



Five key recommendations for learning languages to thrive in New Zealand schools

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Preamble

In the last ten years, New Zealand has experienced a 14% decrease in the number of secondary students learning languages as a subject at school. For Asian language learning, the decline has been 29%.¹

In August 2015, the Asia New Zealand Foundation and the New Zealand Association of Language Teachers (NZALT) co-convened a working group to determine collaboratively the key issues and possible solutions to resolving the decline in language learning in our schools. Our work builds on what has already been achieved through the Auckland Languages Strategy (COMET Auckland - Te Hononga Akoranga, 2015) and contributes to broader debates about the necessity to introduce a National Languages Policy.

The intended audience for this subsequent document is the Minister of Education, leadership and key staff within the Ministry of Education, particularly those involved with the Review and Maintenance Programme (RAMP), and other groups and individuals interested in enabling languages to thrive in our education system.

1. Engage the community

- a. Promote the rationale of language learning to the community. This rationale includes that language learning helps to raise student achievement; supports career advancement; and provides economic and social benefits.
 - Highlight the tangible and intangible benefits of learning a language - see Auckland Languages Strategy (COMET Auckland - Te Hononga Akoranga, 2015), p. 6:
 - Improved student achievement at school
 - Reduced barriers to trade and economic development
 - Greater integration and inclusion of migrants and refugees
 - Status, support and protection for our languages and cultures

¹ Statistics obtained from the Education Counts website www.educationcounts.govt.nz Secondary students learning languages: 2005-90,694. 2015 - 77,588. Secondary students learning an Asian language: 2005 - 21,286. 2015 - 15,207. Figures exclude students learning in Māori Medium or Pasifika Medium.

- Better career and employment prospects for our young people in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas
 - Enhanced social cohesion and harmony
 - Reduced barriers to civic engagement and accessing public services
 - Engage the media to build a groundswell of support; encourage a national debate; request people who are recognised across New Zealand and have a strong voice in New Zealand to talk about the value of language learning.
 - Promote the profiles of successful New Zealanders who are multilingual.
- b. Normalise language learning as part of growing up in New Zealand.
- Encourage the notion of language learning being part of schooling in New Zealand for the benefit of students at school and throughout their lives.
 - Promote the link between language learning and being confident in your own heritage and identity as a person.
- c. Educate, support and encourage parents to speak their home language.
- d. Encourage connections between schools and their local language communities and schools/communities overseas.
- e. Equip and support New Zealanders to live successfully in an increasingly multilingual society by linking language learning to existing and future government policy. Government policy should reflect a multilingual approach to support human rights. All members of society need to communicate inter-culturally in order to be successful.
- Encourage inclusiveness following the Ministry of Education guidelines in *Success for All* (Ministry of Education, 2010b).
 - Support language learning in schools as part of encouraging students' international capabilities. The *International Capabilities* report (Ministry of Education, 2014) states that "learning a second or foreign language is considered by some to be one of the most effective ways for students to develop cross-cultural communicative competence and an awareness of other cultures and world views" (p. 12).
 - Support language learning in schools by drawing attention to their value (linguistically and inter-culturally) for businesses operating in New Zealand and internationally.
 - Following the initiative of the Auckland Languages Strategy (COMET Auckland - Te Hononga Akoranga, 2015), continue working on the development and implementation of a National Languages Policy.

2. Develop a Languages in Education Strategy

- a. Consider the 2007 Ministry of Education *Strategy for Languages Education Phase 1, 2008-2012 – Schooling. Draft for Consultation* (not released for consultation at the time) as a basis for a new strategy.
 - Other key documents should be considered, including the Auckland Languages Strategy, New Zealand and overseas research and similar strategies or initiatives from other countries.
- b. The final overall strategy should include and link all education sectors, i.e., ECE, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary and Community language learning. In the tertiary sector, consider the requirement for students seeking admission to university to have at least some NCEA Level 1 credits in an additional language.
- c. Ensure comprehensive consultation in the development of the strategy.
 - This would include a broad approach that would cover economic, community and social interests.
 - The consultation should include teachers, principals, Boards of Trustees (BOTs), communities, state and private sectors and other interested groups and organisations.
 - Consultation on the strategy provides opportunities for a national conversation on the importance and benefits of language learning within an increasingly culturally diverse New Zealand positioned within an increasingly interconnected world.
- d. To ensure successful implementation of the strategy:
 - The New Zealand Curriculum for schools (Ministry of Education, 2007) needs to withdraw the “working towards offering a language” statement (p. 44) and make language learning a core subject alongside the other curriculum areas.
 - National Administration Guidelines (NAGS) need to include priority on learning languages and a requirement for BOTs to enact by a stated date.
 - Consider appointing a specialist languages teacher to a permanent role as an advocate / senior advisor within the Ministry of Education.

3. Review and update the New Zealand Curriculum and NCEA requirements

- a. Establish *Learning Languages* as a core learning area for Years 1-10.
 - Make learning languages an equally valued learning area alongside all other learning areas.
 - Ensure a focus on intercultural communicative language teaching which emphasises communicative interaction for real-world purposes and encourages motivating learner-centred approaches.
 - Introduce a language (in addition to the language of instruction) from Year 1.
 - Ensure that the expectation for learning languages will parallel progression through the eight curriculum levels in other subject areas.

