

Submission No 92

INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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Submission for the Review of the NSW School Curriculum

Main Topic: Eligibility Criteria for the Four Asian HSC Language Courses (Chinese, Indonesian, Korean and Japanese) with Particular Attention to HSC Japanese

I am making this submission to ask that students wishing to study these languages be given opportunity to take courses which the students believe are best suited to their proficiency in the language they choose to study.

Beginners, Continuers (and Extension), In Context and Literature courses exist for Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Indonesian courses for the HSC in NSW. The content for the courses were developed before the determination of the eligibility criteria which has resulted in a situation where students are penalized for growing up in families who speak one of these languages at home.

The eligibility to take a course in these languages are based on the language environment of students rather than their proficiency in the relevant language. This has led to a situation where students are discouraged from extending their proficiency in the language of their parent(s) as they are often deemed ineligible for the course which matches their proficiency. This means that they either take a course that they know would be too difficult for them or take the decision not to study their family language.

There are vast differences between students when it comes to their proficiency in their parental background language. As an example, a student who has lived in an area with high proportions of people with Chinese background and whose parents both speak Chinese at home could be expected to have a high level of proficiency in Chinese. On the other hand, a student with only one parent speaking Japanese and the other speaking English, with very little exposure to Japanese as a community language as there are basically no suburbs in Sydney with a large concentration of Japanese diaspora, is unlikely to be highly proficient in Japanese. Studies have shown that a large proportion of Japanese diaspora who are mostly women are partnered with non-Japanese speakers while Chinese and Korean diaspora tend to be partnered with people of the same ethnic background. There can be also be significant differences between students' proficiency in their family language, even if their language backgrounds are similar.

Students selecting music as one of their HSC subjects are not questioned about their background. Even if both parents are professional musicians enabling a student to be surrounded by music from birth, or even before birth, and the parents have provided the student with an environment conducive to be extremely familiar with music, that student is free to take Music 1 or Music 2, depending on where the students are in their music studies.

The same philosophy should apply to students choosing to study a language.

Views such as mine have been criticized as coming from parents who are preoccupied with the child's HSC results. That is not the case. I know and live the benefits of being bilingual. My partner only speaks English but I always spoke Japanese with my children, despite being aware that this could stand in the way of them taking Japanese for their HSC, which it did. I am saddened when I think back to the disappointment my children experienced when they were not able to take Japanese for their HSC but I am proud that I persisted because they are now enjoying the benefits of being bilingual adults not just in their personal lives but in their work as well. The benefits of being bilingual or multilingual does not stop at the individual. Such individuals can have so much to give to local communities, businesses and international relations. How wonderful would it be, if HSC students are able to take language courses which are commensurate to their proficiency to add an important level of proficiency to language spoken at home which by nature has its limitations.

NSW is a rich, multi-cultural state. Its young people from multiple backgrounds have so much to give to the state, Australia and the wider world. The ability to communicate, not just verbally but in reading and writing in multiple languages, is an invaluable asset for NSW. Yet the current eligibility criteria for the four HSC language courses in NSW sit in the way of developing such talent for these languages which are the languages of countries that are four of the closest to Australia, both geographically as well as in trade.

I therefore ask that students wishing to study languages be given opportunity to take courses which the students believe are best suited to their proficiency in the language they choose to study.

With respect,

Noriko Kojiro-Brown

Conference Interpreter