



PROFILES OF CHINESE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. On its website, MySchool, ACARA publishes data about each school in Australia including an index of the socioeconomic background of the school's parents.
APT	Administration and planning time, time during the week when primary teachers are not engaged in face-to-face teaching.
Confucius	Confucius classrooms are a product of collaboration between Australian education Classroom agencies and Hanban (see below) through which recognition and a number of teaching and learning resources for Chinese are provided to schools.
Hanban	Hanban is a non-profit organization affiliated to the Ministry of Education of China 'committed to making the Chinese language and culture teaching resources and services available to the world.' It has an office in Melbourne.
IB	International Baccalaureate. Among other things an international curriculum, assessment and certification program. While covering a wide range of levels of schooling in the report it refers to arrangements at Years 11 and 12.
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies: computers, but as well interactive whiteboards, flip videos (simple video cameras), iPods etc.
IWB	Interactive Whiteboard, a whiteboard with a range of digital capacities including internet connectivity, increasingly widely used in Australian schools, especially primary schools.
KLA	Key Learning Area, a subject or related collection of subjects (eg The Arts).
LOTE	Language (or languages) other than English.
PD	Professional development.
Pinyin	A system of transcription of Chinese characters into words using the Latin alphabet.
Prep	Preparatory year, prior to Year 1, called Kindergarten and Reception in other Australian states and territories.
SOSE	Studies of Society and Environment.
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, responsible among other things for conducting the VCE.
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education, the curriculum and assessment arrangements for Years 11 and 12 in Victoria. Students may also take VCE studies in Year 10.
VELS	Victorian Essential Learning Standards, the official Victorian Government curriculum prescription for Years Prep-10.
VSL	Victorian School of Languages, a government 'school' which coordinates the offering of 50 different languages taught outside conventional schooling arrangements (at weekends, online or by other forms of correspondence for example).

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the Chinese Teacher Training Centre (CTTC) was established by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development as part of their partnership with China's *Hanban*, with the brief to enhance the capacity of Chinese teachers so as to improve retention of learners in the post-compulsory years, and raise their level of proficiency in using the language. The means for doing this are professional development and research.

Low student achievement in Chinese as a Second Language (L2 Chinese), assessed in terms of continuation of study to the end of secondary schooling and level of proficiency achieved, was a major finding of the report *The Current State of Chinese Language Education in Australian Schools* (Orton, 2008/2010). Then and still, hard data by year level on details of second language student numbers and their proficiency achievement in Chinese are not in existence. However, nationally the retention rate beyond compulsory study remains at only around 5%. Among non-Chinese background students who persist, there are some who achieve quite admirable levels of oral and literacy skills, but they are a very small minority; and their success notwithstanding, by the time they leave secondary school, virtually none has reached the oral skills standard achieved by many of their peers who study a European language, and they have mastered only the same number of characters as a primary school Grade 1 student in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan. By contrast, their schoolmates taking European languages are reading authentic newspaper articles and short stories in their second language.

With the known additions since publications of recent survey reports (Lo Bianco, 2009; Orton 2008/2010), the number of students learning Chinese in Australian primary and secondary schools in 2012 is estimated to total approximately 90,000, the smallest cohort by far of the six most commonly taught languages (Japanese, Italian, French, Indonesian, German, Chinese), which together comprise 91% of all language teaching in schools. With 330,000 students, Japanese as a Second Language (L2 Japanese) is the most studied language, and this despite it being deemed by the Foreign Service Institute in Washington, DC to be as equally demanding as Chinese for an English speaker to learn, both estimated to require 3.5 times more time on task than a European language. Furthermore, L2 Japanese not only has four times the number of students as L2 Chinese, in Victoria which leads the country in language learning to Year 12 by a margin of 50%, L2 Japanese presents eight times as many students at Year 12 as L2 Chinese, of which only a tiny number are of Japanese background.

Many students of Chinese start with interest and some excitement, but 95% drop it at the first opportunity, between one and three years after they start. Those who drop out are uniformly non-background learners. By the final years of school, there are only a handful of students who have learned Chinese in a classroom left, and a large body of home speakers and overseas educated first language speakers. These last have their own curriculum and assessment (L1 Chinese), but even in Victoria, where the remainder are further divided into Advanced L2 Chinese and L2 Chinese, in L2 Chinese, home speakers (who have most often also been educated for some years at weekend community schools and have a greatly superior proficiency level) outnumber non-Chinese background regular school learners by nearly 6 : 1 (820 : 150), and this leads to greatly depressed grades in Chinese for regular school learners, which impact on their university entrance examination score. This situation was and remains a great deterrent to these second language learners of Chinese to go on with it to the end of secondary school.

Yet it seems this constraint cannot entirely explain the low retention rate or the generally low proficiency achieved. Most students who quit Chinese study do so early: many not continuing in secondary after learning in primary school, and the bulk opting out well before Year 11. As well, there are regular classroom learners who love Chinese and go on to Year 12, regardless of the skewed assessment outcome, and some of those have impressive language proficiency.

Chinese study as presented above is framed in terms of the end result. Based on these results, the CTTC has worked persistently to have the Year 12 assessment regulations separate school classroom learners from the far more proficient educated home speakers. At the same time, the CTTC has equally persistently sought to understand better what goes on in the conduct of Chinese programs in schools and classrooms across all year levels in order to identify early action that might lead to better outcomes later. The Program Profiles project was designed to contribute to this goal.

Program Profiles Project

In the course of data gathering for the 2008 report on Chinese in Australian schools, the term 'program' was used constantly by education providers, Principals and teachers as if it were clear what this constituted. Yet on investigation, what it did mean in substance was such varied provision of Chinese language study as to make comparison across schools and sectors quite difficult.

The primary objective of the Program Profiles project was to provide some new, basic information about what constitutes 'having a Chinese as a Second Language program'; what those involved believe about their program and the practice of Chinese teaching and learning; and what they draw on to inform their practice.

Informed by greater knowledge of actual programs, teaching practices and aspirations, those involved in other school programs at all levels, and those making decisions about the expanding provision of Chinese, should be able to undertake wiser and more effective action in their tasks, and will have some shared referents to use in their discussions. The information gathered was also intended to enable the CTTC to develop better targeted consultation and professional development work. As well, it was hoped that the contact made at all levels in Victorian schools across the spectrum would allow the CTTC's services to be better known and employed. Both these latter goals have already been achieved.

Procedure

The project comprised the documenting of eleven Chinese programs in a purposive sample of Chinese programs in a representative spread of school types in Victoria, undertaken to establish a set of initial data on Chinese teacher practice within the contextual parameters set by their school leaders: their Head of Languages or Curriculum Coordinator, and the Principal or Vice Principal. People at all three levels within a school were interviewed and the teacher was observed teaching two classes. Interviewees also filled in a short personal profile of educational studies, teaching experience, second language learning experience and China contact. Researchers were in their participating schools on at least two different days, often three. The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed before being subjected to graded levels of coding. The questions were composed from research and knowledge of Chinese language programs in Australian schools (e.g. Orton, 2008/2010)¹ and from studies of schools and curriculum change (e.g. Griffin, Murray, Care, Thomas and Perri, 2010)².

Schools approached were those where the Chinese program appeared stable and generally valued, as evidenced by a small but successful initiative towards its improvement having already been taken with the support of school leaders. In all, 19 schools were approached and 12 (5 government, 4 independent and 2 catholic) agreed to take part by making senior and middle level staff available for interview, and at least one of the teachers of Chinese at upper primary or middle years secondary available for interview and teaching observations. In the end, full data could only be gathered at 11 schools, due to the constant unavailability of leaders in the twelfth, despite their averrals of interest in participating.

Schools with a Chinese program are not evenly representative of the range of schools across the State, but among those profiled in this project there is at least one example of all the significant variables of school type: primary, secondary and P-12; government, independent and catholic; inner urban, outer urban and rural; single sex and co-educational; recently established, medium standing and long-standing Chinese programs; single and multiple teachers of Chinese on staff.

¹ Jane Orton, *The Current State of Chinese Language Education in Australian Schools*, Melbourne: The University of Melbourne and The Asia Education Foundation, 2010. <http://www.education.unimelb.edu.au/cttc/>

² Patrick Griffin, Leanne Murray, Esther Care, Amanda Thomas, Pierina Perri, Developmental assessment: lifting literacy through professional learning teams. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*; Nov2010, Vol. 17 Issue 4, p383-397.

OBSERVATIONS

The study confirms the impression made in the 2008 research that 'a Chinese as a Second Language program' is not a single notion, but a term that covers quite widely varied forms of provision in time allocation, type of instruction and teaching practices, all set within very different environments. However, the data also show that there are common aspects to the term 'Chinese program', among which the following are the most evident.

1. The programs are all strongly valued by the Principal and Vice Principal and, indeed, are often carrying their highest aspirations for the school and the children. Many school leaders are determined to showcase the program in public, and are personally prepared to sustain it through privileging funds, choosing and mentoring Chinese teachers, and advocating and protecting them against criticism from within the school or from parents. A more varied support is evident at the middle level of school authority – the Curriculum Coordinators and Heads of Languages. While not opposing Chinese, the views of the former often suggest little knowledge of language learning or appreciation of its educational value, and little connection to the actual teacher and the relationships inside the Chinese classroom. Heads of Languages who do not teach Chinese are often sympathetic towards the problems they perceive their colleagues to encounter in handling students and keeping numbers viable, but only the two who themselves are teachers of Chinese show deep appreciation of the challenges.
2. The teachers of Chinese are dedicated and keen to see their students progress, but in many instances they are very isolated and several experience considerable tension in their work, feeling frustrated at not being able to implement teaching in accordance with their beliefs due to pressure to prepare students for final year exams, busyness, lack of stable accommodation for their program and negative student attitude and behaviour.
3. There is not a great deal of common understanding of the task of teaching and learning Chinese among those involved in providing for it. Most in school Administration are monolingual and the few school leaders who speak another language grew up bilingually rather than acquiring their second language in a classroom. As a group they know little about language learning and virtually nothing about Chinese.

Among the Chinese teachers there is little recourse to contemporary pedagogical principles when discussing their practice. Most just take an essentially traditional approach of 'talk and explain' combined with an eclectic choice of supplementary activities. Some make use of digital technology, though its employment is uneven and limited, and often for teaching convenience rather than to maximize learning opportunities. The lessons observed at all levels were uniformly conducted virtually 100% in English and comprised a steady working through of textbook exercises and worksheets.

In the primary schools, in particular, the Chinese curriculum is fairly ad hoc, and there seems to be little method in common across the schools. The learning is further fragmented by low contact time. In the secondary area, despite valuing spoken proficiency, there is a relentless drive to push in the characters that will be needed by Year 12, although barely 5% will go that far. At all levels many of the teachers had opposing and often fuzzy views on the use of *Pinyin* romanisation, confusing it with being a substitute for learning to write characters rather than a necessary tool for foreign learners to use to record new vocabulary as it is sounded (which characters do not provide), and for noting the sounds (pronunciation) of characters themselves.

4. It is evident that student behaviour in Chinese classes is a problem in the eyes of school leaders and of Chinese teachers themselves. This also fits with the opinions of successful learners of Chinese in Victorian schools³ that they did not learn much in Years 7, 8 and 9 due to teachers being always engaged keeping order. The information from one teacher in the present study that when doing a language teaching qualification in China the main course is about the language itself, nothing to do with student behaviour – which is the students' own responsibility – is particularly illuminating with respect to this matter. It suggests not only that Chinese teachers will often not know how to engage students or deal with disruption, but, more importantly, may believe it is not their duty to learn how to do that.

Reflection

Considering the Profiles and the above observations, it becomes abundantly clear that the teaching of Chinese in many ways still has much of a pioneer quality to it, with the teachers and administrators daily facing considerable challenges to their knowledge and ingenuity, which those interviewed, at least, confront and meet with energy. However, as noted, many in school leadership positions offer their support with little knowledge of what is needed from a good language teacher beyond enthusiasm. For the teachers, moving from room to room, seeing students only once a week, managing classes of learners made reluctant by parents who do not value the study of a second language, while at the same time dealing with mixed levels of learners, means constantly dealing with factors that make good teaching extremely difficult. The teachers also work under endless pressure to meet their school's aspirations for good VCE results, and this brings the consequent pressure to drum in the characters at the expense of developing listening and speaking. Most are managing all these tasks while operating in a language not their own and in an educational system very different from the one in which they were successful, a system that includes some values which are in conflict with the values they were raised to respect. What continuing professional development there is in Chinese must compete with the time and money used for in-school and sector programs and the constant over-busyness of day-to-day work.

Overall, the study shows that despite considerable aspiration for success and much hard work at all levels, Chinese as a Second Language programs remain fundamentally fragile, needing protection from various angles and vulnerable to collapse as senior year enrolments shrink under the failure of classroom learners to excel in VCE.

At the time of producing this report, a year after the Profiles were compiled, it is expected that a real advance will shortly be made in unblocking the Year 12 impasse, and this will introduce a hugely welcome change to the environment and potential meaning of learning Chinese at school. However, considering the details of programs from the early and middle years revealed in the Profiles, even after that happens there is likely to continue to be considerable loss of students before senior years. In terms of the very evident effort expended by all involved, and in terms of the national interest, this is compellingly regrettable. The aim of the recommendations which follow is to suggest a path which could avoid such an outcome.

³ Claudia Prescott and Jane Orton, 2012. *Good Learners of Chinese – profiles of students in secondary schools*. Melbourne: CTTC and The University of Melbourne. <http://www.education.unimelb.edu.au/cttc/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following interrelated proposals for action emerge from the study as needing a concerted effort from all involved within a program of any type if a significant difference is to be made to the number of students retained beyond the compulsory years and to the degree of proficiency attained by students at any level.

1. The most fundamental need is for a theoretically grounded, shared understanding among Chinese teachers and their school leaders of the learning task confronting students tackling Chinese as a Second Language; and the use of a common core of sound pedagogical practices that are likely to be effective in producing motivated, successful students, in accordance with Australian conditions and educational values.

With respect to the learning task, the full meaning of two central demands made on learners of Chinese as a Second Language appears not to be appreciated in current programs.

- Firstly, there is a much higher burden on memory demanded by Chinese than occurs in learning another language: not just vocabulary, but also characters must be individually remembered for every syllable acquired – and virtually none of either can be recognised by relying on spoken or written English (as can, for example, words like *education*, *educación*, *educazione* in European languages); and this burden is placed on students who are very much weaker in memorising than students schooled in China.
 - Secondly, the learners need to develop some quite new ways of working with their body and their mind than have been developed in acquiring their oracy and literacy proficiency in English. These challenges are present from the start and continue. In tackling oral language they are caused by tones and by the small number of different sound combinations in Chinese and the consequent high occurrence of homophones, and in literacy development by the reading and writing of characters – all challenges which are not present when starting a European language or, indeed, other Asian languages.
2. As a result of the demand on memory, the appropriate allocation of time on task in terms of both volume and frequency is of critical importance in learning Chinese. Three 20-minute sessions per week will achieve a far better yield than a single hour-long class, and leaving a gap of more than one day between lessons makes it all but certain that a large piece of the language already worked on will be forgotten. Primary classes scheduled for 30 minutes a week or even only once a fortnight are unlikely to lead to much linguistic proficiency, nor any bonding between students and teachers. Teachers, themselves, have difficulty linking such lessons and the content of most primary classes remains unconnected clusters of vocabulary (colours, numbers 1-10, family members, domestic animals), which are easy to comprehend but hard to do anything useful with and, as a result, are easily forgotten. Efforts need to be made to get activities going in the classroom which provide the support of real meaning by being connected to the actual *doing* of something in the language in the here and now, something which also attracts the learners to want to join in, for example, games, drama, tasks using an iPad.

Given the work involved to master characters, and the reality of the crowded school timetable, there is a critical need to make engaging activities using Chinese available to students beyond the classroom at all times.

3. Language learning is a key area in the Australian curriculum because it is recognized that significant educational development can be achieved through the process of successful language acquisition. In a number of cases, information in the Profiles shows a mismatch in expectations of those involved about how this goal might be worked on in Chinese teaching.

One Chinese Head of Languages proposes that the language teaching-learning style should largely be culturally consonant with target language norms. It is argued here, however, that the legitimate primary criterion against which a pedagogical approach should be assessed is not cultural authenticity but practical effectiveness. And the evidence over two decades is

that expecting Australian students to assimilate huge numbers of characters and lists of vocabulary simply by memorising them does not work, and that most do not achieve a generally satisfactory standard of proficiency in either oral or literacy domains. Memorisation is a skill, which increases with use. The average 10- or 13-year old Australian has nothing like the memorisation skills owned by their Chinese teacher at the same age. As well, the second language learner's task is to conquer characters which are concurrently also new vocabulary items, with little opportunity to internalise them through use. This represents a massive burden on memory quite different from that faced by their teachers as children meeting the characters in primary school for a language which they already spoke fluently, and which were used everywhere in the society around them.

As with primary school learners retaining the names of objects, the solution to Australian secondary students' remembering characters and vocabulary will be to engage them in using the language often, in ways which require attention to meaning and careful observation, along with providing some affective investment in outcomes, i.e. they *want* to produce the blog entry on their family, sing the song, dress up in the beautiful costumes, do well in the competition or computer game, act out the character from the film, and enjoy the work needed to achieve that. This does not preclude having them memorise language, but doing so would not be an end in itself but in order to have it readily available to do something for which having it in memory is needed, like reciting a poem fluently, or acting out a role play.

Within the Australian educational system it is understood to be the teacher's task to engage students and while students should, indeed, be diligent, and learning a language will certainly entail some steady reviewing work, activities should be designed to educate, to assist with the burden on memory and not require more time reviewing than absolutely necessary. Furthermore, to suggest that Chinese teachers need to engage learners' interest is not only so as to be effective with respect to language acquisition, but also to be effective educationally – in developing such aspects as the students' curiosity, capacity for independent and collaborative work, and higher order thinking, attributes valued in, for example, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and the Australian Curriculum.

Calling for local values to be maintained in Chinese teaching practice is likely to cause a clash in values for many Chinese teachers, and will seem to some to be an illegitimate cultural imposition. In response, I would say, firstly, that the imposition is justified when the alternative results in the extensive failure of learners of Chinese as a Second Language in our schools to thrive in the language, or to produce through the study of it the desired intellectual development. I would also point out that, not surprisingly, it is a stance which very much reflects in reverse what happened in the teaching of English as a Second Language in China, where foreign teachers of English faced trenchant criticism from Chinese educators and students over some decades for wanting to use methods which did not fit the local norms there. The demand that foreign teaching approaches in China be changed to a more Chinese style has largely been mitigated by Chinese teachers taking over English instruction at all but senior levels. The option to do that in reverse for the teaching of Chinese in Australia is not currently available. Arguing for maintaining Australia's educational values in schools in this country is further supported by major Chinese school districts such as those in Shanghai and Beijing making fundamental changes in their educational goals essentially towards those being introduced from abroad. They are doing this in recognition, like us, that they fit with the demands of the 21st century, when 'the routine, rule-based knowledge, which is easiest to teach and to test, is also easiest to digitize, automate and outsource', and that, as a consequence, what students will need for their future is to be able to assess complex, messy situations, identify problems, and design creative solutions to them.⁴

⁴ A. Schleicher (ed), 2012. *Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century – Lessons from around the World*. Paris: OECD Publishing, p. 34. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264xxxxx-en>

In considering the above recommendations, it is essential to appreciate the difficulty involved for many overseas educated teachers to adapt easily to conditions so different from those under which they grew up. As a result, it will take not only an open heart but also sustained professional development to allow the practical meaning of what is being asked of them to be grasped and mastered. And because what is being asked is literally outside their own experience, they cannot do it by themselves. An equally open heart and sustained effort will be needed from local educators to help in the process, and to make efforts in reverse to understand the differences in beliefs and values at the base of pedagogical practice in the two countries, and learn to see the 'normalcy' of their own educational values as cultural, not natural. Even in the best of circumstances it will be a gradual process that will take time and patience.

As noted at the start of this section, the observations drawn from the Program Profiles show that what is required for improvement in Chinese as a Second Language programs is a *concerted* effort. Developing a core set of shared goals and practices will only occur if the task is recognized by all involved to be a *joint activity*, one in which the problems are not seen as belonging to one group or the other, but understood to be *shared* problems, just as, to be effective, solutions will also need to be developed as a shared stance. Neither group can manage such a transition on their own: each needs the culturally bounded knowledge and understanding of the other. As in all truly intercultural endeavours, it can be expected from the start that the outcome to emerge will, by its nature, be a hybrid practice.

Jane Orton

THE PROGRAMS: A SUMMARY BY THEME

This section of the report provides a consolidated picture of the programs studied, set out in a series of themes and ideas which were generated by the interview schedule and from the data collected.

The Schools

The eleven schools examined include three stand-alone primary schools, which, as is usual in Victoria, teach the seven levels from Preparatory Year (Prep) to Year 6; four stand-alone secondary schools (teaching Years 7-12), one which provides studies for Years 5-12, and three multi-campus schools, which offer education from Prep to Year 12.

Six of the schools are from the government sector, four are independent and one is a catholic school. Eight are based within the greater Melbourne area, where more than 75 percent of the state's population lives. The three non-urban schools are all located on the fringes of regional centres.

The urban schools are spread widely through Melbourne's diverse sprawl and are surrounded by very different socio-economic and ethnic environments. More than 90 percent of one of the school's families fall into the top quartile of ACARA's index of socio-economic background⁵, and the families who attend the 11 schools offering these programs are more likely to be found in the top half rather than the bottom half of that index. By contrast, one of the schools has more than 70 percent of its families in the bottom half, and two others are closely reflective of the overall national socio-economic distribution.

The vast majority of students in these schools are of Anglo-Celtic descent and first language speakers of English. Perhaps 25 percent are of non-English-speaking background, and these may or may not use one or more languages which are not English at home. But, with one striking exception, these are less likely to be Asian languages than European languages. The striking exception is a large primary school (500+ students) which has a non-English-speaking background group of about 80 percent of its students, almost all of whom are background Chinese speakers. Three of the schools also have a cohort of international students who come from Asian countries. The largest of these cohorts (c. 150) is almost exclusively Chinese.

The schools profiled thus comprise a fairly typical cross section of the schools and school populations found in Victoria.

Why Teach Chinese?

While recently there has been a flurry of Chinese program openings as the result of Federal government incentives, the language has been taught in some schools in Victoria for more than 40 years. Twenty years ago, under an earlier government drive to develop an 'Asia-literate' population, there was a short surge in new programs. As a result, in today's schools there are executive staff who have not chosen to offer Chinese but have simply inherited a program, with no memory of why it was introduced. Some of these, nonetheless, have passionate reasons of their own to maintain the program. Equally passionate and clear about purpose are those who have been instrumental in recently establishing a program in their school as part of national awareness that the 'Asia Century' has arrived. Details of these views are presented below.

It's the language of the future

Senior figures in the majority of the schools visited were quick to make reference to the importance of learning the language of a new world power. Correa Primary, for example, changed its language from Greek ten years ago because the Principal and the community 'saw [Chinese] as the language of the future' in terms of Australia's economic and regional relationships.

⁵ Reported on the MySchool website: www.myschool.edu.au

Consideration of students' futures was a common theme. The Principal of Acacia Primary said:

I really believe that Chinese is the language of the future. I think [students who have some familiarity with Chinese] will get the job before someone who doesn't. So I really believe that I'm fitting these children out for the future, for their employment.

The Principal of Melaleuca Secondary had a similar view. He had made his own choice of Chinese for the school, buoyed by the commitment of the Federal government to recognising the importance of Asia for the economic prosperity of Australia. He took into account young people's futures and felt that 'they needed to understand an Asian culture, and if we could get them to take their place in this Asia Pacific area that would be great. So that led me to Mandarin.'

At Baekia College both representatives of the school executive believed that this new addition to their curriculum provided an opportunity for their students to see 'the real world out there' where China is a 'dominant force and a global economic leader', while also providing a learning option to help 'break down barriers to understanding.'

The idea of growth in intercultural understanding was regularly linked to the argument about adjustment to a new economic and geopolitical future. This was thoughtfully put by the Principal at Correa Primary, himself bilingual.

It is not a purely language program. There is a lot of cultural learning associated with it. To have a global outlook ... is to recognise that there are other languages, and that we can't expect everyone to speak our language. We also need to make an effort to speak their language. I think those sorts of views are pretty universal here and very strongly held.

It was noted in passing at one school that setting up a Chinese program was in accord with national priorities and policy, a comment offered as an observation about anticipation of support rather than a motive.

A strong motivation for starting was as a recent experience of professional travel to China. The three newest programs — at Ti-Tree, Melaleuca and Baekia — were all direct products of the impact of study tours that senior members of the schools' executives had recently undertaken in China. This had also been the case earlier at Acacia. The Principal of Eugenia had been to China twice and her thinking about the appropriate nature for a program had been influenced by watching the time and effort young Chinese were putting into learning English. The Asia Education Foundation (which had managed a number of the study tours) had also been influential via its 'Leading 21st Century Schools: Engage with Asia' program, in which three of the Principals had participated.

It's a language, and learning a language is valuable

Several of the school administrators considered the offering of Chinese as a part of a good foreign language program. 'We have a very big language program. It is very hard to imagine what we do here [at Cassia] without it. It's just part of our identity' — and that a good foreign language program is an essential part of a good school curriculum.

The Principal of Grevillea made the clearest statement among all of the interviews of a general belief in the educational efficacy of learning languages. Learning a foreign language, he said, 'helps to develop school students' capacities to memorise, and concentrate, increases their sound sensitivity to foreign languages, and develops a tolerance and respect for other cultures.'

Can it be done?

I think the kids struggle if not taught two things properly. In speaking, it's tone accuracy that is the most challenging for them. ...The other thing is the recollection in writing, particularly writing characters, because it's a totally different system from the [Latin] alphabet, and they will be very resistant to characters at all.

Many of the interviewees agreed that learning Chinese is hard for the two reasons this teacher from Eugenia gave: the challenge of encountering a language which has two unfamiliar aspects at its base — a system of tones in speech and a character-based alphabet.

Most of the interviewees were confident that the difficulties could be surmounted as long as the students were keen and well-motivated. There was some variation in perspective about how well motivated their students were. In two or three cases it appeared that the further from the classroom the interviewees were, the more confident they were that problems could be resolved. But the majority of teachers believed that what they were trying to achieve could be achieved, although not all included linguistic competence as their goal.

The Head of Languages at Kunzea (a French teacher) thought that ‘all languages have things that are hard and things that are easy. Chinese seems to have a simplified grammatical system. So there you go. You’ve got to do your difficult learning in different areas is the way I see it.’

When asked about the challenges of mounting a Chinese program, the teacher interviewed at Correa replied with a useful summary of all the conventional issues. While he thought the program was being taught well at the school, he had some concern about the degree of student engagement. He put this down to lack of contact with people of Chinese background (in the very Anglo-Celtic locale around Correa). He felt that the teachers faced difficulties in getting students to see the relevance and importance of learning Chinese, and he saw this arising at least partly from general community apathy towards learning another language in Australia.

Community Attitudes

Some of the communities which the schools serviced encouraged the inclusion of Chinese in their programs. At Hakea College a group of Chinese-speaking parents mounted a push to this end, and at Acacia Primary parents at least tacitly recognised and supported its teaching. The evidence for this comes from the doubling of Chinese-background families at the school (to 80 percent of its population).

At Kunzea, the Head of the Languages Department referred to Chinese as one of the ‘prestige’ languages the school offered (the other being French). Chinese, she explained, ‘gets the children of the people who are upwardly mobile, those whose parents are asking, “What can this offer my child in the big world?”’ This effect didn’t necessarily apply to enrolment in the senior years at Kunzea where the proportion of non-background students dropped off sharply.

The Principal at Grevillea commented on the ‘long battle, sometimes, to convince parents about the merits of foreign language learning.’ He thought that battle had been won about ten years ago when the advantages of engaging in foreign language studies for their children’s prospective tertiary education (via scaled-up scores for tertiary entrance) had become persuasive for parents. He noted, too, that the school’s parents were increasingly alert to the practical realities of the developing economic and other relationships between Australia and China.

At Correa and Eugenia, and to some degree elsewhere, a more benevolently liberal attitude prevailed. Correa’s Principal described the program as ‘no particular drawcard’ but neither did it arouse much opposition. At Eugenia the parents were happy to support the Chinese program’s existence at the school, but that didn’t mean that they would encourage their children to enrol in the study.

The majority of schools reported some resistance, often coming from the ‘one or two’ rather than an organised or large group. Many of the standard arguments emerged, not so much about Chinese *per se*, but about learning languages in general. At Baekia, a good number of parents had voiced their concern about the value of a foreign language being taught to their children. They had expressed a preference for practical vocational skills training. The Assistant Principal at Westringia noted that ‘In the junior years the parents do get a bit pig-headed and a bit “Oh no, my family’s from a Greek background, I don’t need to learn Chinese”. That sort of stuff.’ At Melaleuca it was reported that parents did not seem to regard learning a language, whether Chinese or any other, as very important and some saw it as taking away time from the essentials of literacy in English and numeracy. Students themselves had asked the question: ‘Why do I have to learn Chinese when I am never

going to go there?’ To which the teacher’s response had been, ‘You don’t have to go to China. China will come to you!’

In this context it is salient that four of the Principals, three with the most recently established programs, had made what might be called ‘executive decisions’ to introduce Chinese, without any particular consultation with their communities. In each case this course of action was influenced by the passion with which they believed in the rightness of their cause, Acacia’s Principal, for example, saying, ‘I really *strongly* believe that if I’m going to make a difference to the education these children are having at this school, having been taught Mandarin is the most important thing.’

