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# The Skills in Question

Report on the Professional Learning Strengths and Needs  
of Teachers in the NSW Community Languages Schools



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Authors: **Ken Cruickshank, Marjory Ellsmore,  
Patrick Brownlee**

**Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education  
Sydney School of Education and Social Work  
University of Sydney**

A Report to the NSW Community Languages Schools Advisory Board



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# Introduction and summary of key recommendations

Community Language schools, known as heritage language schools in North America and complementary schools in the United Kingdom and Europe, constitute a major provider of languages education worldwide, in countries where minority languages are spoken. Across Australia, over 7,000 largely volunteer teachers work in these community-run schools on weekends and week nights, teaching one of 64 community languages and aspects of cultural understanding.

This report presents findings on the teachers, principals and community volunteers in these schools: their skills and knowledge, their teaching practices and experiences, and their professional learning strengths and needs. We give teachers and students a 'voice', so that the role of these teachers and the schools they work in can be better understood. The study is based on an online survey of teachers (n=856, 31%) and semi-formal interviews (n=47).

This study highlights the importance of teachers and their language schools in bringing families together, thereby forming and maintaining language communities. The teachers play a key role in developing language resources, and passing on language and cultural understandings in many languages which are not taught in any other context.

The teachers and schools are also complementary providers of language education in major languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Greek and Vietnamese, and sole providers in less commonly taught languages such as Samoan, Thai and Ukrainian.

The teachers themselves represent a valuable national asset. The majority of them have tertiary qualifications from Australia and overseas, and constitute an untapped resource in terms of training in education, languages, health, business and other areas.

We found that for many teachers, however, pathways are blocked in gaining accreditation in mainstream education systems where the percentage of students who are bilingual is double the percentage of bilingual teachers.

The key recommendations from our study are:

- That volunteer teachers be provided with substantial professional learning programs and support in carrying out their work. This is especially important for smaller schools and less commonly taught languages where help is needed in attracting, mentoring and developing teachers, particularly second-generation ones.
- That continuing pathways to employment and further study, particularly to teacher accreditation, be established for Community Language teachers. This group of teachers represents a key resource in terms of qualifications and linguistic, educational and cultural skills.

# Context

Community Language schools were first established in Australia in 1859 by German immigrants in South Australia, and later in the 1860s in New South Wales (NSW). The volunteer community-run schools continued throughout government restrictions such as the White Australia policy (Immigration Restriction Act, 1901–1973) and the 1918 ban on bilingual education. One Greek language school, in fact, traces its origins to 1918.

The burgeoning of multicultural initiatives in 1980 saw the establishment of the Ethnic Schools Program and per capita federal government funding for these schools. This funding led to the first real documentation of this language education sector: Norst (1982a) reported some 1,150 schools with over 3,000 teachers and 58,000 students, the largest groups being of Italian and Greek background. The sector has continued to grow with an estimated 100,000 students and 7,000 teachers across Australia. In NSW Community Language schools, there are currently over 3,000 teachers and 37,000 students<sup>1</sup>.

The aim of this study, funded by the NSW Department of Education, was to research the professional learning strengths and needs of teachers in NSW Community Language schools, and also to explore the reasons for the attrition or continuity of teachers in these voluntary roles. This information was needed in order to inform policy directions and to develop appropriate professional learning and support for teachers.

The specific objectives were:

- To develop a detailed profile of teachers in NSW Community Language schools, in regard to their diversity, skills, backgrounds and professional learning needs
- To gain insight into these teachers' educational experiences and their teaching in Community Language schools and how these could be improved
- To explore the roles of teachers in the schools, including the factors that keep them teaching and why they leave
- To understand the careers and further study goals of the teachers and how these can be supported.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures do not include non-funded early childhood learners or adults learners; nor do they include learners in non-government funded schools. The total in NSW would be closer to 60,000 students and across Australia, an estimated 150,000 learners.



# A review of the background literature

Despite the rapid growth of international research into Community Language schools, with over 300 studies in the past two decades, there is barely any research into the people who teach in these schools. Of the more than 300 research studies, reports, articles and books internationally in the past 20 years, fewer than 15 consider the teachers (Cruikshank, Nordstrom & Bai, in prep). We found only 10 studies and reports. The first comprehensive studies were those of Joshua Fishman in 1976 and 1986 (1991), Michael Clyne and colleagues (Clyne, 2003; Clyne & Kipp 1997; Pauwels, 2005) and Marlene Norst (1982 a and b).

Norst's study of 3,000 teachers found that most were women (68%); two thirds had teaching qualifications and/or experience (64%) but these were often not recognised in Australia; and one third had no teaching experience (36%). One quarter of the teachers received no recompense for their teaching and half received less than \$10 per hour (51%). Under half of the teachers reported having any access to professional learning. In a smaller study of Greek language teachers, Norst found that almost half had no formal qualifications (45%) and experienced difficulties in English (43%). Most worked under difficult conditions, preparing their own materials or adapting less suitable resources from overseas. Overall, Norst concluded that, despite the difficulties, these teachers played a key role in their communities and in language teaching in terms of developing children's senses of identity and promoting family cohesion (Norst, 1982a).

Several recent studies confirm Norst's key finding that teachers in Community Language schools have high levels of commitment to and engagement in their teaching, but they are hampered by a lack of resources and recognition for their teaching (Gindidis, 2013; Pantazi, 2010). A major British study (Minty et al, 2008) found that 80 per cent had degree-level qualifications from overseas and two thirds had teaching experience outside the United Kingdom (average 7.25 years). The overwhelming majority of teachers wanted to gain accreditation to teach in mainstream schools.

Studies also have found that teachers born and educated overseas tended to be more traditional in their approaches to teaching. Second generation teachers, on the other hand, were found to be more flexible in engaging students and developing learner autonomy (Kim, 2017; Gindidis, 2013). The large-scale studies found that while most teachers are born overseas there is a small but growing number of Australian-born teachers (Norst, 1982; Minty et al, 2008).

There is a research gap in terms of profiles of specific languages, teachers' perceptions of the work they do, their teaching, and its impact on learners and language communities. The lack of knowledge about teachers in Community Language schools persists. This research gap has enabled the characterisation of Community Language teachers as *yiayias* or *babushkas* passing on notions of traditional language and culture to not-always-willing generations of young children.

# Research design

We decided on a combination of online survey and face to face interviews. Previous studies had relied on hard copy surveys but achieved low response rates because of problems in directly contacting teachers: schools only meet once a week, there is teacher turnover and changes in addresses, and often even principals lack contact with teachers (Minty et al, 2008). The survey was developed in collaboration with community members and education system officers after ethics approval was gained from relevant authorities.

Initial demographic questions in the survey established age, gender, country of birth and length of time in Australia. The survey then asked about teachers' 'best', 'second best' and other languages. This question was limiting but we chose self-assessment of proficiency ('best') in preference to other terms such as 'mother tongue' and 'home language'. Only three respondents reported equal fluency in their community language and English.

We also asked which language/s teachers taught and which school they taught in. The school list was a drop-down menu and only allowed one answer. However, it emerged that many teachers teach across schools, which must be accounted for in future surveys.

Further questions asked teachers how long they had been teaching in Community Language schools, on which day/s they taught and for how many hours. Teachers were asked if they taught any other languages, which could indicate whether some teachers were teaching in multiple schools. Questions about family and work commitments were included to get an idea of the outside pressures that teachers experience.

To gain a picture of the teachers' qualifications and training we asked about years of secondary education (drop-down menu), the field (if any) of post-school education (drop-down menu), the type of qualification (open question), and if/what they were currently studying. We then asked detailed questions about any teaching qualifications and/or experience in Australia or overseas, including 'Are your qualifications approved for teaching in Australia?'. To this question, 31 per cent answered 'yes'. This turned out to be a misrepresentation, however, because some teachers did not understand what constituted accreditation to teach in Australia. Upon examination of other item responses by teachers, we calculated the figure to be closer to 3 per cent.

