

CURRICULUM MATTERS: LEARNING LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

The New Zealand Ministry of Education's Curriculum Stocktake 2000-2001 process singled out second language teaching and learning as a subject for curriculum review and enquiry. The result was Government approval in 2003 to separate the learning area *Language and Languages* in the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (1994) into two. The separation involves establishing (a) a learning area to focus on English, and (b) a new learning area that involves developing a generic languages framework with the potential to work across all languages offered as an additional language in schools.

This paper discusses the complex issues surrounding curriculum policy development, and relates them to the contested nature of language status, language learning and language support in societies and schools. The process of developing the generic languages framework is described within the context of curriculum renewal. The framing of overarching educational goals for languages, encompassing linguistic, cultural and communicative competencies, is exposed and the implications of such goals are explored. Factors relating to the opportunities and constraints of implementing *Learning Languages* as a curriculum learning area are outlined. The paper concludes with highlighting the need for broad discussion on curriculum matters through a co-constructive process that takes cognisance of teachers' perspectives in addition to those of policy-makers and academics, as well as public and political will.

INTRODUCTION

New Zealand language planning and language policies exist, despite repeated claims to the contrary. Ironically, many national developments go unnoticed, as they do not conform to a 'rational and national' unified policy articulation that is centrally mandated. They are thus viewed in deficit terms or ignored.

This paper addresses the historical, political and social contexts of planning for learning languages other than the language of instruction in English-medium state education, commenting specifically on progress within the frame of national curriculum renewal. It proposes a sense of history, an understanding of the political context, and a 'theoretical pluralism' (Boston, 2001, p. 23) as necessary pre-requisites for a comprehensive and perceptive evaluation of progress in languages policy development in New Zealand (Spence, 2004, p. 389).

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The individual school is the major locus of educational administration.¹ The New Zealand Government's 1989 reforms terminated the Department of Education and its 'interventionist policy forms' (Gordon, 1997, p. 66) and made schools self-managing. New Zealand schools have more autonomy than those in virtually any other country (OECD, 1994, cited in Gordon, 1997, p. 68), described as "virtually autonomous providers of education" (Hirsch, 1995, p. 6; cited in Gordon, 1997, p. 67).

The 1988 State Sector Act changed the relations between Ministers and public servants, and altered the character of the public service (Walsh, 2001, p. 52). The Ministry of Education was established in 1989 as a Crown agency to provide policy advice to government. Accountabilities through national education and administration guidelines, and three-yearly compliance inspections by the government audit agency, the Education Review Office,² ensure that schools meet their student needs and provide good quality education.

The New Zealand Education Act (1989) provides for free education in state schools³ administered by boards of trustees. The main languages of instruction are English and te reo Māori, the indigenous language of New Zealand. All essential learning areas have curricula in both English and te reo Māori, the latter to guide state-provided Māori language medium education in *kura kaupapa Māori* (state schools where the teaching is in the Māori language and is based on Māori culture and values).

Uniquely amongst commentators, Starks and Barkhuizen (2003, p. 248) situate the 1993 *New Zealand Curriculum Framework / Te Anga Marautanga o Aotearoa* (NZCF) in its political context as a statement of policy to guide planning at various levels of the system, with flexibility to suit the various local conditions and the needs of schools. The NZCF promotes learning other languages as an area of the curriculum that is important to New Zealand's health and growth:

All students benefit from learning another language from the earliest practicable age. Such learning broadens students' general language abilities and brings their own language into sharper focus. It enriches them intellectually, socially, and culturally, offers an understanding of the ways in which other people think and behave, and furthers international relations and trade. Students will be able to choose from a range of Pacific, Asian, and European languages, all of which are important to New Zealand's regional and international interests (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 10).

The proposal, and intention, that *all* students learn a language other than English was seen to have significant implications for secondary schools (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998, p. 213). This clear statement of policy picked up on the recommendation in the 1992 Waite report *Aotearoa: Speaking for Ourselves* that a second language be introduced in the core school curriculum.