Such strong views, however, were not widely reported from the community, either for or against.

The Place of the Program in the School

The various subjects and activities in a school accrue different levels of status, some because of their centrality to certification, others because of internal or external affiliations with institutions, occupations or ethnic populations. Walking into the reception area of a school it is not uncommon to find signs in a language other than English, banners or gifts from sister schools in other countries and photos of various school trips to the country of language origin, all announcing that the school takes pride in its languages program. In other schools, however, there is no indication that languages are a recognised and valued part of the curriculum. Indeed it can be hard to even discover that a language is taught at the school, and it is clearly regarded as no more than one of a slew of subjects offered.

Among the 11 schools visited, Grevillea is distinguished by a Chinese program which extends well beyond language teaching. All students learn Chinese in its primary classes. In Year 7, students must study an Asian and a European language, and the study of one language is compulsory in Years 8-10. Chinese is offered through all these year levels and to Year 12. The language program is supported by school-wide, cross-disciplinary ‘Chinese literacy’ which has an impact in the design and teaching of most elements of the curriculum.

The Principal is a very active supporter of the program, now more than 30 years old. Saying that Chinese, construed broadly, ‘is an important component of Grevillea’s public identity’, he echoed the sentiment of the school’s Head of Languages, who said: ‘Generally, Chinese puts up a flag for this school’s reputation.’

The Principal spoke of the impact of many China tours, an active and productive sister-school relationship and the recent addition of a Confucius classroom to the program. He noted that the school-wide China-focused learning experiences running concurrently with the Chinese language program, together with the by-products of a highly interactive sister-school relationship, had led to many teachers, including ‘a very strong core’, having had ‘a powerful experience of China and Chinese’.

The Head of Languages, a teacher of Chinese, was similarly upbeat and made reference to the same range of factors. He also commented on the strength and consistency of support from the administration and one of its important practical manifestations, what he thought were ‘the reasonable hours timetabled for foreign languages’.

Thus, Chinese is a major component of this school’s identity. In this, the school is an unusual case, both within the sample of schools profiled and more generally. But the views expressed offer a standpoint which can be used as a reference when considering the place Chinese programs occupy in the other ten schools.

Attitude of the schools’ leaders

The very high level of engagement with their Chinese program and its success among some of the school leaders has been noted. This was particularly true of all the relatively new programs where, in each case, a good deal of personal and professional investment had been made in their success. In several cases (Ti-Tree Primary and Melaleuca Secondary, both young schools, are good examples), it appeared that the Principals were ahead of their generally young staff members and were working hard to explain their concept of what should happen and why the program (or an ‘Asian focus’) was

so important. It was a job they appeared to be enjoying and was central to their vision of what their schools should be like.

If at a less passionate level, administrators at other schools were still generally committed to their program and its success. Terms were used such as 'high importance', 'significant', 'defining aspect', 'strong proponent', even when the administrators were talking about mature programs or ones for which they didn't have direct responsibility.

This engagement was also evident when the Assistant Principal at Westringia College was expressing his considerable disappointment about the performance of its Chinese program. He didn't mince his words.

We've had Chinese here for quite a while. [It was first offered 16 years ago.] For the amount of time and energy and even money that we invest in Chinese education within the school, I think our outcomes are diabolical.

He followed this up later, saying:

The big thing with languages is it's not a sexy thing. It's not a thing that sells. It's not Maths, English, Science. It's not like you can get the Chinese kids out at an RSL function in their uniform doing the national anthem in the band, or they're not bringing a trophy home for sport, or they're not hanging a beautiful picture or anything, like Art. So it's a really hard one for a school in our situation when money is an issue to say, "Okay. We're going to throw \$50,000 or whatever at Chinese or French or any language". Because at the end of the day you're going, "Hang on, what am I getting out of this as a school?"

In the context of discussing his concern about the retention rate in languages to Year 12 he noted his preferred option, still, is to 'get the VCE happening in languages'.

At Kunzea and Cassia the administrators spoke about the Chinese language program in more matter of fact terms. But even in these cases, Chinese at Cassia was spoken about as an essential and natural part of a very rich language offering, and at Kunzea the Assistant Principal spoke of the value of the Chinese sister-school relationship, reciprocal visits and the maintenance of its international program not just with enthusiasm and commitment, but placing them as a crucial and stable part of the school's identity.

The interviews provide some insights into the notion of support from the administration as it is enacted in practice. On the basis of what they said, and have done, the best support these administrators see themselves able to offer is to exercise their responsibility to get, or develop and encourage, good teachers. Two of the Principals had not renewed the contracts of teachers, one of them because she had decided to change the language offered to Chinese, and the other because he was not satisfied with the quality of the teaching which was occurring. Almost half of the Principals talk about offering encouragement directly to their teachers. Two were noted as providing direct help with class management and discipline problems.

Administrative staff support Chinese programs by securing resources. Three language centres were under construction. Two schools at least were recipients of 'Becoming Asia Literate' grants from the Australian Government under the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program. In one case, funds had been used to purchase Chinese musical instruments and other teaching resources, and in the other to support a study tour of China.

Another form of support offered by administrators is to enhance the environment. The Principal at Acacia, for example, said, 'One of the very first things I really wanted to do was to have a big Chinese dragon in the main entrance there.' The Principal at Melaleuca also had big plans. His intention was to make the connection between the school and China obvious by putting up special displays of things Chinese. Two classrooms had already been dedicated to this end (a 'Mandarin Corner') and the school has provided money for buying related Chinese decorations and objects. He regarded this as his way of saying that 'the school values Chinese and wants to display this fact'.

The school leaders support their Chinese program with budgetary concessions when they are not otherwise justified. In a similar vein to the views of the Assistant Principal at Westringia presented

above, three schools kept senior Chinese classes alive by allowing them to operate in circumstances (low student numbers) which would otherwise have seen them cancelled.

Finally, the administration maintains support by absorbing community concern and shielding their teachers. The Assistant Principal at Baekia talked about this, as did the Principal at Melaleuca.

We have got three beautiful teachers over there who need a lot of protection because the community doesn't really appreciate what they are doing. [The teachers] need reassurance from somebody like a Principal to say, "Keep going, you are doing a fantastic job."

The above presents a broad set of actions which illustrate what support from a school administration might mean in practice. In some cases it seems to be essential to program health and continuation, in other cases it is more a manifestation of the Administration's own desire to identify the school with things Chinese and to hothouse its Chinese language program. While many acknowledged the benefit of patronage from the Leadership, teachers may not always appreciate such constant attention from on high. 'Support' was certainly interpreted by some of the teachers as meaning being left alone.

Attitude of other members of staff

The 'other members of staff' were a very diverse group. In the primary schools they included generalist classroom teachers whose classes were taught Chinese by the language specialist teachers. While broadly positive about the study of languages, these teachers weren't deeply engaged with the Chinese program, and in fact didn't know much about it. In the two schools where it was taught to their classes during their administrative and planning (non-teaching) time (APT), neither generally remained in their classrooms during Chinese lessons (no doubt because they needed the time for their own work). There was no attempt in either case to integrate what was being learnt in Chinese with what was being learnt in the rest of the program. A somewhat different situation prevailed at Ti-Tree Primary, where Chinese was taught as 'classroom' (rather than APT) time and classroom teachers remained in the room, although not necessarily engaged in the lesson. However, some of the classroom teachers of this school revised language points and vocabulary with their students and displayed the words students learnt in their Chinese classes. They also put up Chinese displays in their rooms which they sourced themselves.

In the secondary schools the other member of staff interviewed was generally a Departmental Head (going by varying titles). Two of the Heads of Languages were also teachers of Chinese and hence were very well informed about the program. In most other cases there was a fair degree of knowledge of the type required by an administrator, about program and budget for example, or dealing with unsatisfactory teachers, but not detail of the program or the teaching.

The attitude of other members of staff broadly reflected their roles as described above: positive, or uncertain and distant (see Acacia, for example), thoroughly immersed, or administratively involved and wanting the program to run efficiently and effectively (see Grevillea, for example).

Compulsory or elective

Another indicator of the place of a Chinese program in a school is whether or not it is compulsory or elective for the students.

This is one of the points at which program arrangements in the primary schools tend to diverge from those in the secondary schools. Chinese is part of every student's program at Correa, Ti-Tree, Acacia — all primary schools — and in the primary sections of Westringia and Grevillea Colleges. It is also compulsory at Melaleuca Secondary in Years 7 and 8, the only levels operating at the time of the interviews there.

In the other secondary schools Chinese is an elective subject, although in all these schools taking a language, especially in the junior years, is required. Taking more than one language is required at three of the schools. In most schools students may choose Chinese from a set of three, in a couple of cases even five. Beyond the compulsory years, Chinese is timetabled against a range of subjects, most typically something in IT, graphics and Art, or other academic subjects. For example, at Kunzea, senior Chinese was timetabled in the same block as two sciences, computer animation and

another technology study. The Assistant Principal suggested that one reason for the drop off in enrolment at this level was students' wish to pursue other subjects from these options.

Making any subject compulsory makes it necessary to deal with issues of considerable variation in student engagement and progress. There were several comments made about this issue. At Correa, a primary school, the Principal explained, 'we usually argue strongly against [exemption] ...we always try to explain to them that we really don't think [remaining in the class] is actually going to have any negative effect.' At Ti-Tree, the Literacy Coordinator took a similar stance. Even if a child was having difficulty with 'the language side, ...we still want them to have an understanding of another culture.'

It was also a matter of concern at Grevillea, where the Head of Foreign Languages noted that, despite some teachers overlooking students with limited interest and complaining about them hindering the progress of the class as a whole, these students make a substantial contribution to the numbers of Chinese learners at the school. He thought that schools should be required to classify students into categories appropriate to their language competence rather than year levels as a general strategy to reduce the complexity caused by mixed proficiency levels in the classroom. He suggested that the problem of disengagement is likely to increase with the onset of adolescence. The earlier description of the class and the more general discussion at Westringia are indication of what might occur when this happens.

On the other hand, if the study of Chinese is elective, the problem of maintaining enrolment (and thereby a healthy and stable program) may emerge. This issue was discussed by most of the secondary staff, and at some length by teachers from Hakea and Eugenia. At Hakea the discussion was couched in terms of fluctuation in numbers and poor retention rates, along with the impact of the inability of non-background students to compete in the senior years when students' future directions are influenced so seriously by tertiary entrance scores. At Eugenia, the Head of the Languages Department noted, 'the numbers game is tricky. There's no Year 12 Chinese class this year, and that makes things difficult.' The Principal observed the decline as well and, like the Vice Principal at Westringia, found herself challenged by teachers in other areas who felt they had a claim to more funds given the flourishing numbers taking their subjects.

Time allocation

The amount of time allocated to the subject is yet another indicator of the place of a Chinese program in a school.

There wasn't a great deal of variation in this regard except between primary and secondary programs.

The primary programs consisted of between 30 and 60 minutes per week, variously configured in the schools, with year level an influence. Broadly, younger students got less and older students more, within those fairly narrow parameters.

In the secondary schools, Year 7 students generally got about 100 mins a week in two sessions, Years 8-10 had 150-200 minutes in three sessions, and Years 11 and 12 had 200-250 minutes in four sessions. There was some minor but insignificant variation on that pattern. Even at the top end of these numbers, the total hours across Years 7-10 is still quite some way below the minimum 700 hours recommended for the National Curriculum for Languages. The inadequacy of the time allocation to develop competence in a 'hard' subject like Chinese emerged consistently in interviews. The teacher at Acacia, for example, believed that the biggest obstacle to the success of her program was the amount of teaching time, even though she goes 'full on'. The teacher interviewed at Eugenia was similarly concerned.

Forty minutes or fifty minutes class time — warming up, practising individually, the group, and then only five or ten minutes for the writing and homework. OK. A week of musical, got swimming, and then it's St. Cecilia's Day and school holiday coming up, a long weekend, and some students finish the term early on holiday already, like one week before, you know, so all these making the learning really hard.

The teacher at Kunzea said, 'Not enough. ...I don't have enough time' in the context of talking about the fact that two of her periods with a group were a double. It is not just the amount of time, but also the frequency of contact that is important in learning a language, especially ones, like Chinese, where frequency of engagement with characters is central to retention. At Melaleuca, each class in Years 7 and 8 has 150 minutes of Chinese a week, but this is timetabled in two blocks. When questioned about this, the Principal appeared unaware that frequency not just quantity of class time was an important factor in success in Chinese.

Explaining that each class received 50 minutes of Chinese per week, the Principal at Correa noted, 'It is not a lot of time, but you are competing with a lot of pressure from all sides.' There were several descriptions of these pressures from 'the crowded curriculum', one of the most precise and telling from the Principal of Acacia.

We try to do 10 hours English a week, and five hours of Maths ...and in the 10 hours [left] we have to fit music, library, computer, art, technology, science, humanities, social skills, sport, Phys Ed ...and language.

Intersection with other school activities

The brief description of the program at Grevillea at the beginning of this section includes the idea of developing 'Chinese literacy', meaning such things as cross-curricular reference, related extra curricular activities and resources, cultural celebrations and events, used as ways of building the texture and richness of a program. While Grevillea's was a special and unique case, there were a number of examples from the schools of attempts to extend the scope of the Chinese program beyond the specific lessons so as to support interest in and engagement with the language program. Some examples are set out below.

Other curricular areas

Among the primary schools, there was some evidence of curricular sharing occurring at Ti-Tree, and at Correa there had been some attempt to incorporate aspects of Chinese culture in the classroom units of work. A unit on public spaces, for example, included students going on a city excursion which included a laneway walk through Chinatown. But when asked about one aspect of the program that could be improved, the teacher interviewed replied that he thought that there should be still more integration of Chinese into other units of work. At Acacia, the underlying theme of the teacher's response was that efforts of this nature would be an artificial and difficult process.

According to the Assistant Principal, at Westringia's primary campus where only Chinese is taught, 'Asian studies is massive ...the staff really get heavily involved in Asian Week. They do Chinese New Year, and it's all a very big part of the program because all the staff are leading it.'

Sister schools and study tours

The Senior School Coordinator and Head of Languages at Hakea discussed the impact on language competence of spending time in-country.

The Head of Languages thought, 'It's the same old thing. What you put in is what you get out', to which the Senior School Coordinator responded, "I think in fact it does open up a whole world. Whereas when it's a classroom, it's one of the lessons you go to that day.'

Four of the 11 schools had sister-school relationships in China, two other schools were in the process of setting one up and another two were actively pursuing the idea. Of the four which were extant, two relationships were extremely active with students and staff having regular exchange visits. One was foundering a little, and one (after considerable effort, described in the report from Eugenia) had just been established.

Eugenia had been conducting study tours to China for more than a decade. Cassia also had a substantial study tour program which included homestays. Westringia, which owns and manages a school in China, had a wide-ranging study tour program (students were in Peru at the time of the interview), with the suggestion that, now that China was just one option among many, interest had diminished. One other school had had trouble generating student interest in study tours of China.

Excursions and cultural events/festivals

Chinatown and the Chinese Museum were popular destinations for the excursions which a number of the schools included in their programs. More noted that they celebrated Chinese festivals (Lunar New Year and other occasions) and found other reasons for cultural events (an Asian bazaar, for example).

The school environment

The three examples of ways in which the school environment had been changed to support Chinese programs appear above under 'Attitude of the schools' leaders'.

Grevillea and Baekia had Confucius Classrooms supported by the *Hanban*, a Chinese government cultural organisation. Ti-Tree had applied for one, and application was under active consideration at Melaleuca.

The Teachers

Their origins

The Head of Languages at Kunzea talked about there being two different types of language teachers – those who have come to the language because they are interested in it, and those for whom the language is their native language. She said that for the latter, ‘the positive aspect of the situation is that it’s total identity, and the negative aspect is that it’s total identity.’

Of the 28 teachers of Chinese interviewed in these 11 schools, only three were born in Australia. The others have come from China, Taiwan or Hong Kong. One member of this group had grown up in Australia.

The vast majority of the overseas-born group have teaching qualifications from both China and Australian tertiary institutions and many had had teaching experience in China.

One of the important aspects of their Australian training was to introduce overseas-born teachers to the Australian school system, something which would not be required by Australian-born teachers. There were not extensive comments about pre-service training, but those that were made suggest a level of dissatisfaction: ‘It’s mainly about the academic writing. That’s what we have learned’; ‘I learned not much’; ‘I want to learn about language teaching. That was not in my course’.

On the other hand, as the following comment from one of the teachers suggests, there is a cultural distance that many find difficult to bridge.

Some of the classroom language, I think this is the weakness for most Chinese teachers, because our language is Chinese, and in China we’re not used to manage the students. It’s students’ responsibility to behave, so it’s two different ideologies. In Australia teachers spend a lot of time talking about what kind of skills we need to discipline the students. While in China when I’m doing my teaching qualification, our main course is about the language itself, whether you are up to a certain level and to be able to teach the students.

Despite these difficulties, Chinese teachers persevere. There was one newly-graduated teacher among the group of 28. Another one teaching Chinese for the first time was an Anglo-Australian (with a Chinese wife) who normally taught Japanese. Apart from those two cases, the data show these were an experienced group of teachers, with several having taught for more than 20 years and many for more than 10.

Isolation and collaboration

One significant issue in the stability and longevity of programs is the support which might be drawn from colleagues who are doing the same or a similar task. The teacher at Baekia, for example, stated how keenly he felt his isolation as the ‘only person in the Chinese program’, especially as he was ‘teaching a new course, making it up as I go.’

There was only one teacher of Chinese in five of the 11 schools. In another school, there were four, but all worked on different campuses and met irregularly. In another, there were two teachers but both worked part-time in different sections of the week (and the school). Thus seven out of the 11 effectively worked on their own.

From the evidence in these interviews, however, having the numbers does not ensure good collegial relationships. At one school where there were three teachers, one had been moved to a separate staff room to avoid some type of personality clash. One concern of the teacher interviewed at this school was the lack of communication between the Languages staff. She felt that this was why she had very little idea about the school’s trips to China, what teaching methods other Chinese teachers were using in their classrooms, what professional development opportunities she might take advantage of, or what her colleagues were doing in that regard. ‘I’ve got no idea with this, ‘cause I never ask them you know.’

Several of the seemingly happiest teachers were on their own. The brand new teacher at Ti-Tree commented on how much support she felt she was getting from the administration and other teachers at the school. (She also had a teaching assistant, so was not entirely alone even in her own

classroom.) The teacher at Acacia said she felt very comfortable and supported in her school because she was able to run the program exactly the way she wanted to. She felt no pressure for her work to be integrated with the rest of the curriculum, and said with some emphasis that she did not want it to be. The sole teacher at Eugenia (albeit also with a teaching assistant) clearly had a valued and well-established role in the school.

Very smooth and productive collaborations were claimed at Cassia and Grevillea, two of the oldest programs, and also among the three teachers working in the comparatively new program at Melaleuca. At Cassia, where great claims were made for collaboration, each of the three teachers interviewed commented on the freedom and autonomy they enjoyed.

These perceptions suggest that professional isolation is not a simple idea, and that the feeling of being alone or not may be influenced by personality and state of mind as much as by actual numbers in a language department.

Teaching Assistants

Four of the schools had teaching assistants for Chinese: Ti-Tree, Hakea, Westringia and Eugenia.

At Ti-Tree (a primary school) the assistant had a modest role, helping with handing out materials and checking that students were able to do their work. But at Hakea (on the secondary campus), the Head of Languages claimed being able to employ language assistants was a centrally important aspect of their language programs: 'Being able to work with a young native speaker who's up to date with young people's interests. It just has improved the oral competency greatly.'

What do the teachers find most difficult?

The issues which were commented on as difficulties by the teachers were those generated by unruly or disengaged student behaviour, absence of a dedicated teaching space, time pressures and busy-ness, both in and out of the classroom, the absence of clear and consistent teaching programs with accompanying resources, and the loss of students at senior levels.

Most of these factors were stated as discrete items and only in some cases were they dominant themes in the description of their professional practice. Student misbehaviour, for example, was clearly a serious and on-going problem at Westringia. As in many schools and subject areas, at Melaleuca the teachers commented that Year 7s were quite biddable and engaged, but that this changed in Year 8.

Absence of a dedicated teaching space applied most frequently to the primary teachers, who moved from one classroom to another, those classrooms being the domain of a generalist. This was brought home at Correa where the Chinese teachers had had their own room, 'always beautifully decorated, and inspiring just to walk into' according to the Vice Principal. The teacher at Acacia felt there would be more things going on if she had her own 'proper' classroom, and at Kunzea the teacher wanted a 'permanent settled Chinese classroom'. Without their own room in which to leave their materials securely, there had also been problems with damage and theft.

A number of the schools did have dedicated teaching spaces, but it was a matter of policy to keep the teaching of Chinese in generalist classrooms. This did not stop the teacher wishing for her own room with ICT resources that worked and where the same settings could be maintained.

The remaining difficulties were each expressed by only a few of the teachers. In the longer-established programs, with senior students, time pressures and busy-ness were problems, while in newer programs, having better established expectations, program outlines to meet these expectations, and resources to make those outlines work as optimally as possible, were issues. The overall paucity of material available for school level Chinese, the lack of resources reflecting modern China and contemporary language, and the imminent need for sequences of resources to be used with the National Curriculum, were raised by some teachers.

The loss of non-background students at senior levels is a significant problem and is discussed in its own section of this summary. (See page 29)

Professional Development

There were mixed views on access to professional development (PD) according to position in the school. The school administrators were generally confident that it was available and accessible to the teachers of Chinese, on the same basis as it was to all other members of staff. At Correa and in several other cases, this meant having professional development on two days a year. The school would use some of these events for its own priorities, but the teachers were able to make at least one choice of their own.

The teachers were less sure that this was the case. At least one claimed to be too busy to participate in professional development. There was also some question about the range, suitability and value of what was on offer, sometimes coupled with uncertainties about what actually was available, and whether or not information about opportunities were being passed on by the responsible person. Some of the teachers had trouble accessing language-specific PD and there was some frustration with the amount of school-based PD which was often not relevant and of low quality

The most common wish in the area of professional development was for more support in learning how to use ICT effectively in the classroom. The other topic which recurred was classroom management and for help with strategies and ideas to engage and interest students; and non-background teachers were keen for opportunities to develop their conversational Chinese.

The Quality of the Teachers

A good Chinese teacher

The fundamental importance of good teachers to a quality program was expressed with great regularity. 'Strong teachers', beautiful teachers', 'vibrant teachers' were highly prized by administrators and teaching colleagues alike. The strongest comments in the whole collection of interviews are reserved for teachers who were felt to be not up to it.

Quite a few defining characteristics of good teachers of Chinese were offered, largely unprompted: enthusiastic, passionate, dedicated, committed; great personality, bubbly, infectious, relates well to the kids, has a sense of humour, has a positive attitude; well organised (repeated several times); loves the language and the culture. More specific to Chinese was reference to the importance of English language skills, a view that came from non-teachers of Chinese and Chinese teachers themselves.

A problem Chinese teacher

There were two schools where the quality of the teaching was noted as a problem by senior members of staff. At one, Ti-Tree, the Principal had solved his problem by not renewing the previous teacher's contract on the grounds that 'she wasn't fair dinkum about it.'

Concern about the quality of teachers dominated the heartfelt contribution from the Assistant Principal at Westringia.

We're just struggling to get decent teachers, like good, energetic ...teachers who can really engage the children. I'm generalizing here, but over the years I've also found that discipline is something that the Asian teachers have struggled with.

In Year 7 the kids are finding it very difficult to understand their teacher's English when they're trying to explain things.

His views were supported by the Head of Languages, who had made efforts to work with the Chinese teachers on what she and they saw as their weaknesses with respect to classroom management and 'getting the kids hooked'.

The Head of Languages at Kunzea told a similar story: 'Unfortunately we still have a teacher in the Chinese faculty who shouldn't be teaching, full stop.' She felt that a major weakness of the Chinese program was the mixed quality of the teaching and was keenly aware that negative messages had gone out about the program as a whole and that the poor performance of the teacher had stigmatised the language.

She described the poor qualities of this teacher as lack of patience, and lack of competence both in English skills and as a language teacher. The dominant theme of the feedback from students had concerned her unapproachability.

In what might be construed in many ways as a model program, the Principal at Grevillea noted quite explicitly that many of his students, nonetheless, experienced some incompatibility between their conventional learning styles and the Chinese teachers' teaching styles. Of the school's eight Chinese teachers, he said, there are 'two basically of Australian origin' while the rest are from China and have come out of the Chinese education system. The gaps which emerge lie in the differing expectations each group has of the other. He felt a more effective and better-supported adaptation process in terms of better understanding the Australian education system and its students was required.

The Teaching Program

Expectations

The rationale for learning languages included in the ACARA 'Shape Paper' for the new Australian Curriculum for Languages proposes development of communicative competence as a first goal of language learning and adds three further reasons of equal value: development of communication skills, intercultural capability and 'an understanding of the role of language and culture in human communication'.⁶

One or more interviewees from all the schools made reference to the significance of the cultural aspects of their Chinese program. In a typical instance, the three teachers at Melaleuca viewed their job as not just teaching Chinese language but also teaching about Chinese culture. They wanted to promote China 'so that people will have a better understanding of China and its people. ...Language cannot go without cultural understanding'.

This attitude was even stronger in some of the primary schools. It was very clearly put by the Vice Principal at Correa when he explained that 'It is not a purely language program. There is a lot of cultural learning associated with it. To have a global outlook ...we also need to make an effort to speak their language. I think those sorts of views are pretty universal [at the school] and very strongly held.' More importantly, for the school, achieving high levels of fluency was not overly important. Providing students with a good foundation and a positive attitude towards learning another language were 'ten times more important than a little bit of achievement'.

To get students used to the idea of learning another language, to offer them 'taster' programs of 30-60 minutes a week with a cultural element, was the intent of many of the programs up to mid-secondary level. At Hakea the teacher tries 'to entertain [her Year 7s, 8s and 9s] a bit, which means we watch cartoons, play computer. ...My Year 10, Year 11 and the 12s certainly have more priority.' These upper level students at Hakea were background speakers.

One of the teachers at Grevillea said the goal for her teaching was 'To encourage the students to like this subject, like the learning and be interested in Chinese culture.' She defined success as meaning '15 to 16 [in a class of 20] enjoy studying Chinese with me and 7 to 8 of them end up having very good learning results.' She was concerned about this target being achieved, due to the rather low level of pressure students received from their families and society to pursue high academic achievement, and a rigid school policy that makes learning at least one foreign language mandatory for all students.

In sum, teachers interviewed did not have particularly high targets and expectations in relation to linguistic competence in a majority of cases. There were significant exceptions. At Cassia, student retention and academic performance were used as performance measures, and both were high. Around 50 percent of students who had studied Chinese at the school had gone on to study Chinese language and culture at tertiary level.

Approach

'Approach' to language teaching means a functional theory or set of guiding principles which direct or consistently influence the teaching process. This topic did not emerge in many of the interviews and, where it did, rarely in much detail.

The three main concerns were the place of the four language skills, when they should be introduced and the emphasis they should be accorded, and in some cases also, the need to relate the content of what was being taught to the life experience of students.

A focus on speaking and listening was generally but not universally agreed to be the starting point. 'Seriously, who learns English by writing anyway?' said the teacher at Acacia, who also had just encountered enquiry learning. 'I've never done that. Always teacher-based you know. But now I am really interested in broader tasks.' Her classroom, like several other primary classrooms, employed learning stations/activities through which students rotated. She, too, was one of the proponents of

⁶ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (November 2011) 'The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages' p. 9. Accessible at: http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Languages__Shape_of_the_Australian_Curriculum.pdf

linking the content to the students' lives so that learning was more relevant to them, especially the non- background students. 'If I don't link it up to their life, they don't grab it,' she noted.

At Baekia, the teacher believed that his junior secondary students should learn characters in the introductory stage and should be taught in a 'mixed' manner. He believed that the oral language taught and learnt should be authentic and practical — the learning of classroom language, for example — while paying attention to tones and speaking skills.

The teacher at Eugenia drew on his own experience as a guide to his approach:

I learnt English as a second language in China and my teachers told me a theory for language teaching is always listening as people naturally do. Listening and speaking comes before reading and literacy acquisition. But some teachers just go the easy way. They just create heaps of worksheets. I think it helps with classroom management, you know, like making sentences and you just supervise. Working full-time teaching four, five or six periods a day and practicing speaking, it's very exhausting.

The most sophisticated expression of a teaching approach came from Cassia. The teachers there talked about the most suitable method of teaching a foreign language in a host country. 'When we learnt English in China, it was in a Chinese way. It was "Chinglish". Likewise, when Australians learn Chinese in a pure Australian way, it become "Engnese".' A combination of the two styles seemed to the Head of Languages to be the most efficient way to teach. 'When learning the home country language [= target foreign language], we use home country methodology, supported by English method.

Two other distinctive aspects of this program were mentioned. The first was the multi-level tailoring to the needs of individual students — a process which is worked out with the participation of the student and his or her parents as well as with other staff. The second was a focus on the need for memorisation. All the teachers at Cassia agreed that memorisation was an essential component in the learning of Chinese. The only other reference to this came from Kunzea, where the teacher explained that she taught characters by getting her students to look at them as pictures, and then using their imagination, to draw a response. But she thought that, in the end, learning characters was like memorising correct spelling. 'Always have to have spelling, spelling, spelling.'

