



Asia Education Foundation

Building Demand - What Works For Studies of Asia

Building Demand: engaging school educators

Study program provides impetus for studies of Asia network in Tasmania

An AEF-facilitated study program to Fujian provided participants with powerful professional learning about China, its education system and studies of Asia more generally. Subsequent to the program, funding has been provided to allow the group to continue to network and support implementation of the cross-curriculum priority Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia in the Australian Curriculum.

Teacher networking: *Building Asia Literacy Across Tasmania*

In January 2012, 19 Tasmanian educators spent two weeks in Tasmania's sister state Fujian in China, developing their professional practice and Asia literacy. The study program resulted from a partnership between the Tasmanian Department of Education, the Catholic Education Office, Independent Schools Tasmania and the AEF. It is supported by the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) funding.

General aims of the project are to:

- >> develop an understanding of the Australian Curriculum's cross curriculum priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia;
- >> engage with contemporary China through experiential learning;
- >> build strong links with China;
- >> introduce Chinese language programs in schools;
- >> explore possible sister school relationships.

Professional learning programs, both before and after the study program, were provided to support the general aims.

Professional learning in China

Once in China, participants engaged in a variety of cultural and educational experiences including school visits in Beijing, Shanghai and Fuzhou (the capital of Fujian). The Australian Embassy also provided a briefing, as did the Fujian province's Department of Education. A presentation about the program for International Student Assessment provided an informed perspective on China's educational success.

Sessions about Chinese language also explored China's pedagogical approaches, providing new knowledge for most participants. One responded:

'... made me far more aware of the importance and the future impact of developing students to be multi-lingual; teaching English in China is a huge priority. We need to embrace such initiatives to empower our students for their future.'

Roundtable discussions with schools in Fujian laid the foundations for ongoing relationships and the possibility of sister school relationships being established.

A common experience among participants was a challenging of previously held views about China:



'I now feel a connectedness to the people [of China] and have a greater understanding of their culture, their way of being and the enormity of their nation, their lifestyle, perspectives, motivation and their future targets.'

Tasmanian participant, Study program to China

'Through the many different experiences, I found that my preconceived ideas were constantly challenged and on a daily basis new questions formed.'

'... before this [study program] opportunity I had no first hand knowledge; now everything in my teaching and learning program about China has a context and I find myself relating to in-country experiences and providing clarity for students.'

Outcomes for participants

Three months after the study program, participants were asked about the impact of the experience. All responded in one of the two highest categories: 'a lot' of impact or 'a great deal' of impact.

As well, two-thirds of participants have maintained links made with education organisations or schools in Fujian and expect to formalise these connections as sister school relationships. One said:

'... at a school level I have already commenced an email link with teachers, which I hope will eventually [lead to] establishing email links between students. There are many untapped opportunities to consider.'

All participants have reported back to colleagues at their schools and will be facilitating further professional learning for them in the next year.

Participants agreed that they had a clearer perspective on China and its people, and that the program challenged them to revisit their educational and life perspectives, in turn enriching their classroom practice. One said:

'I now feel a connectedness to the people [of China] and have a greater understanding of their culture, their way of being and the enormity of their nation, their lifestyle, perspectives, motivation and their future targets.'

Other outcomes

The study program provided impetus for participants to continue to network with each other. Funding has been provided for one district high school to take the lead in supporting such a network. Its principal has 0.2 time release to:

- >> facilitate two network meetings;
- >> offer ongoing support and advice on implementing the Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia cross curriculum priority and Intercultural understanding general capability through learning areas;
- >> share approaches to innovative language learning;
- >> establish a shared Asian resource bank;
- >> communicate the learning of the network across Tasmania.

Conclusion

As a consequence of the study program, participants have demonstrated an increased engagement in both their own learning about Asia and promoting studies of Asia for their students.

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.

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