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Languages for all? Final report

Can all U.S. Residents have the opportunity to learn a second language?

The Language Enterprise⁹

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Forward

This Final Report Action & Plan is the result of a year-long collaborative effort on data and information collection as well as a national and international dialogue on language needs and capacity in the United States and other predominantly English-speaking countries (PESC). This work resulted in a White Paper, “Languages for All?” and an International Forum held at the University of Maryland on September 30, 2013. The intent of the “Languages for All?” initiative was to spark a discussion of whether access to a second language is necessary for, and can be made available to all learners or only the more privileged learners in these countries.

Our purpose is not the traditional mode of advocacy for more language-enabled Americans. While advocacy informs the recommendations below, the intent here is threefold:

- First, to outline a vision and message that provides a solid base for unified efforts across the Language Enterprise, a coalition of constituents with vital interests in language representing education, government, heritage communities, industry, and overseas partners;
- Second, to balance advocacy with empirical evidence; and,
- Third, to propose a concrete action plan, with clearly defined strategic goals, objectives and milestones, for advancing language in the U.S. at all levels of education, starting with K-12.¹⁰

9. This paper is published by the Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL) at the University of Maryland. Further information is available at <http://www.casl.umd.edu/lfafinalreport> [accessed: 16 July 2014].

10. Editor’s note: K–12 is shorthand for public education from Kindergarten to 12th grade, meaning the whole of primary and secondary education in the United States and some other countries.

The previous White Paper, “Languages for All?: The Anglophone Challenge,”¹¹ submitted evidence on the feasibility of providing second language education to all Americans. The International Forum brought together policy makers and managers and leaders from all sectors of the Language Enterprise to react to this evidence and draw recommendations from it. This Final Report summarizes the evidence in the White Paper and synthesizes the reactions at the Forum in an attempt to answer the question in the title: Is it desirable and feasible to provide all learners in our education system the opportunity to study a second language? If so, how? If not, why not?¹²

We direct this document to two audiences: The first is members of the Language Enterprise, that they might agree to act in unison to accept a common Vision and Message and Action Plan. The second audience is our nation’s leaders, educators, and managers who formulate policy and make decisions about language education at the national, state, and local levels.

While the White Paper and Forum had international input from colleagues from the Australian and British Academies, the present report is focused on the United States, although it is informed by insights of these two nations’ efforts on behalf of language.

This study is not meant to be comprehensive, citing all evidence, policies and actions. Rather, the objective is to provide sufficient information and data so that leaders and managers across the Language Enterprise can assess current and projected needs and capabilities and arrive at coherent, comprehensive, and collaborative solutions to the language problem in the United States and other PESC.

Rationale

A deep and persistent malaise afflicts language education in Australia, regrettably shared with other English-speaking nations, and the expressions of concern, even frustration, at the fragility of languages suggests a public refusal to accept this state of affairs. –Joseph Lo Bianco.¹³

11. Available at:

- Link to Sept 30, 2013 International Forum video: <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/umdcasl>.
- Executive Summary: <http://languagesforall2013.blogspot.com/>.
- The Sept 2013 version of the paper can be found on the sponsors websites

12. All responsibility for this document belongs to its authors and not to any organization with which they are affiliated.

13. Lo Bianco, Joseph, “Second Languages and Australian Schooling,” *Australian Education Review*, 54 (2009).

A growing number of today's politicians, journalists, academicians, and business leaders cite the national benefits of a multilingual society, while more and more educators, psychologists, physicians, sociologists, and – most importantly – parents insist that a second language is of major benefit to the health and well-being of our children. Yet, despite this rising chorus of testimony, our education systems seem unable to find the will or the resources to effectively and efficiently make foreign language education an essential part of our children's preparation for life in the 21st century.

This inconsistency is reflected in recent, major studies that tout the need for language,¹⁴¹⁵¹⁶ while language study is given scant notice or simply omitted from some of the newest U.S. national education plans and policies that are in fact receiving generous budget support (e.g., Common Core, National Education Technology Plan, ConnectED, etc.).

