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2021 Short-Term E-Exchange Program – Research Submission

**Fostering Second Language Learning in Schools**

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# Introduction

As part of the International [E-Exchange Program](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/careers-at-education/scholarships-and-programs/international-teacher-exchange/short-term-e-exchange-program), a virtual exchange was completed between New South Wales and overseas counterparts. This exchange provided an opportunity for short-term one-on-one partnerships between educators with similar interests or fields. This action research report on the shared focus area was completed following the 6-week program.

As both a Languages specialist Secondary School teacher and the Languages Co-ordinator at James Busby High School located in South-Western Sydney, I felt I was obliged to bring to the forefront some obvious issues and concerns associated with the instruction of languages in public schools in NSW. My objective in this venture was to uncover processes which underpin the implementation and delivery of languages programs in the public school sector. My overseas counterpart, Tanja Burns of Edmonton Public Schools, a Languages Consultant for Bilingual Programs in Primary Schools located in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, was able to provide valuable insight into how as linguistic educators in the 21st century we might be able to encourage a change in the delivery of methods associated with languages education in both the primary and secondary schooling networks both systemically and at district level. Our common objective was to delve into:

* how we encourage students and the school community to respect and value languages as a vital component of a student’s educational experience, to value its purpose and increase its validity in the school community and
* what the existing issues and concerns are that are creating barriers for future development and growth.

# Focus area / context

The aim of the research was to explore and compare the structure of language programming and the pedagogy of language teaching in our language programs in our respective school divisions, and uncover what the common issues and concerns are that underpin the development and growth of this specialist area in schools in the 21st century.

The Bilingual Programs in Edmonton Public schools comprises of the intensive study of one of the following language and cultural programs:

* American Sign Language Bilingual
* Arabic Bilingual
* Chinese(Mandarin) Bilingual
* French Immersion
* Late French Immersion
* German Bilingual
* Hebrew Bilingual
* International Spanish Academy.

NSW schools such as Murray Farm, Rouse Hill, Campsie and Scotts Head Primary Schools are able to offer Bilingual programs but at a limited range. Students progress into upper primary followed by junior secondary without consistency and lacking development, thus enabling an unfortunate dwindling of the number of students who value second language education at a later stage in their schooling life.

# Signficant learnings / Findings

**Edmonton Public Schools** adhere to a language mandate (the only school division in the province of Alberta that has one), where students are required to study a second language starting in grade 4 and ending in grade 9.

The majority of students study French as a second language (FSL) as this is one of the official languages of Canada, however, there are other options available depending on the location of the school and teacher qualifications. There are also French Immersion programs, where students begin in K or grade 1 with 100% French instruction until halfway through grade 2, when students are also instructed in English language arts. Many students are able to reach a B2 level of proficiency by the end of grade 12.

In addition, there are bilingual programs in Arabic, Chinese, German, Hebrew and Spanish. These programs have a similar approach to French Immersion in that students are immersed in the second language and are taught content in that language. These programs also begin in K and extend all the way to grade 12.

Once students reach grade 10, they can choose whether or not they want to continue studying a language. About 70% of the French Immersion and Bilingual students continue with their immersion/ bilingual language program until grade 12, although there is some attrition whenever there is a switch in divisions.The language mandate demonstrates to students and parents that second language learning is valued.

The government of Alberta offers an annual Language Learning Bursary for Teachers that provides up to $5000 for teachers to train overseas. There are up to 10 bursaries available per year.

**In New South Wales schools**, students must study a mandatory 100 hours beginning at Stage 4 in their studies of a second language. However, this is insufficient and it creates a negative association with learning a language. Language instruction needs to be introduced earlier to create confidence in self and value. If it is incorporated into the curriculum at an early stage students will appreciate the importance of it. If it has validity within the real world beyond the classroom and is on equal par as other core areas of learning, it will be seen as purposeful.

Joseph Lo Bianco states (Second languages and Australian schooling by Suzanne Mellor):

Teacher preparation must be a priority focus for any second languages learning policy because ‘only with a continuing supply of high-quality teachers and articulated delivery at school and district levels, will it be possible for continuation for many students in formal language study in their selected languages.

**Tanya and I have a combined passion** for the need to motivate students to see language as beneficial, particularly as we are embarking on a global level with technology and possibility. There is also the need for students to view language as beneficial for future employment prospects, eg, the need to speak a foreign language is essential when communicating with trading partners and the world in general. Regarding teaching young second language learners in LOTE contexts, UOW’s Honglin Chen & Janica Nordstrom states:

*‘With languages not currently being mandated in primary schools, the decision for offering LOTE curriculum largely depends on the principal and the school context. In some schools, languages are taught because the class teacher ‘happens’ to be bilingual and in other schools qualified language teachers come to the school for scheduled-in language lessons’*

# Conclusion / Recommendations & sharing

There is a need for:

* more advocacy and promotion of languages at all levels: (school, school division, teacher professional association, province/ state etc.);
* recognition of student achievement in the area of language learning through international credentialing (eg DELF, DELE, Sprachdiplom, etc), but could also start on a smaller scale (ie school or school division);
* mandatory second language programs at earlier stages;
* integrating second language as a pre-requisite for certain tertiary courses;
* discussions with various organisations and associations (possibly consulates) to discuss possible grants, student recognition, re-instating professional learning for teachers to liaise, network and reinvigorate abroad to update skills, knowledge and proficiency.

To sum up, it can be concluded that languages curriculum and associated policies (especially at systemic level) require significant change to establish Australia as a nation that honestly embraces, nurtures and fosters second language learning, particularly when compared to systemic and district level practices in Edmonton Schools and other schooling systems abroad. It is widely known that learning a second language has cognitive benefits. The evidence suffices to have one consider why, as Jordan Baker of the Sydney Morning Herald states, ‘..We are one of the most multilingual countries in the world. Kids come to school bilingual and end up monolingual in English’.

# Acknowledgements

[NSW students lag Australia and world in learning second language](https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/nsw-students-lag-australia-and-world-in-learning-second-language-teachers-20210506-p57pm6.html) (Jordan Baker SMH)

Teaching young second language learners in LOTE contexts (UOW - Honglin Chen & Janica Nordstrom)

Second languages and Australian schooling (Suzanne Mellor)