The final section of the survey focused on the teachers' professional learning needs: if they wanted to become accredited mainstream school teachers in Australia; if they wanted professional learning in English and their community language. Respondents were given a list of topics regarding professional learning, with options of strongly agree/agree/not important.

The 903 responses we received provided 850 'cleaned' samples, once incomplete and doubled-up responses were excluded. These allowed us to gain a sample of teacher responses representative of language groups in the broader community.

Overall 54 languages were represented, with large numbers from Chinese (164), Vietnamese (115), Arabic (81) and Korean (68). All recently arrived refugee-background groups were also represented: Tamil (54), Assyrian/Chaldean (14), Tibetan (14), Dari (13) and Uyghur (2). There were many recently arrived teachers from Iraq and Syria in the Arabic language group.

The teachers completing the survey came from 110 of the 274 Community Language schools listed. In many cases there was only one respondent, perhaps the principal alone. In the case of those languages with large numbers of respondents, and particularly in numbers disproportionate to their share of total student



numbers (e.g. Polish, Tibetan), it appears all the teachers were encouraged or motivated to complete the survey. A further 29 teachers of 12 different languages did not indicate the name of their school.

The main 'under-response' in relative terms was from teachers of Arabic backgrounds. We employed an Arabic-speaking Research Assistant and made efforts to gain Arabic-speaking interviewees. Face-to-face interviews were an integral part of the process in order to gain more in-depth responses around the barriers to re-entry to the teaching profession.

In spite of over 400 teachers indicating willingness to be interviewed, only 47 were reached. The final concerted effort resulted in 32 face-to-face interviews. The language breakdown of these interviews was as follows: Arabic (12), Armenian (1), Assyrian (2), Chinese (2), Dari (2), Japanese (5), Korean (3), Polish (1), Tamil (3) and Tibetan (1). All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews in Arabic were summarised in English.

Interview topics were:

- Qualifications gained overseas and in Australia
- Knowledge and sources of information about gaining accreditation in Australia, and career goals and expectations and steps taken in achieving these
- Perceived professional knowledge, and learning strengths and needs
- Issues for other teachers in their community in gaining accreditation and finding employment.

There was an interactive relationship between survey and interview findings analysis. Issues emerging in survey analysis led to changes in interview questions and interview findings led to additional analyses of survey data. Interview findings were analysed using content and thematic analysis. Survey findings were given subjective and multivariate analysis.



## The teachers

Currently, the overwhelming majority of teachers in Community Language schools are women (87%). This is an increase from Norst's finding (1982) that 68 per cent of teachers were female. It seems that the more established communities become, the more the responsibility for language teaching falls on women. Men also make up 45 per cent of teachers in new and emerging language communities, and the majority (52%) of school leaders are also male.

The age profile of teachers runs counter to common assumptions of teachers in the schools: that teachers are retired grandparents. We found a spread of ages among the teachers: 33.1 per cent are under 40, 27.5 per cent are aged 40–49 and 34.6 per cent are aged over 50. This variation across language groups is explored below.

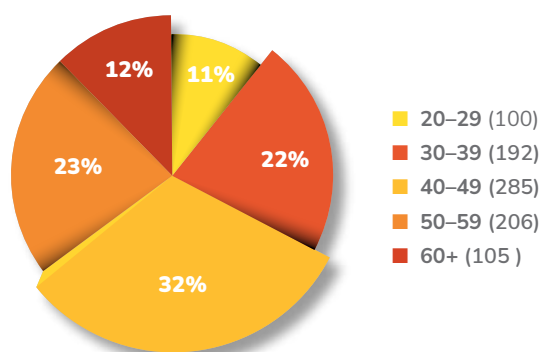


Figure 1. Age range of teachers

There is also a range in terms of time lived in Australia. Most teachers have been in Australia a long time: 59.5 per cent have been in Australia for more than 10 years; 19.4 per cent for between five and nine years; and only 14.6 per cent for four years or less. These figures indicate that teachers bring their long-term experience of living in Australia to their teaching. The gap tends to be the absence of second generation teachers: only 4 per cent of teachers are born in Australia. The implications of this for 'succession planning' is explored in the discussion section of this report. in this report

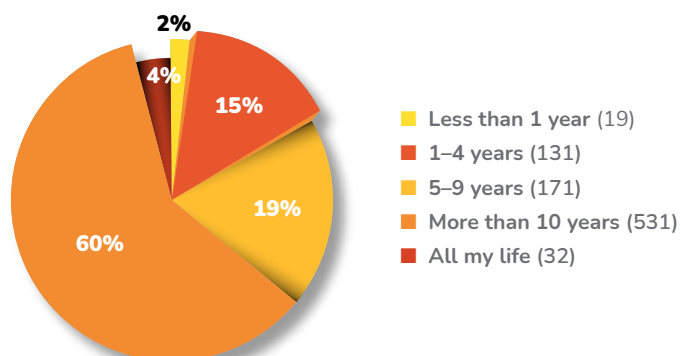


Figure 2. length of time in Australia

There are many differences within and between language groups. Among Arabic teachers, 57.5 per cent (43% average) are under 40 but the majority (67.5%, with an average of 59%) have been in Australia more than 10 years or were born here. These significant differences, together with the higher percentage of female teachers of Arabic (90%), could indicate that teaching in Community Language schools provides a pathway for women after childrearing, not only in Arabic but also in other schools.

The profile of Greek language teachers differs: 36.4 per cent have been in Australia for less than four years (survey average is 17%). These teachers are female and generally aged under 40. Our interview data indicates that many migrated as a result of the financial crisis in Europe (2007-2008). In the Greek language schools, typical of many schools, there are also many teachers aged over 50 who have a long record of teaching in the schools. The teacher profile thus reflects the migration history of the community.

Several other communities, such as Polish and Assyrian language groups, have had different waves of migration and the profile of teachers reflects these patterns. The majority of teachers of Polish (48%) have been in Australia for more than 10 years but a sizeable number (36%) has been in Australia less than four years. In the Assyrian language schools, all teachers have been in Australia for more than 10 years even though student enrolments include many recent arrivals. There is a spread of ages among teachers in Polish and Assyrian schools.

The profile of new and emerging languages such as Bangla, Dari and Tibetan is quite specific. Over half of the Tibetan teachers are aged under 40 and have been in Australia for less than four years. Nearly all are male, indicating the role of the monks in establishing the schools. Most teachers of Dari are female but have been in Australia for more than 10 years; only one has been in Australia for less than four years. This shows the role of established migrants supporting the schools' newer arrivals where there are different waves of migration. Teachers of Bangla are younger (all under 50) and have been in Australia for a shorter time; there are equal numbers of male and female teachers, a profile which is common with new and emerging languages.

This diversity within and among language groups has many implications for the targeted and nuanced nature of teacher support needed:

- Teachers who have been in Australia for under four years would need access to professional learning in their community language and also support in gaining fluency in English.
- These teachers would also need much more support in gaining knowledge of teaching in Australia.
- Women undertaking teaching as a way of returning to the workforce or further study will require careers advice and pathways.
- Second generation students may need pathways into teaching and also support in developing greater proficiency in their community language.

## What teachers bring to their teaching

Teachers in Community Language schools are highly qualified. Our survey responses indicate that 87.7 per cent of teachers have post-school qualifications. Just under 40 per cent report having undergraduate degrees and 12.7 per cent have postgraduate qualifications; the remainder have college/TAFE level qualifications. These findings align with the UK study (Minty et al 2008) in which 81 per cent of teachers report postschool qualifications.