Influence of senior curricula

One significant influence on 'approach' especially in the secondary years was the influence of the curriculum design of Chinese in the Year 12 Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the International Baccalaureate (IB).

This was as true at Cassia (where the IB is taught) as it was anywhere. Explaining why she highlighted character teaching and essay writing, one of the teachers said, '70 percent of the IB content is about writing.'

It was also a matter of particular concern at Grevillea. The view put there was that success with VCE Chinese studies entails very frequent assessment of a narrow range of skills. The Head of Languages noted the negative influence this had on the flexibility of teaching activities and curriculum design at other levels. 'The foreign language teaching is completely confined by VCE exams. We must follow it ...for both Years 11 and 12 students and younger students. Thus, the teaching styles may be stiff ...a little dull and lacking variability.' However much he regretted this situation, he was resigned to it. 'There is nothing we can do. The restrictions are clear.' The practical effect was described by another of Grevillea's teachers. 'Eighty percent of the students are learning "mute" language ...which makes me most unhappy. ...Students' ability to recognize and write characters is completely detached from their ability to speak.'

The Lessons

A good number of the lessons observed consisted of working step by step through a textbook or, as a closely-aligned substitute, the use of work sheets. What happened in the primary schools tended to be more varied.

One of the teachers at Correa described what she did in her primary Chinese classes in some detail. She said she spent approximately three weeks (with one lesson per week) on a topic and used resources from a variety of places. She used these to teach the students some action words and then assessed their comprehension by asking them to mime the action. One of her lessons with the Year 5s was observed. Activities were tightly structured and the lesson was conducted in English with the vocabulary for parts of the body the only words spoken in Chinese. The teacher had some difficulty remembering student names, a consequence of seeing so many students only once a week, which also made control a problem. Character writing was used as a punishment with one child. Playing a game of Simon Says, the students listened quite well and participated enthusiastically.

In one lesson observed at Ti-Tree, another primary school, the teacher had incorporated a range of group work activities with the older students. Some students were working on their own at a desktop, while others were practising their spoken Chinese with her. Another group were listening to Chinese music on their iPods while another group was doing some writing. In a lesson with younger students, there was a lot more teacher direction and students sat in a circle practising 'What's your name?' over and over again. The sentence was introduced using a puppet.

The classes at Acacia were also broken up into varied group work. The teacher said she usually spent 20 (of 60) minutes on oral work 'because I believe that if you can't speak, you don't understand.' Her classes usually had quite a few native speakers in them and she often used them to help her with modelling oral language for the non-native speakers.

While the Chinese programs at Kunzea College were still very much based on progressing theme-by-theme through a textbook, one of the teachers spoke about how she supplemented the textbook material with other activities, such as watching movies, singing, doing role plays, creating culture days (for example, setting up a New Year festival with lots of different stalls with costumes to try on, take photos in, play Chinese games, etc), going on excursions to Chinatown during the Dragon Boat Festival and kite making. She talked about playing several different games in her classes (like 'Simon Says' and 'Musical Chairs') and getting students to write songs and perform them.

At Melaleuca there was an emphasis on repetition and rote learning. 'They have to memorize [the language].' [The homework assigned] might be memorizing fixed sentence structures or idioms. 'I assign long sentences to them to memorize every day.' The teachers also use regular dictation to reinforce students' vocabulary knowledge and frequent composition writing tasks to improve students' writing skills. They, too, considered the integration of culture and history as another important component in the teaching of Chinese.

In the Year 11 class observed at Hakea, the teacher listened to students without comment as they read passages they had written in response to the Chinese film *Not One Less*. She was very pleased with the group: 'See, a lot of them have already experienced a lot of issues in real life. That's what I really like to draw their attention to see, to observe, and to realise: what's reality, rather than just to criticise, you know, to say poor, no good. But because their observation, they're extending or thinking.' When asked about the nature of the exercise, she said: 'It's gathering information and evidence, but they need to have ideas and to organise this information, make them become evidence, to go a bit further. I never say to do oral without them prepared properly and based on topic study first.'

At Cassia the format most frequently used to practice pronunciation, tones and speech in Chinese was casual conversation at the beginning of lessons on previously-learned topics, e.g. age, and spontaneous topics inspired by daily events, like the weather, particular clothes worn by students, or school happenings. This occurred before going on to work from the textbook or worksheets that the teachers had constructed themselves. Memorisation of characters and sentences was another component of class work, often coupled with homework of the same kind.

The actual nature of the teaching practice also emerged in the discussion of issues in teaching Chinese, as shown in the section that follows.

Issues

Teaching characters and tones

The presence of characters and tones are seen to be the most challenging aspects of learning Chinese.

There was a general but not universal view that students should begin with speaking and listening. The teacher at Ti-Tree, for example, did not believe that they needed to learn characters in the primary years. 'Because students have little exposure to characters, it will not be useful to teach them now.'

The main dissenter to the idea of speech first was a secondary teacher who thought that 'Because it's a totally different system from the [Latin] alphabet they will be very resistant to charactersIt should be introduced in probably the very first class.'

Characters were taught in some of the primary schools. At Acacia the teacher taught characters by making up stories with the students. 'I turn it into a tiger. I say, "Ok, this is the ears here and this is a bit of the fur coming out of the ears and this is the head", and so on.' She believes that writing is more a secondary school level skill so her focus was on reading and recognizing characters.

The students at Correa were introduced to characters in Year 4 and just for recognition. In Years 5 and 6 students start to copy characters. The teacher didn't believe that her students would remember the stroke order, so her main emphasis is on recognition and she encourages students to use pictures to help them remember. The characters are chosen from the topics they are studying.

At secondary level, one of the teachers at Grevillea also used a story-creating method to help students learn characters. Although her students like this method, they have to accept the reality that not all characters are susceptible to learning this way and that, 'sometimes, they have to learn by rote.'

The teacher at Kunzea had a similar view. She taught characters by using flashcards with pictures and then getting students to write the character. 'It's just like, step-by-step, stroke-by-stroke.' She wished there was software that would allow teachers to design worksheets for students based on stroke order. At the time of the interview, she was handwriting her own. She also taught characters by getting her students to look at them as pictures, and then using their imagination, to draw a response. But she thought that, in the end, learning characters was like memorising correct spelling.

At Westringia the teacher's view was that, 'When I start, I usually start with speaking. When the student get the idea, so speak and listen usually goes together.' But she thought it was important that students should learn characters. 'If the students don't learn characters they will lose interest. When they write characters and when they build up their knowledge about the characters, their understanding of this language, their interest is built up.' However, 'Most students from Years 7 to 9 don't have much vocabulary, so most of them [spend the bulk of their learning time] revising characters in the first semester of Year 10.'

There were also different perspectives on teaching tones.

The teacher at Acacia had a strong belief that students would just 'pick up' the tones from listening to native speakers and would know when they were wrong. She does explain to her students what the tones are, but after that she didn't believe there was a need to do any more explicit work on them.

The teacher at Ti-Tree expressed concern that there were some issues with tones, particularly using the second tone instead of the first. She paid significant attention to oral and listening skills, including tones, and believed that these two skills should be taught together.

When asked about what he thought was the hardest thing for Australian students in learning Chinese, the teacher at Eugenia suggested,

I think the kids struggle if not taught two things properly. In speaking, it's tone accuracy that is the most challenging for them. I've been working on my strategy and I think it seems to be working, but however hard you show them with diagram, for some people — even to go

'doh, re, mi, fa, so, la, te, doh' — it's too hard. It will not work however accurately you show how the tone works, because once you put it into practice their natural tone takes over. It's not an intellectual problem. It's their language habit.

The teacher's other point concerned learning characters and his comments about that are recorded under 'Use of Pinyin' below.

Another secondary teacher, at Kunzea, who commented on this issue, explained how she taught tones. She gets her students to go through an initials and finals table found in a typical textbook first. 'Everybody must have finished this one [example of *ba* with four tones] with the four different tones and they need to read properly. But when I teach them, I'll just use the four hats and I'll just put it on my head and say, "Ok what's this?"' She thinks this works especially well for her non-background students because, 'with background they have their Shanghaiese dialect, or Fujian, or Cantonese. [Non-background students] always pronounce like *my* background. Beautiful, very formal.'

Use of Pinyin

There were markedly differing views on whether or not *Pinyin*, the orthodox system of romanised Chinese writing, should be taught in Chinese programs.

The most emphatic proponent of *Pinyin* was the teacher at Kunzea, who thought it should be taught and that careful attention needed to be given to correct spelling as well. It was also used at Correa and Ti-Tree, Cassia ('but not on its own') and Westringia ('but speaking and listening first').

The views against using it were generally expressed more strongly.

At Acacia the teacher said,

I explain to the children in this school that when you learn Chinese you don't really follow *Pinyin*. Okay, I do agree that some Chinese teachers will be against me, but when I learn English I never use the proper *Pinyin* system in the dictionary. I say to the children, what you hear you write it there yourself in any way you think that you were able to say it, exactly the same as what I say. That way, you will be able to say it properly, but if you really pronounce the *Pinyin* way maybe you won't be able to pronounce properly.

At Grevillea the choice not to use *Pinyin* made ten years ago was thought to have been 'the most successful and important change in the school-wide teaching of Chinese'. One of the teachers explained that she thought many cultural messages were embedded in Chinese characters and language phenomena. 'Chinese language is particularly influenced by characters and the Chinese culture might be seen as culture of characters.'

At Eugenia, the use of *Pinyin* was discussed by the teacher in terms of the general issue of teaching characters. 'Once you have *Pinyin* with the characters they will always pay attention to *Pinyin* and ignore the characters. ... You should introduce [characters] as early as possible to impress the idea that the characters are the right thing to learn if you want to learn genuine Chinese.' Early on in his teaching he had emphasised *Pinyin*, but had found 'after a year or two the students did not want to learn the characters anymore. So in last three years I shifted my teaching from *Pinyin* back to characters.'

Use of Chinese in the classroom

There was little discussion of the language of instruction. It appeared that it would almost always be English. The reason given by the three teachers who spoke about it was the need for students to understand what to do. For example, from Hakea, 'Not everyone understands in Chinese. If it was just a top level IB class, still a couple of students wouldn't understand everything in Chinese.' From Ti-Tree: 'I don't think they are ready for [instructions in Chinese] and I don't want to give them a lot of stress.'

A recorded exception was at Eugenia, where the teacher used Chinese in class as often as he could to provide his students with exposure to the language.

Resources

Many of the programs examined are highly reliant on textbooks as their basis. '*Kuaile Hanyu*' and 'Chinese Made Easy' (which uses *Pinyin* extensively) were two referred to by name. In each of the three instances where there was some discussion of the textbook, dissatisfaction was expressed. In one case the chosen book had no colour illustration and had 'boring' presentation of its content. In a second the text was thought to be of limited use to students, especially because of its poor cultural content. The third was 'out of date', but was used because 'it's got the traditional and the simplified writing so we have combined both the forms learners use, and some quite basic grammar information too.'

There was a fairly widespread belief among the teachers that commercial resources for teaching Chinese were limited in range and generally of poor quality. Material brought from China was commonly noted as proving too difficult for second language learners and very different in style from the sorts of textbooks and other learning materials Australian students were accustomed to.

The teacher at Acacia (a primary school) didn't think much of textbooks. 'I have got a textbook, but we don't have time to allow the children to read them unless I have an inquiry learning station in the reading corner. ... But most of the textbooks don't have a CD to come with them, how we going to read it properly for them?'

Many of the teachers had developed (in the mature programs), were developing, or were planning to develop their own materials. This was one of the sources of time pressure that some of the teachers were feeling.

Several of the primary teachers provided a long list of eclectic resources they had gathered to use in their classroom, for example, flashcards, worksheets, various ICT devices including iPods and IWBs, realia because of its interest to students, songs, chants and lots of puppets. Many had been made by the teachers themselves. This was also true of some of the secondary programs. To the list above, they added DVDs and CDs, which appeared to be in fairly wide use.

The use of ICT

All of the schools but one had ICT infrastructure which was variously described as 'very good' or 'excellent' by the senior staff, and by some of the teachers. At Baekia, the one exception, the inadequacy of ICT resources in languages and the lack of technical support were noted and acknowledged by all the interviewees and projects were in train to improve the situation. Even in the schools with very good resources, however, the resources weren't used very much by the teachers of Chinese. There were various reasons for this.

One reason was not having an established teaching space. At Correa, although each classroom had five desktop computers and trolleys of laptops available, the teacher felt that moving from class to class made it virtually impossible to make use of them in the time available. She also had trouble accessing websites she wanted to use, but the technician only came to school on Wednesday afternoons, the time when there were no Chinese teachers in attendance. Similar reasons were advanced at Kunzea and Ti-Tree. Equipment had to be transported and set up, and even then it was not always reliable. These three teachers all wanted to make more use of ICT.

A second reason was that most resources were beyond the range of students' language skill level. This was a view advanced at Grevillea and Westringia, among other places.

A third reason was a felt lack of ICT general competence, or not knowing what to do with ICT resources in the classroom, or not knowing what resources were available. As a result, developing skills with classroom use of ICT was very high on the list of unmet professional development requirements.

One of the three teachers of Chinese at Melaleuca was getting value from an interactive whiteboard but the other two, while happy with their access to ICT, weren't using it much. DVDs and games were used at Hakea with Years 7s and 8s, though apparently more as filler. At Westringia, ICT was used one period a week, mostly for the creation of Powerpoint presentations or posters.

The teacher at Acacia was a keen user of her preferred tools — iPod ‘Touches’ and DVDs — in her classes. ‘It’s more engaging I think and the children love it.’ She normally preloaded videos onto the ‘Touches’ and then directed the students to which ones they should be watching, or which applications they should be using. She was very confident about using the iPods, but less so about using interactive whiteboards and was finding that she and a ‘few other Chinese teachers [are] really not sure about the interactive whiteboard, because when it came out everyone heard, “Oh, it’s not supportive for the Chinese font. No you can’t use it”.’ She used the interactive whiteboard more as a showcase for the wiki she had created for her classes.

A Central Issue

Among the most serious issue that emerged from the interviews was the difficulty of retaining non-background Chinese learners to senior secondary levels.

The profiles make evident that this situation creates two problems. Firstly, there is a lack of appeal for non-background learners in continuing with Chinese, despite this being a fundamental part of the national drive to increase the number of future citizens who have a knowledge of Chinese. Secondly, there is the deleterious impact on the viability of any Chinese program in secondary schools where the dominant group is not Chinese by birth or heritage.

At all except one of the secondary schools, including schools with long established programs and a deep commitment to the maintenance of Chinese, the enrolment of non-background students at Year 12 is either no more, or in a state of crisis. Only at Cassia, an unusual case and a comparatively small school which teaches the International Baccalaureat at senior levels, was there no comment on this problem.

The problem was a matter of deep concern at Grevillea. The Principal knew about it. 'Almost all Australian-born students of Chinese have to deal with increasing difficulties to do well in VCE Chinese due to the changing demographic of the Australian population.' His Head of Foreign Languages described it as leading to 'very dreadful phenomena.' These included an increasing drop-out rate of non-background learners of Chinese at senior level. He was aware of many other schools' hesitating to offer Chinese, many 'top-notch' students giving up Chinese to avoid low VCE scores, and severe polarisation of language levels formed by the unbalanced composition of the student body. To resolve these issues, he believed that special arrangements were needed for assessment in VCE Chinese which took more careful account of students' language background. 'These obstacles will never be overcome if the examination structure remains the same.'

Similar stories were told at Hakea and Eugenia.

Hakea has background-speaking students. But even there, the Year 11 group observed had begun with 20 students in Year 10 and the number had declined to fewer than 10 the following year because, even though they were good students, 'they find the work just too demanding.' All of the students had considerable background (all but one had spent time at school in China), but the teacher felt she still needed to spend a good deal of time in remediation to bring them up to the required standard.

At Eugenia, about 20 percent of the school's students continue with language study at Year 12. 'But for Chinese it's another story', said the Head of the Languages Department. 'Numbers up and down, up and down. Since 2001, our first Year 12 VCE class, the biggest number has been 12, I think, and lowest number three or four.' The Principal was alert to the problem. 'I think we're up against it in one sense, in that now when you have somebody who has no background whatsoever, the opportunity to get that high study score is not as great as it was.'

At Kunzea there were plenty of background speakers and a very high awareness of the problem. Around two-thirds of the students at Year 10 who choose to continue studying Chinese at VCE level have some sort of background in the language. The Assistant Principal also noted the reduction in challenge and genuine educational opportunities that this was driving the background speakers towards. 'We battle with the issue of background kids because it does sort of warp things.'

The Head of Languages at the school noted that 'Chinese has got a fantastic retention rate. It's got the best retention rate of all the languages. But it's because of the proportion of native speakers at the school.' Her concern was not maintaining enrolment, but encouraging 'non-backgrounders' to learn Chinese, and in that case the result was poor. She, too, knew the problem. 'The definition of who's doing Chinese as a second language still includes students who have background Chinese, and the same assessment procedures and judgments are applied to those students as to students who have absolutely no background. I would say there needs to be another category ...so that Anglo kids feel that it's worth going on.'

One of Kunzea's Chinese teachers had put a lot of effort into encouraging non-background students to continue with Chinese, and one step the school had taken was to establish a VCE class for

background speakers in Year 10 and one for non-background students. 'So it might mean that those ['Anglo'] kids feel more comfortable about continuing on to VCE.'

The teacher interviewed at Kunzea cited the case of one non-background student in a prior year who had done exceptionally well (a score of 45/50) in second language VCE Chinese. It had taken lots of lunchtime teaching and other extra opportunities like participating in speaking competitions, studying in Guangzhou for a month, and having a great deal of other extra tutoring.⁷

No one interviewed seemed to know how to get action occurring that might resolve this problem by dividing the groups and still allow both sets of learners the chance to do well. Yet from Principal to teacher, all in secondary were anguishing over the situation, and saw it as risking the extinction of Chinese as a viable second language program in secondary schools.

⁷ This occurred 4 years ago now and there has not been another such student getting A+ since.

SCHOOL PROFILES

Correa Primary School

Enrolment	c. 530
Year levels	Grades P-6
Sector	Government
Languages offered	Chinese
Age of the Chinese program	c. 10 years
Number teachers of Chinese	2
Year levels Chinese offered	Years 1-6; mandatory
Designated class time	50 mins per week
Students' language background	Predominantly Anglo-Australian

Correa Primary School is a government primary school (Years Prep-6) situated in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. It has an enrolment of approximately 530 students and is a school zoned to its local neighbourhood, restricted in how big it can grow by the constraints of its accommodation. Eighty-five percent of students' families are in the top quartile of ACARA's socioeconomic background index. Insignificant numbers are in the bottom two quartiles. One quarter of the school's students have a language background other than English. The school does have some children of Chinese background, but they are in a small minority.

The school's administration

The views of Correa's administration were represented by the Vice Principal, Jim Stavros. He has been at the school for around seven years. Chinese was already being taught as the school's language when he arrived. He came from a neighbouring school which also taught Chinese and he had had considerable involvement with its program as a classroom teacher there. He had collaborated with the language teacher at that school, helping her use digital video to film short plays in Chinese with her class. He has less direct involvement now in his current role but does help with the organisation of special days or events which highlight Correa's Chinese program. He feels that by doing so he not only supports the teacher but the program as well.

Jim has no connection with China or with the language directly, but has found the language very interesting, particularly the characters. He is of Greek background and regards language learning as important: 'You actually learn more about your own language by studying the nature of languages, so there are definitely advantages to it.' He is fluent in both English and Greek and has learnt Italian in Italy. He has also done some study of Sanskrit.

Chinese has been part of the curriculum at this school for around ten years. It replaced Greek as the school's language and was adopted because the Principal and the community 'saw it as the language of the future in terms of Australia's relationship with China economically and [as a regional neighbour], and the emerging role of China in many ways'. At this stage there is no sister-school relationship with a Chinese school. They tried to establish one but it didn't eventuate.

Each class in this primary school receives 50 minutes of Chinese per week. 'It is not a lot of time, but you are competing with a lot of pressure from all sides.' The job is shared between two teachers. One takes the lower grades; the other takes the upper grades. Both work part-time. Jim expressed his high regard for both teachers.

The school is zoned – it is popular and enrolment is always full. The offering of Chinese is not regarded as a particular draw card. However, Jim was confident that 'all the teachers and the parents regard the Chinese program as being of essential importance'. The school does not want the program to be tokenistic. He believes every program, including Chinese, must be treated with

respect and be properly supported. 'As far as I know, everyone else at the school also looks at Chinese ... as being important because it helps you understand things about your own language.'

The school also regards cultural understanding and knowledge as an essential component of the program. 'It is not a purely language program. There is a lot of cultural learning associated with it. To have a global outlook ... is to recognise that there are other languages and that we can't expect everyone to speak our language. We also need to make an effort to speak their language. I think those sorts of views are pretty universal here and very strongly held.' For the school, achieving high levels of fluency is not overly important. Significance is attached to providing students with a good foundation and a positive attitude towards learning another language. Jim counts attitude 'as ten times more important than a little bit of achievement'. He noted that the school has had a number of students who go to on secondary school and take Chinese and do very well in it. 'So we are encouraged by that.' He regards the program as a means of showing children that 'there is another language, to let them engage to a certain degree with that language and with its culture and to broaden their interests and their horizons and their understandings.'

All students take Chinese. There has been one request to be excused and it was only for a short period of time. 'We usually argue strongly against it. ... Now, we always try to explain to them that we really don't think it is actually going to have any negative effect, but ... we are sure it will be a positive experience, because you actually learn more.' He also believes that separating a child from his or her peers never has a good effect. 'So we certainly don't subscribe to any philosophy that for children who are underachieving, their time is best spent not doing a second language and doing something else instead.'

Jim regards the quality of staffing as being of essential importance to the program. He also believes that the attitude of the teacher towards the program will influence the attitude of the students. The support of the classroom teacher is therefore very important. 'I think that most of our teachers, if not all of them, have a very good attitude towards it so that would be conveyed. Having the right teacher is very important and we have been very well serviced in that regard.'

Currently, the Chinese teachers have to move from room to room. This is because of building works. The school has always had a separate Chinese room and when the building is completed, it will once again have its own room. (Art and Music have been affected in the same way.) Jim said that 'it was always beautifully decorated, and inspiring just to walk into and you get a feeling of what it was about.'

Professional development is available for all staff. Teachers have an allocation, half of which needs to be aligned with school goals, while the other half is a matter of personal professional choice.

Access to ICT is very good at the school, with teachers making constant use of technology to do presentations, research and video making. Each classroom has five desktop computers and there are trolleys with 10 laptops that can be used at each of the Year levels. 'We are very well resourced in that area', Jim noted. The Chinese teacher has access to this equipment in the classrooms and has used it for photos, mapping, slide shows, power points and videos.

Parents are provided with a written report of students' progress three times a year along with an interview in the middle of the year. The Chinese teachers have a section in the report that they must fill in. As with the other specialist teachers, they need to be available for the parent-teacher interviews, but only on request.

From the Vice Principal's point of view, the learning of a second language is a valuable undertaking. He is supportive of his two teachers and the school will once again provide a dedicated classroom when the building works are completed. He sees the program at the school as being important not just for learning a language and the benefits that can provide to better understand one's own language, but also as a way to give students an insight into another culture, and to develop more varied perspectives. The Vice Principal believed that the Chinese program is widely supported by both the school and the community and attributes its success to the Chinese teachers.

A classroom teacher

Ian Morrison teaches a Years 5/6 class at Correa. He has been teaching for around eight years and for six of these at Correa. He has also spent time working overseas. This experience has given impetus to his belief that learning a second language is very important. He studied German at high school up to Year 12 but has had no experience with Chinese and has never been to China, although he said that it was 'definitely on the agenda'. He believed engagement with China was important: '... such a large country and large population and a major economic player as well. I think it is absolutely essential that we learn the language of a country so central to our future.'

He regarded good teaching as being dependent on developing good relationships with the students and believed that, without good relationships, 'you are not going to get anywhere academically. It is not going to happen.'

When asked about the strengths or weaknesses of the program, Ian responded that he hadn't really thought about it. However, while he thought it was generally taught very well, he had some concern about the degree of student engagement, which he put down to lack of contact with people of Chinese background. He felt that the teachers face some difficulty in getting students to see the relevance of learning Chinese and how important it will be. He saw this arising at least partly from the lack of importance attached to learning another language in Australia.

Chinese lessons occur during the administration and planning (i.e. non-teaching) time of the classroom teachers. For this reason the classroom teachers do not necessarily have much of an idea of what the students are learning. Sometimes the teachers remain in the room, but if that is the case they will be engaged in their own work. At other times, they leave the room. During the lesson observation conducted as part of this project, Ian used the time to work on a computer away from the students and moved in and out of the classroom a couple of times.

Although the addition of a second language may add to the 'crowded curriculum', Ian sees it as important and 'the way it should be.' When asked about the response to the program by the students and parents, he regards it as being very positive. 'They are definitely very supportive of cultural awareness if not just language awareness and I think a lot of parents are very aware that when [their children] get to secondary school, a lot of them are able to continue with their Chinese and they have got that head start.'

When asked about the support the program receives from the rest of the staff, Ian said that, while they all see the benefit of Chinese and support it in a variety of ways, some classroom teachers are more supportive than others. One issue this year has been the fact that Chinese does not have its own classroom and that has meant a number of difficulties, including the fact that the Chinese teachers do not have a place to put up their own posters and displays, and are therefore unable to create an environment conducive to language learning.

There is some attempt to incorporate aspects of Chinese culture in the classroom units of work. A unit on public spaces saw students go on an excursion into the city which included a laneway walk through Chinatown. When asked about one aspect of the program that could be improved, Ian replied that he thought that there should be more integration of Chinese into other units of work. At the same time he noted that some units of work lend themselves more readily to integration than others.

In summary, Ian, as a generalist teacher, was positive about the program, although he was not particularly aware of its nature. He is supportive of language learning and Chinese in particular, as he sees China as an important economic player whose language will be useful to the students in the future. He thought the rest of the staff were quite supportive, although the degree of support varies from teacher to teacher. He noted the impact that the temporary absence of a dedicated classroom was having on the program and some issues with student engagement that he ascribed to the lack of contact with people of Chinese heritage.

A Chinese teacher

There are two teachers of Chinese at the school; both are of Chinese origin. The teacher interviewed, who takes the senior years (4-6), has been at the school on short term (annual) contracts since the origination of the program. She had previously worked in a private school at

secondary level and has no primary training. However, she has completed a Masters degree in Education at Monash and has a Graduate Diploma from Deakin, both of which included modern languages methodology. She believes that the Graduate Diploma was far more useful than the Masters for preparing her for teaching in Australian schools. She felt that the Master of Education was too theoretical, while the Graduate Diploma helped her to combine theory with practice, what she described as 'the real world'. 'Because I wasn't born here and I wasn't in the school system here, I didn't really know what the school was like until I went to the teaching round.'

The two Chinese teachers at the school work on different days. In order to plan together, they phone each other at least once a week or leave a note explaining what has been done. Each term they also spend some additional time together talking about their programs and planning their next term's work. They are each responsible for planning their units of work for their year levels, but share ideas and worksheets. Dora has found working in a primary school very demanding compared with working in the secondary school. 'When I came to primary, I realised this is not busy, this is crazy. I mean it.' There seems to be little attempt to work out a long-term plan, 'All our concentration here is to plan a lesson and make sure that the kids will learn in that 45 minutes.' Dora thought that there was little time for planning, even though the teachers had one period a day for non-face-to-face teaching duties.

Dora spends approximately three weeks (with one lesson per week) on a topic and uses resources from a variety of places. Some books had been purchased from China, but these were found to be of very limited use for second language learners. When asked about the types of activities she uses, Dora gave an example of teaching the students some action words and then assessing their comprehension by asking them to mime the action. She keeps records of their work in the form of a portfolio, which is actually a folder or a scrapbook.

A lesson with the Year 5s was observed. A tightly structured approach in which classroom instructions and management were all conducted in English was adopted. Dora had difficulty remembering student names, which also made control an issue. Some boys made silly noises throughout the lesson but other students were on task and working well. Character writing was used as a punishment with one child. Although asked to write them out, he was given no guidance on how to write them. When Dora used a game of Simon Says, the students listened quite well and participated enthusiastically. Basically, the lesson was in English with the vocabulary for parts of the body the only words spoken in Chinese.

In a lesson with another group, a class of 30, students revised the vocabulary for countries and nationalities and were then given a test. All instructions were given in English. Students worked well and Dora made the comment, 'they are very quiet today. Must have heard about the Year 5s. They had a talking to and this class must have heard.' The classroom teacher interrupted Dora when she decided that the lesson was over and Dora left without saying a formal goodbye.

A third lesson observed, this time with Year 6, was on hobbies. Dora revised the names of different sports and activities, using English most of the time and students were allowed to refer to a list from the previous week. The absence of space on the whiteboard for Dora to use presented a number of problems. She was informed by the students that she could not erase what was on there, so had to make use of a very small margin at the side. One student was very disruptive and constantly played with an electronic game until the classroom teacher returned to the room. The main activity was a role play in which students were required to talk about eight activities with a partner, saying whether they liked or disliked the activities. Students worked well in this part of the lesson and they had time at the end to present their plays.

Dora mentioned that although there is reasonable access to computers, she has difficulty when she wanted to use them for Chinese. There were problems with access to various websites. In this context, she mentioned 'Languages Online'. She had produced a game for the students but decided that it would be more fun for them to design a game themselves. However, that had not been possible given the restrictions on downloading at the school.

