



Glenfield Intermediate

Glenfield Intermediate started running a Chinese language learning programme a few years ago. From small beginnings, the programme now includes a classroom teacher who is committed to teaching the Chinese language, a language assistant, and a provisionally registered teacher who is a native speaker of Chinese. These and other initiatives are encouraging the growth in Chinese language learning – not just at Glenfield Intermediate, but in surrounding schools as well.

Developing a pathway for student learning

Glenfield Intermediate is part of an eight school cluster in the Auckland region which includes six primary schools and one college. The cluster has agreed on a long term goal to develop itself into a sustainable quality provider of Chinese language, thereby also fostering cultural understanding. The cluster is focussed on ensuring there is a pathway for students to continue their language learning between schools, making their learning less disjointed.

“I realised that we needed this programme to really run from primary school up through other levels to make it work,” says Raewyn Matthys-Morris, Principal of Glenfield Intermediate. “We want to have students coming into the school with skills already in place. Luckily we have a diverse community and progressive principals in the region who want to work together.”

“The aim within the cluster is to grow capability with other schools so we can support each other, with the ultimate aim to establish a Confucius classroom.” To support this goal, the cluster has developed a joint business plan to coordinate and support activities that increase students’ capability, knowledge, understanding and disposition towards Chinese language and culture. To keep the plan going and assess progress towards its goals, the cluster holds planning days each term.

Strong teacher support

Some of the practical applications of the cluster’s plan include strong teacher support. “Teacher capability is key in the business plan,” says Raewyn. This includes such activities as having Chinese language assistants in the schools, providing financial support for lead teachers to complete university qualifications, hosting teacher workshops, accessing the Ministry of Education’s TPD L programme and appointing a lead teacher of Chinese.

Opportunities for cultural experiences

The plan also includes support for cultural experiences for students, teachers and principals. These include such things as support for students to attend annual Chinese Language Camps and Chinese New Year celebrations in Auckland city.

Ensuring that cultural experiences are accessible for all is also an important consideration for the cluster. “Our aim is to have activities that don’t always have to cost lots of money,” says Raewyn. For example, last year Glenfield hosted events at the school, with language teachers around the area and students who are in the classes, to showcase Chinese culture.

Developing sister school relationships

The cluster also aims to develop sister school relationships with Chinese schools and set up designated Chinese language and culture learning and teaching areas in the schools.

“Developing sister school relationships will give us a depth of contact and knowledge that you can’t get from learning at home. Without that, the knowledge that students take home can be much more insular,” says Raewyn.

A day in the life of a full language immersion scholarship

Angela Clouston is Glenfield Intermediate’s Chinese Language teacher. In January 2009 Angela participated in the professional development immersion programme at Peking University, and has never looked back. That experience piqued her interest to learn more – and ensure her students learnt more – about China. Angela began teaching Chinese through the Ministry of Education’s Hao Kit, but thought she would take it one step further and applied for a full language immersion scholarship at Peking University.



The value of full immersion

Angela describes her time at Peking University as hugely important for her language development. "It was a great experience. I went from the basics to full immersion."

During her time at Peking, the day started at 8.30am and went to 12.30pm, leaving the afternoon free to practise her language skills. "There were lots of opportunities to practise what we had learnt after classes finished; we got out into the community to speak with the locals."

"I really got so much more from the full immersion experience than I could ever get from a text book. I learnt more in one month than in one year of night classes."

A different perspective

The experience emphasised to Angela the difference in teaching styles and the importance of teaching methodology in the New Zealand classroom.

"The experience of learning was quite different from the way we teach in New Zealand. I had to get used to a way of teaching which was very teacher directed. It relied very much on rote learning, with writing, singing, calligraphy, speaking and reading. I also learned that the teachers had very different assumptions from us about our nature and rate of learning."

The language programme included the assistance of a language buddy and involved an assessment at the end. "We had a buddy assigned to us who we could talk to and who helped with characters and pronunciation. At the end we had an exam where we stood up at the front of the class to sing and we also had to write a story about our life."

Networking with fellow teachers

An added advantage to the experience was going with fellow New Zealand language teachers. "Teachers from all over New Zealand came along so it was also a good way to get contacts and continue networking when we get home. We were all in the same boat so it was really useful to be able to share our experiences, learn together, and keep up the communication when we got back."

Ongoing learning

Angela has since sought to develop her language ability and proficiency in language teaching by undertaking the TPD L programme. "This programme has been a big challenge, but one that has helped me learn so much more about approaches to teaching Chinese language. It's been really useful to get the advice and support, as well as the learning opportunities, that this programme affords."

Cultural benefits

Angela says that over the time she's been teaching, she's seen the students from her class be more culturally responsive outside the classroom. "I think they have more awareness that people are different and the things they do are different. They're now having conversations with people in the community, such as ordering food in Chinese. It's fantastic to see students have these authentic interactions where they can use their language meaningfully."

Tips

- Focus on developing teacher capability. Apply for any professional development and resources that are available. Support teachers to go on the Ministry of Education's TPD L courses to ensure they keep developing their language skills.
- Encourage awareness and support for Chinese language learning across the school. Use opportunities like the Principal's delegation and the professional development programme at Peking to get more school leaders interested in Chinese.
- Find learning opportunities for your students that help engage them with Chinese culture. See what events are being undertaken in your community, whether language camps or cultural celebrations. Invite people from your local school community to help.