This inconsistency rises to the level of a national educational dilemma, as it inevitably raises questions that might explain the neglect of foreign languages in national education policy. Is this neglect due to:

- A perception that it's just not that beneficial to our nation and our children? After all, English is our native language, so why bother, especially when we have a more urgent science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) problem that has to be addressed?
- An assumption that at least up to more recent times quality language instruction was perceived as available only to a minority of students studying at more financially privileged institutions able to afford small classes and low-demand disciplines?
- A common assumption that it is just too hard and takes too long to learn

14. American Academy of Arts & Sciences. "The Heart of the Matter: The Humanities and Social Sciences for a Vibrant, Competitive, and Secure Nation," 2013.

15. U.S. Department of Education, "Succeeding Globally through International Education and Engagement: U.S. Department of Education International Strategy 2012-16," 2012.

16. A study surveyed the language policy history of 40 years from 1970 and identified at least 67 policy-related reports, investigations or substantial enquires into the problem and challenge of instituting an effective language education experience for Australian learners. See Lo Bianco, Joseph and Inna Gvodenko, "Collaboration and Innovation in the Provision of Languages Other Than English in Australian Universities," University of Melbourne, 2006. See also Lo Bianco, Joseph, "Second Languages and Australian Schooling," *Australian Education Review*, 54 (2009); and *Lost for Words*, The British Academy's ongoing effort on behalf of language study in the UK (available at: http://www.britac.ac.uk/policy/Lost_For_Words.cfm). A Summary of Australia's efforts in building a national language policy can be found in Lo Bianco, Joseph and Renata Aliani, *Language planning and student experiences: Intention, rhetoric and implementation* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters), 2013.

a second language, so only the smartest among us can master this skill and only elite institutions can provide the instruction?

For decades, English-speaking countries around the world have wrestled with the question of whether English is enough. In the United States, particularly since 9/11, national security considerations have argued strongly for more language abilities, at least as far as those parts of government with national security responsibilities are concerned. While the efforts of the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Intelligence Community (IC) on behalf of language have contributed to efforts in language education, the PK-16 education system itself has not made language an essential part of the curriculum.

This report is intended to sharpen our understanding of the “needed-but-neglected” dilemma and to plot a way forward in resolving it.

The results

The “Languages for All?” White Paper and International Forum considered these questions and suggested concrete actions in response to the answers provided. The answers to the questions of access and quality outlined in the White Paper and affirmed at the International Forum were the following:

1. The demand for language abilities at all levels of society is unprecedented and growing.
2. Today’s technologies offer access to language learning that makes it possible for anyone to take up the study.
3. Scientific breakthroughs offer the promise of much more effective and efficient learning, even if the advances are just beginning to penetrate the education system;
4. Best practice at the PK-12 and higher education levels has made remarkable advances in the last decade, although broad if not universal diffusion and acceptance of such practice is a task to be undertaken.

However, sensing that addressing the questions of access and quality was not sufficient, the Forum also asserted that the supply system, while having significant resources, is not organized for efficient and effective delivery of language to all who desire it. The demand side is not playing its appropriate role in sending demand signals and supporting the supply side. Accordingly, the recommendations of the White Paper as refined and expanded at the International Forum focused around the notion of the “Language Enterprise,” comprising five sectors of language supply and demand: education, industry, government, heritage communities, and overseas partners. The consensus was

that these sectors now agree to stand on “common ground” with regard to Vision, Message, and Action and organize to renew efforts to make learning and instruction available to anyone who wants it for any language.

This common ground would comprise a unified vision, message and action plan, which is here outlined.

Vision of a desired state

Within the next decade, nation-wide acceptance of the teaching of a second language to a growing population at all levels of the education system, starting early with K-12, with universal and equal access to language learning opportunities throughout the United States.

More specifically, for the United States, this access to language education would comprise a full range of abilities:

- appreciation of the role of language and culture in contemporary domestic and international societies;
- usable skills for domestic interaction and international travel;
- high-level skills enabling global professional practice; and
- expertise providing language education and language technologies.

[...].¹⁷

This vision of the future of language in the U.S. encompasses 100% of children in the education system, with:

- 100% of learners in the U.S. education system with exposure to international perspectives, culture and/or language, in order to inform life-long decisions about work and learning and to support language and international efforts broadly in society;
- Additional 30% with basic language skills, in order to work, for example, in the service industry and to travel freely;
- Additional 15% with global professional skills in order to practice at a high level internationally; and,
- Additional 5% with expert skills, in order to perform necessary research and design and implement language education and training.

