



A Strategy cut-short: The NALSAS Strategy for Asian languages in Australia

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Abstract

This paper examines the first national attempt to establish the study of Asian languages and cultures in the Australian education system. The National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy was based on the recommendations of a report commissioned by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in December 1992, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* (1994). The Report detailed a strategic framework for the implementation of an Asian languages and cultures program in Australian schools. This paper proposes that the Report was unprecedented in the history of policy efforts to teach Asian languages in Australia. It then analyses the Report's focus on language study, its reception and implementation during its first quadrennium. It argues that despite some shortcomings, the Report's implementation from 1995-1998 was significant in establishing formative foundations for Asian language study in Australia. This paper proposes that although progress towards targets was made during the second quadrennium, the Howard government's decision to cut the Commonwealth's funding commitment for this long term Strategy in 2002 was inappropriate at a time when Australia's engagement with the nations of Asia was increasingly significant.

1 Introduction

Asian language development is a matter of national importance, requiring urgent and high-level attention at a national level. (COAG discussion, cited in Rudd, 1994, p. i)

The impact of global and regional economic contexts is increasingly significant in the discourse of the knowledge economy (Dale, 2005) and notable in the debates about language policy and second language acquisition. It can be argued that as language policy ideals are linked to a desired geopolitical future, there is a heightened awareness of the significance of developing language skills as part of national capacity building. As Pang (2005) observed "the emerging thinking is that the capacity of a nation to remain competitive globally depends on whether its citizens are educated and sufficiently skilled for work in the future, and not on capital and technology as before" (p. 161). This paper contends that an analysis of a major Australian language policy initiative, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* (Rudd, 1994), has international significance for language policy development. For like many nations responding to global challenges, Australia has only one official language and no other language than English is widely used, yet it seeks to develop relationships with other nations where different languages are spoken. Concomi-

tantly, educational provision as well as multicultural thinking often contribute to language policy prescription in those nations whose citizens are skilled in more than one language. Given that national capacity building in second language provision has domestic as well as external considerations, this investigation of the Report's policy implementation in the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy also provides insights into the challenges of establishing other languages in the school curriculum for language educators throughout the world.

In December 1992, heads of government from the states, territories and the Commonwealth at the annual Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting debated the need to increase the proficiency of Asian languages and cultures skills in Australia. At this time there was increasing awareness that although Australia's national language, English, was growing as an international language, it was not adequate to meet the needs of learners in a multi-lingual world and the Asian region in particular. At the conclusion of this meeting, COAG members established a high level working group to prepare a report on the then-current level of Commonwealth and State commitment toward Asian language and culture education in Australia. This group was also asked to propose a framework designed to implement a national Asian languages and cultures program in Australian primary and secondary schools by the end of the 1990s.

This was a momentous task, for whilst "Australia is rich in its linguistic potential, offering a wealth of languages" (Clyne, 1993, p. 53), competing legitimate demands for the provision of language study within the nation, meant that the teaching and learning of languages in Australia was contested. As Carr and Pauwels (2006, p. 5) observed, even the nomenclature for languages used in the community and learned in schools was disputed. This paper contends that three categories of languages had a claim on government and community support in Australia by the early 1990s. These were strategically important languages, such as Chinese (Mandarin) and Indonesian; traditionally taught European languages such as French and German; and community languages, such as Italian and Greek. Moreover, as will be seen, any attempt to formulate national education policy in the Australian federal system had to be negotiated through multi-layered individual state and territory education bureaucracies as well as different bureaucracies at the Commonwealth level. This process was highly complex, time consuming and frequently contested.

In February 1994, the COAG working group presented its report, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* (Rudd, 1994). This Report is referred to as the Rudd Report in this paper, after the Chair of the Working Group that produced it, Kevin Rudd. Rudd was the most influential public servant in the Queensland government at this time, and a key advocate of engagement with Asia and the teaching of Asian languages. Rudd is currently Leader of Federal Labor's Opposition. In framing its strategic focus, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* (1994) observed that numerous reports before it emphasised the need for Australians to have Asian languages and cultures skills. Accordingly, this part of the paper provides a brief overview of both the advocacy for Asian languages and cultures in Australia and the inertia that prevented a national strategy from being implemented prior to the Rudd Report's acceptance in 1994.

In 1969, the Auchmuty Report argued for Asian studies to be accorded "parity of esteem" with the study of European languages and cultures in the Australian education system (Auchmuty, 1969) and concluded that "Asian languages are not sufficiently widely available at secondary level" (p. 90). Auchmuty's (1969) prescient justification that "practical arguments" (p. 20) such as "the steady growth in economic, cultural, political and military links between Asia and Australia during the last two decades" (p. 20) indicated that the "reappraisal of Australia's traditional attitudes towards Asia" (p. 11) would have to commence in the classroom continued to resonate in the calls that followed. Indeed, between 1969 -1994, some 40 government and non-government policies, documents, committees, working parties and organisations "explored aspects of the need for Australians to learn Asian languages and cultures" (Henderson, 1999, p. 61). The prevailing concern evident in those documents and policies which focused on the need to teach Asian languages and studies in Australia was that knowledge about Asia was essential for the national interest. At specific times, such documents have intersected with other government policies on languages, and with policies and reports on education reform, business, trade and economic matters. However, "what is striking about the policy arguments for Asian studies is that they have independently pur-

sued the placement of Asian studies on the education agenda in terms of Australia's national interest" (Henderson, 1999, p. 64).

This paper contends that the national interest¹ rationale shifted in emphasis as national Labor governments began to view second languages as a national resource, and to acknowledge Asia as the regional key to solving Australia's immediate and long term economic problems (Henderson, 2003). As successive national governments in the period from 1983 drew education into the process of micro-economic reform, the language of policy prescription and the language of policy debate about the study of Asian languages and cultures reflected an increasing preoccupation with economism. Moreover, these debates intensified as those groups opposed to Asian languages and studies condemned the growing emphasis on Asian languages. Such opposition can be categorised in four ways. First was the assumption that as English was the international language of business it was not necessary to teach Asian languages. Second was the argument that Asian languages might undermine the "Europeaness" of Australia's cultural heritage and therefore European languages were the appropriate "foreign" languages to be taught. The third view extended this position and its advocates argued that the study of character-based languages such as Chinese (Mandarin) and Japanese took too long to master and therefore should not be taught in schools. Fourth, advocates of community-based languages claimed that government resources should meet the needs of migrant groups in Australia. Concomitantly, other groups argued for control over the policy process so that their beliefs, and their preferences for the sort of Asia literacy required in the national interest, would be manifested in policy prescription. The intensification of this debate also reflected wider concerns about the government's mandate to make language policy and education policy in the national interest.

