

LANGUAGES EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Volume 3 Number 8, 27 August 2009

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LANGUAGES LEARNING & EARLY CHILDHOOD

ACT: Proposed bilingual [Mandarin/English] childcare centre at University of Canberra

Public Meeting on Saturday 24 October 2.00 – 3.30 pm

On Saturday 24 October you are invited to a public meeting at the University of Canberra to discuss an exciting proposal to establish a Mandarin-English bilingual childcare centre.

The meeting will be held in Building 2, Room B2

Organised by a local non-profit organization which has operated a community-based bilingual early childhood centre in Mawson for 25 years (<http://alma.anu.edu.au>)

- Hear about plans for the new centre
- Talk to staff and parents from ALMA's current bilingual childcare centre in Mawson
- Discuss the advantages of bilingual education
- Register an expression of interest for enrolment in the new centre

All are welcome. Refreshments provided.

RSVP to canberrapanda@gmail.com by 22 October 2009

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Victoria: Bilingual playgroups make languages child's play

Denise Ryan, the Age, August 10, 2009

VICTOR Chow was determined his children would have some understanding of his Chinese heritage. He wanted to make up for the fact that as a young man he couldn't communicate with his grandparents because they spoke Mandarin and he spoke English.

Aware of international research showing that the optimal time to introduce a second language is before the age of five, Mr. Chow tried to find a bilingual Mandarin language program for young children. Only a few language schools offered classes for infants and they seemed too formal.

Undeterred, he decided to start up his own bilingual playgroup and approached universities for advice. Dr Berenice Nyland, a senior lecturer in the school of education at RMIT University, helped him to establish the program for the Bright Sparks Bilingual Playschool, which combines the elements of a playgroup with focused language learning.

Until recently it was almost impossible to find such a playgroup. While Melbourne had a handful of long-standing German and Italian bilingual groups, there were few others.

But a growing awareness that immersing infants in a second language is hugely beneficial for later language studies has led to the creation of many more groups.

Read entire article: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/the-many-languages-of-play-20090809-ee6e.html>

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OPINION: WITHER LANGUAGES?

Is it Groundhog Day on Languages?

Jim Wilson, the Australian, 13 October 2009

WORDS fail me. When I read, "Language tyros lost for words" (HES, September 16) I thought it was Groundhog Day. The Australian Academy of the Humanities report articulates problems that have been common knowledge for at least three decades. I scuttled back to my 1994 thesis to check and yes, there it all was in chapter seven. Incidentally, this is not an accusation of plagiarism. Any language teacher could have recited these problems. I learned them as a teacher, state bureaucrat, and national adviser to the Asian Studies Council in the 1980s and 90s.

The article, however, does have merit. It shows the usual suspects are debating the usual problems and making the usual statements about the lamentable state of language learning in Australia. I suppose it keeps them in work.

There are a few reasons language learning is a problem. The main ones are:

- There is no political will to mandate learning of languages of national importance for a selected cohort of Australian students.
- Language policy development and implementation have been beset by bureaucratic incompetence, the politics of ethnicity and social justice, and an apathetic-antipathetic Anglo-Australian attitude to language learning.
- The (justified) inability of schools to provide multi-level language courses to a linguistically diverse school population when even one language course will have only a few students in senior school and sometimes none at all.
- The structure of year 12 examinations is locked in the past and does not reflect educational needs in a globalised world.

If you add to the lack of languages the abysmal knowledge of history, economics, geography and politics (and I suppose, English) then the academy has much with which to concern itself.

Jim Wilson , Beaumont, South Australia

Source: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,26205292-21682,00.html>

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Downhearted and disillusioned

June Hammond, the Australian, October 07, 2009

I AM a teacher of Japanese with 25 years experience and have been passionate about teaching language and culture. I have never been more downhearted or disillusioned about the future of languages.

In South Australia, languages are generally compulsory to year 9 and after that the retention rate falls horrendously with the huge choice of subjects students have.

Not only are we teaching specialist subjects that previously have been taught in the tertiary sector but we are also including vocational subjects.

Of course, the ethos of a broad education at secondary level is one I believe we should pursue; however, the introduction of future SACE (the new South Australian certificate of education) in year 11 next year means the narrowing of subject choice.

The eventuality will be only four subjects in year 12 in 2011, and will languages fit within those four subjects? I'm guessing not.

Students are already indicating that they will not continue languages after year 9 as they will not be able to continue and they don't see the point. There will be the few who have a love of language learning and who will continue but I can see the end of languages programs as we have them.

This all seems to be in direct opposition to what Kevin Rudd is trying to do by pouring money into languages, language labs and Asian studies.

I was at a conference recently and many of the languages teachers there expressed the same concerns. Maybe we need to look at the baccalaureate and make a language compulsory through to year 12? Imagine the uproar, especially from the universities.

June Hammond , Seymour College, South Australia <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,26173283-21682,00.html>

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Let's get much more serious about languages education

Leonard Colquhoun, the Australian, 7 October 2009

THE University of Melbourne's Joseph Lo Bianco's typically robust dissing of "lightweight programs that give (foreign) language learning a bad name" (HES, September 30) ought to have been done 30 years ago.

