



Asia Education Foundation

*What Works*  
**summary report**

**Making an Asia-literate school**

**2016**

# ***What Works* summary report**

## **Making an Asia-literate school**

A report based on research by the Asia Education Foundation

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## Executive summary

This report outlines research on the establishment of Asia literacy in Australian schools. It identifies seven key factors that shape how effective schools will be in the implementation process. The report provides a research-based 'how to' Asia literacy manual for schools and those who support schools.

### A supportive policy framework

The first factor underpinning the effective implementation of Asia literacy is the establishment of a clear, supportive policy framework. It principally concerns governments and education systems and sectors, but is also relevant to schools. A policy framework gives permission for action, provides a basis for resourcing and helps set goals and targets. It is the foundation for a shared, community-wide effort to achieve the Asia literacy goal.

Australian governments have established a strong policy framework for Asia literacy, principally through the Australian Curriculum. This follows the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* and the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*. Governments have also supported Asia literacy through funding key programs.

Policy responsibility rests with governments, but not only there. Schools should also develop policy frameworks for Asia literacy and clear plans for implementation including realistic goals and plans for action.

### Key message

*Effective Asia literacy programs require a strong policy foundation at every level: government, education system/sector and school.*

### Leadership

While a policy framework is essential, it is impotent without strong and effective leadership, especially in schools. Leadership is the first lever in translating policy into practice. The *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* sets the policy framework, and the research is clear about the critical role for school leaders in innovation to establish Asia literacy.

Effective school leadership is essential in establishing policies and programs for Asia literacy, developing school partnerships, implementing Asian language programs, achieving higher levels of intercultural understanding and engaging parents in the area. But school leadership is most effective when a shared leadership model involves 'teacher-leaders' across the school. This process increases engagement, provides champions for change and strengthens the commitment to identifying and using evidence-based approaches.

The research says effective leaders have a strong moral purpose, inspire staff and support evidence-informed practice. They need resilience, perseverance and flexibility and always keep the long goal in mind.

### **Key message**

*Effective Asia literacy programs require committed, strategic, persistent leaders across the school; leaders with a sense of moral purpose, the capacity to inspire staff and a readiness to support evidence-informed practice.*

### **Teacher capacity**

The teacher is the best available source of variance in student learning. Building teacher capacity in Asia literacy is essential to success. The factors that assist in this process are clear in the research.

Schools need to develop a culture of professional learning and reflective practice. This involves a commitment to evaluation of practice and adoption of evidence-based approaches. Teachers are given time to develop new knowledge about what works in Asia literacy, apply this knowledge in their classrooms and use the results to coach colleagues. Coaching is usually the responsibility of teacher-leaders.

A second key element in building capacity is the role of the personal experience of a teacher or school leader in shaping understanding of Asia literacy and generating the excitement and moral purpose that drives action. The experience of an intense, productive and enjoyable engagement with the people of Asia is consistently a key initiator of change. International study programs are commonly the source of this experience, as are sister school relationships in Asia. Researchers found that teachers involved in study programmes overseas gained heightened cultural knowledge and intercultural understanding, and that these gains led to changes in their teaching practice and in taking on leadership roles in Asia literacy programs in their schools.

The third element in teacher capacity building for Asia literacy is the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). They can generate innovative and transformative learning environments, engage students with higher order thinking skills, improve student engagement, help students become independent researchers, strengthen learning outcomes in languages and develop a wide range of global competencies.

### **Key message**

*Growing teacher capability in Asia literacy demands a strong professional learning culture with a commitment of time and resources, personal experience (eg through sister school partnerships or study programs in Asia) and effective use of ICT.*

### **Curriculum and resources**

The Australian Curriculum provides the curriculum policy framework for Asia literacy. The key levers are the cross curriculum priority entitled Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, curricula for Asian languages and the intercultural understanding general capability.

Successful schools start with curriculum documentation. They have modified curriculum documents to include the Asia cross-curriculum priority, developed scope and sequence documents and modified units of work with an Asia focus across the curriculum. Schools then develop student projects to integrate learning areas and to share with international counterparts. In-country experience and international partnerships are rich sources of ideas for curriculum redesign and structural transformation.

In the languages area, innovative approaches include developing a sequential curriculum map for languages that addresses both content and teaching approaches, including those involving ICT, and a project in a community of schools to build a language continuum across primary and secondary years.

Success in the area of intercultural understanding has often started with an exploration of the general capability in the Australian Curriculum. Some learning areas, notably English and History, provide rich contexts and substantive content opportunities for Asia literacy.

Innovation in curriculum resources has involved collaboration with target language communities as a source of authentic texts and experiences. A range of resources, including ICT, is used to provide different voices and perspectives; teachers will, however, sometimes need support in dealing with challenging content. The curated resources from the Asia Education Foundation have been a key source for many schools.

#### **Key message**

*Curriculum planning, documentation, resourcing, innovation and implementation are all critical to the effective implementation of Asia literacy. The most successful schools use a range of proven strategies and approaches across the curriculum and the school.*

#### **Pedagogy**

Even the best curriculum requires high quality pedagogical skills and capacities to put it into practice. In policy terms, improved pedagogy is explicit in the work of the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, especially in the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*..

Effective schools working on Asia literacy choose to invest in new pedagogies and curriculum design. They position Asia literacy within the active learning, higher-order thinking, inquiry and problem-solving approaches and uses of technology central to 21st-century learning.

