

Research Directions

Office of Research Services

Community Languages

Dr Greg Noble, Centre for Cultural Research, together with Mr Bruno Di Biase, School of Humanities and Languages, has received funding to explore current challenges and themes of the NSW Community Languages Program. Through literature analysis and preliminary case studies of two Community Languages Schools, the NSW Community Languages Board of the NSW Department of Education project will aim to form the basis of a proposal for a larger study of the program.



'The NSW Community Languages Schools Program funds community organisations to run language classes for school-aged children on weekends and evenings with the aim of helping communities maintain and develop their languages' said Dr Noble. 'In the NSW system almost 50 languages are taught at 450 sites to about 31,000 students. Although arguments for the economic and social benefits of teaching of languages other than English had a fundamental role in the development of a languages policy in Australian education, such benefits of language teaching are often disputed or undervalued. It seems the role and institutional position of Community Language Schools are ambiguous and financial support for their services is not always adequate. As the clientele of the University of Western Sydney continues to broaden socially and culturally, it will become increasingly important to understand and address the educational, linguistic and cultural capacities and resources students bring to their further education'.

The pilot study will initially scope out current issues through interviews with stakeholders and two small case studies of Community Languages Schools in Sydney's western suburbs - arguably one of the largest and fastest growing areas of immigrants taking up residence in Australia. Researchers will map the central issues and themes identified by stakeholders, including representatives from the NSW Community Languages School Board, the Department of Education, other mainstream educational facilities and ethnic community leaders.

The case studies will then examine these issues in relation to two specific sites through interviews with school staff, volunteers, students and their parents, exploring how the issues impact on or play out in the educational and cultural experiences of young people. Discussion will include themes such as the economic viability and current funding arrangements of the schools, the relations between the Community Languages schools and mainstream schooling and what contribution the language schools make to cultural maintenance and community cohesion.

This pilot project is intended to form the basis of a larger study into the Community Languages Schools program with a view to establishing the social and financial benefits of language education.

Project Title: *A Pilot Study of the NSW Community Languages Schools Program*

Funding has been set at: \$12,600.
September 2006.

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