

# LANGUAGES EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

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Read this on the web at <http://www.languageseducation.com/news1080918.pdf>

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## ENGAGEMENT WITH ASIA

### National Forum on Asian Languages and Studies in Schools - 19 September 2008

By the time you are reading this article, the National Forum on Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) will be convening in Melbourne to consider issues relating to the design and implementation of the program to intensify the study of our Asian neighbours, with a particular focus on the languages and cultures of Indonesia, Korea, Japan and China - with an investment of some \$62 million over the next three years.

Following a stirring address by Professor Robin Jeffrey on "Asian Skills for the Asian Century" participants from all over the country will be brainstorming and exploring three designated key result areas for implementation planning:

- Flexible delivery and pathways
- Increasing teacher supply and support
- Stimulating student demand

The strategic directions and issues identified in the course of this Forum will be a further input to the COAG Productivity Group, chaired by Hon Julia Gillard MP, which has responsibility for coordinating this aspect of the education revolution.

So it may be some time before we can provide you with further information. Meanwhile, in keeping with this important event, we bring you some leading articles with a focus upon the need for a better informed engagement with our neighbours in this part of the world.

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## Educating for the Asian Century

*EdPod, ABC Radio National podcast, 11 September 2008*

Host: Richard Aedy

Panel: Professor Robin Jeffery (Director of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at ANU), Kathy Kiting (Principal of Campbell Primary School in the ACT), Andrew Blair (President of the

Australian Secondary Principals Association), Malcolm Norris (Head of Exploration and New Business for Intrepid Mines)

The five-year-olds starting school this year will be at the peak of their working lives in 2040, when China and India are predicted to become the world's major economies.

So should their education reflect this reality?

In this forum, recorded at the recent Asia Education Forum in Adelaide, Richard Aedy discusses what new skills and knowledge Australian children will need to succeed.

Also, how well prepared are our schools for teaching students the cultural literacy that could help them engage with our region?

Download the mp3 audio file at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/edpod/stories/2008/2359111.htm>

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## **Asia literacy: making a good policy better**

Kent Anderson, East Asia Forum, 27 August 2008

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has made 'Asia Literacy' a key goal for his government. I am one of the strongest supporters of this agenda. Nevertheless, let me identify two significant issues that hamper our current approach.

First, Asia Literacy is a term that has to be interpreted broadly. It is commonly given too restricted a meaning. Doubtless the prime minister sees Asia literacy in its broadest meaning but it is important that language alone, however critical, will not make us an Asia literate nation.

On the language front, Asia Literacy in practice is represented by the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP), essentially a cheaper version of the Rudd-designed National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Program, or NALSAS, that ran from 1994-2002. NALSSP will put \$62.4 million over three years into developing secondary teaching of Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, and Korean.

Targeting these four languages as priorities is a pretty good bet. China is our largest trading partner; Japan is our largest export market; Indonesia is our closest neighbour; and if you were going to pick one country on which to take a punt Korea as our fourth largest trading partner provides pretty good odds.

Focus on these four languages, however, may yield short term gains but leave us exposed in the long term.

Read more at <http://eastasiaforum.org/2008/08/27/asia-literacy-making-a-good-policy-better/>

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## **Australia's Asia literacy and an Asia Pacific Community**

*Charles Prestidge-King, East Asia Forum, 27 August 2008*

Kevin Rudd's focus on China began as an undergraduate and hasn't waned.

This is worth keeping in mind as context to his comments on Australia's approach to Asia, on his recent trip to Singapore.

Rudd considers the 'rise of China' as the greatest event and policy challenge for the coming century, and restated his commitment to make Australia 'the most Asia-literate country in the West', stressing the importance of what he called 'functional expertise', as well as linguistic and cultural understanding of our region. He also reiterated his idea that good policy is underpinned by good scholarship.

Rudd's comments in Singapore, echoed sentiments expressed at the Crawford School's China Update. In Singapore, Rudd signed a security pact with his counterpart, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, and he talked about his idea of an Asia Pacific Community. Singaporean think tanks had earlier greeted that with a fair degree of skepticism.

The plan for an Asia Pacific Community (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for analysis on the Asia Pacific Community) is another level up from the \$62 million Labor pledged for Asian language teaching in Australia.

Rudd's immediate plan on the latter front would see Australians equipped with the necessary language skills to take effective advantage of opportunities throughout Asia. His goal, in the longer-term, is to fashion an Australia that's regarded as the 'go-to place' when it comes to knowledge of the wider region.

Read more at <http://eastasiaforum.org/2008/08/25/australia%E2%80%99s-asia-literacy-and-an-asia-pacific-community/>

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## **Is Australia Asia smart?**

***Kathe Kirby, 18 August 2008***

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced a commitment to making Australia the most Asia literate nation in the western world last week. It's not a moment too soon.

