

The Queensland Centre provides travel grants for Japanese language teachers who wish to undertake study in Japan. The teachers eligible for this scheme are either those who will enrol in an approved Japanese language course in Japan, or visit the country for a specific program which meets the approval of the Centre. The Centre is also planning to offer special-purpose in-service courses in the near future.

The other area of major activities by the three Centres is the development of new curriculum materials. Japanese teaching in the 1990s is increasingly making use of advancing information technology (IT) and computer technology. Reflecting this trend, both the Queensland Program and Macquarie's Centre invest a significant proportion of resources for the research and development of new curriculum materials suitable for IT-based learning.

All three Centres came into being in the latter half of the 1990s. This was indeed very timely, as this coincided with the period when Australia saw an unprecedented growth in Japanese teaching in pre-tertiary education systems. The rapid growth in this sector required much outside support, particularly from universities. All three Centres directed the major thrust of their activities towards providing support to teachers in pre-tertiary education systems, and they were also best placed to do so.

5.4 National Language Policy

Multiple factors contributed towards the enormous growth in pre-tertiary Japanese teaching during the 1990s. A number of factors which caused the increase in student numbers in university Japanese, the *Tsunami* of 1988, must have been also at work behind the pre-tertiary growth. The dedication by pre-tertiary teachers of Japanese cannot be overlooked as another important factor. Growth on this magnitude, however, cannot be explained without taking into account the national policies on languages adopted by successive Australian governments during this period.

Australia's first National Policy on Languages was introduced in 1987 by the Federal Government. This was the first such policy ever adopted in

English speaking countries and, more importantly, the first multilingual language policy in the world. The policy recognised the importance of English, but also supported expanded learning of other languages to promote social equity, economic efficiency, and cultural enrichment (NLLIA 1997).

Until the 1960s, Australia treated languages other than English as a 'problem' (Lo Bianco 1995). Under its assimilation policy, the country considered that languages other than English were disadvantageous to migrants and placed obstacles in their process of assimilation.

Since the 1970s, with multiculturalism gathering strength, Australia went through a transformation in its attitudes towards languages. Lo Bianco describes the transformation in three stages (ibid.: 91-91). In the first stage, language became considered as a right. In this context, the acquisition of English as a Second Language is a right for all migrants to ensure that they will enjoy equal opportunities in the Australian community. At the same time, to retain their own mother tongue and encourage their off-spring to learn it is also a right, as by so doing they can preserve their cultural heritage. In the second stage, the concept was further expanded. Language was viewed as a contribution to cultural diversity and enrichment of the Australian community at large, a significant distance away from the previous notion of 'language as a problem'.

In the third stage, the concept of language became articulated as a national resource. This concept was built on the realisation of Australia's increasingly close relationship with Asian countries and expanding trade opportunities in the region. Under this concept, the acquisition of Asian languages, Japanese in particular, greatly increased its relevancy.

The 1987 Policy was followed by another national policy statement in 1991 when John Dawkins, then the Minister for Employment, Education and Training (DEET), released a Commonwealth White Paper titled *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*. It is of particular importance that the Policy included as one of its goals the expansion of the learning of languages other than English (LOTE).

The learning of languages other than English must be substantially expanded and improved to enhance educational outcomes and communication within both the Australian and the international community. (DEET 1991:14)

Three reasons were cited to explain the importance of LOTE learning, as it:

- enriches our community intellectually, educationally and culturally;
- contributes to economic, diplomatic, strategic, scientific and technological development; and
- contributes to social cohesiveness through better communication and understanding throughout the broader Australian community (ibid.:14-15).

Referring to the fact that fewer than twelve percent (12%) of Year 12 students²¹ currently enrol in LOTE courses, the 1991 Policy proposes that the proportion be increased to twenty five per cent (25%) of Year 12 students learning one of LOTE by the year 2000.

It is stated in the Policy that priority attention must be given to languages of broader national interest to Australia. State and Territory Ministers, who carry primary responsibility for pre-tertiary school education, were asked to nominate eight core languages for each State/Territory from the list of fourteen priority languages: Aboriginal languages, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Modern Greek, Russian, Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese.

In order to achieve the year 2000 target, State and Territory Ministers were promised Commonwealth financial assistance, which would be calculated on the basis of \$300 per each Year 12 student completing a priority language.

Six of the fourteen priority languages listed in the White Paper were Asian languages. The Policy document states that 'Australia's location in the Asia-Pacific region and our patterns of overseas trade should continue to be a factor in this selection of priorities' (ibid.). The importance of Asian

studies and languages was repeatedly mentioned throughout the document. A particular reference was given to the fact that Asian studies and languages were included in the Commonwealth government priority funding area for the 1991-1993 triennium. The 1991 White Paper, however, did not articulate any Asia-specific proposals. The Asia-specific initiatives were introduced in the following year.

