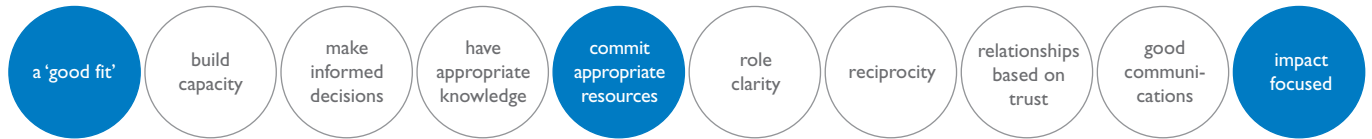


Case 3: Learning Neighbourhood Asia Literacy

(Not-for-profit grant to a cluster of schools for a program with teachers and students)



Priority areas: languages, ongoing professional learning, digital/online learning, school leadership development

About Learning Neighbourhood Asia Literacy project

A neighbourhood of four schools in New South Wales (NSW) received a \$35K grant from the Asia Education Foundation. The schools (one high school and three primary schools) wanted to use the grant to develop a project to focus on language *and* culture. The aims of the project were to build teacher and student understanding of Asian culture; and improve the teaching of Mandarin in the middle years of schooling (the last two years of primary school and the first two years of high school in NSW). Real-time video links facilitated the teaching of Mandarin across the schools. Other interactive technology permitted staff to collaborate and develop lessons for less experienced teachers of Mandarin.

To learn more, visit:
<http://www.rootyhill-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/>

About the Asia Education Foundation

The Asia Education Foundation (AEF) works in partnership with government and non-government education agencies, universities, philanthropic foundations (e.g. The Myer Foundation and Sidney Myer Fund) and the corporate sector to:

- ▶ promote and support the study of Asia across the curriculum
- ▶ develop Asia-related print and electronic materials
- ▶ promote the study of Asia through professional learning
- ▶ educate the broader community about the importance of young Australians engaging with Asia

To learn more, visit:
<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/about.html>

What we discovered

Good fit –

- ▶ the school identifies the need and potential partners make it their business to understand the need.
- ▶ keep a wide enough vision when funding so schools are able to address a key locally identified need.

Commit appropriate resources –

- ▶ excite the community about the vision for the project then resources (human and other kinds) can flow.
- ▶ securing money isn't the only requirement; the motivation, networks and connections with people can also make things happen.

Impact –

- ▶ for a relatively small financial investment, teachers will make a huge effort to make something work.
- ▶ teachers can carry forward lessons from projects, like the Asia Literacy project, for the rest of their careers.

A 'good fit'

Principal of Rooty Hill High School, Christine Cawsey AM was invited as a NSW principal delegate to an Asia Education Conference in 2009. Part of the conference included a briefing session on the Asia Education Foundation's (AEF) new grants program.

A relevant locally identified need

As Christine listened and talked with AEF staff, she could tell there was a very good fit between the AEF's objectives and those of Rooty Hill High School. "A very critical issue for us is Asia Literacy. 40% of our students are from an Asian background, although only 1% have a Chinese language background. Across Sydney, many students come from non-English language backgrounds and I believe 20% of Sydney's students have a Chinese language background."

At Rooty Hill, students were able to access Languages other than English (LOTE), but not until 2009 was Mandarin and a focus on Asia Literacy introduced into the school. This coincided with the school's involvement in the Western Sydney Region partnership program with Ningbo Province in China and the University of Western Sydney. Highly talented education graduates from China came to western Sydney to complete a Masters' Degree and acted as volunteers in classrooms in schools. They helped develop lessons; analysed student performance data to better track student learning; prepared resources and, most importantly, engaged with students, sharing language and cultural experiences. In this they were supported by John Meng, a teacher at Rooty Hill High School, who went on to lead the project described in this case study.

Through the Chinese government's Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), John led an AEF delegation to China in January 2011 and was given a DEEWR sponsored fellowship to return to China to lecture at Dalian Education University in January 2012.

Make connections between existing networks, activities and resources and your proposed project.

The staff at Rooty Hill could have put in an application, but the reality was it probably would not have made it past the first cut. The cluster program had three primary schools linked to the high school. Staff at these schools were also keen to find new ways of linking the middle years curriculum and two of the schools also had a Ningbo volunteer.

In NSW, all government schools are video-linked to each other through the Connected Classrooms program and can link to schools beyond the state, including international connections. As Christine highlights, "we are lucky that we have a connected curriculum culture, which means we could run classes in Mandarin by experts with students who did not have access to a teacher of Mandarin." The school already had connections with local primary schools, but the focus of the grant and the AEF's favoured way of distributing the grant presented a new opportunity to engage together.

Form partnerships for mutual benefit.

