

## LANGUAGES RATIONALE

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1. From *Making Languages Work*, 2002

### • THE PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING LANGUAGES IN SCHOOL

Language learning increases the knowledge and skills of students in intellectually and socially unique and utilitarian ways.

The following reasons for including the learning of Languages in our schools are interconnected. The list is not hierarchical or as discrete as it appears. As with all learning areas, the outcomes of learning Languages are complex and entwined.

#### **Cognitive connections**

- Recent brain research has indicated that particular learning areas develop unique knowledges and skills. Languages, as a 'subject' discipline, develops particular discourse and conceptualisation skills and knowledge.
- Language cognition increases the repertoire and use of students' 'multiple intelligences'.
- The cognitive development that occurs through Language learning, links to other cognitive activities. These are not simply linguistic but also spatial, emotional and include other aspects of cognition.

#### **Linguistic skills**

- Using a Language, beyond a cursory level of proficiency, encompasses sophisticated knowledges and skills indicative of particular higher order learning capacities.
- Knowing more than one Language extends competency in the first Language. The majority of the competent speakers of English in the world also are competent in a Language other than English. Bi-lingual English speakers have greater linguistic skills and flexibilities than mono-lingual speakers of English.

#### **Linguistic flexibilities**

- The development of globally operating information and communication technologies (ICTs) has demonstrated the need for significant flexibilities in the ways our students use language. ICTs develop their own 'languages', eg mobile phone text messaging, that increasingly draw on the flexible application of the linguistic skills of users.
- The information revolution exemplified by the Internet and other accessible communication and information sources draws on a range of

Languages, and an understanding of how language works. Within five years, the dominant language of the Internet will be Chinese, not English.

### **Connecting with multicultural and international communities**

- Our students live and learn as part of a globalised community as well as being members of local, regional and particular Language communities. Learning a Language and gaining skills of intercultural competence assist our students to engage as members of many communities.
- The classical education provided by schools until the 1960's included studies of Latin and Greek in its core as a way of connecting that curriculum. The curriculum of 2000 and beyond, with a focus on local-global connectivity, requires cultural, linguistic and communication knowledges and skills, gained through the study of Languages.

### **Intercultural competence**

- Australia's multicultural society is also multilingual. Skills in a Language other than English provide students with insights into other cultures and an ability to connect with them and not simply observe them.
- Language learning can develop intercultural competence by linking the ways language and culture connect in students' first and 'learned' Languages.

### **Connecting as part of the SACSA Framework**

- Language encodes individual and social values. Developing the Essential Learnings of the SACSA Framework, particularly identity, communication and thinking, requires understandings and knowledge of Languages. In addition, notions of future and the applications of ICTs are bound together in linguistic understandings.
- Students learning in a SACSA Framework constructivist pedagogy must have the notion of Linguistic diversity, particularly their own, acknowledged and valued.
- Languages make other learnings coherent with each other: artistic, linguistic, geographical, historical and communication-based studies and learnings connect with learning a Language and its cultures.

## 'Modifiable' School Newsletter Item

*Why does our school teach Languages (or name of Language)?*

1. Students extend their thinking and reasoning skills and they apply these in other areas of learning and in processing knowledge.
2. We want our students to develop and use 'multiple intelligences' and learning Languages is central to this capability.
3. Using more than one language is a skill of the highest order.
4. Knowing aspects of another Language improves students' skills in using English and communicating effectively.
5. Learning a Language assists our students in using modern communication and information technologies like computers and the Internet.
6. Our students will be able to work internationally and will be able to engage with other cultures using the skills gained by learning a Language in our school.
7. Students will be able to relate to their local society and culture as well as being able to operate globally.
8. Language learning is a core aspect of the SACSA Framework.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGES IN THE CURRICULUM

- Learning Languages is both an intellectual and a utilitarian activity.
- The learning of a Language develops unique and particular linguistic brain processing capacities.
- Being able to speak more than one Language involves high order intellectual skills and capabilities.
- English language and linguistic skills are improved by the gaining of skills in another Language.
- Linguistic flexibilities gained through learning another language enhance students' use of information and communication technologies and global information systems like the Internet.
- Understanding other cultures through learning an additional Language enables cultural connection within our local multicultural community and with global communities.
- Knowledge and skills gained through learning a Language connect with knowledge and skills of other components of the curriculum.
- Languages are a core aspect of the SACSA Framework and fulfill a significant role in developing students' capacities related to the Essential Learnings.

## 2. From Review of Languages in the Northern Territory 2003

### 7.3 Contemporary research on reasons for Languages learning

The following briefly expands upon these new understandings as they are evident in action and through the literature and relates the research to the Northern Territory. References for further examination of contemporary research are provided in the bibliography.

#### *7.3.1 Languages and curriculum coherence*

The first issue is that of curriculum continuity. The 1998 policy was that learning languages should be compulsory for students in Years 6 and 7 and for two years in secondary schools, normally in Years 8 and 9. One of the goals of the Board of Studies document of 1999 was that by 2006 all students from years 4 to 10 would study a Language other than English. The issue of continuity of learning and curriculum coherence was to be addressed if students were to achieve a 'broad and balanced curriculum'. The relationship among Languages and other learning areas of the curriculum becomes significant. And, it can be argued, that for many students, the need for high levels of proficiency in another language become less significant. This does not mean, however, that culture based courses, devoid of learning language, are satisfactory. Learning aspects of a language, and being able to use them, are important.

