

LANGUAGES EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

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CHINESE LANGUAGES EDUCATION

Letter to the Editor

Dr Jane Orton, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne

I would like to address the letter to the Editor in the 13 November, 2008 issue of ACSSO Languages Education in Australia (Vol. 2, No. 15 [<http://www.languageseducation.com/news1081113.pdf>]) by Dr Lijian Hong of Monash University, headed in reference to Demand for Asia Study Overhaul, an article in The Sunday Age (12-10-08) outlining a summary of findings from a report I have recently completed, Chinese Language Education in Australian Schools.

"When I read Jane's interview in the Age, I found it very confusing. What is this notion of 'Chinese teaching Chinese?'" Dr Hong asks, and then goes on to make a number of critical comments.

It would appear Dr Hong has not read my report, although it is available on a number of websites including the Chinese Language Teachers Association of Victoria's webpage on the MLTAV website. This is a pity, as referring to the primary source would have provided some answers to the questions she raises and allayed some of her fears. What she has read, it seems, is just the article, for which the journalist drew on the report's Executive Summary (not supplied to him by me).

Dr Hong's first question asks how I can use the word "Chinese" students when there are several possible referents. In the report, the different kinds of Chinese learners in Australian schools are described and distinguished at length, making very clear the difference between classroom learners of the language, primary students who have spoken Chinese of some variety since birth, and students who arrive in Australia during their secondary schooling having grown up in a Chinese society and been educated in a Chinese medium school.

Dr Hong's method in the remainder of the article is to raise a number of questions in the negative. Thus she asks, "Is there anything wrong to offer Chinese Australian kids (heritage language learners) to learn Chinese as a community language?", and, "Don't we have the obligation to provide these [international] Chinese school kids a language maintenance program for them while they study in our country?" She does not refer to any evidence supporting these as problems, but the inference is that in the report I have said something to the contrary. This is not the case.

Read more at <http://www.languageseducation.com/orton081127.pdf>

Download Dr Orton's report at

http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/pdf/reports/chinese_language_education_in_australian_schools.pdf

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More Australian children should learn Chinese

Transcript, Radio Australia, Nov 11, 2008

The University of Melbourne has published a report on the teaching of standard Chinese or Mandarin in Australian schools.

The report found that at the end of last year, less than a fifth of all Australians working in China could speak Mandarin, and just one in ten had ever studied a China-related subject.

The report's authors say last year, only three per cent of Year 12 students in Australia were studying Chinese - and almost all of them were already native Mandarin speakers.

The Australian education sector says it is now looking at ways to increase the number of students in Australia who study Chinese. Presenter Christine Webster speaks with "Chinese Language Education in Australia" Report Author Dr Jane Orton:

JANE ORTON: Well from the beginning we'd say, of course, that learning a language in school is good educationally but the question then becomes which language we learn or which language we present, and this has been always according to historical ties or local community groups, regional proximity, trade and social interaction, and the premise of the report is that, on these grounds, China has become more important than, really, than any other country and that this is a new situation, and then, as a result of that, we need a good pool of competent users of Chinese and a smaller pool of highly competent users of the language, who have strong socio-cultural understanding. And the fact is that we don't have anything like that. That's where it began and, in fact, it shows that the Chinese is the smallest of any of the languages taught in our schools nationally by a long, long way.

CHRISTINE WEBSTER: Your report suggests hardly any European Australians are choosing to study Chinese.

JANE ORTON: Oh, no, to continue. Quite a lot of them begin. We've got something like 84,000 Australians in total studying Chinese around the country, but that drops to 4,500 by Year 12 and of that group only about 400 are not Chinese.

CHRISTINE WEBSTER: Why are they deciding to not continue with their studies after a certain time?

JANE ORTON: Three reasons. One - and it's the primary reason that kids continue with things at school - and the fact is that they find that they can't do well. The non-background Chinese are absolutely overwhelmed by the number of competent background-speakers and immigrants, first-language speakers, from Chinese societies, and so, you know, they don't enjoy it and then, also, of course, it's very bad for Year 12 scores and so they drop out usually at the end of Year 9, even at the end of Year 10. The second reason is that learning Chinese is much more challenging for an English speaker. The American Foreign Service Institute estimates it takes about 3.5 times longer to become proficient than say for us to become proficient in Spanish or Italian or German, and so it is quite a slog. And, at the same time, it's not been terribly well researched and so to date it's still not been terribly well taught.

