

Primary LOTE

Primary school is where we provide for our community's children to become whole people. It is a chance we give them to be all that they can be, in as many dimensions as we can imagine.

In primary school, we are all scientists, authors, artists, musicians and athletes. Later we specialize, and many of us no longer write poems, but we have done, and that matters. It gives us insight to ourselves and others, and a basis to build upon if we ever want to change our direction later.

It follows that, in primary school, we should be more than monolingual. We should be, consciously, part of The World. To have communicated with friends who do not use English, is as important as to have high-jumped, or made something out of clay, or acted in a play. These potentials need activating early so we know them to be parts our ourselves.

It is not obvious how this can be achieved. How can our children have this positive experience of linguistic success, without impinging on the opportunity to experience real success in other, equally important, domains?

The answer is to provide a simple one first. Just as we provide a simple musical instrument, a simple game for sport or a simple poem structure in literature, we can provide a simple language for primary use.

A descant recorder is a simple instrument that will teach a future flautist, saxophonist or even pianist, useful understandings about pitch, tempo, and volume as well as providing manual dexterity and the habits of waiting your turn, reading music, listening to the the group, practicing when it is hard, recovering from mistakes, playing by ear, performing in public and taking a bow.

Not only is it more practical to teach a simple instrument that the class teacher can play, but this is more effective than giving a saxophone to an average five year old, which is just too heavy, difficult and discouraging and , therefore, likely to be abandoned. A two-step process, well-executed, gives the child two happy experiences of success: mastering the recorder, then mastering the saxophone.

Similarly, Esperanto is a simple language which teaches that there are other ways to talk: other sounds, other letters, other words, other ways to make sentences, other ways to be polite or rude. It teaches nouns and pronouns and adjectival agreement and other grammatical concepts. It also teaches how to remember things, how to re-word an idea, how to recognize an idiom, how to use a bilingual dictionary, how to be patient when someone is struggling to communicate with you, and how to find the courage to speak up when you know that you might get it wrong. Esperanto can be used to communicate with a worldwide community of a few million speakers from over one hundred maximally diverse cultures. Children in dozens of countries are learning Esperanto as their first foreign language, and good infrastructure is in place to facilitate contact between them, in their new meet-in-the-middle language.

The job of secondary school is to prepare for adulthood, to start to specialize and to choose your identity and direction. A confidently bilingual child with personal experience of foreign language learning, and use, is much better prepared to choose and commit to learning a third language than a monolingual child can be. Again, a two-step process offers both more satisfaction on the journey and a higher rate of "arrival" , the mastery of the target languages.

Australia has never had anywhere near enough LOTE teachers to provide for all its children. Fortunately, new materials called "Talking to the Whole Wide World: Integrated LOTE and Intercultural Education for Australian Primary Schools" have been designed for use by classroom teachers. The teachers learn the language along with the children in the first year of use. The process is fun and varied, including active teaching, practice play, songs, jokes, intercultural research, creative applications, intercultural communication and consolidation exercises.

Classroom teachers are available all day, every day, in every city and village and school of the air. They know each child well and can vary time allowances and tap into interests for individuals. They can integrate language learning to provide more frequent practice, more efficiently. Language immersion works. As generalists, they model "normal adulthood", taking LOTE out of the realm of unusual specialists and finally starting to erode Australia's monolingual mindset.

To be part of this revolution in Primary LOTE education, or for more information, please visit the website at www.mondeto.com