These innovations are most effective if they are implemented with reference to the research evidence. Schools find that the use of well-researched pedagogical models is the key to achieving classroom change. This is part of the 'knowledge mobilisation' process, which involves teachers in bringing research knowledge into their practice and spreading the findings within the school.

The concept of intercultural understanding is transformative, so it requires pedagogies that facilitate transformative change: authentic, student-driven social action, reflection on social justice and ethical discussions of complex and challenging issues.

Language teaching, similarly, must engage and motivate students through student autonomy, providing short- and long-term goals and familiarising students with the target culture. Schools found that direct interaction with student speakers of target languages improves language proficiency and broadens worldviews.

ICT is important in providing virtual experiences to students who cannot gain them directly. Students engage with their international counterparts using ICT and can develop deeper relationships, overcome stereotypes, and become more interculturally competent. Schools use ICT to position students as researchers conducting independent investigations in cross-curricular contexts. ICT can also assist in engaging students with higher order thinking and communication skills.

**Key message**

*Asia literacy demands the use of a wide range of 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogies including inquiry, higher order thinking, problem solving and social action; use of ICTs can expand the capacity of the teacher and the school to engage students with authentic content.*

**Building demand**

One of the key issues faced by Asia literacy over recent decades has been the need to build demand for studies of Asia, Asian languages and the development of intercultural understanding. The requirement for building demand applies as much to teachers and school leaders as it does to parents, students and the general community.

For teachers and school leaders, the key strategies involve persuasive personal encounters, policy endorsement, collegial support, maintenance of the initiative over time and adequate funding. Use of ICTs can support teachers and also have benefits in improving student demand for studies of Asia and Asian languages and improving student outcomes.

Demand for language teaching is more complex. Successful schools establish programs to target students through cross-national peer-to-peer contact, exposure to background speakers of the language and contact with professionals working in the region. They also target parents by informing them about the language program, its benefits to their children and how they can help at home.

**Key message**

*If Asia literacy is to be sustainably established in schools, efforts to build demand are essential. These should target school leaders, teachers, parents and students.*

**Community and parent engagement**

Building school community demand for Asia literacy is a key to sustainable change. There is extensive research showing a positive correlation between parents' engagement in their children's education and learning outcomes. This is critical in the area of languages education, where parents can encourage their children to study a language, communicate positive attitudes about the target language and culture and support their child's learning at home.

The research indicates that parent engagement in support of languages programs occurs where there is a strong leadership commitment to their involvement, they are involved in cultural events, language role models are showcased, they are kept informed about the program and their child's progress and they are provided with practical tools to assist their child's learning.

Parents and community members can be encouraged to take part in school activities in ways that recognise their expertise, through an audit of their Asia-related expertise or by sharing their stories and personal experiences in the classroom. Community members can also contribute to discussion and decisions on the school's Asia program.

**Key message**

*Asia literacy programs will be at their strongest when schools work to ensure that parents and community members play an active role in supporting them. In the area of Asian languages, in particular, parent and community engagement and support are essential.*

## Introduction

This paper makes clear what is involved in achieving high levels of Asia literacy in Australian schools. It offers a research-based 'how to' manual for schools and those who support schools as they make decisions and take action to achieve the goal that every Australian student should be Asia literate.

The research on which the paper is based was reported by the Asia Education Foundation during the period from June 2012 to July 2015 in the *What Works* series of publications<sup>1</sup>. The 10 numbered documents in the series address the following areas:

WW1	Building demand for Asia literacy
WW2	Leading school change to support the development of Asia-relevant capabilities
WW3	Achieving intercultural understanding through the teaching of Asia perspectives in the Australian Curriculum: English and History
WW4	Using ICT in schools to support the development of Asia-relevant capabilities
WW5	Schools becoming Asia literate
WW6	Australia-Asia school partnerships
WW7	Study programmes to Asia
WW8	Parents and the learning of Asian languages in schools
WW9	Achieving intercultural understanding in schools
WW10	Teacher education and languages

The research provides information and analysis on issues including:

- school curriculum, with a focus on both the incorporation of Asia perspectives and knowledge in the curriculum in general, and the teaching of the languages of Asia;
- pedagogy and related school practices;
- teacher education and further professional learning;
- school leadership;
- the role of parents in supporting language study
- programs of study in Asia;
- partnerships between Australian schools and their Asia counterparts;
- use of information and communication technologies (ICT); and
- a range of other practices and orientations aimed at improving Asia literacy.

The summary is organised around a set of key factors involved in developing Asia literacy in Australian schools. These are the factors that the research shows are effective in developing Asia literacy in students, teachers and schools. They have been consistently at the top of the list of influences identified throughout the *What Works* series. In effect, they define the effective characteristics, practices and orientations among agencies and individuals that both shape and predict Asia literacy. Taken together, they are a template for action.

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<sup>1</sup> The *What Works* series is cited throughout this document as WW1, WW2 etc., referring to the volume number in the series

In discussing each of these key messages, where the research provides relevant data the paper considers the evidence as it applies to agencies and individuals with responsibility for matters relating to the improvement of Asia literacy among young people:

- schools and school leaders
- teachers;
- governments, education authorities and support agencies; and
- teacher education institutions.

The report aims to suggest what can be done by or for each of these agencies and individuals to improve Asia literacy, or to enhance their capacity to encourage Asia literacy.