CHRISTINE WEBSTER: And I believe there are quite a lot of people going to work in China but they really don't have the language skills. What kind of problems is this causing?

JANE ORTON: Well, to date, it hasn't mattered quite so much because they've been able to draw on Chinese to do their interpreting and their research for them, but of course that has meant that they're very dependent on not just on Chinese but they're usually very young Chinese, they're usually 30 years old or something like that, who are bright but who may not have the same experience as a 45-year-old who's got to make big decisions about lots of money. And, so, it means that they can't really run their own businesses. Now, to date, very often they haven't had to do much of that because they're mostly working in the export end of things with international clients or working for each other, so they're doing the legal work for some other company - European or foreign company - but the difference is that now they're going to start to need to get involved in the Chinese domestic economy, and that means that they really are going to need not just language but good language and a very good understanding of the social reality.

Read more - or listen online - at

<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/programguide/stories/200811/s2416184.htm>

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Melbourne set to host Chinese teacher training centre

Hon Bronwyn Pike MP, 23 September 2008

Melbourne is a step closer to securing one of three new Chinese Teacher Training Centres worldwide, with the signing of a landmark agreement between the Brumby Government and the Chinese Government.

Education Minister Bronwyn Pike said, if given the go-ahead, the proposed centre for teachers of the Chinese language would act as a think-tank for experts from China and Australia to explore how best to teach Chinese language and culture.

Ms Pike said the centre would also significantly boost the number of Victorian students studying this important language.

"In Victoria we are extremely proud of our multicultural status and the rich cultural experience this state offers," Ms Pike said.

"This proposed centre will be a boost for students and teacher who will have access to a cutting-edge facility to enhance the teaching of Chinese language and culture for years to come."

The study of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) is already an intrinsic part of the Victorian school curriculum, with 22 languages taught in government primary schools in 2007, 19 in secondary colleges and 43 through the Victorian School of Languages (VSL).

There are also 13 Victorian government schools that run bilingual programs, three of which are Japanese bilingual programs.

"We provide around \$60 million annually for language education in government schools with Chinese the most studied language by government secondary school students at the VSL," Ms Pike said.

Read more at <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/minister-for-education/melbourne-set-to-host-chinese-teacher-training-centre.html>

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Chinese is fastest growing language taught in U.S. schools

Ron Matus, St. Petersburg Times, Florida, USA, 15 October 2008

The short teacher with the bamboo-print blouse hands her students a mini-football, basketball and soccer ball, and tells them to practice their words. "Don't drop the ball," she jokes.

As the students pass the balls up and down the rows, they count.

San shi si.

San shi wu.

San shi liu.

Thirty-four. Thirty-five. Thirty-six.

"Very good," Jingsi Cheng tells them, first in English and then in Mandarin Chinese.

With every exotic new word they learn, the 23 seventh- and eighth-graders in Cheng's first-period Chinese class make the planet a smaller place.

They also offer some observers proof that an American education system often panned as detached from a fast-changing world can become more responsive.

"It's just a great way to teach students in the 21st century," said principal Dallas Jackson of Thurgood Marshall Fundamental Middle School in St. Petersburg. "I want to provide the best, current education we can possibly offer here."

Cheng's two classes at Thurgood Marshall, offered for the first time this year, are among hundreds cropping up around the country, fueled by awareness of China's growing economic muscle, the demands of parents and the prodding of educators who want schools to offer something fresh and maybe, just maybe, a little more relevant.

When education guru Willard Daggett gives speeches, he often cracks this joke: Why are 1.4-million American kids learning French when India and China are reshaping the world? The punch line: Because we have so many French teachers.

Read more at <http://www.scrippsnews.com/node/37158>

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INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Indigenous Languages Petition

TO THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER, MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

This petition of citizens from Australia and overseas - both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous - draws to the attention of the House that we are alarmed at the rate of unchecked language loss in Australia.

