

## **PROMOTING THE BENEFITS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING**

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The need to promote language teaching across Australia has been identified as a priority in the *National Statement and Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005-2008*. While many countries in the European Union are moving towards ‘mother-tongue plus two foreign languages’, introducing languages from the earliest years of primary education, languages continue to struggle to gain legitimacy as a *key learning area* in many primary and secondary schools across Australia. Substantial barriers remain to recognition and acceptance of the unique contribution language study makes to the education of young people. There exists a pervasive lack of awareness or even deep-seated misunderstanding of the concomitant cognitive benefits, benefits to first language literacy, and intercultural insights and understandings which language learning can provide. Compounding this lack of awareness is a complacency that, as native speakers of the global *lingua franca*, English speakers do not need to learn another language. This report seeks to provide language teachers and other advocates of language learning with accessible, concise information about the benefits of languages learning and the inadequacy of the notion that *English is enough*. It draws on literature from experts in a number of fields including second language acquisition, psycholinguistics and language education, summarising key concepts and presenting key arguments which are fundamental to supporting and promoting the benefits of languages education<sup>1</sup>.

This report comprises five sections:

- A. The benefits of language learning for literacy development
- B. Cognitive benefits of language learning
- C. Culture, language and intercultural language learning
- D. Intercultural competency, global understanding and *English is not enough*
- E. Age and second language learning

Sections A and B contain two parts: at the outset, a synopsis of *key ideas* in clear and accessible language, followed by a summary, in the form of an annotated bibliography, of five key studies in each of the fields. This format provides the reader with the flexibility to cite brief, succinct information, or, alternatively, to access more detailed information about the nature and findings of empirical research in each of these areas.

The remaining sections (Sections C, D and E) are also based on recent key articles and reports which reflect current trends and thinking in second language teaching and learning, and from the field of second language acquisition research. Following the synopsis of *key ideas*, these sections are presented as broad summaries/overviews of each of the topics. The reader is provided with the references at the point of citation, thereby permitting further perusal of the source documents as required. The ideas and arguments contained in the five sections of this report are, of course, closely interconnected. They are treated separately here in the interests of clarity and accessibility.

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<sup>1</sup> The reader who wishes to explore these and other related issues in much greater depth is referred to Michael Clyne’s comprehensive book, *Australia’s Language Potential*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press (2005).

## Section A: The benefits of language learning for literacy development

### Key ideas:

- Studies have shown that children need certain preparatory skills in order to learn to read. These include *metalinguistic awareness*<sup>2</sup>. Learning a second language has been shown to enhance children's metalinguistic awareness and thereby their reading readiness (eg. Yelland et al 1993).
- Learning a second language aids in the development of metalinguistic awareness because it broadens children's experience of language generally. Monolingual children have a limited set of resources to help them to develop metalinguistic awareness. However, children who have acquired a second language from an early age and those learning a second language are more readily able to 'step back' from, or abstract about, their own language and compare it with another language system. They are more readily able to reflect on language as a system, and to understand that the relationship between the *form* of a word and its meaning is an arbitrary one. These kinds of experiences help them to develop understandings and insights about the nature of language which they need in order to develop literacy. (Liddicoat 2001; Yelland et al 1993; Bialystok 1987; 2000).
- Longitudinal studies of immersion in Canada – programs in which children learn part or all of the school curriculum through the medium of a second language, usually French - have shown that, despite the fact that students in such programs have less exposure to English in the school setting than children in regular English-medium schools, the children outperform their monolingual peers in measures of English skills (Swain and Lapkin 1991).
- The concept of *word* as a component of language is one of the first aspects of linguistic awareness that children learn. It is integral to learning to read. Studies have shown that bilingual children have an advantage over monolingual children for certain tasks which involve this aspect of language, including some aspects of word awareness (eg Bialystok 1987).
- A component of literacy common to all languages is the skill of making meaning from texts. Readers must learn to combine a number of strategies in order to do this: using their knowledge of the world, skimming, making inferences, contextual guessing of words, etc. These skills are common to literacy in all languages, and are transferable from one language to another (eg. Baker 2006).

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<sup>2</sup> This is loosely defined as *thinking about* and *reflecting on* the nature and functions of language. It describes the capacity to use knowledge *about* language as opposed to the capacity to *use* language.

**Key Studies:****A1: Yelland, G., J. Pollard and A. Mercuri (1993) The metalinguistic benefits of limited contact with a second language. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 14: 423-444.**

In this study, the researchers set out to investigate: a) whether the widely reported metalinguistic benefits of childhood bilingualism would be available to children who had a more limited exposure to a second language; and b) if such benefits were found, whether these would extend to advantages for reading acquisition.

There were two groups of Prep. and Grade 1 children in the study: those who were taking part in a one-hour per week Italian program ('the marginal bilingual group'), and those who were not ('the monolingual group'). The groups were attending schools in the same geographical area in Melbourne, and thus were drawn from comparable communities and socio-economic backgrounds. They were also carefully matched on age and language-related measures.