Indeed, this consistent struggle over what sort of knowledge was most valuable and who should make the policy decisions about it, intensified to such a degree that a national strategy for Asia literacy became hamstrung. Moreover, as noted earlier, the Constitutional division of powers in Australia² meant that policy implementation in education was essentially a shared and highly complex business between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories³. It can be argued that the national government, cognisant of the potential political fall-out from some of the powerful language lobby groups, was reluctant to exercise its mandate in this matter and passed the issue back to the States. Hence, from 1991 responsibility for prioritising which Languages Other Than English (LOTEs) would be studied in schools was effectively left to the States and they determined the outcome with reference to the politics of that matter within their own constituencies. Similarly, the implementation of Asian studies across the curriculum remained the prerogative of the States.

The 1992 COAG brief provided the opportunity to establish a long term strategy for Asia-literacy by framing it as a cooperative policy between the Commonwealth and the States. The use of COAG as the forum to generate political leadership on a national policy direction for Asian languages and cultures instead of the existing structure for national education policy making, the intergovernmental council made up of all State, Territory and federal Ministers for Education - the Australian Education Council (AEC)⁴ was most significant. Given the succession of past policy failures, advocates for a national strategy such as Rudd, and Queensland's Premier at the time, Wayne Goss, were cognisant that an Asian languages and cultures strategy would only take effect if it received political endorsement at the COAG level of power by federal *and* State leaders⁵.

The assumption underpinning this model was that the interests of both levels of government would be met and result in an outcome that was in Australia's national interest. COAG's mandate gave the Intergovernmental Working Group, chaired by Rudd, unprecedented authority in drafting policy prescription, and the brief made explicit that the overarching focus for a national strategy was to facilitate "Australia's economic interests in the Asia-Pacific region" (Rudd, 1994, p. i). Moreover, this paper contends that Rudd was not only cognisant that previous debates had undermined the political will to implement policy prescription, but he was also aware that it was the economic rationale which carried the most authority in convincing politicians of the need for a national strategy for Asia literacy.

In recommending an increasing focus on languages acquisition, the Report stressed that the number of Year 12 students studying a second language had fallen dramatically in Australia.

In the late 1960s, almost 40% of year 12s studied a second language. By 1982, this figure had fallen to 16.1%. In 1992 only 12.5% of Year 12 students were studying a second language ... (s)ignificantly, less than 4% of Year 12 students today are studying an Asian language. (Rudd, 1994, p. iii)

Such figures were “noted with concern” (Rudd, 2005, p. 2) at the COAG meeting. The Working Group’s recommendations that State and Territory Governments endorse the 1991 Commonwealth White Paper (Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), 1991a, 1991b) targets of having 25 per cent of Year 12 students studying a second language were “welcomed” (Rudd, 2005, p. 2). Further, the COAG Communiqué noted that Governments would aim to achieve that target through a 10 year strategy, commencing in the 1996 school year, comprising of programs outlined in the Report.

After “considerable debate” (Rudd, personal communication, December 4, 1998), COAG accepted the Report and endorsed its recommendations with one with one exception⁶, on 25 February 1994 at its Hobart⁷ meeting. COAG “noted the importance of the development of a comprehensive understanding of Asian languages and cultures through the Australian education system if Australia is to maximise its economic interests in the Asia-Pacific region” (Rudd, 1994, p. i). As Rudd observed, “(p)ut simply, it was a fusion of political and bureaucratic willpower which came together to transform it from a strategy, into a reality” (Rudd, 2005, p. 4). Indeed, following COAG’s acceptance, Rudd put on the public record his acknowledgement of the magnitude of such bipartisan agreement across the levels of state and federal government. According to Rudd, the decision to fund the Report at a time of budgetary constraints was

unusual, considering the spinoffs will not be apparent for many years. “If the country is going to bite the bullet on what is a very long-term strategy, then it needs to start now. It is a refreshing and visionary decision by Labor and Liberal governments to focus not just on the short term.” (Rudd, cited in Roberts, 1994, p. 20)

2 The Report’s policy prescription

Asian Languages and Australia’s Economic Future (1994) emphasised that a national Asian languages and cultures strategy should be developed in the context of second language provision. To this end, it recommended that four priority Asian languages, selected for their economic significance to Australia, and studied through a school-based program, form the thrust of an Asian languages/cultures initiative in the Australian education system. The languages chosen were Japanese, Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian and Korean. The Report recommended that these language priorities be periodically reviewed against future regional developments (Rudd, 1994, p. 44). As noted, the Report endorsed the Commonwealth’s 1991 White Paper targets, however, it recommended that the target date be extended from 2000 to 2006. Significantly, the Report recommended that 15% of Year 12 students should study a priority Asian language while the remaining 10% study other languages by this date. Further, it was recommended that 60% of Year 10 students should study a priority Asian language by 2006.

The Report also addressed the issue of language proficiency and recommended that Education Ministers develop proficiency scales, testing and reporting mechanisms for the four priority Asian languages and that specific targets be established for a school based national program. Further, the Report recommended that Asian cultures courses be developed within the Key Learning Area of Studies of Society and Environment, and that proficiency outcomes which reflect appropriate learning in this area be determined by the beginning of the 1996 school year. As McKay (2005) observed, the construction and implementation of standards, also called outcomes-based curricula, by governments was driven by neo-liberal ideology, “not simply by principles of educational philosophy” (p. 244). As noted, during the years immediately prior to the commissioning and accep-

tance of the Rudd Report, the assumption that national education was indispensable to economic recovery, was driving many education reforms in Australia. Ironically, the years of lobbying by Australian Asianists for a national strategy for Asian studies which culminated in the *National Strategy* (Asian Studies Council, 1988) and the Ingleson Report (Asian Studies Council, 1989), coincided with the peak period of policy reforms by the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in the Hawke Government, John Dawkins (1989–1991), notably to the higher education sector. The prioritising of Asian studies in certain government policy documents, such as the Higher Education White Paper (Dawkins, 1988), was debated by policy group elites. The concern was that the link between the utilitarian outcomes of Asian studies with government policy moves to integrate the Australian economy in the Asian region, appeared to downgrade the intellectual, philosophical and cultural rationales for studying Asian languages and cultures (Healy, 1990).

When Paul Keating became Prime Minister in 1991, the emphasis on making explicit links between education, training and work coalesced with the micro-economic push for the standardisation of observable outcomes evident in the major education reports to come out of this period, such as the Finn Report (Australian Education Council, 1991), the Mayer Report (Mayer, 1992) and the Carmichael Report (Employment and Skills Formation Council, 1992). Indeed, the Rudd Report argued that “it was pointless developing an expanded school-based program in Asian languages/cultures unless we have some means of measuring its long term effectiveness ... quantitative targets ... provide one basis of measuring program outcomes. But these must be integrated with appropriate qualitative measures capable of assessing proficiency outcomes” (Rudd, 1994, p. x). In this sense the Report reflected both the political nature of its origins and the impact of changing regional circumstances on Australia’s export competitiveness, for it was “prepared in the context of a concerted national policy effort over recent years involving all levels of government aimed at the internationalisation of the Australian economy” (Rudd, 1994, p. ii).

