



BACKGROUND

Community languages (CL) schools have been operating in NSW since the 1860s. There are over 37,000 students learning one of 64 languages taught by 3000 volunteer teachers. Our Institute (SICLE) aims to support the teaching and learning of community languages through building capacity in schools with teachers and for students. It works in three main areas:

- conducting research to inform policy and evidence-based approaches to teaching languages
- providing professional learning pathways for teachers in NSW community languages schools
- developing curriculum resources and assessment to support students learning community languages

THE SKILLS IN QUESTION: TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

We want to develop a research base for community languages education and CL schools. Our first study was into the professional learning strengths and needs of the volunteer teachers in the CL schools. This involved an online survey (n=854) and face to face interviews (n=47) in 2018. The key findings of the report, *A Question of Skills*, are that the volunteer teachers are generally female (90%) and have lived in Australia for more than ten years (60%). There is a spread of ages with roughly one third under 40, a third aged 40 to 49 and the remaining third over 50. The volunteer teachers have high levels of qualifications. 87% have tertiary qualifications, the majority with undergraduate degrees and postgraduate qualifications. Just under half of the teachers have qualifications in education (44.3%) and just over half (54.9%) have international teaching experience. Most want to gain accreditation at teachers in mainstream schools but only four per cent have managed to do so.

Overseas-trained teachers are often seen as a problem' group in Australia (Reid, et.al, 2010) but we calculate an economic benefit to Australia of \$182 million in terms of qualifications gained overseas based on domestic costs of educating graduates. Teacher attrition is not high: 42% have been in CL schools for over five years and only a third less than two years. The profile is therefore one of women returning to work or further study after raising their families – but the pathway is blocked.

Key requests for professional learning related to using technology and curriculum development. Beginning teachers wanted behaviour management. Teachers also took advantage of professional learning with the majority having completed recent professional learning (66%) and the *Certificate in Language Teaching* (63%). Older teachers were also more likely to have undertaken professional learning. A majority of teachers wanted support in improving their classroom English (86%) and most (80%) also wanted support in studying their community language. Being a native speaker does not mean that teaching the language is easy! Only four per cent of teachers are Australian-born. In some schools there is a majority of older teachers and so succession-planning and having pathways for second-generation students to become teachers is a key issue. The study has led to the planning and development of our **teacher pathways**.

DEVELOPING LANGUAGES, BUILDING COMMUNITY: CAPACITY, CURRICULUM & TEACHING IN CL SCHOOLS

Our second study involved the online survey of principals (n=157) and teachers (n=409) and face to face interviews (n=28) asking about resources used, approaches to teaching, knowledge of the syllabus, and school organisation. Our findings can be summarised in five main areas, the role of CL schools in the community and in languages/ cultural education; the students, teacher and principals; the organisation and operation of the schools; curriculum and assessment and teaching; ICT and the schools.

Place and role of the schools. The research has been conflicted on whether to see the schools 'either as providing an alternate pathway to languages education similar to other sectors or articulating 'mother tongue language teaching and cultural maintenance' with the mainstream (Liddicoat et al 2007:100). In other words, does the sector have a complementary role in languages provision or is it just a place where parents focus on language and cultural maintenance for children. This second view has probably been because of concerns about the quality of teaching and assessment, teachers and curriculum in the schools. Liddicoat *et al* (2007) argued against accepting the sector as recognised educational providers. Others (Norst 1982, 1983; Baldauf 1997; Erebus, 2002; Lo Bianco, 1987, 2009) argue for integration of the schools and recognition of student learning through improvement of teacher skills, curriculum and classroom teaching. Our study supports the role of CL

schools as an alternate provider with one proviso. There is \$5.4 million annual funding for these not-for-profit schools and volunteer teachers in NSW, a miniscule fraction of the cost of languages education in mainstream schools. Expectations of the sector must be realistic and the schools should not be seen as taking over roles which should more properly and effectively be carried out by mainstream school.

Community languages schools play a key role in forming communities, especially important for refugee background groups or those whose languages were repressed in countries of origin. They negotiate pathways between stakeholders such as ethnic and religious groups, consulates, families and mainstream institutions and schools. CL schools can respond quickly to emerging need such as for Uyghur, Dinka, Akan, Tibetan and other languages. They can adapt to needs of dispersed communities such as Swedish, by online teaching. They bring together communities with high levels of mixed marriages such as Thai and Filipino.

We found a significant change in the students and classes in CL schools and thus their role in terms of language and cultural development. In previous studies, the students were generally primary-aged first or second-generation learners (Norst, 1983; Baldauf, 1997; Minty *et al*, 2007). In our study many schools had shifted to teaching 2nd, 3rd and 4th generation students. Thirty per cent of students were secondary-school aged. Fifteen per cent of schools were running unfunded preschool/ playgroup classes and 12 per cent of schools ran classes for adults. There was also a marked increase of no-background students in classes. CL schools are generally the only language providers for over 30 languages such as Thai, Tongan and Tibetan. Our interview data indicated that schools see their role as linked to other providers from early childhood to adult. Schools views of cultural development were much more in line with recent research into bicultural identities and translanguaging.