Dora said that access to professional development (PD) was not a problem at the school. 'The school always encourages us to go to PD.' Even so, she has only attended one session and that was during the holidays so there was no issue about a replacement. (That said, during the interview with

the classroom teacher, Ian mentioned that if the Chinese teachers do attend a professional development activity, they would be replaced by a Casual Relief Teacher.)

Dora expressed confidence in her students' ability to learn Chinese and felt that the primary students are actually better than secondary students at picking up the language. Her focus is mainly on speaking and listening, only introducing students to characters in Year 4 and then just for recognition. In Years 5 and 6 students start to copy characters. She does not believe that her students will remember the stroke order, so her main emphasis is on recognition and she encourages students to use pictures to help them remember. The characters are chosen from the topics they are studying. She uses *Pinyin* extensively but does not worry about developing the students' accuracy with tones, citing lack of time as the main reason. She believes teachers need to be realistic in their expectations with the limited time available to them.

In terms of support for the program, Dora said that she was given considerable support by the Vice Principal, especially when dealing with problems of student behaviour. She also thought that the program was supported by most of the staff, although she had a sense that a number of teachers thought that second language learning was not important. She cited a case where her class was cancelled because an absent staff member had not informed another that the class was to have Chinese. Students in the class also said 'Can we have Maths?' although Dora had arrived for her lesson, indicating some student resistance to Chinese as well.

When reflecting on her own practice, Dora felt that she needed to make her lessons more fun and less boring. She frequently just grabbed a worksheet for the day. Although the Chinese teachers have a considerable range of resources available to them, Dora complained that she does not have time to develop plans around them and ideas for their use. She said that she makes considerable use of songs and videos in her lessons.

The teachers have organised excursions to Chinatown and the Chinese Museum in the past and have also brought in guests. The availability of funds for these and other purposes was not clear to her. The other Chinese teacher was in charge of the budget and Dora was required to ask her first if she wanted to purchase resources.

When reflecting on her time at the school, Dora said that she has found it quite challenging. She was concerned that the program was in need of considerable improvement. She was worried that unless they put more effort into it, the students will start to say it is boring. Her perception was that the program needed more variety and greater access to technology. Student engagement with the language varied from class to class, with some students exhibiting lack of interest in the activities and even some resistance to studying Chinese. Although each classroom has reasonable ICT resources, moving from class to class made it virtually impossible to make use of them in the time available, and any issues with technology are dealt with by a technician who comes to school on Wednesday afternoons, the time when there are no Chinese teachers in attendance.

Ti-Tree Primary School

Enrolment	c. 700
Year levels	Grades P-6
Sector	Government
Languages offered	Chinese
Age of the Chinese program	Two years
Number of teachers of Chinese	1 and an assistant
Year levels Chinese offered	Levels 2-4 (Years 1-6)
Designated class time	Level 2 (Yrs 1&2) 1 hour per week Levels 3 and 4 (Yrs 3-6) 30 mins per week
Students' language background	40% non-English-speaking background. Some Chinese.

Ti-Tree is a government primary school in southern suburban Melbourne. Situated in an area which attracts young families, the school opened in 2002 with 230 students. There are now approximately 700. There are currently 30 classes divided into Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) levels, making four levels across the school. A high proportion (c. 40%) of students have a language background other than English, and the school's students include a mix of Sri Lankan, Indian, and Chinese, along with children of Australian and European descent. According to the ACARA index of socioeconomic background, the school's families are largely reflective of the Australian average in that regard. A number of signs in Chinese are in evidence at the school, with more to come. The entrance to the school also has a strong Chinese display which includes examples of work done by students.

The time allocation for the Chinese program is one hour per week for the Level 2s, and half an hour per week with the other more senior classes. There is no room allocated for Chinese so the teacher and her assistant are required to move from class to class. The classroom teachers are required to stay in the classroom with her so the time is not designated as APT.

In terms of ICT, the school is very well equipped. iPods, desktop computers as well as interactive whiteboards and data projectors are available for classroom use.

The Principal

Ti-Tree did not offer a language other than English when it was first established. A teacher who was able to teach French did so, while teachers from a nearby secondary school helped out as well with languages. When this teacher left to go to France, the program was discontinued. The Principal, Rod Sewell, was a participant in a study tour to China at the end of 2008 which provided the catalyst for introducing Chinese even though the secondary schools where its students go after Year 6 teach Japanese and French. Rod hopes to persuade the major one of these to introduce Chinese, and to that end commenced the Chinese program in the junior years to give him time to influence the secondary school.

After Rod's initial visit to China, the original Assistant Principal also went to China and both of them grew increasingly confident that Mandarin should be the language for the school. Rod had also been a participant in the Asia Education Foundation's 'Leading 21st Century Schools' professional development program. Rod had had some concerns about how well cultural identity had been taught at the school and believed that a focus on Asia with Mandarin supporting would sit well with a range of needs and interests present in the school.

The decision to introduce Chinese was made by the School Council (of which the Principal is always an influential member). There was no consultation with the community and parents were not surveyed. Rod regarded it as a strategic decision because: 'We knew that we were going to be supported by the Chinese government and our government. ... It is self-evident that, over time, Chinese is going to be the [language] that Australia is going to grasp.'

This view was borne out at least partly by the school seeking and receiving a \$20,000 'Becoming Asia Literate' grant from the Australian Government under the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program. The school used the money from the grant to employ a Chinese musician to teach the students traditional Chinese music. The musician is purchasing a range of different instruments with the aim of developing an ensemble which could go to China to perform. The task of setting up a sister-school relationship with a school in China is being approached enthusiastically, and plans were in train to send students to China when this had happened. The school had also applied to *Hanban* to become a Confucius Classroom.

In the interview Rod's commitment to the program and determination to make it a success were obvious. 'There is all this structure that we have created in just 12 months, and we have just said that this is what we are and we are going to do well.'

The response from the community has been very positive, although he thought that support for the program from the staff was more variable. 'I have to do some persuading from time to time.'

The original Chinese teacher left ('She did re-apply but she wasn't fair dinkum about it.') and has been replaced by a newly graduated teacher. (The school also has a Chinese assistant teacher.) The Principal and the staff regard the new teacher very favourably. 'She is a lovely girl and a really good thinker and you can see that she just exudes enthusiasm.' It was noted that her qualifications as a primary generalist teacher made her more attractive as an employee than if she had only been a language specialist. The staff are more than happy with her performance this year in contrast to the rather negative attitude which developed towards the previous teacher. Another staff member, employed as a replacement for a teacher on leave, speaks Chinese fluently — a fact that pleased Rod. He indicated that he supports the Chinese teacher's attendance at PD sessions and is aware of networks for language teachers in the region.

Rod expressed his belief that teacher training institutions are not doing enough to expose their students to a 'new paradigm'. 'My whole attitude has changed dramatically, and I would hope that I am espousing that because I had a WASP-ish European attitude. I really did. I think we need to be providing our teachers with a fairly clear viewpoint. What does [the shift in global influence] mean for our kids? If teachers perpetuate stereotypes and attitudes that are well out of date, kids learn them not least because they often get the same thing at home.' On this basis, Rod sees the growth of intercultural understanding being equally at least as important as the development of familiarity and proficiency with the language. He wants Ti-Tree's Chinese program to extend well beyond the language classes to the school's program as a whole, with special events happening each year.

Generally speaking, the Principal of Ti-tree is happy with the progress made while acknowledging that the program is in its early stages. He had concerns last year about the delivery of the language program but these have largely been allayed. He sees the establishment of a Confucius Classroom at his school as a sign, a symbol of their commitment to Chinese language and culture.

His commitment extends beyond staffing and he supports the Chinese teacher by expecting that the classroom teachers stay while the lessons are being conducted. He was impressed by the Chinese teacher providing relevant links and information for the classroom teachers, encouraging them to pursue ideas within their own programs. His positive attitude and enthusiasm were evident. 'I'm happy. I think we will go from strength to strength.'

The Literacy Coordinator

Kitty Nelson, the school's literacy co-ordinator, also had very positive views about the program. No longer a classroom teacher, she had a good idea of what was happening in the current program. She was pleased that the new teacher, Jinghua Ai, is now integrating the content of her teaching with the rest of the curriculum. When the program first started, she felt that Chinese was being treated as a completely separate entity. Now, 'Jinghua is very much fitting in and integrating her work with the rest of the curriculum. That was her philosophy right from the start. We were looking to employ someone like that.' Jinghua attends teacher programming meetings as well as specialist meetings to plan whole school events. At the time of the interview there was preparation underway for a 'big Chinese festival'. Kitty acknowledged that while this was desirable, 'you can't do this all the time. Your own class has its own identity and you can get stretched too thinly.'

Jinghua does not have her own teaching room. The staff had agreed to leave pinboard space in each of their classrooms in order to include a display related to Chinese. This was happening in most cases. Like Ron, Kitty was impressed with Jinghua's enthusiasm to involve the classroom teachers by adding Chinese information to the school server for them to access cultural as well as language information. Jinghua had also worked with the art teacher to create a red dragon at the entrance to the school.

Jinghua had also put links on Ti-Tree's 'My Classes' website for students to access, from both school and home. Feedback from parents has suggested that they were using the site and were pleased to be able to do so. In the previous year when Kitty taught a class part-time, she had read a book about dragon boat racing and had set up chairs, pretending they were in a dragon boat race. They filmed the activity and put it onto the My Classes website for parents to see. She offered this personal case as an example of classroom teacher involvement. During the previous year each Level had to do something involving Chinese in their inquiry projects. In Level 2, for example, they looked at differences in food, games, clothing and hobbies to make intercultural comparisons. This unit culminated in a visit to Chinatown and the Chinese Museum.

Kitty said that feedback from the parents had been very positive. 'Yes, they love it! The Level 2 parents just think their kids are great, and the Grade 2 kids and the Grade 1s think it is great because they can speak something that their older brothers and sisters don't know. ... They all want to go to Chinese restaurants.'

Regarding resources, Kitty said that the Language budget was quite good and should more funds be required, the Principal's interest and support could be counted on. The grants have also been useful. The school has purchased four copies of a 'big book' on China which can be used by classroom teachers as well to further support the language program.

Professional development for the Chinese teacher was recognised as important because 'there is no one else here for her to bounce ideas off so that sort of thing would be seen as important for her to go to.'

In terms of assessment, the previous Chinese teacher was required to make a generic comment for Level 4 (Years 5 and 6) outlining what students had done in Chinese although other records were kept in the form of checklists with comments about individual student progress, including pronunciation and ability to remember vocabulary.

Kitty confirmed the Principal's statement that all students were involved in the Chinese program; there are no exceptions. Even if a child was having difficulty with the language side, 'we still want them to have an understanding of another culture.' For Kitty, the best thing about the program was the enjoyment students get from it, not only from learning the language but also from gaining an understanding 'behind things'. She commented that if a child found a book about China in their reading box, they would be very excited and want to show everybody.

Kitty thought that, from what she has seen, Chinese is not too difficult. Students may not learnt much language but 'they were confident with what they know'. Her view was that, just as in all subjects, there are students who do not do so well. However, they 'just love it' and they had become 'quite capable'.

Kitty also thought that staff were generally supportive of the program. While she had heard some negative comments, no one was obviously against it. She thought that the staff regarded Chinese as just part of the curriculum and part of what they do. The program had been 'sold fairly well to the community. ... If it hadn't been set up as well and if there weren't resources and it wasn't interesting, then maybe there would be issues. But, no, it has been good. I would recommend it.'

She suggested that the personality of the new teacher had had a lot to do with the success of the program. She 'is bubbly and enthusiastic' so the teachers as well as the children enjoy her presence at work.

The Teacher of Chinese

At the time of the interview Jinghua Ai, who comes originally from Taiwan, had been at the school for only one month. She is the second teacher to be employed since the program was introduced.

She trained as a teacher in Taiwan where she taught English and felt that this experience had been very useful for her work at Ti-Tree. In Australia she completed a Graduate Diploma. This course did not include language teaching methodology but she felt that it had provided her with a very good understanding of how Australian primary schools work and how students learn, giving her a better insight into how Australian schools operate, government expectations and the administrative requirements. It also provided her with knowledge about the school culture in Australia. She would like to undertake additional study of language teaching methodology, especially if it was focused on primary education.

Jinghua said she felt very well supported in her work. Some of the classroom teachers revised language points and vocabulary with their students and displayed the words students have learnt in their Chinese classes. They also used Chinese displays in their rooms which they sourced themselves. She feels that the parents are happy with the program because their children enjoy it.

She has a teacher assistant with her in her classes. The assistant helps with handing out materials and checking that students are able to do their work.

Jinghua felt quite confident about her English language skills, although she admitted that she needs to do a lot of preparation before a class. When she writes reports, she is able to get assistance from her mentor.

Currently Jinghua is using quite a lot of English in her lessons, particularly with regard to classroom management. Her aim is to increase her use of Chinese little by little. However, she thinks she will probably continue to use English when explaining. 'I don't think they are ready for [instructions in Chinese] and I don't want to give them a lot of stress.'

In choosing topics, she is concentrating at this stage on basic speaking skills, for example, students introducing themselves and greeting, although for Level 3 she is trying to integrate with the mainstream program. However, the topic of immigration limits the degree of integration at this stage and the range of useful language is limited too, so if she does talk about an aspect of Chinese immigration, it would be conducted in English.

Jinghua teaches all classes at the school except for the Prep. class. Level 2 has one-hour lessons each week while Levels 3 and 4 have half an hour. She uses a range of resources in her classroom such as flashcards, worksheets, and various ICT devices including iPods and IWBs. She also likes to use realia as she believes it is very interesting for the students. She also uses songs, chants and lots of puppets.

For assessment, she mainly uses checklists. She was finding the standards in VELS high and at this still early stage in the year did not know how often she would be required to report.

She felt that her access to professional development was good. She was planning to attend the 'Strategies for Beginning LOTE Teachers' and 'Classroom Management Practice' run by the Southern Metropolitan Region of the Education Department. She has also joined the *Hanyu Laoshi* ning.

It might be noted that when the Chinese teacher attends PD, she is not replaced. Instead, Chinese is cancelled for the day. As language classes are not regarded as APT for classroom teachers, they are generally in the classroom anyway. Although the teachers are in attendance, the evidence from lesson observations was that they did not actually take part in the lessons. They usually spent their time on correction or preparation, although one Year 6 teacher did check what the students were doing.

Jinghua expressed her wish to be able to use ICT in creative ways, not just as an alternative to the whiteboard or blackboard. Although access to ICT in the school is good, not having her own classroom made it quite difficult for her to use effectively. Every classroom is set up differently, so

it can be stressful trying to incorporate ICT. For example, a particular classroom may not have a suitable computer or program for what she has planned. Equipment failure was possible so that even if she had planned her lesson carefully, it might not be possible to implement. When it is operational, she had plans to make use of the Ultranet by setting up a Chinese wiki for the school.

For all the above reasons, she found the absence of a dedicated classroom problematic. Each lesson requires considerable preparation and sessions such as calligraphy are time consuming with the need to pack up and then put out materials again.

While Jinghua saw her role as primarily being a language teacher, she also recognised the need to teach about Chinese culture. She wants to develop students' interest in learning Chinese so that they will continue to want to learn it in the future. She also saw her role as providing support for the classroom teachers who want to incorporate aspects of Chinese culture into their program or develop units integrating studies of China, as well as being available to provide assistance when the school decides to celebrate Chinese cultural events.

Jinghua was confident that her students can learn Chinese. She found them motivated and she was satisfied with their progress. She did not believe that they needed to learn characters at this stage. 'Actually Chinese characters are quite hard to learn. Because students have little exposure to characters, it will not be useful to teach them now.' Instead she preferred to let students try writing a few just to give them an idea of how they work. She uses *Pinyin* regularly and felt that the students learnt very quickly. However, she was concerned that there were some issues with tones, particularly using the second tone instead of the first. She pays significant attention to oral and listening skills and believed that these two skills should be taught together.

That said, Jinghua said she would like to find a balance between the language that needs to be taught and the culture, and would like some guidance on what students need to know, including those who may not continue with Chinese in the future. With the older students, she has incorporated a range of group work activities. In one lesson observed, some students were working on their own at a desktop, while others were practising their spoken Chinese with her. Another group were listening to Chinese music on their iPods while another group was doing some writing. With the younger classes, there was a lot more teacher direction — students sitting in a circle practising 'what's your name?' over and over again. The sentence was introduced using a puppet.

Jinghua is very happy in her position at the school. She feels supported by both the Principal and the other staff. The students are very motivated and love learning Chinese. She feels that it is very important to have contact with other teachers of Chinese because her issues are not always the same as those of the classroom teachers.

Acacia Primary School

Enrolment	c. 525
Year levels	Grades P-6
Sector	Government
Languages offered	Chinese
Age of the Chinese program	7.5 years
Number of teachers of Chinese	1
Year levels Chinese offered	All students
Designated class time	Prep: 30 mins per week Yrs 1-3: 1 hr session each fortnight Yrs 4-6: 1 hr session each week
Students' language background	Close to 80% of non-English-speaking background, mostly Chinese

Acacia is a large government primary school (Prep-Year 6) in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. More than half its students' families are in the top quartile of ACARA's socio-economic background index and more than 60 percent of the students have a language background other than English. Many of these are Chinese.

The Principal

Trudi Smith, its Principal, has been a teacher for 40 years, 30 of them in school leadership positions. There has been a different language taught at each of the three schools she has worked at. The introduction of the Chinese program at this school was at her initiative. Her interest had been stimulated by travel to China (twice) for professional reasons, and the school has been involved in the Asia Education Foundation's 'Leading 21st Century Schools: Engage with Asia' project.

She explained the reasons for her initiative as a result of a great deal of thinking about what would be best for the school and its students.

'There was our community, of course, and the sorts of families coming in [increasing numbers of Chinese, as it happens doubled, since the introduction of Mandarin], and I wanted to really start to build on our standards, our outcomes, our student achievement and our English standards — that sort of thing. I also looked at the future and where these students will be with their needs in ten years time. So I made a decision. I consulted the school council and the community, of course, but the effect of my decision was that from Prep to Year 3 everyone would learn Chinese and from Years 4 to 6 they could continue with their Italian.'

Part of the reason was what Trudi saw as cultural.

'One of the very first things I really wanted to do was to have a big Chinese dragon in the main entrance there and so the next year I put a lot of money into the Visual Arts program so that we could get an Artist in Residence and the Artist in Residence could work with the children and build the Chinese dragon.'

Then there were new technological resources which had emerged and been incorporated in the school's program.

'We have interactive whiteboards in every classroom, so that's made a big difference for our language teacher because when she goes in to a classroom she can just immediately plug her notebook in and we can be sitting in China. We can be Googling; we can be looking; the characters are up there. You're hearing the language being spoken on the big screen and all of those sorts of things. It just makes so much difference.'

'We've got netbooks, whole class sets of netbooks, ... we've got the flip videos there. If children are making a little speech or a little presentation just flip the switch — it's a bit like a mobile phone — then just quickly do it. Then you can replay it straight up on the big screen and you can see, you can hear, you can give feedback, and all those sorts of things. Technology just making that difference all the time.'

But there was also a new global perspective present.

'I really believe that Chinese is the language of the future. I think [students who have some familiarity with Chinese] will get the job before someone who doesn't have Chinese as a second language. So I really believe that I'm fitting these children out for the future, for their employment. It's an opportunity the school can open the door to. I really *strongly* believe that if I'm going to make a difference to the education these children are having at this school, having been taught Mandarin is the most important thing.'

Italian had for many years been the language taught at the school, and so the shift to Mandarin had a number of more general consequences.

'The staff embraced it really well. I think there was probably those that had built up a friendship with the Italian teacher so there was that sort of — wow, what's going to happen to her? You are basically phasing her out of a job. There was a little bit of that there. But, you know, I sold it. I really sold it. I'm a very passionate person and I really convinced the staff that this was the best direction to take.

'[In terms of the parent community] you get the one or two ... who say why is everything always focused towards the Chinese community in this school? And the answer is because that is our language, that's what we are teaching.'

After seven or eight years Trudi felt that she had done the right thing. 'Tenfold I made the right decision, and now all the other pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are falling into place. The significant difference it made was that I now have about a 70% Asian population so my Asian population has doubled since I've made these changes.'

One issue that Trudi had focused on was the difficulty, or perceived difficulty, of Mandarin. She remained convinced that it is a difficult language.

'But there is no point saying, "Oh, Chinese characters are so difficult to learn. That's difficult so we're not going to do that. That's in the too hard basket so, like a lot of schools, we'll just do the cultural side of the language and things like the greetings, *ni hao*, and counting to ten or colours." ... We do that too, but I think the characters go hand-in-hand with learning the language. You shouldn't do one without the other. I could take you around today and you could actually see [the students] all writing the characters.'

Like many Principals, she felt that the strength of the school's program was closely allied to the quality of the teaching.

'Sandra [the Chinese teacher] has got a great personality and she's passionate [about the program] too. So she can really get the children actively involved and engaged and excited, and I think she really stimulates the children to learn. Her lessons go full spectrum from talking about pop and what's happening in China or Singapore or Hong Kong, to what's happening in Australian schools and relating it. ... So I think one of the good aspects is I have a good teacher, who really challenges and extends and stimulates the children.'

The introduction of the program had had some structural challenges.

'I didn't want to take seven years to implement Chinese, so I had to run a parallel program keeping Italian in the senior years [4-6]. I also set up Chinese and Italian extra curricular extension classes so the children from Prep to 3 who were having Chinese as part of their core curriculum could take Italian as an elective and the children from Years 4 to 6 that were doing Italian could take up Chinese as an extra curricular activity. We were also supporting the introduction of Mandarin in other areas of the school's work.'

The examples she gave were an increased focus on Asian studies, changed topics for research units, and conducting activities like an Asian Bazaar.

'[Teacher X] was teaching Chinese [previously] and she's now doing Visual Arts. I've asked her to include listening to and speaking Mandarin in the Visual Arts program. ... I think the children here need that modelling, that real modelling of the language, so our religious education team are all Chinese teachers as well. So is my canteen manager. So we're really embedding the culture into our school.'

'Sandra has introduced the dance component of China as well, so we have our fan dance group. We have our Chinese or Asian dance group and she's implemented a little bit of Korean dance as well, and the Tai Chi type things. All those. Just giving our children a broader curriculum.'

One of the issues was finding time in a crowded school teaching program.

'One of the things I've been really pushing this year is the explicit teaching of English and Maths. We try to do 10 hours English a week, which is a two-hour literacy block every day, and five hours of Maths, so we have 10 teaching hours left. And in that 10 hours we have to fit music, library, computer, art, technology, science, humanities, social skills, sport, Phys Ed ... and language. It's always a squeeze.'

'The biggest obstacle is the small snippet of time that you can devote to [language study] in a school week. It is probably not enough so that, especially the Australian-born children, when the children finish Year 6 they have that fluency of being able to speak a second language. I've been mentoring a Principal in another district and they've got a Japanese immersion program and most of their teachers are Japanese and the children are taught all of their subjects in Japanese. You could have problems with that, too.'

'The other main obstacle affecting our work is that you have first-language-speaking students in the same class as the Australian-born child who comes in with no knowledge or understanding. That spectrum of ability is a real challenge to teach and to keep every child engaged and working.'

A classroom teacher

Roger Leeson is the school's VELS Coordinator, an influential position with relation to the school's curriculum and assessment program. He had his own views about the significance of the teaching of Chinese and languages more generally.

'I'd say that in the last few years language has been something that's just been added on. It doesn't sort of fit in anywhere, but I see it more and more happening with the strong studies of Asia push. We had a meeting and a PD about that late last year and already one of our units is changing to be more Asia-centred. The language study would fit in with that too.'

'Grade 5 used to do a major project on countries anywhere in the world. This year we thought well, it's kind of valuable that we look at Asian countries, so we're looking at just changing that a little bit. ... When you get subjects like a language you're trying to fit them in to other units, like at the moment we are doing a geography unit on mapping skills. So how do we fit a language into that? We can't.'

'I think it's valuable that they are doing [a language] at this time in their lives. Particularly if they've had it through from Prep. Some of them are quite adept at it now. It's harder for the ones who have come from another school. I'm also Transition Coordinator (primary-secondary) and it would be interesting to see what language they will choose [at high school]. I've never actually asked them, what they intend studying next year. Are they going to drop language, keep it going?'

'I think one of the good things at this school is that they're — well, they're not immersed in Chinese, but the Aussie kids have got the language that they're learning all around them because so many of their friends, their peers and their community come from a Chinese background. So I think they see some value in it. ... Whereas from my previous teaching experience where we did Indonesian, there were no other Indonesian kids around so it was harder for them to learn. But I think here they value it a little bit more because they can see it happening around them naturally. It's not just something that

comes into a classroom and then leaves.’ That said, he had never heard non-Chinese students trying to use Chinese outside of class time.

He felt that he had ‘nothing at all really’ to do with the Chinese program. ‘Certainly at the VELS planning stage we don’t think, “Where does LOTE fit into this topic?” In a couple of weeks we are having a day for planning a Unit on Space. We won’t sit down and think “How do we fit Chinese into this?” It’s probably done the other way around.’

Participation in planning by the Chinese teacher at Acacia was very difficult because, to enable the grade teachers to plan together, the specialist teachers take their classes.

‘I know from previous experience there has been a bit of scepticism towards offering a language with the old “this child can’t read, can’t spell English. Why do they need to learn French or Chinese or anything?” But certainly from the staff here, I think, Sandra is supported and the program is supported and valued, and, because it is part of our school, studies of culture and Asia is, I think, supported well ...

‘I don’t know if parents *really* value their child learning a second language. It’s not one of the traditional subjects. They’d rather their child count, read and spell, and write and know the history of the world — that sort of thing. ... I’ve had this discussion with my wife — she’s a French teacher. What she would say, and I would agree, is that if you really want children to learn another language, then you don’t do it for an hour a week. It needs to be something more than that ... and there just isn’t any scope to do more than we do. That’s just an obstacle that can’t be broken through.’

Roger explained that he is an enthusiast for the importance of the way the learning environment can be built through expectations, behavioural and academic, which become implicit in everything that happens in the classroom.

‘Just establishing the right learning environment is really important, then after that I suppose it is giving everyone a chance and an opportunity to do what they can. But, hopefully, they understand the expectations that I’ve got and value my expectations to the point where, regardless of who they’ve got teaching them, they follow and respect those expectations. It doesn’t always happen though.’ He is thinking out loud about this with relation to (the Chinese teacher) Sandra’s classes, which occur in his classroom with him present. ‘It is Sandra’s class and therefore her standards. I mean the children do have to adapt.

‘I think Sandra teaches in a very motivating, engaging sort of way using iPods and blogs and all that sort of stuff. ... If the children aren’t learning, it’s not because they’re not being motivated by her ... I think the kids generally like it and they try to be good at it, they want to be good at it because it’s valued here.’

At this school, the Chinese teacher did not have a dedicated classroom. She goes from classroom to classroom to give her lessons. Sometimes the teachers of those classes were present during the lessons, sometimes not. This particular teacher talked about how he did try to find something else to do while the Chinese lessons were happening in his classroom, but that if he needed to be in his classroom, then he stayed, and that does not bother him. He didn’t know whether it bothered the Chinese teacher or not.

‘I’ve never spoken to Sandra about it. Whether she’s comfortable or not, I’ve got no idea. But she’s never said anything for five years, and I don’t know if I’m any different to any of the other teachers. I’ll only intervene ... if I notice that [the students] are not doing what I would expect them to do with me, but I try to make myself a bit busy.’ He made the point that if he does stay, and he regularly doesn’t — he often works in the staffroom during the Chinese class — he’s not there to check on her. ‘When I do stay, some of the stuff they do is quite interesting. Last week they were doing numbers in Chinese. But I don’t make a point of staying.’

He saw some value in having a dedicated room or ‘Centre’. ‘Sandra could have her displays up, and she would be able to have her space and her resources and all that sort of thing together. But for language I don’t think it’s essential.’ Noting that there had never been a discussion of having a Language Centre — ‘not that I’ve been part of anyway’ — he speculated that cost would prove an insuperable problem.

The Teacher of Chinese

Sandra Kee is in her mid-thirties. She was born and raised in Hong Kong and has spoken Cantonese since birth. She began to learn English in 1987 when she came to Australia as a high school student, although she said there was not much need for her to use English socially because of the high number of Chinese students at her school. It was not until she began university studies that she felt the real need to improve her English. She started studying Mandarin in 1992, and has been teaching it at this school for 6 years.

She spoke of the fundamental importance of making the learning in her classroom fun in order to engage the students. 'I don't want to be like the classroom teacher. Just boom boom do it. They've got more time with the children, I've only got an hour each week. I say, "Let's enjoy every single moment of it".'

As for her beliefs about teaching the various aspects of Chinese language, Sandra had a strong belief that students would just 'pick up' the tones from listening to native speakers and would know when they are wrong. She does explain to her students what the tones are, but after that she didn't believe there was a need to do any more explicit work on them. She believed that reading, speaking and listening were the functions that should be focused on in the primary years. 'Seriously, who learns English by writing anyway?'

She was keen to try new things in her classroom and was open to learning about new approaches to teaching Chinese. 'The really brand new one [for her] is inquiry learning. I've never done that, always teacher-based you know. But now I am really interested in broader tasks. I adapt the method, change it a little bit, to make it more activities-based, so that's what I do.' She realised the importance of linking the content to the students' lives so that learning was more relevant to them, especially the non-native-speaking background students. 'If I don't link it up to their life, they don't grab it.'

