

NZ LANGUAGE CURRICULUM DRAFT FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION - 2006

Submission on the 'Learning Languages' learning area in the New Zealand Curriculum Draft for Consultation 2006 By The Wellington Sri Lankan School (WSC)

1. Introduction

The Wellington Sri Lankan School (WSC) welcomes the draft curriculum as a clear statement on integrating learning outcomes, principles, values and competencies. WSC also acknowledges the commitment to language learning reflected in the draft curriculum and the strategic approach it will provide to achieving the long term goal of promoting language learning outcomes.

The WSC acknowledges and supports the addition of the eighth learning area – 'Languages' (which includes, Te reo, NZSL and Pacific languages) in the draft curriculum. This is a strong signal from the government in its commitment to learning Languages in New Zealand.

Our submission aims to seek the assistance of the Ministry of Education through the NZ Language Curriculum and the education system to enable the Sri Lankan Sinhalese children and youth in NZ maintain Sinhalese as their mother tongue and enhance/preserve their cultural identity.

2. How the Sinhalese School evolved in Wellington

Sri Lankans who have taken up residence in New Zealand have always desired to, and continued to, maintain linkages with their country of birth. This has been mainly due to the high level of respect and recognition with which they have upheld their cultural values. Their intention has, however, not been to live, and be identified, as a separate water-tight ethnic group; on the contrary, they have always recognised the high degree of achievement and the rich cultural values of the rest of the population living in New Zealand. Their intentions and efforts have been to integrate with the others in New Zealand, while contributing, even in a small measure, to enrich its culture by the values and practices held in high esteem in their country of birth. Participating in, and organising of different cultural programmes in New Zealand for many years have been forms of manifestation of these intentions.

On the initiative of a few parents living around Wellington, a Sinhala Language School for children was started during the year 1993. Classes were conducted on Sundays at the Redwood Primary School, Tawa initially and later moved to Rewa Rewa Primary School in Newlands since 1996. The teaching was confined to one hour a week. Some of the parents and grand parents of the children volunteered to function as teachers. Classes were generally determined by the age groupings, viz. 5- 7 years, 7 - 9 years, 9 - 12 years and 12 + years. It was found to be necessary to conduct, at times, several separate classes for children

within the same age group due to the wide variations of proficiency in the Sinhala language of the participating children. Team teaching was encouraged; parents very willingly assisted in the conducting of the teaching programmes. (In addition to this, classes were also conducted in Buddhism for Buddhist children under these same age groupings since 1997). In the initial stages the teaching curricula generally followed those developed in Sri Lanka for language education.

The need for revising the curriculum of study was felt after some time. After investigating into some of the Sinhala language teaching in places outside Sri Lanka, a decision was made, in the year 1999, to follow the model developed by the Victorian School of Languages in Australia. This system operated from the beginning of the year 2000.

During the latter part of the year 2000, an Educationist from Sri Lanka, who happened to be himself a parent of the Newlands Sinhala Language School, offered to help further revise the curriculum of teaching.

A comprehensive survey was conducted among the parents to assess the needs. This survey comprised of a Questionnaire Survey, supplemented by in-depth interviews. The findings of this survey showed unambiguously that what the parents wished for, for their offspring, was the transference of moral and cultural values which they themselves imbibed having grown up, studied in the Sri Lankan society, and which opportunity their children lacked living in a different environment. A discussion paper was prepared based on the findings of this survey and several workshops were held with the parents to provide a forum for further deliberations on the subject. Based on these deliberations, goals and objectives for language teaching were defined. These provided for the total personality development of the child and the transference of moral values and cultural aspects while developing the Sinhala language proficiency of the participating children. Further work has been done for the development of detailed lesson plans based on these goals and objectives.