Our findings in terms of school organisation and capacity showed great differences between and within languages group. There tended to be a bipolar organisation of larger or smaller schools, with 26% of schools consisting of only one class. Smaller schools reported the most difficulty in funding, finding teachers and resources. Almost 80 per cent of schools are located in government school classrooms, and there is a strong need for support in negotiating their 'tenancy'. The workload of volunteer principals is far too much. Some language groups such as Macedonian, Greek, Tamil, Swedish and Chinese have strong organisation and close links with mainstream curriculum. Smaller groups such as African and Pasifika languages and minority groups such as Assyrian, Chaldean and Kurdish are fragile and need strong support and capacity building. There are, for example over 18,000 students speaking Pasifika languages in NSW government schools but only one Tongan and one Samoan school with 104 students!

There is great diversity in terms of curriculum and teaching. Although there are some 22 community languages syllabuses, they are not relevant for many schools where teachers may have limited background in education and English! Syllabuses were written for mainstream schools. Eight per cent of schools use textbooks, produced overseas (44.3%), in Australia (26.6%) or by the schools themselves (24.1%). These textbooks act as curriculum which was lacking in many schools. There was strong evidence of student-centred, interactive teaching. Over 60% of teachers report having done 60 hour professional learning programs through SICLE. The findings from our attitudinal survey were positive but mixed. Main teacher concerns were student engagement, differentiation and behaviour management. There was a marked difference in reported teaching approaches to previous studies. There was a lack of attention to assessment/ outcomes, although 16% of schools reported using external assessments such as HSK or tests based on CEFR¹.

Just under 90% of principals wanted teachers to use ICT in the classroom but under 40% of teachers had access to internet or ICT and even less to Smartboard. Many relied on their own iphones and ipads.

TEACHER PATHWAYS: PL PROGRAMS

We provide three 60-hour NESA-accredited professional learning programs for teachers in NSW government-funded Community Languages Schools². 439 teachers successfully completed these programs in 2019 and over 2,500 have completed our programs since 2008. The **Community Languages Teaching Program (foundation)** program covers practical aspects such as lesson planning, teaching activities and classroom management. Participants observe classes in day schools. The program also introduces how children learn, recent approaches to education, teaching different ages and abilities, and special needs. Programs run in different places around Sydney and Wollongong and there is a mixed mode/ online program. There are also special workshops in Arabic, Chinese, Korean and Tamil for teachers of these languages.

¹ HSK: *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi* [Chinese Proficiency Test], CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference

² NESA: NSW Education Standards Authority

The **Community Languages Teaching Program (Advanced)** helps experienced teachers become curriculum mentors. The program covers unit planning, assessment, using technology and advanced teaching skills. The main assessment task involves participants undertaking a mini-research project on planning a unit of work, developing resources, increasing student engagement or similar topics.

The **Community Languages School Leadership and Management Program** is for principals, school leaders and committee to develop more effective schools. This program has three strands: people management (finding, employing, mentoring teachers), financial and school management (funding/ fees/ paperwork) and educational leadership (developing programs and policies etc). Participants carry out an audit of their school and design ways to improve school management and curriculum.

TEACHER PATHWAYS: GAINING ACCREDITATION AS MAINSTREAM TEACHERS

We have a group of bilingual **Careers Advisors** who provide free advice to Community Languages teachers in planning career, further study and gaining credit for overseas qualifications. The Advisors visit schools and meet teachers in different locations around Sydney and have helped over 170 teachers in 2018/9.

We run free higher-level **English classes** in writing, speaking and pronunciation for teachers in NSW Community Languages Schools. These classes are run on Wednesday nights for teachers who are above 6 on IELTS but not yet close enough to the level required for teaching accreditation.

We provide subsidies for teachers to sit for the **ISLPR** English test which is required by NESAs to become accredited teachers in NSW schools. The International Second Language Proficiency Rating test is a less expensive test based on the language of teaching. Over 80 teachers will have sat this test by December 2019. We have made a continuing agreement with ISLPR in Queensland to have Sydney University as their testing centre.

From 2020 we have places in **Master of Teaching programs** at WSU, ACU and other universities for teachers who have a recognised degree but who need preservice teacher education. We had over 400 applications for the first 30 places at Western Sydney University starting in March 2020. We offer subsidies for teachers in government-funded NSW community languages schools. This program involves universities running specific programs for these teachers in alternate mode: on weekends, online and school holidays. We assessed qualifications, organised English preparation and testing and information sessions and will provide academic skills training for teachers. Successful applicants receive subsidies of \$5,000 each. In semester 2, 2020 we plan a further intake of 70 teachers.

CURRICULUM AND CAPACITY

We are working with principals and schools to collect, categorise, review and upload local, national and international teaching resources for different languages onto **online portals**. Our survey of the 510 Community Languages Schools in NSW found that having good, up-to-date curriculum resources for Australian students is the most important need across all languages. We started with the main languages: Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Korean and Vietnamese, with project officers collecting all available resources from schools and from other states, overseas and online. These resources are checked for quality and copyright by key teachers in the schools and then uploaded on to online portals. In 2020 we will be running teacher workshops in these languages to familiarise teachers with these resources and develop more. We have begun similar projects now for Japanese, Turkish, Hindi, Tamil, Macedonian, Persian/ Dari and Assyrian.