The groups with the highest percentage of tertiary qualifications (graduate/postgraduate) are teachers of Greek (66.7% graduates), Indian subcontinent languages (66%) and Tamil (76%). In addition to having these qualifications, half of the teachers in our survey are also currently studying in a range of fields, including education.

Of those with tertiary qualifications, 44.3 per cent have majors in education. This was the main field of study for graduates in all Community Language schools. The groups of language teachers with the highest percentage with majors in education were Japanese (63%), Greek (57.6%), Polish (60%), Swedish (70%) and Macedonian (71%).

In addition to having qualifications, teachers also brought much experience in terms of education. In response to questions about their teaching experience, 54.9 per cent of teachers reported teaching experience overseas. This is a more accurate picture of those with a teaching background as in many countries a major in education is not the prerequisite to becoming a secondary teacher. For example, although only 26.8 per cent of teachers of Indian languages reported a major in education (average 44.3%), 65.1 per cent of these teachers reported having teaching experience in India. Among teachers of Chinese, 43.8 per cent had majors in education while 59.8 per cent had teaching experience overseas.

**The overall picture is one of language teachers with high levels of qualifications and extensive teaching experience in Australia and overseas. This level of qualifications should not be underestimated. It represents an economic benefit to Australia in terms of the cost of pre-service teacher education of more than \$182 million, based on the domestic costs of educating graduates. In purely economic terms this is a group of teachers who are an important but neglected resource.**

## How teachers start teaching in Community Language schools

Our interview data shows that teachers undertake work in Community Language schools for a wide variety of reasons. The most common reason is that as overseas-trained teachers they sought teaching work in Australia.

Teachers also reported that they were invited to teach by friends or family already working in the Community Language school, or were asked when they enrolled their own children in classes. In this latter case, the teachers were usually targeted because they had teaching experience and/or teaching or higher education qualifications from overseas.

*I became a teacher [of Sinhala] at the community language school when I enrolled my kids in 2010. The school was in need of teaching staff and I liked working with children. I also felt the need to contribute to the community.* Nimala<sup>2</sup>, medical practitioner

*I was approached by my sister, vice principal at a Chinese community language school. They needed a teacher who could speak English well because of a number of students with English as a first language.* Ken, Chinese teacher

*I was always waiting for my son while he was in Tamil school. I was interested in teaching. I used to run tuition in India. I asked to find out what qualifications I needed and was told 'as long as you know Tamil and have a passion for teaching'. They let me start as a support teacher for one year. I have been teaching for 3 years now.*  
Sathaka, Information Technology (IT) graduate, software programmer

Some schools recruited teachers through advertising on social media or via SBS. A lot of the schools use classroom assistants as a way to recruit new teachers, develop their skills and judge whether they are suitable to become teachers in their own right.

*I heard about the Vietnamese school through the SBS radio. I contacted them about a teaching position and considering my teaching experience in Vietnam, I was offered a position.* Hanh, Vietnamese teacher

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2 All names are pseudonyms.

## TEACHER STORY

### ‘I just love languages’ — Zeinab’s story

Zeinab has been teaching in the Arabic language school for two years. A friend introduced her to the principal and she began teaching, taking time off to have her children.

*“I had never thought of becoming a teacher but I realised I like working with the young children and I look forward to it every week.”*

Zeinab was born in Costa Rica, of Arabic-speaking parents but with Spanish as her language of everyday life. At 17 her parents sent her to Jordan to complete Year 12. She lived with relatives but her Arabic was very basic.

*“I thought I dreamed in Spanish, not Arabic.”*

It took her two years, but Zeinab struggled and developed literacy in Arabic. She gained entry to university and began a Bachelor of Arts in English, supporting herself by tutoring students in Spanish.

At the end of her first year at university, Zeinab migrated to Australia to get married. She arrived in 2014, aged 20, and started teaching in the Arabic Community Language school.

Zeinab juggled teaching with having three children in three years. She also managed to complete a Diploma in Childcare at TAFE.

*“Originally I wanted to be an interpreter – I just love languages. But since I am working with the young children, I have come to love teaching too. I know with my family I cannot go back to study full-time but I want to end up teaching in the day schools.”*

The challenge Zeinab reported is making the classes interesting for children because the school uses textbooks which she feels are too difficult for them.

*“Arabic is a beautiful language – you understand it like a flower opening. I would like to help the children enjoy learning it like my own children do.”*

Zeinab's complicated migration history, along with her study and work experience, is typical of many of the teachers in Community Language schools. It is common for them to be multilingual, speaking three or more languages. There are often several migrations in their background, and most of these teachers have studied at tertiary level overseas and/or in Australia.

# Teachers and their teaching experiences

*At first when I was asked to take the class I refused and now I cannot stay away from it.*

Pina, Maltese teacher

Pina's comment is typical of the experience of many language teachers. Their commitment to and enjoyment of teaching was a common theme in our interviews.

*What do I like? The curious students, who really want to learn the language. The fun, energy and knowledge I am getting through the teaching.*

Sangita, Hindi teacher

In particular, observing students' progress in developing their language skills provided a powerful motivation for many teachers to continue to teach at a Community Language school.

*I love teaching and I like children. I really like all processes of teaching, from classroom training to evaluation. ... I'm excited to make a lesson plan about what I teach to the students and how I teach them. Even though I can't exactly guess the student response, I'm happy to prepare the lessons, but most of all what I like the best about teaching is communicating with the students.*

Jiehyun, Korean teacher

The teachers were clear about what they wanted the children in their classes to achieve. This was not so much stated in terms of outcomes but rather in terms of the children's linguistic and cultural knowledge and abilities.

*I want them to learn our own language. Because when they start school, they just kind of just lose the ability to talk in our own language.*

Ping Chinese teacher

*The best thing I think is when the children make some progress in learning Chinese, I feel really happy. That's what I think the best thing why I want to stay there to teach it. Sometimes when they can express their ideas in Chinese, or when they know some of the Chinese culture such as Spring Festival or [unclear] Festival and then they do some activities with their parents or in schools. I feel they learn – really know something, I feel very happy.*

Jing, Chinese teacher

The teachers also emphasised that the role of developing cultural understandings and identities is central to the role of Community Language schools.

*I intend to teach them the cultural heritage and all the things also associated to the community language, so that's the best thing I can say, when I'm teaching with the community language students.*

Sinu, Tamil teacher

*What basically motivates me, to be quite honest, is to make sure that kids stay firm with their cultural traditional backgrounds and language is the biggest part of that.*

Jamila, Arabic principal

However, the construction of heritage culture is not a simplistic notion of imparting traditional values, but one which builds on and clarifies young people's bicultural identities.

*Just to be able to transfer all your knowledge about the language, the culture, the tradition, the history about the Macedonian to these children that they've been here and they're like a second or third generation here. Just to continue to grow our background, the language and the culture.*

Dafina, Macedonian teacher





*She's (talking about her daughter who attends the school) – I find that the split personality aspect – because kids who are from a different culture, different language, although they come and settle in Australia ... they always have some kind of confusion about their identity. How much am I Australian? How much am I Indian? ... That [attendance to community language school] has given her answers to all the questions and confusion she had and it has helped her to grow in Hindi aspect. She is more confident. Shreya, Hindi teacher and parent*

Although language proficiency may not necessarily imply cultural knowledge (Hoffmann, 2014) teachers linked the two and saw teaching both these things as their central role in the school.

*What I like the best is to support our students who learn and discover their culture through their language ... because they go hand-in-hand and I guess the most fun is sort of when we have – I know we'll have to cover language too, but the most rewarding is when we can cover things in Sweden that I noticed that they find very engaging. The cultural part of that which is obviously – I mean it's always through the Swedish language, but it's not the grammar and it's not that, but that's what I find the most rewarding. Nova, Swedish teacher*

The teachers' constructions of their students' culture were not simplistic dichotomies of being 'Australian' or 'ethnic' but rather an additive and positive biculturalism, where knowledge of their cultural backgrounds strengthened their identities.