The tasks administered to the children were designed to test their levels of *word awareness*, which has been shown in many studies to be related to reading acquisition. The children were tested twice. The first test was conducted in April (2 months into the school year) and found no difference in the performance of the two groups. The second round of tests were conducted in September of the same year, and found that the children in the 'marginal bilingual' group 'were showing a significantly higher level of word awareness than their monolingual counterparts' (p 436). While this advantage weakened across grade 1, the researchers concluded that although the 'marginal bilingual' children's exposure to the second language was relatively limited, 'it does seem to provide them indirectly with other important cognitive and educational benefits, such as aiding in the development of written word recognition – a critical component of reading acquisition' (p441).

**A2: Swain, M. and Lapkin, S. (1991) Additive bilingualism and French immersion education: the roles of language proficiency and literacy. In: Reynolds, A. *Bilingualism, Multiculturalism, and Second Language Learning. The McGill Conference in Honour of Wallace E. Lambert*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp203-216.**

'Additive bilingualism' refers to the situation where an individual's first language is a 'societally dominant and prestigious one' (p203); there is no danger or cost to the first language when a second language is learned. In fact, additive bilingualism has typically been associated with positive social and cognitive characteristics of bilinguals.

French immersion in Canada is a prime example of an educational program which promotes additive bilingualism. The students are overwhelmingly English speakers – ie. speakers of a prestigious, majority language – who are learning a second language (French) which brings with it potential economic, cognitive and social rewards for its

learners. Early French immersion programs involve the children learning *all* of the kindergarten and Grades 1 and 2 curriculum in French- a language with which most children will have had very little contact in their pre-school years. By grades 2 or 3, an English language arts component is introduced into the program; gradually, the time allocated to English is increased so that by Grade 6, approximately 50% of the school program is in English, and 50% in French. Thus, the children in French immersion will have had less exposure to English in the school setting than children in regular English programs. Also, they will have had no formal literacy instruction in English until Grade 2 or 3. ‘Interestingly, in spite of the restricted instruction in English, a body of research is accumulating which suggests that aspects of the immersion students’ English are enhanced’ (p204). This article provides an overview of these studies.

The studies have found that, in the first few years of primary schooling, the immersion students lag behind their peers in regular English-only programs in some aspects of English language skills. This is not surprising, given that no formal English instruction is provided until Grade 2 or 3. However, by the end of Grade 5, ‘immersion students perform as well as or better than their English-educated peers on all aspects of English language skills measured by standardised tests...From Grade 5 on, in almost all instances where there have been significant differences between immersion and comparison students, immersion students have outperformed their comparison groups in such areas as punctuation, spelling, vocabulary and grammatical usage...’(p205).

The researchers suggest that these findings offer support for the hypothesis that ‘the advantages in English demonstrated by early immersion students in the middle and upper elementary grades may in part be due to their knowledge of two language systems, a knowledge which permits them to contrast French and English, thus leading to a heightened overall awareness’ (p205).

**A3: Bialystok, E. (1987) Development of word concept by bilingual children. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 9: 133-140.**

Understanding the concept of *word* as a constituent of language is one of the ‘first (and perhaps most significant) aspects of linguistic awareness that children master’ (p133). This concept is regarded as a central one in the acquisition of literacy skills. Bialystok refers to the Russian psychologist Vygotsky, who proposed that bilingual children would be more likely to grasp the notion that *words* are formal abstractions of language, because they have two labels for things, and therefore could see the arbitrary nature of the relationship between words and their referents. This study investigated bilingual and monolingual children’s awareness of *word* as a linguistic form.

There were three smaller studies reported on in this paper, each of which investigated different aspects of word awareness. The studies included a total of three groups of (mostly Grade 1) children: those who were monolingual English speakers; those who were partially bilingual, in that they were learning French through a French immersion program (however, English was their first and dominant language); and those who were fully bilingual, balanced in their French and English abilities.

The study concludes that the bilingual children showed advantages in a number of aspects of word awareness when compared to the monolingual children:

‘Across the three studies, bilingual children were more advanced than monolingual children in their mastery of some aspects of the concept of word...[They] were most notably advanced when required to separate out individual words from meaningful sentences, focus on only the form or meaning of a word under highly distracting conditions, and reassign a familiar name to a different object. Each of these tasks requires the ability to selectively attend to words or their features and to perform some operation on that isolated component....The ability to selectively attend to units of language and to apply specific processes to those units is an integral part of using language for advanced or specialized purposes, such as literacy’ (p138).

