



Building Demand - What Works

The Study of Asian languages

>> from students

Building Demand for: providing students with quality programs

Promoting Asian languages learning through The Arts

For some students, engagement with the arts of Asia provides motivation for the study of Asian languages and studies of Asia. In any case, language learning should never take place in a cultural vacuum and The Arts provides a most appropriate cultural context in which to situate that learning.

The three schools featured here have all taken steps to provide students with authentic experiences of the arts of Asia. All have been supported by 'Becoming Asia Literate Grants to Schools' (BALGS) grants.

Mater Dei College, Western Australia

Mater Dei is a Catholic co-educational college in the northern suburbs of Perth. Its BALGS project involved a whole-school approach to the study of languages and studies of Asia with particular reference to Indonesia and Japan.

A particular focus was the use of creative learning technologies and online or virtual learning environments. Teachers of The Arts in particular embedded studies of Asia by using an Asian theme across several year levels. This included:

- >> the school's Showcase arts exhibition featuring art with an Asian theme, such as lino block printing, calligraphy, kanji writing and Japanese kite making;
- >> the establishment of close ties to the City of Kagoshima in Japan, allowing webcam links to high school students in Japan, and consequent discussion and debate;
- >> an 'Arts Exchange' in which Year 10 Mater Dei students' graphic artwork was sent to Kagoshima for an art exhibition in October 2010, and in return the City of Kagoshima sent pictures of calligraphy for Mater Dei's Showcase exhibition.



A Mater Dei 'Arts Exchange' will be held in October 2012 focusing on the Year of the Dragon. Students from Kagoshima will be contributing art works to display in the Perth exhibition.

Reflecting on both the increased use of technology (so as to cater for a variety of learning styles), and the whole-school Asian arts theme, the project leader said:

'Numbers of students studying languages in Years 11 and 12 have increased for both Indonesian and Japanese, showing an increase in the importance of languages to both students and the parent community.'

St Aloysius College, South Australia

St Aloysius College is an independent P-12 girls' school in the centre of Adelaide. Its BALGS project focused on the establishment of a gamelan orchestra at the school, supported by an Indonesian gamelan musician-in-residence. The project aimed to:

- >> stimulate student interest in Indonesian language and culture;
- >> train music teachers in gamelan notation, instruments and cultural aspects;
- >> become a gamelan 'hub school';
- >> embed gamelan ensemble lessons in the Years 6 - 9 Music curriculum.

Authentic experiences of Asian arts stimulates student demand for Asian languages

Two Western Australian schools and one from South Australia have focused on giving students real-life experience of the arts of Asia. The result has been a greater interest in The Arts themselves, Asian languages and studies of Asia more generally.

Authentic experiences of Asian arts make Asia real in the lives of students and can stimulate their demand both for Asian languages and studies of Asia more generally.

These objectives were largely achieved. According to the project leader:

'This project has raised the profile of both gamelan and Indonesian language. Primary students have learned basic Indonesian words and this has stimulated interest in studying Indonesian in secondary school. The Indonesian classes have had opportunities for conversation in Indonesian with [gamelan musician] Dodi, as well as deepening their cultural knowledge.'

The gamelan has become a tangible focus for Asia literacy in the school and has led to student interest in associated arts performances, such as dancing, pencak silat, shaman dance (hand clapping) and kite making. A further highlight was when a popular journalist visited the school from Jakarta, where he spent a morning interviewing students and staff. As a result, the St Aloysius gamelan orchestra was included in episodes of *Seputar Indonesia* and broadcast across Indonesia.

John Curtin College of the Arts, Western Australia

John Curtin College of the Arts is a selective government secondary college in Fremantle with a long history of delivering quality arts programs.

Its BALGS project focused on contextualised Indonesian theatrical learning.

Skills workshops for both students and teachers were held by a professional guest practitioner of the traditional Indonesian dramatic form *wayang wong*. Teachers were further supported through professional learning, delivered by academics and community experts.

Within the classroom, interactive technologies are currently used to enable students to view Indonesian dramatic forms in their cultural setting. A pilot program implemented throughout 2011 culminated in a dramatic production of the Hindu epic, *The Mahabharata*. In 2012, BALGS funding will enable students to develop and showcase an original theatrical adaptation of Christopher Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously*. Students will gain a broader understanding of Indonesian culture and history within dramatic form and, more importantly, make cultural links between Australia and Indonesia.

The college principal reinforced the idea that The Arts can be used in a unique and innovative way to promote studies of Asia:

'The college is cognisant of the need to ensure The Arts curriculum delivers the imperatives of the Australian Curriculum, which requires schools to implement initiatives that ensure Asian content is included.'

Conclusion

Authentic experiences of Asian arts make Asia real in the lives of students and can stimulate their demand both for Asian languages and studies of Asia more generally.



Related links

- >> Case study about Mater Dei College www.asiaeducation.edu.au/materdei
 - >> St Aloysius College at the AEF 2011 National Summit www.asiaeducation.edu.au/staloyusius
 - >> Becoming Asia Literate: Grants to Schools www.asiaeducation.edu.au/balgs
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Contact Asia Education Foundation P: +61 3 8344 4800 E: aef-support@asialink.unimelb.edu.au