

LEARNING FROM HIGH-PERFORMING JURISDICTIONS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CLEAR RATIONALE FOR LANGUAGES LEARNING

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

This report contains three sections, each of which leads into the fourth section which is a rationale for the teaching and learning of languages in Victorian schools, aimed at a range of audiences. In order to facilitate reading this report, the main points from each section are summarised below.

Benefits of Languages Learning

The study of additional languages (formerly known as Languages Other Than English) in Australian schools tends to suffer from the same lack of support as in other English speaking nations such as England and the United States of America. This is largely due to the misconception that 'English is enough' and that monolingualism in English is the norm. This view is understandable because English is the additional or second language promoted across the world in non-English speaking countries. However, this is not a justification for the complacency displayed by monolingual speakers of English in the face of an ever increasing multilingual world population.

School communities in Australia face many challenges in the implementation of a broad based curriculum which includes offering an additional language. One of the key issues for schools in deciding what sort of language program they will offer is the strong emphasis on the development of numeracy and literacy in English. Many school communities may be unaware of the positive impact of learning an additional language on the development of English literacy, particularly where the program is appropriately staffed by a well qualified language teacher and adequately resourced, and where such a teacher is able to make relevant comparisons and connections between English, the additional language, and the language/s of the students.

Learning an additional language benefits both individual students, and the community at large. Such benefits include the following:

Individual

Literacy skills	Liddicoat (2001) describes how second language teachers develop literacy through explicit instruction because they realize that learners need strategies to cope with unknown words in a text; thus they complement the work of English first language teachers who assume knowledge of vocabulary. He also states that <i>"second language learning is ... a resource for enhancing literacy, not a problem for acquiring literacy. It provides information about the nature of language which learners need in order to develop literacy."</i>
Cognitive development	Learning another language has significant cognitive benefits for the learner enabling her/him to gain unique insights and perspectives on the ways in which language functions. Bilinguals have more than one way of viewing the world. Learning a second language develops meta-linguistic awareness, that is an appreciation of the systematic character of language (Lo Bianco 2009).
Communication skills	<i>"... today's students [need] to be able to manage multiple types of communication across languages and cultures"</i> (Simpson Norris 2001). Learning another language extends students' capacity to engage with others from different languages and cultures in a variety of contexts. It enables them to participate in interactions for a variety of purposes and to understand and produce a range of texts and discourse forms.
Intercultural competence	Excellent language programs enable learners to make connections across languages and cultures; and to understand both their own and others' languages and ways of knowing and doing.

Career and employment options	Having competence in English only is not, and will not, be sufficient to share in the experiences, to meet the challenges, social or economic, local or international, of the workforce and society now and in the future.
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Community and society

Intercultural competence	Language learning contributes to the development of rich linguistic and cultural resources through which the community can engage socially, culturally and economically in all domains.
Economic	The Business Council of Australia sent a letter to all Members of Parliament on 1 st April 2011 urging them to maintain the Asian studies and languages programs because of the need for students to be equipped with the knowledge of the cultures and languages of the region that is on Australia's doorstep. It also published a policy paper in early 2011 (Lifting the quality of teaching and learning in Higher Education) which stated a need for <i>"international capabilities based on the ability to adapt to working in an international environment with people from different cultures as part of multi-national and multi-disciplinary teams"</i> and saw the study of languages as contributing to this.
Social	Learning another language contributes to greater social and community engagement. It enables young people to cope with global interactions in a technology driven world, especially in terms of multi-literacy skills (Garcia 2009).

Languages Teaching in High-Performing PISA Countries

Although the case study countries which consistently perform at a high level in PISA all offer additional language programs across the years of compulsory schooling, it would not be advisable to posit a simple 'cause and effect' hypothesis between this latter and the performance of the students on first language maths and science tests given the complex inter-play of a range of variables which contribute to a nation's or region's results on these international tests. Nevertheless, there are some points which should be noted for consideration from the three case studies which were undertaken. Firstly, there is no single explanation for Finland's high performance, but rather, it would appear to be *'attributable to a web of interrelated factors'* (Välijärvi et al (2002, p. 4), namely the following:

- i) The relative homogeneity of the Finnish student population
- ii) Homogeneity of schools: low 'between-school' variation
- iii) Highly qualified teachers and the high status of the profession
- iv) The importance of education in the culture: over 70% of the population will participate in tertiary education at some stage in their lives, a figure well above the OECD average of 50%
- v) Finnish students read more in their leisure time, and read a greater variety of text types than other students in OECD countries (Välijärvi et al 2002, p. 16).

