



Association of German
Teachers of Victoria Inc.

Supporting teaching and learning since 1979

27th November, 2014

Mr Robert Randall
Chief Executive Officer
ACARA

Re: Australian Curriculum: Languages – German

I am on behalf of the Executive of the Association of German Teachers of Victoria Inc. in the hope that the Context Statement for German can be amended prior to being endorsed by the Board and officially published, as inaccuracies remain.

In listing where German is an official language, Belgium and Luxembourg are mentioned, but not South Tyrol in Italy. There are only passing references to diversity of the language and cultures. The document soon moves to Germany being the only country of influence in past and contemporary society. The influence of past and contemporary 'German-speaking communities' is inclusive.

We are very concerned that there seems to be resistance to feedback about the sentence:

.... German has different regional and national varieties, although all users understand 'Hochdeutsch', so called 'Standard German', which is taught in Australian schools and universities

German IS a pluricentric language. It is not a case of being a 'so-called' Standard German. There ARE different Standards of German, as there are for English and other languages: Standard Germany German, Standard Austrian German and Standard Swiss German. These are facts, not 'so-called'. The Australian Curriculum for English uses the term 'Standard Australian English'.

In disbelief about what I was reading in the Context Statement for German, I wrote to Dr. Leo Kretzenbacher from the School of Languages and Linguistics at the University of Melbourne. I asked for his advice about the Draft Australian Curriculum for German. His response was passionate and comprehensive in its rejection of various elements in the document. An extract of his reply is printed with his permission below, not including his concerns about the elaborations.

.... "Among the many highly objectionable statements in the "German context statement", the following is possible the most objectionable: "German has different regional and national varieties, although all users understand 'Hochdeutsch', so called 'Standard German', which is taught in Australian schools and universities." While there is nothing wrong with the first clause, except for the fact that it mixes the completely different categories of regional varieties on the one hand and national standard varieties on the other hand, the statement about "Hochdeutsch" is so wrong that not even the opposite of it would be correct.

For starters, there is no such thing as a supra-national "Standard German". The fact that German is a pluricentric language and has different (if mostly mutually understandable) national standard varieties was strongly argued for decades by that great Australian linguist, the late Michael Clyne, and is now general knowledge in German Studies. Any Australian school and university worth its salt will teach German as a pluricentric language and make students aware of the different national standards right from the start.

Secondly, the non-existent mythical pan-Germanic "Standard German" is certainly not the same as "Hochdeutsch". As a linguistic term, Hochdeutsch or High German is a term subsuming Upper and Central German Dialects, such as Bavarian, Alemannic and Upper Saxon. So the dialects of Zurich or Dresden would clearly be classified as "Hochdeutsch", although they are nowhere near the Swiss or Germany-German national standards. Colloquially, "Hochdeutsch" can also refer to the respective



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national standard as opposed to any local dialect, but that would mean that there are different national varieties of "Hochdeutsch".

In conclusion: while the body of the Australian curriculum for German contains a few mistakes and is mainly characterised by its ignorance of the development of German linguistics over the last 20 years or so, the "German context statement" is simply embarrassing." (Email 29th October, 2014)

As I understand it, the writers of the Australian Curriculum for German did not have the final say over what was included and what wasn't. I don't understand why the person or persons in charge of the final copy would not check with an authority at a university about the status of the German language in Europe, especially when strong objections were raised.

We strongly recommend and respectfully ask that if no other changes can be made, that at least the status of German can be portrayed as a pluricentric language with different standards. The suggested sentence to replace the one in question above would be much shorter:

.... German is a pluricentric language with different standards and regional varieties.

We have further concerns about how German is described.

Unlike other language curricula with extensive descriptions of how the language arrived and developed in Australia, there is no mention German-speakers being the largest non-English speaking group in Australia prior to WWI. Free settlers arrived in 1838 in South Australia, but German-speaking explorers and crew were certainly present before on various European expeditions. German-speaking scientists, explorers, architects and farming families had a significant impact on the early development of Australia.

Certainly German was taught in schools of those early German-speaking settlers. There is no mention about these schools being closed or being forced to use English, or of the covering over of the rich German-speaking heritage in Australia through the change of names of towns with the onset of WWI, nor of the internment of German-speaking Australians and migrants and their descendants, and again in WWII, including those of Jewish migrants fleeing Europe, and Templers brought from Palestine.

We also ask that particular schools are not named in the Context Statement, not only because the reference about the Deutsche Schule Melbourne is not correct, but also because it ignores other options in Victoria and importantly, in other states in what is meant to be a national document.

We appreciate the work of the writers and others at ACARA. We look forward to the document being finalised, but are somewhat thankful that the delay may provide the opportunity to amend the reference to 'Hochdeutsch' and 'so-called standard German' because it is wrong and portrays Australia in a very poor light in the countries where those standards of German are spoken.

Kind regards,

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Cc Mr John Firth, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority