



Parents and the learning of Asian languages in schools

Overnewton Anglican Community College, Victoria

The school and its language programmes

Overnewton Anglican Community College is a P-12 independent co-ed school operating on two campuses in Melbourne's northwest, in Taylors Lakes and Keilor. The College has an above-average ICSEA value. According to the ABS, Taylors Lakes is a culturally and linguistically diverse suburb with a large proportion of first-generation immigrants. Keilor also has a large overseas-born population; many residents are of Italian ancestry and the proportion of people from an Anglo-Saxon background is below the national average.

Overnewton is aiming to become a 'lighthouse school for languages' and emphasises the need to prepare students for the Asian century. It offers Indonesian from Year 3 and German from Year 5. In 2014, it successfully introduced Chinese at Prep. The College's rationale for introducing Chinese language learning at an early stage is based on research into successful language acquisition, which promotes the earliest possible start.

What works and how?

Overnewton is committed to fostering partnerships with parents to encourage and enable their active engagement in their child's education. The College sees parental engagement as one of its defining characteristics, and each school within the College has its own Parent Support Team. The College regularly draws attention to this commitment, for example, in its official documents.

One way this commitment is implemented is through information sharing—such as in the College newsletter, Whispers, and during parent education evenings—on how

parents can support their children's learning and wellbeing. The following two activities are examples of parental engagement with respect to the newly-introduced Chinese language programme.

First, parents were involved in the preparation of resource material for the programme. This activity was part of the College's Family Contribution Scheme, which requires parents to commit at least 18 hours per term to an activity related to the school community. In December 2013, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) team at Overnewton emailed 45 parents of Chinese background to inform them about the establishment of the 2014 CLIL programme. Since then, eight parents from this group *'work once a week to help make Chinese labels and posters, organise teaching materials and reading texts, and make simple PowerPoint presentations and iBooks'*, as clarified by Janet Gangell, the Acting Head of Curriculum at Overnewton.

Second, the school developed an online Wikispace platform to facilitate joint parent-student learning of Chinese. All parents are given a password to access the platform. The aim is for parents to support their children's language learning, using materials created by Chinese language teachers at the College. The teachers also upload audio and video material, such as songs, so that parents can help their children read and sing in Chinese at home.

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children insist on singing along to the videos before going to bed. One parent stated that her son now loves doing his Chinese homework on the iPad and sharing what he has learnt with his family. Another parent of Chinese background said *'we access the online resources every day, and I encourage [my son] to speak more, read more and listen to more Chinese.'*

Parents are also able to access help avatars on the Wikispace, to gain a better understanding of more complex linguistic points and explain these to their children.

Why it works

High-level commitment to engaging parents in their children's learning—captured in official statements and/or policies—are important to the success of school parental engagement strategies (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Overnewton is committed to fostering a school culture that both appreciates and calls for parents' active engagement, which helps strengthen parents' self-perception as active educators of their children alongside the school (Emerson et al., 2012). The two parental engagement activities with respect to Chinese language can be classified as active approaches that seek to build parents' capacity to encourage, support and monitor their children's learning (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999).

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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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

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