The fact that Asian languages are currently on the decline in our schools and no state curriculum in Australia explicitly requires the study of Asia has left us in dire shape for the emerging Asian century.

Only 5.8 per cent of Year 12 students currently study an Asian language and close to 80 per cent of students studying Mandarin come from Chinese backgrounds.

A 2006 study found the majority of children surveyed in one Australian state believed all Muslims were terrorists, with most saying they had learned little or nothing about Islam in school.

We live in a complex region yet currently only half of Australian schools teach anything about Asia.

The Rudd Government has committed to reinvigorating a national Asian languages and studies program in schools. With a focus on Mandarin, Japanese, Korean and Indonesian languages and cultures this is a real boost to our Asia literacy.

But it's going to take much more than \$62 million to get there for every young Australian.

The Asia Education Foundation at the University of Melbourne has produced an impressive range of curriculum materials and teacher education programs to help achieve Asia literacy.

However, the majority of our teachers did not learn about Asian history or culture in their own education and there is no overarching plan to comprehensively address this shortfall with future teacher training. There's a shortage of Asian language teachers and we need native speaker teacher assistants.

Importantly we are in a moment in time to make a difference.

Read more at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/08/18/2338257.htm>

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## **An Open Letter from the Asia Education Foundation**

**Dear Professor Dawkins**

***Re: Australian National Goals for Schooling***

I write on behalf of the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) in response to your call for consultation on the draft National Goals for Schooling in Australia.

School education stakeholders recognize that the world has changed significantly since 1999 when we last set national goals for schooling.

I draw your attention to the recent Call to Action: Asia literacy for every young Australian, an initiative of the AEF Advisory Board and endorsed by twenty-four peak education bodies.

This alliance specifically calls for "the National Goals for Schooling to state the necessity to equip every young Australian with Asia skills and knowledge."

The key defining global development over this past decade has been the emergence of Asia as the economic powerhouse of the twenty-first century, signaling significant shifts in Australia's strategic and trade alliances.

The National Goals for Schooling must recognize this reality if Australia is to equip its young people to thrive and prosper in our world today.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has said that the core challenge for Australia is how we best prepare ourselves for the Asian Century - to maximize the opportunities, minimize the threats and make our own active contribution to making the Asian Century peaceful, prosperous and sustainable for us all.

In fact the PM has stated that he "wants Australia to become the most Asia-literate country in the western world." If this is to occur it is essential that our National Goals for Schooling include in their aspiration and intentions that for young Australians to comprehend their world and be active and informed citizens in local, national, regional and global contexts, they need to develop a sound understanding of Asian countries, cultures and languages.

A goal such as the following would be appropriate:

"That, when they leave school, students will have, within a significant international orientation, particular knowledge, understanding and appreciation of our Asian region and its engagement with Australia, as well as inter-cultural and language skills to engage successfully with Asian peoples and enterprises.

Read more at <http://www.languageseducation.com/opinion.htm>

Read the "Call to Action: Asian Literacy for Every Young Australian" at [http://www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/13930/Call\\_to\\_Action\\_July08.pdf](http://www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/13930/Call_to_Action_July08.pdf)

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## **Proposed teacher professional development resources on Islam**

The National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies at The University of Melbourne in association with the Myer Foundation is considering a professional development program for primary and secondary

school teachers. The program is aimed at enhancing awareness and knowledge of Islam and Muslims. The proposed program would cover Islamic history & civilisation, principles and values, as well as the socio-economic experience of Muslims in Australia. The program will be designed and delivered in collaboration with the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) to ensure the material is relevant and useful for teachers. We wish to ensure that the program can be used by teachers in their classrooms, and will include in the program teaching strategies in relation to Muslim traditions and practices.

The proposed program is conceived in response to recent research which suggests that teachers can be at a loss when dealing with Islam. This feeling may be shared by students, making it very difficult to deal with bias and misrepresentation. A recent study by the Australian Catholic University discovered that half of the Victorian school children surveyed viewed Muslims as terrorists, and two out of five believed that Muslims were 'unclean'.

The proposed program would help teachers, especially those with a large number of Muslim pupils, to separate fact from fiction and relate to their Muslim students on common ground. For this project to move forward, however, we are seeking your support.

We hope you share our belief that the proposed program will be of intellectual and pedagogical value to our teachers, and, so that we can ascertain the level of demand for such a project, we would appreciate your supporting statement to that effect. You will find below a sample response which we hope would be of some help:

"I/We support and welcome the proposal for an Islamic education program for teachers. Introducing teachers to Islamic civilisation and history, as well as the experience of Muslims in Australia and Australian schools would have clear benefits to our teachers and students."

