

# COMMUNITY LANGUAGES AND LOTE PROVISION IN VICTORIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: MIX OR MATCH?

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Primary school languages education continues to be a challenging issue for all states in Australia. In Victoria, LOTE study is provided at the primary level to address the needs of linguistically diverse communities, as well as to provide an enriching learning experience for monolingual speakers of English. The challenge remains to ensure that programs that are run are effective, address the needs of the community and are embraced as a valuable and enriching component of the school curriculum. This study looks at the provision of LOTE in 2003 in Victorian primary schools and in particular, through an analysis of the geographical location of community groups and primary LOTE programs, how effectively community needs are being met. We also analyse the nature of LOTE programs through an examination of teachers' qualifications, time allotment and program type. Factors identified by some schools as impinging on LOTE study at the primary level, such as literacy concerns and multilingual diversity, will also be examined.

## The Victorian context

The introduction of LOTE programs in primary schools in Victoria, as part of the normal curriculum, dates back to the early 1980s with the introduction and government support of primary level community language programs. In 1983, the Victorian government employed the first supernumerary community language teachers in primary schools to aid in language maintenance and development for LOTE speakers. Initially, around 130 such teachers were employed in a small number of primary schools, supported by extra ethnic teaching aides and community language consultants (Ozolins 1993).

The greater expansion of LOTE throughout the state primary system occurred in the early 1990s, when the government adopted a policy titled *The LOTE strategy* (Victoria. Directorate of School Education. Ministerial Advisory Council on Languages Other Than English 1993), under which all primary schools were expected to develop a LOTE program. The Department of Education and Training (DE&T) recommended that students receive LOTE teaching throughout the duration of the compulsory schooling period (Prep to Year 10)<sup>1</sup>. To achieve this goal, financial support for LOTE programs was provided to schools as they agreed to introduce a language into the curriculum. From approximately 5% of schools offering a LOTE in the early 1980s, in 2003, 90.3% of primary schools offered some sort of LOTE program. Sufficient time has passed since the 1993 *LOTE strategy* for us to reflect on the extent to which that policy objective has been met, and the extent to which LOTE provision coincides with the needs of ethnic communities, especially those resident in Melbourne.

While the LOTE strategy encourages the acquisition of another language, in reality the aims of primary LOTE study in Victorian schools ranges from language acquisition at the most ambitious, to development of cultural awareness at the least ambitious. This paper reports on the current state in Victorian state schools of Victoria's major community languages. In particular, it attempts to address the following questions:

- How well do schools respond to the ethnic breakdown of their communities?
- If there is a mismatch, what are schools doing and why?
- What is the quality of LOTE provision for community languages?

These questions will be answered through a top-down, largely statistical, approach, based on three sources of information. The first source, *LOTEs in government schools, 2003* (Victoria. DE&T 2005) was produced by the Research Unit for Multilingualism and Cross-Cultural Communication at the University of Melbourne, and examines the provision of LOTE in primary and secondary state schools during normal schools hours, as well as study through the Victorian School of Languages (VSL), which provides LOTE classes on Saturdays, and through distance education. The second source involves unpublished data from the Ethnic Schools Association of Victoria (ESAV), while the third source involves home language use data from the 1996 and 2001 Australian censuses (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)).

## Community languages in Victorian society and schools

In 2003, 19 languages were offered at state government primary schools in Victoria. This study focuses specifically on the following nine community languages: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Croatian, Greek, Italian, Macedonian, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese. These languages were chosen since they represent the nine most widely spoken community languages in Victoria for all age groups (2001) (Table 1).

Language	No. of speakers 2001	No. of speakers, 1996	Percentage change
Italian	149,999	160,061	-6.3%
Greek	122,699	124,671	-1.6%
Vietnamese	63,919	54,039	+18.3%
Cantonese	60,632	53,887	+12.5%
Arabic	47,190	39,478	+19.5%
Mandarin	38,863	25,636	+51.6%
Macedonian	32,670	32,978	-0.9%
Turkish	28,496	25,843	+10.3%
Spanish	22,878	22,648	+1.0%
Croatian	25,638	25,429	+0.8%

**Table 1**

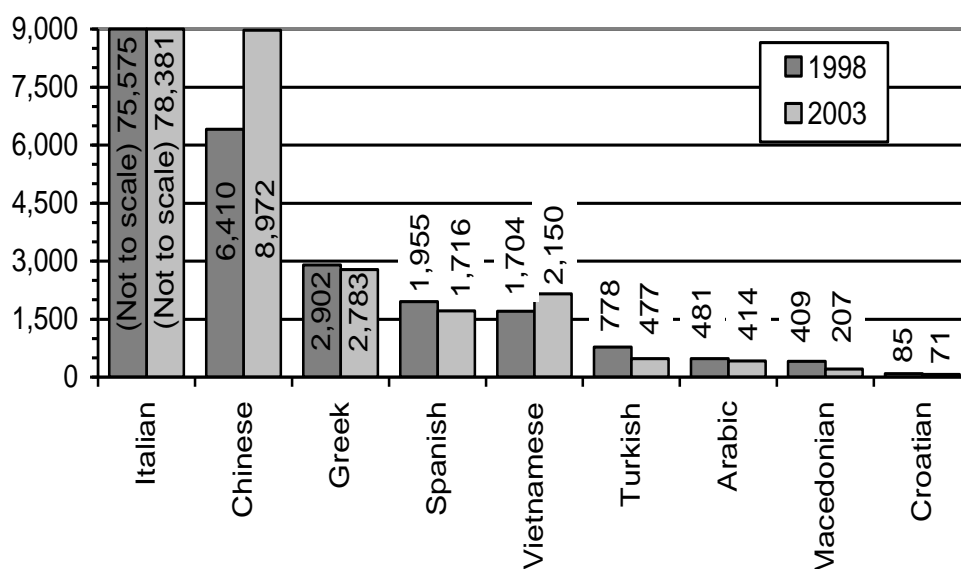
Ten top community languages in Victoria, 1996 and 2001 (Source: ABS)

A comparison of census figures (1996-2001) shows that while the number of Italian speakers is beginning to decline in Melbourne, numbers remain relatively stable for Greek, Macedonian, Croatian and Spanish. On the other hand, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Arabic and to a lesser extent, Turkish, show considerable ongoing growth.

