



Parents and the learning of Asian languages in schools

Tenison Woods College, South Australia

The school and its language programme

Tenison Woods College is an R-12, co-ed Catholic school located in the regional town of Mount Gambier. The school has an above-average ICSEA value. According to the ABS, the population of Mount Gambier is quite homogeneous, both ethnically and linguistically. The vast majority of its population is Australian born and speak only English at home.

The College offers two languages: Italian from junior to senior secondary, and Chinese from Year 8 to Year 12 (with separate Continuing and Background speaker programmes). Students must study one of the two languages in Years 8 and 9. The college has an [Australia-Asia BRIDGE school partnership](#) with a school in China (Zhoucun Experimental High School).

What works and how?

The Principal of Tenison Woods, David Meziniec, formally promotes the important role parents play in supporting their children's learning. In the College's 2013 Annual Report, for example, he reinforced the view that 'parent involvement is one of the significant determinants of student success at school'. The focus on parental engagement is linked to the College's Catholic tradition, which underscores the significance of the family, as well as its Reggio Emilia approach, which emphasises school-family relationships as fundamental to a child's learning.

According to the results of a parent survey in 2014, the majority of parents at the College felt they had been given sufficient information about their child's learning and progress. Three quarters of parents felt their engagement is valued by the College, and 85

per cent stated they had ample opportunities to be engaged in their child's schooling.

Tenison Woods has undertaken a range of activities to promote its Chinese language programme among students and parents. For example, a visit to China was organised recently for all interested students, parents and members of staff. Upon their return, participating students shared their travel experiences with other students, and parents who went on the trip were able to fuel other parents' interest in Chinese culture and language. To further build parent interest and awareness of China, the College hosts cultural events, such as a lantern parade through the streets of Mt Gambier, in collaboration with other local schools.

To reinforce the value of learning Chinese among parents and students, the College highlights the different learning pathways for Chinese studies as part of its 'Pathway Expo Nights'. The College's Language Coordinator, Suzanne Pepe, describes these events as '*a whole 8-12 school approach [where] parents and students have the opportunity to research which pathway(s) they need to follow in order to further their language learning goals*'. Moreover, the events provide a platform for teachers, parents and students to discuss the career pathways that language learning offers.

Why it works

Strong support for parent engagement in children's schooling conveys to parents that their contributions as co-educators are valued and appreciated. This encourages parents to take an active role alongside the school in their child's learning (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). The high level of

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satisfaction among parents of the College regarding the school-home relationship suggests that the leadership commitment to parent engagement has been translated into practice.

Several language-specific initiatives at Tenison Woods, for example, the cultural events and overseas trip to China, have helped raise parents' awareness of, and interest in, Chinese culture and language. Parents who are interested in language learning are likely to communicate their positive attitudes to their children (Gardner, Masgoret & Trembaly, 1999). This subsequently plays a role in motivating students to continue with their language study (Prescott & Orton, 2012).

The Pathway Expo Nights provide stimulus for parent-child conversations about the benefits and value of learning Chinese. Such conversations are important to successful language learning (Houtenville & Conway, 2008).

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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