



4 March 2023

AFMLTA SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO DISRUPTION IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

The Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations (AFMLTA) is the peak national body representing teachers of all languages in Australia. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this Senate inquiry into disruption in schools.

While we understand the complexity and need for systems, schools and families working together to reduce disruption in classrooms, our response focuses on the role of the teacher in this space.

Terms of Reference

The issue of increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms, which is disadvantaging students and contributing to poor literacy and numeracy results for young people, denying them the learning of essential foundational skills to reach their full educational, economic and social potential, with specific reference to:

(a) the declining ranking of Australia in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) disciplinary climate index, making Australian classrooms amongst the world's most disorderly;

NA

(b) the impacts, demands and experience of disorderly classrooms on teacher safety, work satisfaction and workforce retention;

The AFMLTA represents more than 3000 teachers of languages throughout Australia. The work of a classroom teacher is arguably one of the most complex - it involves significant hours of planning for lessons, then delivering the lessons and evaluating them, and assessing the learning of students. What educators in schools do in the design of lessons, and how they plan for interaction with students, have a strong impact on student engagement in learning, and therefore teacher satisfaction. It is clear that teacher satisfaction can be compromised when the classroom climate is less than ideal.

Teachers consistently report, including in recent teacher survey research conducted by the AFMLTA, that the challenge lies in teaching in increasingly complex classrooms where increased demand is placed on teachers to plan for and accommodate students with specific behavioural and learning needs, as well as the demand for teachers to take care of student well-being, often when not trained, nor supported. There are many effective and passionate educators who are up for this challenge, and supportive school and systemic structures will provide the opportunity for the challenge to be overcome.

(c) teachers' views on whether or not they are sufficiently empowered and equipped to maintain order in the classroom and what can be done to assist them;

While diversity of learners is unavoidable, the challenges for teachers are that developmental pathways for learners are difficult to establish, and resources to assist in providing meaningful learning experiences for all are very difficult to find or produce.

Australian Government and state and territory government and education jurisdiction initiatives and activities, for decades, have allowed significant professional learning through targeted funding to empower and upskill teachers of languages in contemporary pedagogy and learner engagement. These have had overall positive impacts and have included:

- National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) project (1994-2002)
- National Statement and Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools (2005-2008)
- National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) project (2008-2013).

In addition to these, national AFMLTA developed projects have had similar positive impacts and included:

- [Ready? Set? Series](#)
- [Professional Standards Project](#)

Our teachers report that they feel equipped to maintain the order and engagement of most students. The gap is when there are extreme cases of “Tier 3” students in [positive behaviour for learning frameworks](#). That is, the 5% or so of students requiring intensive, individualised supports. Even more tailored and flexible systems in schools would allow the student to be supported by those with expertise, within the regular classroom environment, thereby continuing to gain curriculum and social benefits associated with this.

Similarly designed and implemented suites of in-service professional learning projects, with significant input from the professional associations, may result in a further empowerment of teachers in managing student motivation and connection.

(d) the robustness, quality and extent of initial teacher education to equip teachers with skills and strategies to manage classrooms;

Initiatives undertaken at national and state levels in relation to initial teacher education have seen improvements in the quality and structure of language teacher education programs. However, there is much variability across tertiary institutions and there is a need for a model of expectations or of good practice, for teachers undertaking education courses for primary or secondary educators, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Professional associations such as the AFMLTA, First Languages Australia, Community Languages Australia and the Languages and Cultures Network of Australian Universities (LCNAU) may be able to work with Councils of Deans of Education and universities to assist with such provision. Such modules could be integrated into current degree structures in a consistent manner to ensure all teachers have a minimum standard of attention to the particulars of their own language teaching before graduating and entering the classroom, including in the area of managing classrooms.

Australia is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse countries in the world and starting with the learner and valuing the plurilingual and pluricultural resources they bring to the classroom is a key foundation to managing student learning.

(e) the loss of instructional teacher time because of disorder and distraction in Australian school classrooms;

Time-on-task can be defined as the amount of time spent being actively involved in the learning process, acquiring new skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes. It is well known that it takes significant time on task for students to become successful in the learning of a language - success leads to improved confidence and engagement with school and learning. Teachers of languages often report a range of distractions that reduce their instructional time. There is a need to consider explicit (mandated) minimum time allocations for compulsory years of language learning at both primary, and junior secondary levels in particular, and to align curriculum more explicitly to these times. Such times must be connected to research on meaningful overall minimal time, and on frequency of lessons, for retention of information.