Responses need to be either on official letter-head, or emailed with full details of your association/school.

We look forward to hearing from you

A/Prof Shahram Akbarzadeh (NCEIS) & Ms Katherine Schoo (ACSA)

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## **INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

### **UN Secretary-General Urges Protection and Promotion of Endangered Indigenous Languages**

*Following is the text of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message for the International Day of the World's Indigenous People, observed on 9 August:*

In 1994, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 9 August the International Day of the World's Indigenous People. There were many reasons for this decision, but the fundamental motivation was the Assembly's recognition of the need to place the United Nations clearly and strongly behind the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, in order to put an end to their marginalization, their extreme poverty, the expropriation of their traditional lands and the other grave human rights abuses they have faced and continue to encounter. Indeed, the suffering of indigenous peoples includes some of the darkest episodes in human history.

Important as it was, proclamation of the Day was only a prelude to a greater milestone: last fall's adoption by the General Assembly of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration is a visionary step towards addressing the human rights of indigenous peoples. It sets out a framework on which States can build or rebuild their relationships with indigenous peoples. The result of more than two decades of negotiations, it provides a momentous opportunity for States and indigenous peoples to strengthen their relationships, promote reconciliation and ensure that the past is not repeated. I encourage Member States and indigenous peoples to come together in a spirit of mutual respect and make use of the Declaration as the living document it is, so that it has a real and positive effect throughout the world.

As 2008 is the International Year of Languages, this International Day is also an opportunity to recognize the silent crisis confronting many of the world's languages, the overwhelming majority of which are indigenous peoples' languages. The loss of these languages would not only weaken the world's cultural diversity, but also our collective knowledge as a human race. I call on States, indigenous peoples, the United Nations system and all relevant actors to take immediate steps to protect and promote endangered languages and to ensure the safe passage of this shared heritage to future generations.

Source: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/sgsm11715.doc.htm>

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## FROM HERE & THERE

### Bittersweet success

**Vietnamese v French: did our teacher's challenge to his pupil inspire them both to master a language?**

*Rick Jones, The Guardian, August 26 2008*

Among the teenage scholars at Deptford Green school nervously turning up for their GCSE results last Thursday was this 52-year-old French teacher who had taken an exam in Vietnamese to demonstrate to a disbelieving class that, with a little effort, it is possible to learn a language in three months.

I had arrived at the school in January as a supply, taking over a number of classes including the bottom GCSE set.

Tommy, a Vietnamese boy in that class, was destined for an F and struggling. It did not help that he preferred to spend the lesson chatting. I told him it wasn't too late. I insisted he could still pass French even at this stage.

Tommy scoffed. You learn Vietnamese in three months, he said, and I'll learn French.

It was the end of February. Vietnamese has a western alphabet, verbs that don't conjugate and no plurals. I accepted the challenge (Parlez-vous Vietnamese?).

I bought books and tapes and started attending the Saturday morning Vietnamese community school. A language-learning company called Rosetta Stone heard about the attempt and sent software, no obligation.

The linguistic difficulty is the six tones indicated by French-style accents, but I overcame this to an extent by turning phrases into tunes. The question "What nationality are you?", for instance, sounds like the opening of The Star-Spangled Banner, strangely.

Read more at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/aug/26/schools.languages?gusrc=rss&feed=education>

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## **Our language skills are a national embarrassment**

*The Observer, August 3 2008*

If you ask schoolchildren why they prefer not to study a foreign language, they will generally answer that the subject is too difficult or pointless, perhaps adding the perennial juvenile complaint that it is 'boring'.

Astonishingly, the entire education system in England and Wales agrees.

In 2002, secondary schools were relieved of the obligation to make students take at least one foreign language at GCSE.

As a direct consequence, as a report in The Observer today shows, language learning is in crisis.

The numbers of children sitting French and German GCSE are in freefall.

That means fewer A-level candidates, fewer students taking language degrees and so fewer competent language teachers.

Such declines are hard to reverse.

Read more at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/aug/03/languages.schools?gusrc=rss&feed=education>

(Hint: browse the 40+ comments following the article for some bonus personal insights into languages education in the UK)

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## **Speaking is 'languages weakness'**

*BBC News, 1 July 2008*

Speaking skills remain a weakness among children learning modern languages in secondary schools in England, says a report from inspectors.

But this is against a background of wider improvements in learning languages, Ofsted reports.

This mixed picture shows GCSE results have improved more than other subjects.

But the report, evaluating language teaching, also notes that the number of students taking French and German exams has been in decline.

The Ofsted report, The changing landscape of languages, an evaluation of language learning 2004 - 2007, examines how languages are being taught and the progress towards providing language lessons in primary schools.

