Educaton is expected to be both relevant to the lives of students and address the contemporary issues they face. In the Australian Curriculum and the education goals of the Melbourne Declaration, *Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia is a national educational priority*. Enabling all young Australians to develop knowledge of the languages and a better understanding of the cultures of countries throughout the Asia region develops their appreciation of the economic, political and cultural interconnections that Australia has with the region.

Australia’s educational engagement with Asia is immediately connected with teachers’ interests in promoting linguistic diversity in increasingly globalised societies, and teachers’ educational uses of the ever-expanding multimedia information technologies. Multiliteracy teaching and learning was originally conceived by the New London Group (Cazden and others, 1996) to address these two interrelated aspects. For the ten-members of English-speaking New London Group (Cazden and others, 1996: 62) the First Principle of multiliteracy states:

> we want to extend the idea and scope of [English-only] literacy pedagogy to account for the context of culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalised societies, for the multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of the texts that circulate.

Thus, the First Principle of multiliteracy concerns teaching that values linguistic diversity through using new modes of communication technologies. Pedagogies of multiliteracies are being used to address the saliency of Australia’s engagement with Asia through the interrelationship between linguistic diversity and the multiplicity of communication media.

However, we acknowledge that, like all forms of education, multiliteracy is a subject of argumentation and rational disagreements. Lo Bianco (2000) mapped the positions contending for the use of multiliteracies. He notes that the New London Group’s First Principle of multiliteracy for Australian educational engagement with Asia’s linguistic diversity through the diversity of new communication modalities, is challenged by those using new technologies to effect linguistic homogenisation. This resistance to Australia’s educational engagement with Asian languages narrowed multilitrearies exclusively to changing from print literacy to using ICT tools (Schwarzer, Haywood & Lorenzen, 2003). For a few, this opposition to the New London Group’s fulsome conception of multiliteracies meant reducing it to developing students’ capabilities for using and creating multimodal texts (Taylor, Bernhard, Garg & Cummins, 2008). The use of ‘multiliteracies’ as part of the Australian Curriculum’s focus on engagement with Asian languages has produced manifest antagonism (see also Marshall, Hayashi & Yeung, 2012). This is despite the increasing local/global connectedness manifested in linguistic diversity, and the requirement for using multiple languages for cross-cultural, inter-community and trans-national communications. Over the years the struggles over multiliteracies have seen it reduced solely to those allied to developing a constricted range of literacies students require for competently engaging communication technologies (Omoniyi, 2003).

This paper contributes to the New London Group’s First Principle of multiliteracies through Asian linguistic engagement using multimodal texts available through ever advancing information technologies. Using the concept ‘deschooling classroom practice’ we see multiliteracies pedagogies merging through the use of virtual learning environments spanning national borders. The examples of multiliteracies pedagogy given below are to engage 21st century Australian primary students with Asia. These activities are informed by the New London Group’s pedagogical framework which focuses on meaning making through the scaffolding provided by situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice (Cope and Kalantzis 2000).
the Western Sydney Region of the NSW Department of Education and Communities. Since 2008 we have been training Chinese teacher-researchers at the University of Western Sydney to support non-Chinese speaking class teachers, by having them study how to use the cross-sociolinguistic similarities between English and Chinese in order to increase the ease and attractiveness for students to learn Chinese as a second language.

The following ideas are applicable to a range of content in the Australian Curriculum and can be incorporated into existing classroom programs and expanded upon. These examples are intended to inspire primary teachers to creatively engage their students with Asian languages and cultures, developing their intercultural, meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic capabilities as they reflect on and talk about what happens when they bring together different languages – using ever advancing information technologies.