## Availability of community languages

The nine specified community languages are available in a number of schools across Melbourne, with Italian studied by the largest number of primary age students and available in 26.0% of primary schools. The eight other community languages we are profiling are only available in 0.3 to 3.8% of primary schools. Between 1998 and 2003, enrolments in Chinese (+40.0%), Vietnamese (+26.2%) and Italian (+3.7%) have increased, while the other community languages have experienced decreases in enrolments as indicated in Figure 1. All of the community languages represented in Figure 1 that experienced a decrease in student numbers also experienced a fall in the number of schools offering the LOTEs. While it appears that the primary school sector has not responded to the increasing size of some of

the community language groups, figures from the VSL and community language schools, to be discussed shortly, provide a more detailed picture of provision for all nine community languages.

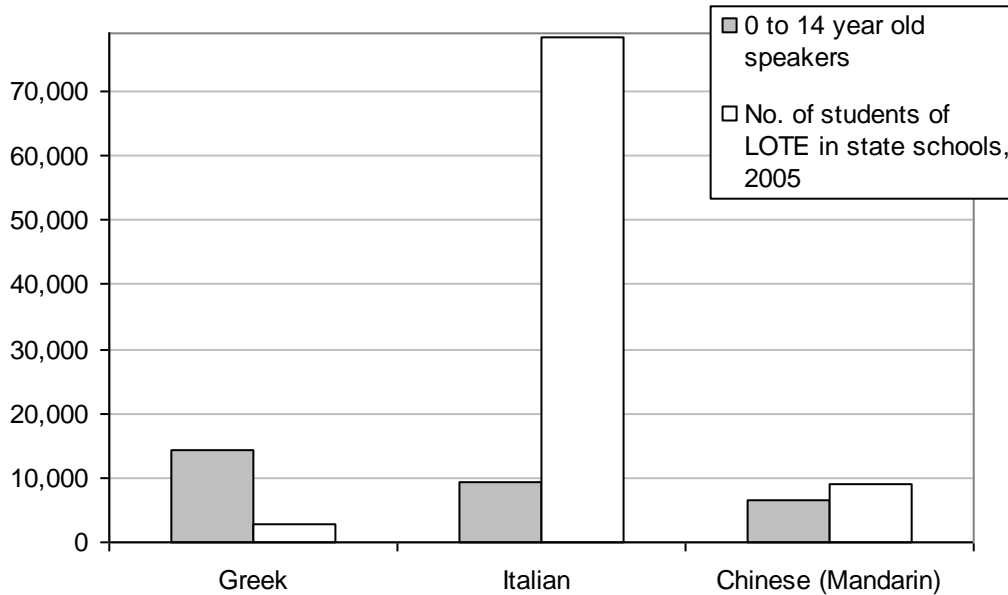


**Figure 1:**

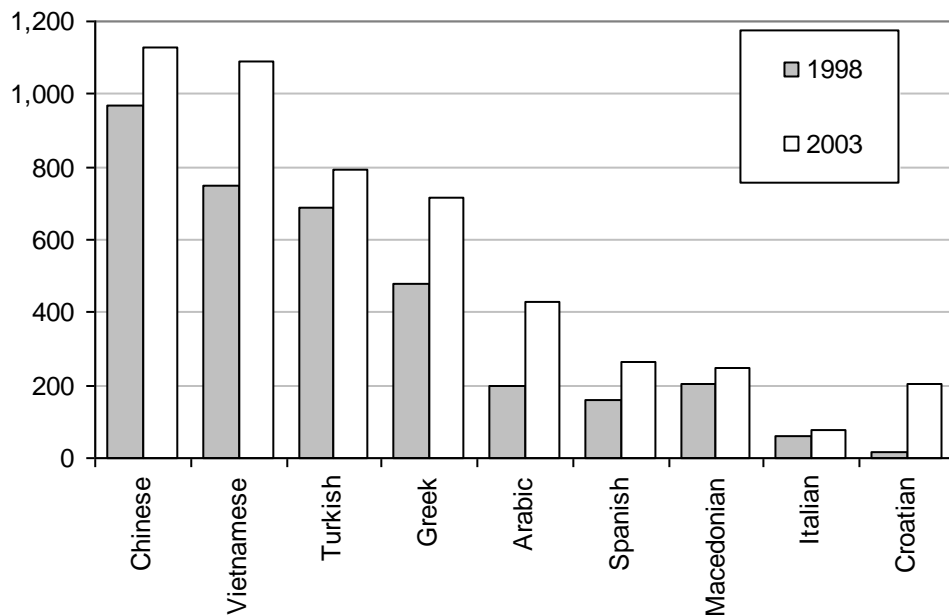
Number of students in state primary schools by selected LOTEs, 1998 and 2003 (Victoria. DE&T 1999 2005)

As Figure 2 indicates, a disproportionate number of students learn Italian – almost nine times as many as those learning Chinese (Mandarin), although the 0 to 14 year old population of speakers of Chinese (Mandarin only) is already two-thirds the size of Melbourne’s 0 to 14 year old Italian-speaking population and continues to increase. The discrepancy is even greater when we compare Italian and Greek. While the 0- to 14-year-old Greek-speaking population is 1.5 times the size of the equivalent Italian-speaking community (Clyne and Kipp 2002), a state primary school student is 20 times more likely to be learning Italian than Greek. The gap reflects to a large degree different attitudes and policies adopted by the respective communities in the 1970s and 1980s: the Italian community favoured a shift of focus and funding from community language schools to mainstream schools, a move that was resisted by the Greek community at the time. As Clyne (2005: 113) points out, the timing of the Italian community was opportune: it coincided with a shift towards positive attitudes in favour of LOTE learning in mainstream schools – something that Italian was then well placed to take advantage of. As Figure 2 shows, that advantage still persists in Victorian state primary schools.

