

INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Organisation: Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations
(AFMLTA)

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Introduction

The Modern Languages Teachers Association of NSW (MLTANSW) is the peak professional body of teachers of languages in NSW. It has a membership of 650 and has a proud history of over 60 years of representing teachers of languages at all levels of schooling, and across all languages taught in NSW schools, as well as in community schools. MLTANSW contributes to both state and national consultation processes on languages education, and currently has representation on NESA BCC Languages, NSW Community Languages Schools and the Australian Federation of Modern Languages' Associations.

MLTANSW welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the NESA Curriculum Review, aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of school education in NSW. We are excited by the prospect of contributing to changes in conceptualisation and implementation of the curriculum aimed at improving life and career opportunities for every young person in NSW.

This submission addresses the terms of reference in regard to the research and practice evidence supporting the necessity of a robust and inclusive curriculum in which languages plays a vital role. Languages contribute to preparing all students for complex global futures, recognising the diversity of learners and their needs, the necessity to engage with rapidly advancing technologies, and in providing essential foundational skills for literacy and plurilingual language skills, intercultural awareness and understanding, and the capacity to engage nationally and internationally in economic, political, social and cultural spheres, with high levels of competence and confidence.

Our submission addresses ways in which languages education supports:

- the aims of the Review
- the terms of reference (purposes and principles; essential knowledge skills and attributes for all learners; curriculum design; and implications for assessment and reporting, pedagogical practices, teacher preparation and professional learning, school organisation; legislation; and quality and impact)
- the broad areas of regard (national policies and legislation, the work of ACARA and the Australian Curriculum)
- the key question provided by NESA of ‘what needs to change?’.

Our submission begins with a brief overview of the literature that supports the benefits of learning languages and its importance in the curriculum, as well as the benefits of ‘starting young’. We then discuss, in relation to the terms of reference, how such learning will be critical to the NSW curriculum developed from this review, and provide some suggestions for change. The submission concludes with 13 recommendations, related to the necessity of inclusion of languages, across the years of schooling, and in meaningful time allocations, in any revised curriculum.

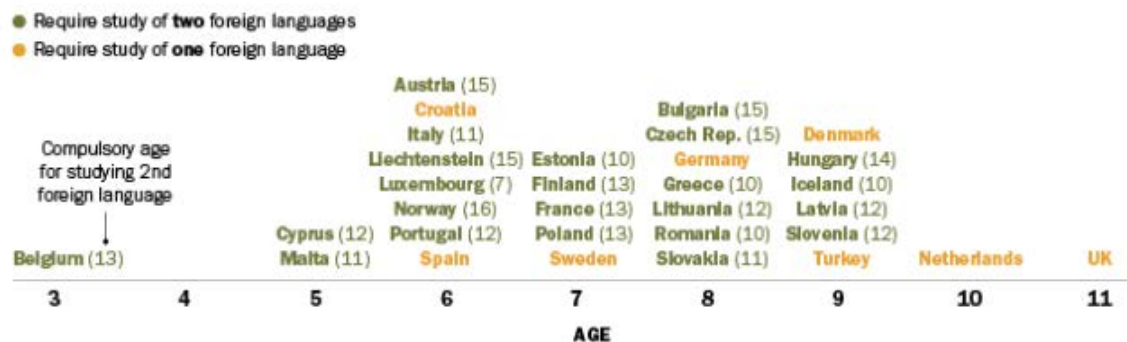
Benefits of learning an additional language and the necessity of languages in contemporary curricula: A brief review of the literature

The research literature of the past several decades has provided unambiguous evidence of the benefits of learning an additional language, and the critical need for languages learning as an essential 21st century learning skill for all young people, to be included in any future-focused, meaningful curriculum.