In some states and territories, there are practices that reduce learning time for students, including the withdrawal of EAL learners or students with specific learning needs. In-school evidence points to the fact that systems and supports that promote the inclusion of all students in language learning, improve their overall education and engagement with school.

(f) the impact of disorderly, poorly disciplined classroom environments and school practices on students' learning, compared with their peers in more disciplined classrooms;

NA

(g) the stagnant and declining results across fundamental disciplines as tested through National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) attributing to poorer school-leaving results and post-school attainment;

Research clearly points to the learning and active use of two or more languages and literacy benefits to all students across all learning areas. Based on our research in this area, the AFMLTA recently produced a ***Why Language Learning Matters*** infographic for teachers and school leaders that links the benefits of knowledge of additional language/s and the development of skills in literacy and numeracy. The infographic, which is available on the AFMLTA [website](#), demonstrates how students with a language background other than English outperform their peers in all measures and across all levels on NAPLAN tests. A full article outlining this research will be published in an upcoming edition of *Babel*, our national journal.

Other OECD countries, whose students outrank Australian students, have much stronger, continuous and cumulative language learning structures. Students in Australia who have learnt more than one language may be as much as two years ahead of their peers in NAPLAN results. There is a case that stronger language learning programs in Australian schools increase success and achievement at school and therefore, potentially less disruption and distraction for students.

(h) how relevant Australian state, territory and federal departments and agencies are working to address this growing challenge;

The challenges faced by teachers in all schools, of all subjects and phases of learning, continue to grow. Now, more than ever, collaborations between governments and the professional associations are important. Examples of how such collaborations have proven effective in addressing challenges have been listed throughout this response. There is a case to be made that similar collaborations could help address the challenge of student engagement and disruption. Ongoing in-service professional learning, designed by the profession, for the profession, has marked improvements on teacher practice, as well as school systems and structures.

Even prior to the development of the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers, the AFMLTA engaged with the profession to develop professional standards for languages teaching. This project produced a set of [professional standards](#) which were designed to be generic across languages. These career-long aspirational standards assist teachers to progress their professional skills in all areas of their work. Language specific versions of these standards were also developed, as were lead teacher standards. This project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations through its School Languages Programme. The project was being developed and implemented by the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), with the Modern Language Teachers Associations (MLTAs) in each state and territory, and the Research Centre for Languages and Cultures Education (RCLCE) at the University of South Australia. A group of 400 teachers nationally participated across Streams A and B. A further group of teachers then participated in Stream A and in Stream C across. The target group continued to be teachers of all languages (including Indigenous languages) across Australia, in all sectors, across all levels of experience, and including those in mainstream schools, Government Schools of Languages, distance education, and ethnic/community schools. Teachers conducted investigations into their work, including in the areas of student engagement and management. In 2021, these standards were updated to reflect the changing nature of teachers' work.

Research and practice have proven that structured mentoring relationships within the teaching profession have mutual benefits. The AFMLTA's Mentoring and Reflecting: Languages Educators and Professional Standards ([MoRe LEAPS](#)) project (aimed to develop accomplished lead teachers of languages in each

state and territory. Teachers learnt about the mentoring process and developed enquiry-based projects where they developed skills in the mentoring of others. In some cases, the projects were centred on learner engagement and reducing unproductive behaviours in lessons, and partnering with parents and families to more deeply engage students. Other examples of effective mentoring in practice include the Modern Language Teachers' Association of New South Wales (MLTANSW), an AFMLTA state-based member, developed in 2021 a [program](#) for mentors and mentees who wished to develop and share skills in various aspects of teaching practice, including language teaching pedagogy, lesson and assessment planning, collaboration groups and, importantly, teacher, student and classroom organisation tips. Both mentors and mentees were given ongoing support, professional learning and resources to help in their roles. It is an opportunity to share expertise, reflect on practice and collaborate with other teachers to help refine one's own practice. The experience may also help teachers working towards Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher accreditation and who wish to build leadership capacity in their field. The Modern Language Teachers' Association of Victoria has also had a [mentoring program](#) since 2005. Similar opportunities may exist specifically in managing student learning and have very positive outcomes.

(i) how leading OECD countries with the highest disciplinary climate index rankings are delivering orderly classrooms to provide strategies on how to reduce distraction and disorder in Australian classrooms;

NA

(j) any related matter

NA



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