At the same time that enrolments in state schools have decreased for five of the nine community languages, the VSL has experienced an increase in enrolments for all nine languages between 1998 and 2003 (see Figure 3). Where primary schools may be unwilling or unable to provide and/or sustain language programs, students and parents may often wish to maintain LOTE study, with the VSL playing a vital role in providing this opportunity. While this paper is focused on the study of LOTEs in the government education sector, a brief look at enrolments patterns in community language schools (see Figure 4)<sup>2</sup> contributes to gaining a broader understanding of language provision in Victoria. Community language schools operate outside the mainstream school system, under the ESAV, and also play an important role in primary level LOTE provision (see Clyne 2005: 105-6). Enrolments in Arabic, Chinese and Vietnamese have all increased between 1998 and 2005, while enrolments in the other six languages under examination here have all decreased. When considering enrolments across the different providers (bearing in mind the differences in the years of data



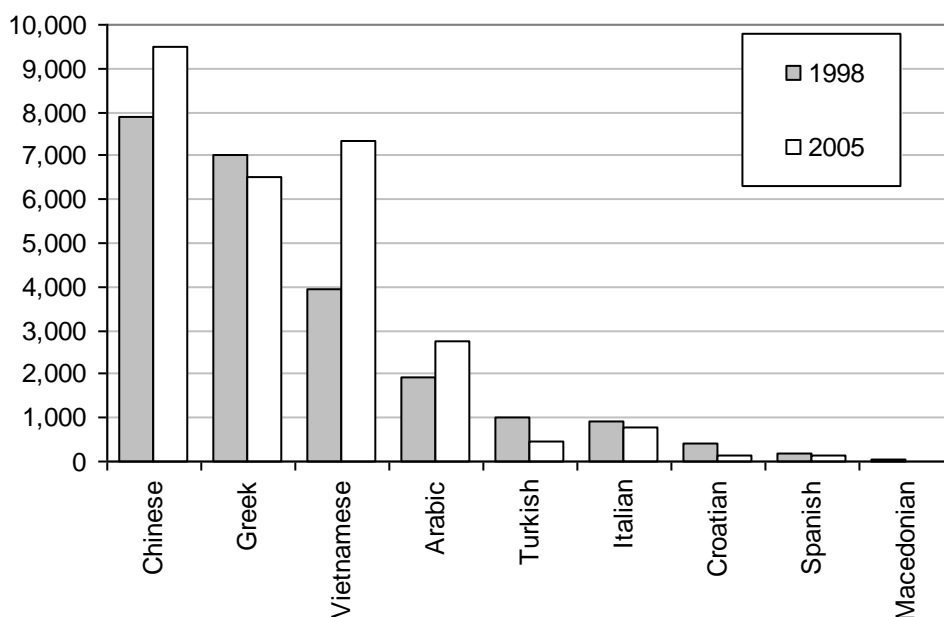
**Figure 2**  
Number of community speakers and students of Chinese (Mandarin), Greek and Italian, 2001 (Clyne and Kipp 2002:34; Victoria. DE&T 2006)



**Figure 3:**  
VSL enrolment by selected LOTE, 1998 and 2003 (Victoria. DE&T 1999, 2005)

collection: 2003 for the government system and 2005 for the community language schools), enrolments in Chinese and Vietnamese have increased significantly across all providers, while enrolments in Croatian, Greek, Italian and Spanish have remained stable. Overall, enrolments across providers have decreased for Macedonian (-15.9%) and Turkish (-68.4%). Turkish is particularly noteworthy in that the decrease in enrolments in state primary schools is disproportionately higher than the decrease in the number of state schools offering the language. While this decline may be partially accounted for by the increase in enrolments at the VSL, the significant drop in enrolments at community language schools may indicate a

movement away from language maintenance by the community and requires further investigation:



**Figure 4**

Student enrolments (All year levels) at community language schools, 1998 – 2005  
(Source: ESAV)

## LOTE-speaking communities and LOTE provision in Local Government Areas in Melbourne

Early LOTE primary school policy in Victoria encouraged the provision of community languages where a significant proportion of the school community spoke a particular community language. With the expansion of LOTE study and the ongoing geographical movement of new and older migrant populations within Melbourne, the ability for community groups to access their language within the mainstream education system and for schools to offer community languages becomes more difficult. In comparing the LOTEs taught in primary schools across Melbourne with the geographical spread of LOTE speakers, we can establish to what extent there is a match between the needs of these communities and appropriate LOTE access.