**A4: Liddicoat, A. (2001) Learning a language, learning about language, learning to be literate. *Babel* Vol. 35, 3: 12-15.**

This article summarises some of the key issues in the current debate about languages and literacy. It provides a well-structured explanation of the important role that second language learning can play in enhancing literacy development. Some of the key points are:

- The literacy debate in Australia has tended to become very narrow and focused on ‘literacy in English’. This is an ‘impoverished view of literacy’ because it makes a very simplistic link between time spent on English literacy and learning. It ignores the complex and potentially rich understandings and insights which second language learning brings (p12).
- Literacy is based on a conception of language as an abstract system. Learning a second language provides students with the opportunity to understand that the relationship between the *form* of a word and its *meaning* is an arbitrary one. For example, young children pass through a stage where they are unable to separate the meaning of a word from its attributes. They find it difficult to understand that the sounds which make up the English word ‘dog’ are not an inherent part of that word. ‘However, a child who learns that another collection of sounds, such as those found in French (*chien*) or Japanese (*inu*) can also mean ‘dog’ has learnt something important about the nature of language... The child knows that a meaning can be represented in more than just one way and that variation in form is a possibility in language. This is an important realisation which assists in learning that sound can be encoded in graphic forms and that these graphic forms can be variable’ (p14). Such understandings are important in the development of literacy.
- Language learners learn to talk about language as an object, to think about the components of language and the way in which messages are structured. They learn to compare one language system with another. They learn strategies such as guessing unfamiliar words from context. The explicit focus of a second language program *is* language. Thus, in the second language classroom, there is ‘an educational dimension which is not available elsewhere [which provides] an

important complement to the work of the generalist/English teacher in the area of literacy' (p15).

- 'Learning a new language teaches the learner something about the nature of language and languages, and this is knowledge which needs to be developed by a literate person. When people question the value of language learning for younger learners, or suggest that language learning might be counterproductive, they see only part of the picture. What they do not see is the extra learning that takes place. Language teachers do not only teach a language, they also teach about language as a concept, and about communication, context and culture... Second language learning is therefore a resource for enhancing literacy, not a problem for acquiring literacy. It forms part of the whole package for learning about language as a part of schooling and provides additional insights into the nature of language that are not available to the monolingual learner' (p15).

**A5: Baker, C. (2006) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. (4<sup>th</sup> Edition) Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.**

This book provides a very broad and comprehensive overview of research and issues relating to bilingual education and bilingualism.

Some of the key points relevant to bilingualism, second language learning and literacy are:

- At one stage, it was believed that a bilingual person stored their two languages separately in their brain, and any increase in the use of a second language would result in the diminishment of the first. This is the 'naïve theory of bilingualism'. It conceives of the two language systems as operating separately in the brain, without transfer, and with a limited amount of 'room' for languages. However, recent research has shown this theory to be a fallacy. 'The evidence suggests the opposite – that language attributes are not separated in the cognitive system, but transfer readily and are interactive' (p168). Therefore, when a child learns lessons in school through the medium of a second language, the information does not merely feed the second language part of the brain. Concepts learned in one language can readily transfer to the other language. 'Teaching a child to multiply numbers in Spanish or use a dictionary in English easily transfers to multiplication or dictionary use in the other language' (p169).
- Academic and cognitive skills transfer readily between languages. While there may be differences in the vocabulary, grammar and writing systems of languages, all languages with writing systems have in common that the reader must learn to make meaning from the text. Concepts and strategies involved in this transfer easily from one language to another, for example, 'scanning, skimming, contextual guessing of words, skipping unknown words, tolerating ambiguity, reading for meaning, making inferences, monitoring, recognizing the structure of text, using previous learning, using background knowledge about the text' (p330)

are strategies used by readers whether the text is in English, German, French or Spanish.

- Therefore, while the sounds of letters and decoding of words have a separation in learning to read in each language, ‘the higher cognitive abilities and strategies required in making meaning from text are common... Overall, reading competence in two languages does not operate separately’ (p330).



## Section B: Cognitive benefits of language learning

### Key ideas:

- Much of the research on cognitive aspects of second language learning has focused on divergent and creative thinking, and many studies indicate a bilingual advantage in these areas (Bialystok 2001; Bialystok et al 2005; Ianco-Worrall 1972; Ben-Zeev 1977).
- Early and more recent research indicates heightened levels of metalinguistic awareness amongst bilinguals. They appear to develop a more analytical orientation to language due to their experience in organising their two language systems, and keeping them separate while they perform particular tasks. This experience appears to give them an advantage over monolinguals when performing tasks involving control of linguistic processing (Bialystok 2001; Ianco-Worrall 1972; Ben-Zeev 1977; Bialystok et al 2005)
- Research with children who are learning a second language in a partial immersion program (Australia, Eckstein 1986) or a total immersion program (Canada, Swain and Lapkin 1991 – see section on literacy) has shown benefits for divergent and creative thinking as well as for first language literacy skills.