Foreign language classes that comprise little but (badly) cooking exotic national dishes, labelling family trees and cutting and pasting touristy scenes have reduced the subject to ridicule for far too long.

Just as mathematics and the physical sciences exist in broad-based curriculums for more than the off chance that some students will become physicists, chemists and mathematicians, so languages cannot now be, and never were, justifiable because some former learners might wander off to Berlin or Beijing, Turin or Tokyo, Madrid or Marseilles.

But, as Lo Bianco clearly explains, "getting serious on teaching languages" starts with leadership from federal and state governments backed up by serious, as distinct from tokenistic, staff and equipment resourcing.

A big ask - and perhaps a start would be ditching that damaging and dishonest euphemism, languages other than English, along with its childish acronym LOTE, terms notably and laudably absent from Lo Bianco's article.

Leonard Colquhoun, Invermay, Tasmania

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More than time for a new approach to teaching languages

Damian Hart, the Australian, 7 October 2009

THE tragic state of how languages (other than English) are taught in our schools is a topic of regular discussion in my household. I had seven years' tuition in Italian yet, in a story that is notorious in my family, in year 10 could write only one paragraph, describing eating a blue ice cream, a red ice cream and so on. Initial beliefs that it was my lack of academic prowess or interest have been challenged as my three children (19, 16 and 12) seem to have suffered the same fate. This is not for want of encouragement and support as I am indeed seeking to learn Italian as an adult.

However, the preoccupation with colouring in flags, eating national food and completing senseless worksheets has done little to produce bilingual speakers, not just in my family but across the nation. We need only to look at some European countries such as Germany where English is so integrated in schooling and so successfully taught that it is a bilingual country. Australia, we have failed. Learning languages other than our own brings the individual and country

so much. The critical issue is to be able to speak the language. I am no expert but our teaching methods have failed generations of would-be multiple language speakers. Time for a new approach.

Damian Hart, Kardinya, Western Australia

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Realism and real time

K.M.Gunn, the Australian, 7 October 2009

LET'S be realistic. We will be wasting 150 hours of classroom time if we believe that any language can be taught in that time. It cannot. It most certainly cannot be taught to a level where a student will be sufficiently fluent to retain it. They will not.

If we have students who want to learn Chinese and Japanese, then they should be encouraged. There is, however, little point in asking the child or grandchild of Greek, Cypriot, Turkish, Italian, Maltese, Polish or Czech or any other migrants to learn those languages unless they wish to do so.

It would be far better to be helping them learn the language of their ancestors by using community resources. That way we may actually end up with some bilingual or even trilingual Australians.

K.M. Gunn, Lower Mitcham, Victoria

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'Get serious' on teaching languages

Bernard Lane, the Australian, September 30, 2009

LIGHTWEIGHT programs that give language learning a bad name should be wound up as part of a nationwide attempt to engage schools, teacher training and ethnic communities in a serious culture of language learning, a new report recommends.

"You need a symbolic change," said Joe Lo Bianco, the University of Melbourne language planner who wrote the report. "The focus in the debate should now be what constitutes serious effort (in language learning)."

The report, released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research, cites the case of a language teacher who had to service four schools in four days, each with about 150 students.

Professor Lo Bianco said superficial programs undermined public confidence in language learning. "People judge the entire enterprise on the basis of its weakest link and conclude absurd things like, 'Australians can't learn languages'."

The report says education ministries should guarantee children will receive 150 hours a year of tuition in any of seven languages - Mandarin, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Spanish - from primary to secondary, if necessary at a hub high school in each region.

Professor Lo Bianco said these languages had been chosen because they had, or could soon have, the capacity needed for expansion. He estimated the proposals in his report would demand about \$50 million a year in federal money, across six years, as well as reallocation of existing state funding.

Read entire article: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,26143114-12149,00.html>

Report: "Second Languages and Australian Schools", Joseph Lo Bianco, with Yvette Slaughter: Publisher- Australian Centre for Educational Research

http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/AER_54-SecondLanguagesAndAustralianSchooling.pdf

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RESEARCH

Language teaching in Australian schools

Life Matters, ABC Radio, 1 October 2009

Almost 90 per cent of senior high school students learn no second language at all.

Professor Joseph Lo Bianco wants language teaching to be re-prioritised, based not on the old arguments of improving economic ties with nations, but based on the personal benefits to Australian students from learning a language.

Access program online at: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/lifematters/stories/2009/2701101.htm>

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“Foreign Language Education, Academic Performance, and Socioeconomic Status: A Study of California Schools”

Hyekyung Sung, Amado M. Padilla & Duarte M. Silva

Abstract: This study examines various features of foreign language program offerings at 220 public high schools in California. Foreign language program features were examined in relation to the school's Academic Performance Index (API), the school's socioeconomic status (percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch), and percentage of English language learners (ELLs).