Quality teaching project. Key teachers are trialling and developing 48 units of work in nine languages for use in Community Languages Schools: Arabic, Assyrian, Chinese, Greek, Hindi, Korean, Macedonian, Tamil, Turkish. The units reflect quality teaching and rich task outcomes aligned with new K-10 languages syllabuses. Teachers had two days of workshops and received in-school support to trial and evaluate these units with their students. Final units will be presented in December 2019 and uploaded on to the curriculum portal.

New syllabuses: scope and sequence and units of work. We are developing scope and sequences and units of work to accompany the new NESAs K-10 syllabuses in Hindi, Macedonian, Persian/Dari, Punjabi and Tamil. These units will be bilingual and are available free for volunteer teachers in NSW CL schools.

We are developing a **Passport for Languages** to accredit student language learning. These will be based on detailed languages progressions and teacher professional learning to use these progressions for student assessment. At present there is no way for parents, teachers or students to know what level any student gets to in any language class. This project is aiming to develop progressions or scales for community languages which can then be adapted into different versions for community languages. The progressions/ scales will be trialled with groups of students to gain evidence for validity/ reliability in 2020. Community languages teachers will be given professional development to be able to assess student work samples. The eventual outcome will be an online

Passport for Languages on which can be recorded the listening, speaking, reading and writing levels that students gain. This **Passport** will also include student self-assessment and can be carried across schools and stages of schooling to show evidence of proficiency

Projects for smaller schools. We are running digital storytelling with Tongan and Khmer schools. Digital storytelling is a way to engage students and develop their community language by getting them to plan and make videos on a range of topics. This project is being run in the Khmer and Tongan schools. Teachers have a series of workshops learning to use a range of tools and apps in their classes, run by Dr. Kirsty McGeoch and based on the Critical Connections project in England.

Using government schools. We have a set of videos about having community languages schools use day school premises. These clips have interview footage with day school principals discussing the benefits of hosting community languages schools, how to organise co-operation and address issues that emerge. The videos will soon be available on the NSW Department of Education website.

Promoting schools We are producing video clips to promote student and parent involvement in community languages schools. In collaboration with Turkish language schools we are developing clips of interviews with students, ex-students, parents and others talking about why to learn their community language. These clips will be disseminated through social media.

OTHER PROJECTS

Community Schools Support Officers This program aims to get 2nd generation students into teaching in CL schools. We provide \$700 stipends and training for 70 Community Language Support Officers, 'Gen-2' students to become teachers in Community Languages Schools. Many Community Language Schools find it difficult to get teachers, especially younger ones with Australian experience. Community Language Support Officers receive several days training and then are placed with a mentor teacher providing support to students. We are exploring getting credit for this in university programs.

Community Languages Teacher Test. The CLTT assesses proficiency in a range of community languages. Language teachers often have years of training and language learning but have no way to accredit their proficiency in their language. We are developing and trialling two tests. The first is the **Community Language Teacher Test (CLTT)** for accredited K-6 teachers who need proof of proficiency to gain permanent status as community languages teachers in NSW government schools. This test will be open to other languages teachers in primary or secondary schools who also want evidence of their levels of proficiency. We have tests for 10 languages and are developing more. We are also offering the Verifying Language Proficiency (VLP) testing for applicants wanting to gain entry to pre-service teacher education programs and need evidence of proficiency.

2020 International Community/ Heritage Languages Education Conference. This conference will bring together international and Australian researchers at Sydney University from 2nd to 4th July, 2020. Keynote speakers are Prof. Maria Carreira (UCLA), Dr. Vicky MacLeroy (Goldsmiths, London) and Prof. Joe lo Bianco.

Research seminars and annual lecture. We offer a regular research seminar series. Prof. Jim Tognolini will deliver the annual Michael Clyne lecture on Thursday 21st November at 5pm. **Assessing languages: Accounting for language skills gained in and outside the classroom.**

Tertiary working party. Our TWP involves researchers from NSW and ACT institutions meeting four times a year to coordinate research efforts into community languages.

Exploring EAL/D Education in Secondary Science. This was an intervention study of teaching Science to EAL students in eight low-SES secondary schools using 'high challenge, high support teaching' through rich tasks. It was funded by the NSW Department of Education

Recent Media and SICLE website

<https://sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups/sydney-institute-community-languages-education.html>

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/earshot/features/tongue-tied-and-fluent/>

<https://www.nswcurriculumreview.nesa.nsw.edu.au/home/homePageContent/view>

<https://www.smh.com.au/education/gonski-s-missed-opportunity-on-languages-20180601-p4zix3.html>

<https://www.igssyd.nsw.edu.au/blog/sbs-reveals-igs-is-bucking-the-trend-in-languages-learning>

<https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/recent-research-into-community>

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/our-languages-a-national-resource-in-terminal-decline>

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/hindi-tamil-among-new-languages-to-be-taught-in-nsw-schools>