Some elements appear repeatedly: developing teacher capability, for example, is a responsibility in different ways of teacher education institutions, education systems and support agencies, schools and school leaders. It is arguably also a responsibility of teachers themselves.

The summary confines itself to matters that the research demonstrates, or convincingly argues, to have a material impact on Asia literacy. Some of the factors are generic; they apply not only to the establishment of Asia literacy but also to effective education more generally. Others are specific to Asia literacy.

It should be noted that this paper addresses only the research reported in the 10 *What Works* documents. While this represents a substantial body of work, it is not a complete account of research in the area.



## What is Asia literacy?

Asia literacy refers to the knowledge, skills and understandings of the histories, geographies, literatures, arts, cultures and languages of the diverse countries of the Asian region. It includes both:

- cross curriculum studies of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia; and
- learning Asian languages, with a focus on Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean (WW1: 8).

Asia literacy also addresses intercultural understanding, which has consistently been closely linked with the Asia initiative.

## What are the key factors shaping Asia literacy?

The *What Works* series consistently identifies a set of common factors that tend to improve and enhance Asia literacy in schools, teachers and students. In summary, they are:

- A supportive policy framework
- Leadership
- Teacher capacity
- Curriculum and resources
- Pedagogy
- Building demand
- Parent and community engagement

These are not the only factors that matter. They are, however, the factors for which the research cited provides the most compelling case.

### 1. A supportive policy framework

The first factor underpinning the effective implementation of Asia literacy is the establishment of a clear, supportive policy framework. It principally concerns governments and education systems and sectors, but is also relevant to schools. A policy framework gives permission for action, provides a basis for resourcing and helps set goals and targets. It is the foundation for a shared, community-wide effort to achieve the Asia literacy goal.

This factor was recognised at the beginning of the *What Works* series. The first research report in the series, addressing studies of Asia, noted the need for:

A clear course of action: This course of action needs to be sanctioned and encouraged by an appropriate body or policy (via, for example, the policy of an education agency or, pertinently at present, the requirements of the Australian Curriculum). It should be relevant to the needs of the participant and his or her context, feasible, challenging, and productive of concrete results (WW1: 2).

Australian governments have, in recent years, established a strong policy framework for all of the elements of Asia literacy. The principal policy mechanism is the Australian Curriculum (ACARA,

2016), which includes the cross curriculum priority entitled Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia and the intercultural understanding general capability. These are reflected throughout the learning area documents.

The Australian Curriculum itself reflects the policy context for education established by all Australian governments in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, which is explicit about the need for the development of Asia capabilities and ‘the need to nurture an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity, and a sense of global citizenship’ (MCEETYA, 2008: 4).

*What Works 3* also notes the role of the Australian Government’s *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* (Australian Government, 2012), which sets a broader policy framework within which education is located and which provides:

policy imperatives for establishing studies of Asia within the core curriculum, and for Australian students to develop Asia- relevant capabilities (WW3: 8).

*What Works 9* reinforces this policy role for governments, but also makes clear that policy does not stop there. It argues for ‘addressing these factors systematically as part of planning and design of school policy, curriculum and pedagogy’ (WW9: 5). This focus is reflected in case studies throughout the series. Schools refer consistently to the importance of their own policy frameworks. Huntingdale Primary School refers to the ‘structural, policy and procedural changes’ needed to embed pedagogical change associated with strengthening the teaching of Japanese (WW5: 33). Illawarra Sports High School refers to ‘the school’s broader commitment to the policy around building Australia’s Asia-relevant capabilities’ (WW4: 33). Tranby College recognises that ‘one way to formalise such commitment [to family-school partnerships] is to incorporate it into school policy documents’ (WW8: 18). Similarly, *What Works 8* found that ‘schools with a formal parental engagement policy typically fare better in working with parents than those that do not’ (WW8: 46).

Governments and departments of education have also played a key policy agenda role through their funding of specific projects and programs. The Building Asia Literacy: Grants to Schools (BALGS) project has offered many schools the chance to strengthen their Asia literacy practice. The most significant project in terms of developing improved intercultural understanding is the BRIDGE program (an acronym for Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement). BRIDGE has been recognised nationally and internationally for its innovation in supporting Australia-Asia school partnerships. It was acknowledged as one of Australia’s leading educational innovations at the 2012 Biennial National Education Forum. Prior to that, it was shortlisted in the final 20 projects in the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations-BMW Award for Intercultural Innovation 2011, of which it ranked 16th out of 400 entries from 70 countries.

### **Key message**

*Effective Asia literacy programs require a strong policy foundation at every level: government, education system/sector and school.*

## 2. Leadership

While a policy framework is essential, it is impotent without strong and effective leadership, especially in schools. Leadership is the first lever in translating policy into practice. *What Works 2* notes that there has been a strong policy focus on school leadership through the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA 2008) and in the development of the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (AITSL 2016). *What Works* research is clear about the key role played by effective leadership across all elements of Asia literacy. The clearest statement of this position is found in *What Works 6*, which states ‘school leadership plays a significant role in any implementation of change or innovation for Asia literacy and intercultural understanding’ (WW6: 9).

Related findings are evident across the field. *What Works 8*, discussing the establishment of strong Asian languages programs, found that ‘formalised leadership commitment to strengthening parental engagement in student learning is a major success factor for building successful family-school partnerships’ (WW8: 18). The paper cites a number of schools in which leaders have successfully engaged parents in their programs. *What Works 6* makes a similar finding regarding the role of school leadership in the establishment of school partnerships (WW6: 8). *What Works 1* found that an effective school languages program must be ‘well supported by the school leadership in authentic and effective ways’ (WW1: 24). *What Works 3* found that achieving higher levels of intercultural understanding requires ‘support from school leadership’ (WW3: 24).