Sandra was a keen user of ICT in her classes. 'It's more engaging I think and the children love it.' She accommodated the limited number of iPod 'Touches' she has in her classroom by getting one group to use the iPods and the rest of the class to work learning something else with her. She normally preloads videos onto the iPod 'Touches' and then directs the students to which ones they should be watching, or which applications they should be using. She was very confident about using the iPods, but less so about using interactive whiteboards and was finding that she and a 'few other Chinese teachers were really not sure about the interactive whiteboard, because when it came out everyone heard, "Oh, it's not supportive for the Chinese font. No you can't use it".' She used the interactive whiteboard more as a showcase for the wiki she had created for her classes.

In her classes Sandra usually spent 20 (of 60) minutes on oral work 'because I believe that if you can't speak, you don't understand.' Her classes usually have quite a few native speakers in them and she often uses them to help her with modelling oral language for the non-native speakers.

To teach characters, she makes up stories with the students. 'I turn it into a tiger. I say ok, this is the ears here and this is a bit of the fur coming out of the ears and this is the head, and so on.' She doesn't focus much on actually getting students to write, as she believes that writing is more a high school level skill. Her focus is on reading and recognizing characters. When asked about how she actually taught characters, she wasn't specific about methodology. Her view about *Pinyin* was that it 'is really just very minor' and whenever she writes it she always writes the characters on top. She also doesn't focus on the correct spelling of *Pinyin* with her students.

'I explain to the children in this school that when you learn Chinese you don't really follow *Pinyin*. Ok I do agree that some Chinese teachers will be against me, but when I learn English I never use the proper *Pinyin* system in the dictionary. I say to the children, what you hear you write it there yourself in any way you think that you were able to say it, exactly the same as what I say or what the video says or the podcasting says. That way, you will be able to say it properly, but if you really pronounce the *Pinyin* way maybe you won't be able to pronounce properly.'

Sandra also said that she doesn't really use textbooks.

'I follow a bit of a book, but for the conversation I don't follow books. I just do it, and always think about the real life situation. Because, seriously, I have got a textbook, but we don't have time to allow the children to read them unless I have an inquiry learning station in the reading corner. Then I get them to do it, but most of the textbooks don't have a CD to come with them, how we going to read it properly for them?'

Sandra's assessment practices tend to be fairly informal and based on observation of her students — whether they can use a phrase properly, or how often they come to ask for help. She also asks them directly to rate themselves on how they think they are going. 'I ask them in English, "Ok, how many of you think that I have boosted up your confidence in the Chinese number system, *ju shou*." They all *ju shou*, all right? And then I say, "Ok, physically place it there now if very confident." This one is *mamahuhu soso*. Ok, this one is hey, *hen hao* very good. None of them place themselves on the negative one. I have got about five or six of each class in the middle. Most of them are actually confident.'

She explained she felt very comfortable and supported in her school because she is able to run the program exactly the way she wants to. She felt no pressure for her work to be integrated with the rest of the curriculum and said that she does not want it to be. But it seemed that she did sometimes talk with other teachers about what could be covered in her classes. 'Last year the Grade 3/4 were doing transportation and one of the Grade 3 teachers actually suggested to me, "Why don't you show them the different type of transportation in Asia in your class and then teach them the names?" So yeah, that will be part of the program anyway, so things like that happen.'

Sandra was very keen to find a sister school and build a relationship that will allow them to begin an exchange program with the Grade 6 students, at least in terms of developing a correspondence. She also mentions how impressed she is that some of the Australian families in the school have gone to China for family trips and they actually come to her and ask, "Mrs Kee can you teach my children more in speaking? They need that." I'm talking about Australian families [who have] gone there. Three families came back to me and say we need more.'

The Prep classes have half an hour of Chinese a week, Years 1-3 have got an hour ('full on') each fortnight, and Years 4-6 have an hour each week. Sandra says this is a big improvement from what it used to be, and that she hopes it continues to build until all grades have an hour a week. She believes that the major obstacle for her program is the amount of teaching time, but there would also be more things going on if she had have her own 'proper' classroom.

For her own professional development, Sandra wanted to have more conversational practice as she thought her accent (influenced by her Cantonese background) was not quite up to standard. She also said she'd like more PD on using ICT.

Westringia College

Enrolment	c. 1500
Year levels	Years P-12
Sector	Independent
Languages offered	P-6: all students take Chinese 7-10: all students must take one of Chinese or French 11-12: Japanese, German and Indonesian offered as IB subjects. VCE Chinese offered.
Age of the Chinese program	16 years
Number of teachers of Chinese	4
Year levels Chinese offered	P-12
Designated class time	Yrs P-6 30 mins per week Yrs 7-9 3x50 min periods per week Yrs10-12 4x50 min periods per week
Students' language background	20% non-English-speaking background. Mostly non-Asian. Some international students who are mostly Chinese.

Westringia College is an independent co-educational school with multiple campuses (P-12, P-6 and 7-12) all located in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. It has a total enrolment of nearly 1500 students of whom less than 20 percent have a language background other than English. It has about 30 international students, who are mostly Chinese. According to the ACARA index, the socioeconomic background of its students quite closely matches that of the Australian population as a whole. The school provides IB courses at all levels.

Westringia also owns and manages a school in China which teaches a variety of Chinese students (including from Taiwan). Students can exchange there, but this has happened rarely.

All of its primary students study Chinese as a conventional part of their program. Students are required to study one language from Years 7 to 10, choosing either Chinese or French. In Year 10 the IB requires students to study a language at B level (beginners) for a semester. Japanese, German and Indonesian are offered as IB subjects. Students can also opt to take VCE Chinese. The students at Years 7-9 have three 50-minute periods per week, at senior level they have four.

The Vice Principal

Dan Harrison, the Vice Principal, has been at the school for 13 years. He began the discussion with a list of concerns.

'We've had Chinese here for quite a while. [It was first offered 16 years ago.] For the amount of time and energy and even money that we invest in Chinese education within the school, I think our outcomes are diabolical.

'There are numerous reasons. It used to be that students would do half French and half Chinese in one year and then choose. Now, with the IB, kids have to do a language up to Year 10, but in Year 10 we do have other languages. You can do German or something and it's pretty much a fluff course for six months. But our biggest thing is that you can have the kids sitting there willing, but if you haven't got the people delivering it ... We're just struggling to get decent teachers, like good, energetic qualified ... oh not qualified, but good, energetic teachers who can really engage the children. I'm generalizing here, but over the years I've also found that discipline is something that the Asian teachers have struggled with.'

Is this true for other languages taught at the school?

'We have French and our numbers are dwindling in the senior years but engagement is higher because the teachers' English is their first language. We do have a little bit of an issue when it gets to the higher levels, where we do get native-speaking French people in just to make sure the accent's probably more there. We do have a native-speaking junior school French teacher, but because the energy's there and the children can relate to that person a lot more, and they're more passionate, and they can sort of see the light go on in the kids' head a lot easier, we don't have the same issues as we do with Chinese, where our staff normally have English as their second language. In Year 7 the kids are finding it very difficult to understand their teacher's English when they're trying to explain things. That's our big issue there.

'If there is an issue with [the language of instruction], I think kids often put the shutters up even if it is the best message in the world and it's the right message. We're not an A+ sort of school [at VCE]. So when you have mid-range students and some who struggle a bit, when it's hard to understand the teacher well, especially boys, they just put the shutters up.

'At the junior school campus Asian studies is massive. [In terms of languages] they just teach Chinese. Asian studies is a subject and the staff really get heavily involved in Asian Week, they do Chinese New Year, and it's all a very big part of the program because all the staff are leading it. ... With languages I find the variation depends more on the person in the room out the front.

'They're completely different, the person who wants to teach French, the person wants to teach Chinese — they're a completely different kettle of fish.'

Dan explained that the school has always had a strong involvement in the Asia Pacific region. 'We're a member of Round Square⁸, and as a result we helped build a school in Nepal. Every year we still fund a teacher to teach at that school. It's fully funded by the students of our school. We exchange in the junior school with Thailand and India. We don't try to get kids to go to England or America or Canada. Anyone can go and do that and feel quite comfortable. So we've always had a strong understanding there.'

He noted that one of the campuses is 'very Anglo-Saxon'; at the other two there is a lot more Asian and Indian influence. 'In the junior years the parents do get a bit pig-headed and a bit "oh no my family's from a Greek background, I don't need to learn Chinese". That sort of stuff. We're definitely moving forward, but we need to work harder at it.'

'We have tours to China, trips for three weeks but not for a term or longer. In my time we have had a lot more go to Japan, but that's even died away a lot now. A lot of kids are choosing to go to India and we've even had one or two go to Yemen, Brazil and Kenya, and Peru is the one that's on at present. So there's a few options out there.'

The school is building a new language centre on its senior campus.

'We didn't get that much money to go full out, so we've actually got a lot of dormant stuff there so we can put computers and stuff in later. I spoke to the staff recently about what they needed, they said what about listening at different levels and comprehension, and I said "well there's things called MP3 players which cost about 40 bucks. We're not a rich school by any means. Why don't we get a whole class set of those?", and that has happened. But the actual building itself is really just spaces to teach in. There are little booths to do recordings in, the offices and stuff are all there for the staff, so it's actually a home base which there has never been in the past.

'One thing we did look at is actually not having to have big rooms to teach in because languages, especially in Years 10, 11 and 12, aren't large subjects.'

He returned to his concern with the attractiveness of language learning for his students.

⁸ 'Round Square is a world-wide association of more than 80 schools on five continents sharing unique and ambitious goals. Students attending Round Square schools make a strong commitment, beyond academic excellence, to personal development and responsibility. This is achieved by participating in community service, work projects, exchange programmes and adventuring, which can, and often does, take students half way around the world.' From www.roundsquare.org/index.php?id=who_we_are

'The big thing with languages is it's not a sexy thing. It's not a thing that sells. It's not Maths, English, Science. It's not like you can get the Chinese kids out at an RSL function in their uniform doing the national anthem in the band, or they're not bringing a trophy home for sport, or they're not hanging a beautiful picture or anything, like Art. So it's a really hard one for a school in our situation when money is an issue to say, "OK we're going to throw \$50,000 or whatever at Chinese or French or any language". Because at the end of the day you're going, "Hang on, what am I getting out of this as a school?" Because we've got to get students in. We're an independent private school. We don't have a church or anyone backing us and we're only very young.

'One thing that upsets me is that we have compulsory language up to Year 10, but the amount of students going on in VCE is tiny. We have electives in Years 7 and 8 for trade and arts subjects and the kids wanting to do it in VCE is massive, and our results are huge, like we know we're in the top five schools for textiles, for music, for things like that. But the opportunities they get [to do these subjects] in Year 7 to 8 are quite minimal. So we need to either get the VCE happening in languages, which is my preferred option, or give these other subjects a bit more of a fair go 7 to 10.'

Head of The Languages Department

Westringia's Languages Department, of which Ruth Tierney is Head, comprises herself and nine other teachers of languages, spread across the various campuses. Ruth is a passionate and very experienced teacher of French, who has been at the school for some years. She was emphatic about the relevance of Chinese to the education of today's Australian children, but like the Vice Principal, was not happy with the school's Chinese program, especially for non-background learners in the secondary section. She felt an older Chinese teacher in another campus got along all right with background learners and the primary program is not a great concern.

Ruth has joined her school up to a regional network of language teachers, though the contact has not been very frequent. She was looking forward to the advent of the school's new Language Centre, though largely as a dedicated space, which she felt would give Languages the status of Science, Art and Music, which have their own areas.

Ruth has made efforts to work with the Chinese teachers on what she and they see as their weaknesses with respect to classroom management and 'getting the kids hooked'. More recently she had been less interventionist, until a very recent conversation with one of the secondary Chinese teachers.

'The meeting was about class management. One of the things that emerged was that this teacher had no idea about tricks such as body stance and where to stand for best view of the class. My uncle was a school inspector and he used to give me hints about such things. For example, if you are right-handed, stand to the left of the board, so you can keep the front of your body facing the group and write sideways. This needs to be practised to perfect the technique. Reverse the instructions for left-handers. In either case, don't turn your back on the class to write instructions or information on board. I can write on the board without looking after 25 years. The kids are always gobsmacked by that. And when you're watching or addressing a group, stand in one of the front corners, not in the middle of the classroom at the front. In the corner you can see everyone, in the middle you have minimal vision of those to the left and right at the front.'

Ruth said she had learned to *prepare* everything on paper ahead. Nowadays she prepares posters of instructions and put them on the screen electronically. She had said to the particular Chinese teacher that she should make character stroke order cards and stick them to the board 'so that most of the character teaching is already in a package' and then only demonstrate briefly, once the kids have seen all the steps.

'Or again, use technology, so you can face the students — all so important when there are difficult characters in class. The Chinese teacher said to me that she was able to face the board fully in China. This showed me that she needed to understand that she has to tailor her technique to the setting and not be like an ostrich about such things.'

Some of the other tips Ruth suggested were that the Chinese teacher should 'get the students underway with a quick simple two-minute activity right at the start, so that there is less room

for setting a tone of noise or distraction, for example, a quick unjumble puzzle, a picture to draw and label ... This helps the teacher while marking the roll.'

Ruth tried to get across a range of her values and principles: have a sense of humour; and build a relationship which has clear borders, but a sense of connection; and know how important the teacher's facial expression can be.

Ruth had also talked to the teacher about adolescent psychology: 'If they know that there is likely to be a consequence and this is mentioned matter-of-factly and clearly, most adolescents have a sense of self preservation and after a while there is little need to carry out consequences for the vast majority.'

Another strategy she suggested was to do the unexpected. The Chinese teacher had told her that when she was talking to a student on the walkway another student had grabbed a tree branch above her head and shaken it, wetting her a little. 'She asked what I would have done. I said that I would have burst into song with "Raindrops keep falling on my head" and smiled and dusted the water off. Or, I would have jokingly said, "Thanks for the shower, and your name is what, dear?" Obviously, if this were repeated or there was a bullying act, she should take it further.'

A teacher of Chinese

Daphne Yi is the teacher of Chinese at the school's 7-12 campus. She is Head of Chinese but her view was, 'Actually it's not very clear about who is taking the role because there is [at least one] (four altogether) of us in each campus.' They have a meeting twice a term, sometimes more often depending on how busy they are. They all use the same textbooks, but individual teachers decide the details of the program and the class activities.

They have one main textbook but also used others. Daphne was using 'Chinese Made Easy' which she wanted to propose as the main textbook next year because of her belief about its suitability for Australian students. This textbook uses *Pinyin* extensively, 'but not in every word. The characters at the back, but with 'Chinese Made Easy' I find that the exercise book is better. The exercises are step-by-step.'

Driven by participation in the IB, which prescribes the nature of the assessment, there were common assessment tasks across the school. Daphne liked the IB because 'it gives you more idea about what the students should achieve, so it's more comprehensive and more structured. And, basically, there is an overall idea about what you must do, so you follow it.'

Like the rest of the teachers, the Chinese staff conventionally had two opportunities for professional development each year. Their choices are submitted to the Languages Coordinator for approval. This PD was usually part of the program organized by the Association of Independent Schools in Victoria. The topics which interested Daphne included classroom management skills, and teaching VCE Chinese. 'Sometimes we have PD from Victorian School of Language on Saturdays, so I go to those as well.' Daphne teaches Saturday school classes for the VSL.

The school used to have compulsory Chinese for Year 7 after which students could choose Chinese or French. But the influence of the IB changed this to the arrangement described in the introduction. But, as a rule, the students who chose Chinese began it in Year 7, where one class operates at each of the secondary campuses. There were considerably more French classes. 'Part of the reason', Daphne said, 'is more students think this language [Chinese] is more difficult to study.'

When asked about the emphasis she put on speaking versus learning characters, Daphne suggested, 'When I start, I usually start with speaking. When the student get the idea, so speak and listen usually goes together.' But she thinks it is important that students should learn characters. 'If the students don't learn characters they will lose interest. When they write characters and when they build up their knowledge about the characters, their understanding of this language, their interest is built up. If the students don't have enough vocabulary they start losing interest later on. Most students from Years 7 to 9 don't have much vocabulary, so most of them [spend the bulk of their learning time] revising characters in the first semester of Year 10.'

In terms of ICT use, Daphne's students usually had one lesson using computers each week. 'They make a poster or a Powerpoint or other classroom items. [ICT] is very good for this.'

Daphne wasn't confident that most students could learn Chinese. 'Depending on what topic it is, not difficult, yes they can say with general conversation. But when they get to higher level then it depends on how the students are going. But I think most of the time we spend a lot of time dealing with students who are having trouble. If the students behave well they learn more, so I find that in Year 7 they learn more than in Year 8. And I've asked other teachers how students go and a lot of teachers feel that in Year 9 students start forgetting about what they learn. So it depends on how they behave in the class.'

A Year 7 class had been observed and four boys had been particularly disruptive. 'They are disturbing, yeah.' When asked why she hadn't been firmer with them, Daphne said, 'Sometimes I need to complete this task, you know, the topic. I planned up to this level. They've got to be able to say these words, to have conversation or to write these characters. So if I spend too much time on disciplining one or two students then the progress and the process will get slow in the class so I won't be able to complete the plan. So, basically, the plan.'

Daphne was not sure of the efficacy of the PD she had attended, especially that related to classroom management. 'Some of the classroom language, I think this is the weakness for most Chinese teachers, because our language is Chinese, and in China we're not used to manage the students. It's students' responsibility to behave, so it's two different ideologies. In Australia teachers spend a lot of time talking about what kind of skills we need to discipline the students, while in China when I'm doing my teaching qualification, our main course is about the language itself, whether you are up to a certain level and to be able to teach the students. For example I want to teach Chinese, then the course they provide is literature learning. It's the novel, the character, the author — so it's more like that.'

Daphne felt she hadn't learnt much during her Australian training. 'It's mainly about the academic writing. That's what we have learned. We did techniques on lesson planning, how to plan the lessons. But in terms of Chinese, I have enough knowledge to teach students Chinese because my language level is up to that level. But, say, TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language). I feel I would prefer learn more about English itself rather than teaching techniques.'

'If you go to a Chinese Culture School, it's a school probably worthwhile observing. I think some of the Saturday schools, that's where we have the highest level.' It was pointed out that the students there were entirely native speakers.

'If you go to public school you notice the kids are even more disruptive. I think the main problem with Chinese is, generally speaking, most Chinese teachers didn't get much training in actually how to deal with students' problems. Some of the [English] we know, like I want to say it, but how can I say it properly. Maybe the expression coming from my mouth is different. So maybe if I can get some of the language and keep using it and practicing it, in the end I can use it freely.'

Grevillea College

Enrolment	2000+ on several campuses
Year levels	Years (Kindergarten +) P-12
Sector	Independent
Languages offered	Chinese in the primary years Chinese, Indonesian, French, German and Latin in the secondary years. Students must study an Asian and a European language in Year 7, and the study of one language is compulsory in Years 8-10
Age of the Chinese program	30+ years
Number of teachers of Chinese	7 F/T, 1 P/T
Year levels Chinese offered	As part of all Years K-6; an option from Years 7-12
Designated class time	Prep to Year 6 1 x 55-minutes per week Year 7 – 2 x 55 minutes per week Year 8 to Year 10 – 3 x 55-mins per week Years 11 & 12 – 4 x 55 mins per week
Students' language background	Close to half the students are of non-English-speaking background.

Grevillia College is an independent school (Kindergarten to Year 12) located in suburban Melbourne that offers single-sex and coeducation education to students on multiple campuses which together have an enrolment of over 2000. Ninety percent of the students' families are in the top half of ACARA's socioeconomic background index.

A Chinese program has been running for more than three decades at this school. During this period, and especially in its early years, the program went through a considerable struggle to establish itself. It has been hard work to convince parents and the community of the value of providing foreign language learning opportunities for students. There have also been some significant transitions in teaching philosophy and pedagogical approach among the Chinese staff. Despite these challenges, the program has succeeded in offering a well-rounded curriculum and in obtaining outstanding student results.

The school has the largest cohort of K-12 students learning Chinese in Australia, and fosters school-wide, cross-disciplinary 'Chinese literacy', significant scaffolding for an appreciation of Chinese language and culture and a major support for the language program.

The Principal, Scott Collins, and the Head of Languages, Irvin Wang, both declared their confidence in what has been achieved, citing strong and consistent support from the school administration and good collaboration among the staff as important factors in what has happened. This did not stop Irvin in particular raising questions about the program and its future. 'How efficiently is it working? Is further innovation required in teaching practice? What might be possible in this regard? Are teachers willing to make changes? These are all questions right in front of your face ... However, on second thoughts, let's just wait a while and see.'

The biggest concern for Irvin and Xiaolan Peng, another Chinese teacher at the school, was a problem embedded in the study of Chinese in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The issue, which causes a big drop-out of the school's non-native-speaking Chinese students from senior levels, is that their performance is assessed against a large cohort of first language home speakers of Chinese, thus diminishing their chances of scoring well in Years 11 and 12 Chinese, and consequently affecting their overall score. It is also the case that the curriculum and assessment specified for VCE Chinese influences the nature and possibilities of the program they can offer in the earlier years of study, narrowing the teaching and learning opportunities they otherwise might offer, most obviously in its emphasis on written rather than oral work. They were disappointed with the negative effects that this situation has on the quality of their program and the effort they put into making Chinese available to the widest range of students.

The school has a policy that the study of at least one foreign language is compulsory till the end of Year 10. Both Irvin and Xiaolan noted that 'some students select Chinese not from their interests, but because they have no choice and have to yield to the school policy.' They suggested that this was one factor leading to a polarisation of student interest and engagement which becomes increasingly evident in Years 9 and 10. The Principal, however, saw this policy as a positive contributor to the school-wide promotion of foreign language learning and feels it to be 'fairly successful.' Considering the issue of low-performance/low interest students, Irvin proposed that all learning needs, interests and levels should be catered for and that some students could be directed towards study with a stronger emphasis on Chinese culture, history and geography.

To suit the school's circumstances, the Chinese teachers have collaboratively developed carefully aligned teaching programs with associated materials and resources. One reason for this is a concern to maintain 'pace.' Irvin encourages teachers to plan and implement teaching based on their personal and professional strengths 'as long as their teaching pace keeps up with the curriculum requirements.' For Xiaolan this means prioritizing the teaching of characters in order to meet the needs of VCE written exams. She thought that a story-creating approach she was currently using to help her students memorize characters was both effective and engaging for the junior secondary students. She embeds cultural elements into character teaching and language, reflecting her belief that Chinese culture is, in many ways, bound up in Chinese characters. She rarely uses ICT in her classes because of the inefficiency of ICT equipment in the classrooms she uses and her lack of ICT competence.

At the time of this investigation the school was building two new language laboratories in addition to the existing one, and the Principal was encouraging teachers to use Podcasts and other ICT resources in their language classrooms. Irvin and Xiaolan hadn't taken to this immediately. They expressed their concern that 'Podcasting is hard to promote due to the quality of students' language levels.' According to Irvin, students' limited language competence and the limited amount of characters learned up to Year 12 make their use of ICT in the teaching and learning process impractical and ineffective.

The Principal

Scott Collins is the Principal of the school. He described the Chinese program at his school as a 'fairly distinct one' due to its long history (over 30 years) accompanied by many China tours, an active and productive sister-school relationship and the recent addition of a Confucius classroom to the program. The school offers Chinese to students from Kindergarten to Year 12. He defines the high level of knowledge of China at the school as well-developed 'Chinese literacy.' It is noticeable, according to Scott, that the school-wide Chinese learning experiences concurrent with the Chinese language program, together with the by-products of a highly interactive sister-school relationship, have led to many teachers, including 'a very strong core', having had a powerful experience of China and Chinese.

One result of the school's stance is that a majority of its students takes two foreign languages in the middle years and a high retention rate is maintained in the senior years. 'This school is especially committed to foreign languages learning', Scott affirmed, although there had been 'a battle, sometimes, to convince parents about the merits of foreign language learning.' He thought that battle had been won about ten years ago when the advantages of engaging in foreign language studies for their children's prospective tertiary education had become persuasive for parents. He also noted that the school's parents were increasingly alert to the practical realities of the developing economic and other relationships between Australia and China. In Scott's opinion, in addition to its obvious value for communication, learning a foreign language helps to develop school students' capacities to memorise, and concentrate, increases their sound sensitivity to foreign languages, and develops a tolerance and respect for other cultures. To further this agenda, two new language laboratories with high quality ICT facilities were under construction.

Scott acknowledged that his 'almost all Australian-born students of Chinese' have to deal with increasing difficulties to do well in VCE Chinese due to the 'changing demographic of the Australian population.' He also noted that many of his students experience some incompatibility between their conventional learning styles and the Chinese teachers' teaching styles. Of the school's eight Chinese teachers, there are 'two basically of Australian origin' while the rest are from China and have come

out of the Chinese education system. The gaps which emerge lie in the differing expectations each group has of the other. This matter is unresolved, and as more Chinese teachers enter the system, Scott thought this was a matter for urgent consideration by bodies responsible for the professional training of these teachers. He felt a more effective and better-supported adaptation process in terms of better understanding the Australian education system and its students is required.

Head of Foreign Languages and teacher of Chinese

The Head of Foreign Languages and a teacher of Chinese at the school, Irvin Wang has wide experience and deep knowledge of the issues relating to the running of a successful school Chinese program, including those beyond his own school. Irvin thought that the major strength of the Chinese program at his school was its 'balanced development in all aspects.' The examples of this he provided, were the strong Chinese cultural atmosphere in the primary school, the long-running sister-school relationship with a school in China, the recent establishment of a Confucius classroom, the benefits derived from the Assistants to Teachers of Chinese program, the variety of large-scale Chinese activities organised, and simply having 'the largest cohort of students learning Chinese at the same time in Australia, and possibly quite rare in the world as well. Generally, Chinese puts up a flag for this school's reputation.'

Irvin recognized the attention and support that the school has provided to the foreign languages learning area, in the aspect of the consistency of support and the reasonable hours timetabled for foreign languages. This school offers two European languages, two Asian languages and Latin — a language which provides benefits to 'top-notch students engaged in medicine, law and so on at the tertiary level.' Irvin noted that students regularly achieve high scores in VCE language exams, despite 'a few recently arisen issues in the Chinese language area.'

Success with VCE Chinese studies entails high assessment frequency over a narrow range of skills. Irvin noted the negative influence this has on the flexibility of teaching activities and curriculum design at other levels. 'The foreign language teaching is completely confined by VCE exams. We must follow it ... for both Years 11 and 12 students and younger students. Thus, the teaching styles may be stiff ... a little dull and lacking variability. However, there is nothing we can do. The restrictions are clear.'

He was also very much aware of the problems generated by there being little differentiation between Chinese home-speakers and non-background speakers in the VCE rating system and the significant growth of the home-speaker proportion in the examinee population. He thought that this was creating 'very dreadful phenomena.' At this school these phenomena include an increasing drop-out rate of non-background learners of Chinese at senior level. Elsewhere he is aware of many schools' hesitation in offering Chinese, many 'top-notch' students giving up Chinese to avoid low VCE scores, and severe polarization of language levels formed by the unbalanced composition of the student body.

To resolve these issues, Irvin believed that special arrangements were needed for assessment in VCE Chinese which took more careful account of student language background. 'These obstacles will never be overcome if the examination structure remains the same.' He also thought that schools should be required to classify students into categories appropriate to their language competence rather than year levels, in order to reduce the complexity caused by multiple competency levels in the classroom. He thought it important that teachers should cater for the interests and benefits of the majority of students who lie in the bottom and middle section of the 'learning pyramid'.

Despite some teachers overlooking students with limited ability and complaining about them hindering the progress of the class as a whole, these students make a substantial contribution to the numbers of Chinese learners at the school. Irvin thought such students might welcome the possibility of resuming the study of Chinese in the future provided practices necessary to accommodate them were implemented. He wanted a larger group to retain good impressions about learning Chinese at school. Like Xiaolan, Irvin thought that 'students have not been successfully taught to speak Chinese in this program.' He attributes this problem to the tremendous time and effort required to build a sound knowledge of characters which consequently takes away the time that can be used in training speaking and listening skills. However, because of their mutual interaction, he thought the speaking and listening competencies would not grow significantly if the knowledge of characters was limited.

Last but not least, Irvin was firm about the auxiliary role of ICT in the Chinese classroom. He admitted that ICT had not been widely used in most of the school's daily teaching of Chinese. The most commonly-used ICT activities include displaying culture-related internet resources and practicing character typing on the computer. However, the use of interactive white boards was being strongly promoted in the primary school. At least one teacher was reported to have become very skilled in designing engaging class activities using this resource.

A teacher of Chinese

Xiaolan Peng has had a very positive work experience at this school. 'My teaching is never interfered with here', she said. 'I am supported by the school in whatever content and in whichever way I would like to conduct my teaching. ... My colleagues are very friendly and nice. I feel very comfortable here.' Having been at the school for more than a decade, Xiaolan is well immersed in the collective spirit among Chinese teaching staff that directs and supports the program's current activities. She is grateful that all the staff share the responsibility to create supplementary teaching materials based on chosen textbooks for common use. She believes by assigning a different Chinese teacher to each year level, students benefit from individual teacher's personal teaching style and 'gain opportunities to learn from all teachers' merits and strengths.' Xiaolan is also happy about the systematic assessment format across campuses and the high frequency of formal assessment in the prescribed Chinese language curriculum.

