

POSITION PAPER

Author: Jacqueline Koob

Date: May 2009

LANGUAGES STUDIES

The Secondary Principals Council values the study of Languages Other Than English in every school and is committed to supporting its Principals in developing and strengthening the position of language studies in schools. We believe that there are significant benefits for both students and the broader community in providing quality languages education to all students. We call upon governments at all levels to also support Principals and schools in this undertaking.

The SPC recognizes that in the current situation there are factors which could be seen as impediments to such development. However, it is the position of the SPC that there should be incentives for schools to provide meaningful and practical pathways for students to study a language to HSC level.

This position reflects the national agenda and specifically the National Plan for Languages Education and the statements in the DEEWR Information Package for Principals on Languages: "Open the Door to a Bigger World". The goal of providing "quality languages education for all students, in all schools, in all parts of the country", to which the Australian Ministers of Education committed in this Plan, will require the implementation of specific policies, plans and timelines for DET and schools to bring the goal into effect.

Rationale

The SPC recognises a large number of reasons to justify urgent and proactive measures to strengthen the provision of quality LOTE study in NSW. They include:

- The global society: workforces are increasingly and globally mobile.
- There is a need for cultural awareness to avoid the development of an insular attitude towards the rest of the world.
- Cross-cultural skills are vital in a multicultural and global society. Deeper knowledge of a culture is enabled through knowledge of the language.
- Internationalisation and global connections are significantly enriched by being able to communicate in the language of your trading and commercial partners.
- Proficiency in other languages provides career and study opportunities that would not otherwise exist.
- A successful and cohesive multicultural society is increasingly dependent on a multilingual workforce, and increasing career opportunities are coming into existence for speakers of more than just English. Our students are competing with higher levels of multi-language knowledge across the world (for example in Europe, Asia and South America where more than one language is expected.)
- International and local career opportunities depend increasingly on the juxtaposition of second language proficiency with other skills.
- Language learning is valued as part of cognitive development. Second language learning is an important aid to the development of literacy and generic cognitive and life skills.
- Second language proficiency is valuable to individuals for many social and personal reasons including cultural identification, cultural enrichment and travel.
- Worldwide communication in LOTE via the internet is an increasing part of students' lives.
- Research clearly demonstrates that language acquisition is optimized by starting at an early age
- Learning a second or subsequent foreign language supports the learner's competence in and understanding of the first language / English.

- Given the future likelihood of students progressing through several careers, which may later require another language the acquisition of language learning skills in one language facilitates the later learning of additional languages.
- A strong languages program which reflects the nature and needs of the local community can enrich the life and profile of the school and encourage greater parental participation in the school community.

Which languages?

The SPC identifies three categories of languages for affirmative action and particular attention.

1. A group of priority languages to be supported across the State
2. Community languages
3. Aboriginal languages.

It is appropriate to identify a group of priority languages in order to facilitate funding for training and provision. At the same time schools need to take into consideration the needs of the local community and to provide for a language group which is strongly represented in that community, whether this be a migrant group or a local Aboriginal community.

Priority Languages

A group of priority languages has been identified on the basis of their strategic, cultural, political and economic significance to Australia.

The recently released ASPA policy on languages study highlights diversity and sustainability of language offerings and identifies six priority languages. The NSW Languages Strategic Advisory Committee concurs with these and adds two further.

The SPC therefore supports these eight priority languages, namely: French, German, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean.

Well-developed syllabuses and course materials are available for each of the priority languages.

SPC Position

The SPC advocates that each Secondary school target and focus on face to face delivery of one or two languages from the above groups.

It is strongly recommended that schools support the provision of additional languages in response to community needs and that the DET supports schools in that position.

Community Languages

The SPC recognizes the value of the various community languages which are reflective of Australian society. The SPC supports the ongoing provision of study in those languages in schools which can establish viable and sustainable programs, with adequate numbers and community support.

Many syllabuses exist as either Board Developed or Board Endorsed syllabuses for the use of schools which elect to offer that particular community language.

In addition, the SPC recognizes the value of **all** other community language programs and supports the learning of such languages through programs external to the school.

The SPC position is that the DET continue to support and resource such studies in community languages.

Aboriginal languages

The SPC recognizes and supports the DET's commitment to "provide all students with opportunities to develop deeper understandings of Aboriginal histories, cultures and languages through:

- Aboriginal studies
- Aboriginal languages
- Aboriginal cross-curriculum content in schools
- relevant studies in TAFE and community education.

(from the "Aboriginal Education Policy", November 2008, Section 1.6.6)

The SPC strongly supports the learning of Aboriginal languages in communities which can establish viable and sustainable programs in response to local needs.

