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Exploring success and sustainability in languages education in NSW Independent schools

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The current context:

What governments want...

- Desire/need for more language capability

But the reality is...

- Continual decline in number of students studying languages
- Ongoing challenges of retention beyond mandatory years

Key developments...

- Australian Curriculum for languages released
- The NSW Languages Review:
 - New K-10 Languages Curriculum framework (2 strands - Language understanding/awareness and Languages learning)
 - Primary KLA
 - Incentives for Stage 6
 - Development of a languages policy



Languages education still in crisis? (LoBianco, 2009)

This research



- **Aim:** To explore different Independent School contexts to find out what different forms of success look like

- **Aim:** To understand how successful programs manage to remain sustainable

- Four schools were selected to be case studied:
 - Observations of classes
 - Interviews with teachers, executive staff, principals
 - Collection of data regarding student numbers, style of program, timetabling etc

- Illustration of four individual cases and exploration of common themes/elements

Success in languages education

- **Prior research in this area is limited**
 - Most prior work focuses either on the attributes of the "good learner" (see for a review Norton & Toohey, 2001) or upon the attributes of the "good teacher" (Westwood, 2005)
 - **Learner Attributes:** key variables explored include cognitive aptitude, learning strategies, learning styles, personality, motivation, and anxiety (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995)

What about the Program and Context?



AFMLTA Program standards

<http://afmlta.asn.au/professional-standards/>

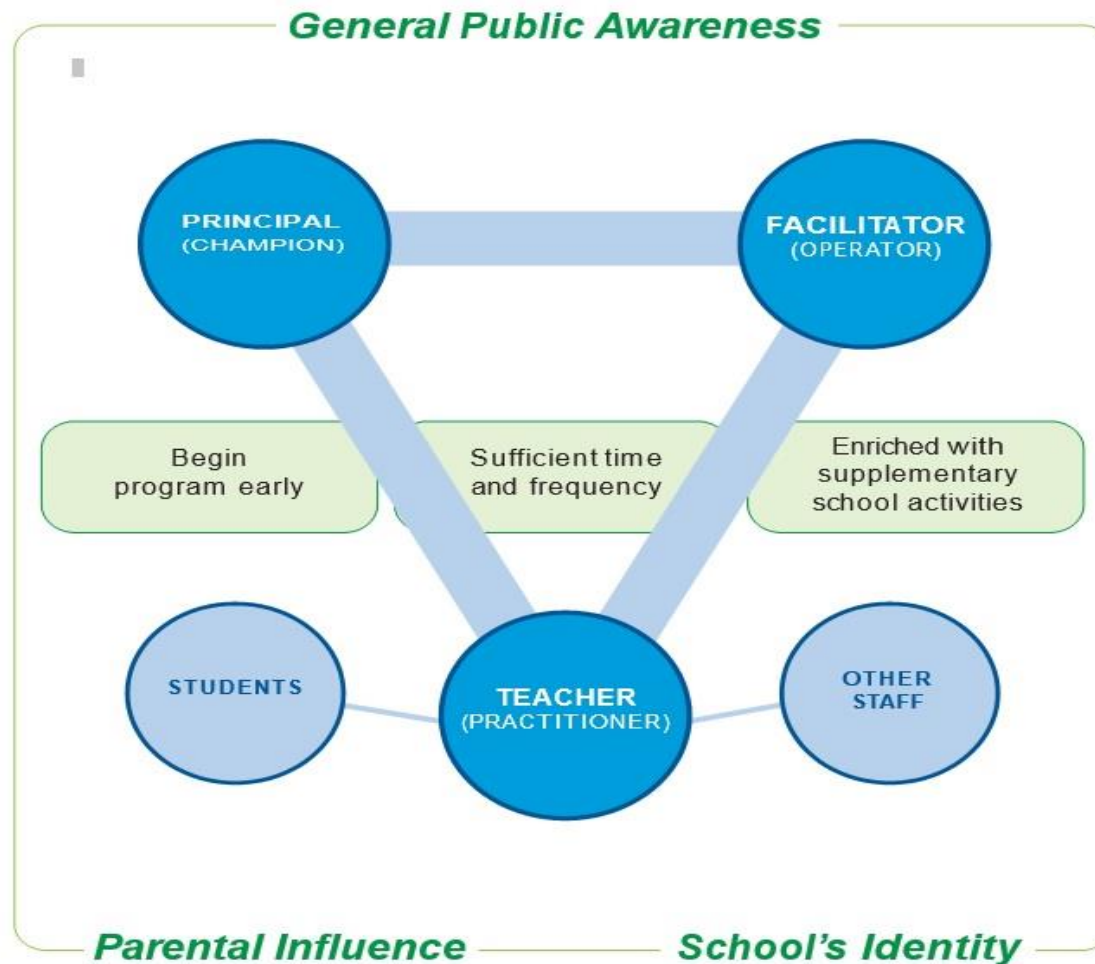
- actively valuing languages within the school culture and explicitly in school statements, planning, timetabling and resourcing
- focussing on language progression both during each year and across years
- having suitable time on task and timetabling of languages classes
- having adequate and long-term staffing (preferably more than one teacher)
- allocating dedicated languages space/ classrooms
- providing a suitable budget for resources
- recognising the practical and performance based nature of languages learning and allowing small enough class sizes to do this well
- facilitating transition into the school for new learners acknowledging different prior knowledge (AFMLTA 2005).