### **B1: Ianco-Worrall, A. (1972) Bilingualism and cognitive development. *Child Development* 43, pp 1390-1400.**

Previous studies of bilingual children have indicated that they demonstrate a faster rate of development in specific areas of cognitive functioning than their monolingual peers. Ianco-Worrall set out to investigate some aspects of these findings. Specifically, she wanted to test the observation that bilingual children separate the sound of a word from its meaning earlier than monolingual children do.

The informants in her study were 30 Afrikaans-English bilinguals aged 4-6 and 7-9 in Pretoria, South Africa. They were matched with a group of unilingual (monolingual) children on measures including IQ, age, sex, school year and social class.

There were two different experiments in the study. The first involved questions of the type ‘I have three words: *cap*, *can* and *hat*. Which is more like *cap* – *can* or *hat*? Children could make their choice based on the *sound* of the word (*can* is more like *cap*), or on the *meaning* of the word (*hat* is more like *cap*, ie. they are similar objects).

Amongst the older groups, the study found that there was no difference between the monolinguals and the bilinguals: both groups chose according to the meaning of the word (ie. *hat*). However, amongst the younger children, the bilinguals tended to respond on the basis of word meaning (as had the older children), whereas the monolinguals responded overwhelmingly on the basis of the sound of the word. ‘The conclusion we draw is that bilinguals... reach a stage in semantic development...some 2-3 years earlier than their unilingual peers’ (p1398).

The second experiment involved asking children if the names for objects could be interchanged, for example, 'suppose you were making up names for things, could you then call a cow 'dog' and a dog 'cow'?' Bilingual children were more likely to agree that this would be possible, whereas monolingual children showed greater resistance to this idea. Bilingual children demonstrated greater awareness that the relationship between a word and its meaning is arbitrary rather than fixed.

**B2: Ben-Zeev, S. (1977) The influence of bilingualism on cognitive strategy and cognitive development. *Child Development* 48, pp 1009-1018.**

Ben-Zeev's study involved two groups of Hebrew-English bilingual children, one in the USA and one in Israel, and a matched group of monolingual children in each country who spoke only English or Hebrew respectively. There were a total of 96 children in the study, with an average age of 7 years.

Ben-Zeev set out to investigate whether bilingual children have some special cognitive flexibility, given that they are constantly monitoring their two languages in order to keep them separate and to avoid 'interference' between their two language systems.

She administered several different kinds of tests, including the Symbol Substitution Test. In this test, the child was required to recognize that changing the *name* of an object did not alter its attributes. For example, the child was shown a toy aeroplane and was told 'In this game, this is called a turtle'. The child was then asked some questions such as 'Can the turtle fly?' Successful completion of this task required the child to inhibit attention to the distracting information (ie. the fact that the name of the object had been changed) and to focus on the object's attributes. In another task, children were asked to substitute the word 'macaroni' for 'I'. After this was explained to them, they were asked 'how do we say *I am warm*?' (Correct answer: '*Macaroni am warm*'). Once again, to complete this task successfully the child was required to ignore word meaning, resist the 'correct' sentence and the interference of word substitution.

Ben-Zeev concluded that bilingual children, because of their experiences of two different language systems and two sets of rules, display an advantage in this kind of test. They are more flexible and analytical in their approach than are monolingual children. Bilingual children 'have a more analytic orientation to structures' and are more able to 'seek out the underlying dimensions in the patterns they confront' (p1017).

**B3: Eckstein, A. (1986) Effect of bilingual program on English language and cognitive development. In M. Clyne (ed) *An Early Start*. Melbourne: River Seine, pp 82-98.**

This study took place as part of the evaluation of second language programs in several Melbourne primary schools in the early 1980s. One school had a bilingual 'partial immersion' program in which children were learning some curriculum areas, including science, through the medium of German. Eckstein's study aimed to investigate several questions, including whether the children were able to transfer concepts, knowledge and

skills learned in their second language to their first without being re-taught; and whether the ability levels of the children in the bilingual program in terms of concepts, knowledge and skills were comparable with their monolingual peers. She also sought to investigate the interrelationships between cognitive and linguistic development in both the first and second language for children learning part of the curriculum in a second language.

The children in the bilingual program were compared with matched monolingual children from a neighbouring primary school. The two different groups were taught science units on magnetism and electricity in German and English respectively. In a range of tasks designed to test science concepts and knowledge, the children who had learned through the medium of German 'performed as well as or significantly better than their monolingually educated peers on most test items' (p87). They were able to effectively transfer 'both linguistic and cognitive skill from [their second language to their first language]. The children consistently performed better on the English-medium version of the test in all areas; that is, understanding of knowledge and concepts, knowledge of specialized terminology, as well as production of more complex and sophisticated answers' (p97).

Eckstein also found that there was some evidence to indicate that the children in the bilingual program had gained cognitive benefits from their experience. 'In terms of concepts and knowledge, the bilingual children significantly outscored monolingual controls on 25% of test items when tested in [their second language] and 35% of test items when tested in their dominant language. Also, they seem to have a more creative and flexible approach to dealing with unfamiliar terminology in that they demonstrate a slightly greater tendency to use alternative language structures when they do not know the precise terminology. Such findings are also consistent with research studies showing that bilinguals demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility and are more divergent thinkers' (p97).