High API ranking high schools reported a larger percentage of students enrolled in foreign language classes, more foreign language teachers, fewer emergency-credentialed teachers, more feeder middle school foreign language programs, more study abroad and foreign exchange programs, and more technology use in foreign language teaching.

However, these relationships were not found in low socioeconomic schools and schools with larger numbers of ELLs.

Foreign language educators can use the findings to offer recommendations to school administrators, policymakers, and professional organizations about ways to improve the teaching of foreign languages in secondary schools regardless of students' socioeconomic status or the growing population of ELLs.

Read entire research paper: http://www.stanford.edu/group/CFLP/research/fla1q_06_article8.pdf

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Students learning bilingually: investigating learning experiences and personal outcomes

Janet Beck, Assistant Principal, Richmond West Primary School “Curriculum Leadership” September 2009

Richmond West Primary School in Melbourne operates bilingual programs in English/Mandarin Chinese and English/Vietnamese. The programs support and encourage children in the development of Chinese or Vietnamese as a first language, as well as English as a second language, while also offering a strong start to second language learning for students from English-speaking backgrounds.

Earlier this year Richmond West initiated an evaluation of bilingual education at the school, with support from DEECD's Research Grants to Schools program.

Richmond West Primary School is located in a public housing estate in inner-eastern Melbourne. The school caters for students from a wide variety of cultural and economic backgrounds, although most are considered to be economically and socially disadvantaged. As of 2008 there were 162 students enrolled: 86% of the students are from families of LOTE-speaking backgrounds and 68% of families are eligible to receive the EMA. The predominant ethnic groups are Chinese, East Timorese and Vietnamese. Since 2005 a small number of students from north Africa have been enrolled.

Bilingual education has been a feature of Richmond West for more than 20 years, in various forms. As well as catering to students who speak Chinese or Vietnamese as a first language, the bilingual programs have begun to attract a number of students from English-speaking backgrounds living in other suburbs.

The school currently uses a dual-strand bilingual education program in Chinese-English and Vietnamese-English. The English/Chinese bilingual program operates in Years P–4 and the English/Vietnamese program in Years P–2. The children are fully immersed in each language for half the week throughout the school year. Both bilingual programs are taken by fully trained teachers who speak Chinese or Vietnamese as a first language. They are supported by specific Chinese and Vietnamese language software available on the computers in the bilingual program classrooms.

In the later grades, Chinese and Vietnamese are taught as community languages for two hours per week, but the school plans to extend the Chinese bilingual program to Years 5 and 6 in 2010.

Read entire study: <http://cmslive.curriculum.edu.au/leader/default.asp?id=28811&issueID=11921>

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Use It Or Lose It? Study suggests the brain can remember a 'Forgotten' Language

Science Daily, Sep. 25, 2009

Many of us learn a foreign language when we are young, but in some cases, exposure to that language is brief and we never get to hear or practice it subsequently. Our subjective impression is often that the neglected language completely fades away from our memory. But does “use it or lose it” apply to foreign languages? Although it may seem we have absolutely no memory of the neglected language, new research suggests this “forgotten” language may be more deeply engraved in our minds than we realize.

Psychologists Jeffrey Bowers, Sven L. Mattys, and Suzanne Gage from the University of Bristol recruited volunteers who were native English speakers but who had learned either Hindi or Zulu as children when living abroad. The researchers focused on Hindi and Zulu because these languages contain certain phonemes that are difficult for native English speakers to recognize. A phoneme is the smallest sound in a language—a group of phonemes forms a word.

The scientists asked the volunteers to complete a background vocabulary test to see if they remembered any words from the neglected language. They then trained the participants to distinguish between pairs of phonemes that started Hindi or Zulu words.

As it turned out, even though the volunteers showed no memory of the second language in the vocabulary test, they were able to quickly relearn and correctly identify phonemes that were spoken in the neglected language.

These findings, which appeared in a recent issue of *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, suggest that exposing young children to foreign languages, even if they do not continue to speak them, can have a lasting impact on speech perception. The authors conclude, “Even if the language is forgotten (or feels this way) after many years of disuse, leftover traces of the early exposure can manifest themselves as an improved ability to relearn the language.”

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/09/090924112845.htm>

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Do Bilingual Persons Have Distinct Language Areas In The Brain?

Science Daily, July 9, 2009

A new study carried out at the University of Haifa sheds light on how first and second languages are represented in the brain of a bilingual person. A unique single case study that was tested by Dr. Raphiq Ibrahim of the Department of Learning Disabilities and published in the *Behavioral and Brain Functions* journal, showed that first and second languages are represented in different places in the brain.

The question of how different languages are represented in the human brain is still unclear and, moreover, it is not certain how languages of different and similar linguistic structures are represented. Many studies have found evidence

that all the languages that we acquire in the course of our life are represented in one area of the brain. However, other studies have found evidence that a second language is dissociated from the representation of a mother tongue.

