



Building Demand - What Works

The Study of Asian languages

>> from parents and community

Building Demand: engaging parents and community

Parents Understanding Asia Literacy Project

The Parents Understanding Asia Literacy (PUAL) project aims to build a network of parents who can work collaboratively with schools to increase demand for Asia literacy, both among students and among other parents and the local community. Because they play an influential role in determining the learning pathways their children follow, parents need to be involved as allies and partners.

The project is a collaboration between the Australian Parents Council (APC) and the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) in consultation with the Asia Education Foundation (AEF). It is funded through the Australian Government's National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP).

Goals

The specific project goals are:

- >> to recruit enthusiastic parents to act as Asia literacy advocates;
- >> to provide them with high quality, relevant training and strategies that will help them influence their own school communities to embrace Asia literacy;
- >> to provide them with the support they need along the way;
- >> to collate outcomes and assess the influence of parent advocates at the conclusion of the project.

Recruitment and training

Parents of primary and secondary school students from 75 schools across Australia (including government, Catholic and independent schools across metropolitan,



regional and rural settings) were invited to express interest in participating in the project by becoming 'parent advocates'. Up to three parents from each of the 75 schools have been chosen to participate in the program. At its conclusion, the PUAL project will have trained 225 parent advocates for Asia literacy.

Training is being conducted by an Asia skills consultancy and training company.

During a one-day training program, parent advocates come together in cluster groups. Together, they discuss why Asia literacy is important and learn about the emphasis on Asia in the new Australian Curriculum (via the Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia cross curriculum priority). Parent advocates also examine strategies for engaging school leaders and other parents and raising awareness of, and support for, Asia literacy within their own school communities. Proven strategies for lobbying, advocacy and effective communication are explored. Parents are also provided with materials such as the 'What Works Guide' to proven advocacy techniques.

The training sessions recognise that participating parents come from a wide range of communities and backgrounds. For some parents, Asia literacy may already be an established part of their primary school's program.

Parents build demand among students and other parents

The Parents Understanding Asia Literacy project is funded through NALSSP. The first project of its kind, it provides training for parents so that they can work as advocates for Asia literacy in school communities. Although still in its first year of operation, indications are that advocacy from this direction is having positive effects.

'... Already we can see there are many parents who are extremely talented in their own professions, who are prepared to use their skills to advance Asia literacy within their own school contexts.'

Ian Dalton, Executive Director,
Australian Parents Council

For other parents, Asia literacy may not yet be a priority at their school. The project helps participants recognise the challenges and barriers to building Asia literacy within their individual school contexts, and examines strategies they can use to overcome these.

Parent advocates are assisted individually to assess the situation at their school and develop an action plan to put Asia literacy on the agenda and build Asia literacy demand within their school communities. Examples of action plan strategies developed during the first round of training sessions include:

- >> engaging with the principal, parents committee or other parents individually;
- >> contributing to school newsletters;
- >> looking into Asia literacy best practice at other schools in the area;
- >> conducting research about what Asia literacy programs already exist and why Asian languages and/or studies of Asia are not more prominent;
- >> running information sessions for like-minded parents.

Parent advocate training emphasises the need to act as a positive, respectful and sensitive advocate and all action plan strategies will reflect this approach.

Implementation and support

As parent advocates return to their communities and implement their action plans, support is available to them. The APC keeps in regular phone and email contact and can provide extra assistance as required.

The APC is also working to generate local media interest in the activities of parent advocates.

Outcomes

The PUAL project is ongoing, but an evaluation will take place in the second half of 2012. The first cohort of parents completed training workshops in Perth, Sydney, Wollongong, Melbourne, Darwin, Adelaide and Brisbane in early 2012.

Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, with the vast majority of participants describing sessions as very helpful and very effective. Typical participant comments include:

'The workshop was very stimulating and thought-provoking.' [Melbourne participant]

'It was empowering and encouraging. It made what feels like a fairly insurmountable task seem achievable.' [Brisbane participant]

'It was helpful in defining some long term ideas on Asia literacy in the Australian education system.' [Perth participant]

'It was a good opportunity to learn some basic advocacy techniques.' [Sydney participant]

Conclusion

Given that parents are influential in many ways in the education of their children, it makes sense to involve them as partners in creating demand for Asia literacy. They can assist both in building student demand and demand from other parents and the local community.

Executive Director of the APC, Ian Dalton says:

'PUAL is the first project of its kind where parents are being used strategically as agents of influence in schools. Already we can see there are many parents who are extremely talented in their own professions, who are prepared to use their skills to advance Asia literacy within their own school contexts.'

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

- >> Parent Understanding Asia Literacy www.pual.org.au
- >> Ian Dalton speaking at the 2011 AEF National Summit www.asiaeducation.edu.au/pual

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