Key elements of a successful program : (Lindholm-leary, 2005)

- a cohesive and school-wide vision and goals for language learning
- high expectations of achievement for all learners
- availability of support and resources for all students
- effective leadership including program advocacy
- staff cohesion, collegiality and development
- funding
- language education programming that upholds current theory and best practice for language learning
- a focus on ongoing and continuous planning (Lindholm-Leary, 2005)

Sustainability (Orton et al, 2013)

Dynamics of a Quality, Sustainable Chinese Program



School one: International Grammar School (IGS)

- Co-Educational
- Inner City, Sydney
- 30 Languages staff

Key factors:

- Language Leaders – 3 leadership positions
- Whole school philosophy commitment
- Languages from pre-school
- Mandate through to year 10
- Additional language added in year 7



“ There is such a love of languages. Language is really at the centre of the school. You’d be missing out on something if you didn’t keep going with it.” - Principal

“Languages is always in the documentation, it’s in our motto, visually there’s language walls, assemblies, kids are presenting and Mcing (in Language)” – Language teacher

“the timetable- the amount of hours is value and that’s showing the whole community that (Languages) is valued” – Language teacher

“having a director who’s communicating with other areas at a high level and to have a participant in a whole school vision. Languages are there and languages have a say.” – Language teacher

School two: The Armidale School (TAS)

- Regional centre
 - All boys (secondary)
 - Co-Ed (primary)
 - Transition-12
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- Key Factors:
 - Languages “space” – dedicated building
 - Committed Teachers
 - Primary school language program (IB PYP being introduced 2015)



“You look at all of those indicators that tell you that a particular area of the school is well regarded and valued- it’s the physical environment, it’s the way the timetable operates around those subjects, it’s the flexibility given to the teacher to do things” – principal

“We make sure there are learning goals in student-friendly language, make sure they know what is going on. With the tasks we tend to not over-asses ...,we focus on enjoying the language and...it’s scaffolded.” – Language teacher

“I think there’s a synergy that operates between the school administration, people who are making decisions on timetables and resources and the like, and how successful a particular area of the school is. So there’s no doubt that Languages has been a successful area for us, and that makes decision-making about resourcing it much easier. That creates a cycle of success.” - Principal

School three: Ravenswood

- All-girls
- Suburban Sydney
- Key Factors:
 - One language mandated to end of year 9 (increasing to year 10?)
 - All students do two languages in year 7
 - Choice of six languages



“Leadership commitment to Languages is strong. We made it mandatory for every girl to study a language until Yr 9... I should have made it to the end of Yr 10” – Principal

“A little bit all the time is what you want rather than just once or twice a week – Languages teacher

“With all schools there is the issue of minimum numbers in Years 11 and 12, we do have a minimum number but they’re not too rigid with it for Languages. You need the school to understand that languages are a special case” – Languages teacher

“Having the option of ...two Asian languages and keeping the Latin which is such an important classical language and having a range of European languages , I think is wonderful” - Languages teacher

School four

- All boys
- Inner Suburbs of Sydney
- Key Factors:
 - IB program in Junior school
 - IB at senior secondary level
 - Range of languages – 3 modern and 2 ancient
 - Taster course in year 7, all students choose one language for year 8.



“Our strengths would be 1) the enthusiasm of our teachers 2) their competence 3) the fact that we build into our structure a timetable which allows kids to do two languages...”— Executive Member

“The one thing we need at the middle school level – at Year 7,8,9 level is encouragement across the board from parents and other teachers.. Given that most teachers at most schools are monolingual outside of the languages learning area.” – Languages teacher

“It’s not just a matter of (the students) reaching a certain standard. I want them to go as far as they can, within the classroom, and everyone will achieve different things but I want to take them as far as I can” – Languages teacher

Common interpretations of success

- Numerical measure/ Outcomes
- Choosing the language beyond compulsory years
- Continuing the language after school (University or career)
- Developing competence at own level
- Developing Intercultural understanding
- Developing a lifelong love of the language and culture

Common factors impacting on success

- **Time in the form of:**
 - Quantity and quality,
 - Frequency of lessons,
 - Regularity of lessons.

- **Whole School Valuing of Language Learning through:**
 - Physical space,
 - Timetabling,
 - Budgetary support,
 - Being vocal about languages being an important cornerstone of education,
 - Mandating language learning beyond the 100 hours,
 - Setting an expectation of commitment to language learning,
 - Supporting small classes,
 - Funding excursions
 - Supporting exchange programs
 - Supporting teacher professional learning.



Common factors impacting on success

- **The Teachers who are:**
 - Passionate,
 - Skilled,
 - Dedicated,
 - Enthusiastic,
 - Developing a rapport with students,
 - Making learning relevant to the learners.
- **Sufficient resourcing through:**
 - Equipment
 - Buildings
 - Technology
 - Texts and resources
- **Space**
 - Classrooms
 - Staffrooms
 - Dedicated language space
- **Leadership valuing languages including:**
 - Head of Languages,
 - Executive,
 - Principal.



Sustainability factors

- Succession planning
- Building the program at all levels of learning
- Investing in staff and infrastructure
- Incentives (University)



Discussion

- **How do you measure success in your school context?**
- **What factors impact on the success of your program?**
- **What challenges do you face in relation to sustainability?**

Where to find this resource?

Under Research on new AIS Languages website

<http://www.aisnsw.edu.au/languages>

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