According to Dr. Ibrahim, there are various ways of clarifying this question, but the best way to examine the brain's representation of two languages is by assessing the effects of brain damage on a mother tongue and on the second language of the bilingual individual. "The examination of such cases carries much significance, since it is rare that we can find people who fluently speak two languages and who have sustained brain damage that has selectively affected one of the languages. Moreover, most of the evidence in this field is derived from clinical observations of brain damage in English- and Indo-European-speaking patients, and few studies have been carried out on individuals who speak other languages, especially Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Arabic, until the present study," he added.

The present case examined a 41-year-old bilingual patient whose mother tongue is Arabic and who had fluent command of Hebrew as a second language, at a level close to that of his mother tongue. The individual is a university graduate who passed entrance exams in Hebrew and used the language frequently in his professional life. He suffered damage to the brain that was expressed in a language disorder (aphasia) that remained after completing a course of rehabilitation. During rehabilitation, a higher level of improvement in use of the Arabic language was recorded, and less for the use of Hebrew.

After rehabilitation, the patient's language skills were put through various standardized tests that examined a range of levels language skills in the two languages, alongside other cognitive tests. Most of the tests revealed that damage to the patient's Hebrew skills were significantly more severe than the damage to his Arabic skills.

According to Dr. Ibrahim, even if this selective impairment of the patient's linguistic capabilities does not constitute sufficient evidence to develop a structural model to represent languages in the brain, this case does constitute an important step in this direction, particularly considering that it deals with unique languages that have not yet been studied and which are phonetically, morphologically and syntactically similar.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/07/090708094825.htm>

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Study Shows Bilinguals Are Unable To 'Turn Off' A Language Completely

Science Daily, Aug. 19, 2009

With a vast majority of the world speaking more than one language, it is no wonder that psychologists are interested in its effect on cognitive functioning. For instance, how does the human brain switch between languages? Are we able to seamlessly activate one language and disregard knowledge of other languages completely?

According to a recent study published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, it appears humans are not actually capable of "turning off" another language entirely. Psychologists Eva Van Assche, Wouter Duyck, Robert Hartsuiker and Kevin Diependaele from Ghent University found that knowledge of a second language actually has a continuous impact on native-language reading.

The researchers selected 45 Ghent University students whose native-language was Dutch and secondary language was English. The psychologists asked the students to read several sentences containing control words - plain words in their native-language - and cognates. Cognates are words that have a similar meaning and form across languages, often descending from the same ancient language; for example, "cold" is a cognate of the German word "kalt" since they both descended from Middle English.

While the students read the sentences, their eye movements were recorded and their fixation locations were measured--that is, where in the sentence their eyes paused. The researchers found that the students looked a shorter period of time at the cognates than at the controls. So in the example sentence "Ben heeft een oude OVEN/LADE gevonden tussen de rommel op zolder" (Ben found an old OVEN/DRAWER among the rubbish in the attic), the bilingual students read over "oven" more quickly than "lade."

According to the psychologists, it is the overlap of the two languages that speeds up the brain's activation of cognates. So even though participants did not need to use their second language to read in their native-language, they still were unable to simply "turn it off." It appears, then, that not only is a second language always active, it has a direct impact on reading another language--even when the reader is more proficient in one language than another.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/08/090818130435.htm>

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PUBLICATIONS

“Languages Matter!” - feature in Multilingual Life newsletter winter 2009

This must-read feature in the Winter 2009 edition of Multilingual Life (published by the SA Government) can be accessed on <http://www.multicultural.sa.gov.au/magazine.htm>. Contributors include Michael Clyne, Lia Tedesco, Greg Wilson and many more.

Go direct to the Winter edition: <http://www.multicultural.sa.gov.au/documents/MulticulturalLifeWinter2009.pdf>

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PORTAL LAUNCH

“Language on the Move”

Ingrid Piller

At the International Pragmatics Association Conference in Melbourne in July I delivered a keynote lecture on “Multilingualism, Second Language Learning and Social Inclusion” and also co-organized a panel on the same topic together with my colleague Kimie Takahashi.

The panel raised a number of important issues related to social justice in multilingual and transnational settings and we felt we would like to share the panel with a wider audience than was able to attend the panel or will be willing to wait till some of the papers will be published in a 2011 special issue of The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism we will be guest-editing.

To this end we started to create a website from which audio-recordings of the panel presentations could be downloaded. In the process we found that there is a real need for a collaborative space where research on language and communication in multicultural and transnational contexts can be shared, brainstormed, discussed and disseminated.

Therefore, we are delighted to be able to announce the launch of a new sociolinguistics portal, Language on the Move(www.languageonthemove.org) today.

Language on the Move is dedicated to issues of language and communication in multicultural and transnational contexts and open to anyone interested in language learning, multilingualism and intercultural communication, in short, in L.CoM – Language and Communication on the Move.

The L.CoM portal is (and is meant to be) work in progress and we hope that many of you will join us in sharing, discussing and disseminating cutting-edge work in language learning, multilingualism and intercultural communication.