The data on the geographical distribution of LOTE speakers is based on analysis of the 2001 Australian census data by Clyne & Kipp (2002), including data from unpublished maps displaying the distribution of speakers of certain languages across Melbourne. The data outlines the concentration of LOTE speakers in Local Government Areas (LGAs), relative to each LOTE speaking community. For example, relative to the Vietnamese speaking community in Melbourne (63,033 speakers), the highest concentrations of Vietnamese speakers (7,670-17,020 speakers) are in the Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Greater Dandenong LGAs, with a medium level of concentration (730 – 7,760 speakers) in Yarra, Darebin and Geelong LGAs. A further 13 LGAs have a concentration of 60 – 730 speakers of Vietnamese, while another 49 LGAs have between 0 to 60 speakers of Vietnamese. In this section, we concentrate on the LGAs with the highest concentration of speakers (relative to each community) for each of the nine languages we are examining. (See Note 3 for details of high concentration levels for all nine community languages).

When comparing the availability of LOTE programs for community groups, several languages were well catered for in state primary schools, while a few communities had more restricted access to their language. For Croatian, Italian, Greek, Turkish and Vietnamese, all areas with high concentrations of speakers had a number of primary schools offering these languages.

Mandarin was also well catered for: 87.5% of LGAs with high concentrations of Chinese speakers offered the language at the primary level. It was also offered in a number of areas with a medium concentration of Chinese speakers. There was one area with a high concentration of Mandarin speakers that did not offer the language at the primary level, the Greater Dandenong area, which will be discussed in further detail shortly.

Sixty percent of LGAs with a high concentration of Arabic speakers had schools teaching Arabic. But there were two LGAs with high numbers of Arabic speakers that did not offer the language. One was the area of Brimbank, which will be discussed in further detail along with the Greater Dandenong area below. The other LGA that did not offer Arabic in schools was the area of Whittlesea. This may be explained in part by the relatively recent influx of Arabic speakers to the area. Between the 1996 and 2001 census, the Arabic population in Whittlesea grew by 94.9% – as a spill-over area from LGAs immediately to its south with their traditionally high concentrations of Arabic speakers. While primary schools in the Whittlesea LGA offer the languages of more established community groups, Greek and Macedonian, the area has yet to accommodate the recent influx of Arabic speakers. It will be interesting to see whether in the next ten years, patterns of LOTE provision in that area will alter to reflect that LGA's changing demography. However, we are not optimistic on this point. Available evidence pointing to a general reduction in student (and school) numbers learning Arabic in primary schools suggests that this may not occur within the school system in the Whittlesea area, but increases in enrolments at the VSL and at community language schools may be a result or even a cause of this decline and require further investigation.

For Macedonian, only one of the two LGAs with high levels of Macedonian speakers had primary schools offering the language, although again the LGA that did not offer the language was Brimbank. There is a weaker match between concentrations of Spanish speakers and the provision of Spanish, with only one of three LGAs with high concentrations of Spanish speakers offering Spanish at a primary level; Brimbank was one area with a high concentration of Spanish speakers, but with no Spanish offered in primary schools. However, four LGAs with a medium concentration of Spanish speakers also offered Spanish.

## **Taking a closer look: Diversity in Brimbank and Greater Dandenong**

As discussed above, state schools in the areas of Brimbank and Greater Dandenong do not offer a number of the LOTEs spoken by the local community. Both areas are two of the most linguistically diverse areas in Melbourne with over 50% of residents in both areas speaking a LOTE at home. Within Brimbank, there are numerous community languages, with thirteen LOTEs having more than 1,000 speakers. Some of the bigger community languages spoken in Brimbank are Vietnamese - the language of 10.4% of all residents in Brimbank - Maltese, Italian, Greek and Macedonian (see Table 2). Since the 2001 census, there has also been a large increase in the number of immigrants from the Horn of Africa to this LGA, which adds to the complexity of offering a community language in Brimbank primary schools.

<b>Language</b>	<b>Percentage of residents</b>
Vietnamese	10.4%
Maltese	5.2%
Italian	4.6%
Greek	4.2%
Macedonian	4.1%
Tagalog	2.2%
Arabic	2.0%
Turkish	2.0%
Spanish	1.9%
Cantonese	2.3%
Mandarin	0.4%

**Table 2**

Number of LOTE speakers (selected), Brimbank LGA, 2001. (Source: ABS)

The evident linguistic diversity of Brimbank, and especially the large size of its Vietnamese community, could be construed to favour community LOTE provision, especially that of Vietnamese, in local primary schools. However, our results show that only one community language (Italian) is offered in Brimbank primary schools (see Table 3). The other languages offered in Brimbank have no local community base and fall within the category of 'international languages' particularly favoured by government policy and funding, especially at the federal level, since the 1990s. Sixteen percent of primary schools do not offer a LOTE program of any kind, a figure that is substantially higher than the state average of 9.7%. On the other hand, a small number of primary schools in the area offer more than one LOTE to students, but given the limited choice of languages (Italian, Japanese, and Indonesian) this does not appear to be a direct attempt at dealing with local linguistic diversity. The specific reasons for this result, somewhat surprising given the area's linguistic diversity, require further investigation.

<b>Language</b>	<b>Percentage of primary schools offering LOTE</b>
Italian	48%
Japanese	20%
Indonesian	16%
No LOTE at all	16%

**Table 3**  
Primary LOTE provision in Brimbank, 2003

In the Greater Dandenong area, 13 LOTEs have more than 1,000 speakers, with Vietnamese again the most prevalent community language (see Table 4).

