

Speech delivered by:

**Professor Michael Clyne, director of RUMACCC,
Research Unit for Multilingualism and Cross-Cultural Communication Launch**
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The Research Unit for Multiculturalism and Cross-Cultural Communication was established recently to conduct and disseminate the results of research to facilitate the harnessing of Victoria's language resources and cross-cultural communication experience.

While more than a quarter of Melbournians use a language other than English at home, Australian CEOs trail their counterparts in 27 countries in multilingualism.

Many parents trying to raise their children bilingually give up because they do not know how to do it. Inter-generational communication is still impoverished by many children's shift to English only, and some newer communities are desperately looking to the experience of older communities and the results of research on them help resolve this problem. Some of the previously well-maintained languages are now being lost in the second and third generations.

We have 43 languages accredited for our VCE and most children take a LOTE a primary and junior secondary levels but very few students at least in government schools continue a LOTE to year 12. Our primary and secondary schools offer an impressive range of languages but we strike problems when children move schools and thus languages programs because we don't show them how to utilize in the new language the metalinguistics skills they have acquired through participation in the earlier language program.

The cross-cultural communication which occurs between migrants from different parts of the world will take place increasingly internationally. Our collective experience in cross-cultural communication could make us an important link between Europe and Asia if we make more extensive use of this experience.

We were the first English-speaking country with a comprehensive language policy but we have not kept up its implementation and governments have not continued their commitment to it.

Such issues and many more require a partnership between researchers, the communities being researched, and the potential users of the research. Most of the activities of the Research Unit for Multilingualism and Cross Cultural Communication centre around such a partnership.

This includes a large scale project on the role of the secondary school in the maintenance and spread of community languages, involving the state and Catholic education systems, four schools, and the Victorian Multicultural Commission as well as ourselves.

Another area for partnership is our workshops on raising children bi- or trilingually which enables parents to access the results of research work and to network and researchers to benefit from the experience of the participants.

We have also been working with specific communities to examine how and for what purpose they are maintaining their languages and how their aspirations can best be achieved.

We are co-operating with schools in action research to help improve the outcomes of their bilingual and community language programs.

Our current language-specific projects deal with Arabic, Auslan, Filipino, German, Greek, Macedonian, Mandarin, Somali, and Spanish.

Next year we will be combining an analysis of the 2001 Census language data with a survey of community language use in public domains to ascertain to what extent language policies are matching current demography.

We look forward to the continuing challenge of helping to make the most of Victoria's multilingualism and cultural diversity.