<http://www.languageonthemove.com/>

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Routes in Languages: Increasing the take-up of languages from schools to university

The UK Routes into Languages program is funding by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Children, Schools & Families.

The program is funded to run for four years, commencing in 2006-2007 through to 2009-2010; and operates through the establishment of a number of regional consortia, through which groups of universities will work together with schools and colleges, to develop a range of resources and strategies to enthuse and encourage people to study languages.

The website not only includes information about all aspects of their initiatives, but also an expanding array of free online resources for teachers – which will also be of great interest to parents and families – and some extremely valuable materials which promote the value of languages education.

The project has an online newsletter available to free subscription.

Further information: <http://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/index.html>

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Chinese Learning Software Tool - An innovative way to learn Chinese

The objective of writing this email to you is to introduce a software tool that will help people at large, especially students to learn the Chinese language.

We are an Australia based company specialises in providing a software tool to learn the Chinese language. Technoglobal Solutions is Penpower Technology (based in Singapore) Partner in Australia and New Zealand.

“Penpower Chinese Expert” is a comprehensive Chinese language learning software tool suitable for students and adults. Younger students can learn it with guidance of parents and teachers. Older students and adults can learn it themselves at their own time. It will increase students’ exposures to mastering Chinese. It helps to improve their speaking, reading, listening and writing skills. Presently, we have introduced this software tool to the Chinese Association of Victoria Chinese School www.cavinc.com.au and the responses from the Principal and school council are extremely encouraging.

Enclosed is a brochure which explains the product in detail. We are looking forward to demonstrate our exceptional product to you. We hope that by contacting ACSSO , this would be our first step to introduce the software tool to every school throughout Australia which teaches the Chinese language.

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Website: www.penpower.net/sg

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ASIA LITERACY

Asian literacy grants for 141 Australian schools

Hon Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Education, 14 October 2009

The Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, today announced that 141 primary and secondary schools across Australia will receive \$1.8 million in grants under Round One of the Becoming Asia Literate: Grants to Schools outreach program.

The \$6.24 million Becoming Asia Literate: Grants to Schools is a key element of the Rudd Government’s National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP).

Eighty six projects, representing 141 schools, will be funded to implement projects that promote the teaching and learning of Asian languages and/or studies of Asia in their schools for the NALSSP countries of China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea.

Individual schools were eligible for grants of up to \$20,000. Clusters of up to five schools were eligible for grants of up to \$40,000.

Due to the very strong response, with more than 680 applications received, additional funding of \$1 million has been provided to supplement the program. This has significantly increased the number of schools receiving a grant under Round One.

Round Two of the Becoming Asia Literate: Grants to Schools will open in May 2010.

A list of the successful schools and their projects is available at http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NALSSP/Pages/News_AsiaLiterate.aspx .

Read entire release: http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Pages/Article_091014_164943.aspx

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INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

\$9.3m to save indigenous languages

The Age, August 9, 2009 (AAP)

The federal government has pledged \$9.3 million over the coming year to help take 113 indigenous languages off the critically endangered list.

Of the 145 indigenous dialects spoken in Australia, 110 are at risk of being lost, a 2005 report found.

But under the government's national indigenous languages policy, there will be an increased focus on protecting the last vestiges of indigenous language.

Announcing the policy on Sunday, Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin and Arts Minister Peter Garrett said more would be done to raise national awareness of the battle.

"These languages are ... a significant part of Australia's heritage and we must ensure they are protected for the benefit of future generations," Mr. Garrett said. "A focused and coordinated national approach is critical to safeguard indigenous culture and save these unique languages."

Communities will be encouraged to use endangered languages as much as possible and all efforts will be made to pass them on.

The 2005 report found that languages under threat were being spoken by small groups of people and mostly those aged 40 and over.

The policy will also encourage the teaching of indigenous languages in schools, although it is understood not to alter the course in the Northern Territory, where bilingual education is set to be scrapped in 2010.

Ms Macklin said language was an intrinsic part of identity. "It is so important for all people to be aware and proud of their traditions and culture and this, of course, includes celebrating the unique qualities of their own language," she said.

About 30,000 people, both indigenous and non-indigenous, are presently involved in indigenous language studies around the country.

Source: <http://news.theage.com.au/breaking-news-national/93m-to-save-indigenous-languages-20090809-edza.html>

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NT: Bilingual education 'a scapegoat' for inadequate resourcing:

Gina Marich, ABC News, 25 September 2009

Opponents of the Northern Territory Government's policy on cutting bilingual education say it is gambling with Indigenous children's futures.

The Government is making schools teach the first four hours of classes in English, putting an end to 30 years of support for bilingual education.

A group made up of church and community leaders, scholars and non-government organisations has sent letters to Federal and Territory politicians.

The group says all the evidence suggests bilingual education is the best way for Indigenous children who speak their native language at home to learn English.

The group's representative, Bishop Gregory Thompson, says underfunding, not bilingual education, is to blame for poor outcomes in remote Aboriginal schools.