Education jurisdictions nationally, and internationally, agree on the need to engage with global communities, and to have the intercultural and language skills to do so, as seen in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008), NESA syllabuses, and in international policy such as from the European Commission (European Commission, 2011; 2014) and the OECD Education 2030 project (OECD, 2018). Most nations of the world count a bi- or pluri-lingual capacity as the norm, a rudimentary skill, needed to successfully engage with the world. Education jurisdictions around the world include languages as a key learning area, and it is not unusual for students to learn up to four or more languages, with two considered a minimum requirement. In northern Europe and Scandinavia, for example, typically students attend bilingual preschools (with total immersion in two languages), learn two languages from the first year of school (their own and an additional language [so-called [foreign] language]), and many add a third language from around Year 2. The European Commission (EC) collects data on the learning of additional languages in European nations, indicated in the table below.

Most Students in Europe Must Study Their First Foreign Language by Age 9 and a Second Foreign Language Later

Compulsory age for studying first foreign language, by country



Note: Pupils in Scotland (a part of the UK) and Ireland are not required to study a foreign language. The German-speaking Community in Belgium studies their first foreign language at age 3 and a second at 13; the Flemish Community does so at ages 10 and 12; and the French Community begins their first foreign language at age 8 or age 10 and are not required to study a second foreign language. In Estonia, pupils must study a *second* foreign language between ages 10 and 12. In Finland, pupils must start learning a foreign language between ages 7 and 9; in Sweden, between ages 7 and 10.

Source: Eurostat

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Table 1: Foreign (additional) language study in Europe (EC, 2014)

Australian children are greatly disadvantaged if they are not provided with the opportunity to learn additional languages (especially from a young age), and to a level of proficiency that will support opportunities for employment and engagement with communities of language users around the world (ACARA, 2011; European Commission, 2011; OECD, 2018). It is therefore incumbent on curriculum developers to ensure that Australian young people do not become isolated as monolinguals in a world of multilinguals, and that there are sufficient and timely opportunities to learn languages throughout the years of schooling, as an essential 21st century learning skill (ACARA, 2014; OECD 2018).

It is no longer a case of 'English is enough', in a world where the supremacy of English is being overtaken- or at least shared- by other languages, such as Chinese, Spanish and Arabic. As an example of shift from English as the most dominant world language, Internet users by language dropped for English from 75% in 1998 to 45% in 2005. From 2001 to 2011, the increase in use of Chinese on the Internet was 1,277%, compared to a 281% in English. In 2018, Internet websites are 25% English, 19.5% Chinese, 8.1% Spanish and 5.3% Arabic (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_used_on_the_Internet), with Chinese, Spanish and Arabic sites growing exponentially faster than the number of English sites. While English will continue to remain a significant world language, young people will need facility in at least one and probably two or more other languages. Benefits gained from learning *any* additional language will assist in understanding how language works in all languages (including English), making it possible to acquire additional languages more easily.

The research literature identifies benefits for learning languages across multiple, interconnected domains- personal, social, academic (learning), and cognitive. Any curriculum review, and subsequent development of revised curriculum, will be concerned with all these domains, as they pertain to the wellbeing, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of the whole child, as the core business of educators. Some of these benefits of learning additional languages are summarised below:

Personal benefits

- Increased communicative and intercultural awareness, enabling students to look beyond their community and look at other cultures, and to have empathy and respect for these cultures and people (Garcia, 2009; Sahlberg, 2018; Villano, 1996)
- Depth of understanding human experience (Bialystok, 2014; Garcia, 2009; ACARA, 2011)
- Desire to travel and willingness to engage with people of other cultures (Pinter, 2012)
- Increased understanding of others' points of view (Fernandez & Gluckberg, 2012)
- Comparative workforce advantage and enhanced job opportunities (Marcos, 1998).

Social benefits

- Benefits include enhancement of economic competitiveness, diplomatic relations and tools for negotiations, trade negotiation skills, political and security interests, social harmony, empathy and respect for others, health and wellbeing benefits, teaching, and law enforcement (Baker & Wright, 2017; Garcia, 2009; Marcos, 1998; Moloney, 2008; Morgan, 2010, 2011; Morgan & Mercurio, 2010); Sahlberg, 2018; Scrimgeour, 2014)

