9 August - Modern Language Teachers Assoc of Tasmania State Conference - Hobart -  
<mailto:suzette.holmes@education.tas.gov.au>

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3-5 October - Japan Studies Association of Canada 2008 Annual Conference - Waterloo, Canada -  
<http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/asian/jsaa/JSAC.pdf>

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16-18 October - Immersion Education: Pathways to Bilingualism & Beyond - St Paul, USA -  
<http://www.carla.umn.edu/conferences/immersion2008/call.html>

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25-27 September - XIIth Foundation for Endangered Languages Conference 2008 - Leeuwarden,  
Netherlands - <http://www.ogmios.org/home.htm>

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8-9 November - International Symposium on Japanese Studies and Japanese Language - Hong Kong -  
<http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/asian/jsaa/hk-j.pdf>

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