"Bilingual education has been attempted but never resourced, teachers recruited but never supported, houses intended to be built but not done. These are all indications why bilingual education has been a scapegoat, but not based on evidence.

"Every evidence indicates the other - that children learn best in their language. There's a serious risk that we will continue to undermine the confidence of Indigenous parents when we seek to undermine the first language of their community."

Read entire article: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/09/25/2696894.htm>

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NT: Expert blasts bilingual education changes

Eleni Roussos, ABC News, 7 September 2009

There is no proof that changing bilingual education in the Northern Territory will improve English literacy for Indigenous students, a leading academic says.

In a bid to improve literacy from next year, all bilingual schools in the Territory will have to teach Indigenous students the first four hours in English.

But Professor Peter Buckskin, who is part of a team examining the success of the Howard government's Australian Direction in Indigenous Education, says governments should embrace Indigenous languages in schools, not move to restrict them.

"The Northern Territory has a real privilege of having inter-generational language speakers and that should never, never be lost to the communities of the Northern Territory," the University of South Australia professor said.

"They have a real opportunity to develop really best practice models in the world."

He cannot understand why bilingual education is being changed.

Read entire article: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/09/07/2678651.htm>

- Audio: Academic says no evidence to cut bilingual education in NT schools (The World Today)

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COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS LANGUAGES & CULTURES

Nagle College, Bairnsdale, Victoria

Getting in touch with the different cultures in a school community can present a way to build and strengthen family school partnerships.

The benefits of bringing representatives of local cultural communities into school and giving the exploration and understanding of those cultures a curricular value is illustrated in this video about Nagle College in Bairnsdale, Victoria.

See more at <http://www.vimeo.com/5269042>

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Riverland Flamenco Fiesta: St Joseph's School, Barmera, South Australia

The Riverland Flamenco Fiesta project aimed to create an opportunity for the community to come together and have fun, while raising the profile of the Spanish program at the school.

Languages teacher Carol Edwards had worked with all-classes who presented items of song, dance and poetry in Spanish. Artist-in-residence Susi Masi then invited each class to perform their flamenco dance, which was accompanied by internationally acclaimed Spanish guitarist Aloysius Leeson.

At the beginning of 2008, Spanish teacher Carol Edwards and newly appointed principal Joyce Stark were successful with their submission for a grant as part of the Catholic Education SA Languages Grants Program. The aim was to involve not only the entire cohort of students and teachers but also the wider Barmera community in a celebration of Spanish culture to mark the International Year of Languages.

From inception the project was not just for the students but for the entire community to come together and have fun. The Languages consultants from Catholic Education SA were involved in the project from its inception and liaised with Caty Manrique, Education Advisor to the Spanish Government, who attended the Fiesta and was supportive of the community. Local involvement occurred in ripples, radiating out from the school, and gathering strength from the Parents and Friends Association, School Board, local Parish, BerrilBarmera Council, Barmera Library, Studio Flamenco and friends and families associated with all of the above.

The profile of Spanish has been raised and it is envisaged that languages learning will continue to be integral to the culture of the school. A commitment to a languages program resonates with the school's culture of inclusion.

Read entire article in the October edition of the online Newsletter of the Society for Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA) http://www.spera.asn.au/articles.php?req=list&root_id=15&sub_id=56

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NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE

SA: Languages may be first casualty in high school subject shake-up

Lauren Novak, Advertiser, October 09, 2009

TEACHERS fear languages will be the first casualty of next year's changes to high school subject requirements.

Under the new South Australian Certificate of Education regulations, senior students will have more flexibility in the number and type of subjects they study.

Interest in languages and Australian Studies, which will no longer be compulsory, is expected to dive as demand for vocational education and training (VET) subjects rises dramatically.

Australian Education Union state vice president Anne Crawford said many teachers who specialised in subjects set to fall out of favour would need retraining. Ms Crawford said a survey of more than 50 schools showed changes in subject demand were likely to prompt major timetable reshuffles.

Mr. Seidel predicted subjects with fewer enrolments would be the most at risk and Ms Crawford expected languages to be the "first major casualty".

Read entire article: http://www.news.com.au/adelaidenow/story/0,22606,26189198-2682,00.html?from=public_rss

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UK: State pupils lag far behind private school peers in language GCSEs

Richard Garner, Independent, 30 August 2009

Pupils at independent schools have five times as much chance of getting top A*-grade passes in French GCSE as those in the state sector, new figures reveal.

An analysis of GCSE results reveals a major divide between the performance of state and private schools. The figures show 30 per cent of youngsters in independent schools get an A* grade, compared with just 6 per cent in state schools – including selective grammar schools. The picture is similar for German (30 per cent in private schools and 7 per cent in state schools) and Spanish (35 per cent and 10 per cent respectively).

The comparisons emerge as a new row has flared up over the inexorable slide in the take-up of modern foreign languages at GCSE in all schools following the government decision to make them voluntary for 14 to 16-year-olds seven years ago.

French suffered a 6.6 percentage point drop in take-up this year and is now taken by only half the number that took the exam at the turn of the century. German, which fell by just over 4 percentage points, is in a similar state.

