Association for Learning MANDARIN 汉语 in Australia Inc

澳大利亞學漢語協會

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia through the education system and beyond

Supplementary Submission in response to questions on notice received 12 December

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Question 1 What role do teachers play in influencing students to undertake or continue language learning and cultural studies?

Teachers are key players in influencing students to undertake or continue language and cultural studies.

a) What resources are required to support teachers to deliver language and cultural studies?

Promoting school-wide recognition

Resources are required to encourage school-wide recognition of a school's language program. Evidence of the language outside of the language classroom and in other areas of the curriculum reinforces its value and relevance.

Language teachers, especially those working alone in primary schools, often do not feel an integral part of the school's overall educational program. This is one of the factors that leads to low morale, which makes recruitment and retention of languages teachers difficult.

Lack of support from school leaders, many of whom have little experience of reaching any significant level of proficiency in a language other than English, can set the tone for the school and affect both staff and student attitudes.

A nationally funded program that encourages principals to strengthen their understanding of the value of languages education could help raise the profile of the language and cultural studies programs taught at their respective schools. The program could provide funds for relevant language learning, overseas exchanges or local community engagement[1].

Promoting the value of languages education

Resources could also be directed at countering misconceptions about language learning: That it is incompatible with English literacy development for example, or that learning a language will expose children to foreign government propaganda. The latter seems a particular problem for Chinese language programs. There is abundant evidence of the many benefits that language learning can have across the curriculum.[2]

[1] Submission 76 from Canberra Indonesian Teachers makes similar points and suggestions
[2] See for example Submission 41 from A/Prof Ruth Fielding

Question 2 How can the government improve access to Asian language and cultural studies for rural and remote schools?

ALMA acknowledges that delivering consistent, high-quality language programs in rural and remote communities presents significant challenges. We submit that improving access for these schools cannot be achieved by attempting to duplicate metropolitan staffing models. Instead, access relies on a distributed model where high-quality language programs are delivered remotely, building on the networks of current distance education providers and government schools of languages. The latter exist in several states and offer centrally delivered programs in a wide range of languages, usually outside of regular school hours, often using hybrid/dual delivery models. Targeted federal funding could support an increase in the range, quality and effectiveness of Asian language and cultural studies offered online.

National Centres of Excellence

The establishment of national Centres of Excellence could underpin program development and the teacher education and professional development that would be necessary to ensure the delivery of consistent, high-quality language programs in the target languages from Kindergarten/Reception upwards.

These centres would be language or language-family specific, liaise with relevant state and national bodies, teacher associations and language networks. They could draw on best practice, such as the 'lighthouse schools' discussed by Canberra Indonesian Teachers in their submission[3], The centres could also develop programs to support schools and teachers to offer full or partly bilingual programs in which one or more non-language subjects are taught in the language. Such programs allow more time-on-task, which is especially important to gain a meaningful level of proficiency in Asian languages, particularly Chinese[4].

A Federal Government funded Mandarin language Centre of Excellence could be established as a model that could be replicated for other priority languages. Mandarin language has immediate sovereign capability, has a clear plan for improvement in program delivery in Dr Jane Orton's 2016 report that is still very relevant today[5], has a national network of schools where the language is offered though CLIL or fully bilingual models, and several exemplary immersion programs such as the bilingual stream at Mawson Primary School in Canberra.

Recognition of language proficiency for Rural Learners

We also note that rural and remote Australia is linguistically diverse. Many families speak a non-English language at home, including Mandarin and other Asian languages. In common with their urban peers, children from these families often lack a mechanism to have their proficiency recognised by the formal education system. This can discourage them from further study of that language.

The development of progressions for languages, as discussed in response to Question 3 below, would provide a way for students to demonstrate their level of language proficiency. This could enable formal recognition of these skills, assist placement at the appropriate level if their language was the language offered through distance education at their school, and ensure that a student's location does not prevent recognition of their language skills and the opportunity to build on them through a high-quality language program.

[3] Submission no. 76
[4] Discussed in submissions by A/Prof Ruth Fielding (No. 41) and Intensive Chinese Network (No 82)
[5] Building Chinese language capacity in Australia https://www.uts.edu.au/globalassets/sites/default/files/20032-acri-jane-orton---chinese-language-capacity_web_0.pdf

Question 3 How can the school system better connect with community and heritage language speakers to deliver language and cultural studies?

Many schools are venues for community language (CL) classes after school hours or on the weekends. Some CL schools invite staff from the host schools to end of term and other special events. Such interaction could be encouraged.

Funding to encourage CL schools to explore ways for the mainstream schools their students attend to acknowledge the students' CL learning in some way could help raise the status of CL education, particularly if there were a way for the CL school to provide some measure of the level of language learning achieved.

a) How can community and heritage language associations support the language pathways and the continuity of language offerings between primary, secondary, and tertiary education?

A key problem in supporting continuity of language learning is the lack of an agreed system of progressions for languages that can demonstrate a student's level of proficiency. Progressions are common in Science, Mathematics, Literacy, and English as an Additional Language as sequences of steps that describe learning.

SICLE, Sydney University's Institute for Community Language Learning, is currently trialing progressions in Arabic and Chinese which can be used no matter which syllabus has been followed or where the language was learned[6]. Based on research into first, second and heritage language development, SICLE has developed 'milestones' in these two languages and has used student work samples to develop indicators for each milestone.

> "The eventual outcome will be an online Passport for Languages that will have a permanent record of the listening, speaking, reading and writing level attained by each student.
>
> This Passport will also include student self-assessment and can be carried across schools and stages of schooling to show evidence of proficiency …" [6]

The SICLE initiative also provides teachers with a diagnostic tool for planning and programming, thus helping support language pathways and continuity of language programs between CL schools and primary, secondary and tertiary education

<u>The role of federal funding</u>

National funding to build on the work of SICLE and develop progressions in other languages could provide community language schools with a way to show what their students have learned. This would make it possible for mainstream schools to confidently acknowledge language learning outside their own language program/s, raise the status of languages education in CL schools and encourage students to continue their language learning journeys.[7]

In relation to our submission calling for support for a secondary continuation to the bilingual Mandarin program at Mawson Primary School, the progression being trialed for Chinese by SICLE could be invaluable for the teachers developing materials in the areas of the secondary curriculum to be taught through the medium of Mandarin. It would also facilitate the design of any bridging support needed for students who elect to join the bilingual secondary program without the immersion experience at Mawson Primary.

[6] 'Crediting student language learning' at https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups/sydney-institute-community-languages-education/our-projects.html
[7] This links to the call from ACSSO (Submission 10) for a national credentialing pathway for community and heritage languages.

Question 4 What are the advantages and disadvantages of learning Asian languages and cultures in the education system?

Learning Asian languages and cultures in mainstream schools

- Advantages:
  - the programs have status – they are part of general education
  - they can be studied within school time and
  - progress is acknowledged in formal school reports and examinations
- Disadvantages
  - any one school is limited in the range of languages it can offer

Learning Asian languages and cultures in after-school or weekend programs

These programs can be centrally delivered by government schools of languages in several states or by community organised classes in a variety of locations in all states and territories.

- Advantages
  - greatly increase the range of languages available to study
  - allow students to study a language that is of interest or especially meaningful to them
- Disadvantages
  - compete with recreational activities and can decrease time with family
  - variable quality of programs in community organised CL schools
  - Unless accredited to offer Year 11 and 12 courses, language learning at a CL school is rarely acknowledged in mainstream education. This lack of status often deters students from continuing study beyond primary-school age.