In 1992, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commissioned a report on a National Asian Languages and Cultures Strategy for Australian Schools. A Report was prepared by the working group, chaired by Kevin M. Rudd, and was released in 1994 as *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future*. (Council of Australian Governments 1994)

The Report found that in 1992, less than four percent (4%) of Year 12 students were studying an Asian language. The Report put forward a number of recommendations to improve the situation. In selecting the priority languages among the Asian languages, the working group took the view that it was necessary to prioritise Australia's Asian language requirements, according to the country's long term regional economic interests (ibid.: iii). Based on the next twenty-year projection of Australia's relations with Asian countries, specifically in terms of trade and investment activities, the Report concluded that the Asian languages that Australia should focus on are:

- Japanese
- Chinese (Mandarin)
- Indonesian, and
- Korean

The Commonwealth Government, as well as State and Territory Governments, accepted the Report and, based on the recommendations of the Report, the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy was formulated. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the NALSAS Strategy for the period between 1995 and 2006, and decided that Commonwealth NALSAS Strategy funds be directed towards the achievement of the national targets

identified in the Report. The national targets which are to be achieved by the Year 2006 include:

- All students in Years 3 to 10 will be learning LOTE language,
- Sixty percent (60%) of the above students will be learning one of the four NALSAS targeted languages: Japanese, Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian and Korean,
- Fifteen percent (15%) of Year 12 students will be learning one of the four NALSAS targeted languages, and
- School students in Years 3 to 10 will have Asia content incorporated into the other subjects they are studying. (DEETYA 1997)

Given the fact that only four percent (4%) of Year 12 students were studying an Asian language in 1992, the 15% target of the NALSAS Strategy meant nearly a 400% increase in student numbers by the Year 2006. The NALSAS Strategy became a cooperative initiative between Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. It was agreed that the Strategy identifies performance targets in terms of student participation and proficiency reached, as well as number of teachers trained and their proficiency (DEETYA 1998).

The Commonwealth Government provided over A\$70 million towards the NALSAS Strategy between 1994 and 1997. A further A\$42.6 million was allocated in the 1998-1999 Budget. Ninety five percent (95%) of the funds was to be distributed to States and Territories and the non-government school sector to supplement their own contributions to achieving the NALSAS targets in any of the four priority languages. The remaining funds are allocated to support national collaborative activities in the following major areas:

- professional development for teachers;
- development of proficiency outcomes for students and teachers; and
- curriculum materials. (ibid.)

In May 1999, the Commonwealth Government announced that additional funding of A\$90 million over the next three years to 2002 will

be provided to continue the NALSAS Strategies. In his announcement, Dr David Kemp, Minister for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) stated that, through this decision, 'the Government had reaffirmed its commitment to the study of Asian languages and Asian studies in Australian schools'. He reiterated the Government's commitment by stating:

By developing students' understanding of Asian languages and cultures through NALSAS, our workforce of tomorrow will be better placed to participate in the global economy. (DEETYA 1999)

What the government intended was, in fact, a further incentive for the cultivation of Asian literacy in general, and the language-specific literacy of each of the targeted Asian countries in particular.

According to the 1999 DEETYA Report, since the NALSAS Strategy was put in place between 1994 and 1997, the number of students learning Chinese increased by some twenty thousand (20,000) and Indonesian by one hundred thousand (100,000) (ibid.). By far the largest increase, however, occurred in Japanese, where the increase was by nearly one hundred and forty thousand (140,000) between 1993 and 1998.

Into the eighth year of its implementation, the second independent evaluation of the effect of the NALSAS Strategy was commissioned by the government. The resulting report titled *Evaluation of the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Strategy*, prepared by Erebus Consulting Partners, was released early in 2002 by the Department of Education, Science and Training. The Report revealed that the number of students learning Japanese has further increased to approximately 420,000 in 2001, an increase of more than 100,000 students in the three years since 1998. Of the learners of four NALSAS languages, Japanese learners occupy a fifty five percent (55%). Japanese remains the most widely taught language in Australian schools. The Report declares that 'Australia had more young people learning Japanese than any country in the world other than Japan itself' (Erebus Consulting Partners 2002: 6).

An increase of this scale in pre-tertiary Japanese cannot remain without making significant impact on the Japanese programs at universities. The NALSAS Strategy was conceived as a twelve-year strategy to give benefit to an entire generation of Australian school children for the duration of their school education (Rudd 2002). In its eighth year, the full impact of the student increase has not yet reached the universities, and the extent of its implications yet to be revealed. Some of the NALSAS influences, however, are already felt in the university Japanese programs. One piece of evidence is the continuing strength of Japanese studies departments in universities, against the tide of general decline in language-related disciplines in recent years, particularly in European language disciplines. The strength has been maintained despite Japan's prolonged economic downturn and the increased competition with other Asian languages.

The most immediate implication of the NALSAS Strategy is that the students are now entering Japanese programs at university with increasingly varied levels of Japanese language proficiency.