Over 250 vigorous and vibrant languages on record at the time of European arrival in Australia have been reduced to just 17 which are being transmitted naturally to younger members of their communities.

Some other languages are still spoken fluently but the vast majority are in varying states of decline and disrepair.

There are also vigorous efforts across the country to maintain and revive languages, in some cases to re-introduce them after many decades of non-use.

In the debate and activity addressing indigenous disadvantage indigenous languages have been overlooked.

Language should be seen as a pathway to education, to healthier and wealthier communities, not as a separate subordinate issue.

Read more at

http://www.fatsil.org.au/component/option,com_joomlapetition/Itemid,./catid,1/func,viewcategory/

Call for a national Indigenous languages policy

Patrick McConvell, research fellow in Linguistics, ANU, ABC Radio Lingua Franca, 8 November 2008

The debate about the future of Australia's Indigenous languages is reaching a crucial stage.

On the one hand there are calls for a coherent national Indigenous languages policy from many local and regional Indigenous organisations.

On the other we are seeing the government of the Northern Territory, where many of the strongest languages are spoken, bending to pressure to remove what is perhaps their last vital support, their use in some schools.

'Two way' or bilingual programs, which teach in Indigenous languages as well as teaching English, have been the subject of much contention and changes of policy over the years, with a new wave of attacks launched earlier this year by Helen Hughes of the Centre for Independent Studies.

But, though so vigorously criticised from some quarters, the introduction of bilingual education programs in the 1970s, in Northern Territory schools, was arguably the most important step forward in Australian Indigenous language policy since, for the first time, it was recognised that children initially learn better in their home language.

The program also enabled Indigenous Australians to take over significant roles in education using both their western education and their own cultural traditions.

Then, in a national language policy report in the 1980s, came the recognition of the right of Indigenous Australians to maintain their languages, as well as the funding for Indigenous language centres.

These advances were followed by reversals in the 1990s, including the closing down of the bilingual education programs in the Northern Territory and in the Pitjantjatjara lands of South Australia.

A string of reports called then, again, for better organised support, including the National Indigenous Language Survey report of 2005, but such recommendations were largely ignored.

Though one bright spot was the development of Indigenous language policy and school programs in New South Wales. For the first time a state government was giving recognition to the languages of the first

peoples of the regions as well as requiring schools to make efforts to incorporate teaching about these languages in their curriculum in a structured way.

Read more - or listen online - at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/linguafranca/stories/2008/2410952.htm>

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Gillard supports NT bilingual indigenous education decision

Sydney Morning Herald, November 19, 2008

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard says she supports the decision by the Northern Territory government to effectively scrap bilingual indigenous education.

The Northern Territory government announced last month that the first four hours of every school day had to be taught in English.

This leaves an hour and a half at the end of the day for indigenous language and culture.

The move prompted an immediate outcry from the Territory's nine remaining bilingual schools, who argue their children perform better at English than those in English-only classrooms.

Ms Gillard said on Wednesday that she backed the NT initiative.

"For indigenous Australia, English is the language of further learning and English is the language of work," she told reporters at the opening of a new 'E' learning centre at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education, south of Darwin.

"If we want indigenous kids who are growing up today right across the Northern Territory, right across the nation to have a chance ... to get a good job then people need to read and write English, they need to do that fluently and proficiently."

Ms Gillard said the federal government still supported indigenous language and culture.

"We want to ensure that indigenous Australians have the opportunity to learn their own language, their original language as well," she said.

Read more at <http://news.smh.com.au/national/gillard-supports-nt-education-decision-20081119-6bdf.html>

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Ignorant decisions exacerbate declining outcomes for Indigenous learners

Misty Adoniou, Australian Council of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Associations

We express profound dismay at the actions of the Northern Territory Minister for Education, Marion Scrymgour, to effectively end bilingual education in the Northern Territory.

Minister Scrymgour's directive that all Northern Territory students receive four hours of English instruction each day effectively closes the 10 remaining bilingual programs in the Northern Territory.

This marks the final blow in a systematic undermining of bilingual education in the Territory, where prior to 1998, 21 programs were in operation.

Recent national testing in literacy and numeracy in the Northern Territory showed below-average results which has prompted the Minister's directive.