Notable in the Report’s recommendations was that second language learning be mandated during the compulsory years of schooling and that Year 3 be considered as the most appropriate starting age for studying a second language. The Report also tackled the number of hours required for second language proficiency, and stipulated that 2.5 hours of instruction per week for each year of study was required for Years 3 to 10, and that 3 hours per week was necessary for Years 11 and 12.

The Report recommended that a minimum national standard for Asian language teachers be developed to ascertain levels of proficiency; that a strategy to ensure the required number of appropriately proficient Asian language teachers be established; that curriculum statements and frameworks for the priority languages be established and that teaching materials be developed for Asian languages and cultures education. The impact of projected higher Asian languages/cultures proficiency outcomes on TAFE and university courses was considered and the Report recommended that a high level working group from the relevant authorities investigate the implications for course offerings.

Three broad programs were recommended as the implementation machinery for the Report’s policy priorities. The first was a school-based program to cover Year 3–10 and Years 11–12 languages and cultures programs. First titled the Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (ALSAS) program, it would become known as the National Asian Languages and Studies (NAL-SAS) strategy during the first term of its implementation. The second program was concerned with a smaller number of schools and focused on an Asian Language Immersion (ALI) program. The third program dealt with an optional Year 13 course, offered on a scholarship basis, to facilitate “in country” language study before tertiary study.

Of course, such broad-ranging and long-term national programs for Asian languages and cultures education required extensive funding, and the Report was explicit in how this was to be achieved. It presented details of costing for the period from 1995 to 2006 and recommended that each year a 50% contribution from the Commonwealth be matched by a 50% contribution from the States. As Lingard (1994, p. 6) observed, the Report “seems to be of a piece with the drive towards a more unified, collaborative national curriculum strongly pursued by John Dawkins as Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training)⁸. The Report’s core theme was developed

through its economic rationale for an Asian languages/cultures strategy and its emphasis on the human capital view of students. The Report was explicit about its purpose. It focused on “Asian languages and complementary Asian cultures education in Australian schools as a means of enhancing Australian economic interests in East Asia” (Rudd, 1994, p. ii). It must be noted that the Report did not envisage language proficiency as an end in itself, rather the Report’s long-term goal was to link Asian language proficiency with other professional skills. These emphases supported the policy push for an export culture.

Moreover, the Report was at pains to link its policy prescription with the Commonwealth government’s micro-economic reform agenda. According to the Report, the school-based strategy was the only means “to achieve the sort of high-level language outcomes sought for the priority languages identified in the report - particularly given the length, continuity and intensity of instruction needed to achieve those outcomes” (Rudd, 1994, p. 96). As Wilson (1995) put it “(w)hat has made this Report different is that it has overtly, one might say unashamedly, linked language learning in schools to national economic performance and put considerable resources, some A\$1442.2 million for the period 1995-2006, to realising its goals” (p. 98).

The Report’s observation that “(o)nly through the school system will long-term, sustainable generational change in attitudes to the East Asian region be realised” (Rudd, 1994, p. 98) reiterated the emphases of the Asian Studies Council’s *National Strategy* (1988) and the Ingleson Report (1989). However, the Report’s broad goal of creating a “critical mass” (Rudd, 1994, p. 98)⁹ was closer to the *National Strategy* (1988) than it was to the Ingleson Report (1989), for the former advocated a three-tiered approach¹⁰ for Australia’s current and future economic interests, while Ingleson (1989) was concerned that the complementarity of Asian studies and Australian studies¹¹ be central in policy prescription. Moreover, the Rudd Report did not work within the paradigm that informed the *National Strategy* (1988) and Ingleson’s work (1989). These earlier emphases balanced the economic rationale with intellectual, philosophical and cultural rationales for learning Asian languages. Rather, the human capital paradigm was paramount, and the Report followed the dual model approach first advocated by the *National Strategy* (1988), and then endorsed by the Garnaut Report (Garnaut, 1989) and the Leal Report (Leal, Bettoni & Malcolm, 1991), for Australia needed “to integrate Asian languages/cultures skills with other professional and occupational skills of the workforce” (Rudd, 1994, p. 77).

Although the Report’s policy prescription prioritised Asian languages by stipulating that 15% of Year 12 students should study one of the four target languages by 2006, its endorsement and extension of the Commonwealth’s White Paper targets provided for an increase in other languages. Indeed, the Report’s Asian languages goals did not detract from the enrolment figures for European languages. Recommendation 5B suggested that governments “agree that the remaining 10% of the Year 12 target be met by studying other languages (up from the present figure of 8%)” (Rudd, 1994, p. x). This paper argues that this was a strategic move designed to steer the accent on priority Asian languages in the Report past attempts to politicise and undermine it¹². One reviewer candidly observed “(e)ducation authorities regard the European languages traditionally taught here as being of little practical benefit - either to the economy or to students - but they will remain available” (Roberts, 1994, p. 21). The Report’s advocacy of second language learning expansion in Australia meant that

these policy goals will not detract from the numbers of students currently studying the more traditional European languages. Neither ought they reduce the availability of what are usually referred to as community languages, which are supported by various ethnic groups in Australia and which have usually been tied to the broader goals of multiculturalism. (Lingard, 1994, p.6)

While the Report acknowledged that the study of Asian societies was significant, it did not afford cultures equal emphasis in the Report. Rather, the Report’s central assumption that its policy prescription should be set in the context of overall second language provision drove the allocation of resources. In plain terms, this meant that Asian studies would be the “poor relation” in the im-

plementation process. According to Wilson (1995), the long term impact of the Report's strategy would result in

the rather paltry amount, of some A\$32.0 million, for Asian studies apart from languages, especially when viewed against the total of \$1442.2 million, over the period 1995-2000. There is no provision thereafter for Asian studies while language provision continues to receive funding of well over A\$100.0 million per annum until 2006. (p. 112)

The Rudd Report dealt explicitly with two components of teacher training for the priority languages, that is the number of teachers and the quality of such teachers. Indeed, Rudd put on the public record his acknowledgement of the lack of trained second language teachers and the implications of this for the Report's strategy.