Overall, Community Language teachers were driven by altruism and a desire to contribute to their community. They found satisfaction and emotional payoffs through the potential benefits to language learners and the broader ethnic community. In particular, student progress in learning engendered this sense of achievement.

# Challenges in teachers' work

Community Language schools are registered not-for-profit organisations and so teachers cannot be paid employees. However, schools generally provide teachers with reimbursement for travel, resources and materials, and professional learning.

Almost one third of teachers (32.6%), mainly in smaller schools, work voluntarily with no reimbursement. Of those schools that do give teachers reimbursement, 63.3 per cent contribute less than \$30 per hour.

There is little change from 1982 when one quarter of language teachers received no reimbursement and over half received less than \$10 per hour. This is despite the increase in government funding for schools from \$30 per capita in 1982 to \$200 in 2019.<sup>3</sup>

When we asked teachers about the challenges they face in working on weekends and weeknights, the main comment was lack of access to basic teaching resources and space for teaching.

*We don't even have access to the internet or anything else in the building we use. We just have the room. The school has smart boards and all kinds of wonderful resources but we are not allowed to use them.* Anja, Finnish teacher

For many teachers, when they began teaching this lack of resources came as a shock. Even though a few have access to rooms and facilities in mainstream schools, many of the teachers reported feeling like unwelcome guests.

*Our principal is trying hard to get access to the school internet. We bring our own paper to stick to the wall because the whiteboards are full of stuff and we can't use them. I use my own data plan to show videos.* Radika, Tamil teacher

*We have no classrooms. We are only allowed in the hall. 70 students in one space. It is very cramped. Little ones and parents coming in, friends in other classes as distraction, some teachers are very loud. Sometimes the school forgets to leave the tables and chairs out for the classes so the students have to go outside and use playground seating. This is very negative for students who feel that learning Arabic is not a priority.* Iman, Arabic teacher

Many teachers also commented on the need for appropriate, locally based resources. This had led many schools to developing their own textbooks and readers.

*We shouldn't use books that come from overseas. Our kids are Aussie and they think in the English language so we need things more explicit for how to build knowledge for these particular kids. We need local resources and units of work to draw on that suit local kids.* Amira, Arabic teacher

Teachers linked this issue to the broader need for syllabuses, curriculums and programs across schools. Teachers requested a common curriculum for each language at each stage of learning, in terms of outcomes, assessment, student achievement levels, and awarding of certificates of attainment. These responses show a level of sophistication in planning and programming that runs counter to many common preconceptions about Community Language schools.

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<sup>3</sup> Victoria and South Australia provide \$200 per capita annual funding for language schools. NSW provides \$130 but also supports free use of government schools (equal to \$40 per capita) and in 2019 also provided IT grants for schools (equal to \$30 per capita).

# What teachers gain from their teaching: professional learning strengths

The main change in Community Language schools since the 1980s has been the provision of professional learning for teachers.

In 1982 less than half of the Community Language teachers in NSW (45%) reported any professional learning; what existed was mainly workshops delivered by their own school. In our study, all teachers had attended professional learning programs and the majority (66.1%) had attended workshops in the previous three months. Participation was significantly higher for teachers of Vietnamese (78.3%) and Tamil (74.1%), and lowest for teachers of Indian languages (44.4%). A majority (63%) had completed the University of Sydney Certificate in Language Teaching.

We analysed whether age was a factor in participation: Are older teachers less likely to attend professional learning? The contrary is true. Nearly every teacher over 50 and 70 per cent over 60 had undertaken some professional learning in the previous year.

Community Language teachers traditionally gain their skills through informal learning on the job, and there is an emerging body of research into such informal learning (Hoekstra et al, 2007). Dina, for example, says volunteer work in the Greek school gave her the knowledge, status and self-satisfaction of being a teacher.



## TEACHER STORY

### 'I always wanted to be a teacher' — Dina's story

Dina has been teaching Greek in Community Language schools for 49 years.

When she finished high school she read in the newspaper that Australia wanted people who had finished secondary school and she decided to migrate. She started learning English but did not tell her parents her plans.

*"I always wanted to be a teacher in Greece but ... the war. At that time in Greece, they believed women must not go to school but stay home, learn to cook, make dresses and all of that. But my father was different. He wanted us to be educated."*

After a few months Dina met Stavros, her future husband, who agreed to go to Australia with her. When she told her eldest brother about this he said, 'Never, never, you are a girl. If you were married, okay, but not now. You can't go.'

Stavros asked Dina's parents for her hand in marriage and they left for Australia. She started work and was also approached by the Greek community to teach in the schools.

*"I told them I finished only high school. I don't have anything else. They say, okay we need teachers, so can you teach? I said, of course I can."*

When Dina started teaching she used textbooks from Greece which worked well with children of first generation migrants. But by the time children of the second generation started attending there were many mixed marriages and Greek was often not spoken in the home.

Dina started preparing her own materials, and the school devised their own textbooks for the second, third and now fourth generation students. Now Dina teaches the children of her original students and the parents sit in on her classes. They watch her teaching basic spoken Greek with their children and she asks the parents to model these skills at home.

Dina's approach to teaching focuses on listening and speaking, but she also aims to develop the students' reading and writing. She did not like the Australian schools her own children attended and recounted stories of interaction with teachers when she was asking for more homework.

*"When I asked the teacher what we could do at home she told me get him to read the newspaper. The newspaper! A third class boy! I said, what is the problem with Australian schools? We had history textbook, geography book, maths book, reading book and exercise books. Then I went to principal and I said, I don't understand that teacher, what she is teaching my son. Now, the system is better. I see the kids. They have real maths books, reading books and it's better."*

Dina's reasons for teaching Greek were not cultural but to be 'educated' or 'clever', words which she used frequently. She loved to surprise students by telling them how proud she was of her fluency in Turkish which she gained from her parents.

*"They are Australian, of course. But they have Greek background and their father might be Italian. I mean Greece is 10 million people, so you can communicate. If you learn Italian you can communicate with 75 million people. It makes you clever, opens your horizons. It is good, but it doesn't matter if you speak Greek or Italian or German."*

Over the years Dina changed some of her teaching approaches.

*"One boy, the mother is Greek, the father is Jewish and it was Easter time. And I wanted to teach the kids to say a prayer. The father told me, he said, no he can't make his cross. I say, don't worry. You have to change!"*

# Why teachers stay and leave in Community Language schools

Of the teachers surveyed, some 42 per cent had been volunteer teachers for over five years and two thirds had been volunteering for more than two years. These figures far exceed those for any comparable volunteer work. Retention rates for over five years were highest for Tamil (76%), Armenian (72%), and Dutch, Khmer and Portuguese (66% each). Turnover was highest for Arabic (53% less than two years) and Korean schools (40% less than two years).

Why do teachers leave or stay?

The three key reasons for staying, as stated in interviews, were:

- Feeling part of a team with support from the principal
- Enjoying and having a passion for teaching
- Student enthusiasm and learning from students.

These reasons were interconnected and related to feelings of collegial support and connectedness in the school. Those schools with high retention rates had regular teacher meetings, shared online networks and provided other administrative support for teachers.

*We don't have high turnover. Most teachers have been here since the school opened. New teachers take the younger children then move with them to more advanced classes. We also have teachers for music, sport and dance. Some teachers leave when their children leave but usually take a break and come back.* Anna, Armenian teacher

*The positive aspects of teaching in my school are that I have a good team of teachers which support one another and can communicate queries to each other.* Ilektra, Greek teacher

*All my teachers get together for study sessions. We do inservice in the school. Teachers request this and I provide everything: food, materials that I prepare. Everything is free. We share. My teachers usually stay but the younger ones leave when they get married and have babies.* Yuko, Japanese teacher





The reasons for leaving were stated in more instrumental terms:

- The lack or absence of any reimbursement
- The lack or absence of access to resources in host schools.

