



Asia Education Foundation

## Building Demand - What Works The Study of Asian languages

>> from students

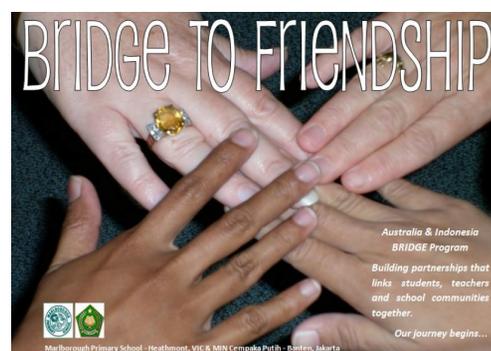
**Building Demand for:  
providing students with quality programs**

### Australia-Asia BRIDGE School Partnerships

The Australia-Asia BRIDGE (Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement) School Partnerships Project aims to enable students to develop intercultural understanding and to develop teacher skills and capacities to support this work in schools. BRIDGE is based on the principle that effective use of innovative technologies by teachers and students will build people-to-people links that develop communities of friends and learners across borders.

Currently, there are three school partnerships projects:

- >> The Australia-China BRIDGE Project has established 24 partnerships that support the development of Mandarin language capabilities of participating Australian teachers and students. A focus has been to support non-Chinese background language teachers and students to have interactions with native speakers of Mandarin. All 48 participating BRIDGE teachers are language educators.
- >> The Australia-Indonesia BRIDGE Project has established 80 partnerships, with many focused on strengthening both Indonesian language programs and studies of Indonesia across learning areas in the Australian schools. Of the 320 participating teachers, around 50% are language educators, with the remaining teachers predominantly from a social science background.
- >> The Australia-Korea BRIDGE Project has established 24 partnerships, all with a focus on strengthening the study of Korea across the curriculum of the Australian schools.



As a result of their participation in the project, two Australian schools are introducing Korean language through teacher re-training and language assistant programs. The majority of the Korean teachers were language educators, while most Australian teachers had a social science background.

Establishing Australia-Asia school partnerships has supported Australian schools in building demand for existing language programs by students and initiating new language programs by school communities.

### Benefits of connecting through innovative technologies

Prior to joining the BRIDGE Project, many participating Australian schools offer an Asian language. Participating in the BRIDGE Project provides them with an opportunity to strengthen their language programs through the use of synchronous and asynchronous technology to support learning and teaching. Schools value the opportunity for their students to engage and learn from peers through interactions resulting from school partnerships.

**International school partnerships and innovative technologies build demand for Asian languages**

The Australia-Asia BRIDGE School Partnerships Project establishes school partnerships to develop intercultural understanding to equip young people to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century as responsible local and global citizens. BRIDGE is funded by the Australian Government and The Myer Foundation.

'Students have been enthusiastic about communicating with their peers in Indonesia and are excited to use technology in their classroom.'

Teacher, Tranby College, WA

BRIDGE teachers report that the ability to connect students between classrooms in Asia and Australia strengthens class participation, engagement and learning outcomes. Many schools have reported that students are interacting with their new friends outside of language class hours, through social media. There has been an increased interest in language classes and students have exhibited strengthened language skills through regular practise with native speakers.

### Some examples of building demand

The language teacher at Tranby College in Western Australia reports:

*'Since participation in BRIDGE, Tranby has had increased student enrolments in Indonesian language classes and had better student assessment outcomes. Students have been enthusiastic about communicating with their peers in Indonesia and are excited to use technology in their classroom. They appreciate the opportunity to learn a language through peer communication using contemporary discussion topics as a means of language learning.'*

Leongatha Primary School in Victoria is building the BRIDGE Project into the everyday instruction of their language classes. Skype sessions are held daily for around 30 minutes. Each day, a small group of students from the Australian class and Indonesian class communicate around a specific topic. Students are required to converse in the target language and assist their peers with vocabulary and pronunciation. The language teacher says:

*'We have moved from being an isolated school to being part of the wider global community and that's really important in the 21st century.'*

In addition to innovative classroom practice, many school partnerships have developed student and teacher exchange programs. All exchange programs have had the aim of building their school partnership as well as providing opportunities for teachers and students to strengthen language capacity and intercultural understanding. Schools have reported that many students are more inclined to study (or continue to study) a language when there is an option to put it into practice.

Through BRIDGE, students are able to appreciate the global connectedness of the 21st century and how language is the key to engagement with our neighbours.

### Other aspects of building demand

Of the three, the Australia-China BRIDGE Project is the only one focused entirely on supporting language (Mandarin) programs. The Indonesian and Korean BRIDGE Projects are open to all learning areas and focus on an integrated curriculum approach.

Approximately a quarter of Australian schools participating in Indonesia BRIDGE do not offer Indonesian language and none of the Australian schools in Korea BRIDGE offer Korean. Most of these schools joined the BRIDGE Project initially to have a school partnership and strengthen their Asia literacy program. However, as the partnership grows, many Australian schools begin to explore how they can offer their partner school's language. This is usually, but not always, driven by the school leadership.

In a recent example, the parent community encouraged Marlborough Primary School in Victoria to offer an Asian language as a result of their involvement in BRIDGE and the strength of their Asia literacy program. The principal says:

'It was the parent community who approached me with the suggestion that perhaps it was time to begin an Asian languages program.'

Principal, Marlborough Primary School, VIC

*'It was the parent community who approached me with the suggestion that perhaps it was time to begin an Asian languages program. We had created such a strong focus on Asia literacy, but the community felt that some understanding of an Asian language was also important.'*

As a result of BRIDGE, a number of Australian schools have supported teachers to re-train in the target language and others have secured funding to employ new language teachers.

### Challenges

The strict application process for Australian schools requires the full support of the school leadership. In a small minority of cases, however, when leadership changes so do attitudes to BRIDGE.

This obviously impacts on the ability of participating teachers to grow the program and build further demand for Asian languages.

### Conclusion

The Australia-Asia BRIDGE School Partnerships Project has helped build demand for Asian languages and more broadly, Asia literacy in Australian schools. Many schools have reported outcomes in addition to the original scope of the project and gone on to initiate discussions and implementation of whole school curriculum approaches to Asia literacy and Asian languages.

### 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

- >> BRIDGE News [www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bridgenews](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bridgenews)
- >> BRIDGE home page [www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bridge](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bridge)
- >> AUSAID BRIDGE Page

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