Rudd says, funding aside, the present supply of qualified teachers is inadequate to begin the language program immediately. "That's why it needs to be taken gradually over the next decade." (Rudd, cited in Roberts, 1994, p. 21)

To sum up, the Rudd Report fulfilled its brief to establish a strategic framework for "the implementation of a comprehensive Asian languages and cultures program in Australian schools" (Rudd, 1994, p. 1) in four ways. First, it was informed by the original terms of reference and this was reflected in the structure and content of the Report. Second, the Report was driven by the two assumptions which informed the brief¹³. Third, the Report's rationale for the selection of the four priority Asian languages, and its long term strategy, derived from the statistical evidence of the East Asia Analytical Unit. This meant that those economies and markets in Asia deemed at the time to be most significant for Australia's potential trade interests over the next twenty years were prioritised. Fourth, the Report's long term strategy was cognisant of the current efforts by all Australian jurisdictions in Asian languages and cultures education. Of course, the issue of whether the acquisition of Asian language skills directly contributes to increased export earnings was, and remains, contested.

However, although this was "a clever report" which operated "within the terms of reference given it by COAG" (Lingard, 1994, p. 6), a core issue lay unresolved throughout the Report's drafting and, as will be seen, this was most significant for its implementation. This issue was related to the fact that some Commonwealth bureaucrats in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) were reluctant to commit funds for the Report's implementation. The funding issue continued to be problematic and was not resolved until July, 1995.

3 The Report's reception

The responses to *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future* (Rudd, 1994) can be categorised in three ways. First, were those reviews which acknowledged and applauded the Report's pragmatism and policy achievement. COAG's acceptance that the Report's implementation costs should be shared, was noted in terms of

something of a broader agreement across the spectrum of Australian Party politics of the desirable nature of Australia's economic future and the role that education and training are to play in relation to it. (Lingard, 1994, p. 6)

Similarly, Singh (1996) remarked

no doubt others are as puzzled as they are envious to see the Liberal and Labor constituents of the Council of Australian Governments apparently agree to support the funding of the \$200 million for the initial implementation of this proposal. (p. 157)

Wilson (1995) observed “(f)or once, the Commonwealth and the States and Territories are agreed ...” (p. 98), while even the Rudd Report’s most trenchant critic, the Australian Language and Literacy Council (ALLC), noted that

no other single report, since the release of *The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* and the National Statement and Profile on Languages Other Than English, has had the impact upon Commonwealth, State and Territory policy in language education that *Asian Languages and Australia’s Economic Future* has enjoyed. (ALLC, 1996, p. 52)

The second and third set of reviews revolved around the debate about who should control education policy. Some reviews in the second strand critiqued the Report as an example of high level, centralised government policy making that was removed from education departments and their forums for deciding policy. Accordingly, the Report was placed in the continuum of federal Labor’s micro-economic education reform agenda and critiqued for its instrumentalism.

The most strident attack against the Report was first made by Rodney Cavalier, the Chair of the Australian Language and Literacy Council, in his address to a Language Expo, sponsored by the National Languages and Literacy Institute (NLLIA), held in Sydney during July 1994. Cavalier’s address itemised fourteen points of criticism against the Report. These views were then published in the NLLIA’s July edition of *Australian Language Matters*. Although Cavalier’s (1994) public criticisms were flawed, Wilson’s (1995) *caveat* was most significant. He observed that Cavalier’s arguments were dangerous because they contained “sufficient truth to be superficially convincing” (p. 99) and that his conclusions appeared valid “only because of the omission or exclusion of other, related factors” (p. 99).

Cavalier’s (1994) fourteen points of criticism can be summarised as focussing on the Rudd Report’s national economic interest rationale, its advocacy of compulsory second language learning, its lack of attention to the concept of what constituted appropriate second language teacher training and the advocacy of certain languages above others. Cavalier’s assumption that there was no need for Asian language policy prescription was hardly surprising, for he argued in his own report¹⁴ that English was the language of international business and that government language education policy must “support diversity” (ALLC, 1994, p. 30) instead of determining priority languages on the premise that “prevailing verities will be a constant” (p. 30). As well, Cavalier (1994) alleged that the Report was silent on pedagogy, that its targets were unrealistic for inadequately trained teachers, and that ill-conceived methods and conscripted students could not attain the quality of second language learning the Rudd Report wanted to achieve.

Cavalier’s subsequent attacks in 1996 revealed his depth of resentment of high level policy making that went beyond the usual education forums. What was disturbing about these attacks was that they were made under the auspices of the Australian Language and Literacy Council’s (ALLC) report into the supply and quality of teachers of languages other than English - *Language Teachers: The Pivot of Policy* (ALLC, 1996). The thrust of the ALLC’s (1996) report was that “those responsible have not worked the policies through into practice” (p. 3). As Rizvi (1997) observed, it was

highly unusual for government reports to criticise strongly policies which have yet to be fully implemented ... The ALLC report accuses governments of setting meaningless targets, of not doing enough to train more qualified teachers, and of developing plans devoid of an understanding of the conditions under which teachers work. (p. 111)

According to the ALLC’s standpoint, the Rudd Report’s strategy represented

a classic case of ambitious and massively expensive policy goals, unsupported by adequate numbers of fluent language teachers able to demonstrate the competencies required of a language teacher. (ALLC, 1996, p. 180)¹⁵

However, it must be noted that Cavalier had another agenda in this criticism, for as noted above, his previous report, *Speaking of Business* (1994), had coincided with the release of the Rudd Report in February 1994, and was based on the assumption that English was the language of international business. The Rudd Report had been at pains to debunk this conjecture, most notably at the level of small business. The ALLC's report claimed with reference to the number of LOTE teachers required

(t)he Council of Australian Governments" report is not convincing in its claim that "only 40 per cent will be additional permanent language teacher numbers". This is in stark contrast to the conservative estimate of the Australian Language and Literacy Council that the figure would be much closer to a 500 per cent increase. (ALLC, 1996, p. 55)

Knight and Lingard (1997) argued that the Rudd Report's political derivation augured poorly for implementation and cited the critiques levelled against the Report in *Language Teachers: the Pivot of Policy* (ALLC, 1996) as

indicative to some extent of the catastrophic consequences in implementation terms of policy developed politically at such a distance from professional knowledge. (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p. 41)

Similarly, the Report's acceptance through the COAG process "rather than the relevant ministerial council" (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p. 40) was characterised as an example of the general trend in government decision making "remote from the usual education policy communities" (p. 40). The Report was criticised by teacher educators for having unrealistic goals divorced from the realities of practice. Wilson's (1995) observation that the Report was "silent on 'pedagogy'" (p. 108) reflected two wider interrelated problems which the Rudd Report did not address. First, how could a new educational culture which valued the teaching of second languages be established for LOTE teachers in an already overcrowded curriculum? Second, how could the contested issue of methodology be addressed, given that existing practice for LOTE teaching in Australia was informed by the theory of communicative competence and this was contested by some (Wilson, 1995; McMeniman, 1995; Henderson, 2002)? The implication was that unless both issues were addressed, the Report's recommendations would not work. Kirkpatrick (1995a) went further and argued that the Report did not allocate enough time to the teaching of script-based languages, such as Modern Standard Chinese, Japanese and Korean. Moreover, he argued that these Asian languages

should not be taught in primary schools or even at lower secondary school level to non-background speakers of these languages ... because of the relative difficulty in learning the languages. (Kirkpatrick, 1995a, p. 6)¹⁶