Learning benefits

- Increased reading range and literacy and numeracy skills in first and additional languages (Garcia, 2009; Education Scotland, 2010)
- Better performance in standardised literacy and numeracy tests (Thomas, Collier & Abbott, 1993; ACARA, 2014)
- Better understanding of symbols in print (Bialystok, 1997, 2014)
- Increased creative thinking and problem-solving skills (Sahlberg, 2018)
- 'Language as subject' learners (not in immersion programs) outperform those who do not learn languages, in literacy tests (Rafferty, 1996)
- Positive relationship between additional languages study and English language achievement in English speaking nations (ACARA, 2014; Barik & Swain, 1975; Bialystok, 2014; Genesee, 1987; Swain, 1991).
- Higher academic achievement throughout school years (Thomas, Collier & Abbott, 1993)
- Special needs learners (with both disability or giftedness) benefit from language programs, and gifted learners achieve higher proficiency levels (Baker, 1995; Brickman, 1988)

- Early exposure to additional language learning provides educators with the ability to identify giftedness and strong language aptitude (Allen, 1992)
- Higher achievement on standard maths, reading, and vocabulary tests (Delistraty, 2014).

Cognitive benefits

- Increased creativity and problem-solving skills (Bamford & Mizokawa, 1991)
- Outperformance of monolinguals in IQ testing, increased intellectual flexibility (Bruck, Lambert & Tucker, 1974; Hakuta, 1976; Weatherford, 1986)
- Higher general intelligence (Bak, Nissan, Allerhand, & Deary, 2014)
- Delayed onset of dementia (Bak et al, 2014; Bialystok et al, 2016)
- Improved planning, prioritising, and decision making (Costa et al, 2015)
- More perceptive of surroundings (Alban, 2016)
- More critical and analytical (Alban, 2016; Fernandez & Glucksberg, 2012)
- Better focus, concentration and attention (Siegfried, 2013)
- Likely to delay immediate gratification in the pursuit of long-term goals (Bialystok, 2014)
- Better memorisation, including better working memory (Morales, Calvo & Bialystok, 2013)
- Higher levels of mental flexibility and agility (Gold, Kim, Johnson, Kryscio & Smith, 2013)
- The ability to switch between tasks quickly (Bialystok et al, 2016)
- Superior music and other arts skills (Cardillo, 2014)
- Attentive listening skills (Krizman, Marian, Shook, Skoe & Kraus, 2012).

Benefits of learning languages early

In addition to the benefits of learning languages at any age, the research literature also points to benefits of learning a language early, and hence our recommendation for languages programs being available from pre-school and across all the years of schooling, and that the curriculum review consider ways of making this possible. While recent studies show that the plasticity of the brain indicates that we can learn new information, including languages, at any age (Freitas, Farzan & Pascal-Leone, 2013), we now also know that the brain changes during the process of acquiring an additional language, and that this change provides benefit from the point of change, with increased grey matter density and white matter integrity, which confer lifelong cognitive benefits, including diminishing the likelihood of early onset dementia (Bialystok et al, 2016; Li et al, 2014).

Grammar structures learned in additional language learning impact on first language learning, as well, so learning an additional language early provides support for understanding the first language, and hence the literacy gains identified above, which support the benefits of an early start for additional language learning, when first language literacy gains are also most needed (Pinter, 2012). Longitudinal research (Jia & Fuse,

2007) shows that the environment in which learning occurs influences learning rates, and that a bilingual environment often provides more varied and richer opportunities for learning and using language in meaningful and deliberate ways. Further research reveals that younger children (under 12) acquire grammar patterns in a different order from older children (14+), whose pattern is similar to adults (Dimroth, 2008), with benefits for flexible use of the two grammar systems, and that learning a language before adolescence produces more native-like pronunciation (Harley, 1996; Patkowski, 1990).

Perhaps the most compelling reason for beginning an additional language early is that the child has more years to engage in the culture surrounding the language, and to develop greater intercultural understanding and awareness, which is recognised as a critical 21st century learning skill across the literature (OECD, 2018), and has benefits for learning across the curriculum and also the development of skills for life (ACARA, 2014). Learning a language early also normalises diversity and difference and enhances the ability to learn skills of empathy and respect.