More broadly, school leadership for Asia literacy can be conceived as more than the responsibility of a small leadership team. *What Works 2*, addressing the issue of leadership for Asia literacy, argues that ‘although leadership at the school level remains paramount, collective leadership across schools and systems creates “tailwinds” of change’ (WW2: 7). This document also notes that the case study schools examined ‘have established leadership at various levels within and beyond the school to create robust and sustainable change’ (WW2: 8). This was also true of the Becoming Asia Literate: Grants to Schools (BALGS) schools:

In all schools...leadership for change was driven by teacher-leaders...who assumed responsibility for a variety of programs and initiatives to support Asia literacy (WW5: 19).

*What Works 2* goes further, arguing for the development of teacher leaders through the distribution of leadership across the school and the principal’s legitimization of the role of teacher leaders (WW2: 24):

Leadership for change involves shared leadership across the school. A successful principal distributes leadership and encourages innovation, decision-making and commitment to sustainable reform (WW2: 9).

As the research notes elsewhere:

...collegial models of leadership increase engagement of staff in key decisions involving curriculum, teaching and learning (WW5: 35).

Another form of distributed leadership concerns the role of ‘champions’:

people within schools who have the capacity to influence local policy and practice and to provide effective support for initiatives to change practice (WW1: 14).

Consistent with the concepts of teacher-leader and champion, an approach that schools have found effective in building teacher leadership is nominating one member of staff to be responsible for

finding and sharing Asia literacy-related research (WW2: 27). Other approaches that have been effective include teacher-leaders working in teams to establish momentum for systematic, whole-school change, and individual teacher-leaders inspiring colleagues to innovate on curriculum and pedagogy within a faculty or across a number of year levels (WW5: 19).

*What Works 2* is also clear about some characteristics of effective leaders of Asia literacy programs that achieve deep and sustainable change. They include:

- Leaders with a strong sense of moral purpose for building Asia literacy (a view supported in WW5: 20);
- Leaders who provide inspirational motivation to their staff;
- Leaders who support research and evidence-informed practice, who can both understand the significance of Asia literacy and select appropriate curriculum and pedagogic approaches
- Teacher leaders in a distributed model that prioritises student learning (WW2: 2-4)

The research is clear about what kind of leadership is required to achieve sustainable change in schools. It involves ‘resilience, perseverance and flexibility...[and] that leaders always have the long goal in mind’ (WW2: 31).

#### **Key message**

*Effective Asia literacy programs require committed, strategic, persistent leaders across the school; leaders with a sense of moral purpose, the capacity to inspire staff and a readiness to support evidence-informed practice.*

### **3. Teacher capacity**

Hattie’s research, stated most famously in his 2003 paper for ACER, demonstrates that the teacher is ‘the greatest source of variance that can make the difference’ to student learning (Hattie, 2003: 4). If policies and programs in Asia literacy are to be effective, teachers are the essential link.

*What Works 2*, reporting on the Becoming Asia Literate grants to schools (BALGS), notes that the grants program ‘enabled teachers to build their professional capacity and confidence to improve student engagement, skills and knowledge around Asia’ (WW2: 13).

The research shows that one characteristic of schools that are effective in building teacher capacity is a culture of professional learning and reflective practice. One of the case study schools in *What Works 3* illustrates this characteristic:

Within this culture of leadership and capacity building, teachers are encouraged to evaluate their practice and to work from an evidence base of ‘what works’ in intercultural understanding. They then use this evidence to re-shape curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment (WW3: 7).

*What Works 5* reports that teachers in BALGS case study schools:

were given time to develop new knowledge about ‘what works’ in Asian languages education and studies of Asia, to apply this knowledge in classrooms, and to use observed results to coach colleagues in applying a coherent approach to teaching (WW5: 31)

Coaching is an approach characteristic of schools with a strong professional learning culture. This usually involves teacher-leaders (often mid-career teachers) working closely with peers. (WW5: 27).

*What Works 5* also reports that the BALGS schools, having provided teachers and school leaders with time release for curriculum planning, showed the benefit of the additional planning time:

Round 3 schools show[ed] evidence of addressing the Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia cross-curriculum priority within the Australian Curriculum (WW5: 16).

They also strengthened their professional learning by taking advantage of opportunities to incorporate evidence-informed practice into their plans through consultation with academics and discipline-based experts. A teacher-leader in one school reported that:

My practice is now based on the best possible resources and pedagogies that we, as an experienced group of innovative and experienced teachers, had gathered and sorted into a sequential and comprehensive curriculum (WW5: 30).

Similarly, evaluations of BRIDGE demonstrated that the reason for the very high reported effectiveness of the program was the program’s adoption of elements considered optimum for successful school partnerships, including ‘purposeful professional learning’ (WW6: 2), awareness of broader intercultural advancements in educational theory and practice, and access to relevant professional learning and resources (WW9: 4).

A second key element in building teacher capacity in Asia literacy is the role played by the personal experience of a teacher or school leader in shaping understanding of Asia literacy and generating the excitement and moral purpose that drives action. The experience of an intense, productive and enjoyable engagement with the people of Asia through sister school relationships or interactions with native speakers of an Asian language is consistently a key initiator of change.