**B4: Bialystok, E. (2001) *Bilingualism in Development: Language, Literacy and Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.**

**B5: Bialystok, E., Craik, F., Grady, C., Chau, W. Ishii, R. Gunji, A., Pantev, C. (2005) Effect of bilingualism on cognitive control in the Simon task: evidence from MEG. *Neuroimage* 24, pp 40-49.**

Ellen Bialystok has been involved in researching aspects of bilingualism and its relationship to cognition and the development of literacy – particularly with young children - for more than two decades. Her book (2001) draws together and explores the findings from her work and the work of many other researchers in this field; the later study (Bialystok et al 2005) uses recent neuro-imaging technology (magneto-encephalography MEG) to explore some of the neural aspects of the bilingual advantage which have been reported in the research literature and which were summarized in her book.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This study involved monolingual and bilingual adults with an average age of 29 years.

Bialystok notes that bilinguals do not have uniform or ‘across the board’ metalinguistic or cognitive advantage over monolinguals. However, she suggests that the early acquisition and regular use of two languages has been shown to enhance the ability of children to solve problems which require them to *selectively attend* to information, for example, where they are required to ignore or inhibit misleading information in order to complete a task. Bialystok refers to this skill as ‘control of linguistic processing’ or ‘cognitive control’. She details studies which have shown this advantage for bilinguals over monolinguals across several domains of thought, including concepts of quantity, spatial concepts, and problem solving (see Bialystok 2001: Chapter 5; and Bialystok et al 2005:40).

Why would bilingual children excel in problems which require control of attention? Bialystok and other researchers have suggested that this ability results from the need that bilinguals have to differentiate between their two languages, to control or inhibit one while focusing on the other. Recent research has shown that ‘both languages are activated when a bilingual uses one of them... The joint activation of both languages means that bilinguals must control attention to the selected language in order to achieve fluency in the designated language without intrusions from the other system’ (2005: 40 - 41). ‘A possible reason for the enhanced cognitive control which has been reported for bilingual children is that the same control processes are used both to solve these misleading problems and to manage two active language systems. Bilingual children, therefore, have had more opportunity than monolinguals to exercise a crucial cognitive skill, and this practice may then accelerate the development of that skill’ (2005: 40).

The 2005 study led by Bialystok used MEG technology to investigate which areas of the brain were used by monolinguals and bilinguals to complete specific processing tasks. In general, the study found evidence to support hypotheses that suggest differential brain-behaviour relations for monolinguals and bilinguals, consistent with the activation of areas of the brain that are engaged in the management of two language systems (p48).

## Section C: Culture, language and intercultural language learning

### Key ideas:

- Learning another language offers insights into other cultures and ways of relating to the world which no other area of the curriculum can offer. A language and its culture(s) are inextricably linked – they have developed together over a long period of time. When we learn another language, we are learning not only the words used by speakers of that language to designate everyday objects and ideas, but we gain insights into other ways of thinking about and relating to the world (Baker 2006; Wierzbicka 1997; Crozet and Liddicoat 1997; 2000).
- In an intercultural approach to language learning, learners identify and explore their own cultural perspective – its norms, values and boundaries - as well as those of the people whose language they are learning. They begin to broaden their understanding of human behaviour and begin to see that their own cultural perspective is just one possible world view amongst many (Crozet and Liddicoat 1997; 2000; Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco 1997).
- Separating the teaching of culture from language offers only a superficial experience of the target culture because language *encodes* and *reflects* its culture. Without access to the target language, learners will not attain the depth of understanding they need to engage with cultural knowledge in any meaningful way (Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco 1997).

People who have never learned another language often have the naïve view that language learning simply involves learning another set of ‘labels’ to designate the same objects, emotions and ideas as a person can express in their first language. Therefore, they believe that learning another language involves learning lists of words and expressions which have a one-to-one correspondence with those in the learner’s first language. This ill-informed view overlooks the fundamental links between a language and its culture, and the multifaceted insights and understandings which learning another language brings – in addition to the cognitive benefits and benefits for learners’ literacy, which are outlined in other sections of this report. Some key aspects of language and culture, and the aims of intercultural language teaching, are outlined below:

**A language indexes its culture** (Baker 2006): a language and its culture have developed together throughout a long period of history. Therefore, the language that has grown up around a culture is a unique expression of that culture. The songs, hymns, folk tales, sayings, appropriate forms of greeting and taking leave from others, the history, wisdom and ideals of a particular group of people are all reflected in that group’s language. ‘The taste and flavour of a culture is given through its language; its memories and traditions are stored in its language’ (Baker 2006).

