
Languages education in mainstream Australian schools

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When we talk about a new national curriculum, let me tell you its core hallmark – when it comes to English, maths, science, history, languages – will be absolute rigour.

‘Rudd to raise the bar for schools’, *The Australian*, October 6-7, 2007, p.1

Only one subject area both demands and supports all of the following:

- Academic rigour
- Linguistic flexibility
- Cultural awareness
- English literacy skills
- A sense of global citizenship

(see Independent Schools Queensland Briefings, Vol.1, Issue 7, August 2007)

Some macro solutions...

- Take advice from those who teach languages well (less reliance on English-speaking countries)
 - Make language study compulsory for all students in Years 5 to 10
 - Focus on delivering a small number of languages well
 - Ensure continuity of language programs within jurisdictions and between levels of schooling
 - Differentiate effectively between background speakers and beginners
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Some macro solutions (continued)...

- Offer incentives to individuals who are already competent in two or more languages to train/retrain as teachers
 - Refer to syllabuses that are comprehensive and detailed and are useful to teachers and students (viz. German, Dutch, French, Swiss documents)
 - Establish a well-publicised national database of resources in languages education, accessible to all stakeholders
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Some macro solutions (continued)

- Expand opportunities for language teacher exchange and immigration
 - Design a national media campaign to promote the United Nations International Year of Languages and demonstrate the significance for Australia
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Some micro solutions

- Create dedicated teaching spaces for languages
 - Timetable language classes to ensure frequency and continuity
 - Emphasise the cognitive and literacy benefits of language study (cite the experts and the literature to staff across all subject areas and make links wherever possible – i.e. English, maths, science, history, geography, art, technology, economics, music)
 - Cater for beginners and continuers
 - Hold information sessions for parents and students and send home succinct statements of purpose with references to support these
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Some micro solutions (continued) ...

- Develop links with students in other countries and ensure there is regular communication
 - Invite guests to school assemblies and classes
 - Survey students and celebrate diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds
 - Ask students how they learn best and get them to prepare and lead lessons (TECHNOLOGY!!!)
 - Place constant emphasis on understanding how languages work as systems
 - Have fun with language(s)
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