Community Language schools which serve lower-socioeconomic status (SES) communities face many more financial challenges and can offer their teacher/s much less in terms of resources and recompense. It is these smaller schools and smaller language groups which are most in need of support.

*We don't have money to adequately compensate teachers for the amount of work that is put in. We do it for the good of the school and also the good of our own children. We get petrol money and parents pay fees.* Akiko, Japanese teacher

*Schools ask for so much. I need to have a program. I need exams, teaching from 10 to 2pm. And so much is asked of me. Don't put all these extra demand on me. I quit from my school and I really loved the community there.* Amira, Arabic speaker

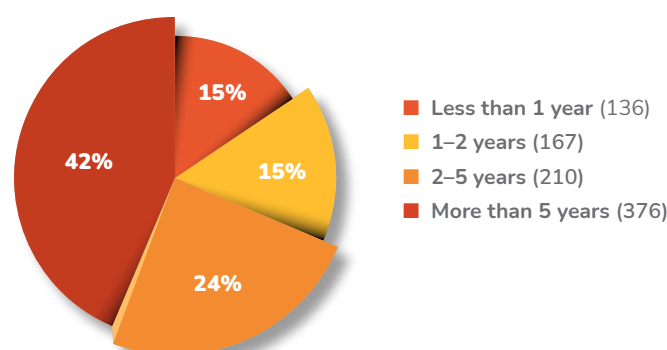


Figure 3. length of time teaching in Community Language Schools

The variability in retention/attrition rates across schools indicates that more attention needs to be given to school capacity and resources as well as to minimum levels of reimbursement for teachers.

## Teacher supply

Many teachers and principals raised the issue of finding volunteer teachers. This was especially the case with smaller schools and language communities without recent migrants.

*Our main worry is to keep up the supply of teachers. We need some sort of mechanism ongoing. How can we build this network? I know of a couple of Tamils who are mainstream teachers but I don't know if I can rely on them to come on board or to call on them for their proficiency.* Cithara, Tamil teacher

*I struggle to find good teachers. It would make me happy and satisfied if I can find more teachers.* Maria, Maltese teacher

Some schools adopted the innovative idea of having parents or graduates of Community Language schools as helpers/teacher aides. They were attached to classroom teachers and mentored towards becoming teachers themselves.

However, there remains an absence of Australian-born teachers in the schools. This indicates the lack of pathways for students from Community Languages schools to the Saturday School of Community Languages and then into volunteer teaching in the schools, an issue which needs to be further explored.

# Professional learning needs

When we asked about the main areas in which teachers require support, three key areas emerged from both the online survey and interviews:

- Training in and access to IT
- Curriculum development, Australian-based resources and lesson planning
- Behaviour management, teaching mixed levels and groupwork.

The demand for professional learning in IT indicates that teachers were aware of their students and their needs, and also of the rapid changes in technology in terms of resources for teaching language.

*We need more introduction to IT courses so teachers can understand how to use the new technology in classroom.* Hoang, Vietnamese teacher

*I believe that computer course will be useful to support my teaching as I can easily record songs and stories with colourful pictures and animation so the lesson will be more enjoyable to the students. The students will be more motivated to learn if I record their activities and show them again and teach them from what they have done.* Jing, Chinese teacher

Other frequent requests included ongoing teacher training in classroom management, engaging students and lesson planning.

*I feel that teachers in community language school should either have some teaching background when they enrol or should be made compulsory to undergo the cert of language teaching. Their lack of experience may potentially impact on the students' motivation and enthusiasm to learn. In our school we lack integration of technology in the classroom. The older students get bored and have dropped out when they start high school. It would be good to try to engage them further. Teachers want to learn more about classroom management. Easy for me now because I teach primary aged kids. But if I took a middle school class I would need more information. That is why at the Chinese teachers' conference I chose the secondary school activities workshops.* Minh, Chinese principal

*We can't keep high-quality lessons in the whole school. We need more training system constantly. We have nearly 350 students in our school and more than 20 teachers. Because we have introduced some many new teaching methods for our high school classes and I can already see the positive results among past students. But only high school is not enough, we need to change the whole school teaching methods and all teachers have to update their teaching skills.* Tomoko, Japanese teacher

Teachers also wanted opportunities to have site-based professional learning and chances to visit other schools.

*I am always interested to attend workshops and courses that take place in Sydney. It is important to be up to date and meet teachers of other community schools to exchange ideas and discuss our work.* Tatiana, Russian teacher

*In terms of improving the way the school teaches Arabic, it would be useful too for all teachers to stay up to date and aware of teaching and training courses or workshops. If there are short courses or trained professionals that can come to the school, would be very useful.* Fatima, Arabic teacher

The main shift in Community Language schools in the past 20 years has been the amount of professional development available to teachers and the numbers of teachers who have taken advantage of this. Teachers in our study wanted and expected professional learning support; they were clear about their strengths and needs. This level of professionalism is a shift from that reported in earlier studies.

# Teachers and their career goals

This section explores two key findings from our study:

- That volunteer teachers undertake work in Community Language schools as the first step into further study or building a career in Australia after their children reach school age
- That this group therefore represents a valuable resource in terms of teacher supply not only for mainstream schools but also for a range of professions.

About half of the teachers reported being in full-time employment. For some, this was a continuation of their careers prior to immigration – in IT, engineering and medicine/health. Many were also engaged in work that they had taken on to support their families when they first migrated.

Almost half of the teachers gave 'home duties' as their primary responsibility. These were mainly women who had taken breaks from work to raise families.

There was also a significant group of teachers who had incomplete secondary or no post-secondary education. These teachers often had limited access to education in their countries of origin.

The common thread in all accounts was the desire to undertake further education and/or employment. The step into volunteer teaching in Community Language schools represented one means to achieve this goal.

The majority of teachers surveyed had undertaken a range of Australian tertiary qualifications as a career path. Many had completed courses in childcare or health/aged care at TAFE Certificate and Diploma levels; others had enrolled in university studies for Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral degrees. The reasons for these studies varied, but many wanted to gain employment credentials in Australia.

*My major from Japan qualified me as a PE teacher and I have thought of doing a post-graduate degree when I have time. I am doing a Diploma in Children's services at the moment. There are more employment opportunities in early childhood. The government used to give international students working permits for childcare and IT. Not now.*

Yumiko, Japanese teacher

Several teachers had undertaken courses to gain permanent residency. One had completed a Master of Business in Philanthropy and Non-Profit studies. Many had completed programs in childcare and early childhood education, and some towards finding work in the retail sector or to gain qualifications as medical receptionists, only to find that they could not gain employment. Several had been directed into inappropriate courses – Masters and even doctoral studies in education – but then learnt that these did not qualify them for accreditation as teachers.

The overwhelming majority (79.1%) of teachers expressed the wish to become accredited teachers in Australia. This was highest for teachers of Greek (100%), Indian languages (92.9%), Arabic (89.1%) and Chinese (87.4%).

Only 3 per cent of teachers in Community Language schools were accredited mainstream teachers. This finding confirms smaller scale studies of teachers in Community Language schools (Minty et al, 2008; Cardona, Noble & di Biase 2008).

The picture that emerges is of a group of highly skilled and highly trained teachers who have not been able to gain accreditation as teachers in mainstream educational institutions in Australia.



Many teachers reported wanting to be accredited as primary school teachers, while others wanted to teach in secondary schools:

- 278 (32.5% of all respondents) wanted to become primary school language teachers.
- 166 (19.4%) wanted to be generalist grade teachers.
- 153 (17.9%) wanted to teach languages at secondary school level.
- 172 (20.1%) opted to teach other subjects in secondary schools.