17. Editor’s note: A diagrammatic representation of the levels of language progression has been omitted. It can be consulted in the online text at: <http://www.languagepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Languages-for-All-Final-Report.pdf>, page 5 [accessed: 16 July 2014].

Our assumption is that in order to achieve language competence at higher levels, we must broaden the base of this pyramid by attracting many more learners into the system, ensuring that a sufficient number of learners will stay for the extended sequence of language learning required by these high levels of ability.

The notion of language as an integral part of elementary and secondary education is not rare in this world of diverse domestic societies and globalized communities. Most countries in this world are multilingual, with citizens who have abilities in more than one language and abilities that fit a broad range of demand.

Finally, this vision includes heritage language learners and English Language Learners (ELL) as well as native English speakers acquiring abilities in a world language.

Message: Value proposition and feasibility of universal access

This vision has to be expressed within a consistent and convincing message about the “value proposition” of language, both to the individual and the broader society, as well as about the feasibility of access and effectiveness of the learning process. The direct value of a language competent citizenry to a multilingual society includes both international (military/political, economic, and social) – all well documented – as well as domestic (government and private sector products and services).

The Value Proposition for individuals can run from the immediately pragmatic – jobs and higher pay – to general education (cognitive advantages of bilingualism, literacy), to broader access to global information, resources, and people, innovative products and services (that more and more come from abroad), and finally to the most “esoteric” (well-rounded education). The advantages to society in the political/military, economic (GDP), and social spheres must be documented with real evidence, so, too, the advantages for individuals (e.g. lifelong earning power). General access and effectiveness must also be supported by evidence, as is done in the White Paper, but in a more complete form.

Action

Vision Objectives and Timelines

- 2 years: *Proof of Concept*: Consensus across LE on Vision, Message and Action Plan, with infrastructure established and plans for roll-out in 5 states.
- 5 years: *Initial Implementation*: Infrastructure and programs assumed by the Vision implemented in 20 states;
- 10 years: *Realization*: General acceptance of language education across the United States

The following is a proposed plan of action focused on the next five years, with objectives and milestones to be achieved. It presumes:

- Academe and the private sector taking the lead, with organized collaboration on policy and implementation;
- Support from each of the five sectors of the Language Enterprise, each according to its means and access;
- Reliance on the states and their language, education and political leadership, with some support from the federal government;
- Minimal new investment, but maximum socialization of current investment.

[...].¹⁸

Organization

In order to stop the roller coaster focus on language in the U.S., we are attempting to achieve what Baumgartner and Jones call a “policy monopoly”:

Policy monopolies have two important characteristics. First, a definable institutional structure is responsible for policymaking, and that structure limits access to the policy process. Second, a powerful supporting idea is associated with the institution. These buttressing policy ideas are generally connected to core political values which can be communicated directly and simply through image and rhetoric. (Baumgartner & Jones, p. 7)¹⁹

A possible institutional structure could emerge under the designation

18. Editor’s note: the Report continues with a detailed five-year action plan.

19. Baumgartner, Frank R., and Jones, Bryan D. (1993). *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

“Language Enterprise” in order to meet this description, just as the Vision and Message are intended as the “supporting idea.” The “institutional structure” could be a coalition of organizations representing the five language supply and demand sectors. However, given the breadth of this coalition, an organizing locus is required and must be so supported by the members.²⁰

Conclusion

Is the ambition of a second language available to all Americans realistic or futile, now or in the foreseeable future? Clearly, based on history, this will not be possible without significant effort, both top-down and bottom-up.

From the federal point of view, it is a difficult time to attempt this renaissance of interest in language in the U.S. Budget constraints, conflicting priorities and legislative stalemates make leadership on this issue at the federal level difficult if not impossible. Under these conditions, it makes no sense to wait for government to “come around,” but the focus must now be on mobilizing the education, industry, heritage, and overseas sectors to collective action in a grassroots effort in collaboration with the national security entities in the federal government and the economic interests in state governments

20. The American Councils Research Center (ARC) has volunteered to be that center, but others may be interested.