

Languages Review Working Party

Background Paper 1

Introduction

This Paper is the first of a number of background papers the Languages Review Working Party will provide to the Westgarth Primary School community.

This Paper summarises our research work to date, which has involved investigating leading research in the area of languages education in Australia, including Government publications. We have also been identifying the legislation and policy that applies in this area.

This Paper draws from the main themes in research papers. It also explains the key legislative and policy requirements that currently apply to Victorian schools, which together form the backdrop for this Review.

Finally, a list of references has been included for further information.

Summary of key points from research papers

- There is general consensus as to the significant benefits of learning a language for students.
- Language education requires a substantial time allocation.
- Technology has a significant role to play in the provision of languages education.
- 'Pathways' are important for there to be real gain in language learning and students need to be encouraged to pursue languages in their senior secondary education.
- Management and allocation of DEECD funding to ensure the provision of qualified language teachers, quality teaching and appropriate learning materials will be an ongoing challenge.
- The traditional view still holds that students who learn a second language early in life are more likely to attain higher levels of proficiency than those who begin as adolescents or adults. However, this depends on teachers being trained specifically to teach languages to children, small class sizes, availability of appropriate training materials, and enough time allocated.

Discussion

Legislative requirements

Legislation requires languages to be taught in line with the applicable curriculum. Below is an explanation of the source and nature of this legislative requirement and how it applies to Victorian schools.

It is a Victorian legislative requirement for schools to substantially address eight learning areas and one of those areas is 'languages' (the other seven are: English; mathematics; sciences; humanities and social sciences; the arts; health and physical education and; information and communication technology, and design and technology). The requirement is sourced in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and enforced through the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).

Curriculum in each learning area must be delivered through Australian Curriculum, AusVELS or other approved curriculum programmes. Currently, in Victoria, AusVELS is the model through which the Australian Curriculum is implemented. It retains Victorian priorities and approaches to teaching and learning.

In AusVELS, the languages domain has two dimensions: communicating in a language other than English and intercultural knowledge and language awareness. It is silent on which learning models should be used to deliver these aspects of the languages domain. This means that schools have flexibility in terms of the language learning models, i.e. learning languages may occur through different types of programmes: language-as-a-subject programmes, content-based programmes, and various types of immersion/bilingual programmes (which sees the use of two languages in instruction). Extra-curricula language learning can also be facilitated through schools, e.g. by way of partnerships.

The Australian Curriculum is still being developed by the federal authority, named the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The 'Australian Curriculum: Languages' includes the development of language-specific curricula and a Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages. It is anticipated that some of the language-specific curriculum will be published late 2013. It has been signaled by the Victorian Government that all schools implement a Languages Program consistent with the above by 2015.

Government policy

As a matter of policy, the Victorian Education Department (DEECD) recommends 150 minutes of language study per week in primary school (it endorses 700 hours of language study before Year 7). At the federal level, ACARA recommends fewer hours.

DEECD's policy position is that Victoria should aspire to every student having the opportunity to learn a language and to achieve proficiency in that language. Languages education should aim to maximise high-level language and intercultural skills (this accords with AusVELS). DEECD's policy is premised on the notion that languages education contributes to the development of students' cognitive, communication and problem-solving skills and offers students new ways of understanding their own identity and culture and the cultural perspectives of others.

DEECD's policy encompasses the principles of: (1) 'Participation', i.e. every student should participate in languages learning; (2) 'Quality', i.e. quality programmes include flexible delivery, effective use of online resources, best-practice teaching; (3) 'Diversity', i.e. schools will work with their school community to select languages and; (4) 'Partnership', i.e. locally-driven partnerships, e.g. with feeder schools, sister schools, opportunities for real-world language use.

Commonwealth policy (as set out by ACARA publications) is being developed on the assumption that all Australian students will learn a language in primary school.

Further information:

- ACARA, Shape of the Australian curriculum: languages, 2012. www.acara.edu.au
- ACARA, the Australian Curriculum: Languages Information Sheet, 2012, www.acara.edu.au
- DEECD, Victorian Government's Vision for Languages Education, 2011, www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/languageseducationvision.pdf
- VCAA, AusVELS Curriculum, 2013, ausvels.vcaa.vic.edu.au