



Building Demand - What Works

The Studies of Asian languages

>> Removing structural impediments

Building Demand: providing students with pathways

Asian languages in early childhood

This strategy introduced the teaching of an Asian language to six early childhood settings (kindergartens, pre-schools or child care centres). Intended outcomes included children developing an awareness of, and appreciation for, diversity; and a sense of their own identity along with the values, beliefs and practices of their family group and the wider community. Importantly, it was also intended that the strategy would lead to children continuing to engage with language study in primary school.

Sites began delivering their language program in Term 2, 2010 after a term of planning, resource development and parent consultation. The pilot was concluded at the end of Term 3, 2011. Each site had a small grant to cover planning costs and a 0.1FTE salary (three hours per week) or equivalent for the six terms of the trial.

Three different models

When sites applied to participate in the trial they were asked to nominate one of three possible language delivery models:

Model 1: A preschool teacher or childcare worker who is a native speaker of the language provides language-learning experiences.

Model 2: A language provider works with a preschool teacher or childcare worker to support the provision of language experiences.

Model 3: A language provider comes into the early childhood site to provide language experiences.

The first model was preferred by the South Australian Department of Education and Childhood Development, but only one site had



access to a suitable language provider. Most of the sites initially chose the third model and invited a local primary teacher to come to their site. In some instances the pre-school was located in the grounds of the primary school and it was intended that the same teacher would continue to teach the children when they moved into reception class. In all sites, attempts were made to weave the language into the daily program so that it was not seen as an add-on.

Making progress

As the trial progressed, sites that initially chose the third model became aware that the language program would not be sustainable if they did not incorporate it in some way into their regular program. As a result, some sites began to move towards the second model as the childcare workers started to pick up the language themselves and incorporate it into their daily program.

Language providers were, in most cases, available for a limited time and although sites tried hard to maximize their impact, there were inevitably some coordination problems. These were overcome in various ways. One language provider, for instance, said

"There is strong research evidence to support the cognitive and social benefits of language learning in the early years. The success of this pilot program demonstrates that it's feasible to introduce Asian languages in early learning centres in this state and that there are multiple positive outcomes from doing so."

NALSSP South Australia
Evaluation Report, 2010-20112

"I go home and generally do ... a little newsletter ... And it's got ... whatever language I remember that I've used ... so if a child does go home, or if a staff member goes, 'What was that word?' they can refer to it."

Some workers also made a conscious effort to replicate content for children who did not attend the site on days when the languages provider was there.

Selected outcomes

Now that the pilot has ended, participating sites have stated a commitment to continuing the language program in some way. Some language providers have created resource packs and produced videos as models for other early childhood workers to use. One language provider has successfully applied for a language scholarship so that she can continue to teach the language at her site.

Parental support for the language program at their child's site has been high throughout the pilot and many have expressed their desire to see it continue.

The NALSSP South Australia Evaluation Report 2010-2011 indicated that:

'The early childhood and distance education programs directly increased enrolments in Asian languages by increasing the number of sites teaching languages.'

Further, it says that

'Outcomes for children were described with considerable consistency. All settings were very positive about the benefits to the children of exposure to the language.'

In particular, the evaluation found that children had increased confidence in their transition to primary school, particularly in language learning. One language teacher said

"... that's been a really big plus ... for me it's that transition, seeing students at the children's centre and then seeing them in the primary school. They are so much more relaxed ... children coming across into the Indonesian room... have had that experience of the classroom so it's not new to them when they're starting school."

Another early childhood site reported that, in the second year, kindergarten children were regularly accessing the Japanese room at the primary school, and contributing to the establishment of a Japanese garden. These are the sorts of activities that normalise and promote the teaching of an Asian language for the students

Conclusion

The project evaluation concludes:

"There is strong research evidence to support the cognitive and social benefits of language learning in the early years. The success of this pilot program demonstrates that it's feasible to introduce Asian languages in early learning centres in this state and that there are multiple positive outcomes from doing so."

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.

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