Guided by the NZCF policy statement, curriculum guidelines and associated forms of support have progressively developed since 1994 for Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Samoan and Cook Islands Māori. Curriculum guidelines for Tongan, Tokelauan, Niuean, New Zealand Sign Language and te reo Māori as a second language are in preparation. Latin and Indonesian are able to be assessed for national qualifications.

¹ Each school is governed by its own board of trustees, which includes five parent representatives elected by the school's current parents, the principal, a staff representative selected by the school staff, and a student representative in secondary schools. The board of trustees appoints and employs the school principal and school staff, although in most schools the principal is the effective employer (Wylie & Mitchell 2003, p. 3).

² For further information, see <http://www.ero.govt.nz>.

³ The 101 private schools also receive some government funding.

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Recognising the need for a more strategic approach, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with NZALT, developed and published *Learning Languages: A Guide for New Zealand Schools* (NZ Ministry of Education, 2002) which provides advice to schools on strategic planning for effective language programs. Devolving administrative responsibility to schools requires cooperation, commitment and leadership at the local level where the decisions are made (Lilly, 2001; Gibbs & Holt, 2003, p. 29).

With this policy mandate, and various forms of support being provided, why did second language learning become a contentious issue in schools, and a subject of enquiry for the Curriculum Stocktake?

Among a number of problems and issues that had been raised was the status of second language learning. With optional status, learning a language can be considered desirable but not essential for the well-being of the nation or the education of the individual student (Ellis, 2000, p. 46).

The 2000-2002 Curriculum Stocktake had a threefold purpose: that of seeking assurance of the quality of the NZCF as policy; a higher likelihood of its effective implementation and therefore of improved outcomes for students; and an agreed direction and process for the ongoing development of the New Zealand Curriculum, for both English-medium and Māori-medium education.

As part of that process, the Ministry convened a meeting to discuss the implementation of the essential learning area *Language and Languages*. A number of issues were explored. Factors such as varied time allocations, “taster” programmes in Years 7–10, little sequencing across the primary-secondary interface, were reducing the potential for students to achieve with ease (Education Review Office, 1994; Holt et al., 2001, p. 42; Shearn, 2003, p. 11).

Wide variations in language curriculum guidelines, developed progressively over a decade by specific language groups without the guidance of an overarching framework, were complicating the task of developing generic achievement standards for languages at each of the three levels of the new National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) to be introduced in 2002. Developing standards based assessment consistent with the required level⁴ of each language’s curriculum was also challenging. Teacher responses included reducing the standard to ‘what can be achieved by students’ in their teaching and learning contexts, and avoiding making the learning appear hard through the ‘option has to be fun’ syndrome to increase student motivation.

The author’s presentation to the meeting framed logical next steps in languages-in-education planning. These were two-fold: firstly, the need to seek the development of a languages curriculum framework that would work across all languages: and secondly, a proposal to investigate the move towards making the learning of a second language a compulsory part of the curriculum for Years 7–10 (Spence, 2001). The need for coherent government strategy to support two separate essential areas, one for languages of instruction, English and te reo Māori, and the second for all other languages, became a priority recommendation (Shearn, 2003, p. 14).

At the same time, international critiques of the NZCF were noting the low priority accorded to learning languages (ACER, 2002; Le Métais, NFER, 2002). Consideration to building on New Zealand’s bilingual culture to motivate and support students to learn further languages at school and beyond was recommended. Peddie (2005, p. 32) describes the Curriculum

⁴ Set at Level 6 of the curriculum (year 11) for Level 1 qualifications on the New Zealand National Qualifications Framework, called the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA).

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Stocktake Report's recognition of the importance and the complexity of the *Language and Languages* area as a major step forward:

The essential learning area *Language and Languages/Te Kōrero me ngā Reo* should be two separate learning areas - *English/Te Reo Māori* and *Languages*. This separate area would include heritage, community and foreign languages and the learning of English and te reo Māori as second languages. Schools should be required to provide instruction in an additional language for students in years 7 - 10 (except for Māori immersion settings) but it should not be mandatory for all year 7-10 students to learn another language. Generic outcomes for students should be developed and included in the revised New Zealand Curriculum Framework and Te Anga Marautanga o Aotearoa (2002, §19, Section One).