The main subjects were Mathematics and Science, areas in which there are shortages. Additionally, 149 teachers expressed interest in gaining accreditation as teachers in TAFE or other colleges of adult education. This aligns with the findings of the smaller-scale study by Minty et al (2008).

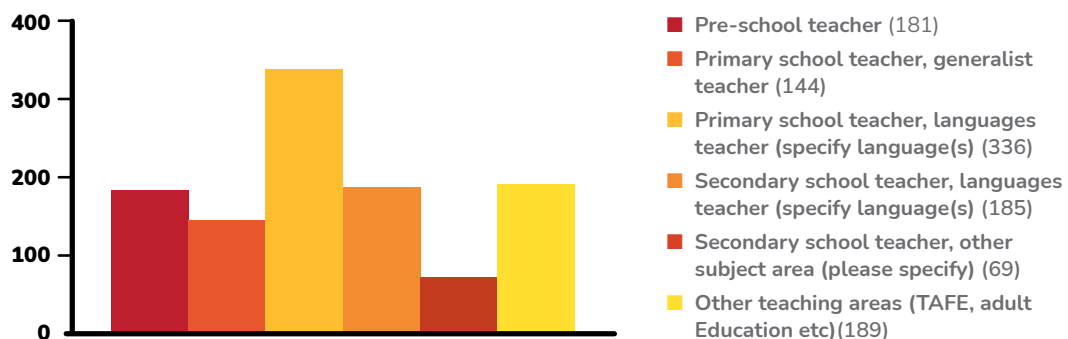


Figure 4. Career goal

# Why so many Community Language teachers want to gain accreditation as mainstream teachers

That 79.1 per cent of Community Language teachers want to gain accreditation is worth noting, considering that only 44.3 per cent of teachers have majors in education and only 54.9 per cent of teachers reported teaching overseas. Many volunteer teachers who have degrees in other fields – such as Management and Commerce (8.8%), IT (5.3%), Health (3.9%) and Engineering (3.4%) – had decided to switch careers to teaching because of their experiences in the Community Language schools. As contributing factors in this, they reported their enjoyment in teaching, in preparing lessons and watching children learn. In addition, they liked the routines of teaching – collegial meetings, undertaking professional learning workshops, assessing students' work, giving feedback to students and parents, organising school events and excursions – as well as representing the school in the community. They also enjoyed their status as teachers in the eyes of parents and community members.

The teachers reported that these aspects of informal learning – 'learning on the job' – motivated them to change their career goals. Overall, the finding is that 677 teachers in this sample and, therefore, an estimated 2,140 teachers (80%) in the NSW Community Language schools, want to gain accreditation as teachers in mainstream schools.

Marieke's account is typical of this cohort.

*I moved to Australia five years ago. I never studied to be a teacher but I am a social worker who started teaching 'health' at a high school in the Netherlands due to lack of teachers ... My life is now filled with teaching at the school and people privately at home ... I also started a PhD focusing on bilingualism because of my experiences.* Marieke, Dutch teacher

At present, for these language teachers, the pathway to a career in teaching is blocked. Only 3 per cent of them had managed to gain accreditation as mainstream teachers. Older teachers, such as Anna (see below), tended to give up on their career goals because of the barriers blocking their goals. In fact, those teachers who had been in Australia for less than four years were the most enthusiastic about gaining accreditation (91%).

The following section looks at why these career pathways were blocked.

## Getting information and finding a pathway

The interviews we conducted indicated the lack of accurate information upon which teachers were basing their career goals and their need for careers advice. In fact, many teachers asked the interviewers for advice.

*Can you find a way for me to become an English teacher here in Australia? ... I taught English for 13 years in Korea and majored in English at university. Now I'm supervisor in a childcare centre. The qualifications for primary and secondary school are too hard for me to do. I'm not 20 years old anymore.* Suin, Korean teacher

*We want to continue working in either primary or high school, but I don't know what to do – what courses or how to get to them.* Norma, Arabic teacher

Some teachers reported getting advice from friends and other teachers in the schools, but this advice was not always accurate. Others had applied through different channels and organisations but were unable to assess the meaning or value of the advice they received. The experience of Anna, below, was typical of that of many of the teachers.



## TEACHER STORY

### ‘They told me my qualifications were no good’ — Anna’s story

Anna migrated to Australia in the 1990s. She had been an Early Childhood teacher in Poland for 12 years and had a Master of Education degree. When she started looking for work in Australia, the government office sent her to an agency.

*“I showed them my qualifications and asked about teaching Early Childhood. The man pushed them back to me across the table and told me they were not worth anything in Australia. He told me I could do cleaning or work as a nurse’s aide in aged care or be an assistant in pre-school. He told me that if I wasn’t prepared to work hard in Australia I should go back to where I came from. I went home and cried but I gave up ever wanting to be a teacher.”*

Anna worked in aged care but also started teaching in the Polish language school four years ago when her eldest child started high school. The school had just started a pre-school group and she was the teacher. She had mixed emotions when she started teaching but loved working with children again. Her students were second or third generation Australians, and she taught them mostly through songs and games.

However, Anna said she also felt sad at the turn in her life, with her work in aged care taking her away from teaching. When we told her that her qualifications would always have been accepted in Australia and that she had been given the wrong information, tears came to her eyes, but she replied that the past was the past and that her teaching now was giving her happiness

## Barriers to career goals

The most common barriers to gaining accreditation were financial, family responsibilities and levels of English language proficiency. Some Community Language teachers were still establishing themselves and their families in Australia, and for them the cost of going back to study was often seen as prohibitive.

For Ming, going back to study would require financial support and help with childcare.

*I used to be a trained teacher but for 28 years have had a job in tourism in Australia but still loved education. I taught basic English in China until the 1980s and then went into tourism here. I work for [a major childcare agency]. I studied the Certificate 3 course. I am interested in becoming a qualified teacher in Australia. It is difficult to say how much study I would be able to do to upgrade to local qualifications. I would need government support.*

Ming, Chinese teacher

The English levels required for teaching in mainstream schools also present a barrier. The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) requires level 7.5 for Internationally educated teachers (IELTS), with a minimum 8 in speaking and listening, or Level 4+ in the International Second Language Rating (ISLPR) in all skills. However, in NSW and across Australia, there are few higher-level academic English courses available for longer-term professionals with overseas qualifications.

Generally, teachers achieve good levels of everyday English, but 80 per cent of them reported wanting to undertake courses to improve their English. Making the next step is difficult for them, however, and English test preparation programs are expensive. Moreover, if teachers do not achieve the required grade in one section of IELTS they must re-sit the whole test. Results are only valid for two years. As a result of these factors, many teachers lacked confidence and were afraid to sit or re-sit the necessary tests.



*I was a high school English teacher [in Japan]. I'm not working here as an English teacher because I would have to do the [English] test and classes for that are on Saturday when Community Language school is on. Also it is very expensive and I don't think this is a fair test so I haven't done it. Some friends have moved to Melbourne because they don't have to do the test there and they are teaching Japanese in Victorian high schools.* Yumiko, Japanese teacher

There are further barriers too. Until 2018 in NSW, teachers who were native speakers of a language with university studies through that language were not allowed to teach that language because they did not have studies of language and literature in the language. (This requirement has since been dropped and native speakers can get evidence from a university of their proficiency.)

*In Japan I was teaching English. I have a bachelor's degree from America where I grew up. In Japan I taught a lot of English. I lived there for 12 years and started an English school with my husband in Japan. I also taught in high schools in Japan ... Since I arrived in Australia I have a lot of opportunities to teach Japanese. I teach Japanese in a pre-school once a week. I have been trying to find out how to get a job casual teaching but it's quite hard to get a foot in the door. Seems ridiculous to have to do two years Japanese at university level if you are a background speaker.* Michiko, Japanese teacher

There are also barriers in applying for accreditation. All instructions are online, and getting the required transcripts and translations without support is not easy. Many applicants have complicated histories of study and making sense of their qualifications takes time.