The third strand of reviews were informed by those educators who adopted a socio-culturalist critique and by those who utilised a post-colonial extension of this critique to claim that the Report perpetuated a "neo-Orientalist perception" (Lingard, 1994, p. 6). Those critics of government policy making who adopted a socio-cultural critique claimed that the Report underestimated "the deep ambivalence that exists in the Australian society about its engagement in Asia" (Rizvi, 1997, p. 120) and that many Australians were confused about what this meant. This argument stressed that because Australians were expected to make a shift in their thinking about Asia, they were "unclear about the extent to which this involves a rejection of the dominant European languages, values and traditions" (Rizvi, 1997, p. 19)¹⁷.

The reviews of the Report which relied upon the post-colonial critique pursued the notion of the autonomy of discourse analysis as an end in itself¹⁸. For example, Singh (1996) argued that the Report's concept of Asia-literacy represented "a discursive formation to which Australian students can attach themselves at one of three different levels" (p. 161). This was, in fact, a reference to the Report's strategy for creating a critical mass of Asia literate Australians with varying degrees of

expertise, first endorsed by the *National Strategy* (1988). This notion of Asia literacy was not a “discursive formation”, rather, it involved a realist appraisal of what the *National Strategy* defined as the “qualitative and quantitative change in the skills of Australians” (Asian Studies Council, 1988, p. 11). Several educators (Rizvi, 1997, Williamson-Fien, 1996, Singh, 1996) regarded this notion of Asia literacy as “part of a new kind of neo-colonialist project” (Singh, 1996, p. 160). According to this view, the Report’s context for second language provision was inherently divisive for

Asian languages occupy a contradictory space, being simultaneously the languages for connecting Australia with currents throughout Asia, and a line demarcating and reproducing existing privilege. (Singh, 1996, p. 162)

However, no evidence was employed to clarify or substantiate this claim, which drew upon Said’s (1978/1991) conception of Orientalism¹⁹, and seemed to infer that Australian engagement involved processes of “connection” that advantaged Australia and disadvantaged Asia.

There was, however, some significance in the critiques of the Report’s political genesis and its instrumental policy prescription. That is, because the members of the Working Group wanted to produce a policy prescription that was acceptable to politicians at the COAG forum, they drafted the Report within the assumption that linguistic competence would contribute to economic performance. Rudd was resolute that this economic argument mattered and that a broader rationale would not have secured political support (Rudd, personal communication, December 4, 1998).

4 Implementation in the first quadrennium

COAG endorsed the Rudd Report’s suggestion that the implementation period should commence in 1995, and, that this process should be overseen and directed by a high level national steering committee. The formation and location of this committee was initially contested amongst some jurisdictions (Henderson, 1999), however, the matter was finally resolved when the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) established the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Taskforce in September 1994. Once established, the Taskforce was promoted as a co-operative initiative in the partnership between the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and non-government education authorities. It had an independent Chair, Professor Colin Mackerras from Griffith University, and membership consisted of high level representatives from State and Territory government and non-government schools and systems, together with representatives from the Commonwealth, the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, MCEETYA, and the Vocational Education and Training sector²⁰. A Commonwealth-funded Secretariat supported Taskforce operations, and it was based in the Languages and Cultures Unit of the Department of Education in Queensland.

The Taskforce’s agenda was determined by four specific terms of reference, outlined by MCEETYA. First, the Taskforce was required to develop a detailed implementation plan for NALSAS, to be ratified by MCEETYA, based on the endorsed recommendations of the Rudd Report. Second, the Taskforce had to facilitate the collaborative implementation of NALSAS. Third, it was to develop “and facilitate the implementation of a publicity/awareness strategy of the importance of Asian languages/cultures education” (NALSAS Taskforce, 1996a, p. 1). Fourth, the Taskforce had to provide an annual report to MCEETYA. As well, COAG was to receive a Taskforce report for the first three years of its operation.

Essentially, the NALSAS Taskforce was responsible for the co-ordination of the Strategy, while the responsibility for implementing it rested with State and Territory education authorities in the partnership. The Rudd Report made clear that certain issues had to be addressed if its policy goals were to be achieved. These were the “problems of language teacher competence and supply” (Rudd, 1994, p.127); the “development and provision of quality curricula and related teaching resources for programs in Asian languages and studies” (p. 129); and the “development of distance learning Asian languages and Asian studies programs” (p. 130).

The magnitude of coordinating this task was complicated by the fact that the Strategy's funding arrangement was contested between the Commonwealth and the partners. This was not resolved until July 1995 and resulted in the Taskforce receiving only 5% of the Commonwealth NALSAS contribution²¹. Moreover, the Commonwealth stipulated that this allocation was to be used for collaborative projects with a national focus, and approved by the Minister. Accordingly, the Taskforce prioritised the development of infrastructures which facilitated addressing issues such as teacher training and professional development, curriculum materials, and distance education as its goals. The assumption was that this approach would gradually impact upon LOTE teacher supply and quality, materials production and modes of delivery across the jurisdictions and support the partners' efforts to achieve the Strategy's participation target goals for 2006. These were reflected in the NALSAS Strategy Implementation Plan, presented to the fourth MCEETYA meeting on 8 December 1995. The wording of the Preamble to this plan noted that the Taskforce had

interpreted its terms of reference to focus on the collaborative strategies for the implementation of the NALSAS on the understanding that, in addition, individual jurisdictions have their own implementation plans in support of the strategy. (NALSAS Taskforce, 1995, p. 2)

Indeed, the Implementation Plan Format was designed so that each recommendation of the Rudd Report²² was paralleled by a "Responsibility lies with" column indicating the Taskforce's interpretation of whether the recommendations were to be collaborative "as distinct from being a matter for individual jurisdictions" (National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Taskforce, 1995, p. 2). It might be argued that this format was simply an effective means of delineating responsibilities in the implementation process. However, this paper contends the format evinced the delicate balancing act the Taskforce had to negotiate as it steered the implementation process between the demands of different jurisdictions. Moreover, as foreshadowed with reference to the political and structural constraints on the Taskforce, this balancing act was a subset of broader debates between the States and Territories with the Commonwealth about funding the Strategy and who was in control of the Taskforce (Henderson, 1999).