However, the rationale for the decision lies in a misplaced 'common sense' notion that Indigenous children's learning outcomes will be improved if the Territory adopts a Bush-style English-only policy.

The emphasis on standardised testing in the adoption and implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States has been severely criticised (e.g., Kohn 2000).

The move to English-only classrooms will be as ineffective in Australia quite simply because it flies in the face of all current second language acquisition research which clearly demonstrates the multiple benefits of bilingualism for cognitive development and the maintenance of social and cultural identity.

Read more at <http://www.languageseducation.com/adoniou081127.pdf>

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NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE

LA Resolution

On 28 October 2008, the Los Angeles Board of Education officially adopted a Chinese, Spanish, and other World Languages Resolution.

This is a major feat for the second largest school district in the U.S.

The Resolution states, "all students, regardless of their home language, should be provided with the opportunity to study at least one language, in addition to English, beginning in elementary grades and continuing their study sequence for 6 to 8 years in order to achieve a high level of proficiency."

The Resolution goes on to include, involve and mandate the teaching of non-English world languages in Los Angeles schools.

Download the Resolution at <http://www.askasia.org/chinese/docs/LAresolution.pdf>

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South Australia announces languages education promotion grants for schools

Hon Jane Lomax-Smith MP, SA Minister for Education, 24 November 2008

Education Minister Jane Lomax-Smith has today announced recipients of grants to promote languages education in their communities.

Nineteen schools and preschools will receive funding in 2009 for programs that strengthen positive community attitudes and perceptions for languages education.

"South Australia has taken up the challenge to promote the importance of learning one of the many different languages offered in our schools very seriously," Dr Lomax-Smith says.

"Languages and cultural diversity are an important part of our schools and preschools, and a number of activities will take place this year to take this message to the wider community."

Pitjatjantjara will be one of several languages promoted in a cluster of schools led by Christian Brothers College through a series of events and activities for Celebrating Life, Language and Culture, which include student forums.

Read more at <http://www.ministers.sa.gov.au/news.php?id=4004&page=1>

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Travel Round the World in a day! An ACT celebration of languages

Mandy Scott, Convenor, Canberra Region Languages Forum

Over 800 people got a taste of our multilingual local community on Sunday 28 September at the University of Canberra (UC).

The day comprised a range of activities and displays which celebrated the many languages being spoken and learned in the Canberra region and marked the UN International Year of Languages.

Officially opened by Mr. John Hargreaves, ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the event incorporated the Ethnic Schools Open Day, an annual event which showcases the work of the more than 40 community-run schools teaching over 30 languages in the ACT.

Children from these schools were the main stars of the musical and dance performances throughout the day, though adults had their turn with a spectacular Indonesian dance by UC students and the singing of an Italian choir.

Participants were able to visit more than 45 display stalls organised and staffed by local ethnic schools, other community groups teaching or promoting languages, and Canberra's diplomatic community.

There were also free workshops, courtesy of several UC lecturers and students, embassy personnel, community members, and teachers, which allowed participants to learn about particular languages and writing systems, get practical ideas about how to help develop language skills, and discuss the value of languages for life and work.

We were especially pleased to have a workshop which introduced us to speaking Gamilaraay, an indigenous language of NSW.

Read more at <http://www.languageseducation.com/scott081125.pdf>

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Modern Language Teachers Association of Queensland (MLTAQ) Biennial Conference "Languages Matter!"

1-2 October 2008

Superbly organized by MLTAQ Gold Coast in conjunction with the Gold Coast Campus of Griffith University, with a well balanced and wide-ranging program reflecting the challenges and opportunities for effective teaching and learning of languages in the modern world and an increasingly technology-rich operating environment, this event was a major celebration of the key themes of the International Year.

You can access the full program, session outlines and presenter details online at:

<http://www.mltaq.asn.au/MLTAQ%20Biennial%20Conference%202008%20Languages%20Matter.pdf>

By mysteriously evolving circumstances, a late-scheduled obscure parallel workshop by Phillip Mahnken and Rupert Macgregor on the support work of the national Parent associations, the formation of a national Languages Action Alliance and the launch of the new national website <http://www.lingo.org.au> transmogrified into the closing plenary.