<b>Language</b>	<b>Percentage of speakers</b>
Vietnamese	9.4%
Khmer	3.7%
Cantonese	3.6%
Greek	3.4%
Italian	3.1%
Serbian	2.3%
Arabic	1.8%
Spanish	1.9%
Mandarin	1.7%

**Table 4**  
Number of LOTE speakers (selected), Greater Dandenong LGA, 2001. (Source: ABS)

Within the Greater Dandenong area, there is a higher correlation between languages taught and those spoken in the community than in Brimbank. Of six languages offered, at least three of the community languages (Italian, Vietnamese and Spanish) we focus on are offered in the primary system in Greater Dandenong (see Table 5). Nevertheless, over 40% of schools offer French, a language only available in 8.4% of primary schools across Victoria. While there is a small French-speaking Mauritian community in the area (1% of residents), the provision of French is clearly disproportionate to speaker numbers in that LGA, as is the case for Italian in Brimbank. It is arguably the case that Italian in Brimbank and French in Greater Dandenong act as 'neutral' languages that serve as a useful compromise language choice amongst the many different language groups resident in each LGA.

<b>Language</b>	<b>Percentage of primary schools offering LOTE</b>
French	43.5%
Japanese	21.7%
Italian	13.0%
Indonesian	8.7%
Vietnamese	8.7%
Spanish	4.3%

**Table 5**  
Primary LOTE provision in Greater Dandenong, 2003

## **Explaining LOTE provision: Conflict avoidance, transience and literacy issues**

As part of the study, some primary school principals provided extensive feedback regarding LOTE provision in their primary schools. This feedback underscores the difficulties behind catering for community groups in highly multilingual areas. Three areas of concern were highlighted:

**(1)** There is some sensitivity to conflict avoidance and/or discrimination, whereby a locally spoken community language is not selected in order to not create unnecessary tension within a school community. For example, at one school, even though Somali is the majority LOTE at the school, it could not be offered, as other refugee groups within the school might see such a move as discriminatory. The school, therefore, chooses to continue with Italian as a 'neutral / communal' language.

**(2)** Transience is an issue in a number of schools, but in particular for schools in the Greater Dandenong and Brimbank areas. At one school, the transience level was about 35% each year, with students regularly moving to another area or returning overseas. In response to both these issues, such schools are opting for cultural programs to facilitate greater understanding between groups within the school communities, which allows 'many barriers to be broken'. In fact in some schools, school councils are changing their school charters to specify that a 'Cultures other than English' program is to be conducted for their students, overriding the government policy of recommended LOTE study at the primary level.

**(3)** Within some schools there is still an ongoing concern about the perceived incompatibility of LOTE and literacy and numeracy development. A majority of these schools where this issue was raised have over 50% and up to 98% of students from a LOTE background, with English the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and sometimes 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> language for a child. Concern was raised that students would become 'confused' by another language. Further research is needed to understand why there is the perception that students would become 'confused'. Undoubtedly, the study of a new LOTE can prove problematic at highly multilingual schools where a number of languages would need to be catered for, although some schools have taken their own approach. For example, one primary school is focusing LOTE funds on mother tongue maintenance programs from Prep to Year 2 in Assyrian, Turkish, Vietnamese and Hmong, while at another primary school a Greek mother tongue program is run for some students at each year level, while other students study Italian. Both schools focus on literacy in their mother tongue programs.

The concern with literacy was not just for students with a LOTE background: principals reported that communities were concerned about the literacy skills of monolingual English speakers and the intrusion of LOTE. In the case of one school community the principal noted that students were largely from a low socio-economic background and that there was still a great deal of work to do to convince the communities of the positive relationship between LOTE learning and English literacy acquisition. As a consequence of this perceived risk to literacy and numeracy development through English, many primary school children in both monolingual and highly multilingual areas are denied access to LOTE learning, in direct

contradiction to government recommendations. While it is generally agreed that there is no perfect time to start language study (see e.g. Clyne, Jenkins, Chen, Tsokalidou & Wallner, 1995; Johnstone, 1994; Sharpe, 2001), second language research has provided a series of conclusions about the advantages and disadvantages of starting language study at different ages. Advantages for an early start include:

- Greater metacognitive awareness of a child's own language and of other languages, leading to advances in the age of reading readiness in English (Yelland, Pollard and Mercuri 1993)
- For bilingual students, mother tongue language study provides a 'link between home and school, raises the status of the home language and their parents who use it, and enables children to develop it beyond the essentials of the home domain before the children's level of English and cognitive level has exceeded the level of their home language' (Clyne, et al, 1995:9)
- The raising of consciousness and development of positive attitudes to cultures and languages (Clyne et al, 1995; Nostrand, 1991; Vilke, 1988)

Raising awareness of these issues in schools and particularly in the parental communities will be vital for the success of LOTE programs at the primary level.

## The nature of LOTE programs

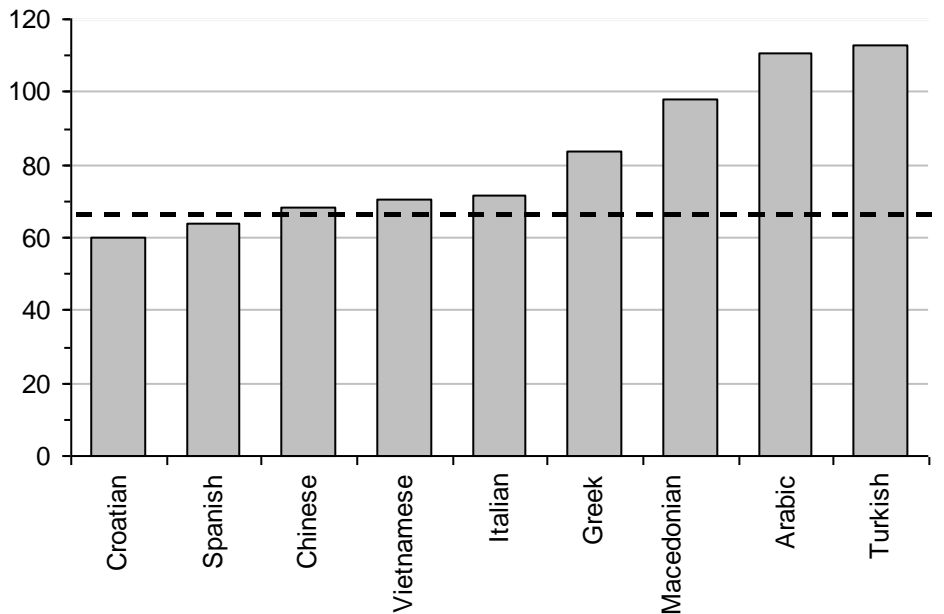
We now turn our attention to the nature of community LOTE provision in primary schools, and consider specifically four important indicators: (1) contact time; (2) teacher qualifications; (3) program type; and (4) language learning models.

