



MGTAV - A.B.N. 65769279171

The Issue of Priority Languages.

Somewhere in the world, every two weeks a native language disappears. And with each language gone, we lose thousands of years of culture, history and identity.

All Single Language Association presidents are able to rattle off many reasons why their language is a priority language. As the president of the Modern Greek Teachers' Association I can talk for hours, as could other Language Association presidents - about the benefits of learning Greek and why it should be a compulsory language for all students in school.

Some of these reasons are:

- . Greek is the official language of the European Community and is rated internationally as a major world language.
- .Greek is the third most widely spoken community language in Australia
- .Australians travel to Greece in their thousands per year and thousands of Greek tourists visit Australia annually
- .Greek is one of the strong bases of the English language
- .Greeks have made an important cultural and economic contribution to Australia.

However, this is not the real issue given the current climate and state of language teaching in Australia at the moment.

Across Australia the study of languages continues to decline and we have reached crisis point.

We are in denial of our rich language potential.

We should not be content with our monolingual mindset.

We should promote all languages across all areas and levels of education - all languages are priority languages.

Language skills acquired at home are often wasted. Children learning languages are not given the opportunity to benefit from resources to develop their competence.

Why are we the only country to complain about the crowded curriculum when other countries in the world don't find it too crowded to include two languages other than their first to study?

Language proficiency is not one of our assets as it should be for we pride ourselves in our multi cultural identity.

It should appal us that the retention rate in Year 12 LOTEs is just under 13%.

In fact according to the G8 Language Education Report the state of language education in Australia is a national tragedy and an international embarrassment.

In Finland, all year 12 students study three languages.
Almost all Dutch students study English and 40% study a third language. Most European countries are working towards a standard of three languages as core curriculum.

We unfortunately, are cutting back on our language programs across all sectors of education.
Our lack of second and third language capacity is holding us back and will continue to hold us back from engaging purposefully in the international diverse global economy.

What is needed is growth in the overall numbers of language students – not a bun fight as to which language gets what funding. All languages can survive given they have students and teachers who are proficient in the language and able to teach.

The ACCI 2007 report clearly states that to effectively participate in a globalized world there should be compulsory language of a “foreign” language from seven years of age or earlier.

Our primary schools are failing our students in the area of language education.
The learning of languages has been identified as a key element of futuristic educational thinking in Australia.
We cannot separate language education from advancing multiculturalism – and all that this means for all our languages spoken in Australia – including the survival of indigenous languages.
We can not ignore much of our cultural heritage and the prominence and importance of retaining and expanding our multicultural heritage, our community and indigenous languages.
We have trading partners all over the world, not just in Asia so all languages should be promoted.
To focus on priority languages is a short term fix – we must concentrate our efforts on long term sustainable languages. We should be pushing to help all schools, all sectors, all providers to increase and establish more programs and help schools and staff and students become citizens of the global, multilingual world we live in.

All Languages are Priority Languages.

Manthos Kokkinakis
President
Modern Greek Teachers’ Association