It has been historically established in the Australian education systems that a significant number of students who have learned Japanese at pre-tertiary level will continue their Japanese studies at university, regardless of the discipline of their choice. Language programs at Australian universities, therefore, have had long experience in coping with students with advanced knowledge of the language. The Japanese program at the University of Sydney, the oldest established program in the country, has for many years offered two streams at the entrance level, one for students without previous knowledge of Japanese, the other for those who have studied Japanese at secondary schools.

While the number of students with advanced knowledge of Japanese remained small, Japanese departments at most universities were able to cope with the situation by finding the suitable level for each student within the existing program. When the number of students with advanced Japanese knowledge began to increase in the mid 1990s, they found the existing program inadequate and could not meet the different needs of these students.

In New South Wales, for example, Japanese in the Higher School Certificate (HSC) examinations is set at three different levels. Consequently, at the entry to university, students who enrol in the Japanese program consist of three groups with different levels of Japanese knowledge. In addition, there are those students who have studied Japanese during Years 3 to 10, but did not continue Japanese for the Higher School Certificate. They form yet another group at university entry.

The situation has become even more complex as an increasing number of secondary school students participate in in-country programs in Japan. In-country programs range from a short home-stay program to a year long high school exchange. It was estimated in 1998 that each year over one thousand (1,000) secondary school students take part in one-year programs (Drysdale 1997:3). They return to resume their study in Australian universities with varying levels of advanced Japanese knowledge.

The situation is similar in all Australian States and Territories. In order to cope with the change, Japanese studies departments at many universities have recently restructured their language curriculum to create multiple 'streams' at the entry level. The new curriculum is designed with two general aims. The first is to offer students, without previous knowledge of Japanese, the introductory course in which they do not have to compete against students with advanced knowledge of Japanese. The second is to provide students, who have advanced knowledge of Japanese, with a course that will take advantage of their knowledge, rather than repeating what they have already learnt. For most universities, 'streaming' became a significant undertaking during the late 1990s, as Drysdale reports in 1997:

An important challenge for most institutions has been to devise programs which effectively stream university entrants with advanced language skills and in-country experience - often acquired through high school or work exchange programs.
(ibid.:5)

The Japanese Studies Department at Macquarie University, for example, now offers three streams at the entry level. At Monash, undergraduate teaching of Japanese language now consists of six levels with an accelerated stream available for students with advanced knowledge entering the program. The Japanese department offers four streams at the point of entry.

Meeting the needs of students with different levels of advanced knowledge of Japanese will be a continuing challenge for all university Japanese programs for many years to come. At present, students who enter university have a maximum of five years of Japanese learning at secondary schools. When the NALSAS Strategy takes full effect, and students may study Japanese from Year 3 onward, they could be reaching university with a maximum ten years of Japanese learning.

On the one hand, this is a very exciting prospect for Japanese studies at universities. Students will no longer spend the majority of their study hours acquiring basic Japanese language skills as they are doing now. The new situation will open possibilities for the Japanese studies department to offer a greatly expanded program on a wide area of Japan-related subjects, many of which will be conducted totally in Japanese, using original materials directly from Japan.

On the other hand, resources of the Japanese department will be extremely stretched. There will still be students starting Japanese for the first time when they enter university. The others will take up Japanese at university with advanced knowledge varying from two years learning to ten years learning. The number of students in the second group has already been increasing, and a further increase is expected as the NALSAS Strategy takes full effect.

In terms of catering for the different needs of students, a unique issue started to emerge in the 1990s, although this is not directly linked with NALSAS Strategy. Japanese studies departments across the country have been finding more students of non-English background enrolling in the program. The non-English speaking background students include, not

only international students, but Australian students whose family generally speak at home a language other than English.

The 1998 report found that at larger universities, the proportion of students from a non-English speaking background in the Japanese studies program has become significant; 44 percent at the University of Sydney, 35% at La Trobe University and 55 percent at Macquarie University (ibid.:6). The majority of these students are of Asian origin and a large number of them have some knowledge of Kanji, placing them at a different starting point from other students when learning the writing of the Japanese language.

This situation requires another revision in Japanese language curriculum. The Australian National University has restructured its language program into written and spoken modules and developed semester-long units. This new structure allows flexibility for an individual student to choose particular language units according to his/her need, and suitable to his/her level of knowledge. The formula gives an added advantage to students who are undertaking a combined degree program, as it allows them to pace their language study over a longer period (Backhouse & Taylor 1997).

Macquarie University is also moving towards separating the language studies into specific modules. The core language units are all divided into half year (semester-long) units. They are supported by a number of purpose-specific module units such as spoken Japanese and written Japanese. The written language modules are further separated into two units, one suitable for students with kanji-background, and the other for non-kanji-background students.

Offering a number of module units is one method towards individualising each student's program, and meeting the different needs of each student. This structure takes advantage of the knowledge that students have already acquired, and allows them to build on that knowledge. By introducing this structure, however, Japanese studies departments are again faced with the perennial problem of resource shortages. The NALSAS Strategy appears to be achieving some of the targets, by increasing the number of

students studying Asian languages at pre-tertiary level. The Government, however, has so far not allocated specific funds to follow up the NALSAS Strategy at the universities.