- Secondary schools to communicate with feeder schools to ensure suitable progression and continuity of language choice. Capitalise on Communities of Learning (clusters of schools).
 - Consider making learning an additional language compulsory.²
- b. Identify and support the three major language learners - first language (L1) speakers, heritage speakers and second language (L2) learners.
- Recognise that there are different language learners, and cater for the different learning needs and capabilities of each category.
 - Develop and design differentiated classes, content and assessment opportunities.
 - Support for L1 speakers: develop separate NCEA Achievement Standards that take account of L1 speakers' competence in the language above that of L2 speakers, e.g., through literature, media, translation components.
- c. Ensure that language and culture are interwoven.
- Culture is embedded in language; recognise the complex relationship between culture and language (Brown, 2007).
 - Language teaching should always link to cultural understanding rather than have a purely linguistic focus, e.g., on grammatical structures.
 - Identify and use opportunities to build intercultural understanding and intercultural learning (Ministry of Education, 2014).
- d. Encourage the use of technology to enhance language learning.
- Explore (and exploit) opportunities for virtual and on-line learning of languages.
 - Upskill teachers in the use of technology and provide effective ideas for its use.
- e. Encourage language learning as part of other learning areas.
- Identify and support opportunities for cross-curricular learning.
 - Consider the potential of the integration of learning areas and subjects, rather than treating them as independent silos, thereby creating contexts for learning that may be seen as more relevant and authentic by students.
- f. Assessment for NCEA
- Address the issue of languages not being recognised for literacy credits.
 - Address the inequity of non-differentiated NCEA standards for L1 and L2 speakers of the target language (see 3b above).

² In Europe, for example, studying an additional language for at least one year is compulsory in over 20 European countries. In most European countries, students begin to study their first additional language as a compulsory school subject between the ages of 6 and 9 (European Commission, 2012).

4. Provide targeted funding for language learning in schools

- a. Recommend that funding for language learning be viewed with a long term goal of sustainability, i.e., 10 to 15 year plan and commitment to targeted investment.
- b. Targeted investment to include:
 - Sector wide targeted funding, i.e., pre-service teacher education, professional learning and development, and resource development.
 - Specified funding in schools' operations grants to develop and strengthen language learning in schools until sector-wide initiatives enable sustainability, i.e., growing student numbers in language learning classes, teacher capability within schools.
 - Targeted funding to resolve equity issues, i.e., language learning appears to exist mainly in higher decile schools.

5. Build a quality language teaching force

- a. Review the likely demand for language teachers at different levels of schooling over time, to deliver on the above actions. Create a plan to build a high quality language teacher workforce accordingly (pre-service teacher education). Review should take into account the different needs of primary/secondary contexts (e.g., addressing the upskilling of teachers in the primary sector, including formal language learning and effective pedagogy, to ensure adequate quality and delivery of programmes). Ensure that all learning areas are equally represented in teacher education programmes.
- b. Explore options to support language learning and use while a quality teaching workforce is built (in-service teacher education).
 - Maximising resources currently funded by the Ministry of Education, e.g., ILEP (2016).
 - Establish genuine partnerships with communities of speakers and their language organisations. If community language expertise is drawn on, this must be in collaboration with a qualified teacher who has a sound understanding of the principles, values, key competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum and the intentions of the *Learning Languages* learning area (Ministry of Education, 2007).
- c. Provide language-specific secondary teacher education.
 - Both pedagogy and language-specific courses are needed at all levels. Participants need to have reached Stage III, or be L1 speakers, in the language they wish to teach.
 - Graduate profile for secondary teachers to include:
 - Thorough understanding of effective languages pedagogy (New Zealand Curriculum essence statement and curriculum levels 1 and 2, and supporting documentation – e.g., Ellis, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2010a; Newton, Yates, Shearn, & Nowitzki, 2010).

- Language proficiency for teachers with regard to the additional language they intend to teach to be *at least* at level B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference or CEFR (up to Year 10) or at C1 to (up to Year 13) (Council of Europe, 2001). This ensures that teacher language proficiency is above that required by learners.
- d. Include language learning and pedagogy as part of teacher education for the primary school sector.
- Graduate profile for primary teachers to include:
 - Basic understanding of effective languages pedagogy (see above).
 - Language proficiency up to A2 on CEFR for the additional language (see above).
- e. Acknowledge existing language expertise in teacher education programmes.
- Build on the language strengths of bilingual learners within pre-service and in-service education.
 - Utilise opportunities to upskill L1 speakers.
- f. Promote and increase existing professional support for language teaching.
- Widespread promotion of what is currently available through the Ministry of Education.
 - Explore options for enhancing existing professional support.
- g. Continue to promote research into effective language learning in the NZ context.
- Widespread promotion of research that has already been done.
 - Encouraging continuation of (funded) research, e.g., Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI, 2016).

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