Read entire article: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/state-pupils-lag-far-behind-private-peers-in-language-gcses-1779373.html>

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UK: Look East - Why Chinese lessons are booming

Hilary Wilce, Independent, Thursday, 8 October 2009

Two East London schoolgirls are chattering animatedly about their families, but not in English, or in their home languages of Urdu or Bengali. Instead Shajedah Kayum and Johura Hasna are gassing confidently in Mandarin Chinese.

At Kingsford Community School, in Beckton, east London, every pupil studies Mandarin when they start at age 11, and growing numbers are now choosing it at GCSE. Last year, 15 students took the subject and 66 per cent of them achieved A or A* grades. In Year Nine, about 50 students have already embarked – one year early – on Mandarin GCSE.

Kingsford is not alone. Mandarin is fast going mainstream with about 500 schools – no one knows the precise figure – offering it as part of the curriculum, and many more in after-school clubs. The first GCSE Chinese textbook has just been published by Pearson Education, in conjunction with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, tailored to a new EdExcel exam.

Sceptics say that this is all just a gimmick and that classroom time could be better used to help pupils become competent in a more accessible language such as French or Spanish.

But according to school heads who offer Mandarin courses, which include language and culture, the subject opens pupils' eyes to the biggest country in the world, hones general language skills, engages boys – who relate to the visual and spatial aspects of the language – enhances students' resumes, and can be a subject in which pupils who struggle with other languages do well.

Twelve schools in Britain have now become Confucius Classrooms, receiving support from the Office of Chinese Language Council, known as Hanban, along with help from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, itself a Confucius Institute since 2006.

This allows them to grow as specialist hubs, helping other schools to bring in Chinese studies.

Read entire article: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/schools/look-east-why-chinese-lessons-are-booming-1799026.html>

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Scotland: Call to protect Gaelic education from cuts and closures

BBC News, 22 September 2009

The contribution of schools that teach Gaelic should be considered when deciding if they should close, according to an islands MSP. Alasdair Allan wants the impact on Gaelic education to be considered as part of the consultation process on closure proposals.

The Western Isles MSP has tabled amendments to the Scottish Government's Schools (Consultation) Bill.

The bill lays out new procedures that must be followed before schools close.

Mr Allan said he hoped to get cross party support for the amendments which will be heard by the Scottish Parliament's education, lifelong learning and culture committee next Wednesday.

He said: "Where schools are offering Gaelic medium or Gaelic education, I believe local authorities should have to consider the potential impact on Gaelic education in that area when a school is proposed for closure.

"This issue was raised by a number of people in response to the draft bill and this amendment will ensure Gaelic provision is properly considered. Gaelic education is growing, but could fall victim to closures if it isn't one of the factors taken into account when decided whether a school has to close."

Read entire article: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/8269084.stm

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UK: Auf Wiedersehen to German?

Jessica Shepherd, UK Guardian, Tuesday 22 September 2009

Diana Beech started her PhD with a view to an academic career at the end of it. But in her field, German studies, "lecturing just isn't a possibility", the Cambridge University student says.

Faced with the closure of German departments across the country, she's having to expand her search to research posts in bibliography – the academic study of books. Germanists like her, she says, "are having to take our passion for our subject behind closed doors, into libraries and archives".

Next month, another university's senate will debate a proposal from senior management to close its German department in 2013. The full-time lecturer, full-time teaching fellow and part-time teaching fellow who make up the University of Leicester's German department have been told the future of their department is "unsustainable".

Meanwhile, Queen's University Belfast has ruled that this year's 20 undergraduates studying German will be its last. It says student demand is "unsustainably low" and that the subject "performed poorly" in the latest evaluation of the research output of UK universities. The language will continue as an extra-curricular study, a spokeswoman says.

Just 64 out of the 116 universities in the UK are offering German as part of a degree, for courses starting in the autumn of 2010. The subject has been taught at UK universities for 125 years. In the 1950s it was particularly popular because of Germany's economic boom and a revival in interest in the Romantic authors Goethe and Schiller. But the latest figures show the number of undergraduates taking the subject in the UK is falling.

The number of students taking German GCSE or A-level continued to drop this year, falling by nearly 8% at A-level to 5,765 students and by 4% at GCSE to 73,469 students

Read entire article: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/sep/22/german-university-departments-closure>

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France calls for better language teaching

Boston Globe (Associated Press), October 14, 2009

French children generally spend years learning foreign languages in school, but the results are often dismal. So President Nicolas Sarkozy called yesterday for an emergency plan to produce more bilingual students.

In a speech outlining education reforms, Sarkozy underscored that “a foreign language is meant to be spoken,” and suggested language instruction should be shifted away from written grammar and memorization to emphasize oral skills.

Students in French public schools begin a second language in middle school and often receive as many as six years of foreign language instruction. Still, many high school graduates struggle to express even the simplest thought in English, Spanish, German, or other foreign languages.

