



# Building Demand - What Works

## The Study of Asian languages

>> from students

### Building Demand for: providing students with purpose

#### The Leading in Languages Youth Summit

The Leading in Languages Youth Summit was held in Perth in May 2011. It came about as the result of a partnership between the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and the Department of Education of Western Australia, and was supported by National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) funding.

The Summit was intended to promote student demand for Asian languages and studies of Asia more generally. In particular, its goals were for students to:

- >> develop an awareness of their Australasian identity;
- >> develop an awareness that by being more Asia literate they can transform their community, their region, themselves and the world;
- >> develop an understanding that cultural intelligence is now the key to working globally;
- >> collaborate with peers and leaders to investigate opportunities for engagement with Asia.

#### Student participation

A total of 192 students were selected to attend, from all over Western Australia and from Independent, Catholic and government schools. Participants were drawn from Years 8 - 11 and selection was based on existing interest in Asian languages and studies as well as, importantly, leadership qualities. A teacher mentor accompanied each school group.

The Summit was specifically designed with a focus on student participation. On arrival, students were given personal itineraries and



passports and had to metaphorically journey throughout the day to different places where different languages were spoken. The process of moving tables and making new friends from other schools was as much about building communication skills as it was about building understanding of cultures. Each time students left a table, they left travel notes about their impressions for the next group.

Throughout the day, interaction with presenters was encouraged. To this end, a special wiki allowed messages to be posted via laptop or tablet, and texting from mobile phones was also accommodated and encouraged. Messages and questions were displayed on big screens and presenters were able to respond immediately. Students found this process engaging and embraced it enthusiastically.

#### Engaging presenters

Kathe Kirby of the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) set the scene for students with a powerful presentation about the importance of engaging with Asia.

Informative, engaging speakers help students see purposes for learning Asian languages

The Leading in Languages Youth Summit provided an opportunity for Year 8-11 students in Western Australia to hear from highly relevant speakers about Asian languages and Asia literacy. Combined with student-initiated local projects, this provides students with purpose, particularly for learning Asian languages.

# 'Asia literacy is the key to our future. We are the key to global peace and harmony.'

Student, The Leading in Languages Youth  
Summit, WA

She introduced students to concepts such as Asia literacy and cultural intelligence, and discussed these matters through student questions and comments on the big screen.

Writer, lawyer and teacher, Alice Pung's story of history, family and identity was clearly of great interest and relevance to the audience. One student texted:

*'Thank you very much for your very touching speech. It really made me feel very special about being Chinese.'*

Climate change activist and writer, Anna Rose, gave a presentation focused on the power and creativity of young people to work together across nations to solve world issues. She encouraged students to think about their strengths and how best they might fulfill their goals.

Nigel Oakey (managing director of Dome Australia) talked about the lessons he had learned living in Asia and Australia and how they supported his business objectives. He talked about how learning a language and being culturally intelligent was the leverage these students were developing to support their own career objectives. Nigel stressed that the world is full of opportunities, especially for those who are open minded about new experiences in other cultures.

## Students plan for action

An important aspect of the day was to encourage students to take action back in their own schools to promote the study of Asian languages and cultures. Consequently, in the afternoon, time was provided for student discussion, debate and negotiation.

Each school group was asked to plan a local project of particular interest and relevance in

their environment, which would allow them to pass on some of what they had learned at the Summit. This opportunity was grasped enthusiastically, and a range of creative ideas came to light. In discussions, teachers took the role of advisors rather than leaders. Each group was offered a small sum of money to implement planned activities.

Two contemporary dance performances demonstrated how collaboration between dancers, between generations and between cultures can create works which are even more powerful and tell a greater story than when an individual works in isolation.

At the time of writing, student projects are being implemented.

## Student comments

Here is a small selection of comments from students:

*'The more you spend time out of your comfort zone, the more you become open-minded.'*

*'Do not fall asleep while your teacher is talking about Asia because it is your future you are throwing away.'*

*'Cross-cultural learning of Asia literacy is a must!'*

*'Asia literacy is the key to our future. We are the key to global peace and harmony.'*

*'We are the global citizens of the 21st century. Asia will provide many opportunities for us.'*

## Conclusion

One-off events of this kind can focus student interest and harness enthusiasm by illustrating the purposes and importance of Asia literacy.

## 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

- >> [Leading in Languages wiki](#)
- >> [Leading in Languages video in Korean](#)
- >> [Leading in Languages video in Chinese](#)
- >> [Leading in Languages video in Indonesia](#)

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

© The University of Melbourne - Asia Education Foundation, 2012

[www.asiaeducation.edu.au](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au)