Secondly, all students in Finland MUST study both of the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, and these two languages are not at all similar and do not belong to the same language families. In addition, the approach to the learning of these two languages is quite different from what learners in Australia experience in learning English as a first or second language. It is clear that children in Finland learning either Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue are encouraged from the outset to think deeply about their own language, but also about other languages. Accompanying and complementing this broader perspective on language generally is an overt focus on contrasting structures and forms in different languages – in a sense, metalinguistic awareness is an integral part of the core curriculum.

In the case of Canada, in spite of it being frequently viewed as a 'bilingual' country, in fact only a small percentage of the Anglophone population is actually proficient in French. This has led the government to aim to double the number of young bilinguals by 2013. The other issue for Canada, similar to problems encountered in Australia, is that of the level of dissatisfaction with the proficiency of Anglophone Canadians in Core French programs where they have a daily lesson from either Year 4 or 5 until Year 9. One reaction to this has been the highly successful trialling of Intensive French in a number of provinces where immersion programs were not felt to be appropriate. The longitudinal research in New Brunswick of these intensive French programs has shown that students achieve almost as good a level of competence as those in immersion programs. However, in terms of effect on PISA results, it is believed that the key factor in achieving a high level on reading performance is due more to the presence of a trained English language arts teacher.

Innovative Pedagogical Approaches to Languages

A number of innovative approaches to the teaching of a language have had positive effects on students' motivation for learning an additional language. Among these are the application of AIM (the Gesture Method) in French and now being trialled in Chinese and Japanese in Australia, and the use of a narrative approach in teaching very young learners. This approach, devised by Professor Traute Taeschner in Italy, exists in a number of European languages and is based on repetition of simple vocabulary and structures through songs and movement. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), also emanating from Europe, has been successfully used in both primary and secondary schools, largely in English as the additional language, but also in French, German and Italian in a number of European Union countries keen to overcome the problems of a crowded curriculum caused by the need to offer 'mother tongue + two other languages' and wishing to produce learners with a higher level of competence in the language than is possible through a language arts program alone.

Another approach to the teaching and learning of languages, which pre-empted CLIL but which was content-driven and task-based was that attempted by Queensland in the early 21st century based around the notion of Productive Pedagogies. The themes which language teachers needed to cover were those of the Humanities program, and offered a genuine attempt to broaden students' vocabulary and to enhance their communication skills and their content knowledge in the target language. More recently, the University of South Australia's Research Centre for Languages and Cultures Education has produced an Australian approach to the development of intercultural competence entitled *Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning Project* which has been trialled in a number of states and territories, particularly in Asian languages.

Summary Rationale for the Teaching and Learning of Languages in Victorian Schools

In order to address the interests of a range of audiences, a summary of the key points which have arisen from the above sections of this report are presented below:

Key messages for school leaders

Why learn languages?

Multilingualism not monolingualism is the norm

Australia has many bi- and multilinguals. Across the world, bilinguals and multilinguals far outnumber those who speak only one language.

Languages offer learners unique insights and perspectives

"The process of second language learning enables the learner to gain unique insights and perspectives on the ways in which language functions - insights which are not accessible via any other subject area. Moreover, 'second language learners have another language system to use for comparison with their first language [and] such a comparison makes explicit and obvious information about the nature of language which learners need in order to develop literacy' (Liddicoat 2000-1 p. 13).

Language learning develops unique skills

Learning an additional language *'strengthens the intellectual and analytical capability of students to engage with different ways of making meaning [...] {and also} strengthens cognitive and general learning capabilities such as creative and critical thinking: brain research shows that language learning uses and develops particular and unique conceptualisation skills and meta-cognition'.*

Learning an additional language/s also enhances learners' communication skills, especially in a program which develops intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997, 2003). It extends students' capacity to engage with others from different languages and cultures in a variety of contexts. It enables them to participate in interactions for a variety of purposes and to understand and produce a range of texts and discourse forms.