Sarkozy noted with disapproval that French students rank 69th out of 109 countries on the Test of English as a Foreign Language, or TOEFL - the standard English-language test for foreign students worldwide, an exam primarily for those who wish to study in the United States. Given its resources, France would expect to rank much higher than that.

Besides a curriculum heavy on grammar, another stumbling block is the teachers themselves. Many are not native speakers of the languages they teach, and many have strong French accents.

Large class sizes might be another obstacle. “You can’t develop oral communication in classes of 30 students,” said Thierry Cadart of the SGEN-CFDT education union.

Sarkozy, whose own English is notoriously weak, pledged to change the way foreign language learning is evaluated, to bring more native speakers into schools and to encourage French youths to study abroad.

The push to improve foreign language instruction comes as French - once the language of diplomacy and the lingua franca in much of the world - continues to lose ground to English. The rise of the Internet has underscored the need for improved English skills among French youth.

http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2009/10/14/france_calls_for_better_language_teaching?mode=PF

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How to Remake Education

Diane Ravitch, New York Times, September 25, 2009

The single biggest problem in American education is that no one agrees on why we educate. Faced with this lack of consensus, policy makers define good education as higher test scores. But higher test scores are not a definition of good education. Students can get higher scores in reading and mathematics yet remain completely ignorant of science, the arts, civics, history, literature and foreign languages.

Why do we educate? We educate because we want citizens who are capable of taking responsibility for their lives and for our democracy. We want citizens who understand how their government works, who are knowledgeable about the history of their nation and other nations.

We need citizens who are thoroughly educated in science. We need people who can communicate in other languages. We must ensure that every young person has the chance to engage in the arts.

But because of our narrow-minded utilitarianism, we have forgotten what good education is.

Ravitch is a historian. Her book “The Death and Life of the Great American School System” will be published in February 2010. Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/magazine/27toolssidebar2-t.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=languages%20education&st=cse

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Foreign Languages Fall as Schools Look for Cuts

Winnie Hu, New York Times, September 11, 2009

IN Edgemont, a high-performing Westchester school district, children as young as 7 could recite colors and days of the week in Spanish, but few if any learned to really converse, read or write. So this fall, the district canceled the

Spanish lessons offered twice weekly at its two elementary schools since 2003, deciding the time and resources — an estimated \$175,000 a year — could be better spent on other subjects.

Class consolidation in Yonkers resulted in the loss of four foreign-language teaching positions, and budget cuts have cost Arlington, N.Y., its seventh-grade German program, and Danbury, Conn., several sections of middle school French and Spanish.

And in New Jersey, the Ridgewood district is replacing its three elementary school Spanish teachers with Rosetta Stone, an interactive computer program that cost \$70,000, less than half their combined salaries.

“There’s never a replacement for a teacher in the classroom,” said Debra Anderson, a Ridgewood spokeswoman. “But this was a good solution in view of the financial constraints.”

After years of expanding language offerings, suburban districts across the New York region are now cutting back on staff and instructional time, phasing out less popular languages, and rethinking whether they can really afford to introduce foreign tongues to their youngest students while under constant pressure to downsize budgets and raise achievement in English and other core subjects.

But such cuts have dismayed and frustrated some educators and parents, who say that children need more, not fewer, foreign language skills to compete in a global marketplace.

Read entire article: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/education/13language.html>

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USA: “One Language Isn’t Enough” – letters to the editor

It is simply shortsighted to cut foreign language programs to balance school budgets.

In times of political crisis, we routinely deplore the lack of speakers competent to function in the critical languages of the moment. Yet research shows that schoolchildren given the opportunity to master a second language have a significant advantage in learning other languages later.

Instead of cutting off a pipeline that is already inexcusably narrow, we should be working to embed world-language study firmly within the core curriculum from kindergarten through high school. That way, we can offer the cognitive, cultural and vocational benefits of learning a second language to all our children.

Catherine Porter
President, Modern Language Association
New York, Sept. 14, 2009

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USA: Speaking a second language is not some upper-class luxury; it’s an important 21st-century skill.

More and more of the world’s children are learning English in addition to their native tongue, giving them a distinct advantage over our monolingual children in the global marketplace.

As a foreign-language educator, I am heartened that more parents want their children to learn languages. Language classes should begin as early as prekindergarten. Research confirms the benefits: children have a unique ability to learn languages with ease before age 6, and children who are bilingual show stronger verbal and cognitive skills and have more expansive vocabularies.

Shouldn’t we expect our schools to offer our children the same advantages that children are routinely offered in Europe and Asia? Our children will thank us later, or will rightly want to know why we didn’t equip them for a global economy, in which Chinese, Spanish and Arabic are going to be the E-ZPass to success.

Julia Pimsleur Levine

New York, Sept. 14, 2009

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- Australian Education Digest : <http://www.acsso.org.au/aed.htm> (weekly)
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- 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)
- Family School Partners : <http://www.familyschool.org.au/news/> (monthly)
- Public Education Voice : <http://www.acsso.org.au/pev.htm> (quarterly)

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