

Government, teachers and principals heading in different directions on why Asia literacy is important

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Australia will need to overcome a glaring mismatch between why teachers, principals and government believe Asia literacy is important, if it is to achieve the goals set out in the White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century, says the lead author of a major national study of Asia Literacy and the Australian Teaching Workforce, released today.

Professor Christine Halse, from Deakin University's School of Education, said there needed to be further investigation to understand the reasons behind the [discrepancies](#) in the priorities.

The report was the largest ever study of Asia literacy among [teachers](#) and principals. Professor Halse and a team of researchers from Deakin University investigated the key features needed by teachers and principals to deliver the Asia literacy components of the Australian Curriculum.

"Apart from revealing Asia [literacy levels](#) among teachers and principals, what was interesting in our study was how the views of teachers, principals and government diverged about why it is important," she said.

"The [White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century](#) and the subsequent [Australian Education Bill 2012](#) views these skills as essential to national productivity".

"Indeed the success of these policy initiatives depends on the capacity of teachers and principals to deliver the cross-curriculum Asia priority in the Australian Curriculum."

Professor Halse said teachers and principals took a more pragmatic approach to Asia literacy, looking at what was possible in their schools.

"After all how do you explain the [economic benefits](#) of Asia literacy to a seven year old?" she said.

"Teachers and principals have more immediate concerns. They view the key benefits of teaching and learning about Asia as building students' understanding of other cultures and creating a more tolerant and successful Australia."

"Indeed a key [motivator](#) for Asia related teaching and learning among teachers and principals is the desire to address racism and prejudice with [respondents](#) saying this motivation stemmed from local incidents where students, teachers and parents had come across incidences of negative stereotyping, deeply engrained prejudice and alarming xenophobia."

Professor Halse said that, at a broader level, principals and teachers also saw Asia literacy as necessary for building students' competence as 'globally smart citizens' able to operate effectively and successfully in a global world.

"Ultimately they saw the key benefit of teaching and learning about Asia was to build an appreciation and connection with culturally diverse peoples and to create a more tolerant and successful Australia," she said.

Professor Halse said the study also produced the first robust, reliable measure for assessing Asia [literacy](#) levels across the teaching workforce and how such a workforce could be developed.

"The research findings are categorical," she said.

"An Asia literate teaching [workforce](#) hinges on providing teachers with continuous, high-level tertiary study and professional learning, including direct professional and cultural experience of Asia through exchange, travel and study programs.

"Or put another way for both teachers and principals, two key 'enablers' for the teaching of languages and studies of Asia in schools is time spent in Asia and tertiary study followed up by professional development."

Provided by Deakin University

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