In determining whether the Taskforce achieved the implementation goals established during the first term of its operation, data was analysed from two reviews of the Taskforce. The first was a Ministerial Review commissioned by the newly elected Howard government's Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, David Kemp, during 1996 (DEETYA, 1997). The second involved a major evaluation commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA, 1998), and contracted out to the Faculty of Asian Studies at the Australian National University during the second half of 1997. It is referred to as the ANU Review in this paper. Other data was obtained from Taskforce reports to MCEETYA, notably *Partnership for Change* (NALSAS Taskforce, 1998), Workgroup reports to the Taskforce, and minutes from Taskforce meetings.

It must be noted that inconsistencies with the collection of comparative national data made it difficult to identify precisely what the Taskforce achieved by the end of 1998. Part of the problem with identifying accurate quantitative data can be explained by the differences within the stakeholders across the States and Territories, and within the government and non-government sector. This difficulty was not restricted to the priority languages, for example, despite the efforts of the MCEETYA Taskforce on School Statistics (TOSS), and the languages working party that was formed under it, efforts to ascertain national data on a number of issues concerning *all* languages study in Australian schools were problematic.

With reference to the priority languages, the funding agreement finally negotiated between the partners and the Commonwealth enabled individual jurisdictions to set their own developmental targets whilst they worked to achieve those recommended in the Rudd Report. Also, the long-term nature of the Strategy, and the fact that some jurisdictions could not commence the NALSAS initiative from the start of 1995 because of a lack of infrastructure and trained teachers, meant that the implementation process varied considerably during the early phase.

Moreover, although some systems endorsed the notion of data collection procedures, others objected “to the resource implications of annual data collection” (DEETYA, 1998, p. 15). Tensions between the Commonwealth and the States were evident in the fact that some systems wanted clarification about “the use the Commonwealth intends to make of the data” (p. 15) and resisted efforts for accountability (A. Langdon, personal communication, November 25, 1998). For example, some systems feared that if their figures indicated favourable progress, the Commonwealth might conclude that the jurisdiction was capable of continuing the program through its own resources and withdraw funding. Similarly, if progress was slow, the fear was the Commonwealth might decide that further funding was not worthwhile and withdraw funding. Because of this uncertainty, some systems were reluctant to provide accurate figures. Such ambivalence was compounded because of the uncertainty of the Commonwealth’s long term commitment to funding the Strategy.

With respect to languages, it was not possible to draw any conclusions in terms of qualitative targets, as the Commonwealth, States and Territories had not reached agreement on the most appropriate means of measuring and recording this data. Yet, as part of its concern to develop exit proficiency outcomes for senior secondary school students, the Taskforce had commissioned a team of experts to focus on two tasks. These were, first to develop a generic framework and procedures for describing student proficiency outcomes and second, to develop language specific descriptors for four different levels of exit proficiency for secondary schools students in Japanese²³.

Obviously, it was a matter of time before such work impacted across jurisdiction, for, despite the recommendations of the Rudd Report (see Recommendation 5C in Rudd, 1994, p. 108), by 1997, national proficiency monitoring relied upon Year 12 enrolments and reports from various Boards of Studies on standards achieved by candidates in each State and Territory. Likewise, a commitment from the Commonwealth government was required to increase the emphasis upon proficiency. As the ANU report observed,

(s)tate policies of offering languages in all schools mean that enrolments are given higher priority than proficiency. Unless the Commonwealth gives priority to emphasising proficiency, it seems unlikely that this emphasis will change. (DEETYA, 1998, p. 10)

This preference amongst systems for quantitative measurements hampered Taskforce efforts to identify qualitative descriptors and recording mechanisms. Nevertheless, the Taskforce pursued its goals, and the following section details the achievements of its collaborative work as categorised in the recent *Partnership for Change* report (NALSAS Taskforce, 1998, pp. 12–19) to the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

Despite the limitations of data collection and the work to be done on identifying qualitative outcomes, some important conclusions can be drawn from the Strategy’s implementation. By way of illustration, the 1996 National Report on Schooling in Australia (ANR) (MCEETYA, 1996) and individual jurisdiction accountability reports to the Commonwealth to 1997 provided enough data to indicate that by 1996 three of the priority languages, Chinese (Mandarin), Japanese and Indonesian, were part of the 12 Asian languages taught in all the States and Territories²⁴.

Most significantly, at the broadest level, the achievements of the NALSAS strategy were reflected in the increasing number of students studying an Asian language. Indeed, the number of government primary and secondary school students studying an Asian language grew by more than 50% from 323 769 in 1994 to 517 730 in 1997 (NALSAS Taskforce, 1998, p. iii). The figures for 1997-98 indicated that more than 600,000 Australian students, or 20% of the current school population, were studying an Asian language²⁵. In the three Catholic commissions where data has been collected since 1994, more than a 50% increase was recorded in enrolments for Asian languages. The number of government schools offering the target Asian languages increased from 2573 schools in 1994²⁶ to 3693 in 1997 (p. iii). Notably, this figure had risen to almost 4000 government schools across the nation, or approximately 53.4% of the national total, by 1998. By this time, over 1000 schools had participated in the Access Asia program (p. 6).

This expansion in the number of government and non-government schools offering the priority languages and studies demonstrated the increasing emphasis on Asian languages and studies policy across the jurisdictions. This paper suggest that it also indicated that education systems were undergoing a cultural transformation and recognising the educational and strategic benefits of a long term commitment to Asian languages and studies in the school curriculum. The formative aspects of this period were also important, for they set in motion the processes which, by 1998, resulted in approximately 2500 teachers trained or retrained in the four priority languages (p. 9), and in the number of teachers who experienced professional development in Asian languages and studies of Asia. It was significant that NALSAS established the national infrastructure for this, whilst education authorities across the jurisdictions developed the infrastructure to implement training and professional development courses locally. These achievements were considerable and demonstrated that despite the difficulties the Taskforce faced, the implementation period to 1998 was most successful. It established a firm foundation for the Strategy's long-term focus and goal that the Strategy would be fully implemented by 2006 (Rudd, 1994, p. 137).

5 Implementation in the second quadrennium and the cessation of Commonwealth funding

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) commissioned a further evaluation of the NALSAS Strategy during its second quadrennium in 2001. Significantly, the review noted "(t)he overall conclusion to be drawn from the evidence available for evaluation is that, while significant progress continues to be made towards the achievements of the NALSAS agenda, the program is not yet at a stage where continued implementation would be sustained by jurisdictions without continued Commonwealth support" (Erebus Consulting Partners, 2002, p. xii). The review recommended that the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) be encouraged to make a strong commitment to the NALSAS objectives through a national position statement. It suggested that the 1994 targets, that 60% of Year 10 and 15% of Year 12 students would be studying a NALSAS languages by 2006, were "overly ambitious" and that "more realistic targets should now be set" (Erebus Consulting Partners, 2002, p. xiii). The 2001 evaluation also recommended that assessment of student outcomes through a national sample survey at Year 6/7 and Year 10 in Japanese and Indonesian occur in 2003 and then every four years, adding the assessment of Chinese in future years. Significantly, the review recommended that to capitalise on the gains made so far, and to ensure they become further embedded in the curriculum of Australian schools, Commonwealth funding for the NALSAS strategy be continued for a further quadrennium in declining annual amounts.

