



Parents and the learning of Asian languages in schools

Illawarra Sports High School, New South Wales

The school and its language programme

Illawarra Sports High School is a co-ed government school in the provincial city of Wollongong and has a below average ICSEA ([Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage](#)) value. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the local population is culturally diverse with a relatively large Aboriginal community as well as Macedonian, Italian and Portuguese communities. Many families speak a language other than English at home.

The school teaches Indonesian language, which is mandatory in Year 8. It has an [Australia-Asia BRIDGE school partnership](#) with a school in Surakarta, Indonesia, and was part of the [Becoming Asia Literate: Grants to Schools \(BALGS\)](#) project. BALGS supported the development of its Indonesian programme.

What works and how?

Illawarra Sports has made the promotion of parental engagement a key strategic priority for 2015-2017, with the aim of enhancing student engagement and attainment. There is particular focus on strengthening school-parent communication, to ensure parents feel welcome at the school and are regularly informed about school activities. The school has recently employed a Community Liaison Officer to assist in implementing strategies to improve parent and community participation in learning.

These strategies include, for example, more frequent use of SMS to advertise events of relevance to parents (e.g. information sessions and parenting workshops) and increasing the distribution frequency of the school newsletter to three times a term. These efforts have borne fruit. An

increasing number of parents are attending in-school meetings, such as parent-teacher interviews. Further, the number of parents who consider school-parent communication as being effective has increased by 44 per cent between 2012 and 2013. Ninety-two per cent of parents have indicated they are now happy with how the school communicates with them.

Illawarra Sports has undertaken a series of initiatives aimed at promoting the Indonesian language programme among students, parents and the whole-school community. Some of these initiatives are aimed at keeping parents informed about the programme and encouraging them to learn more about Indonesian culture and language.

The school's website highlights the benefits of learning a language, such as global mindedness, intercultural understanding and cognitive advantage. The website also explains the reasons and approach behind the school's Indonesian programme, emphasising the relevance to Australian students of learning Indonesian. More specifically, apps that make Indonesian language learning more appealing to students are also suggested on the website. This is partially in response to parents' desire to help their children learn Indonesian and/or to learn the language themselves.

According to Jennifer Jurman Hilton, Indonesian language teacher at Illawarra Sports, the apps are well received by parents. *'Parents have reported that they have enjoyed using Indonesian Flashcard Apps to work together with their children to help them consolidate Indonesian language learning in the classroom,'* she explains.

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Jennifer Jurman Hilton,
Indonesian language teacher
Illawarra Sports High School, NSW

One parent has described her involvement in her child's homework through use of the apps:

The Indonesian language apps are fun and easy to use. I help [my child] review Indonesian vocabulary and phrases. We listen to each word pronounced by a native speaker and we have the ability to record our own voice to compare our pronunciation with that of the native speaker. The apps also include listening and writing tests that give me the opportunity to help [her] prepare for Indonesian class assessments and tests.

The school's fortnightly e-zine, *Bamboopalooza News*, contains regular updates on the Indonesian programme, useful language learning apps and student work. According to Jennifer, this initiative has received very positive feedback from parents. Parents have reported that material contained in the e-zine enables them to talk regularly and openly to their children about the learning that occurs in the Indonesian classroom and the value of learning Indonesian.

'Bamboopalooza News is a colourful and informative e-zine with photographs and articles about Indonesian language learning. I like to talk and ask about digital learning in the Indonesian classroom with my daughter,' remarks one parent.

The use of Edmodo, an online password-protected platform, is another way parents are kept updated about teaching and learning in the Indonesian programme. New information, activities and tasks are added to the platform on a daily basis. This helps students keep up with the learning, and parents have appreciated the opportunity to access tasks and resources. According to Jennifer, Edmodo has encouraged parents to help their children develop strong work habits, positive attitudes towards Indonesian and a love of learning. She believes

the enhanced student and parent engagement with Indonesian language and culture at the school is partly a result of the popularity of *Bamboopalooza News* and Edmodo.

Other initiatives at Illawarra Sports are aimed at expanding parents' awareness and knowledge about Indonesian language and culture. For example, Jennifer invited parents to discuss the importance of intercultural and intra-cultural communication during an excursion to an Indonesian restaurant. This was intended to give parents a taste of the intercultural language learning approach—language and culture taught together—used at the school.

In addition, parents have been invited to attend a once-a-semester morning session where the selected works of students are showcased. This showcase is part of a broader school event involving other learning areas. Moreover, parents are encouraged to get involved in the school's kitchen garden, which reflects a fusion of Indonesian and Indigenous Australian culinary traditions. The garden's opening day was attended by parents, Indigenous Australian Elders, the media, staff and students.

Another initiative aimed at fostering parents' interest in Indonesian language and culture is the free demonstration lesson held during school open nights. Parents who participate in the lessons are generally positive about their experiences. For example, one parent commented, '*I love the Indonesian classroom. It is very relaxing. I now can understand why [my child] loves learning Indonesian. He has finally found a subject he really enjoys and is good at and can sink his teeth into.*'

Due to the success of the demonstration lessons, after-school Indonesian lessons will be offered for parents starting in Term 2, 2015. Parents have responded positively to the invitation to attend another free Indonesian and mindfulness lesson to be held at a Buddhist

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temple near the school in early 2015.

According to Jennifer, '*parental engagement represents an important piece of the puzzle when analysing language enrolment and performance.*' She points to the ever-expanding Indonesian language programme and Asia focus at Illawarra Sports. Only four years ago, no Asian language was taught at the school. Today, it is mandatory for all students in Year 8, including those in the school's Autism Unit.

In 2013, Asia learning and perspectives were incorporated across all key learning areas. In 2014/15, a Year 9/10 Elective, called 'Culture Shock', was offered for the first time to students who wish to further deepen their understanding of Asia. Jennifer credits the introduction of this elective to parental engagement in Indonesian language learning. She adds that these initiatives send '*a loud and clear message to students about the value and importance of learning an Asian language.*' Parents at the school are now more informed about the benefits of learning Indonesian, and their engagement has played a role in encouraging students to excel in their study of the language.

Why it works

Specifying parental engagement as a school priority and including it as part of the school's strategic plan is an important step towards its successful implementation (Family-School & Community Partnership Bureau, 2011; Kim, 2009). The appointment of a Community Liaison Officer at Illawarra Sports further underscores the school leadership's commitment to making parental engagement more than a mere add-on (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Harris & Goodall, 2007;

What Works 8

>> This illustration was taken from *What Works 8: Parents and the learning of Asian languages in schools*, which can be found on AEF's Web portal at: www.asiaeducation.edu.au/whatworks8

About AEF

The Asia Education Foundation provides teachers, education leaders and school communities with innovative programmes, curriculum resources and networks to support the achievement of Asia literacy for every young Australian.

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