Xiaolan had an explicit goal for her teaching: 'To encourage the students to like this subject, like the learning and be interested in Chinese culture.' Her definition of being successful in the teaching of Chinese was, 'Assuming that I have 20 students in one class, success to me means 15 to 16 of them enjoy studying Chinese with me and 7 to 8 of them end up having very good learning results.' Xiaolan was concerned about how well this target was being achieved, especially in relation to students' levels of motivation and interest. She attributed the problem to the rather low level of pressure students receive from their families and society to pursue high academic achievement, and a rigid school policy that makes learning at least one foreign language mandatory for all students. 'As teachers, we can only open one eye and close the other, just let nature take its course ... because [the students who lack motivation] don't have to study Chinese anymore next year.' Xiaolan's other concern is the high drop-out rate of 'good students who are scared away by the VCE testing system.' Unlike in the past, Xiaolan has become increasingly cautious about encouraging students to pursue the study of Chinese when parents ask her advice, aware as she is of the probable impact on their overall tertiary entry score.

She believed that students' oral skills could not be improved with the limited class time allocated to oral practice. 'There is no time to practice speaking. There are only two lessons [per week] in which I need to teach a large quantity of characters and grammar point. ... It is very difficult.' Taking into account other factors such as large classes, face-to-face, one-on-one speaking exercises are not feasible. Consequently, '80% of the students are learning "mute" language ... which makes me most unhappy. ... Students' ability to recognize and write characters is completely detached from their ability to speak.' According to her philosophy of teaching, students should focus on promoting their speaking and listening skills in their early years of study; then, when 'they have clear foundations for the Chinese language [in their knowledge system], they could learn Chinese characters well.'

Xiaolan often uses a story-creating method to help students learn Chinese characters. She deconstructs a character into various components that mimic real-life images, not necessarily with a language-based connection, to create a child-friendly story to help students remember the character's form and meaning. Although her students like this method to memorize characters, they have to accept the reality that not all characters are susceptible to learning this way and that, sometimes, 'they have to learn by rote.' She supported the concept of teaching culture with characters since many cultural messages are embedded in Chinese characters and language phenomena. Xiaolan concluded by saying that 'Chinese language is particularly influenced by characters and the Chinese culture might be seen as culture of characters.' She thought, exemplifying this view, that the most successful and important change in the school-wide teaching of Chinese was the abandonment of teaching Chinese using *Pinyin* and the implementation of character-based teaching that took place ten years ago.

Xiaolan was satisfied with the support for her professional learning needs provided by her school (financial and otherwise) and the independent school association. She mostly attended internal

Professional Development sessions, such as faculty meetings, but sometimes participated in external PD events run by professional associations other than her school, e.g. the Chinese Language Teachers' Association of Victoria. Xiaolan said that she did not often use ICT in her teaching, which was 'a real pity.' She wanted to introduce more ICT component into her work, provided that teachers like herself received more regular training for this purpose and with the reassurance that the school equipment would meet teachers' needs and be free from the constant need for technical trouble-shooting.

Hakea College

Enrolment	c. 900 (this campus)
Year levels	Years 5-12 (this campus)
Sector	Independent
Languages offered	Yrs P-6: Japanese (for all students) Yrs 7-9: Japanese, Chinese, French, German (two langs. compulsory) Yrs 10-12: VCE and IB; the languages above and Spanish
Age of the Chinese program	At senior Year levels for 15 or more years; in Yrs 7-10 for 4 years
Number teachers of Chinese	2, and 1 teaching assistant
Year levels Chinese offered	Years 7-12 as an elective
Designated class time	Yrs 7-9: 5 x 50 minute periods fortnightly Yrs 10-12: 9 x 50 minute periods fortnightly
Students' language background	20% non-English-speaking background. A cohort of international students, some of whom are Chinese

Hakea College is a long-established coeducational independent school with multiple campuses. The campus where these interviews were conducted teaches Years 5-12 students and is in an outer urban area. The campus, with a substantial boarding component, has an enrolment of around 900, of whom about 20 percent have a language background other than English. There are a number of international students, but they constitute 'quite a small percentage'. Almost all of the student's families fall into the top half of ACARA's index of socioeconomic background.

The school teaches Japanese to its primary students, but offers a range of languages to its secondary students, including Chinese, from Year 7 to Year 12, where both IB and VCE Chinese are offered. (The other languages are French, German, Spanish and Japanese.) It is school policy that students are required to study two languages during the middle years (Years 7-9) after which their choice of subjects is unencumbered. In Years 7 and 8 most of the students of Chinese are of Anglo-Australian background. At the senior levels there is a bigger mix of students studying Chinese but most of them, at least to some degree, are of Chinese-speaking background.

Senior School Coordinator and Head of Languages

(Hakea's Principal and Vice Principal were unavailable for interview. The Senior School Coordinator, Denise Jones, and the school's Head of Language, Ann Morris, were available and chose to be interviewed together.)

This is how Ann explained the genesis of the school's decision to offer Chinese.

'I just forget how many years ago it was now, but certainly a succession of Principals and our marketing director together made a real push to introduce Chinese throughout the school, and certainly saw it as the way of the future in Asia. Subsequent to that we had a major review of our languages program over about 18 months, chaired by Professor Michael Clyne, exploring where we were at and how we might move forward. As a result of that review — it was four years ago, because now our current crop of Year 10 students are the first group of students who have gone through under the results of that review — we decided to introduce the compulsory study of two languages at Years 7 and 8. Before that, one language was compulsory in Years 7 and 8 and they used to get it for seven periods in a fortnightly cycle. With the move to two languages chosen (from French, German, Chinese and Japanese) they were given ten lessons but across the two languages, so individual languages lost some time in a cycle but overall the amount of language teaching was increased, and that's where we are today.'

Denise added: 'One other thing was that we had a very big push from parents who are members of the Chinese community . Around the time when we offered Chinese, Jing [at the time, the sole Chinese teacher] was only part-time because we only had Chinese in Years 11 and 12. We didn't offer Year 10 to start with at all, so they had to have either come through Chinese language school on the weekends or some other way. ... I think we got at least ten or twelve students [of Chinese] guaranteed for Year 10 and the Principal said OK.'

Asked how the attractions of continuing with language are explained to students and their parents, Denise said: 'I speak to the students in Year 8 and then again in Year 9 and the recommendation I have is always "if you continue with your language you keep your options open for Years 11 and 12. If you do the IB you really need the language learning skills, and if you choose to do the VCE then you obviously have the attraction of the scaling⁹." So that is pushed, it's in the curriculum handbook, parents are told that, students are told that consistently. The message is very clear that they should keep their options open. And if you can keep students learning a language until the end of Year 10, I think you have a very high chance of them continuing.'

Ann joined in, saying: 'We encourage the students [across languages] with a vocabulary retention program called Phase 6. ... As with all programs we've got a few teething problems in getting the system working, but when it's working it's really good, and certainly with some of my German students I've seen remarkable increases in their vocabulary retention.'

They explained that the school's choice to offer languages in both IB and VCE was based on the specific requirements for IB, which didn't suit a number of students.

Denise went on: '2000 was our first year of offering the IB and we had quite a small cohort. We started with about 18.' Numbers have subsequently fluctuated since that time, but the trend has been growth. 'Currently we have 99 students in Year 11 doing it. The perception of students is that you have to work harder in IB, and they're choosing to do it. Of course it's a battle I have because I want them to work hard in VCE as well.'

Ann referred to the issue of accommodating the needs of both background and non-background speakers and Denise explained: 'With Chinese and the VCE's second language and first language requirements, that's been a real barrier for some students. Some students are not really second language learners of Chinese, but neither are they quite native speakers. They get caught, often being asked to do the advanced course, which is really outside their capability. We still do have some who do first language through the VSL each year, but we don't offer the course.'

They both felt well supported in the school. 'We don't have many battles. We are all supportive of each other here. Languages get the same timetable allocation at senior levels as other studies (nine periods a fortnight).'

'I think the staff here have enormous respect for the language department for what they do. And when the students go on exchange we don't just send them off on exchange for a term. They have to meet with me, we talk about what work they have to do in their other subjects to maintain so they come back not behind in their other subjects. It's not one at the expense of the other, and I think that works both ways, so I think there is good respect.'

The two women discussed the impact on language competence of spending time in-country.

'It's the same old thing. What you put in is what you get out. At the moment I have seven German language students in my Year 11 group and they all went to Germany in term 4 last year. The improvement range is from zero because they didn't like the school, didn't attend and have actually dropped the language already, to some that are just so fluent and making every opportunity to get as much out of the experience as they can. And you get every other bit in between.'

Denise added: 'I think in fact it does open up a whole world, whereas when it's a classroom, it's one of the lessons you go to that day.'

⁹ The scaling process which produces a percentile tertiary entrance ranking for individual students at Year 12 tends to favour students of most languages because of their achievement in their other subjects.

The school is well-resourced in many ways, one of which is the availability of language assistants. Anne said: 'One of the strongest aspects of our program, again across all five languages, is the fact that we're able to employ language assistants. Just because of numbers we have one German assistant, two French, one Japanese and a Chinese assistant, so all our students are given the same exposure to being able to work with a young native speaker who's up to date with young people's interests. That has made a big change over the 17, 18 years now that we've been having assistants. It just has improved the oral competency greatly. Actually our Japanese assistants have been around for much longer than that. [40-50 years in fact.] ... When I came here to run European languages, I said to the Head of Campus at the time, why has Japanese got all the support and French and German not? I was told: "You want it, you find it". So I said: "Well I will", and we've gone on from there.'

Hakea also has up-to-the-minute ICT resources.

'We were going down the interactive whiteboard track but we stopped and we've actually got rid of our whiteboards because all staff have tablet computers where you write on them and it goes straight on the screen. We've actually moved the electronic whiteboards to our primary campus. They really get a lot out of it with their kids, whereas staff here, once they got their tablets, never used the whiteboards again.'

The school also has a video-conferencing facility, often used, among other things, for communication with the other campuses. These teachers thought that the most innovative work with ICT might be happening in the middle school, partly because the pressure of getting through senior courses reduced teachers' capacity to try something different.

But to add to their resources, they would like 'to have a language centre where all languages were in the one building.' Ann commented on the reason for the separation. 'It's historical. I came down here to be Head of European languages and separately there was a Head of Japanese and we were housed in two different areas of the school. It would just be nice for sharing of ideas, equipment and everything else to have everyone under the one umbrella.'

A teacher of Chinese

Liang Jing is in charge of Chinese at the school, one of two Chinese teachers, along with the assistant referred to above. All are native speakers. Jing grew up in China and has been in Australia for about 20 years. For the last ten of these she has taught at Hakea, and she has two daughters who attend the school. Before coming to Australia, she taught Chinese in China. On arrival, after commencing study in Social Work, she completed another teaching qualification.

Being in charge of Chinese at the school largely means sharing administrative information with other staff. Other types of sharing occurred through professional development, but this took place outside the school and not very often. 'Most of time, if you want to go, the school will support you. But there's a budget so you can only go so often. But the nature of the work here, it's just you don't have time to go.' She also has other responsibilities, such as supervising sports teams.

Jing felt that the school is generally supportive of her work and the program. Over the ten years she has been at the school she has tried to 'really lay out foundation and work quietly and again to negotiate with the environment and extending of school too, so I suppose the reputation for the program has built up.'

She customarily teaches a wide range of year levels. The Year 11 Chinese class which was observed contained a very diverse group of students, mostly boarders whose parents lived overseas — Malaysian, Chinese, Thai, Korean and one Anglo-Australian — almost all of whom had spent extended time at school in China. This group had begun with 20 students in Year 10, but the number had declined to fewer than 10 because, even though they were good students, 'they find the work just too demanding.' Jing noted that even though they had considerable background she still needed to spend a good deal of time in remediation to bring them up to the required standard. Even so, 'we can't cater for first language students, we don't have [numbers for] a class.' So the students' options for the senior years are to take an IB course or second language level VCE Chinese.

'When I began [at this school] I was employed as a first language Chinese teacher. The first year I came I think I had seven students in Year 12 and four in Year 11 and they all came from Taiwan, Hong Kong or Macau. But it seems to change over the years and by 2004 I had half [that number]. I think I had four Year 12 students, two from Taiwan, two from China. So you can imagine, I always have to try to combine traditional writing with simplified, and this still can be the case for the advanced students in VCE if they come from Hong Kong.'

As noted above, the majority of the students taking Chinese in Years 7 and 8 are Anglo-Australians. This group can be difficult. 'I have trouble last year with Year 7s, because this is not selective school. ... I had about five, six with learning issues here and there and family issues here and there. But school give me very good support.' She was uncertain how many continued with the subject.

Jing was confident that Anglo-Australian students could learn Chinese 'but it's just culture difference I think and learning. I had quite a few good learners but I didn't see them come into Year 10, and I was disappointed. ... We have a two language policy in the middle school and then they can choose to continue the two languages if they want to. But by the end of that ... they're more likely to choose something else than two languages. Which one to keep? Of course the easier one. You know, they know, we know.'

'Part of my struggle is to communicate to young people the appreciation of the heritage of literature and to a certain extent the traditional form of language. It's like English. Not every modern word is pretty. But we live with it. Computers change everything too. Technology change everything, so a lot of new words, it's totally new because of new technology.'

In the class observed Jing listened to students without comment, as one after the other they read passages they had written in response to the Chinese film *Not One Less*. 'Frankly speaking this is the strongest Year 11 I've had. Last year was relatively strong, but the input, the in-depth learning is not even as deep as this group. See a lot of them have already experienced a lot of issues in real life. That's what I really like to draw their attention to see, to observe, and to realise what's reality, rather than just to criticise, you know, to say poor, no good. But because their observation, they're extending or thinking. Really I'm very happy with it overall. But for individual perhaps I would say, you know, you could go a bit further here.'

When asked about the nature of the exercise, Jing said: 'It's gathering information and evidence, but they need to have ideas and to organise this information, make them become evidence, to go a bit further. I always have combined exercises and I never say to do oral without them prepared properly and based on topic study first. Otherwise you know, you can see good quality come out of this morning's speech, but if they didn't work on it, then you would say very shallow response. It's just not going to be in depth.'

Jing generally speaks to her classes in English. 'Yeah I have to. Not everyone understand in Chinese. If it was just an IB class, still a couple of students wouldn't understand everything in Chinese.'

The issue of grammar was raised and Jing said: 'It's always a problem with grammar and in class, because every student in fact is sitting in a different situation with grammar, so mostly have to be corrected through individual correction. In class, our textbooks do have some formal or general grammatical information, so that's where we just go through it. But I personally believe language you have to [be immersed in] examples of the correct format to get the idea. Also Chinese language, there's a lot of exceptions. It's not a very logical language. The language, the written language and spoken language are very divided. Everybody can talk, but many people cannot read.'

In terms of teaching resources, Jing was heavily reliant on textbooks. 'Normally I use a combination of textbooks. Every book has its merit, but this one, one of the main ones I'm using, it's a little bit out of date. But the content still is good, because it's got the traditional and the simplified writing so we have combined both the forms learners use, and some quite basic grammar information too.'

In terms of using ICT her students sometimes used laptops and watched DVDs, but most of the media used for her teaching was written. With her Year 7 class she sometimes used 'Word Jungle' [an English vocabulary game], but 'the reality for me is you have to create your own games. But you run out of time. My Year 10, Year 11 and the 12s certainly have more priority, and Years 7 and 8 I try

to entertain them a bit which means we watch cartoons, play computer. We use the 'Phase 6' [the digital vocabulary practice and retention tool referred to above] last two years. 'Phase 6' is a good program but it's boring for younger kids. What else we have used? We use 'Federation' [which has a character catalogue], we've still got 'Federation' on the school website. But with Federation, it's good. From time to time you have a bit of fun again. But it's not systematic, so it's not directly related to anything.'

The school has a modest sister-school relationship with a school in China, but there are issues which have proved difficult to resolve in terms of student visiting and exchange. 'They host us in homestay, but we [have trouble hosting them]. Unfortunately last year, because there's a flu, they cancelled.' Students mainly from the senior school have participated in 18-day study tours in China. These sojourns include a homestay and half-time school attendance with cultural experiences. But Jing feels that 'the exchange program need a bit more marketing' and a shift to make it more focused on language acquisition.

Cassia College

Enrolment	c. 400
Year levels	Years 5-12
Sector	Independent
Languages offered	9 languages, including 6 Asian languages
Age of the Chinese program	20+ years
Number teachers of Chinese	3
Year levels Chinese offered	All Year levels as a choice
Designated class time	Grades 5/6 – two periods each week for 6 months. Year 7 – Year 10 four periods each week Year 11/12 five periods each week
Students' language background	30% non-English-speaking background. Substantial Asian cohort.

Cassia College, opened in 1990, is an independent school catering for students in Years 5-12 with approximately 400 students located on the outskirts of Melbourne. Just over 30 percent of its students have a language background other than English; 80 percent of its students families fall into the top half of ACARA's socioeconomic background index.

The school's aim is to provide a 'truly international environment for both local and international students' who come from over 20 countries. With this in mind the school offers nine foreign language programs at Years 11 and 12 under the auspices of the International Baccalaureate (IB) and at other year levels through locally designed courses according to demand. These programs include Chinese, which was started to serve the needs of a growing population of Chinese students.

The Principal

The Principal, Patrick Ball, was strongly supportive of the program seeing it as an essential part of the school's program. 'We have a very big language program. It is very hard to imagine what we do here [at Cassia] without it. It's just part of our identity.' Patrick was very confident of the quality of the Chinese program and the teachers who taught it. 'They are dedicated but they are also experienced. I would call them all "strong teachers".' He noted that it was not always the case that the Head of Languages in a school where many languages were being taught was also a teacher of Chinese (as is the case at Cassia).

He felt that one strength of the school's program was the careful investigation of skill levels prior to entry and the consequent individualisation of teaching.

Besides its timetabled curriculum, Cassia College also organises a Chinese in-country sojourn program and has thus far sent four groups of students to China. Both the Principal and the teachers of Chinese highlighted the positive feedback they have received about these experiences from participating students and their parents and, in addition, the program's success in encouraging continuing enrolment in studies of Chinese. Participating in homestays in China had had a particular impact.

All the interviewees, but Patrick especially, expressed their excitement about and high hopes for the school's new language centre (under construction at the time of this investigation). He thought that, among other things, this would enable better integration of the use of ICT in language teaching, tools for teaching that could be exploited more effectively than was occurring at present.

But, like the teachers, he was very proud of the results the school was achieving.

Head of Languages and a teacher of Chinese

As well as being the Head of the school's Languages Department, Wang Yung also teaches IB Chinese Language A. From many years of teaching experience and a wide range of teaching and administrative responsibilities, Yung has gained a thorough knowledge and understanding of the foreign language programs taught at this school. One of the features of these programs is the multi-level tailoring to the needs of individual students — a process which is worked out with the participation of the student and his or her parents as well as staff from the school.

Yung and the other Chinese teachers used colourful terms to describe the most suitable method of teaching a foreign language in a host country. 'When we learnt English in China, it was in a Chinese way. It was "Chinglish". Likewise, when Australians learn Chinese in a pure Australian way, it become 'Engnese.' A combination of the two styles seems to Yung to be the most efficient way to teach. 'When Chinese students learn English, we use English methodology, supported by home country [i.e. Chinese] method. When learning the home country language (foreign languages taught in Australia, in this case, Chinese), we use home country methodology supported by English method.'

Although holding strong personal beliefs about the most effective ways of teaching, Yung suggested that every teacher is entitled to apply and extend his/her own strengths so that 'hundreds of species of flowers could all have their chances to bloom.' In addition, Yung believed that in order to improve the quality of teaching, the school should work on the completeness of its policy and protocols as well as encouraging the use of ICT. He foresaw that a 'unified policy' of promoting ICT in the teaching of language will be developed and implemented once the new language centre was established at the school.

The quality of the IB Chinese A and B programs at his school is at least partly due to the fact that they are mature, developed and constantly refined over 20 years. But Yung was also confident about the ability and capacity of his Chinese teaching team. As evidence, around 50 percent of students who have studied Chinese at the school continue to study Chinese language and culture at tertiary level. Some high performers even qualify to skip the first year of their studies at university. 'In my personal opinion, some students are quite exceptional in their oral Chinese, at least as good as Kevin Rudd's Mandarin fluency.' He attributed this academic success to the combination of the quality of the program and the effort made by many learners coming from China. That said, he noted that the Years 5 to 10 Chinese program still needs further improvement.

The other teachers of Chinese

Liang Mei is an experienced Chinese teacher. She indicated that she was comfortably secure in her role in the school and the trust she receives from the school, colleagues and parents and the quality of her relationship with all parties. She was very pleased with the support she receives from the school administration and the great professional freedom it provides. She described her relationship with her school as one of mutual trust. 'As long as it is to the students' benefit, I will be given the maximum freedom [to design and teach the curriculum] by the school.'

In this light, Mei had designed and developed an IB Chinese B¹⁰ program consisting of an outline of content and sequence, teaching materials, teaching and learning activities and assessment. With seven years of teaching focused on IB Chinese, Mei has had many successful experiences but has consistently reviewed and enhanced the program by 'amending deficiencies and correcting errors along the process.' Mei described herself as a teacher who 'has a very good understanding of IB Chinese' and who had proved that her teaching 'produces excellent students.'

Mei had formed a set of strong teaching philosophies and teaching practices to suit her situation. As an example, she highlighted character teaching and essay writing 'since 70 percent of the IB content is about writing.' She thought that characters should be taught with a steady growth of difficulty and complexity, and that there should be explicitly-stated standards defining targets for students' character learning results at each year level. For example, 'Seventh graders should be able to master 150 characters and to write a letter to me at the end of the year.' She explained that she favoured the method of storytelling in the teaching of characters and often assigns memorization tasks to students as homework. 'They have to memorize [the language]. [The homework assigned]

¹⁰ B courses are intended for students who have had some previous experience of learning the language.

might be memorizing fixed sentence structures or idioms. I assign long sentences to them to memorize every day.' Mei also uses regular dictation to reinforce students' vocabulary knowledge and frequent composition writing tasks to improve students' writing skills. From time to time, Mei focuses on students' speaking ability and familiarity with *Pinyin*. However, she doesn't approve of the idea of teaching *Pinyin* separately. She considers the integration of culture and history as another important component in the teaching of Chinese. In addition to the timetabled curriculum, Cassia includes various extra-curricular activities in language studies, such as Chinese Museum excursions and in-country sojourns.

Mei was proud of her students' results. The very good retention rate of non-background speakers in her program is one measure she uses. 'I brought 12 students to China on our last trip. It turned out that all 12 decided to major in Chinese at the University of Melbourne.' She spoke of three significant factors contributing to success: the students' own interest, their sense of accomplishment, and the support received from their families.

Mei suggested that she endeavours to adopt ICT in her teaching whenever appropriate. She was very much looking forward to taking advantage of the new language centre and was keen to attend professional development events with a focus on ICT and the IB course.

Gao Lili also teaches IB Chinese B at Cassia. She expressed her strong belief that learning happens only when students can generate intrinsic motivation for the learning tasks. She provided the observation mentioned to the effect that if a student is not self-motivated, no matter how hard his teacher tries, little will change. However, Lili was satisfied with her students' motivation level; they were aware of their obligation to learn a foreign language in order to meet the IB requirements. As a teacher who can only 'spice up students' motivation from the outside', Lili encourages her students by praising their efforts orally and by writing encouraging comments on their work. She also constantly emphasises the need to hear and talk in the Chinese language to produce quality learning.

She talked about how she assigns students frequent memorization tasks, essays and other written work for summative assessment, but how she gives them the opportunity to display what they have learnt in their own preferred fashion, which might be a skit or a role play. She also encouraged beginning Chinese learners to use self-created stories to analyse and memorize characters.

Lili said she works hard and spends a lot of time preparing lessons. Communication and resource-sharing among second language teachers and within the IB language B staff at her school is important to her. She was confident that her pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills were consistently improving with rapidly accumulating experience. She felt that her weakness lay in her classroom use of ICT, but she noted that the intensity of IB courses doesn't allow much latitude for experimentation with pedagogies about which she is currently unsure.

Lili has a great deal of freedom to design her lessons. She was independent in deciding the content to be taught to students, the sequence of topics and the length of time to be spent on each topic. She mainly designed learning activities on her own based on the four language skills — speaking, listening, reading and writing. She chooses to follow one textbook while creating her own worksheets and materials as a complement. Lili thinks both *Pinyin* and characters should be taught to students. She said that she prefers not to overcorrect students when they appear to have an accent. Instead, she tells students it is normal to have an accent and the negotiation of meaning should be uppermost in effective communication. She was insistent that radicals and the concept of structures should be introduced in the teaching of characters, and that characters should be included in students' learning experience both formally and informally. Lili was keen to hone her own skills in teaching characters, grammar and sentence structures.

All teachers agreed that memorisation is an essential component in the teaching of Chinese language, and that a steady growth of difficulty and complexity should apply to the design of the curriculum. They all claimed that teaching oral skills is another important part in their teaching, and should be taught the earlier the better. The format most frequently used to practice pronunciation, four tones and speech in Chinese is mainly casual conversation at the beginning of lessons on previously-learned topics, e.g. age, and spontaneous topics inspired by daily events, like the weather, particular clothes worn by students or school happenings.

The interviewees encouraged the CTTC to pursue its role in designing relevant professional development opportunities for Chinese teachers, especially related to the classroom use of ICT, while providing the latest pedagogical training and teaching resources.

Melaleuca Secondary College

Enrolment	312
Year levels	Years 7-8 (to add a level annually to Year 12 over time)
Sector	Government
Languages offered	Chinese
Age of the Chinese program	Two years
Number of teachers of Chinese	3
Year levels Chinese offered	Years 7 and 8: all students
Designated class time	Two lessons of 75 mins. per week
Students' language background	25% non-English-speaking background. Few of Asian background.

Melaleuca is a government secondary college in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. At the time of this investigation it was in its second year of operation with 312 Years 7 and 8 students. Each year of operation will see a Year level added to the school, and its population will expand rapidly. There are very few students of Chinese background at the school, although a quarter have a language background other than English. Two-thirds of the students' families are in the bottom half of ACARA's socioeconomic background index.

The school's buildings were new and in very good condition. There were a number of classrooms ready for additional students but not in use. They will house the older students. The school is very well equipped with technology with a number of portable interactive whiteboards, one of which is located in the two rooms allocated for Chinese. There were fixed desktop computers in each classroom and netbooks available on trolleys for classroom use. When the proposed Chinese sister-school relationship is established, the Principal wants to see Skype being used to communicate with the students in Nanjing.

The Principal

John Reid, the Principal, has elected to show his support for the Chinese program in a number of ways. Two classrooms have been dedicated for Chinese (a 'Mandarin Corner') and the school has provided money for buying decorations. The Principal regarded this as his way of saying that the school values Chinese and wants to display this fact. He intended to make the connection between the school and China obvious by making special displays of things Chinese. He has purchased red pots for the front of the school and intends to buy some lions to sit outside the entrance to the school. The school will have all major signs translated into Chinese in order to emphasise its presence within the school. He also intended to establish a Chinese garden, with advice from the Chinese teachers about *feng shui*. He had heard about Confucius classrooms and had attended a professional development session on this topic the day before the interview. But, 'Whether we have a Confucius classroom or not is not going to stop us doing anything'.

John is an advocate for the importance of an understanding of Asia as a necessity for the students of today in order for them to take their place in the global community when they leave school. Because of his own mixed ethnic background with considerable exposure to a range of languages in his home country, he is certain that language learning is very important. He made his own choice of Chinese for the school, buoyed by the commitment of the federal government for recognising the importance of Asia to the economic prosperity of Australia. He took into account where young people's futures and felt that 'they needed to understand an Asian culture, and if we could get them to take their place in this Asia Pacific area that would be great. So that led me to Mandarin.' John had no plans to introduce any other languages into the school. His previous experience at a school where two languages were offered influenced his decision. He felt that an unhealthy competition was established. He regarded the Japanese program in his previous school as being particularly successful because it was staffed by Australian teachers whose understanding of Australian culture and pedagogy 'created a whirlwind and was brilliant.' However, in this school John has employed three native speakers of Chinese, of whom he speaks very positively.

John noted that the community has, somewhat to his surprise, accepted Chinese as the language of the school. When asked why it surprised him, he discussed the school's clientele. He thought them to some degree myopic in terms of international perspectives. He even changed the name of the school in order to ensure that students didn't identify themselves with only one geographical location. Although quite a few of the parents do business with China, his feeling was that many do not engage with the culture or the people and he wanted his students to do more than that. It was his sense that there is still a significant level of resistance to studying a second language in Australia. He would like to see the government educate the public about the importance of language learning — not necessarily just Asian languages, but all languages. Although he had no experience with Chinese before introducing it at the school, he has since made some effort to learn the language. He thought he needed to have some understanding about language teaching pedagogy before talking about it with his teachers. This personal initiative has led to him passing on resources to the school's teachers of Chinese.

While the John did not think that there had been any major difficulties so far with the introduction of Chinese, he had some concerns about the availability of competent teachers in the future as the school grows. He also anticipated that he will need to do some talking with the major primary feeder schools. At the time, the closest one did not have a language program but he was willing to let one of his teachers spend some of their time there if the school agreed to set up a Chinese program.

He was also in the process of organising a sister-school relationship. He had had experience of this before in his previous school (which had four sister schools) and was 'absolutely determined to make this successful.' He was willing to send his Chinese staff to China along with some other teachers so that they may experience China. Links with India will also be cultivated through other staff members.