*What Works 1* notes that many teachers already have contact with people with an Asian background. But:

it seems that something out of the ordinary is required to shift the focus of their professional thinking and habits. ...[T]eacher study programs to various Asian countries [offer] a different and more powerful sort of learning....[W]hat appears to have happened was learning through experience, and affective and inductive processes..., persuasive personal encounters...with a capacity to catch and hold the attention of participants (WW1: 12)

Where such personal contact arises through school partnerships, a key element is that such partnerships offer a range of authentic learning tools and resources, because students and teachers are engaged with real students and teachers in the partner country (WW6: 6). This provides opportunities for cross-cultural engagement, strengthened by sustainable, ongoing school partnerships, which were characteristic of the BRIDGE program (see below).

*What Works 7* found that teachers involved in study programmes overseas gained heightened cultural knowledge and intercultural understanding, and that these gains led to changes in their teaching practice and in taking on leadership roles in Asia literacy programs in their schools. Their international experiences also reignited and refreshed their enthusiasm for Asia literacy and generated a strong and sustained commitment to foster their students'; Asia-relevant capabilities (WW7: 3).

A key feature of the BRIDGE program, for example, was its effectiveness as a tool for building teacher capacity. The program has been highly successful as professional learning for teachers, who are 'the primary beneficiaries of BRIDGE'. The principal means for this professional learning is the opportunity to visit partner schools, which enables teachers to 'develop their intercultural understanding, cultural knowledge and awareness...' (WW6: 34). A participant survey showed that 97 per cent of all BRIDGE teachers in Australia stated that their intercultural understanding had developed as a result of BRIDGE and 95 per cent reported that their knowledge and awareness of the partner country had expanded. In addition, 83 per cent agreed that BRIDGE had enabled them to improve their second language proficiency and 81 per cent agreed that they had developed or enhanced their ICT skills (WW6: 35).

Participants reported that all Australian schools had been in touch with their partner school in Asia and 79 per cent indicated that staff at their school had a chance to visit the partner school and make personal connections (WW6: 6-8). In addition

- 88 per cent maintained contact with their partner school;
- 77 per cent agreed that their partnerships are actively supported by their school leaders; and
- 72 per cent reported that BRIDGE has enabled their school to establish a sustainable school partnership to support cross-cultural engagement.

The third element in teacher capacity building is the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). The research indicates that ICT can be a powerful tool, but notes that its take-up is not unproblematic. Success depends on an extended process:

[T]he use of ICT involves a multi-stage process. Schools evolve from familiarisation with, and basic use of, the technology to improve classroom productivity before they begin to focus on subject-specific pedagogy that is ICT-based (WW4: 3).

It is also clear that there is no simple formula for the use of ICT to enhance Asia literacy. Schools use ICT tools in different ways to match their stage of development:

The [case study] illustrations show that despite common themes, each school utilised a different combination of ICT tools to achieve an array of Asia-related curriculum objectives. For some schools it is the building of intercultural understanding; for others it is about improving student engagement and learning outcomes in Asian languages (WW4: 3).

Where ICT has been used effectively, the *What Works 4* case studies suggest that it was associated with a redesign of curriculum and pedagogy, and that technical and pedagogical support were provided.

The power of ICT in supporting Asia literacy is, however, profound. It can generate ‘innovative and transformative learning environments’, engage students with higher order thinking skills, improve student engagement, help students become independent researchers, strengthen learning outcomes in languages and develop a wide range of global competencies (WW4: 3-4).

A further element required to achieve high levels of professional capacity in teachers is effective initial teacher education. *What Works 10*, in considering initial education for language teachers, found a mismatch between the policy intention to boost the uptake and quality of languages education in Australian schools and the current state of languages teacher education (WW10: 43). The study concluded that there had been a decline in education offerings for primary language teachers between 2007 and 2015 (WW10: 3). Primary teachers spend much less time studying languages than in countries in Europe and Asia. (WW10: 44). And ‘...languages teacher education targeted specifically at the early childhood level appears to be non-existent’ (WW10: 43). Even for secondary teachers there had been some shrinking of languages specialisation teacher education offerings, and, despite some exceptions, they were usually not language-specific (WW10: 3-4). This is important because deep knowledge is required to explain complex language points and cultural issues in a rich and engaging manner (WW10: 51).

Leadership also plays an important role in building teacher capability through a distributed leadership model in a school (see above). *What Works 2* argues that within this model ‘teacher-leaders with a strong commitment to Asia literacy can build their capacity to lead change’ (WW2: 4). Teacher-leaders work as instructional leaders, helping to create communities of practice, and contribute to knowledge creation. This occurs within schools that value knowledge creation and encourages trusting and respectful professional relationships (WW2: 21). It is also dependent on ‘the willingness of practitioners to find well communicated research and to create effective ways to share and use this work’ (WW2: 27).

#### **Key message**

*Growing teacher capability in Asia literacy demands a strong professional learning culture with a commitment of time and resources, personal experience (eg through sister school partnerships or study programs in Asia) and effective use of ICT.*

#### **4. Curriculum and resources**

As was noted above, the Australian Curriculum plays a critical role in creating the curriculum policy environment for Asia literacy. The key levers are the cross curriculum priority entitled Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia, curricula for Asian languages and the intercultural understanding general capability. This initiative has the potential, if thoroughly implemented in classrooms, to remedy a substantial earlier weakness in the way Australian curricula supported Asia literacy.