Despite the recommendations of this evaluation, on 2 May 2002, the (then) Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, announced days before the 2002/3 release of the Federal Budget, that the Howard Government would terminate its A\$120 million commitment to NALSAS. At the time of Brendan Nelson's announcement approximately "785,355 students across Australia were studying one of the four NALSAS languages" (Rudd, 2005, p. 10). Commonwealth funding ceased in December 2002 with Minister Nelson's claims that the conclusion of the second quadrennium of NALSAS was the natural time to finish the program and that it was also timely to give the program over to the States and Territories. Yet at the COAG meeting of 1994, the Commonwealth had endorsed the *long-term* Strategy until at least 2006 and finally agreed to fund 50% of the costs in 1995. As Rudd observed, enormous gains had been made in establishing a culture of language learning:

(t)he Review of Studies of Asia in Australian Schools report, which had been released in early 2002, established in a survey across 1000 schools, confirmed that 73.5% of schools taught an Asian language; 25.2% taught Chinese; 31% taught Indonesian; 31.1% taught Japanese; and 2% taught Korean. (Rudd, 2005, pp. 9–10)

Significantly, in 2002 the peak body of Australian Asianists, the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA), argued in a major report that "Australia's long-standing Asia-knowledge base is in jeopardy" (ASAA, 2002, p. xvi). The ASAA report made 15 recommendations which articu-

lated how Australia might “reposition, extend and deepen its Asia knowledge in ways that will enhance security, prosperity and cultural communication” (ASAA, 2002, p. xvi). Thus whilst the ASAA report noted that there was a now a possibility that “Australia’s Asia-knowledge capacity would *decline* rather than grow – at a time when the need for it to grow, and the potential benefits from such growth, have never been greater” (ASAA, 2002, p. 3), the Howard government terminated the Commonwealth’s commitment to the NALSAS strategy. The flow-on effect between school and tertiary study in Asian languages was notable. “The teaching of Asian studies and languages is contracting so dramatically that Asian specialists are now worried that the foundations for Australia’s Asian engagement are faltering, perhaps terminally” (Gurry, 2004, p. 1). By 2004 a survey, supervised by a specialist in Chinese, Anne McLaren, at the University of Melbourne, noted that of 800,000 people studying at Australian universities, approximately 1,800 students were studying Indonesian at tertiary level during 2004, which represented a decline of 15 per cent since 2001. In 2005, Professor Robin Jeffrey, Immediate Past-President, ASAA referred to the implications of an *Australian Financial Review* (AFR) editorial which concluded that Australia needed to reinforce its capacity to work smartly in the Asian region, through public investment in the tools of being Asia-savvy as well as through trade and good neighbourliness. “Among the tools listed was language education”, (Jeffrey, 2005, p. 1). Jeffrey noted:

The AFR is right. The shortage of Asian language skills became obvious to all when agencies working to help in the tsunami relief effort cried out for those who could speak the languages of the Indian Ocean rim. It has been evident to the ASAA for some time, particularly since it began tracking enrolments in Asian languages in Australian universities in 2001. (2005, p. 1)

In a recent speech Rudd (2007, p. 2), in his capacity as Leader of Federal Labor’s Opposition, argued that “education must lie at the core of our long-term strategy for our national security” given that China and India will transform the global strategic, economic and environmental order by the middle of the next century. Such sentiments echo the strategic policy push which saw the acceptance of the NALSAS Strategy in 1994.

6 Conclusion

This paper has argued that COAG’s decision in 1994 to implement the Rudd Report was unprecedented in the history of the policy moves for Asian languages and studies in Australia. The broadest analysis of the Rudd Report suggests it can be conceptualised as evidence of the government’s capacity to prepare Australians for the reality of regional and global change. As a political, and ultimately practical solution to the inertia on developing a national strategy for Asia literacy in Australia, the Report demonstrated the use of political power in determining the kind of knowledge deemed most useful to the national interest. This paper also claims that the implementation of the Rudd Report in the NALSAS Strategy was successful in establishing the formative foundations for learning Asian languages in Australian schools. Further, it contends that the Commonwealth’s decision to terminate its funding agreement before the scheduled time, was short-sighted and undermines Australia’s future capacity for regional engagement.

Notes

¹ Of course, the national interest is a contested term and its significance varies according to the particular interest group or policy community which makes claim to it. Australian Asianists argue that Asian engagement was in the national interest because of the long term implications for Australia’s cultural, social, economic, security and strategic interests.

² As Reid (1984) noted, the government of Australian was based upon the Westminster system. Its principles, “implied but not specified in the Australian constitution, sets up lines of responsibility for decision making and implementation” (Davis, Wanna, Warhurst & Weller, 1993, p. 73). Although schooling was not mentioned in section 51 of the Constitution, which established the Commonwealth government’s powers, there were some aspects of the Constitution which permitted Commonwealth involvement in schooling. As Bor-

geest (1994) observed, the 1946 amendment to the Constitution inserted the Commonwealth's authority to provide "benefits to students" (Section 51, xxiiiA). Similarly, the States grants power of section 96 permitted the Commonwealth to make grants to the States for what the Commonwealth deemed appropriate. Borgeest (1994) claimed that this grant provision has provided the Commonwealth with a "supple source" of power in schooling and has formed the "principle foundation for the power relationships within federal financial arrangements" (p. 3). This notion of "supple power", combined with the structural factor that the Commonwealth has the greater revenue raising capacity has meant that the Commonwealth controlled the purse strings.

³ This was recognised in the first *National Report on Australian Schooling* (Australian Education Council, 1991). It noted that while the "States and Territories have major constitutional and financial responsibility for schooling ... The Commonwealth, along with States and Territories, has a significant role in identifying national priorities for schooling" (p. iii). The Commonwealth's national role was articulated in this document as "considering schooling more broadly, in the context of a nation undergoing significant social and economic adjustment and dependent upon a well-educated workforce. In cooperation with the States, the Commonwealth plays a significant role in addressing resourcing, equity and quality issues through its general recurrent, capital and specific purpose programs" (p. 1).

⁴ The Australian Education Council (1936–93) was the nation's most cogent and longstanding education forum. As part of COAG's efficiency agenda to evaluate and prune the number of peak bodies and operating councils, the AEC was replaced in late 1993 by a new intergovernmental council – the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

⁵ The Rudd Report's origins can be traced back to Queensland's LOTE policy, implemented by the (then) Education Minister in the Goss Labor Government, Paul Braddy. Goss and Rudd were convinced that Queensland's LOTE targets indicated that it was the only State likely to achieve the national goals established by the National Strategy (Asian Studies Council, 1988). See Henderson (1999).