### Contact time

The Victorian government recommends LOTE study for a minimum of 150 minutes per week at the primary level. However, in 2003, only 4.1% of government primary schools ran LOTE programs for 150 minutes or more, and these were largely schools running bilingual programs. The data available to us allow for the examination of trends for all LOTEs, including for the nine community languages specifically considered here. Overall, the average time LOTE programs ran for was 65 minutes per week (excluding bilingual programs). The averages for the nine community languages highlighted in this paper are represented in Figure 5. Four of the community languages in particular provide above average contact time for LOTE per week, with Arabic and Turkish closest to the required 150 minutes per week and Greek and Macedonian providing higher than average contact time. The other five community languages were just above or under the average of 65 minutes per week.

### Teacher qualifications

The adequate provision and employment of sufficient numbers of qualified LOTE teachers are recognized to be significant issues of concern around Australia (e.g. see EREBUS Consulting Partners 2002; MCYEETA 2005; Nicholas, 1993). Around 50% of primary LOTE teachers are employed for less than four days per week. The inability of schools, for whatever reason, to offer fully qualified LOTE teachers full-time positions, may seriously impact on these schools' abilities to offer LOTE at all. Many schools run LOTE programs with unqualified teachers or even parents and other community members, as they are unable to secure part-time LOTE teachers. The report *Languages Other Than English in government schools, 2003* (Victoria. DE&T, 2005) states that there were 1,051 qualified LOTE teachers teaching at the primary level. However the levels of qualifications differs widely. DE&T recognises a range of training qualifications, from a certificate taken at TAFE level, through to fully qualified LOTE teachers who have undertaken three years of post-year 12 tertiary training as well as LOTE methodology training. Overall, 47% of qualified primary LOTE teachers were fully trained. Figure 6 displays the percentage of fully qualified language teachers for the nine community languages being examined in this paper. Croatian and Arabic have a particularly low number of fully qualified LOTE teachers, while Turkish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Macedonian and Spanish have a higher than average number of fully qualified LOTE teachers at the primary level.



**Figure 5**  
Average minutes per week spent on LOTEs, 2003. Dotted line indicates average for all LOTEs (Victoria. DE&T, 2005)

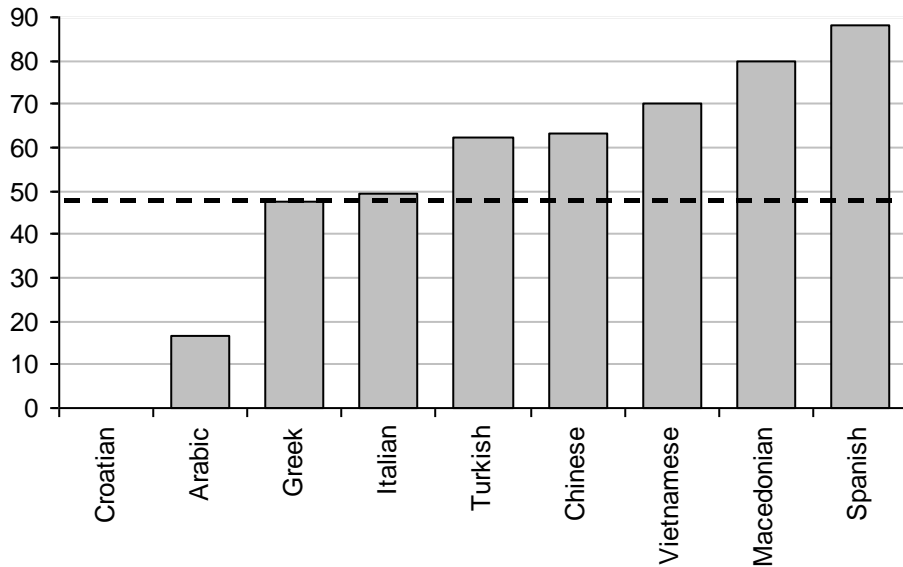
In 2003, there were also 1,312 unqualified teachers supporting primary LOTE programs. For many primary schools that cannot find a LOTE teacher to run a program, a number of alternative strategies were identified in the survey. These include:

(a) Use of generalist teachers, with or without some support provided by specialist LOTE teachers; (b) use of qualified LOTE teachers for one year level only; (c) yearly turnover/change of LOTE; (d) use of LOTE software programs; (e) offering of LOTE as an elective and only at certain year levels, and (f) use of overseas visitors for part of the teaching year. As a final alternative, in a small number of schools (9.7%) there was no kind of LOTE program offered at all.