A 2009 study of Australian curricula by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) for the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) showed that:

- while many subjects and units in Australian curricula allow for the inclusion of content or a focus on Asia, this option appears to be underutilised. Asia content is rarely mandatory.
- Asia content tends to have an Australian or Western focus, and Europe is more likely to be studied than Asia.
- Asia content tends to be confined to a small number of countries (WW1: 8).

The *What Works* research describes a wide range of curriculum changes, practices and approaches that have been associated with success in improving Asia literacy.

A key starting point for curriculum change is the Australian Curriculum (or its manifestation in the various states and territories). Successful schools have modified curriculum documents to include the Asia cross-curriculum priority (in one case replacing fragmented topics that did not go to the heart of the Asia priority) (WW5: 32). A valuable resource for this process is the Asia Education Foundation's *Asia content in the Australian Curriculum*, which lists explicit reference in the Australian Curriculum to Asia content, to assist in including an Asia perspective in curriculum units (WW5: 35). This process can lead to the design of a scope and sequence to ensure that units of work with an Asia focus are developed and taught consistently (WW5: 33). In school networks, teachers across the schools work together to discuss practical details of curriculum implementation (WW6: 63).

One critical component of this process is focusing on the inclusion of Asia literacy across the curriculum. One of the BALGS schools aimed:

to recognise the significance of Asia perspectives to 21st century teaching and learning, to link these to existing programs in the school, such as Indonesian language and the Kitchen Garden, and to assist teachers to plan inquiry-based learning units of work based on the Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia cross-curriculum priority within the Australian Curriculum (WW5: 32)

Within a curriculum framework that is explicit about Asia literacy, schools develop student projects that integrate, for example, science and one of the languages of Asia. One of the BALGS schools conducted a project on local biodiversity and developed signs in English and Indonesian for posting around the study site. These were then shared with students in their Indonesian sister school (WW5: 40-41).

The Asian languages area provides examples of innovative and collaborative approaches. One school developed a sequential curriculum map for language that addresses forms of delivery, learning across the four modes, enriched content and the use of ICT and Web 2.0 technologies and provides for contact with speakers of the target language (WW5: 29). More broadly, a community of schools strengthened their delivery of Asian languages by building a language-learning continuum from primary to secondary school, including sharing language teachers across schools (WW5: 21)

International school partnerships have been a rich source of curriculum ideas. Teachers involved in sustained international school partnerships have engaged in curriculum and pedagogical redesign and structural transformation (WW6: 49). They use in-country study programme experiences as a catalyst to implement curriculum changes (WW7: 41), to develop curriculum units and materials (WW7: 38) and to engage in student project-based forms of collaboration (WW6: 44).

Schools have recognised the importance of curricular, co-curricular and pedagogical embedding of school partnerships and intercultural engagement, including use of student-developed primary resources on Wikispaces and project collaborations between students across partner schools (WW6: 25, 29, 38-39)

In the area of intercultural understanding, a key element of success has been staff developing a thorough understanding of the intercultural understanding general capability particularly at the organising element and sub-element levels within the Australian Curriculum and becoming familiar with opportunities to develop students' intercultural understanding through the



Australian Curriculum learning areas (WW9: 4-5). Some learning areas provide rich contexts for developing intercultural understanding through the use of Asia perspectives. English and History, for example, provide substantive content opportunities and have specific responsibilities for developing students' intercultural understanding, in part through the exploration of Asia perspectives (WW3: 2-7. 11)

Curriculum resources are also an important element of success. One strategy used effectively is shifting, in the words of one case study school, from the use of 'set and sometimes obsolete textbook tasks to current and authentic language collaboration with the communities of the target language' (WW6: 46). In the development of intercultural understanding, and in Asia literacy more generally, schools use a wide range of resources, including ICT, that bring to the fore different 'voices' and perspectives to any story, text, key historical figure, or event (WW3: 4). Across the field, there can be a need to support teachers to deal with content that may be challenging, complex, even uncomfortable (WW3: 4-5).

Schools involved in international partner school interaction have benefited from using the range of curated digital curriculum resources provided by the Asia Education Foundation. These address a variety of learning areas and countries that provide teachers with content to build student knowledge and understanding of their partner's country (WW6: 16).

There are also specific needs for teachers new to Asia literacy. In the area of Asian language teaching, for example, undergraduate trainees and newly graduated teachers need online learning materials with a focus on student motivation in language classes created and uploaded. Such materials should include practical ideas about goal setting in the classroom. Assistance in the preparation and publicising of these materials should be sought from relevant professional associations and tertiary teacher educators (WW1: 5).

### **Key message**

*Curriculum planning, documentation, resourcing, innovation and implementation are all critical to the effective implementation of Asia literacy. The most successful schools use a range of proven strategies and approaches across the curriculum and the school.*

## **5. Pedagogy**

Even the best curriculum requires high quality pedagogical skills and capacities to put it into practice. The research is clear about the kinds of pedagogies that are needed to support Asia literacy. Unsurprisingly, they are similar to those that represent the most innovative and demonstrably effective contemporary teaching practice. In policy terms, improved pedagogy is explicit in the work of the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, especially in the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2016). It is also implied in the detail of the Australian Curriculum.