⁶ Significantly, the Commonwealth reserved its position on Recommendation 7A, the suggested funding commitment of 50% from the Commonwealth and 50% from the States and Territories. See Rudd (1994, p. 170).

⁷ It must be noted that the political landscape had changed considerably between the first COAG meeting in Perth 1992 and the third COAG meeting in Hobart 1994 which endorsed the Working Party's Report. While Labor retained power during the 1993 federal election, Queensland was the only State with Labor in power in 1994.

⁸ The notion of this collaborative strategy stemmed from Special Premiers' Conferences held in 1990 and 1991 when the principle of national portability of goods and qualifications was endorsed. As a result of the general acknowledgement that there was considerable intersectorial overlap, the peak Vocational Education and Training (VET) body, the Ministers of Vocational Educational and Training (MOVEET) met in joint sessions with members of the peak intergovernment council for State Ministers for Education, the Australian Education Council (AEC) from 1991. The general push was for coordination between sections.

⁹ The Rudd Report's recommendations for a critical mass was similar to the policy prescription of the *National Strategy* (1988). The former called for "a strong cadre of professionals equipped with high levels of languages/cultures proficiency relevant to their particular profession; a broader group of support personnel in service industries etc where reasonable level language/cultures skills will be necessary for direct dealings with clients from regional countries; and a general familiarity across the breadth of Australian society with the historical, geographical and cultural diversity of the region reinforced with some basic familiarity with regional languages (this latter group also constituting what the Asian Studies Council refers to as the "reservoir" needed from which to derive more highly skilled "professional" and "support" groups)" (Rudd 1994, p. 98).

¹⁰ See the *National Strategy's* (1988) statement on the need for a "deep and solid layering of national educational expertise" (pp. 11–12) in Asian languages and cultures.

¹¹ See Asian Studies Council (1989, Vol. 1, p. 13).

¹² The Report did not try "to evaluate the relative merits of studying European as opposed to Asian languages. There is plainly a rationale, in part economic but principally cultural, for the continued teaching of certain European languages in the overall language programs of Australian schools. The report neither seeks to challenge this rationale nor to defend it. Rather, the working group's terms of reference makes clear that it is required to focus exclusively on developing a strategy for the implementation of comprehensive Asian languages and cultures education in Australian schools - not to debate the relative merits of "Asian" versus "European" (Rudd, 1994, p. 4).

¹³ These were "first, that East Asia is of long term economic significance to Australia; second, that there was a direct relationship between Asian languages and cultures skills and increased economic performance" (Rudd, 1994, p. 16).

¹⁴ This report, *Speaking of Business - The Needs of Business and Industry for Language Skills* (ALLC, 1994) was published under the auspices of the Australian Language and Literacy Council. Cavalier (1994) argued in the Preface to the report that “a mischief is abroad which exaggerates the economic importance of language study. It is a mischief whose twin is the hoary notion that languages, like our schools and their curriculum, should be only an extension of the transient needs of our economy. The Council rejects the exaggerated value of language study as a nonsense” (p. vii). This report argued that English was “the most widely used international language”, and that it was “the major international language for business purposes” (p. 9). Finally, it was claimed that English was an “Asian language” and “the second language of Asia” (p. 10).

¹⁵ It might be assumed from the tone of this critique that the members of the Australian Language and Literacy Council were unanimous in their attack on the Rudd Report. However, according to one Board Member, Professor Colin Mackerras, this was not the case (C. Mackerras, personal communication, November 17, 1998).

¹⁶ Kirkpatrick’s (1995a) case was that the cultures, rather than the languages, of these Asian nations should be taught along with the cultures of Anglo-European and Aboriginal Australians at this level. However, his real argument was to advance the study of Indonesian, as the only Asian language suitable to be taught across the school system because “there are several characteristics of Indonesian that make it an easier language for native English-speakers than the other three ‘languages of most importance’ as identified by DFAT and COAG” (Kirkpatrick 1995a, p. 26). Moreover, Kirkpatrick claimed that the expertise necessary for the level of small business interaction in Asia assumed in the Report’s recommended proficiency levels, could only come from “background-speakers the majority of whom will not even reach a basic level of proficiency in their chosen language given the grave discrepancy that exists between the time needed to achieve basic proficiency and the time the curriculum allows” (p. 11). See also Kirkpatrick (1995b).

¹⁷ Rizvi’s (1997) argument was that “Australians have been asked to make a decisive ideological shift in their thinking, away from the colonialist frame that has traditionally informed their perceptions of Asia to a post-colonial outlook which challenges the racist assumptions of cultural dominance and superiority. Yet most of their attempts so far to revise their thinking have at best been clumsy, with the new practices of representation failing to make a decisive break from the residual racist expressions that had rendered Asians as a homogenised mass, socially inept and culturally inferior” (pp. 199–200).

¹⁸ Singh (1996) claimed that “COAG’s Rudd Report has no sense outside the various and contradictory traditions that appropriate it. These contexts have influenced the production of the Rudd Report; they will constrain, act upon and facilitate its analysis and interpretation as much as they are likely to influence its implementation ...” (p. 158).

¹⁹ Said (1978/1991) noted that his work employed “close textual readings whose goal is to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which [the writer’s] work is a contribution” (pp. 23–24).

²⁰ According to the appointed Chair, Professor Colin Mackerras (1995), this Taskforce consisted mainly of “educational bureaucrats” (p. 95). Professor Hugh Clarke, Head of the School of Asian Studies of the University of Sydney was the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee representative on the Taskforce, while the Asian Studies profession was represented through the membership of Mackerras and Clarke. From the outset the Taskforce was dominated by State education systems and Commonwealth representatives and efforts by the Asian Studies Association of Australia for representation were rejected.

²¹ The remaining 95% of Commonwealth NALSAS funds was allocated on a per capita basis of school enrolments to the various administering authorities across the jurisdictions.

²² The Rudd Report was referred to as the COAG Report in the NALSAS Strategy Implementation Plan (1995).

²³ These were survival proficiency, minimum social, minimum vocational and useful vocational levels.

²⁴ The ARN survey noted that by 1996 the number of students studying Japanese had increased by almost 50% from 1995 figures, distinguishing it as the most widely studied language in Australia. See the *National Report on Schooling in Australia* (MCEETYA, 1996, p. 115, pp. 117–119).

²⁵ These figures reflect enrolments in government and Catholic schools, national data from independent schools was unavailable (NALSAS, 1998, p. 6).

²⁶ Data from Queensland and Tasmania were not included in this figure as their secondary school figures were unavailable.

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