



Building Demand - What Works

The Studies of Asian languages

>> Removing structural impediments

Building Demand: providing students with pathways

Japanese immersion at Huntingdale Primary School, Victoria

At Huntingdale Primary School, all students learn in and through Japanese language for seven and a half hours per week: two and a half hours for Japanese literacy, and one hour each in Humanities, Science, Art, PE and Music. Each class within the school has both an English-speaking teacher and a Japanese-speaking teacher.

Fundamentals

The program is based on the notion that immersion is the most natural way for young children to learn language. Developing the program, however, meant looking at best practice not only across Victoria and Australia, but also at existing bilingual school systems in Canada, Finland and the USA.

Teachers work in collaborative teams and pedagogical approaches are trialled through action research processes. They are then documented and shared as widely as possible. Hundreds of teachers and many school leadership teams have now visited the school to learn from its experience.

The school involves itself in current research (in at least three different Victorian projects at the time of writing) and a number of national National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) initiatives, including the Leading 21st Century Schools: Engage with Asia project. In 2011, the school was awarded a Becoming Asia Literate: Grants to Schools (BALGS) grant.

Principal Monica Scully says:

'Bilingual modes of education are not in themselves a predeterminer of higher academic achievement. A collaborative team culture embedded in research and innovative reflective practices, within a supportive community, help to create the conditions for Japanese language achievement in our children.'

The program in practice

In practice, both English and Japanese languages and cultures have to be valued equally in the school. All community celebrations, musical productions, sports nights and even the weekly assembly are conducted in both languages. Further, as Scully explains:

Bilingual education transforms school practice

Over the past four years, Huntingdale PS has reconceptualised its teaching and learning practices through a bilingual lens. Students' Japanese and English literacy levels have substantially improved. Students now see it as the most natural thing in the world to learn in two languages. Demand for the program is such that some students travel considerable distances to attend the school.



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Monica Scully, Principal,
Huntingdale Primary School, VIC

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A number of other notable features of the bilingual program in practice include the following:

- >> During sessions taught in Japanese students are only spoken to in Japanese. They may ask questions in English, but the response will always be in Japanese;
- >> The Japanese-speaking classroom teachers must have a native level of fluency and a deep understanding of Japanese culture;
- >> The two classroom teachers plan together (supported by the Leading Teacher responsible for curriculum design) to ensure that content taught in one language is not repeated in the second language;
- >> Teachers use a range of resources including ICTs, big books and both fiction and non-fiction texts to support Humanities, Science, Art and Music taught through Japanese;
- >> The Japanese literacy program must reflect the same quality teaching practice as the English literacy curriculum, with high levels of differentiation, infusion of thinking and embedded ICT.

Achievements

Increasing school enrolments demonstrate that the school is well respected in the community, and that there is a real demand for the bilingual program.

By the time they graduate from Year 6, most students at Huntingdale PS are operating at a Year 8, 9 or even Year 10 level of Japanese. Scully says that parents:

'... are just so appreciative that their child has the opportunity to learn a second language like this. The greatest testimony to our program is our children's love of learning Japanese. They see it as the most natural thing in the world to learn in two languages.'

Or, as one parent put it:

'... you choose what gifts to give your children. We bring our children to Huntingdale to give them the gift of language.'

Finally, in recognition of its achievements, Huntingdale PS received the 2011 Curriculum Innovation Award at the Victorian Education Excellence Awards.

About AEF

The Asia Education Foundation provides teachers, education leaders and school communities with innovative programs, curriculum resources and networks to support the achievement of Asia literacy for every young Australian.

AEF is a joint activity of Asialink at the University of Melbourne and Education Services Australia. It receives core funding from the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

AEF leverages funding to support Asia literacy in Australian schools from a broad range of government, philanthropic and corporate partners in Australia and Asia.

Related links

- >> Huntingdale Primary School: Japanese Immersion Program website
- >> Leading 21st Century Schools: Engage with Asia www.asiaeducation.edu.au/l21cs
- >> Becoming Asia Literate: Grants to Schools www.asiaeducation.edu.au/balgs

Contact Asia Education Foundation P: +61 3 8344 4800 E: aef-support@asialink.unimelb.edu.au