In March 2003 Government approved its proposed direction for ongoing curriculum development that included identification of *Languages* as a separate learning area, and compulsion to offer another language in the curriculum in Years 7 – 10:

It is envisaged that implementation of *Languages* as a separate learning area and compulsion to offer another language will be phased in over the next five years. This recommendation builds on the second language strategy, which is already in place: there are curriculum statements for German, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Samoan, Korean, French and Cook Islands Māori (draft). Curriculum statements for Nuiean, Tokelauan, Tongan, and Te Reo Māori (as a second language) are also being developed. Teaching materials for non speakers of German, Japanese, Spanish, French (Chinese in preparation, for use in 2004) are also available (Cabinet Paper, §29.4).

The directive to establish a new learning area is being actioned within the strategic frame of the New Zealand Curriculum / Marautanga Project.⁵ A key Languages Reference Group of academics, initial teacher educators, advisers and teachers is working collaboratively with the Ministry to construct a generic languages curriculum as the overarching framework that will guide second language teaching and learning in New Zealand schools. The work involves developing an essence statement and a generic set of achievement objectives at Levels 1 to 8 that will work across all languages. National consultation is planned for the second half of 2006.

The requirement for all schools with students in Years 7–10 to offer instruction in a second language builds on a decade-long strategy of encouraging the take-up of teaching and learning languages in Years 7 – 10 that began in 1994 with a grant of \$4.8 million over three years for the 'Second Language Learning Project Years 7 – 10'. Peddie et al. (1999, p. 117) concluded that their evaluation research findings offered a number of useful lessons for the future delivery of languages to the primary sector, considered to be a matter for both individual schools and central planning.

Increasing second language learning opportunities for all students in Years 7–10 continues as a strategic aim of government. In 2005 64% of intermediates; 42% of primary schools and 95% of secondary schools were already meeting the requirement.

The Ministry's *Learning Languages Strategy* is designed to sustain the continuing incremental growth in languages programmes in Years 7 – 10. Substantial material and human resources are already supporting this strategy, including those generously sponsored and donated by other agencies. The strategic framework is that of the New Zealand

⁵ See <http://www.cmp.ac.nz/> and go to *Learning Languages*.

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Curriculum. While Government approved a five-year time-frame around the implementation of the requirement to offer languages to students in Years 7 – 10, any future regulation will be at Government discretion following the New Zealand Curriculum nationwide consultation and finalisation processes in 2006-2008.

DISCUSSION

The policy response that this paper deals with is developing young New Zealanders through schooling with the key competencies that our society considers they will need for the future; how learning languages has become part of that; and the implications for outcomes, pedagogy, assessment and resourcing.

Clyne (2006, p. 177), in considering Australia's language potential, considers the major impediments to realising a country's language potential are:

- one's own and others' attitudes;
- the lack of availability of quality language programmes in schools;
- lack of government commitment.

New Zealand policy has not recentralised. While there continues to be some degree of centralised support, community support for language learning is essential in a devolved context if large-scale changes are to take place in schools and other institutions where languages are offered (Peddie, 1993, p. 118; Shearn, 2003, p. 17). Corson (1990) argues the need for "grassroots arrangements equipped to translate the visions of a national policy into strategies capable of enhancing individual lives" (pp. 157-158).

Lo Bianco (2005) describes shifts in public attitudes towards language education in Australia as providing "the necessary platform for the provision of universal mainstream language programmes and the eventual attainment of widespread and lasting bilingualism among Australians" (p. 1). New Zealand has not yet demonstrated widespread public receptivity to compulsory language learning in the school sector.

