



AFMLTA

Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations

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Allan Blagaich
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Via email

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Dear Allan

RE: Response to the Western Australian Curriculum: Languages

We write to provide a response to the Western Australian Curriculum: Languages recently developed for Western Australian schools. The AFMLTA welcomes WA developing the curriculum as a step towards national engagement with the *Australian Curriculum: Languages* and its adaptation and adoption in each state and territory. We hope that relative consistency across the nation will support teachers and learners of languages, a key learning area.

We would on this occasion like to comment on a few aspects, rather than provide a more detailed response, which will be undertaken by our member, the Modern Languages Teachers Association of WA. We have been approached by many teachers in Western Australia with concerns about what has been developed so far. Areas of concern are the lack of a Year 7 entry syllabus and pathways for language learners of different backgrounds, especially for Chinese.

Year 7 entry

As you would be aware, the Australian Curriculum: Languages has developed curricula for Years F-10 and Years 7-10. The rationale for two sequences is to provide maximum flexibility for schools, recognising that many students begin a new language in Year 7. The two sequences have different content to reflect what can be learned in a longer timeframe (F-10) and a shorter timeframe (7-10). These cannot meaningfully be conflated into a single syllabus. The sequences and content for the two curricula are different and, importantly, the achievement standards are different.

Of great concern to our members is the capacity for students to meet the achievement standards for Years 7-10 in a single sequence for those students who have begun in Year 7, as they are designed to capture achievement over a longer period. This is presenting great difficulties for teachers planning to use the new syllabuses, as they grapple with what to include and how to 'fast track' students to achievement that is not possible in usual time allocation.

We would recommend reconsideration of development of an additional sequence for each language, for Years 7-10, using the content from the Australian Curriculum Years 7-10 sequence, as has been done for the K-10 sequence.

Pathways

An important and significant gain of the Australian Curriculum: Languages over previous curricula is the recognition of the diverse backgrounds, prior learning and experience in languages and cultures that students bring to the classroom. In response to this recognition, the ACL has been developed for the dominant cohort (first language speakers, background language speakers or second language speakers) for most languages, and in the three pathways for Chinese (F-10 and, 7-10 second and background language

learners; 7-10 first language learners). These differentiated curricula account for differences in both oral and written proficiency, and cultural understanding that is inherent in having been schooled in Chinese in China compared to English in Australia, for example; or having Chinese spoken at home, but without literate skills (character writing) development; or being a new learner of Chinese with no previous experience of the language (oral or written) or the culture.

A serious issue in Australian schools is the very small number of second language learners who continue Chinese past the compulsory years. Extensive literature on this issue have pointed to the difficulties for second language learners competing with background or first language speakers of Chinese who have vastly superior skills in the language. It is critical for Australia's future that we engage more Australian children in the learning of Chinese, and we need to provide them with the best support to do so. Differentiated curricula and pathways provide avenues for this to be achieved.

In addition, with very strict eligibility criteria for entry to languages pathways in Years 11 and 12, where first, background and second language learners are identified and separated, there is disadvantage for students who have not had the opportunity to be afforded a K-10 syllabus that prepares them for ongoing study in this pathway. Many schools with high numbers of Chinese first and background learners have needed to develop their own programs to support these students. The new WA curriculum is not keeping up with this differentiated demand.

We therefore urge a reconsideration of the single pathway currently developed for WA. As for the Year 7 entry issue, the ACL content is available and carefully constructed to meet the needs of learners from these different pathways, and could be used by WA in developing additional syllabuses.

Summary

In summary, we have concerns that the current Western Australian Languages curricula do not meet the needs of diverse learners, and that issues outlined above arise from the attempt to include such diverse needs in a single K-10 curriculum. We recommend development of further curricula as outlined above.

We are also concerned for teachers of these languages attempting to meet such diverse learner needs from the single document, and believe it will be difficult for them to plan adequately from the current materials.

We would be happy to discuss our response, if this would assist.

Yours sincerely



Sherryl Saunders

Secretary, on behalf of the Executive of AFMLTA