## Program type

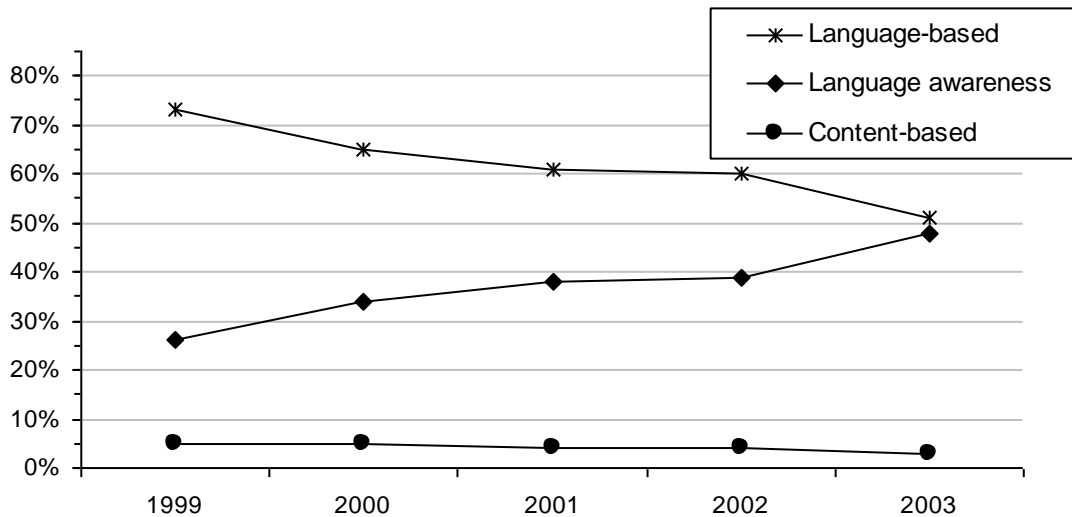
Program type refers to the content taught in LOTE classes. There are three main types of programs that are run in Victorian primary schools.

- Language-Based Programs which focus on the teaching and learning of the target language.
- Language and Cultural Awareness Programs which introduce limited vocabulary and focus on aspects of society, language and culture – mainly through the medium of English. This category includes ‘taster’ programs where students study more than one language during the year.
- Content-Based Programs (Bilingual Programs), where at least two key learning areas in addition to LOTE are taught in the target language for at least 450 minutes per week.



**Figure 6**  
 Percentage of primary LOTE teachers who are fully qualified by LOTE, 2003.  
 (Victoria. DE&T, 2005). Dotted line indicates average for all primary LOTE teachers

As Figure 7 indicates, language-based programs peaked in 1999 at 73% and have been in a steady decline at the primary level. In 2003, 51.7% of programs were language-based programs, 48.0% were language and cultural awareness (LAC) classes and 0.3% were content-based classes.



**Figure 7**  
 Percentage of primary LOTE students by program type, 1998 – 2003  
 (Victoria. DE&T 2005:21)

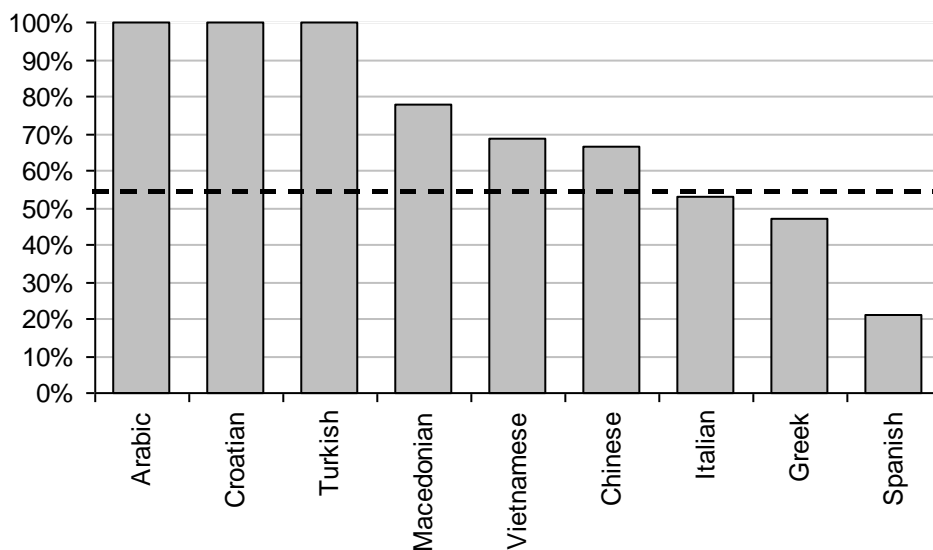
## Language and cultural awareness programs

The official Victorian LOTE policy does not formally recognise language and cultural awareness (LAC) programs as part of LOTE programs, although they have been on offer in Victorian schools since the early 1970s, eg D’Fazio (1974)<sup>4</sup>. In practice, since the widespread introduction of LOTE in primary schools was initiated in the early 1990s, the use of LAC programs has been accepted in order to recognise and support schools’ efforts to introduce LOTE studies. While there are a number of reasons behind the use of LAC programs, of particular importance are:

- A lack of qualified teaching staff resulting in non-LOTE-qualified classroom teachers implementing ‘LOTE’ or ultimately ‘language and cultural awareness’ classes.
- Cultural diversity and literacy concerns, particularly in relation to more recent migrants from Africa, where schools actively chose to focus on culture and to present cultural components in LOTE programs, with minimal or no linguistic education.

For LAC programs to be beneficial in the Victorian context where the expectation is for students to develop LOTE proficiency skills, they would still need to contain a strong linguistic component, allowing for a building up of linguistic skills through a developed curriculum.

In specific relation to the community languages examined in this article, languages fare differently in relation to the type of program, as can be seen in Figure 8. Most of the languages have a majority of programs of the language-based type, although Spanish has a particularly low level of language-based programs. This is surprising in that Spanish has the highest number of fully qualified LOTE teachers amongst the community languages. The fact that Spanish classes average only 64 minutes per week with close to 80% of programs as language awareness program indicates that teacher supply and teacher qualifications are not the only factors impacting on LOTE programs. Why Spanish should be such a focus of language awareness courses remains unclear and also requires further investigation.