As *What Works 5* finds, effective schools choose to invest in new pedagogies and curriculum design (WW5: 6). The paper argues, in the context of the Australian Curriculum and AITSL Professional Standards, that teachers need to be encouraged to move beyond 'safe' curriculum choices and pedagogy to position Asia literacy within the active learning, higher-order thinking, and problem-solving approaches central to 21st-century learning. These views are consistent with the argument that 'Asia-related capabilities are 21st-century capabilities' (WW5: 22).

In a similar vein, *What Works 2* suggests that Asia literacy requires:

21st-century pedagogies such as inquiry, higher-order thinking skills, web 2.0 technologies, and creativity and design (WW2: 3)

These innovations will be most effective if they are implemented with reference to the research evidence. Some of the BALGS schools found that the use of well-researched pedagogical models was the key to achieving classroom change (WW5: 22). This is part of the process called ‘knowledge mobilisation’, which:

...involves the willingness of practitioners to find well-communicated research, to connect research to the tasks and challenges facing them, and to create effective ways to share and use this work within the school and across professional communities (WW5: 29).

The link between Asia literacy and new pedagogies is set out in the research.

Pedagogies for the 21st century connect students with prior knowledge, identities and contexts outside of the classroom, and with multiple ways of knowing and cultural perspectives (WW5: 44).

New pedagogies are, therefore, an essential tool for schools in achieving their task of helping students see themselves as part of a heterogeneous community and world, and enabling them to understand something of the diverse groups that make it up (WW5: 46).

The research also makes a broader point, in discussing intercultural understanding, about the need for attention to both curriculum and pedagogy:

Understanding where one’s curriculum and pedagogic practice sits along an intercultural understanding spectrum is important in recognising what might work in one’s classroom and school context, and what else might be possible in the future (WW3: 7).

*What Works 9* notes that the concept of intercultural understanding is transformative: it suggests that ‘...there needs to be transformation in how young Australians—and indeed broader Australian society—are viewing and engaging with cultural diversity, locally, nationally and globally’. For this reason, it requires learners to ‘search for and make meaning from their experiences....Reflexivity is essential to transformative learning’ (WW9: 7).

This suggests that the pedagogies appropriate to intercultural understanding need to hold the capacity for transformative change. This includes:

authentic, student-driven social action...[which] develops students’ capacity to reflect on issues of social justice and participate in change....[T]eachers guide students through studies of challenging content, concepts or perspectives, and develop strategies for ethical discussions around complex and challenging issues (WW3: 5).

The research identifies a number of features of schools that have made progress in the development of intercultural understanding:

understanding where one’s curriculum and pedagogic practice sits along an intercultural understanding spectrum is important in recognising what might work in one’s classroom and school context, and what else might be possible in the future (WW3: 7).

The research makes similar points about language teaching. *What Works 1* notes that:

For students to persist with language learning, the nature of their classroom experience and attention to the range and variety of their needs and interests is crucial. Effective motivational strategies in the language classroom differ little from those of effective teaching in general (WW1: 3).

The paper finds that the most effective considerations with relation to motivation are:

- promoting learner autonomy;
- increasing learners' goal-orientedness and providing short-term as well as longer-term goals; and
- familiarising learners with the target culture.

Case study schools found that student learning was enhanced by direct interaction with student speakers of target languages. One school notes that student exposure 'to the realities of other cultures and languages [has promoted the development of] their language proficiency and understanding' and broadened their worldview. These learning outcomes provide a viable platform for the development of deep intercultural understanding (WW6: 48)

It is not always possible for students to gain direct interaction with other cultures and languages. This is one of the strongest arguments for the use of information and communication technologies in the classroom: to give students experience of phenomena that they cannot gain directly.

In many Australian BRIDGE schools, for example, students engage with their Asian counterparts in curriculum-based activities, using ICT, while further developing their language skills and enhancing their Asia-related knowledge. In the course of these interpersonal and cross-cultural interactions, students may develop deeper relationships, overcome stereotypes, and become more interculturally competent individuals (WW6: 25).

One school used a combination of ICT tools, including iPads, Smartboard lessons, and collaborative learning tools, to engage with its BRIDGE partner school. The school placed emphasis on students as researchers, with a strong focus on independent investigation within the context of cross-curricular research topics. A teacher described the benefits of using ICT in this way:

We are teaching the students how to research for themselves and to question information. The students are now organising the information and presenting it to the class, demonstrating logical thinking ... there is less focus on the teacher presenting content (WW5: 47)

Schools can develop their use of ICT to a point where students can engage with higher order thinking skills, such as organising, connecting, analysing, repurposing, and creating information. Students have the potential to develop a wider range of global competences through the use of ICT, provided pedagogy and curriculum are redesigned accordingly (WW4: 4).

### **Key message**

*Asia literacy demands the use of a wide range of 21<sup>st</sup> century pedagogies including inquiry, higher order thinking, problem solving and social action; use of ICTs can expand the capacity of the teacher and the school to engage students with authentic content.*

## 6. Building demand

Education is in some respects like a market: no matter how good the product, it will not succeed unless there is demand. One of the key issues faced by Asia literacy over recent decades has been the need to build demand for studies of Asia, Asian languages and the development of intercultural understanding. The requirement for building demand applies as much to teachers and school leaders as it does to parents, students and the general community.

