



Building Demand - What Works

The Study of Asian languages

>> from students

Building Demand: providing students with quality programs

Working with language assistants: real life use of language

Across Australia there are many native Asian language speaking assistants working in schools. While the main role of a language assistant is to support the language teacher, another important aim can be to promote student demand for the particular language, so that students will continue their language studies in subsequent years.

In terms of generating student demand however, language assistants have not been uniformly successful. One obvious reason for this is that the experience of working with a language assistant remains such a small part of a student's total experience at school. It follows then, that looking at language assistants as part of a wider suite of initiatives is likely to produce greater student demand.

A number of initiatives have successfully impacted upon the role of language assistants as generators of demand for Asian languages.

A good practice guide

In 2011, the Association of Independent Schools in New South Wales produced a National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) -funded template of good practice. It was published as *Teaching and Learning Languages with a Native Speaker Assistant: A Teacher's Guide* (Guide).

The Guide provides a step-by-step approach for schools, beginning with how to choose and recruit a suitable language assistant. It then looks at how to orient and train a language assistant, making useful distinctions between the different roles of teacher and assistant.

In terms of the teaching and learning interactions of the assistant with students, it provides advice about:



- >> preparation of students for having a language assistant in their room;
- >> identifying target classes, and ensuring that students of a range of ages have access to the language assistant;
- >> setting aside time to meet with the language assistant for lesson planning, and to ensure that their activities meet syllabus outcomes;
- >> a range of suitable activities for the language assistant;
- >> team teaching suggestions;
- >> strategies for small group work.

The Guide also details a range of ways language assistants can be involved in extra-curricular activities.

Authentic Access in New South Wales

One example of a successful program that uses the Guide as a fundamental resource is the NALSSP funded Authentic Access program, being implemented by the Association of Independent Schools in New South Wales.

Authentic Access has provided for language assistants to be placed in schools for two terms or longer, as well as training for teachers in how to embed assistants work in schools and best manage the process. Among the program's objectives is to increase student demand for Asian languages.

Authentic speaking models in classrooms can motivate students

The use of language assistants in Asian languages classes is well-established, but their work patterns and conditions of employment vary across the country. Evidence is emerging that language assistants can play a part in promoting student demand for languages, but that their roles should be carefully defined and that all involved should receive appropriate training.

'... I really enjoy Japanese, and want to continue until I am fluent. I feel that our native language speaker has really shown me how much fun and how interesting the language and culture is.'

Student, *Authentic Access* program, NSW

In a recent evaluation of *Authentic Access*, students were asked to use a four point scale to rate their experience working with a native speaker assistant. Over 85% of students rated their experience in the top two categories. As well, over 60% of students indicated a desire to continue their study of the language the following year. One comment was:

'... I really enjoy Japanese, and want to continue until I am fluent. I feel that our native language speaker has really shown me how much fun and how interesting the language and culture is.'

Indonesian assistants in the Australian Capital Territory

Another NALSSP funded project, this time in the Australian Capital Territory, is specifically aimed at stimulating student demand for Asian languages.

Now in its third year, the Language Assistants project involves collaboration with the Indonesian Embassy to provide Indonesian language assistants to schools across the ACT. Most assistants are graduates from the Australian National University. A part-time Indonesian advisor was also employed to train and monitor the assistants and oversee their program.

Anecdotal evidence from schools suggests that teachers are very positive about the effects of the program. Importantly, many students are keen to continue their studies with the same assistant next year.

Messages from a recent report to Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

In 2010, the Joint Australia-Japan Working Group for the Promotion of Japanese recommended the investigation of a national scheme through which Japanese citizens would be placed temporarily in Australian schools to support Australian teachers of Japanese.

Related links

- >> Feasibility Study into a Reverse Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Style Program in Australian Schools
- >> Teaching and Learning Languages with a Native Speaker Assistant

This led to DEEWR commissioning a study, published in 2012: *Feasibility Study into a Reverse Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Style Program in Australian Schools*.

The study found that a Japanese Assistants Supporting Australian Schools (JASAS) program 'is feasible provided its purpose is well defined, and the expectations of the program are well understood'. (p. vi) It goes on to describe a number of purposes, including:

- >> making the study of Japanese more engaging for students;
- >> encouraging retention in Japanese from one year to the next. (p. vii)

Importantly in our context however, the study also warns that it 'would be unrealistic to believe that the JASAS program can address all of the challenges facing Japanese language education'. (p. 10) Nevertheless, it 'can reasonably be expected to promote student engagement, which would reflect a higher level of subject enjoyment. Those students are in turn more likely to continue with Japanese in subsequent years'. (p. 15)

Suggested good practice at the school level covers similar ground to the Guide, but at the system level, also includes factors such as:

- >> creating clear roles for assistants;
- >> training teachers to work with assistants;
- >> training assistants to work with teachers;
- >> providing program orientation to assistants regarding Australian education systems;
- >> enabling the exchange to be of a sufficient length so that teachers and assistants can develop meaningful relationships.

Conclusion

There is evidence that language assistant programs have a part to play in increasing student demand for Asian languages, but best results are likely when programs are structured according to good practice guidelines and implemented as part of a suite of measures.

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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AEF leverages funding to support Asia literacy in Australian schools from a broad range of government, philanthropic and corporate partners in Australia and Asia.