

Mandarin Education in the ACT: Pathways to Proficiency Forum

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Summary of discussions and outcomes

Keynote Address – Andrew Leigh

We are in the Asian Century and we need to encourage Asian language skills, especially Chinese. In the process, it is really important to make the Chinese language fun and attractive for children to want to learn Chinese.

Noted from his own experience as a child in Indonesia, the ease with which children pick up a second language at a young age in an immersion environment

Session One – Presentations:

Current situation of Mandarin education in Australia and the ACT

Presenters' PowerPoints at <http://learningmandarin.weebly.com/activities--events.html>

Lessons learned from the Japanese experience

Japanese Language Educators have good support systems. How is this achieved?

Portals are really important, and grant support is good for the establishment of portals. The language learning space (<http://www.lls.edu.au/>) is really useful.

Japanese is a 'cool' language and its popularity has increased through 'cool' Japanese culture, like Manga, Pokemon, Hello Kitty etc. If you can make Chinese 'cool' it will have a greater attraction for children to want to learn more about the language and the culture.

Session One – Discussion:

Transition

How do we get good transition pathways? The new bilingual secondary school in Victoria being established is a good example of a transition program.

Use of different textbooks in different primary schools makes transition more difficult as children learn different vocabulary and characters.

The national curriculum should help.

Pathways are needed between schools that are logical and smooth.

In order to develop pathways and transitions, work needs to be done both on a policy level to lobby for change (support for the national curriculum) and also on a local grass roots level, working with teachers and principals to organize cohesive transitions between feeder schools.

There are transition problems with the bilingual early childhood centre in Mawson (<http://chineseaustralian.weebly.com/>) which is not linked with the preschool program - what happens when the children go to primary school?

The important role of the Principal

Active engagement from principals is important.

Principals have the capacity and power to facilitate change. Work with clusters of principals to facilitate change.

Principals need to use leadership skills and networks to promote good quality education.

Education ideas

What are Chinese Language teaching requirements? What are Chinese Language teaching requirements? A recognized degree in teaching or graduate diploma in teaching is required. Once qualified, teachers can be asked to teach any subject. There is apparently no test of the language proficiency of teachers of languages in the ACT.

We need to create a need for the language and children will follow. Example of requiring children to ask in Chinese for the plate they want (ie. which colour?) and their choice of available food in order to get their morning tea.

Incorporate games in an immersion program (Mandarin Stars Sydney - <http://mandarinstars.com.au/>). Use sensory formats and play with them in the language – easy for them to engage. Program is listening and speaking based – not necessarily led by teachers. Use songs, role play, etc and work with parents.

Demand for Mandarin is there – inspire in the early years, encourage parents to let Principal know that they want their children to learn, use after school programs, make learning cool and fun, use fun activities and teach them in Mandarin.

In primary school there is no need to emphasize grammar as children will absorb it over time.

Community Language Schools

Japanese Language School has been successfully supported by the Japanese Embassy.

There needs to be a standard for community schools to promote consistency and higher quality, and enable shared resources.

Working Group 1: Language policy and resources

Teacher training and quality

School leadership is critical

There needs to be a different model of teaching training and continuing PD

Chinese speakers can to be recruited as teachers or teachers' assistants.

Language teachers need to use other teachers within their schools as a resource

Coordinating curricula

Contact national curriculum – K-10; ACT schools previously adapted ACT curriculum

Coordinate class levels across schools (eg a group of schools runs Chinese at the same time and pools their students to enable viable classes at each level)

Use IT to increase reach of Chinese lessons

Features of immersion/bilingual programs

Start early and involve whole school

All teachers involved – common bond and coordinate vocabulary across subjects

Opt out versus supporting child's learning

Contribution of CLIL

Teaching content in language eg. maths, science - language as vehicle to learn

Coordinating community language schools

Public recognition of CLS and value of CLS contribution to Chinese learning

Lobby for more government funding: currently \$90/student in ACT; Vic \$190/student

ACTION:

- Create opportunities for native speakers to support teaching and learning of Chinese
- Create support networks including mentoring for Chinese teachers and meet regularly
- Map/register people with Chinese teaching skills in ACT
- Explore coordination across schools eg. Classes across schools, ICT
- Implement national curriculum through professional learning and across schools

Working Group 2: Curriculum and content development

Community language schools

Chinese speaking parents can be a resource

Encourage parents to speak Mandarin at home

Make language a real part of life and the school

Make China 'Cool'

Teachers

Staged introduction of writing

Show students what they can do with what they learn

Whole school approach – assemblies, after school goals

Coordinate materials

P.D. to pool information about online resources

Need passionate, enthused teachers

Measuring proficiency

Speaking and Listening first, balance the four skills

Use presentations, Role play, Class activities, tests, interpreting tasks

Fluency more connected to communication and speaking, accuracy to written tasks

Monitor speaking listening

Using the language out of class

ICT

Good for mixed level classes

Use to keep interested, enriches the class

Can continue out of class

Collaborate on resources, apps

ACTION:

- ANU can help with focused PD on better use of IT and teaching children Chinese
- Form networks to collaborate on various areas (involve Chinese community, tweets, map resources against different parts/topics/outcomes of national curriculum)
- Use community as a resource to help increase proficiency, maintain language
- Promote awareness and interest among parents and schools. Principals important

Open Discussion

As a result of the sessions and the working groups, the forum agreed to develop a work plan with the following outcome:

To promote Mandarin linguistic capacity and intercultural understanding in Australia (originating from an ACT pilot)

The Way Forward

The forum agreed on separate components that could be implemented either as separate programs or together to contribute towards the outcome:

1. Marketing (promoting) the value of speaking Mandarin and understanding Asia (China)
2. Raising student engagement and exposure through positive learning experiences including the use of ICT (Language portal/investigate products such as Teacher in a Box)
3. Engaging the whole school community in the students' learning Mandarin (PD Programs, "Engaging Principals in the Language Debate.")
4. School to school community networks to promote seamless transition and progression (Early childhood to tertiary and beyond)
5. Support for the implementation of the National Curriculum for Languages (and the general capabilities) (mapping, identifying gaps and cross over, monitoring implementation and ensuring high quality implementation).

Next Steps

1. A small working group will break down the five components to identify a work plan against the overall outcome.
2. *Grants*
Ideas for grants included:
 - Language resource portal to support Chinese teachers
 - Direct to OLT, Asia Education Foundation, Asian Foundation
 - Resources to write grant proposals: ANU/UC
 - Funding for a person to coordinate the activities
3. *Non-grant efforts*
 - Identify any actions which can be undertaken with current resources and networks while grant applications are in train.
 - Email forum summary and working group outcomes to all participants (including politicians)
 - Consult with the Chinese teachers' network.