



10 March 2021

S21.01 oral

Oral submission to the Education and Workforce Select Committee on the Education (Strengthening Second Language Learning in Primary and Intermediate Schools) Amendment Bill 99-1

Presenters: Rae Duff and Beryl Anderson at 9.45 am on 10 March 2021

Education and Workforce Committee

Members Present: Chairperson Marja Lubeck (Lab); Ginny Andersen (Lab); Chris Baillie (Act); Paul Goldsmith (Nat); Jan Logie (Gre); Jo Luxton (Lab); Ibrahim Omer (Lab); Angela Roberts (Lab); Erica Stanford (Nat).

Members Not Present: Camilla Belich, (Lab).

Introduction

Kia Ora, Good morning, my name is Rae Duff and my colleague is Beryl Anderson, Convenor of the Parliamentary Watch Committee of the National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ).

I am speaking on behalf of the National Council of Women New Zealand (NCWNZ) and Graduate Women New Zealand (GWNZ) who made a joint submission on this Bill.

We support the learning of other languages as it fosters an appreciation for the cultural traditions, religions, arts, and history of the people associated with those languages. Greater understanding, in turn, promotes greater tolerance, empathy, and acceptance of others, which is vital for the ever-increasing multicultural NZ society. Learning another language also meets some of the targets of Sustainable Development Goals to which New Zealand is a signatory – especially from Goal 4 on Education, which are outlined in our submission.

However, both organisations consider that there are several major issues and queries that need to be answered before we can fully support this Bill.

The first is the lack of clarity around Te Reo Māori. If it is already mandatory for schools "to take reasonable steps to enable children to learn Te Reo ", we don't think Te Reo should be classed as one of the 10 priority languages. We think it stands alongside English and NZ Sign Language as one of "our" languages. Making NZ a truly bi-lingual society needs planning, time, expertise, and resourcing. It needs to be worked out with Māori, not imposed on them. We would need to look to countries like Ireland or Wales that have gone some way into bringing back an indigenous

language, although not one suppressed by a colonial power, and see what they have done well and what they wish they had done differently.

We are also not in favour of the government trying to resource ten "priority" languages, especially given that language departments are in decline at universities - this will end up doing nothing well. We think it would be better to concentrate on Māori and perhaps one other, train specialist teachers to a high level and develop a really good curriculum and resources. The language should probably be the "easiest" one for native speakers of English to learn, such as Spanish, which is the world's second most spoken native language after Mandarin Chinese. The language chosen must be a spoken, living language and it would need to be taught by a primary or intermediate teacher, properly trained in both the language itself and the pedagogy associated with it for the age group.

If we try and train teachers in 10 different languages and let schools and their communities choose, what happens when a teacher of say, Samoan leaves, and the only replacement is a teacher of Japanese? And the high school offers German? Nothing will be achieved at all and money and teacher energy, expertise, and goodwill will be wasted.

On the positive side, if there was a strong desire from the community for a certain language to be taught such as a Pacific language, or others that immigrants bring with them, as well a guaranteed supply of teachers for at least 5 years, and a well-functioning Community of Learning, it could have merit. Maintaining those languages is really important for their speakers and their descendants, but we ask "is compulsory education in public primary schools the place to do that"?

Languages have to be taught by trained foreign language teachers. A video and workbook won't work at that level. People learn languages from people. Learning a language at school is very different from acquiring a native language as an infant and specialised skills and knowledge are essential. Native speakers are often not the best foreign language teachers, because they have no understanding of what English speakers find hard about their language.

Learning another language is achieved by training teachers well, ensuring they have the conditions they need to teach successfully, ensuring they have attained a certain level in the language to be taught, having a first-class curriculum to guide them, and supporting that with first-class resources - not necessarily expensive ones, but fit-for-purpose, tried, tested, and proven ones.

Learning any language has huge cultural, cognitive, and personal benefits, but only if the learner has some feeling of progress. If all that is achieved is putting them off languages, the idea becomes a liability rather than an asset. So, in our view some of these issues need to be worked through before legislating for strengthening second language learning in primary and intermediate schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to present NCWNZ and GWNZ's position on the proposed amendment to the Bill and I'm happy to answer any questions.

Questions

Marja Lubeck agreed with our comments on Te Reo Māori. It is taught in primary schools, but queried if it was in the right classes.

In response Rae mentioned that while Te Reo Māori was an oral language, some people needed written material to support what they were hearing.

Angela Roberts asked what needed resolving first. Should there be structures such as a national language strategy, or schools engaging with their wider community?

Rae responded about students attending classes at Victoria University of Wellington on weekends for learning their native language. Schools engaging with their wider community is a different solution from that proposed in the legislation,

More points

We were thanked for our submission and our contribution to the legislative process over many years.