Languages education and the aims of the Review

Provide an education that engages and challenges every child and young person in learning, rewards them for effort and promotes high standards

The newly released NSW Languages syllabuses, based on the Australian Curriculum: Languages, have been developed with broad consideration of all learners, and included in the consultation process representatives advocating for Life Skills learners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, learners from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, language teachers and representative professional and parent bodies, and those with and without prior experiences in the particular languages who have an interest in developing learning for diverse learners. These syllabuses, based on the work of ACARA in the Australian Curriculum: Languages, are revolutionary in their approach to recognising and catering for diverse learner backgrounds and needs, levels of engagement with language, and social and cognitive skill levels, such that they are designed to be engaging, challenging and rewarding for all learners.

The languages syllabuses- and more to come- provide the platform for ALL learners to engage meaningfully in learning, about themselves and their world, through languages. They do so with differentiated, authentic curricula that will challenge and reward all students, and promote high levels of accomplishment, across the years K-10. Senior secondary syllabuses build on the K-10 platform, providing for all learners to access languages learning throughout the years of schooling.

The research cited above demonstrates that the learning of languages has benefits for learners across all subject areas (Alban, 2016; Bialystok, 2016; Delistraty, 2014; Bak, Nissan, Allerhand & Dreary, 2014), improves overall cognitive capacity (Alban, 2016;

Bialystok, 2016), and hence can support this primary aim of promoting high standards, through challenging and rewarding learning. The differentiated curricula ensure that learning can be appropriate for diverse learners, and that every child and young person can benefit from their learning. Language learning rewards student effort through the achievement of incremental communicative competency.

Hence, the learning of languages, using the newly-developed materials and with reference to the Australian Curriculum, supports the first aim of the curriculum review, in providing curriculum approaches, knowledge, skills and attitudes that of their very nature will allow for learner differences, so that the learning is meaningful and rewarding for all learners.

Prepare each student with strong foundations of knowledge, capabilities and values to be lifelong learners, and to be flourishing and contributing citizens in a world in which rapid technological advances are contributing to unprecedented economic and social change in unpredictable ways

Languages learning confers cognitive and academic benefits that will greatly assist in providing students with strong foundations for learning. Engaging in languages and cultures learning, and in particular in intercultural language learning, will enhance learners' capacity to be lifelong learners, and contribute as aware citizens of the world, able to understand from multiple perspectives, changes that may be fast and unpredictable. Language skills will assist in negotiating and collaborating in economic and social situations with depth of understanding, and will promote empathy, respect, intercultural understanding and capability, strong literacy skills, creative thinking, problem solving, patience, and diplomacy skills. Engaging with diverse cultures enhances students' ability to develop understandings from multiple perspectives as well attuning skills of mental agility and flexibility. These will serve young people well as they engage with a future world with rapidly advancing technological changes and other challenges that are as yet unknown.

Furthermore, languages is the ONLY curriculum area that can provide for learning across all other subject areas. Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is an increasingly popular pedagogy employed to teach subjects in the target language. That is, science, maths, history, the arts, among others, can be taught *through* the additional language, improving both subject learning and language learning (Crandall, 2012; Cross, 2014; Fielding & Harbon, 2015). This pedagogical approach is extremely effective, and is widely used in bilingual countries, and increasingly in regular school programs. CLIL addresses the twin needs of requiring sufficient time to learn a language for it to be meaningful, and the problem of the so-called 'crowded curriculum', including both language learning and subject content learning at the same time.

We recommend bilingual learning methodologies, and a commitment to bilingual education wherever possible, using CLIL and other bilingual teaching methodologies, for the greatest benefit of learning languages, and improving subject learning through exploration of concepts across languages. Bilingual programs need to include at least eight hours a week

in each language to be effective, and CLIL programs should ideally provide two or more hours a day of content learning in the target language.

Alternatively- or additionally- languages can be studied as subjects in their own right, and need regular time allowances across a school week to be effective. Ideally, lessons should be held on at least four days a week, and lesson length should be at least one hour. Recent research cited by Spada (2018) indicates that greater intensity of lessons in concentrated time periods is more effective than short lessons spread over longer time periods.