The formal paper relating to that closing presentation is online at:

http://www.mltaq.asn.au/file.php/1/conference_2008/Presentation_at_MLTAQ_Conference_2008.pdf

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Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ): Engaging with Languages

Under the able and enthusiastic leadership of Dr John Roulston and May Kwan, ISQ has provided a strong focus on the opportunities and challenges of languages education and its vital importance in the learning and development of every young person to equip them for a global future.

Key events include their two-day symposium "Engaging with Languages" in May 2008; and their celebratory dinner for the International Year in August with the theme: "Languages - a necessity for Australia's survival".

ISQ's commitment is encapsulated in their August 2007 paper "Learning a Second Language - Why Bother...?" You can access this powerful and still centrally relevant position paper at:

http://www.aisq.qld.edu.au/files/files/Communications/briefings/AugustBriefings_07.pdf

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RESOURCES

Link up with the Languages Action Alliance - and 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.

Lingo is currently running a National Survey which you can access on the website until 19 December.

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

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 - and as a national contribution to the International Year of Languages 2008, 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 has recently been posted out to schools, together with an Order Form you can complete and fax or post back to us.

Alternatively, 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
- a suitable mailing address so we can post these out to you.

New Opinion Pieces added to National Languages Education Website

Over the past two years we have been progressively assembling a varied array of opinion pieces - articles which reflect the range and scope of the ongoing public debate and represent a range of opinions related to languages education - in Australia and elsewhere.

The array has now been expanded to include the following recently-published contributions:

- "A Linguists Vision for Multicultural Australia" - Michael Clyne (18 November 2008)
- "Call for a national indigenous languages policy" - Patrick McConvell (8 November 2008)
- "Minding Our Language" - Tom Hyland (12 October 2008)
- "Australia must confirm its commitment to multiculturalism" - Petro Georgiou (9 October 2008)
- "Asia studies the key to the future" - Kathe Kirby (21 July 2008)

You can check out the whole collection at: <http://www.languageseducation.com/opinion.htm>

LOTE@HOME - Learning languages at home from the early years

"Children who have grown up learning two or more different languages are better problem solvers"

[LOTE@HOME](#) is an innovative way for parents to participate with their kids as they all learn a second language.

They are now available in Mandarin, French, German, Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Maltese, Spanish and Vietnamese and orders are now being taken for 2009 packs.

Devised by a parent who was unable to identify an approach to learning a language other than English that focused on a home, family-based setting, these family-friendly kits have been a huge hit.

[LOTE@HOME](#) packs are not intended to replace formal LOTE lessons, however they are intended to build an "in country environment" in the home that will support the formal learning of a second language.

By using the cards, and reinforcing words around the house, kids will learn a new language in exactly the same way they learned English - by immersion and absorption.

Read more at <http://www.lote-at-home.com.au>

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Asia Education Foundation: New Online and Print Advocacy Resources on Languages Learning

"Languages open the door to a bigger world"

The Asia Education Foundation (AEF), in conjunction with the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) was commissioned by the then Department of Education, Science & Training in 2007 to develop a range of online and associated print advocacy resources to promote the vital importance of languages education and cultural understanding, to key audiences and stakeholders; in particular to:

- Principals
- Languages teachers
- Other teachers
- Parents and families
- Students

The common purpose of both the online and associated print materials is to:

Highlight the inter-cultural, intellectual and vocational benefits of learning languages, in ways informed by commissioned research into the information needs of each key stakeholder group;

Reinforce and extend existing positive attitudes to languages education; and

Contribute towards informed culture change in schools, school communities and families where there are negative attitudes

The materials include:

- Comprehensive Advocacy Statements targeted at each of the key stakeholder groups (online)
- Poster (available in printed format on request)
- Leaflet targeting school leadership (available in printed format on request)
- Three complementary Postcards targeted at students, parents and families, and school teaching staff (each available in printed format on request).

For full details of and online access to the range of promotional, information and advocacy products developed through this process, and information on how to obtain printed supplies for distribution in your school community, visit the website "Languages open the door to a bigger world" at:

<http://www.languagesopenthedoor.edu.au/promotional.htm>

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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 (quarterly)

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