Particular difficulties are encountered when systems of qualifications do not align. In many countries, for example, secondary teachers need an undergraduate degree but not the same level of education study as in Australia. Primary teachers from some countries often began their pre-service training at Year 10 level (or equivalent) and so after four years of training are only recognised as two-year trained in Australia. For these teachers it is next to impossible to gain advanced standing for some education programs. Moreover, few programs are available part-time or delivered in ways that suit Community Language teachers.

However, when asked if they were prepared to undertake more study to gain qualifications, 416 of the teachers surveyed replied 'yes' and an additional 148 'maybe'. This constitutes 66 per cent of teachers surveyed, a significant majority, especially when the numbers of those teachers who are retired and those who are already teaching are taken into account.

**The provision of information and pathways for Community Language teachers is urgently needed. In the same way that Community Language schools allow language communities to develop and flourish, and that they provide centres for these communities, they also act as a key human resource of skills and expertise for the wider community. They represent a possible pathway for parents, teachers and community members into further study and employment – but at present this pathway is blocked.**

The provision of such a pathway would strengthen the Community Language sector. Minty et al (2008) found that teachers gaining qualifications tended to stay teaching in Community Language schools. The experience of Greek language schools, where some 20 per cent of the teachers are also accredited mainstream teachers, confirms this finding.

The provision of such a pathway, however, is not the simple development of professional learning programs. There needs to be accurate and appropriate careers advice and counselling over time so that language teachers can become aware of the opportunities and options they have for further study and employment.



## Discussion and recommendations

There are over 7,000 Community Language teachers across Australia, 3,000 of which are in NSW. These teachers bring an enormous range of skills to their teaching and contribute to the sector being a key provider of languages education in NSW.

Community Language schools are the only language education sector that is growing, having increased by 20 per cent since 2009. Moreover, these schools are the only places where many community languages can be learned. For languages such as Arabic, Greek, Khmer and Turkish, however, there is an interactive relationship with mainstream language education providers.

With demographic shifts in language communities and the shrinking of opportunities for study with other providers, the Community Language schools and teachers take on an increasingly important role. For new and emerging language schools such as Dari, Thai and Tibetan, for example, the teachers are the people who establish and develop communities of speakers.

Since the 1850s, volunteer teachers have worked in Community Language schools. It was not until 1981 that government support for these schools began under the Ethnic Schools Program. Since then, the numbers of teachers in NSW, languages taught and schools have more than doubled.

Government financial support has also increased markedly. In the past 40 years, however, the nature and structure of this support has not kept pace with the changing needs of teachers, or of schools and language communities. These changing needs include the growing disparities between more and less affluent communities and the vastly different profiles of communities in terms of teacher qualifications, skills and English language levels.

- Lower-SES language schools and teachers are particularly disadvantaged. Teachers generally receive no reimbursement; they have little access to resources and less access to professional learning programs. These schools find it hard to attract and keep teachers.
- There are many barriers to teachers wanting to gain accreditation to teach in mainstream schools.
- Professional learning tends to be generic and not cater for specific language issues and changing needs.

# Equitable access to resources

Existing differences in resources and capacity among Community Language schools needs to be taken into account: some communities draw on strong support from consulates, countries of origin and resources for teaching their language as a second/ heritage language; other schools are starting from scratch.

A primary issue to be addressed is differences in access to basic teaching resources such as whiteboards, desks and teaching materials. In interview, many teachers described how the inability to access basic teaching resources undermined their ability to teach as well as their engagement in and commitment to their teaching.

This issue emerged most strongly in the language schools which used premises in NSW government primary schools. Teachers reported that grade/classroom teachers would often fill every space on whiteboards (both fixed and moveable) in the classroom, with notes stipulating that the boards were not to be used. (Most Community Language school teachers photograph their classrooms before and after classes in case there are complaints about changes in the room.)

Access to quality teaching resources is expected by mainstream or regular schools, and is acknowledged in state and national policy ambitions (e.g. The Melbourne Declaration, MCEETYA, 2008). NSW government policy extending to Community Language Schools is unambiguous in this respect, stating that:

Community use of school facilities provides benefits to both schools and their communities through (inter alia):

- the provision of additional extracurricular learning opportunities
- better access for communities and schools to state-of-the-art facilities.<sup>4</sup>

The policy also states mainstream schools should 'allow free access to school facilities for community language classes during school terms' (NSW Department of Education, April, 2017: p7). However, the policy is unclear about which resources can be used: whiteboards are to be provided but there is no mention of storage or of any access to the internet.

Mainstream school principals and teachers are working within guidelines when they limit access to certain facilities. Nonetheless, the policy concerning the use of resources by Community Language schools falls short of supporting the laudable tenets of the Melbourne Declaration and of 'twenty-first century learning', a catchphrase that is typically used as a proxy to explain technology-enhanced, as well as problem-based, engaged-learning approaches (Kirkwood and Price, 2006).

The challenge is how Community Language teachers can contribute towards the language skills and educational experience that students carry with them into mainstream schools. There is an obvious 'everyday' pedagogical connection between Community Language schools and mainstream schools, but Community Language teachers report a sense of marginalisation from mainstream education and schools. This educational relationship needs to be addressed.

Online and digital teaching resources for languages are in abundance. Increasingly, these are becoming viable and authentic ways to connect speakers and learners of any given language across classrooms, cities and countries.

Providing engaging lessons depends primarily on teacher skills but access to the latest learning tools, ones that most learners are already familiar with, is also important. In this context, students enrolled

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4 NSW Department of Education (2017) Community Use of School Facilities Implementation Procedures, Sydney: NSW DoE, page 1; [https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/associated-documents/imp\\_comm\\_use.pdf.pdf](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/associated-documents/imp_comm_use.pdf.pdf), Accessed 26 March 2018.



in Community Language schools experience a two-tiered education: access to relevant, contemporary content and learning tools via digitally mediated learning in mainstream schools; and mid-twentieth century learning via pen and paper in addition to the teacher scribing on old whiteboards or poster paper. The effect on the learner undertaking extra-curricular activities presents more as a mild form of punishment than an opportunity to develop fluency and rich cultural understanding.

Most teachers report having no place to store resources or materials in their host schools. Many had no access to suitable premises for teachers to have meetings and/or run workshops.

The issue of reimbursement also needs to be addressed. The percentage of teachers who receive no reimbursement from their school for materials, travel and/or professional learning has increased from 25 per cent in 1982 to 36 per cent in 2020. Rates of teacher attrition seem to be linked to these low levels (or lack of) reimbursement, a factor that was mentioned frequently in teacher interviews. Provision of such support for teachers, including a guaranteed reimbursement of \$20 per hour for their teaching time, is essential.

## Professional learning

There is no crossover between the professional learning offered to Community Language teachers and that offered to languages teachers in other educational sectors. Community Language teachers do not have access to professional learning in their host schools or to professional learning provided by professional associations, government or non-government schools. There needs to be a sharing of resources.





That said, the professional learning needs of Community Learning teachers are changing and diverse.

- Many Community Language teachers have been in Australia for less than four years (17%). Most workshops are run in English and therefore exclude these teachers.
- Most Community Language teachers (59%) have been in Australia for over 10 years. Although they are native speakers of their language, many have not taught their language as a second language. There is a need for professional learning whereby these teachers can improve their language skills and explore ways of teaching their language as a heritage/second language.
- Languages differ greatly linguistically and culturally. Teaching levels of politeness or formality, like teaching tones and script, have different importance in different languages. There is little support for language-specific professional learning.
- Our study identified emerging areas of need in professional learning. Specifically, these were using technology in the classroom, catering for special needs (see below), teaching young children under five and teaching adults.