So what needs to change?

Currently, despite the development of new languages syllabuses adapted from the Australian Curriculum: Languages, languages are not taught in all NSW schools or at all levels, and the only compulsory learning of languages is the 100 hours in Stage 4. This needs to change. In recognising 21st century learning needs for all learners, and the case for languages as an essential learning area, across the years of schooling, which will benefit all other learning areas and the social wellbeing of learners, there needs to be a commitment to including languages in the new curriculum, and with sufficient time to be meaningful and elicit learning, and a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment by students, as well as developing the necessary skills, knowledge, awareness, attitudes and understanding necessary to engage in complex futures.

Languages pedagogies that include CLIL, other bilingual learning approaches, and use of the extensive online and technological affordances should be adopted, as suitable approaches to achieving 21st century skills.

Currently curriculum-for all years- is linked to and driven by the need to achieve high HSC results which generate ATAR scores. Both the HSC and ATAR reliance should be rethought, as they do not promote the kinds of learning that the literature promotes as 21st century learning capabilities. Unlink the HSC and ATAR from learning goals, which are not (should not) be developed to respond to the gaining of university places.

The states and territories continue to operate as silos, with their own education jurisdictions. There is a need for greater collaboration and cohesion between states, sectors, schools, teachers of different subjects, primary and secondary, students and the parent community. This could include sharing of resources, cross learning areas, in teaching, sharing of language teaching expertise across schools, collaborative programming and so on.

There should be greater professional trust in teachers and principals, and less prescription of content and time allocations, affording greater flexibility for schools and teachers, who know their learners and their diverse needs best.

Other changes needed include the provision of languages for all students, using CLIL and bilingual programs, to develop skills needs for the 21st century. The importance and

benefits of learning an additional language early needs to be reflected in programs for young children. The personal, social and global benefits of learning a language need to be recognised.

Recommendations

- Languages should be a key and mandatory curriculum subject, offered across the years of schooling (commencing in pre-school), recognised for its capacity to meet the aims of the curriculum review, in making a critical contribution to preparing all learners for complex and diverse global futures, and enhancing their cognitive, personal, social and academic skills
- Languages offered should include all those developed for the Australian Curriculum, the NSW syllabuses, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, world languages, classical languages, Auslan, and community languages
- The diversity of learners and their learning needs must be recognised in differentiated curricula, and for languages this means that curricula for first language learners (native speakers), background or heritage learners, and additional language learners are needed, and that there also be separate curricula for different years of commencement
- Languages programs should include bilingual programs, including CLIL pedagogies, as well as 'language as subject' options
- Languages learning time allocations must be sufficient to provide for learners to make appreciable gains in learning sufficient to engage in a plurilingual world, in economic, political, social and intercultural contexts
- There should be more flexible models of delivery such as blended learning platforms or encouraging students to study languages at other schools
- There should be increased resources to support the education of more teachers of languages in Australian university programs, to meet the supply demands, across all the languages of the curriculum, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and community languages; and that ongoing professional learning needs of teachers of languages be resourced by government and provided by languages professional learning associations, as the experts in the field
- School leadership teams need to undertake provided professional learning that includes understanding the benefits of language learning for all learning areas, the diversity of

learners and their language learning needs, the benefits of plurilingualism, and the needs of teachers of languages

- Schools be allowed more flexibility in choices of languages, language teaching approaches and time allocations, as school staff know their communities and learners best
- The NAPLAN, HSC and ATAR score focus of curriculum needs to be decoupled from learning goals and objectives. High stakes testing is not conducive to productive learning
- Planning of languages programs should involve long-term, interculturally focused objectives, in line with 21st century curriculum needs
- Assessment of languages should involve continual feedback, include intercultural learning goals, and progression towards achievement, rather than end-point summative testing. Differentiated outcomes/achievement is required to recognise the diversity of learners and variable starting points in learning
- NSW should work with other states and territories, and the Federal government in developing curriculum, and in establishing networks of teachers to share resources practice, pedagogies and professional learning

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