This is because language encodes individual, cultural, political and social values and knowledges: the sorts of values and knowledges that are described in any list of schooling-graduate qualities. Language is inseparable from ways of knowing the world: artistic, linguistic, geographical, mathematical/logical, historical and communication-based learnings connect with learning a language and its cultures. Additionally, Languages learning provides individual students with a means of understanding 'difference' and making coherence of some of the inevitable 'dissonances' in their curriculum: in this sense they are an example of a curriculum inter-operability, connecting one learning with another.

#### *7.3.2 Languages and individual cognition and capacity*

The second issue refers to the learning needs and capabilities of students. Contemporary research and argument suggests that students who do not gain some proficiencies in languages other than their community Language are significantly disadvantaged when compared with those that do gain such proficiencies. This is evident for Indigenous students whose first language is not English. It also applies to students who are mono-lingual in English.

The reasons are complex and entwined but centre around individual cognitive development and the capabilities to operate effectively along the local-global continuum.

Recent brain research has highlighted the particular and unique cognitive processes engaged in learning a second language, and the ways that such cognition supports other learning processes, particularly linguistic but also spatial and emotional thinking. Using a second language encompasses sophisticated knowledges and skills and extends competency in the first language. Neuro-imaging of bilingual children's brains show some evidence of more complex and broader cerebral activity than monolingual students. (Fletcher, et al 2000). Bilingual English speakers have greater literacy and linguistic skills and flexibilities than monolingual speakers of English.

Students in the Northern Territory live and learn as part of globalised communities as well as being members of local, national, regional and particular language communities. Learning a language and gaining intercultural competencies assists them as learners and post-school 'operators' engaged in work, study and social construction. Skills and knowledges in a second language provide students with insights into other cultures and an ability to connect and interact with them.

The development of globally operating information and communication technologies has demonstrated the need for significant flexibilities in the ways our students understand and use language. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have their own 'languages' that draw upon linguistic skills and their application.

### 7.3.3 *Languages and literacy in English*

Many of those consulted for this Northern Territory review argued that students with poor English literacy skills should not waste valuable time learning another language. The 2002 review of Languages learning in Victoria received similar comments which its report, *Languages for Victoria's future* analyses. This Victorian report summarises the research on the links between learning languages and literacy development in English. This research demonstrated that the early acquisition of a second language advanced reading readiness in English (Yelland et al 1993) and bilingualism was found to advantage students in terms of 'increased problem-solving abilities, cognitive flexibility, verbal creativity and greater meta-linguistic awareness' (Makin et al 1995).

The Victorian review's extensive analysis of the research in this area found that:

*literacy skills are transferable because literacy requires an understanding of how language works (meta-linguistic awareness) and bilinguals have two sets of representational symbols to use for learning and problem-solving and can switch effectively between these systems. They can separate form and content, that is they have two words for 'window' or 'pencil'. (Leopold 1939-49: Ianco-Worrall 1972). They develop an analytic approach to language earlier because they focus on avoiding interference between their languages and pay attention to cues and hints (Ben-Zeev 1977). They also tend to be more divergent thinkers, which supports problem solving.*

#### 7.3.4 Languages and national interest

The third issue relates to nation building: our society and its economy requires a population that is bilingual, linguistically flexible and inter-culturally competent in order to develop the extensive value of diversity within our national multi-cultural society and to engage successfully as a nation with the world.

Major-General Peter Cosgrove, the military head of our combined defence forces, is one of an increasing number of national leaders expressing this view:

*As a nation that occupies a continent we labour under a disability. Our isolation militates against the routine acquisition of multiple languages by our young people. Throughout much of our first century this was not a fatal disability. But... language skills and cultural sensitivity will be the new currency of (the new) world order. If that future is to be one of peace and prosperity our kids will need the capacity to engage in a dialogue with others of different cultures and creeds. And this applies both within Australia and abroad. (2001)*

There are enormous difficulties associated with making Languages learning a compulsory component of the Northern Territory curriculum but this should not deter a consideration of the issues raised here. Any discussion of the place of Languages in a curriculum must be framed by new and different considerations of proficiency in a second language. For too long the values of proficiencies that are less than fluent, and less than those of a native speaker have been ignored. For example, Northern Territory students study the SSABSA short Languages courses renamed as 'Beginners' courses, which implies that these courses are part of a long journey and not a destination in themselves. Travel, business and conversation based second language proficiencies are end points for many and courses based in delivering such outcomes, develop the sorts of capacities described above.

#### 7.3.5 The local-global continuum

There can be little doubt that English has become, for the time being at least, the dominant language of commerce, communication and travel.

This has resulted in real pressures being placed on local and regional languages and cultures, particularly on languages of minority groups within language cultures. However, access to communication technologies with translation programs need not lead to a loss of the first language. Significantly, it has led to increased bilingualism, particularly with English as the second language. The majority of the people in the world who communicate in English also speak another language.

The linguistic flexibilities gained through the learning of a second (third or fourth) language are required skills of all of our students. Monolingual communicators are disadvantaged as local-global operators because they lack the linguistic flexibilities created by understanding other languages and hence the ways that languages work to create both meanings and cultures. Additionally, research would suggest that most monolingual people engage less easily with the 'languages' of technologies than people able to engage in communication in more than one language. For example, SMS text messaging, is creating languages of its own and in some societies with a focus on technological economies, like India, the changes are remarkable. An average of 60 SMS messages a day are sent for each mobile phone in India, using a 'new' and economical language, a mix of Hindi, English and SMS shorthand.