Rooty Hill High School formed an AEF cluster with the three partner primary schools, led by Christine Cawsey, Conny Mattimore, Deputy Principal and John Meng, Head Teacher of Mathematics / LOTE. John developed lessons for the primary schools and coordinated the professional links in the program. "John supported the teachers in other classes, who were not experts", says Christine who wrote the grant submission because at the time, others in the school had little experience in such endeavours.

There were other reasons too why the grant was a good fit for the schools. Christine goes on to explain, "We chose the middle years of schooling as the focus. This enabled all schools in the cluster to fully participate.



Commit appropriate resourcing

A grant size you can do something with is a crucial enabler.

“A crucial enabler was the grant size. It was substantial, \$35,000. This meant we had enough flexibility to spread the funding across a combination of teacher release and the development of classroom materials”. The latter Christine says was fundamental if a lasting legacy from the project was going to be created.

“Our data in 2008 indicated to us that we were not servicing our demography as well as we could”, recalls Christine who then made sure Asia Literacy was embedded into the School and Learning Neighbourhood Plans (four schools together). The placement of Asia Literacy within this plan made sure it stayed on the radar as a key area of focus. With this important foundation in place, other resources were identified to support the project’s success.

Christine explains, “The main thing we needed to do was create the teacher release time to collaboratively develop the resources that would be used online.” The schools used combined school development (pupil free) days, after school meetings and on several occasions employed a casual relief teacher to give some time to the teachers working on the program.

Central to the program’s development was an inter-school Teachers’ Forum where John Meng and the Ningbo volunteers demonstrated online teaching resources and the teachers at the forum selected and categorised these resources onto a shared online Learning Management

System. It was the commitment of the teachers to making the program a success that really mattered. They gave a lot of their time when they realised they had \$35,000 to use on one key strategy.

The cluster anchored the program in what they knew from the research and from their teachers’ expertise worked well with upper primary and first-year high school students. Each school committed to identifying an Asia Literacy contact. Rooty Hill’s Mathematics/LOTE Head Teacher, who also teaches Mandarin, was the project leader. The schools committed other resources for catering and purchase of materials, and collaborative professional learning sessions were rotated between the schools as the project developed.

An area often overlooked when it comes to committing appropriate resources, is the resourcing before an application is even made. Christine and Deputy Principal Conny made sure there was a clear vision for the project and they wrote the submission. Christine notes, “Before the grant application, we had a conversation. We made phone calls to the AEF”. Christine had more experience in grant writing than others in the schools. So she acted as a mentor to Conny in preparing the final submission. Christine also kept an eye on the monitoring requirements of the grant.

Get structures and processes in place to facilitate the implementation of a project.

If you have expertise in proposal writing, share your skills and knowledge with others to build individual and organisational capacity.



Principal, teachers and students from Rooty Hill High School

Impact

The project has had an impact at individual teacher, parent and student levels, as well as at a whole school level.

From the experience, the teacher and deputy principal leading the project developed considerable expertise in project management and budgeting. They received an education department regional award, in recognition for their leadership of the project.

Impact included for teachers: improved project management and budgeting. For students: increased confidence and appreciation of other cultural perspectives, academic outcomes.

Thanks to the project, primary and secondary students had access to experts in Mandarin and had a chance to experience culture through lessons, through visits organised by Hanban and through cultural immersion in the Chinese community in

Sydney. As Christine recalls, "It was fabulous to hear back from students, of non Chinese background, that they now go to China Town with their parents with increased confidence because they can engage more fully". All of these experiences serve to plant seeds of curiosity and interest in Asian culture and the possibility of doing further studies in Asian languages. Rooty Hill has had three students who have completed Mandarin in their final year of schooling certificate. This was not the case prior to the Asia Literacy project.

There have been other unexpected positive outcomes from the project including invitations to present at conferences, involvement in wider professional associations and international requests to visit the school. Through the Hanban connection, Christine and John have been invited to functions held by the Chinese Consul General, and the President of Dalian Education University chose Rooty Hill High School to visit when he came to Australia to look at education in NSW. For a comprehensive high school in western Sydney these new networks have important benefits for students and the community.

Other positive outcomes include the development of new opportunities and networks, benefiting students and teachers.

Postscript

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the project was that in May 2011, after the original AEF project was completed, the online materials were migrated to a new platform. This enabled 51 primary, secondary and tertiary teachers from all sectors in the newly formed NSW Chinese Language Teachers Network to share the resources, experience operating in an online wiki-like collaboration and grow the resources into a Web 2.0 environment where non-Chinese speaking teachers can give their students high quality opportunities to learn the language, no matter where they go to school.

A significant outcome was the production of online materials to be accessed and used by a wide number of NSW Chinese Language Teachers and non-Chinese speaking teachers.