Read more at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/7483034.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/7483034.stm)

## RESOURCES

### Lingo

The Languages Action Alliance is a coalition of like-minded individuals who not only believe in the importance of establishing bilingualism as an Australian way of life but actively seek ways to make that a reality, both individually in their various day-to-day working lives but also working together on projects such as the Lingo website.

Lingo is set up as a blog: an online diary, or weblog, pointing out events, resources, opinions, experiences and research related to languages education for children in Australia, including in early childhood and pre-school years.

The focus is on "providing positive reinforcement to the belief that Australian children can and should grow up knowing at least two languages, and providing practical support to parents, other family members, carers, teachers, principals and other professionals seeking ways to put that belief into action".

Lingo is currently running an Online Survey "for parents / guardians / care givers of children and/or parents-to-be to identify their attitudes, experiences and needs relevant to the support of language learning".

Please use your school and personal networks to encourage maximum participation in the survey.

Read more at <http://www.lingo.org.au/>

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### Leaflet "It is important to keep your first language" now available in more languages

ACSSO and APC jointly launched the original English language version of their leaflet "It is important to keep your first language" - about the benefits of maintaining your home or original family language and raising your children bilingually - on International Mother Language Day in February 2007.

On International Mother Language Day 2008 (the launch date for the UN's International Year of Languages 2008) we made this leaflet available in a further five community languages.

Continuing this process as a national contribution to the International Year of Languages 2008, we can now advise you that the leaflet is currently available in a total of fourteen languages:

- Arabic
- English
- French
- German
- Greek
- Hindi
- Indonesian
- Italian
- Japanese
- Korean
- Mandarin
- Punjabi
- Spanish
- Vietnamese

Information on this and other ACSSO-APC resources is currently being posted out to schools progressively state by state, together with an Order Form.

You can also order supplies of these free leaflets for distribution to families in your school community by emailing us at <mailto:info@languageseducation.com> and indicating the numbers you require in which languages - and indicate a suitable mailing address so we can send them to you.

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## CONFERENCES & EVENTS

European and Australian Perspectives on Language Policy

Towards greater linguistic uniformity or diversity?

International Workshop

2 October 2008, University of Melbourne, 1.30 pm-5.00 pm

2008 is the International Year of Languages designed to celebrate and encourage linguistic diversity around the world.

Recent trends in Europe and Australia send conflicting messages about the value of such diversity.

In this workshop national and international speakers come together to discuss current language policy issues in Europe and Australia.

Presenters include Prof. Sally Boyd, Professor of General Linguistics and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Göteborg University, Sweden Arts Centre Building, The University of Melbourne, Room 509

For catering purposes: Please RSVP to Catrin Norrby <mailto:catrinn@unimelb.edu.au> by Monday 29 September

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EXPOLINGUA Praha 2008

18th International Fair for Languages, Education and Cultures

7-8 November 2008, Prague, Czech Republic

101 exhibitors from 18 countries from all around the globe took part in the international fair, EXPOLINGUA Praha 2007.

The two-day event was attended by 5,487 visitors an increase compared with last year's fair.

Visitors showed a particularly strong interest in language courses, studying abroad and scholarships for studying overseas.

This year, more than 60 seminars, workshops and mini language courses will be held over the two days of the fair.

National and international speakers will focus on new aspects of language learning and showcase the latest innovations and technologies.

Read more at <http://www.expolingua.cz/>

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## REMINDERS

1-2 October - Modern Language Teachers Association of Queensland Biennial Conference - Gold Coast - <http://www.mltaq.asn.au/conference2008.htm>

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

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

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

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>

20-23 November - American Council for Teaching Foreign Languages Annual Convention and World Languages Expo - Orlando, USA - <http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=4730>

4-7 December - Media in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning, Singapore - <http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/cls/clasic2008/>

7-11 December - World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education - Melbourne - <http://www.wipce2008.com/>

## ACSSO EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

Subscription is available free to ACSSO's current range of email newsletters:

- **Australian Education Digest** : <http://www.acsso.org.au/aed.htm> (weekly)
- **International News Roundup** : <http://www.acsso.org.au/roundup.htm> (monthly)
- **Values Education** : <http://www.valuesineducation.org.au/news.htm> (monthly)
- **Languages Education** : <http://www.languageseducation.com/news.htm> (monthly)
- **Ensemble - Music Education** : <http://www.ensemble.org.au/news.htm> (monthly)
- **Public Education Voice** : <http://www.acsso.org.au/pev.htm> (quarterly)
- **Family School Partners** : [http://www.familyschool.org.au/?page\\_id=6](http://www.familyschool.org.au/?page_id=6) (quarterly)

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