### Framework for Asian multiliteracies engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situated practice</th>
<th>immersion in second language learning experiences, using available means from the students’ lifeworlds and simulations of the Australia/Asia relationships to be found in workplaces and public spaces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overt instruction</td>
<td>systematic, analytic and conscious understanding of meanings in a second language and associated technological communication processes. This requires the introduction of explicit metalanguages, which describe and interpret the techno-linguistic elements and their different modes of meaning making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical framing</td>
<td>interpreting the socio-cultural context of particular meanings in a second language by having students stand back from their techno-linguistic studies and viewing these critically in relation to the local/global context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformed practice</td>
<td>transfer in meaning-making practice, which puts the transformed meaning to work in other contexts or cultural sites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The examples below have been inspired by the research undertaken by our team of some 30 educational researchers investigating ways of making Chinese learnable in primary classrooms in

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### Focus 1: Classroom talk – simulating Chinese teacher-student interactions inspired by reflections of Wu, 2010

At the beginning of each lesson, the teacher takes the initiative to say *shang ke* (上课) which means class begins. Everyone stands up. The teacher bows to the students saying *tong xue men hao* (同学们好) which means ‘hello to students’. All the students reply *lao shihao* (老师好) as they bow to the teacher. When students and teachers finish bowing to each other and greeting each other, the teacher will say *qing zuo* (请坐) which means ‘sit down please’ (02/04/2009) (Wu, 2010, pp. 142–143).

When I marked the roll, I practised Mandarin with students as revision. When students spoke Chinese to me, I would reply *hao* (好) in Chinese which means ‘good’ in English. One student did a better job and I taught them *hen hao* (很好) which means ‘very good’ in English (02/04/2009) (Wu, 2010, pp. 143).

When I used my Chinese language software computer, students were curious about it. I let them type Chinese on my computer. They thought the computer was magic. Perhaps next time I can show them the Chinese software and how to change ‘pinyin’ into Chinese characters (Hanzi) (Wu, 2010, pp. 147).

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### Gestural meaning-making through situated practice

Teacher and students use culturally appropriate gestures to accompany use of Chinese language.

Discuss and role-play Chinese gestures relating to classroom dynamics and annual cultural festivals and celebrations. Compare and contrast the use of gestures in Chinese and Australian English. Send email messages to sister school peers to mark birthdays, festivals (e.g. New Year, Moon Festival).
Simulate the dynamics of a Chinese classroom on one or two designated days of the week by using Chinese for particular classroom routines throughout the day. Start with one routine e.g. morning greetings and build up over the term/year/stages. Suggested routines may include morning greetings, afternoon dismissal, teacher feedback to students, student questions/approach to teacher, roll marking, and collecting notes/money.

Linguistic meaning-making through situated practice

A further focus of these days could be on adding Hanzi and Pinyin translations to classroom displays and lists. Consider establishing a Hanzi Chart in the classroom and updating it each week with the characters students are learning. Install Chinese software on classroom computers and allow students to word process Chinese labels and classroom displays.

Spatial meaning-making through overt instruction

Discuss video, online or print pictures of classrooms in China and compare and contrast with Australian classrooms. For instance, what is taught in English lessons can provide a focus for incorporating knowledge of China. The lovely Dragonkeeper series by Carole Wilkinson [see reviews – Ed] work from an English perspective to incorporate ancient Chinese history and fantasy (see http://carolewilkinson.com.au/). These award-winning books open up some new areas for consideration the heroine, Ping and discussion of Buddhism, the Han Dynasty and Tai Shan (mountains of imperial security and stability). Check out Carole’s dragon tour of Melbourne’s central business district, and investigate producing one for your local town or city (http://www.carolewilkinson.com.au/dragontour/)

Linguistic and gestural meaning-making through critical framing

Conduct a debriefing regarding the Chinese language days. Invite students to assess their own use of Chinese as well as participate in a cumulative whole class evaluation process. Develop individual and class systems such as electronic or print charts to be filled in after each debrief, or collection of portfolios of work to use in student self-assessment and evaluation. Explore the classroom use of iPads by students in self-assessment. Work with students on developing their reflective abilities, in self-assessment and self-evaluation of their own progress in speaking, reading and writing Chinese, including Hanzi and Pinyin, as well as their understanding and use of appropriate body language.

Linguistic meaning-making through transformative practice

Organise school community events to coincide with Chinese language days and to celebrate cultural festivals. Add Hanzi to school signage (along with English and Pinyin) to welcome visitors to events.

Linguistic and gestural meaning-making through transformative practice

Welcome visitors to the school/classroom on Chinese language days using appropriate language and gestures.

Linguistic meaning-making through overt instruction practice

Prepare for and debrief Chinese language days by explicit teaching of appropriate language (vocabulary, phrases, intonation) and providing scaffolds (e.g. classroom displays) as reference points to support teacher and students. Develop a shared metalanguage to use in discussing Chinese language days. In middle to upper primary classrooms display focus questions to guide discussion e.g.