Most people know that *visible* items such as foods differ greatly between languages. It is no accident, for example, that English does not have a word for an alcoholic drink made from rice, whereas Japanese does (*sake*); English has a word for a sweet spread made from oranges (*marmalade*) which does not have an equivalent in French, German, Italian, Japanese or Indonesian, for example. Many people are also aware that there are different

*customs and social institutions* which have specific names in one language but not another. For example, English does not have a word corresponding to the Japanese word *miai*, which refers to a formal occasion when the prospective bride and her family meet the prospective bridegroom and his family for the first time (Wierzbicka 1997).

However, many people do not understand that what applies to visible objects such as foods, and social rituals such as that just mentioned, also applies to those things that we cannot see: ‘people’s values, ideals, attitudes and their ways of thinking about the world and our life in it’ (Wierzbicka 1997). These are all embedded in language. When we learn another language, we gain insights into another view of the world; we learn ‘how to relate to otherness’ and ‘how to interact with otherness’ (Crozet and Liddicoat 2000). Language learning, especially through an intercultural approach (see below) expands learners’ horizons and understandings of human behaviour, and ‘prepares them to participate in a multilingual and multicultural world’ (Crozet and Liddicoat 2000) in unique ways that no other area of the curriculum can provide.

**Intercultural language learning:** recent research and thinking about language teaching and the teaching of culture has emphasised the importance and value of an *intercultural* approach. While the basic goals of language teaching have not changed – to help learners to become proficient communicators in the spoken and written forms of the language – the intercultural approach emphasises the central role of culture. ‘Culture is embodied in the ways in which people interact with each other in everyday forms of talk and through the written texts they produce’ (Crozet and Liddicoat 2000); therefore, from the very outset of language learning, learners can explore aspects of another culture. In this approach, learners learn not only about another language and culture, but also about their *own*. They learn to ‘distance themselves from their native language/culture environment to see it for the first time as what it really is, as just one possible world view and not the *only* world view...[w]e presume that the world is the way our culture predisposes us to see it..intercultural language teaching ..makes culture visible – rather than the invisible pattern our own language tells us it is’ (Crozet and Liddicoat 1997). This is an important insight, because our own cultural perspective is a ‘given’, invisible and unanalysed (Crozet and Liddicoat 2000).

Intercultural competence is more than learning *about* cultures and contrasting them. It does not involve simply learning how to copy foreign cultural codes in order to interact seemingly successfully with speakers of another language. It involves recognising one’s own cultural boundaries and those of other cultures, and negotiating and managing these differences in a way that both parties are comfortable with. Intercultural competence is the ability to create for oneself a comfortable *third* place between one’s first culture and the target culture (Crozet and Liddicoat 1997).

**Language and culture are intertwined:** some schools have done away with language programs, and instead have opted to teach about other cultures through a ‘culture studies’ approach. In these programs, children learn some geography or history of other countries, and some aspects of their customs, art and food. Approaches which simply teach ‘world knowledge’ of other cultures through the students’ first language are inadequate to result

in real insights and understandings of other languages and cultures. Language and culture are inextricably linked. The 'culture studies' approach allows the learner only to observe the country or culture 'from the outside', as a tourist does, but, without access to the target language, the learner does not attain the depth of understanding to really engage with this knowledge in any meaningful way. 'Without a linguistic experience of difference, a cultural experience of difference cannot reach the same depths. Difference is the central aspect of intercultural communication and such difference must be lived in communication' (Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco 1997).

**References for section C:**

Baker, C. (2006) *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Crozet, C. and Liddicoat, A. (1997) The challenge of intercultural language teaching: engaging with culture in the classroom. In: Lo Bianco, J., Liddicoat, A. and Crozet, C. (eds), *Striving for Third Place. Intercultural Competence Through Language Education*. Canberra: Language Australia, pp 113-125.

Crozet and Liddicoat (2000) Teaching culture as an integrated part of language: implications for the aims, approaches and pedagogies of language teaching. In: *Teaching Languages, Teaching Cultures*. Melbourne: Applied Linguistics Association of Australia, pp 1-18.

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## Section D: Intercultural competency, global understanding and *English is not enough*

### Key ideas:

- Contacts between people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds have accelerated dramatically in the past few decades, due to a number of factors including advances in technology – the internet, telecommunications, travel – increasing international migration and the trend towards economic globalization. As these trends continue into the future, the need for intercultural competence will be heightened. The ability to understand and engage with people of other languages and cultures will be fundamental to participation in increasingly multicultural and multilingual societies and the global economy (eg. Graddol 2006; Genesee and Cloud 1997; speech by Lieutenant Peter Cosgrove 2002).
- Many monolingual speakers of English are very complacent about the need to learn another language. They believe that their position as speakers of English, the global *lingua franca*, means that they are very fortunate: ‘the whole world is learning English, so why should we as English speakers need to learn another language?’ However, a number of linguists and economists have expressed the view that monolingual English speakers will be at a severe disadvantage in an increasingly globalized world. As English becomes the basic, ‘must-have’ skill, those who speak a second or third language in addition to English will have the competitive edge. This is being increasingly recognized in countries such as India and China, who are already moving beyond learning English to embrace other emerging languages of importance such as Spanish (eg. Graddol 2006; Clyne 2005; speech by Lieutenant Peter Cosgrove 2002).

The phenomenon of the *global village* is a significant major development which began in the latter part of the twentieth century and has accelerated in the early years of the twenty-first century. This period has seen movements in populations unprecedented in world history. Between 1960 and 2000, for example, the total number of international migrants doubled to 175 million (Graddol 2006). People move countries for many different reasons, including seeking temporary or permanent work, seeking refuge from war and upheaval in their own countries, or for education. This movement of populations is significantly altering the social and linguistic mix of the destination countries, which are becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural (Graddol 2006). Added to these demographic trends, technology is also rapidly increasing contacts between people from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds – teleconferencing and video conferencing, the internet and telephone, tourism and business travel - all bring people from a diverse range of cultures and languages into contact on a daily basis. These developments heighten the need for linguistic and intercultural competencies – the ability to understand and engage with other ways of being and doing (see *Culture, language and intercultural language learning*).

Competence in a second or third language, intercultural understanding and cross-cultural competence are becoming crucial components of a basic education to prepare students for



living in an increasingly globalised world. ‘If we are to live comfortably in multilingual, multicultural neighbourhoods, compete successfully in the global marketplace, and take full advantage of communication technologies, basic education ... must include competence in second or even third languages. Further, intercultural understanding and cross-cultural competency are necessary to be effective in diverse local, national and international social contexts’ (Genesee and Cloud 1998).

In Australia, recognition of the importance of these skills has been very slow to develop, despite our increasing linguistic and cultural diversity. Michael Clyne has characterized this as ‘a persistent monolingual mindset’, which regards monolingualism as the norm, and multilingualism as ‘outside the possible experience of “real Australians”’, despite the fact that the number of bi- and multilinguals in the world far exceeds the number of monolinguals (Clyne 2005). General Peter Cosgrove highlighted the need for Australia to overcome its relative geographical isolation, and to recognize and embrace the increasingly close contacts between countries, peoples and therefore languages and cultures in the increasingly globalised world<sup>4</sup>:

‘Both in their scale, and their cultural significance, the proliferation of linkages among nations is without precedence. It is a phenomenon that is inexorable. I cannot imagine a future in which people of all cultures and nations are not increasingly connected by ties of travel, commerce and migration.

As a nation that occupies a continent we labour under a disability. We do not share a land border with any other nation. Our isolation militates against the routine acquisition of multiple languages by our young people that is taken for granted throughout Europe.

Throughout much of our first century this was not a fatal disability. But, as the world enters a second millennium, and as Australia enters its second century, that state of affairs cannot continue. *Language skills and cultural sensitivity will be the new currency of this world order.* Along with computer literacy they will provide the keys to participation in the global economy.’

### ***English is not enough***

For many ‘native speakers’ of English in predominantly English-speaking countries such as Australia, the USA and Britain, the rise and expansion of English as a global language has added support to the long-held presumption that ‘English is enough’: ‘the whole world is learning English, so we don’t need to learn another language’, so the argument goes. However, complex international, technological, economic and cultural changes currently taking place are likely to put an end to the complacency of the *English is enough* argument. As David Graddol argues, ‘English has provided a significant competitive advantage to its speakers over the last few decades... We are now nearing the

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<sup>4</sup> Address by the then Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Peter Cosgrove AC, MC, to the Australian Principals Association Professional Development Council (APAPDC), Melbourne 30 May 2002 (emphasis added).

end of the period where native speakers [of English] can bask in their privileged knowledge of the global lingua franca' (Graddol 2006). In a comprehensive report to the British Council, Graddol provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of a range of global economic, technological, demographic and linguistic data. He concludes that, as the world becomes increasingly bi- and multilingual, monolingual English speakers face a bleak economic future, as multilinguals from other countries prove to have a competitive advantage in global companies and organisations. He describes the growing trends toward foreign language learning in countries such as India, which have capitalized on their English language skills, but are 'already discovering that they need more languages'. This is reflected for example in increasing demand for language courses at Indian (Graddol 2006: 118). Some of the other key trends identified by Graddol include:

- The dominance of English in offshore services will slowly decline, as economies in other language areas outsource services. Japanese, Spanish, French and German are already growing; (p15)
- Mandarin and Spanish are challenging English in some countries for educational resources and national policy priorities; (p15)
- As English becomes a near-universal 'basic skill', the need to maintain advantage by moving beyond English and having proficiency in other languages will become the norm; this is characterized as 'the doom of monolingualism'; (p15)
- The world economy is experiencing the rise of two economic superpowers – India and China. But in addition to these countries, Brazil and Russia are also experiencing rapid economic growth. The era of the dominance of the USA and the European superpowers is drawing to an end, and, with it, our perceptions of the relative importance of world languages will alter dramatically (pp 32-33).
- The dominance of English on the internet is declining, as software improves to support more languages and scripts. Graddol quotes an analysis published in November 2005 by Byte Level Research, which concluded that '...the next Internet revolution will not be in English. While English isn't becoming any less important on the Internet, other languages such as Chinese, Russian, Spanish and Portuguese are becoming comparatively more important' (p44).
- Chinese will remain the largest language in terms of native speakers, and its transnational use is growing rapidly; Spanish has roughly the same number of native-speakers as English, but may overtake it. It is growing in economic importance in both Latin America and the USA; Arabic is growing demographically faster than any other world language (p61).

This section has focused chiefly on economic concerns, and the need for Australian students to be able to develop the skills necessary to compete in an international marketplace. However, it is important not to lose sight of the broader educational goals of language learning, and the unique insights and understandings which this entails (see sections A to C of this report). Considered together, the intellectual, cognitive, intercultural and economic benefits of language learning provide a solid, compelling rationale for endorsing and supporting the unique role of language learning in the curriculum. As Genesee and Cloud conclude: 'Linguistic and cultural competence will be

the mark of the well-educated citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (Genesee and Cloud 1997).

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## Section E: Age and second language acquisition

### Key ideas:

- There are many strong arguments for the early introduction of language learning in schools. Many European Union countries are moving towards ‘mother tongue plus two foreign languages’, recognising not only the linguistic but also the cognitive, attitudinal and general educational benefits to young children of the early introduction of other languages (Commission of the European Communities 2003; Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2006).
- Young children are much more intuitive language learners than older learners, and generally attain higher levels of proficiency than those who begin as adolescents or adults. It is now widely agreed that adolescents and adults differ in their language learning strategies from younger learners. However, the notion that there is a ‘cut off point’, after which successful language learning becomes impossible, has been largely dismissed in the literature. There are many factors which influence the language learning process, including aptitude and motivation, and there remains much debate about the role and interaction of these factors (Singleton 2001; Ioup 2005).

The ‘age-factor’ in second language acquisition has long been, and continues to be, a subject of much debate and controversy. Early research and writing on the subject was often based on folk wisdom and anecdotal evidence rather than on rigorous research. The notion that there is a definite ‘cut-off point’ around the age of puberty, after which complete acquisition of a second language is impossible, has now been largely refuted (Singleton 2001).

In the last three decades, there has been an enormous amount of research and discussion about age and second language learning. The position which is now widely (although not unanimously) accepted amongst researchers in the field is that there is a *fundamental difference* between child and adult language learning. Children rely much more on intuition and an ‘innate language-specific bioprogram’ (Ioup 2005) while older learners must rely on general cognition and the knowledge they obtain from their first language. Few researchers challenge the notion that those who learn a second language early in life for the most part attain higher levels of proficiency than those who begin as adolescents or adults; however, it is widely accepted that children are slower at second language acquisition than adolescents or adults, although they tend to achieve higher levels of proficiency in the long run. It is now widely acknowledged that the role of age-related factors is not clear-cut, and many other variables, including motivation and aptitude, may play a significant role. Some studies have shown, for example, that highly motivated adult learners with exceptional language-learning aptitude can achieve near native-like proficiency in a second language (Ioup 2005).

There has been an enormous increase in the number of early second language programs around the world (Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2006). Many of these highlight not just the linguistic, but also the affective benefits of an early start. For example, a recent European language policy document from the Commission of the European Communities (CEC 2003) emphasises the need to ensure effective language learning in

the kindergarten and primary school, as in such programs ‘attitudes towards other languages and cultures are formed, and the foundations for later learning are laid’ (CEC 2003). Most member states of the European Union are moving towards ‘mother tongue plus two foreign languages’, reflected in the early introduction of second language programs. However, the report also draws attention to important organizational aspects of such programs:

‘The advantages of the early learning of languages - which include better skills in one’s mother tongue - only accrue where teachers are trained specifically to teach languages to very young children, where class sizes are small enough for language learning to be effective, where appropriate training materials are available, and where enough curriculum time is devoted to languages. Initiatives to make language learning available to an ever-younger group of pupils must be supported by appropriate resources, including resources for teacher training. Early learners become aware of their own cultural values and influences and appreciate other cultures, becoming more open towards and interested in others. This benefit is limited if all pupils learn the same language: a range of languages should be available to early learners.’ (p7).

It is clear that these organizational aspects are an integral component of successful second language teaching. Simply introducing a second language program into a primary school does not automatically ensure that the benefits to learners will become available. Questions such as the amount and quality of exposure to the second language, teacher competency, resources and motivation, methodology and continuity of programs are all key elements in delivering these benefits to children.

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