John felt that his staff as whole had not yet absorbed the view that Asian language and cultural skills were important. Because it is a new school, and the staff is relatively young, many were 'bogged down' in writing curriculum. He constantly alerted them to special events and even photocopied information for them on such things as 'Eddie Mabo Day' because he believed that this knowledge is very important. His self-described approach was to 'infiltrate' and he had further plans to persuade them of the need to teach about Asia. He acknowledged the importance of professional development, but didn't want to overload his staff. He view was that 'Asia literacy' has to be gently introduced if it is to become part of the curriculum fabric. At this stage, in Australia, he thought, our cultural knowledge 'is based on Bali and going across and surfing, which is okay, but that is not Indonesia'.

Nonetheless, the teaching staff was supportive of the Chinese program and its three teachers. Because of the area in which the school is situated, John was concerned that his Chinese teachers were 'bearing the brunt' of the general lack of support for languages and suggested that this produced difficulties, especially in a state school. 'We have got three beautiful teachers over there who need a lot of protection because the community doesn't really appreciate what they are doing. [The teachers] need reassurance from somebody like a Principal to say, "Keep going, you are doing a fantastic job." They do need that, otherwise they can go down very quickly, or go to the private system ... because the teachers feel that if they go to the private system there are fewer discipline problems as well as more appreciation of their efforts, so why continue in the state system?' John also expressed dismay with the very small number of non-first-language background students in Victoria continuing with their Chinese to VCE level, a situation that is particularly relevant at Melaleuca, where very few of the students are of Chinese background and will have very little opportunity to make contact with other learners and speakers of the language.

Each class in Years 7 and 8 currently has two 75-minute lessons per week. Although the time allocation is good by some standards, there is a lack of frequency of contact. When this was queried, he responded that the teachers are encouraged to break up their lessons with differing activities. Students, nonetheless, were still only having two language sessions per week, and for Chinese the 'empty' days are particularly destructive. When pressed about the time allocation, he said that every domain complains that they don't have enough time and that he needed to be careful that parents don't complain that, as their children can't speak English very well, they shouldn't be learning Chinese. He intended to give extra time to the students who wish to continue their Chinese into the senior years, giving them enrichment or extension classes so that they will get extra hours.

With regard to professional development, John felt that he provided support for his teachers to attend sessions relevant to Chinese teaching and relevant network meetings.

John intends to make Chinese compulsory to Year 9 with a target of 10% of the eventual Year 12 cohort taking Chinese. That would mean a class of just ten students and he was willing to support that. Even if the number is fewer, John said that he would still support the program at that level. He regarded the Chinese program as crucial to the school, the students and, as well, their parents. In a few years time, he wants the parents to say that, 'He was okay. He was right about the damn thing.' He has taken a long term view and regarded it as hugely beneficial even for students to understand the right protocols when meeting someone from Asia. He had already asked his teachers to be on the lookout for another two good teachers of Chinese. He hoped that in four years time to have established a study of Asia centre at the school with connections not only with China, but also with India, Hong Kong and East Timor.

Nonetheless, John did not want to use the program as a marketing tool. He was concerned that the parents may not understand it and therefore balk at it. He wanted the students' newfound competence in languages to speak for itself. He wanted people to come to the school 'not because we are flying the Chinese flag', but because they had heard good things about the school.

The teachers of Chinese

Two of the three teachers employed to teach Chinese at the school are teaching Chinese full time while the other is engaged in teaching another area of the curriculum as well.

The teachers seemed to be working very well together, planning collaboratively when possible and sharing resources that they found or created. One of the teachers, Chen Yi, is the designated Head of Department although he regarded the other two as close colleagues who helped him to fulfil his responsibilities. As there is no other language at the school, the Head of the Language Department is responsible for Chinese only.

All of the teachers are originally from China. They have varying backgrounds. Chen started out as a university lecturer and taught Japanese in Australia before changing to Chinese. Banban had had a number of years teaching experience in both China and Australia, while the youngest teacher, Biyu, has only just started her career. All of the teachers have studied language teaching methodology at different institutions. They all felt that their courses prepared them to a certain extent for teaching in Australian schools, although they all learnt more from just being in schools and teaching. Their training had at least given them some insight into the Australian school system. They were aware that learning activities need to be student-centred and suitable for the range of abilities and needs.

The school currently uses the textbook *Kuaile Hanyu*, although all the teachers thought that it was limited in its usefulness for second language learners, especially with regard to cultural content. Despite this, they did not seem to have considered changing to a different textbook. They also used the DVDs and online resources which go with that program to provide variety for their students. All three teachers made particular mention of the fact that they needed to spend a great deal of their time creating more resources for their students.

They varied in their emphasis on the four skills. Although they all introduce characters to their students, Biyu focused more on speaking and listening. They all expressed their confidence in their students' ability to learn the language, although there is a concern that some of the students are becoming disengaged, and all saw the need to increase their expertise in developing activities that will keep students interested.

They commented that the students and their parents did not seem to regard learning a language, whether Chinese or any other, as very important and some see it as taking away time from the essentials of literacy in English and numeracy. There had been a number of instances where teachers were confronted by parents who questioned the need to learn Chinese. Students themselves had asked the question: 'Why do I have to learn Chinese when I am never going to go there?' to which Banban's response was: 'You don't have to go to China. China will come to you!' Chen mentioned with some dismay that when the idea of a sister-school relationship was mentioned along with the possibilities of a trip to China, there was very little interest expressed among the

students. This background lack of interest had also influenced the pace at which the students are introduced to the Chinese language. 'I don't want to scare my students away!'

There was a shared understanding that the area in which they work experiences problematic forms of cultural isolation, and that this necessitated some work on breaking 'that kind of cultural prejudice and also how to learn cultural tolerance.' Given that all students are required to study Chinese, they were becoming more aware that their programs need to cater for many different ability levels.

All of the teachers had considerable English language skills, although they noted difficulties at times when giving explanations. They did not have problems with writing reports: a semester report as well as a progress report at the end of the other terms, along with parent teacher interviews each term. Each of the teachers also had responsibility for the pastoral care of 15 students.

Chen and Biyu expressed the need to do more work on classroom management. Banban did not see this as an issue and observation of her class confirmed that students are well-behaved in her class, more so than in those of the other two. The Year 7 students seemed to be relatively well-behaved but the Year 8s were a problem and the teachers were worried that, without it being compulsory in Year 9, very few Year 8 students would want to continue learning Chinese. Although the students were not overly boisterous, there were quite a number who were not focused and continued their own conversations while the lessons were in progress. Some students ignored a number of requests to get on with their work, while a number of the boys called out frequently. In one particular class, the teacher had given students a range of activities, some working in small groups, some with the teacher and some independently on an IWB. Classroom management remained challenging and students needed constant reminders to complete tasks.

There was some concern about the structure of the program and the impact it is having on classes. As mentioned above, the time allocation for Chinese at Melaleuca was two 75-minute lessons a week. The teachers often found 75 minutes too long to keep the students effectively engaged. They would like to have more regular contact, but the present structure of the timetable does not allow for this. The lessons are also conducted in an open learning space, which presented some issues in the beginning with distractions, although the teachers seem to be adapting quite well now.

As Coordinator, Chen was very busy, applying for grants, developing the program and fulfilling his pastoral care duties. There was a sense that the teachers were constantly on the run. The Principal was regarded as 'very ambitious' and while the teachers appreciated his efforts to enhance the position of Chinese, his ambitions also entailed considerable time and effort from his staff. 'He is very good at using us' was a comment made. Much time was being spent on administrative work and making contact with parents about various matters related to pastoral responsibilities.

The teachers try to meet every fortnight to discuss curriculum. They plan together, mainly the integrated aspect of their work with other events in the school. They follow the topics in the textbooks but often employ different activities and use different resources. They work quite independently but share ideas and materials. Because of the level of responsibilities, the teachers felt that 'we need some spare time to review what we have done so far. And also, even with the current curriculum we are doing, we still find it is not sufficient time to get through it.'

All the teachers viewed their job as not just teaching Chinese language but also teaching Chinese culture. They wanted to promote China 'so that people will have a better understanding of China and its people. ... Language cannot go without cultural understanding, so as a language teacher first we need to present to them with the different culture but also the beauty and attractiveness of the different culture.' 'We need to get them to be amazed, to be attracted by the culture.'

Despite the Principal's comments and expressed support, the availability of professional development (PD) seemed to be an issue. Although all teachers at the school were involved in school-based PD every week, the Chinese teachers had trouble with access to language-specific PD. They suggested that either they did not hear about it, or they learnt about it too late. Information about what is available does not seem to reach them, most of it going to the Principal first. They were also frustrated with the amount of school-based PD which was often not relevant and of low quality. However, if they did hear about conferences or network meetings they were happy to attend and the school was happy to allow them to go. 'My personal feeling is that we don't have sufficient

access to the external PDs, but the internal ones are way too much. Rather than looking at quantity, I think we maybe should look at quality.'

The teachers all appeared to be satisfied with their access to ICT. Biyu was making considerable use of the IWB in the Chinese teaching area, although the others used it only occasionally. She uses it not just for presenting materials, but as an activity for group work sessions. The teachers all used group work to varying degrees. Banban admitted that quite a lot of teacher-directed work is done in her classroom because she needs to teach new material. Chen, who came originally from a university background, said that when he first started teaching, it was very much a teacher-directed classroom, but he has realised that teaching as he has been taught has to change and he is working hard to incorporate some group work into his lessons. Biyu uses group work extensively.

There was some lack of clarity about the budget allocation for Chinese and for other subjects as well. Teachers have not been given a figure to work with and so they continue to purchase books and other materials in order to build up their resources and demonstrate their need for an adequate allocation. Considerable time has been spent applying for grants to help supplement their budget.

The teachers expressed their confidence in the leadership and were confident that their efforts were being supported by their Principal. Other staff members are also supportive and approachable.

Baekia College

Enrolment	c. 1100
Year levels	Years 7-12
Sector	Government
Languages offered	Japanese and Chinese
Age of the Chinese program	First year
Number of teachers of Chinese	1
Year levels Chinese offered	Two optional classes at Year 7
Designated class time	3x50 min. sessions per week
Students' language background	Predominantly Anglo-Australian 10% non-English-speaking background.

Baekia College is a government secondary school (Years 7-12 students) with an enrolment of over 1100 located in a Victorian regional centre. Less than 10 percent of its students have a language background other than English and about 70 percent of its families fall into the bottom half of ACARA's socioeconomic background index.

For many years, Japanese was the only foreign language offered at the school. Inspired by a Department-sponsored trip to China in 2008, Ivy Ashton, the Assistant Principal, began to work on an additional foreign language program, Chinese, not only to enrich their timetabled curriculum but also to add to the diversity and multiculturalism in the school's community. Since then, 'all the possibilities' she imagined at the time have been realised, starting with the establishment of a Confucius classroom and the 'amazing power of really good relationships and a really good friendship.' At the time of this investigation, Baekia had established a 'Confucius classroom' facilitated by a Chinese teacher (a native speaker from China), and had a timetabled Chinese program involving two Year 7 classes taught by a non-Chinese background Australian teacher, who also taught Japanese at Baekia.

This program was experiencing both the excitement and teething issues conventional with a new program. The Assistant Principal and the Key Learning Area Leader for Languages, Alec Kirby, believed that this new addition to their curriculum provided an opportunity for their students to see 'the real world out there' where China is a 'dominant force and a global economic leader' and also provides a learning option to help 'break down barriers to understanding.' In spite of the risks inherent in running two seemingly similar East Asian character-based languages, Alec thought the advent of the Chinese program would strengthen their language curriculum by providing an option to students and parents. All three interviewees, i.e. Ivy, Alec, and the classroom Chinese teacher, Peter Trembath, noted that this new program has been receiving continuous and positive support from the school management and also from the *Hanban*¹¹, other colleagues, parents and students.

That said, a good number of parents had voiced their concern about the value of a foreign language being taught to their children as compared, for example, with practical vocational skills training. Influenced by these family attitudes, enough students lacked motivation and interest to make classroom management challenging. All three interviewees suggested that making the content and learning experiences 'interesting' and 'familiar' (and 'cool') for students was the most effective strategy to improve this situation. At the same time, Peter, the person actually teaching the Chinese program, faced other challenges. These included his self-perceived low level of language proficiency in Chinese, lack of time and other resources to create teaching materials, limited time allocation for preparation, minimal ICT resources and low levels of technical support. Alec confirmed many of these problems.

Nonetheless, Peter remained positive about the program. Guided by the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and the school's own learning outcomes and benchmarks, Peter's program focuses on

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speaking skills, character recognition and writing, and cultural learning. He favoured the method of combining the teaching of radicals with whole character recognition, and thought characters should be taught as soon as students begin to learn the language. He intended to enhance the established program and material from the set textbook with 'the ingredients of authenticity and integrity of the Chinese language.' He indicated that he was an active advocate for participation in Chinese cultural activities, hoping that language learning will be encouraged and facilitated through these activities. Although language excursions and in-country sojourn programs are under consideration, Peter had organized his students' language learning journey to start from the 'local first.'

Peter was keenly aware of his lack of formal qualifications to teach Chinese, but he drew inspiration from his Japanese teaching methodology and experiences. He wanted to improve his own Chinese language skills and teaching methods through professional development. Topics of interest to him included planning units of work and classroom use of ICT. He would also like to know more about ways of introducing tone-improving strategies and character-learning approaches.

All interviewees perceived the launch of this Chinese program as a step on their journey to broaden students' worldview.

The Assistant Principal

Ivy Ashton, the Assistant Principal, described at some length the process of how their Chinese program started from a conversation, matured with the nurture of communications and the exploration of possibilities, and finally resulted in the program's commencement. After a discussion with the Principal of a Chinese school during a Department-sponsored trip to China, she started to see 'all the possibilities that could go with [the establishment of] a [Confucius] classroom.' These possibilities related to extending students' learning and global perspectives. She was confident and happy about what had been achieved: 'It's really amazing, building a really good relationship, how that can grow! ... It's really about relationships.'

She held many expectations for the program, such as prospectively introducing Chinese as a first language to attract international students, and developing a related Vocational Education and Training course. This was under negotiation with a Melbourne higher education institution. She was aware of other issues which needed to be attended to. The comfortable coexistence and mutual excellence of both Japanese and Chinese programs was one such matter. She realized the challenge their Confucius classroom was facing with the induction and growth of a teacher new to teaching Chinese. She also acknowledged the school's relevant ICT facilities were in a very formative stage of development, though she saw 'a lot of possibilities there.' There were also the standard issues of program promotion, ensuring adequate financial support and, most importantly, student enrolment and retention. Her personal challenge was to find a balance among her multiple roles at the school while still providing adequate support to this new program.

Ivy commented that while she received considerable support from her school community, many parents' attitude towards the school offering foreign languages is 'why waste time learning a language, something [the students] are never going to use?', rather than the eye-opening opportunity for their children she feels it to be. Despite the existence of this type of mindset, Ivy holds on to her 'world vision.' 'I think the advantage is certainly giving our kids enough opportunities to be part of the global world. [The Chinese program] is introducing them to what's going on in the real world out there.'

The Languages Key Learning Area (KLA) Leader

Until the Chinese program was launched, Japanese had been the only foreign language ever offered at this school. Alec Kirby, the main Japanese teacher and the Languages KLA Leader, held a positive attitude towards the new addition. He explained the advantages which might emerge from the Chinese program from the point of view of the expansion of the school's range of offerings, the enrichment of the educational context, and the support it offered for providing students with enlarged perspectives. By exposing students to a distinct language and culture other than their own, he said 'we can break down the barriers to understanding' while preparing them to 'engage in a world where China ... is a dominant force and a global economic leader.' In the meantime, he was alert to the issues and potential problems occasioned by the introduction of the program. He had some concern about 'two East Asian character-based languages' being offered at the same time instead of a mixture of Asian and European language systems, 'for a bit of difference and a bit of balance'. Noting

the classroom management issues which had arisen, he commented that he thought that 'not enough resources and time have been given to the Chinese program for it to be implemented effectively.'

Alec considered his school had 'a very positive and forward-looking attitude towards language teaching' even though he also felt 'not particularly well-supported', providing as examples the limited time given to various teaching-related tasks and the inadequate ICT resources for language teaching. In terms of community response and support, he felt that it was about 'fifty-fifty.' He attributes the unsupportive attitude among half of the parents to their preference for vocational skills training over language learning, the latter being perceived as impractical. According to Alec, this attitude is a major contributor to students' lack of motivation for language learning. Two other obstacles he saw were students' unwillingness 'to open their minds to other cultures' in this rural setting and the difficulties and irregularities that arise from trying to offer any foreign language. However, Alec was still very confident about students' capability, flexibility and readiness to learn. As a Japanese teacher, he draws on students' familiarity with the most significant features of the country and culture such as *anime* culture, moto-cross riding and electronics to interest and engage them. That, he thought, was what it all came down to.

In his role as Languages KLA Leader, Alec helped determine the nature of the Chinese program in collaboration with the classroom Chinese teacher, and provided formal and informal support. He was unhappy about the lack of standardization of the amount and types of vocabulary required to be taught, while at the same time encouraging creativity and personalized teaching. He saw the four language skills as equally important and encouraged the sharing of resources among teachers. He also believed that the teaching of all languages should be approached in an 'integrated fashion, topic-based with cultural links, included for relevance to students.' He summarised his views about providing students with a good language learning experience as 'sound teaching methodology with a good understanding of the language.'

The teacher of Chinese

Peter Trembath began teaching some Chinese in addition to his regular Japanese teaching at this school at the inception of the program. A non-native speaker of Chinese, Peter first started learning Mandarin when he went to Taiwan in 1993. He described his teaching qualification as 'different' from many other Chinese teachers due to not having 'been through the Chinese classroom system' and 'not being institutionalized as much. ... So basically, all my preparation has been done by myself.'

Commenting on the new program, he said, 'Teaching a new course, I'm making it up as I go.' He noted that he did not have much in-school preparation time to prepare the Chinese curriculum and teaching resources. He was also studying part-time in a Graduate Diploma program, besides teaching a number of Japanese courses at the school. Peter felt his isolation as the 'only person in the Chinese program' keenly. He has to depend on himself, although he sometimes received assistance from the Confucius Classroom teacher and from his wife, a native speaker of Chinese, who is also a registered teacher of Chinese. In addition to limited human resources and curriculum preparation time, Peter thought that the teaching circumstances in this school were 'poor' and that developing a good physical environment for the teaching of Chinese was very difficult. Regardless of these problems, Peter remained hopeful that improvements would occur to help to resolve some of his difficulties.

Feeling 'reasonably prepared' in methodology as a result of teaching Japanese for many years, Peter considered many learning activities and pedagogical strategies were transferrable between the two languages. With some discussion with the Languages Coordinator about course scope and sequence (based on the VELs), he had a great deal of freedom to decide the content and length of individual topics, and the teaching materials and activities to be used.

In terms of teaching of Chinese, Peter believed that students should learn characters in the introductory stage of their learning and should be taught in a 'mixed' manner: 'You teach the parts, and then you teach the whole characters at the same time.' He believed that the oral language taught and learnt should be authentic and practical — he strongly promotes the learning of classroom language — while paying attention to tones and speaking skills. Peter was making an effort to introduce Chinese culture and history in the 'cultural bits' of his course and encouraged Confucius classroom- and community-based cultural activities, e.g. mask-making and *tai qi*. Peter

indicated that although they are applying for funding to support bigger extracurricular programs, e.g. an in-country sojourn program and Chinese Museum excursions, they will first explore the considerable local Chinese heritage and culture.

Peter believed that 'anyone can learn a language [because] they speak their own language.' Learning happened when students have motivation, which is determined by 'the learning environment' provided by their families and the school. He gave an example of how a most challenging student in his class had become 'fantastic' because she is very motivated by the prospect of a school trip to China. However, he was finding classroom management still the 'biggest pain' in his current teaching.

Peter wanted to improve his own language competence and teaching pedagogy through attending professional learning opportunities. By studying at the Confucius classroom and seeking a teacher training scholarship to study short-term in China, he intended to refine his 'not perfect' tones, *Pinyin* and simplified character knowledge and other aspects that he has to 'model for the kids.' His most urgent professional development needs were help with unit planning which 'incorporates some online stuff.'

Kunzea Secondary College

Enrolment	c. 1400
Year levels	Years 7-12
Sector	Government
Languages offered	Greek, Italian, French and Chinese
Age of the Chinese program	c. 12 years
Number of teachers of Chinese	4
Year levels Chinese offered	Years 7-12 as an elective
Designated class time	Years 7-9 3 x 50 mins per week Year 10-12 4 x 50-mins per week
Students' language background	40% non-English-speaking background. Substantial Asian cohort. Large cohort of international students, many of whom are Chinese

Kunzea College is an inner suburban government secondary school (Years 7-12) with a long and varied history. For most of its 85-year history it was a boys' school but is now co-educational, and over the past decade its enrolment has grown as fast as its building program will permit. It currently has more than 1400 students, 40 percent of whom have a language background other than English. It usually has a large cohort of international students (about 150), mostly from Asian countries. It also has a very active relationship, now 10 years old, with a school in China. According to the ACARA index, the socioeconomic background of the families who attend the school are skewed slightly above the Australian average.

School H offers four different languages – Greek, Italian, French and Chinese. Traditionally it's been a strong Greek school. Italian has also been a strong community language. It began offering Chinese about 12 years ago.

The Assistant Principal

Eric Howard is one of the several Assistant Principals at this school, and the management of the Languages Department is one of his responsibilities. An Anglophone Australian in his late-forties, he has been teaching for over 20 years. He is essentially monolingual, but his wife is Italian and speaks to his children in Italian. He has travelled to Italy to visit his wife's family.

When asked about why Chinese was started, Eric suggested that it would have been in response to a community interest and it would also have been strategic in terms of identifying what might be attractive to the school's community as a whole.

Eric spoke of the number of background speakers of Chinese studying the language as a problem. Around two-thirds of the students at Year 10 who choose to continue studying Chinese at VCE level have some sort of background in the language. 'We battle with the issue of background kids because it does sort of warp things and it's almost as though they'd be better off doing another language rather than one in which they've got such great strengths.' Eric didn't cite this as a reason why students might drop Chinese at Year 10. Instead his main explanation for that was the comparative attractions of other subjects which the school makes available. In 2010 Chinese was timetabled in the same block as two sciences, computer animation and another technology study, and he felt that some students would be inclined to choose something with a more practical bent.

He pointed out that to continue with language study students needed to have 'that application, that dedication, the thing that you know you're going to get out of language learning to make it worthwhile, because it's bloody hard.' He also thought that some kids would pick it up and put the effort in because they've got past the initial hurdle and it starts to become interesting. 'If you get

enough of that grunt work under your belt, you say, “Well I know what it's for now”, and start to get the advantage of it, it becomes fun.’

At VCE level the language classes are sometimes a combination of Year 11 and Year 12 students in order to be able to offer Chinese. The school prefers to run a small class rather than have the students study externally through Distance Education. ‘Parents are very committed to [one or other particular language] and they will often go to Distance Ed or the VSL [Victorian School of Languages] to continue studying. With this sort of situation we might run a smaller class than otherwise because we don't want to lose the funding for those kids.’

At Year 7 the students choose which language they would like to study, but in this transitional program they don't get much exposure to the languages the school offers – ‘maybe a “language experience,”’ Eric thought. He reflected that often students’ experience at primary school hadn't been very good, so some were looking for a change. And ‘sometimes there'd be just that impression of what's attractive, because we're becoming a far more middle class school than we used to be, so French certainly is increasing in attraction. But in the end it really would come back to what language they are familiar with and enjoying, or whether they are looking for a different experience.’

Overseas travel to visit his wife's family has had an influence on Eric's beliefs about learning language.

‘That made a big difference for me in terms of recognising the significance of what you can do with language if you're in a different place. Immersion in the cultural stuff is just so important. It makes all the difference in terms of language acquisition. Some families would understand and be promoting [language learning for that reason].’

Eric stated his belief that any student can learn a language, but he recognised the limitations of learning a language in a school setting. ‘Certainly within a three-period-a-week type of experience you're not going to pick up the basic skills that you need. So there needs to be another level of involvement from parents to make that worthwhile, or to translate it through to kids doing [a language] at VCE level. I think it's very difficult for those who just do it at school.’ He also said that while he sees that the time allocated to language learning is one of the obstacles to a highly successful program, another factor was where adolescent students’ interests lie and the powerful influences driving those interests. One of these, of course, was parents’ aspirations and wishes. ‘The influence of parents can't be understated I don't think.’

Eric mentioned the sister-school relationship several times, along with the international program they have at the school, as factors that really support the school's Chinese program. ‘The thing with having the international program and the sister-school relationship means that there's a very strong awareness of where a large number of our kids come from.’ Over the years more than 450 students from the school and many teachers have visited the sister school on exchange. In addition, ‘typically the cultural days are very successful, again supported by the international program. So there's a New Year Feast and things like that that very much get people's attention and support.’

Head of the Languages Department

Lauren Heinrich is Head of the Language Department at the school. She is an Anglophone Australian in her late fifties. She studied French in high school and went to live in France 10 years later. She describes herself as a ‘linguist’ and had taught French at tertiary level before becoming a secondary school teacher, and she seemed confidently assured about her own teaching practices and approaches.

Lauren's ideas about the qualities that a good language teacher requires were: loving the language and culture and wanting the kids to understand the language and culture, and being able to work with them so that this is achieved. She talked about there being two different types of language teachers – those who have come to the language because they are interested and those for whom the language is their native language. She said that for the latter, ‘the positive aspect of the situation is that it's total identity, and the negative aspect is that it's total identity.’

She saw Chinese as different to other [European] languages for two reasons: students have to learn a different writing system and, with tones, a different sound system. Lauren thought that all languages have things that are hard and things that are easy. ‘Chinese seems to have a simplified

grammatical system. So there you go. You've got to do your difficult learning in different areas is the way I see it.'

As far as the structure of the Chinese program in the school was concerned, she commented on the persistent fluctuations in senior enrolments. Noting, as Eric had, the changing demographic of the school community, she referred to Chinese as one of the 'prestige' languages the school offered [the other being French] and so Chinese 'gets the children of the people who are upwardly mobile, those whose parents are asking, "What can this offer my child in the big world?".' This didn't necessarily apply to enrolment in the senior years. 'Chinese has got a fantastic retention rate. It's got the best retention rate of all the languages. But it's because of the proportion of native speakers at the school.' Her concern was not maintaining enrolment, but encouraging 'Anglos' to learn Chinese, and in that case the result was poor.

Lauren explained that one reason for this at this school was that the definition of who's doing Chinese as a second language still included students who have background Chinese, and the same assessment procedures and judgments are applied to those students as to students who have absolutely no background. 'I would say there needs to be another category ... so that Anglo kids feel that it's worth going on.'

At least one of the school's Chinese teachers had put a lot of effort into encouraging non-background students to continue with Chinese, and one step the school had taken was to establish a VCE class for background speakers in Year 10 which meant that the conventional Year 10 Chinese class was of a more consistent standard. 'There will be more Anglos and more sort of distant background kids. So it might mean that those kids feel more comfortable about continuing on to VCE.'

Lauren felt another weakness of the Chinese program was the mixed quality of the teaching. 'Unfortunately we still have a teacher in the Chinese faculty who shouldn't be teaching full stop. Last year I made the mistake of giving her Year 7 and that was disastrous. If you have your first year of language learning with a really bad teacher, that's it. It's really very hard to get them back because they've come to school excited usually — new language, new possibilities — and if it's a bad experience then it's completely identified with that language. [As students see it] it's got nothing to do with the teacher.' She was keenly aware that negative messages had gone out about the program as a whole.

She described the bad qualities of this teacher as lack of patience, and lack of competence both in the language and as a language teacher. The dominant theme of the feedback from students had concerned her unapproachability. 'She just says "go back and find it in the book".'

Lauren then talked about how the staff in the Chinese department did not work together as a team, and have even been placed in separate staffrooms because of their incompatibility.

Working together may have been something that was new for the teachers in the Languages Department at this school more generally, and they were just getting used to sharing practice and resources with each other. Lauren had little idea about what happened in other teachers' classrooms. 'Team teaching is something that is not part of the way this school works. People don't have a culture of coming in to each other's classrooms. That's not something that happens. So one of the things at the moment is breaking down that barrier across the whole school, although it must be said that when this was being discussed last year people were incredibly resistant.'

The Languages Department had only recently experienced their first effort at collaborative practice when they combined classes across all the languages and began a common learning diary activity, written in English reflecting on their language learning. Lauren explained, 'This is simply about their learning and it's a reflection for them. It's not about testing them on what they've learnt so far There is stuff they could be writing in the target language. But when they are reflecting and, you know, saying the thing I think I'm most good at, etcetera, that would be in English. Another focus of the school is improving kids' literacy overall in whatever subject they're doing, so we're encouraging kids to write full sentences in English.'

'When we have our team meetings, our prime focus is working on our next assessment task or talking about the assessment task that we've been working on, getting feedback from people about how it's going, and asking people what they are doing, and getting ideas about what we should be

doing. That's actually my first knowledge of what people are specifically doing in their classroom. In one of those meetings, one of the teachers said, "When I mark the roll to start every class the kids have to, say, give a description of how they are", and I thought, "So simple and so powerful". A number of us are now using that, and with variations. It could be, "I am wearing blue jeans, or my mother's name is something." It means that in every class there's been at least one oral activity whether you've planned for it or not. For me, that's a great tool, and I'm using it from Year 7 to Year 12. That's a great piece of teaching practice.' For Lauren, 'That's really interesting because in terms of specific activities I'm only starting to learn what other people are doing in their classroom.' On being asked whether or not the Chinese teachers use the 'Virtual Classroom' [web-based resources] system at the school, she said she didn't know.