1. Did you like our Chinese day?
2. How did you feel when Ms spoke to you in Chinese?
3. What did you notice that was different about the class during the course of the day?
4. What did you notice that was similar?
5. What do we need to do to get ready for our next Chinese day?

Show a video of a classroom in China and invite students to notice similarities and differences. Focus discussion on teacher-student and student-student interaction and the use of language in classroom. Use video or online examples to engage students in the use of common Chinese phrases in context and linked to celebrations, cultural festivals, and family events. Classroom role-plays followed by discussion/
debrief. Create a list of common Chinese phrases (in Hanzi and Pinyin) and where appropriate their related English equivalents for display. Invite students to compare and contrast between target language and English phrases, noting word order and literal translation. Discuss the appropriate use of multimedia to convey greetings and wishes associated with Chinese cultural celebrations using cards, telephone calls, letters, email, text message, Facebook.

**Multimodal patterns of meaning through overt instruction**

Discuss the appropriate use of multimedia to convey greetings and wishes associated with Chinese cultural celebrations, for example cards, telephone calls, letters, email, text message, Facebook.

**Multimodal patterns of meaning through overt instruction**

Explore the use of software packages to assist students to develop skills in writing Hanzi eg iWrite, developed by Tam and Yeung (2010), which provides demonstration, practice and evaluation to scaffold students’ development of Hanzi. Build students’ metalinguage related to Hanzi. Discuss word associations between characters and English words.

**Multimodal patterns of meaning through transformative practice**

Distribute information about school community events via school newsletter, website and student/class emails to parents. Incorporate some Hanzi (with English translations) on the school website.

**Multimodal patterns of meaning through transformative practice**

Video-conference with an English language class in a sister school in China. Focus on class or group projects. Use video-conferences to develop project ideas in collaboration with sister-school teachers and students.

Consider the following approaches to project development.

**Common projects** – one agreed topic e.g. Homes, Cities – Living in the city, Rural life – Living on the farm/in a town/village, Transport, Food – Eating out and eating at home. Each class/group works on the agreed project and shares the outcomes through email and video-conference.

**Shared projects** with topics decided upon collaboratively by both sister-school classes. Each class/group works on a different aspect of the one project, e.g. Cities in China and Australia – Sister-school classes decide on a list of up to ten cities to include in the project. One class/group researches and compiles information on five of the cities from the list and the other researches and compiles information on the other five. Completed sections of the project are shared via video-conference and combined in an electronic file for display at both schools.

**Reciprocal projects** decided upon collaboratively during a video-conference, by each class asking for and making suggestions of topics of interest for the sister class to work on, e.g. Native animals, Chinese/Australian cultural landmarks, Popular music in China/Australia, Aboriginal culture. Completed projects are shared via video-conference and email.

Focus 2: Birthday happy, reflecting on and comparing structural elements of English and Chinese inspired by the research conducted by Weng, 2010.

I was teaching the phase 生日快乐 sheng ri kuai le (literally translated as ‘birthday happy’) when a student said loudly (he did not even raise hand), Miss, why do you put birthday in front of happy in Chinese? I was stunned by that unexpected question. Seconds later I said, ‘Well, actually I have a similar question for you. Why do you put happy in front of birthday in English?’ He replied, ‘I don’t know. I just say it.’ I said, ‘Well, I guess I don’t know either.’ Then I turned to the whole class and said, ‘That was a good question.’ Our language is part of our culture, which is handed down from generation to generation. Our ancestors developed different life habits because they lived in geographically different places. And the linguistic system is one of these different habits. That’s why people in different countries speak different languages. And we call this cultural difference ...

languages and their use provides an important basis for intellectual creativity, local/global friendship networks such as sister school partnerships, and improved motivation arising from students’ recognition that they and the target language are valued.

**Professional reading**


Wu, T. (2010). Teacher engagement in second languages classrooms. (MEd (Hons), University of Western Sydney).

Michael Singh, from the University of Western Sydney, leads a team of teacher-researchers engaged in school-engaged teacher education and research which has as the primary focus making Chinese learnable for second language learners in Western Sydney.

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