



# Achieving intercultural understanding in schools

## Janet Whittle, Wooranna Park Primary School, Victoria

Wooranna Park Primary School is a metropolitan, F-6 government school located in Dandenong, in the south-east of Melbourne. The school, which has total enrolments of over 350, has a significantly below-average [Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage \(ICSEA\)](#) value. The student population is culturally diverse, and nearly 70 per cent of students come from a language background other than English. Wooranna Park has been part of Korea BRIDGE since 2013 and has developed a partnership with Kangnae Elementary School in South Korea. As a result of this partnership's success, Wooranna Park entered into a second BRIDGE partnership in 2014, as part of Thailand BRIDGE, with Satreephuket.

### Janet's intercultural understanding definition

*Intercultural understanding is understanding and valuing other cultures, languages and the interplay between them that exists over time to build a unique community.*

### Intercultural understanding practice at the school

Janet Whittle is Assistant Principal (Languages, Wellbeing and Special Rights) at Wooranna Park. The school's participation in BRIDGE provides an extension to the intercultural experiences and interactions that naturally occur within the school due to its culturally diverse student population. In many ways, the school illustrates the face of multicultural Australia to its partner schools in South Korea and Thailand.

As a result of Wooranna Park's involvement in BRIDGE, there has been increased presence of Korea-related content across the school's taught curriculum, in addition to the Korean language programme. This has led to heightened student interest and engagement with respect to Korean language and culture. When it first began, the Korean language programme existed as an extra-curricular class with only two students. Six months later, the school joined Korea BRIDGE. Many more students have since taken part in the programme and regular lunchtime classes are now being offered. According to Janet, students are eager to study Korean and even 'use lunchtimes to study Korean just for fun' (AEF, 2014a). Further, the expansion of the Korean language programme at Wooranna Park has even spurred Janet 'to study Korean seriously' (AEF, 2014a).

From the perspective of intercultural understanding, the school has utilised its participation in BRIDGE as a means of authentic learning (AEF, 2014a). Its approach to fostering intercultural understanding among students and staff appears to be focused primarily on language learning and facilitating cross-cultural contact.

Students and staff at Wooranna Park and Kangnae interact cross-culturally both asynchronously and synchronously. Examples of asynchronous interaction include letter writing among students and collaboration on the BRIDGE partnership Wikispace. BRIDGE teachers from both schools have co-created the Wikispace, which contains digital content, activities and curated online resources for students to use.

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## 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.

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 and Training.

AEF leverages funding to support Asia literacy in Australian schools from a broad range of government, philanthropic and corporate partners in Australia and Asia.

Achieving intercultural understanding in schools, Wooranna Park Primary School, VIC, 2015

The schools also use Vokis and other digital platforms (e.g. Edmodo and YouTube) to support curriculum-based collaborations. However, based on Janet's observations, students are even more eager to engage in synchronous interactions with their partner school peers. For example, some Korean language classes at Wooranna Park involve live Skype sessions with students and staff at Kangnae. Every fortnight the Korean BRIDGE teacher at Kangnae offers short Korean language lessons for the Wooranna Park students. In addition, students at both schools assist one another with learning new vocabulary, in English or Korean, and this activity also involves peer assessment and correction.

As Wooranna Park's Korea BRIDGE and Thailand BRIDGE partnerships consolidate, gain momentum and mature, Janet has observed an increase in discussions 'about the need for Asia literacy across the school' (AEF, 2014a). This indicates a developing disposition of openness towards the countries and cultures of Asia, which is consistent with the school's own rich cultural diversity. It also suggests that the intercultural understanding work undertaken by Janet and her colleagues is bearing fruit. Furthermore, BRIDGE teachers from the partner schools have participated in reciprocated in-country visits and joint professional learning sessions. These collaborative activities have spurred the schools to continue their efforts to promote and support language learning and intercultural understanding among students.

## What Works 9

>> This illustration was taken from *What Works 9: Achieving intercultural understanding in schools*, which can be found on AEF's Web portal at: [www.asiaeducation.edu.au/whatworks9](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/whatworks9)

In 2014, AEF observed that Wooranna Park was already quite advanced along the intercultural engagement continuum of school partnerships despite its relatively recent introduction to BRIDGE (AEF, 2014a). This suggests that the school has a sound grasp of what intercultural understanding involves and how transformative intercultural learning can be supported and even fast-tracked.

For a video illustration of Wooranna Park's work around fostering intercultural understanding, visit [www.asiaeducation.edu.au/programmes/aef-videos/bridge-school-partnerships](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/programmes/aef-videos/bridge-school-partnerships). This link also enables access to a range of other video illustrations of BRIDGE schools from across Australia.

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