- For more information, visit the school's website at www.slcls.org.nz

3. Our school's objectives and goals

The purpose of the Wellington Sri Lankan School is:

- To provide opportunities for the children and young adults of the Sri Lankan community in Wellington to learn Sinhalese (the mother tongue).
- To support the development and enhancement of communication skills of it's students in relation to their mother tongue (Sinhalese)
- To provide opportunities to students to develop an understanding, enhance and preserve their cultural identity and enable them to participate in cultural activities.

- To provide opportunities to students to enhance their awareness with reference to Sri Lankan values, traditions, art, music and dance.

4. The needs of the Sri Lankan community relating to it's mother tongue and how effective is the School at achieving them

- There is a strong need for children of the Sri Lankan community to learn their mother tongue (Sinhalese) to enable them to actively participate in cultural activities and to effectively communicate with the community elders who may not speak English.
- Awareness of Sri Lankan culture amongst children and youth of the community enables them to share these values amongst themselves and across cultures in New Zealand.
- Eight volunteer teachers are assisted by parent helpers. They are familiar with the skills and interests of the children in their class. Four teachers have previous teaching experience. Other teachers and helpers utilise their "home" experience in educating their children.
- MCLaSS (Multi Cultural Learning and Support Services funded by the Tertiary Education Commission) have provided funding in the past to conduct teacher-training workshops so that community language teachers are refreshed in classroom skills and are introduced to the New Zealand education system. The Sinhalese teachers have participated to maintain their skills and to meet teachers from other community groups.

5. The impact of the School on the local community

- They are able to communicate in the mother tongue with their friends and relatives in Sri Lanka.
- Increased awareness of Sri Lankan culture, mother tongue amongst children and youth in the community
- Wider participation of children and parents in activities organised by the school such as term-end variety shows, sports days and religious activities.
- Sri Lankan children and youth are able to participate in various cultural festivals organised by Wellington City Council, Sri Lankan groups and other organisations.

6. Value of Mother Tongue

"Language indexes one's culture. Loosing a language is very painful as language and culture are inter-related." Reference: Dr. Joshua Fushman (American Researcher)

Research (Cummins: <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/mother.htm>) shows the mother tongue is important for personal, social and cultural development of

children. Families are stronger and healthier when the members of a community are culturally and socially satisfied.

History shows that Sinhalese language is over 1000 years old. As a language it is under threat of extinction.

7. Sri Lankan Sinhalese Community in Wellington

2001 NZ Census figures show that there were approx. 100 Sri Lankan Sinhalese children/ youth between the ages 5 to 16 years, in the Wellington region. At present the Wellington Sri Lankan School has approx. 60 students in it's roll.

8. Accommodation for the Wellington Sri Lankan School (WSC)

For the last 10 years the WSC conducted it's classes on Sundays during school terms. The classes were based at Rewa Rewa School, Newlands. Students from areas such as Stokes valley, Lower Hutt, Porirua, Tawa, Karori, Johnsonville, Newlands and Churton Park attend WSC.

From 2007 owing to upgrading of Rewa Rewa classrooms, WSC was requested to find alternate accommodation. The Parents group managing the school is currently in the process of looking for suitable accommodation.. The school is managed by volunteer teachers and parents.

WSC was granted Charitable status by IRD in 2000.

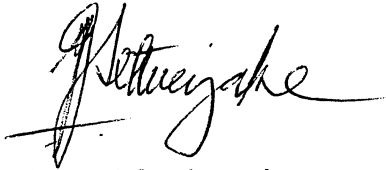
9. Recommendations

The Ministry of Education

- Recognise the importance of teaching Sinhalese to the children/ young adults of the Sri Lankan Community as their mother tongue, enabling them to maintain their cultural identity.
- Take appropriate action to ensure that WSC is adequately resourced to conduct the mother tongue education programme.
- Provide funding to the Host School which provides accommodation and other facilities to WSC.
- Review the Australian (Victorian School of languages), UK, Swedish, and Canadian models of community language education with a view to incorporating relevant principles into the NZ mother tongue education system.

Submitted by

On behalf of the Wellington Sri Lankan School



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