Demand for studies of Asia is most likely to come from teachers and school leaders. For these groups, strategies for strengthening demand overlap substantially with the kinds of activities and experiences that build teacher and school capacity. They include:

- a persuasive personal encounter, which can include visits and study tours, sister school relationships and exposure to inspirational speakers; a key element is unmediated face-to-face experience;
- policy endorsement, such as the inclusion in the Australian Curriculum of expectations about Asia literacy, and a clear course of action including realistic goals and targets, feasible expectations and concrete outcomes;
- collegial influence and support, both within the school and through peer collaboration across schools (WW1: 2);
- maintenance of the initiative over a substantial period of time; and
- adequate funding to support programs (WW1: 4).

For school leaders in particular, it is helpful to provide professional learning related to the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL 2016) that includes a focus on building demand for Asia literacy (WW1: 4).

The position with regard to demand for Asian languages is somewhat different. There are structural impediments (eg shortages of teachers in some languages, maintaining a language in a school over time, consistency between primary and secondary schools) that require sustained attention from governments and official agencies over time. In respect of demand, however, there is evidence that students and parents play a key role in determining both the choice to study a language and student persistence with language learning.

The research suggests that students should be targeted with programs designed to encourage engagement with Asian languages. Programs should include:

- Opportunities for cross-national peer to peer contact, both actual and virtual. These should include improved chances for travel to target language countries and to host visitors from target language countries;
- Regular opportunities for exposure to background speakers of the language being learnt, in and out of the classroom. The employment of suitable young adult background speakers for language assistance should be included in these options;
- opportunities for students to listen to professionals who work in or connect with the Region (WW1: 5).

Demand for language learning is linked to self-perceived interest and the needs of the target group. Motives for learning a language are likely to change according to stage and circumstances of life. However, important focal points are:

- the prospect of making new friends;
- satisfying natural or awakened curiosity about other countries and their inhabitants;
- the prospect of travel;
- as students get older, instrumental reasons related to life and work futures. (WW1: 3-4)

As was noted above, student persistence is associated with continued motivation, and appropriate pedagogical strategies are essential.

Programs should also target the parents of students who are choosing whether to start or continue language study. Parents should be informed about:

- teaching and learning in the language programme and useful resources such as apps and websites (WW8: 25)
- what their children might value about learning a language, and how they might reinforce this;
- the nature of the support they could offer at home which might encourage persistence with language learning (WW1: 4)

The use of ICT to develop students' Asia-relevant capabilities can build demand for Asian languages and studies of Asia. Evolving curriculum and pedagogy in Asian languages and/or studies of Asia classrooms to better suit how 'digital natives' learn can motivate students to embrace the Asian Century (WW4: 4). An evaluation of Web 2.0-based student-centred action research projects in language classrooms in Victoria showed positive outcomes in student motivation and demand for Asian languages (WW4: 10).

### Key message

*If Asia literacy is to be sustainably established in schools, efforts to build demand are essential. These should target school leaders, teachers, parents and students.*

## 7. Community and parent engagement

There is a well-established policy context for community and parent engagement in education generally. *The Family-School Partnerships Framework* (DEEWR 2008), endorsed by the Ministerial council, emphasises the essential role of families in education. This shared responsibility is reinforced in the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA 2008) and is echoed in the Australian Government's *Students First* policy (Department of Education 2014).

Strategies relevant to the previous section on building demand overlap substantially with those aimed at strengthening community and parent engagement. A key difference, however, is that while strategies to build demand aim to foster and consolidate choices made by individuals, community and parent engagement has a broader purpose related to the school as a whole, including its community.

The two come together in the research finding that building whole-of-school community demand for Asia literacy is essential for meaningful and sustainable change (WW5: 6). Evaluations of BRIDGE, for example, demonstrated that the reason for the very high reported effectiveness of the program was the program's adoption of elements considered optimum for successful school partnerships, including 'systematic support and involvement by all stakeholders in the school community (leadership, teachers, students and parents)' (WW6: 2).

There is extensive research showing a positive correlation between parents' active engagement in their children's education and learning outcomes. This is especially important in the area of languages education (as was noted in the previous section). Parents can play several important roles in supporting their child's language learning:

- encouraging their child to study the target language
- communicating positive attitudes about the target language and culture
- actively supporting their child's learning of the target language (WW8: 5).

Parents can also play a role in supporting school exchange visits, homestays and other means by which children can gain personal experience of target languages and cultures.

The research identifies a range of ways of engaging parents in support of languages programs:

- Build and formalise leadership commitment to parent engagement;
- Foster parents' awareness and positive views of Asian languages and cultures (eg by inviting parents to cultural events, requesting them to contribute to cultural activities and encouraging them to become homestay hosts)
- Build parent support beyond the compulsory years by showcasing language role models and highlighting the benefits of Asian language study;
- Keep parents informed about language programs and their child's progress; and
- Provide parents with practical tools to support their child's learning (WW8: 36-8).

Parents and community members can be encouraged to take part in school activities in ways that recognise their expertise. One BALGS school undertook an audit of the Asia-related expertise in existence amongst parents, staff and the wider community. That school also gained the active involvement of parents in sharing their stories and personal experiences for units of work such as 'Building of a Nation', which highlights Australia's engagement with Asia (WW5: 33). Community members can also contribute to discussion and decisions on areas of the school's Asia program. One school sought to:

engage the broader school community in a conversation around the need to understand and value diverse perspectives while addressing issues of common concern (WW9: 30).

### **Key message**

*Asia literacy programs will be at their strongest when schools work to ensure that parents and community members play an active role in supporting them. In the area of Asian languages, in particular, parent and community engagement and support are essential.*

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