Language planning, however, progresses. The 1987 Māori Language Act recognised Māori as an official language, and established the Māori Language Commission as guardian. The NZCF (1993) supports the Act, stating that "students will have the opportunity to become proficient in Māori" (p. 10). Further, *Te Rautaki Reo Māori / Māori Language Strategy* (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2003) is a landmark event in national policy planning. The strategy aims to move the Māori language to the next stage of revitalisation over the next 25 years, by focusing on greater Māori language use in communities. The five goals recognise that a positive and receptive environment is important to encourage people to use their Māori language skills, and, while schools make their contribution, the support of wider New Zealand society is required.

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), also an indigenous language, achieved official status in April 2006. Mainstreaming NZSL in education, as well as in wider society, is the considerable challenge that lies ahead. Schools, too, will be called on to make their contribution.

English, despite not having achieved official status, remains the major language of national and international communication and of achievement. The NZCF identifies the need for all students to develop the ability and confidence to communicate competently in written and spoken English. Among the initiatives supporting this aim are those which relate specifically to addressing the English language needs of students from non-English speaking

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backgrounds (NESB). These students include recent migrants, refugees and foreign fee-paying students.⁶ In addition increased attention is being given to the needs of New Zealand born students of NESB heritage, to address their English literacy needs for academic purposes.

Pacific languages are strengthening their presence. The Ministry of Education's *Pasifika Education Plan* (2001) is a multi-pronged education achievement initiative that aims to increase Pasifika achievement in all areas of education, and includes aims for Pacific languages. Language maintenance and revitalisation, resourcing and capacity building present significant challenges. Schools, again, will make their contribution to society's broader aims.

Language planning occurs at all levels, then, from government departments through to individual teachers, communities and individuals in society. Macro-planning in education has meant largely devolving language planning activities to educational institutions (Corson, 1990). This points the way to developing strategies that are comprehensive yet sufficiently flexible to take account of local conditions (Shearn, 2003; Starks & Barkhuizen, 2003) and more effective school and community partnerships (Glynn, 2003, pp. 273–281). Recent research (Barnard & Glynn, 2003; Ellis, 2000) involves learning from actual practice. These information streams allow for central authorities to adapt more flexibly to changing circumstances and priorities, and be better positioned to make decisions that facilitate desired learning outcomes.

This brings into question the purposes of language learning in schools. In their submission, NZALT (1990) called for a policy distinction “between specialists' demand for very high competency, which only a few will achieve, and the desirability for most pupils to have a sound and satisfying experience of studying a second language” (p. 20). Ellis (2000, p. 39) goes further in claiming the purpose of policy would be to ensure a degree of bilingualism in all students leaving New Zealand secondary schools, with teachers the 'policy carriers' inspiring students to see that language learning has a real place in their lives.

The development of *Learning Languages* as a new learning area offers the opportunity to place second language learning within a new frame of intercultural language learning that will advance the agenda of effective cross-cultural communication and influence the research agenda in applied linguistics. This means that language learners require more than knowledge of linguistic forms. They need to know how to use the language for communication. Since it is not possible to use language without creating both a context and social relationships through the use of language, teachers need to prepare learners to communicate outside their own cultural boundaries. As defined by Liddicoat and Crozet (2000):

An intercultural approach to language teaching aims to support an active participation in multicultural societies where speakers of “other” languages know how to embrace (rather than simply enjoy or reject) cultural difference for enhanced inter-cultural enrichment and social harmony. (p. 12)

Such redefinition is well aligned to the intents and purposes of the Draft New Zealand curriculum and its broader educational principles and goals, positioning “the second language teacher as an educator of young people rather than as a mere language instructor” (Barnard, 2004, p. 217). It presents new challenges, not only to language teachers and learners, but to the whole of New Zealand society. This places New Zealand into an emerging stream of “intercultural” language teaching and learning internationally, seen as a

⁶ In 2003 foreign fee-paying students formed 2.3 per cent of the school population. This specifically excludes the tertiary sector.