The other language teachers had also largely been working in isolation from each other. Lauren was aware of this and had implemented common assessment tasks across the languages, which were discussed in Departmental meetings. The prospect and potential impact excited her.

'This is hot off the press new. I mean this is completely radical. I'm not just talking about it being radical because we are going across languages. It's radical here because this means that the same teachers who are teaching in the same subject area in the same year are doing the same thing. We haven't had that before. ... It's a wonderful way that we are getting to share and get really great stuff from each other and come up with what are really good tasks. That is going to have a profound effect. We're experiencing the thing that many good teachers working together make a better product.'

Now that they had begun to share activities and create assessment tasks together, Lauren had realized the possibilities. She saw the next step in improving language teaching at the school as teachers having the opportunity to spend time in each others' classrooms. She hoped this would happen more when the language classes were not all blocked together on the timetable.

The content of courses will be influenced by what needs to be covered for the common assessment tasks but whatever textbook the teachers have chosen will still be an important consideration. There was still a very strong reliance on textbooks for all the languages (except Greek) and Lauren in particular spoke very highly of using textbooks for both language and cultural purposes.

'A downside of being a language teacher is that I've got to teach it all because I'm the one with the knowledge. I'm the font. But then we've got this textbook, which is fantastic and works really well. There's a workbook. The kids should be able to be working on this stuff without me.' She also valued her textbooks for the related cultural studies and intercultural communication aspects they included. 'I noticed when I started getting my head around the VELS better that we needed to be doing explicit cultural stuff in each unit. The book that we use is a reference book. So it was great because it meant that it was actually there for me.' This represented a shift of emphasis for her. 'In terms of actually teaching about the country, like the geography and the number of people and all that, I haven't had that as a focus, but with our next common assessment task — and I'm reading the VELS clearly here — they need to be learning that stuff as well.'

Lauren had created other resources to be used with her textbook and gave the students lists of things to complete. 'I'm finding that I am being able to be a language teacher who can have kids working at their own pace and getting help from me when they're ready for it. ... That's taken quite a while but I'm feeling really good about that stuff this year.'

In regards to using ICT in the language teaching Lauren suggested that 'as a group we are technologically challenged.' The teachers were just getting used to things like the display TVs that are mounted over the (non-digital) whiteboards, and using iPods for recording students' oral work. She actually had been using iPods herself and has made using them an integral part of the oral work common assessment task to influence other teachers' practice. She also talked about how the learning diaries will be uploaded to the school's Virtual Classroom system, again prompting teachers to use that resource. She didn't really know about the Chinese teachers' use of ICT, but said that, overall, this is an area that needs developing.

A teacher of Chinese

Chen Mei Ling, the teacher of Chinese interviewed, is from China. She was cautious in her responses. When she talked about the overall teaching situation and the school, she was very honest in referring to the limitations and frustrations she experienced, but when talking about her students she was always very positive, enthusiastic and complimentary.

Mei Ling was, in her own words, trying to find the 'best way to survive' in her teaching situation. Of the classes she was taking, all except the Year 7 beginner class was made up of a mixture of non-background and background Chinese speakers with varying degrees of competence and so she always had to prepare several activities for one class. 'Who's in the mixture class? Anybody with any Chinese background, they've learned Chinese, they are in the mixture class. Maybe they've learnt some Chinese in the primary school or they learn at home or weekend school, or they just learn from China because they just come from China. ... You never know who will come to your class. ... I feel like the preparation is very, very hard because you have to do not only one lesson plan. For Year 9 I have to do four, and four exam papers, four test papers and is very hard. If you manage one group, some students can do self-learning, but others need you to stay with them.'

With three periods a week, and at Year 9 two of them a double class, Mei Ling was finding that 'the teaching time is really hard to manage', and that it was 'not enough. ... I don't have enough time. ... It looks like [the students] still stay outside the door. We try give them the key to get in, and once they get in we feel like "Oh that's much easier".'

Despite being very busy all the time, Mei Ling seemed to enjoy the challenge of her teaching situation. 'I think I'm very very flexible. I enjoy things where I know there is a difficulty. I always think, okay, that's my target so this problem won't become a difficulty. You give me the mixture class and I will find a way how can I make them really achieve their best results. ... My philosophy is to know every single child to meet their individual need, so that's what make me work really hard. But my class they are really happy, they are happy. Cause you know I say, don't worry, if I see you are moving, I'm happy. So don't compare because you can't compare with each other. Everybody is different.'

She saw these points as her main strengths as a teacher, saying that one of her weaknesses is that she was yet to take a school group to China – 'that's my space, my empty space' — referring to the gap in her professional experience. She also said, 'Any new knowledge, any new idea or any experience I can share with others, that's the area I need to learn to build up. Like ICT, there are always things to learn. You never finish. Like today you know, we got this new software and the next day interactive whiteboard. ... I will say there is no ending. You never stop learning.'

Mei Ling enjoyed teaching the classes with a more limited range of competence. 'This year I teach Year 7. I will say I really enjoy teach them. I really enjoy, they enjoy, they love it. ... The children you know, look at you and concentrate on speaking. When I talk with them — you know *ni jiao shenme mingzi* — and they can just say beautifully, I don't know how to describe [how I feel].'

She believed absolutely that non-background students can learn Chinese successfully. 'If they are really keen to learn, and if they believe they can, they always can successfully. I give the example. One girl she start from Year 7 and she say, "Which one do I learn?". And on Open Day we met her and finally she decided to pick up Chinese, and that's it. In Year 12 she got [a score, very high, of] 45.' But she has a lot of sympathy for non-background students being in the same class as background students. She knew exactly why they felt like they couldn't succeed and thought there needed to be another stream.

Mei Ling was also acutely aware of the limits in the amount of help from home for her non-background students could expect. She suggested that if they were going to a private school they would probably get individual help through tutoring. 'Can't do homework, go to tutor.' With regard to the non-background student who received the very high Year 12 score, Mei Ling noted that to get her to that level involved lots and lots of lunchtime teaching and other extra opportunities like participating in speaking competitions, having the opportunity to study in Guangzhou for a month, and having a great deal of other extra tutoring. When asked whether she thought that her students should be offered or encouraged to take Chinese at Saturday schools, she demurred, thinking that it was unlikely to be suitable. 'Weekend school only take a certain level, and they are very like in China

the level they learn. Chinese embassy hand out the textbook, they learn the textbook. They learn like the Chinese teacher teach. It wouldn't suit [her non-background students].'

One thing that was of concern to her was the lack of communication between the Languages staff at the school. Among other things, she felt that this was why she had very little idea about anything to do with the school's trips to China, what teaching methods other Chinese teachers are using in their classrooms, what professional development opportunities she might take advantage of, or what her colleagues are doing in that regard. 'I've got no idea with this, cause I never ask them you know.'

Mei Ling's classroom practice was based around a textbook (chosen in consultation with the Year 7 and LOTE Coordinators), which she talked about as though it was an essential part of the program, something that needed to be constantly evaluated and where possible improved. She was troubled about the current textbook because it has no colour illustration and compared this with the high quality resources available in other subject areas. Mei Ling thought it would 'be perfect' to have one set of materials to follow the whole way through primary and secondary school, one to match the new Australian Curriculum, because there is no such thing at present. She was also worried about the fact that what is available is not well-tailored for authentic classroom practice. She had problems with the pitch of the texts (too high) that are used at the school, especially in the mixed ability classes.

While the Chinese programs at Kunzea College were still very much based on progressing theme-by-theme through a textbook, Mei Ling spoke about how she supplemented the textbook material with other activities, such as watching movies, singing, doing role plays, creating culture days (for example setting up a New Year festival with lots of different stalls where kids can try on costumes, take photos, play Chinese games etc), going on excursions to Chinatown during the Dragon Boat festival and kite making. She talked about playing several different games in her classes (like 'Simon Says' and 'Musical Chairs') and getting students to write songs and perform them.

She teaches characters by using flashcards with pictures and then getting students to write the character. 'It's just like, step-by-step, stroke-by-stroke.' She wished there was software that would allow teachers to design worksheets for students based on stroke order. At the time, she was hand writing her own. She also taught characters by getting her students to look at them as pictures and then using their imagination to draw a response. But she thought that, in the end, learning characters was like memorizing correct spelling. 'Always have to have spelling, spelling, spelling, but some kids, they don't really like writing.' She saw *Pinyin* as a useful tool, and believed it needed to be taught with the correct spelling due to students typing characters, i.e. they needed to know the right *Pinyin* to get the right characters.

Indicating how she taught tones, Mei Ling produced an example of an initials and finals table found in a typical textbook and talked briefly about how she gets her students to go through this before using other methods. 'Everybody must have finished this one [example of *ba* with four tones] with the four different tones and they need to read properly. But when I teach them, I'll just use the four hats and I'll just say the hat with the tone on it, put it on my head and say, ok what's this?' She thinks this works for her non-background kids because, 'They catch up so quickly and their pronunciation better than my student with background, because with background they have their Shanghaiese dialect, or Fujian, or Cantonese. [Non-background students] always pronounce like my background. Beautiful, very formal.'

With relation to assessment, Mei Ling mentioned that there are four tests per semester as major assessment tasks, and weekly dictation for oral and listening skills. 'But our Year 7s have so many activities, camp, excursion, music camp, and sickness and you know other things, when they come back they need to catch up, so it's a bit complicated.' For assessment of writing, she uses the VCE format of writing sentences and essays, and for speaking the main form of assessment is role plays.

Mei Ling's classroom use of ICT was limited because of difficulties related to accessing equipment (she mentioned an interactive whiteboard) which is housed in rooms where her classes are not timetabled. Other equipment which can be booked has to be transported from the library and set up. This is one of the reasons Mei Ling would like a 'permanent settled Chinese classroom'. There is a nominated classroom where things can be stored and posters put on the wall, but there have been problems with damage and theft. She had made requests for a more secure location, which had not yet yielded fruit.

Eugenia College

Enrolment	c. 700
Year levels	Years 7-12
Sector	Independent
Languages offered	Chinese, French and Italian at each Year level, two required at Year 7, one in Years 8 & 9. Subsequently elective.
Age of the Chinese program	15 years
Number of teachers of Chinese	1, and a teaching assistant
Year levels Chinese offered	Years 7-12 as an elective
Designated class time	Yrs 7-9: 9 x 50 minute periods fortnightly Yrs 10-12: 4 x 50 minute periods weekly
Students' language background	20% non-English-speaking background, more likely to be Southern European than Asian.

Eugenia College is a Catholic secondary girl's school (Years 7-12) in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. It has an enrolment of just over 700 students, of whom one-fifth have a language background other than English. Eighty percent of its families are in the top half of ACARA's index of socioeconomic background. Chinese, introduced at the school in 1995, French and Italian are offered at each Year level. Year 7 students study two of the three languages offered and then select one they wish to continue with into Years 8 and 9. In 2010, 14 girls had chosen to continue Chinese in Year 8. There were 22 in Year 9 and eight were enrolled in Year 10. In Years 10-12 language study is elective. The Chinese offered at VCE level is the course for second language learners. There is a teaching assistant as well as a teacher for Chinese.

The Principal and the Head of the Languages Department

Anna Bossini is the Head of the Languages Department at the school and teaches Italian. In the interview she was joined for a time by Dorothy Glendon, the school's Principal.

Anna made the following observations about arrangements for language choice at the school.

'Before I came to the school in 2007, at Year 7 all students did all three languages in terms 1, 2 and 3 and then in term 4 they did a lengthy ICT-based cultural project. So there wasn't really much language going on in term 4. Then at the end of term 3 for subject selection they would choose which language they wanted to do all through Years 8 and 9, after which it becomes optional. And we just thought — not enough time spent on language. I've had Year 8 every year so far and it was like they were new again. They didn't remember anything. It was back to basics and they were relying on primary school knowledge as much as anything. So we just thought if they could have a semester, that would be so much more of a solid basis for Year 8, and they will remember things and be in tune with the language again. So, what's happened for the first time this year is Year 6 students [enrolling last year for this year] put in a preference for two languages and we gave them all their number one preference. They definitely got their first choice, and then from the other two, as we could accommodate. Numbers were low for Chinese, so we had to go to third preferences. So everyone got their first, but if they were choosing Chinese it was probably their third.

'The numbers game is tricky and we are very mindful of that, not stepping on other toes. So there's no Year 12 Chinese class this year, and only I think four students now in Year 11, and so that makes things difficult. But they're keen girls.'

Anna suggested that parents were 'engaged [with Chinese] only in the sense that they're really happy that the program is going ahead. But I guess, you know, how does that translate into numbers in the classroom?'

There are a small number of Chinese-language background students at the school but they don't necessarily take Chinese. 'I've got a Malaysian Chinese girl in my class doing Italian.'

Dorothy, the Principal, a keen supporter of languages education, offered: 'I think for us it's an ongoing challenge. We've had Chinese in the school for a long time as one of the languages that we've offered, and we keep trying to invest in sustaining it, but the numbers continue to be small. In 2008 I went on a Principals' study tour to China and I think what we need is a different approach to language study, where there's much more immersion, and regular exposure every day with a few hours, like it is in China with even little children getting two hours of English every day. But we're certainly supportive and we do everything we can to maintain that.'

The time allocation for language classes at the school is four 50-minute periods per week for Years 10-12 and for Years 8 and 9 nine periods over the fortnightly timetable cycle. Both staff members thought that Chinese presented challenges ('characters and tones') which weren't present in the learning of European languages, and noted how even distant background, present in few of their students for Chinese as compared, for example, with Italian, supported language learning.

About 20 percent of the school's students continue with language study at Year 12. 'But for Chinese it's another story — numbers up and down, up and down. Since 2001, our first Year 12 VCE class, the biggest number has been 12, I think, and lowest number three or four. And the school was kind enough to offer to support the VCE Chinese class if there any candidates, even if we offer one class with Years 11 and 12 students together.'

Dorothy commented, 'I think we're up against it in one sense, in that now there are increasing numbers of students who do have some exposure as children, who have Asian grandparents for example, and now still qualify [at VCE level] to do it as a second language. So when you have somebody who has no background whatsoever, the opportunity to get that high study score is not as great as it was.'

She went on, 'Even at Year 7, where we offer some exposure to all of the languages, I'm not convinced that's the way to go. I'd like them to begin with a language and make a choice before they come, but we continue to debate that in the school. What was disappointing for me was when I went on that study tour, there was a Principal from a primary school that actually does feed into our school and they study Chinese. And I thought, oh wow, here we can take in some students who are primed already. And of the eight students who came from that school, studying Chinese, only three put it as their first preference for languages here. We just keep pushing at it. For me, we have to have an Asian language, and of any of them it's Chinese. It's obvious. You know, you just have to.'

The school has got good access to ICT facilities and Dorothy indicated that she was proactive in encouraging their use. Anna commented that members of the Languages Department made good use of what was available and were constantly looking at new possibilities. The school has one interactive whiteboard, but was likely to rely more on notebooks and tablets for the foreseeable future.

Dorothy would like to be able to employ another teacher of Chinese to reduce the professional isolation of the current teacher — in 2007 there were two teachers — but numbers do not make this possible at present.

Teachers at the school determine the nature and content of their own programs. Although where a number of teachers are working on the same subject (and with Italian there are four), they negotiate what is to be done. 'If Simon wanted to do something new and different', Anna said, 'I'd support him. I mean there'd be no question. Obviously if something was a cost issue, that would be the only problem. [When you're on your own] it's an advantage that you don't have to negotiate with anyone, you don't have to fight with anyone in your Faculty. But it's a disadvantage too, because you then don't have that support.'

The teacher of Chinese

Simon Ma is the Chinese teacher at the school. He grew up and also taught in Shanghai and, after completing a teaching qualification in Australia, has taught at Eugenia for more than 20 years. Since he began working there he had successfully undertaken postgraduate studies in language education.

His interview had a major emphasis on an imminent visit to Eugenia's 'exchange' school in Shanghai. ('Exchange' because the girl's objected to the term 'sister school', and Simon wanted to emphasise the two-way aspect of a relationship that is in its infancy.)

Simon explained the rationale for the sojourn program by reference to official position papers and, less directly, his own enthusiasm for China and its culture. He had a Powerpoint display which had recently been presented to parents.

'[The exchange school] suggested that we get like twenty students to go there and they will send a similar number of students to come over to our school for one week, just one week immersion and then sight-seeing. We will go to Shanghai, Beijing and then come back to Shanghai. So I just do like a little [reading from his slides] "education in a global community brings with it an increasing need to focus on developing inter-cultural understanding". That's the rationale. And also, "inter-cultural learning helps learners to understand the world around them, learners will view the world not from a single perspective of their first language and culture but from multiple perspectives". It's quoted from the "National Statement for Languages and Education in Australian Schools" so it's like official government document. And then talk about China. China is one of the world's closest, oldest continuous civilizations with a recorded history of over 5000 years. And then China it's our biggest trading partner over Japan and USA since 2007, and that Mandarin is now the most widely spoken first language. ... Then also coming down to college policy, "Eugenia College aims to equip students with knowledge and skills required to participate in and contribute to a modern globalised world." It's stated in the College strategic plan.'

This is not the first time that the school has conducted a trip to China.

'This is our fifth China trip now — 2000, 2001, 2004, 2007 and this is 2010, so every two or three years we organise one. Our first China trip for Years 10 and 11 students was in September 2000. I was very excited. The school had a policy, an older policy, that overseas trips were not appropriate for all the whole school population because it involves money, and you may disadvantage some students who cannot afford it. But we won that argument.' One reason for the win was because the school got some NALSAS¹² funding from the government, weakening the negative point of view. 'And then for what we're going to do in this year, we got a \$20,000 grant from the government.

'[During the discussion about whether the tour should occur] I talk about the benefits of exchange, of the challenging learning experiences enabling students to become resilient learners. We use that word a lot here, *resilience*, and motivate students to use the target language in genuine contexts. So parents all agree. ... And lastly for more practical reasons, and that made people laugh, to get economic advantages due to the strong dollar. It's become a bit weaker recently, but still a lot better. And also better employment opportunities in the long run. And I talk about shopping, when dollar becomes five or six dollars even in China you can buy lots of things. I think we're departing on 12th December because that is a haunting date. Yeah, so we postpone for another reason. Some girls want to do the Formal, you know, the Year 11 Formal. That's the very day, "I've been looking forward to that day for five years" [they say].'

[Referring to a photo] 'That's the first trip 2000, and they were very good. Everyone was doing Chinese at Year 10 or 11. Actually those are my first group of VCE students and they started at Year 7. And, you know, the enthusiasm using the language was just unbelievable. It's contagious you know, if you want to say something others want to follow and interact, so it's very good. And then gradually we were losing momentum because it was becoming like a cultural tour. So we tried to bring back the focus of language.' He made reference to a short intensive language course that the students would be taking in Beijing on the current trip.

Three teachers were going with him. Simon had proffered advice to the Principal not to take too many teachers because of the risk of it becoming a tourist party again. 'Lots of English conversation going on and the students probably will be more shy to meet local people and practicing their language.'

12 National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools, a national program funded by the Australian Government.

It appeared that there would be no formal evaluation except to record its activities and participants. But, Simon speculated, 'I think the immediate result will be for students to see China, to see the culture instead of only learning from textbooks or from video, from newspapers. You go there and you're in the country and you'll be motivated, "oh my God like you have such a great culture there", and they're experiencing it. So that is I think enough motivation for them, yeah lots of motivation generated from that experience, and also to be able to practice their language in real life situations like shopping.'

When asked about the impact on continuing with language study of participating in the trip, Simon said, 'I almost certain, but you can never tell for sure, that you probably will have more students going on to Year 10 because of this trip. The first China trip in 2000 almost everyone who went from Year 10 went on to Year 11, and almost all those Year 11 students went on to Year 12.'

He discussed the challenges in finding an exchange school. As mentioned, the school was just entering a partnership with a school in Shanghai.

'It was not easy for us to find a suitable exchange school. As soon as the new Principal came in 2007, she was very supportive, so I've been trying to find a sister school. The Principal and I went to the school. We tried to express our willingness, our intention to establish that exchange relationship. But there was a bit of reluctance on their part because of the religious status our school. They said it's government policy [to not allow relationships with overseas schools with religious affiliation]. And then I found out it's not government policy. It's just the school authorities choosing to be on the safe side, you know. They don't want to have any trouble. In China religion is a sensitive topic.'

'And then some other opportunities arose through friends, relatives. They actually initiated the contact. They came to me and said would you like to be a sister school. Get your school to contact these certain schools.' On all of these occasions the other school declined, Simon believed, because of the religious issue.

'And then since we got the grant money and we said exchange program was the main part of the project, I was really in a hurry to find a partner. So I asked my sister in Shanghai for some help and she went to one of her friends who happens to work in [the 'exchange' school]. We use a more modern term like research and development. It's related to the research and the develop educational things. And having a direct contact with a Mr. Wu, the person in charge of foreign affairs, and looking after overseas teachers and things, and they say "OK I support you".'

The conversation returned to student retention in Chinese and the impact of arrangements for assessment at VCE level.

'I think if students do Year 10 they tend to move on to Year 11. I don't know, maybe about half of them. But you know the VCE results really put people off. ... About two weeks ago, the VCAA called for a consultation to discuss the character list for the VCE study design. They suggested using the same character list as the current situation, the same character list for the two groups, Chinese for Second Language Learners and Advanced, and the same number [about 500]. It's good that they update and replace the older [characters], the ones that are not used as frequently, with modern ones, but still the number was increased to 600. ... I wasn't happy and people teaching in the same situation, with kids from a western or a non-Chinese background had the same concerns. ... I just drafted a little presentation and then presented my view. What's the purpose of the study design, and what's the purpose of the character list? It's the guideline for assessment as well as teaching, and [strongly influences] the content of the course and also the assessment tools and criteria. Using the same list to assess the two groups, it does not serve the purpose well. I think they agreed.'

The requirements were subsequently changed to 600 characters for first language learners and 420 for second language students. Simon agreed that students taking VSL ['Saturday'] Chinese classes for eight to ten years would know more than 1000 characters, perhaps 1200 or 1500.

When asked about what he thought was the hardest thing for Australian students in learning Chinese, he suggested, 'I think the kids struggle if not taught two things properly. In speaking, it's tone accuracy that is the most challenging for them. I've been working on my strategy and I think it seems to be working, but however hard you show them with diagram, for some people — even to go 'doh, re, mi, fa, so, la, te, doh' — it's too hard.' It will not work however accurately you show how the

tone works, because once you put it into practice their natural tone takes over. It's not an intellectual problem. 'It's their language habit. So being a habit I think we'll get the students to practice rhythmically. That's one thing.'

'The other thing is the recollection in writing, particularly writing characters, because it's a totally different system from the [Latin] alphabet, and they will be very resistant to characters at all. It should be introduced in probably the very first class teaching Chinese literacy. Once you have *Pinyin* with the characters they will always pay attention to *Pinyin* and ignore the characters. Yesterday I got a Year 10 class doing the games on computer and they were shooting the characters and were listening to the words. I was so pleased that most of them were shooting the characters so accurately.'

'I think that when you teach the writing you teach them the components, how they are structured, and most characters are two parts. One part tells the meaning, the other part gives the sound. Just this morning we were watching a video and the narrator was explaining the Chinese language. He said Chinese *Pinyin* shows the sound while characters do not give a clue to vocalisation. And I straight away corrected that. It's like a preferred explanation. Around half of the characters do give the clue.'

He explained that his students, at least, do care about learning the characters 'but the thing is you should introduce them as early as possible to impress the idea that the characters are the right thing to learn if you want to learn genuine Chinese.' He told a story about how when he began teaching he worried that his students weren't going on with Chinese and whether it was because of the difficulty with characters. Should he, perhaps, emphasise *Pinyin* to get them back? But after doing so 'I found after a year or two the students did not want to learn the characters anymore. So in last three years I shifted my teaching from *Pinyin* back to characters. I don't think I will ever change my strategy again.'

To help his students learn characters Simon had developed a strategy of using raps, which has been successful in developing reading fluency, tone and rhythm.

'I learnt English as a second language in China and my teachers told me a theory for language teaching is always listening as people naturally do. Listening and speaking comes before reading and literacy acquisition. But some teachers just go the easy way. They just create heaps of worksheets. I think it helps with classroom management, you know, like making sentences and you just supervise. Working full-time teaching four, five or six periods a day and practicing speaking, it's very exhausting.

'I use Chinese in class. Not all the time, but the students hear Chinese spoken. I actually got some quality writing tasks for the exam, like the same speaking task and I give them a vocabulary list and if you can describe in writing, and then very, very few grammatical mistakes. There were very popular or consistent errors before introducing the rap strategy [which were markedly reduced after its introduction]. It does help.

'But you can't be perfect, you know. You can't be perfect. Forty minutes or fifty minutes class time — warming up, practicing individually, the group, and then only five or ten minutes for the writing and homework. OK. A week of musical, got swimming, and then it's St. Cecilia's Day and school holiday coming up, a long weekend, and some students finish the term early on holiday already, like one week before, you know, so all these making the learning really hard. So I was telling my Year 8 class this morning let's value every minute and give them some practice on the characters. Yeah they tried.'

APPENDIX : SURVEY AND INTERVIEW DOCUMENTS

Sections A & B to be filled in by all Interviewees in advance of the interview

Section A Personal experience

Name	School	Role

Language history	What / where	Used /done since when
What is your first language?		
What is your second language?		
Do you have any other language proficiency?		
Teaching experience		
What is your experience in your present position?		
What is your involvement in/with the Chinese program in your current school		

Section B: China/Chinese experience

<p>Give a brief overview of your contact with China, Chinese language and Chinese people – if any.</p> <p>If you are Chinese, write about your contact with English and English-speaking countries.</p>	<p>What theories of learning have most influenced your view of good teaching?</p>
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Section B (cont'd) For Principals and Heads of Languages who do not teach Chinese

1. What are the advantages and the drawbacks to having a Chinese program in your school?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your Chinese program?
3. What would most improve the program? How could that be achieved?

C. Guidelines for interviews with Principal and Curriculum Coordinator/Head of Languages

Who decides ...	Who decides ...	What do you think ...	What do you think ...
The topics and order of what you teach?	How much PD you may attend in a year?		
The time you spend on any topic?	Is there a day limit? A dollar limit?	How confident are you that most of your students can learn Chinese?	
The resources you use to teach?	Can you attend any PD you like?	What are the biggest obstacles to their success in your view?	
The methods and activities you use	Is a replacement teacher provided when you attend a PD?	How well do you feel you have been prepared for the work of teaching them Chinese?	Have you ever taken kids to China? If so, to where and how was it? If not, why not and would you like to?
When you assess students?	Can you introduce new ways of teaching in your own classes?	What do you draw on most for inspiration and practical help in carrying out your work?	Does your school have a sister school in China? How does that work? How do you feel about the relationship with them?
How you assess students?	Is it easy for you to use ICT with your classes? If not, what makes things difficult? How could this be overcome?	Are you well supported within your Dept/ section? By other staff? By the Leaders? By parents?	
When and how often, and for how long are classes for each level of Chinese scheduled?	Do you encourage students to do more Chinese outside class? And if so, how, and to do what? If not, why not?	What aspect of your teaching has most improved over the past couple of years? How did that come about?	
		What do you think of as the weakest aspect of your teaching competence? What would you like to do about that?	Do you ever take students on Chinese excursions? Take part in the CLTAV competitions or other collaborative or competitive activities?

D. Guideline for Interviews with Teachers

Who decides ...	Who decides ...	What do you think ...	What do you think ...
The topics and order of what you teach?	How much PD you may attend in a year?	Do you think of yourself as teaching the kids to speak Chinese?	Should Australian students have to learn characters? At what age? And taught how?
The time you spend on any topic?	Is there a day limit? A dollar limit?	How confident are you that most of your students can learn Chinese?	Do you pay much attention to tone and other oral skills? What kind of work would you typically do with a Year 7 or 8 class on oral proficiency in a week or a fortnight?
The resources you use to teach?	Can you attend any PD you like?	What are the biggest obstacles to their success in your view?	Do you teach Chinese history or show films of Chinese society? Have you ever read them poetry or looked at a Chinese painting together?
The methods and activities you use	Is a replacement teacher provided when you attend a PD?	How well do you feel you have been prepared for the work of teaching them Chinese?	Have you ever taken kids to China? If so, to where and how was it? If not, why not and would you like to?
When you assess students?	Can you introduce new ways of teaching in your own classes?	What do you draw on most for inspiration and practical help in carrying out your work?	Does your school have a sister school in China? How does that work? How do you feel about the relationship with them?
How you assess students?	Is it easy for you to use ICT with your classes? If not, what makes things difficult? How could this be overcome?	Are you well supported within your Dept/ section? By other staff? By the Leaders? By parents?	How good is your Chinese? Do you have any worries troubles with it?
When and how often, and for how long are classes for each level of Chinese scheduled?	Do you encourage students to do more Chinese outside class? And if so, how, and to do what? If not, why not?	What aspect of your teaching has most improved over the past couple of years? How did that come about?	How good is your English? Do you have any troubles with it?
		What do you think of as the weakest aspect of your teaching competence? What would you like to do about that?	Do you ever take students on Chinese excursions? Take part in the CLTAV competitions or other collaborative or competitive activities?

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