Languages open up unique opportunities for future employment and career directions

In a 21st century world characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity, global movements of individuals and groups, and the ever increasing developments in information communication technologies, it is imperative that all young people in Australia, no matter what their language and cultural background, have access to learning additional languages as well as being proficient in English. Having competence in English ONLY is not, and will not be, sufficient to share in the experiences, to meet the challenges, social or economic, local or international, of the workforce and society now and in the future. Young Australians, monolingual in English, are already behind their counterparts in other multilingual countries, and indeed, behind their Australian peers whose home language is not English and who have maintained their proficiency in this language. (p.14)

Garcia (2009, pp. 98-100) notes some of the socio-economic benefits in terms of the earning power of bilinguals over monolinguals; she also notes the need for today's young people to be able to cope with global interactions in a technology driven world, especially in terms of multi-literacy skills, and the need for multi-linguals in international business markets where English is not enough. She makes the following apt observation: *'...it is stressed that language skills are complementary to other skills such as science, engineering and technology and are not in competition with them, nor are these skills mutually exclusive'.*

What makes an excellent language program?

Language learning is valued.

High performing PISA countries such as Finland, China, Korea, Japan start learning an additional language in primary school and make it compulsory for the whole of schooling.

Sufficient time is allocated for the language program

In all the high performing PISA countries, learning an additional language begins in primary school and continues, as a compulsory subject, until the final year of secondary school. In Europe, many countries require the study of two languages (as well as the mother tongue) during the whole of secondary schooling. Canada's experiences with Core French show that even daily exposure to a second language from Year 4 or 5 is not sufficient to develop any real competence in the language. The success of their immersion and intensive French programs has demonstrated the need for long and consistent periods of teaching of a second language.

Highly skilled teachers

As Lo Bianco (2009) has stated, 'good teaching is the single most important controllable variable in successful language learning'. Finland requires its teachers to have a Masters degree. In countries where the language teachers' proficiency is not high, for example China, learners make little real progress in the language. Teachers require high levels of linguistic competence, but also need appropriate training in innovative contemporary pedagogies which motivate students, as well as develop their skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing in the target language.

The language/s chosen is/are valued by the community

Although English is the first language of choice in most countries, high performing nations such as Finland value other languages and offer these throughout secondary schooling.

Language teaching makes explicit links with mainstream curriculum learning

The rise of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approaches in Europe, and the growing interest in bilingual or partial immersion programs in Asian countries such as China and Korea have demonstrated the important role that teaching other areas of mainstream curriculum in a second language can play. The success of the immersion and intensive French approaches in Canada also demonstrate that explicit links between an additional language and areas of the mainstream curriculum enhances learners' levels in the target language.

Language teaching develops metalinguistic understandings through explicit links with first language features

Jim Cummins in Canada was the first to point out the difference between interpersonal communication skills in a language and those needed for academic success. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) relies on the development of metalinguistic understandings. Other Canadian research, especially that by Bialystok has also demonstrated that bilingual children have much greater metalinguistic understandings than monolingual ones.

Liddicoat asserts that 'learning a second language is a way of developing metalinguistic awareness by providing direct experience of the variability and arbitrariness of language'. He notes that 'second language learners have another language system to use for comparison with their first language [and that] such a comparison makes explicit and obvious information about the nature of language which learners need in order to develop literacy' (Liddicoat 2000 – 2001, p. 13).

Key messages for teachers

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Languages open up unique opportunities for future employment and career directions

In a 21st century world characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity, global movements of individuals and groups, and the ever increasing developments in information communication technologies, it is imperative that all young people in Australia, no matter what their language and cultural background, have access to learning additional languages as well as being proficient in English. Having competence

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Key messages for students

Why learn languages?

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Australia has many bi- and multilingual speaking people. Before Australia was settled by the British, there were many indigenous languages and the aboriginal peoples knew and understood the importance of knowing many languages.

In many countries bilinguals and multilinguals far outnumber those who speak only one language. We would be very disadvantaged in Australia if all young people could only develop competence in one language, English.

Languages offer learners unique insights and perspectives

'The process of second language learning enables the learner to gain unique insights and perspectives on the ways in which language functions- insights which are not accessible

via any other subject area'. Also, 'second language learners have another language system to use for comparison with their first language [and] such a comparison makes explicit and obvious information about the nature of language which learners need in order to develop literacy'(Liddicoat 2000-1 p. 13).

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What makes an excellent language program?

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Language teaching makes explicit links with mainstream curriculum learning

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mainstream curriculum in a second language can play. The success of the immersion and intensive French approaches in Canada also demonstrate that explicit links between an additional language and areas of the mainstream curriculum enhances learners' levels in the target language.

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Jim Cummins in Canada was the first to point out the difference between interpersonal communication skills in a language and those needed for academic success. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) relies on the development of metalinguistic understandings. Other Canadian research, especially that by Bialystok has also demonstrated that bilingual children have much greater metalinguistic understandings than monolingual ones.

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Key messages for the broader community

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