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response to cultural pluralism and linguistic diversity as a desirable state in nation building and national identity rather than as a problem.

Ingram (2003) places effective, well-planned and highly competent language teaching at the heart of developing attitudes, skills and understanding that will improve intercultural and international interaction. The work now being undertaken by the Ministry of Education on quality teaching as a vital outcome; strategically framing the infrastructure for resourcing languages-in-education, particularly in Years 7–10; and developing an 'essence' statement as the key policy direction for the learning area *Learning Languages* is addressing this key outcome.

There is the opportunity to link New Zealand into the extensive research base of the *Common European Framework for Languages* (CEFL, Council of Europe, 2001), the structured learning progressions that underpin the CEFL, and the tools that are being developed in many languages to support the CEFL. These tools can be used for (a) student achievement and (b) teacher proficiency attestation, both of which are internationally benchmarked. Some of these tools are being trialled in two current Ministry of Education pilot programmes to develop primary teacher language fluency in their chosen teaching language.

There is the opportunity to establish a wider languages community all talking to each other in communities of practice that will enrich and strengthen language teaching and learning in New Zealand; respond well to overtly valuing the diverse languages and cultures within New Zealand; and change the perception of those who know and speak other languages from deficit to that of a vast resource potential for our nation.

Finally, the opportunity to position *Learning Languages* as a learning area within the curriculum, and work with the consent and support of schools and their communities, has the potential to lead to improved quality, a strengthened positioning, and public support, such that moves can be made for mandating second language learning for all students at some point in the future as a natural outcome.

CONCLUSIONS

New Zealand has a unique and increasing diversity of languages and cultures. As Clyne (2005) comments:

Enabling those with plurilingual backgrounds to develop all their languages, English and the others, to their fullest potential not only facilitates the expression of people's identity (feeling good about themselves and others around them) and opportunities for cross-cultural understanding. It also constitutes good economic resource management. (p. 172)

Such enabling is not only the concern of schools; it is also the concern of wider society in all of its manifestations for an agenda that truly supports multiculturalism.

The positioning of languages within the multicultural discourse is a discernible shift towards recognising that understanding of culture and gaining a world view (Spence & Spence, 2000, p. 93) is deepened through language study (Peddie & Jackson, 1999, p. 5; East, 2000, p. 160; Pauwels, 2000, p. 25). Migration patterns and increased people mobility strengthen the need for policy parameters that conserve language resources (Watts, 2000, p. 34), systematise support for ESOL provision (Franken & McComish, 2003, p. 157) and disestablish notions of deficit (May et al., op.cit., 2003, p. 134).

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New Zealand's continuing response has to consider these needs at several levels:

- Consideration of the uniqueness of New Zealand's linguistic landscape, and the status of languages and peoples within it
- The extent to which New Zealand is prepared to move beyond an "English is sufficient" ideology
- The extent to which bilingualism/multilingualism is valued and promoted as natural, normal and desirable
- The extent of the contribution of schooling to developing knowledge and use of languages other than the language of instruction.

The restructuring and responsibilities allocation within the new Ministry of Education has taken time to stabilise following recruitment of education specialists with a teaching background and additional expertise, to lead developments in curriculum policy, pedagogy, materials and professional development. In this way, more infrastructure is centrally provided. Since the late 1990s substantial policy changes have seen a focus on building teacher capability and providing more advisory, curriculum and professional development support. Peddie (2003, p. 11) identifies as critical the impact of key individuals in this process.

Languages-in-education planning continues within the Ministry, strategically and operationally. The directions have been set. Government has the leadership role, but any strategy falls within the broad policy thrust of devolution and local control. The Ministry of Education attempts to achieve the balance between its role as a central agency and the self-management of local educational institutions through processes of contractual arrangements, co-construction strategies and working partnerships. Ongoing critique of the absence of a national languages policy, and a discourse of complaint, fail to take into account the complexities of the positioning of central agencies, the political decision-making process, the policies that do exist, and the contexts in which decisions are made.

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