**Figure 8**

Percentage of language-based courses by LOTE, 2003 (Victoria, DE&T 2005) (Dotted line represents average of all LOTE programs.)

## Language learning models

The final factor to consider in relation to the nature of LOTE programs is the model of learning that is applied, dependent upon the background of students:

- Second Language Model - designed to cater mainly for students without a background in the target languages.
- First Language Model - designed to cater mainly for students with a background in the target languages.
- Mixed Classes - designed to cater for both students who have, and students who do not have, a background in that language, e.g. Greek being taught to a mixed class containing students of both English speaking background and students of Greek speaking background.

In looking at the relationship between the target audience and the type of language learning models students studying community languages encounter, 90.3% of students in programs for first language learners were in language-based classes. However, it must be pointed out that only 0.8% of students studying a LOTE were in classes targeted at first language learners. Students in mixed classes (6.2% of LOTE students) were predominantly in LAC classes (61.7%), rather than language-based classes. The majority of students studying a LOTE (93%) were in classes targeted at second language learners. Again, a majority of these students (56.3%) were in LAC classes, rather than language-based classes.

Without an understanding of how curriculum is differentiated in schools for each of these learning models, it is difficult to understand the significance or importance of this factor. However, these percentages do indicate that language-based programs are offered predominantly to first language speakers. As a result, second language learners are more often receiving language awareness classes rather than classes based on the acquisition of language. Rather than providing all students with the opportunity to acquire a second language directly, the data we have indicates that at least some community language speakers are being provided with the opportunity to maintain and develop their languages, but second language speakers are, broadly speaking, mainly exposed to language awareness classes.

## Summary and conclusions

The primary purpose of our study was to determine the extent to which LOTE provision in Victorian primary schools addressed the needs of ethnic communities resident in Victoria. We focussed specifically on the state's nine largest community languages and on the Melbourne metropolitan area where the state's non-English-speaking population is concentrated.

Our results show many positives, with a more of a match than a mix between LOTE provision and the needs of ethnic communities in Victoria. That said, there are also some areas of concern warranting much closer investigation by researchers and policymakers in the future. Overall we can say that:

1. All nine community languages are taught in one form or another in primary schools, although the extent of provision in terms of numbers of students and schools varies widely: from a small 71 students in three schools learning Croatian to more than 75,000 students learning Italian in hundreds of primary schools in 2003.
2. Some community languages, especially Mandarin and Vietnamese, have shown considerable growth (at least in percentage terms) in the number of students (and schools) in the period 1998-2003. With the exception of Italian, most of the others appear to have stalled in primary schools, despite stable or increasing numbers of speakers resident in the community. On the other hand, the Victorian School of Languages has shown considerable growth in all languages during the same period. As community language schools have also shown strong increases in a number of languages, this highlights the genuine desire of many members of ethnic communities for their children to learn and maintain their languages.
3. With respect to geographical distribution of ethnic communities and community languages, there was a close match between the two factors for almost all languages. We noted however that changing patterns of demographic concentration, as in the

case of Arabic, were not being matched by corresponding changes in LOTE provision in state primary schools. Moreover, in some areas of particularly high multilingual and multicultural diversity, schools often selected a 'neutral' language, such as Italian or French, in order to avoid possible sensitivities with regard to the choice of a widely spoken local community language.

4. We also noted a number of factors identified by principals as impacting in some significant way on LOTE provision in primary schools. The most significant were: (a) avoidance of possible conflict and discrimination (see the previous item); (b) the transient nature of population settlement in different areas of Melbourne; and (c) concerns about perceived incompatibilities between LOTE learning and the English literacy and numeracy skills.
5. With respect to the nature of LOTE provision in primary schools, a number of observations were made. In the first instance, despite a formal policy recommendation of 150 minutes of LOTE per week, the average was 65 minutes, although there was great variation across our language sample. The adequate supply and employment of fully qualified LOTE teachers remains an issue in Victoria, as elsewhere in Australia. In the face of these problems, many schools are creative in finding strategies that allow them to provide some kind of LOTE program to students. As a result, less than 10% of primary schools offer no LOTE program of any kind. We also found significant variation across languages in the extent to which teaching staff were qualified, although for most of the nine community languages, the proportion of qualified teachers was above average. Trend patterns also confirm a relatively rapid shift away from language-based courses to language and cultural awareness (LAC) programs – with a concomitant decline in the focus on the learning of language skills. This is an area particularly little is known about and much more investigation of the phenomenon is clearly needed, including how it might impact on LOTE learning in higher years.

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## Endnotes

1. Most recently reiterated in *Curriculum Planning Guidelines* (Victoria. DE&T, 2006).
2. Note that firstly, enrolment numbers in Figure 4 are for 2005, the only year for which data is available. Second, the enrolment figures for community language schools also covers all year levels, not just primary school enrolments. As a result of these two points, a direct comparison between the three providers is not possible. However, a

close indirect comparison allows for some indication of the direction of enrolments across providers.

3. Numbers for a high level of concentration of speakers in Victorian LGAs are: Arabic (2,700-8,100 speakers), Chinese (Mandarin) (2,130-5,480), Croatian (2,650-5,500), Greek (6,880-11,780), Italian (6,880-11,780), Macedonian (6,622-11,346), Spanish (2,370-3,190), Turkish (6,880-11,780) and Vietnamese (7,670-17,020) (Source: unpublished maps produced by Michael Clyne and Sandra Kipp).
4. Language and cultural awareness programs in Victoria are very different from the kind offered in Europe, cf. Candelier (2004).