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Teachers of additional languages in New Zealand schools: A national survey and case studies

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Abstract

While languages additional to the language of instruction have long been an established, non-compulsory part of the New Zealand secondary school curriculum, it was only in 2007 that they were given an official place as a learning area in the national curriculum. They do, however, remain non-compulsory. This study aims to investigate the background and profile of teachers of additional languages in New Zealand schools, and perceptions of their role, place and identity.

In late 2008, teachers of additional languages at Years 1 to 13 were invited to complete a national online language teachers' survey (NOLT08) (n=317). Two teachers of Spanish and one teacher of Japanese were invited to participate in individual case studies carried out across two school terms in 2010. Data were gathered through interviews and regular entries in a reflective e-log focusing on their situated experiences as teachers of additional languages together with their perceptions of their role and identity.

Results of the NOLT08 survey confirmed that teachers of additional languages in New Zealand schools had different levels of qualifications and experiences depending on the sector in which they were teaching. Teacher perceptions of their roles ranged from those who felt supported and considered the teaching of additional languages an integral part of their professional role, to those who were hindered by a lack of agency and confidence in their proficiency, frustrations with multi-level classes, or assessment demands. Important themes to emerge from the case studies include that being a teacher of additional languages requires a commitment of self and an ability to advocate for the learning area. With supportive schools, primary teachers are developing their own understandings of how to incorporate languages inside and outside of the classroom setting.

This study suggests that the place of teaching additional languages in New Zealand schools is far from established or secure. It highlights the challenges to the role and identity of teachers of additional languages, not least of which is the often-tenuous position of the languages learning area in schools.

Dedicated to my nephews, Alexander and Zac

along with my other ‘children’

Nicki, Matthew, Emma, Giorgia, Eliza, Sophia, Liam, Amy, Matthew, William, Ellie, James, Sophie, Sam, Zoe, Caitlin, Anna, Libby, Sean, Kino-chan

May you all discover the joy of learning languages

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