Recommendations / Desired outcomes

1. The SPC believes that as one of the Key Learning Areas languages study should continue to be mandatory for **all** students to a minimum of 100 hours in Stage 4.

These hours need to be considered as part of the continuum of language learning.

Within that mandatory minimum, schools may explore the possibilities of different levels of study depending on the backgrounds of language study in primary schools.

Languages study should be available to all students, regardless of their background. This means they should not be automatically withdrawn from language study to do ESL, as the maintenance of their background language will assist in their literacy development and settling in school.

2. The SPC supports the position that all students who wish to continue the study of a language to the HSC should be **guaranteed** continuity of study.

Strategies to support the SPC position on languages in schools

1. The SPC advocates for the DET to establish a Languages Taskforce to develop a strategic plan of implementation to achieve the desired outcomes of this SPC Position Paper.
2. A priority group of languages should be strongly funded, to strengthen the provision of quality materials and trained teachers. This would also contribute to the reliable supply of qualified teachers. At the same time, provision needs to be made for the adequate funding of other languages which are relevant to particular communities.
3. Improve public perception and understanding of the value of language learning through a campaign of public support by governments and educational systems.
4. Harness the examples in industry and society in general to promote the career relevance of language studies to students.
5. SPC further explore relationships with overseas governments (e.g. Korea, China) and bodies such as the Asian Education Foundation.
6. The Office of the Board of Studies needs to be equally committed to the place of languages in the curriculum. This should involve a consideration of the relative difficulty of languages courses and further consideration of the eligibility requirements for Beginners and Background Speaker courses. There is a role for the SPC to advocate with the Board in this respect.
7. The SPC recommends that the Office of the Board of Studies be lobbied to develop a system of recognition for prior learning, to ensure that the wealth of Australia's talent in languages be sustained and strengthened. This could be through a system of accreditation akin to that in VET courses.
8. Recognition to be given to the mandatory hours of languages on the School Certificate.

9. Advocacy with universities to encourage entry incentives for students who study languages to a high level. Offer incentives to undergraduates to pursue further language studies and enter the teaching profession. Financial and administrative support for students to study abroad would also make university languages studies more attractive.
10. Facilitate the provision of alternative (non face-to-face) pathways by providing incentives and removing disincentives to such pathways. E.g. Free up access to the Open High School and Saturday School of Community Languages. In the context of a DET-supported program in each school, quotas should be removed to cater for students who wish to study a language other those provided in the school. Removal of the staffing penalties is justified by the need to have supervision and administration for these students in their home school
11. Utilise the possibilities of technology to assist in the provision of continuity in language study. E.g. Consortiums of schools engage in Connected Classroom lessons to combine very small groups. Such arrangements need to be underpinned by adequate technical support.
12. Identify the nature and scope of languages resources that could be accessed using ICT: amalgamate the resources of the Open High School, Saturday School of Community Languages, CLI, TaLE etc.
13. The SPC calls upon the DET to explore more flexible staffing arrangements to enable continuity of language study pathways. The ASPA has highlighted inconsistent transition points. The SPC therefore recommends developing a policy statement in conjunction with our primary colleagues to ensure the continuity of language learning. We should explore the possibilities of learning partnerships within communities of schools, including the promotion of flexible staffing arrangements between High and Primary schools to share language teachers. This would need to be supported by continuing travel allowances and consideration for the different staffing loads in the two systems.
14. We recognize the value of overseas study trips for students and expect that such initiatives will be supported at a systemic level, including regional and state executives, because of the benefits to student learning outcomes. Because very few schools can resource the organization and funding of such a trip on their own and therefore need to combine for such study tours, there is a need for a more streamlined protocol for approval, e.g. approval by the Regional Director of the home school. Provision of scholarships and funding for such study trips is highly recommended, in line with the pattern adopted for International Studies students at university.
15. Clear and attractive career pathways should be developed for languages teachers to encourage the development of a high quality, consistent and reliable supply of languages teachers. The assurance of guaranteed languages classes and support for smaller classes would also contribute towards encouraging highly skilled languages teachers to enter and remain in the profession.

Role of the Principal:

It is imperative that Principals are driving the Position in schools, as part of their responsibility for the overall education of their students. The SPC strongly encourages Principals to adopt a more flexible approach to student numbers in languages classes in order to guarantee continuity. Commitment to running language classes regardless of smaller numbers is part of providing a broad curriculum and intellectual development for students and pathways to the global society. Principals have a responsibility to ensure that each KLA is represented in the curriculum.