# Inclusive education

Eleven respondents reported that accommodating special needs was important. In 2016, approximately 14 per cent of students in New South Wales government schools 'required personalised learning and support because of a disability' (NSW Legislative Council, 2017: 2).

Figures for Community Language schools are unclear. They may be lower than in government schools because such schooling is not mandatory and there is lower participation, or it may be that there is under-recognition of special needs because of a lack of training and resources. The corollary to this is that Community Language schools are not necessarily equipped to accommodate special needs.

It should be noted here that the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 in terms of education only applies to government schools. On the other hand, the nature of parental/carer involvement in Community Language schools could mean support is more readily provided by family members who might help in a classroom. Gathering data on how Community Language schools address special needs and on parental choice is needed to inform professional learning options for teachers.

These factors need to be taken into account in the development and provision of professional learning for Community Language teachers. There should be a strategic plan to cover the short and long term professional development needs of these teachers. A wide variety of backgrounds among teachers requires a wide variety of professional support, and the nature of workshops and conferences requires close consultation with teachers.

While the initial data from our survey provides a priority list of learning areas, the interview responses introduced the need for a more nuanced approach. For example, professional development needs to be conducted in the teachers' community language and be locally available, and principals need to be encouraged to give workshop and conference attendees time to report back to their colleagues on what they have learned.

## Being and becoming teachers

The key finding of this study is that in terms of professional development and career pathways, many of these highly qualified teachers face a 'dead-end' once they begin teaching in Community Language schools.

Our study found that highly qualified women (and men) take up teaching in the schools, often after raising their families, as a step into entering employment and further study in Australia. Almost half have teaching qualifications and experience from overseas. The experience of being a teacher in a Community Language school leads those with tertiary qualifications in other fields wanting to make teaching their career goal in Australia.

Overall, 75 per cent of these teachers want to gain accreditation as mainstream teachers but only 3 per cent have done so. The first barrier is the lack of information: few interviewees knew how to become accredited in Australia. The English requirements were a second hurdle, with IELTS 7.5 (Academic) as the goal; teachers had few ways to reach these levels.

The most significant barrier, however, was the lack of ways to upgrade existing qualifications.

Many primary-trained teachers would be recognised as two-year trained in Australia as they had completed shorter courses or had started teacher training at the equivalent of Year 10. However, these teachers could not gain advanced standing into four-year Bachelor of Education programs.

Secondary-trained teachers often had recognised undergraduate degrees but lacked education courses and would need a two-year Master of Teaching qualification.

Our findings indicated that both groups of teachers would find full-time study difficult with their family and work commitments.

The issue of overseas-trained teachers is often seen as a 'problem'. This has led to all state and federal institutes developing policies for 'overseas-trained' teachers. What is often forgotten, however, is the windfall to Australia in having these teachers: an estimated \$184 million in terms of tertiary education gained overseas.

The provision of pathways for these teachers must therefore be a priority. This wastage of skills and the absence of this group of teachers from mainstream schools has ramifications for the education of all students. The teaching profession in Australia remains overwhelmingly monolingual ('Anglo'), despite the rapid changes in the student population.

## Pathways into volunteer teaching

We found that less than 4 percent of teachers are Australian-born although the numbers of second, third and fourth generation students in Community Language schools are growing rapidly. A third of teachers in the schools are aged over 50, with much higher numbers in Armenian (58%), Chinese (45%), Vietnamese (56%) and some other schools.

The questions arise: What is the succession planning for Community Language schools? Where will future teachers come from?

In most schools there has been a rapid decline in enrolments in Grades 5 and 6 and in the secondary school, with low numbers in all community languages for the Higher School Certificate (HSC). Very few of the languages are offered at tertiary level; hence there are few pathways for students to become Community Language teachers themselves. It is important to address this issue as already many schools are finding it difficult to source teachers. This shortage also applies to the K–6 NSW Community Languages Program in mainstream schools.

## Recognising teachers and their work

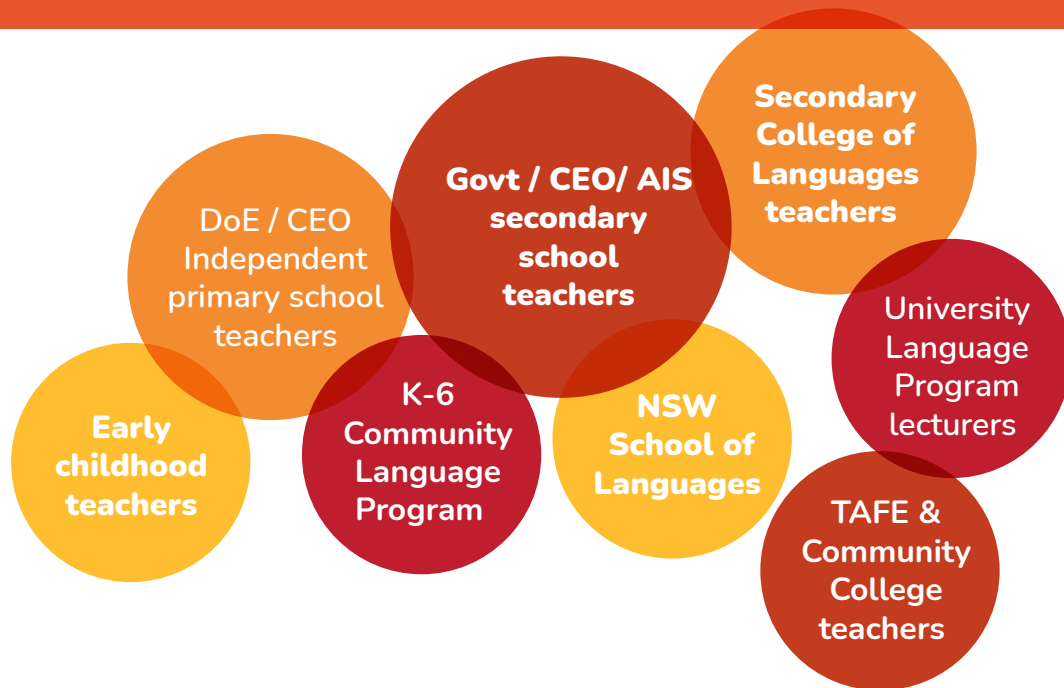
There is great value in the work of teachers in this complementary language education sector, and volunteer teachers need to be provided with substantial professional learning programs and support in carrying out their work. This is especially important for smaller schools and less commonly taught languages where help is needed in attracting, mentoring and developing teachers, particularly second generation ones.

Continuing pathways to employment and further study, particularly to teacher accreditation, need to be established for Community Language teachers. This group of teachers represents a key resource in terms of qualifications and linguistic, educational and cultural skills. As a group of teachers they teach students from early childhood to adults, and cover both established and emerging languages.

In the mainstream sector, language education is divided by age, types of languages and educational jurisdictions. However, there is little in the way of a holistic and coherent approach. The Community Language sector runs parallel to the mainstream one but it is never considered in overall approaches to policies and programs in terms of language teacher supply, development and training. It is time for this group of teachers to be recognised, and for their skills, strengths and needs to be aligned with other sectors.

Early childhood teachers  
Primary school teachers  
Secondary school teachers  
Teachers of adults/ older learners

**NSW Community Language School teachers**



The key recommendations of this report are therefore:

- That volunteer teachers be provided with substantial professional learning programs and support in carrying out their work. This is especially important for smaller schools and less commonly taught languages where help is needed in attracting, mentoring and developing teachers, particularly second generation ones.
- That continuing pathways to employment and further study, particularly to teacher accreditation, be established for Community Language teachers. This group of teachers represents a key resource in terms of qualifications and linguistic, educational and cultural skills.

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