

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Increasing language participation in secondary schools: Cherrybrook Technology High School

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



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Introduction

This case study considers how classroom practices and school factors are encouraging language participation at Cherrybrook Technology High School. This is one of a series of case studies looking at classroom practice and language participation in NSW government secondary schools.

Background

Cherrybrook Technology High School is a comprehensive secondary school located in north-west Sydney. It is the largest public secondary school in NSW, with an enrolment of almost 2,000 students. It has an above average Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA¹) value and around 60% of students are from a language background other than English (LBOTE). The school consistently achieves NAPLAN results substantially above all schools, and results close to and above similar schools (My School 2016).

The school currently offers Chinese, French, German² and Japanese from Year 7 through to Year 12. In Year 7, all students study two languages and then choose to continue with one of these languages in Year 8. In Years 9 and 10, students can choose to continue with their Year 8 elected language, or elect to begin a new language. In senior school, students are offered the choice of Beginners, Continuers and/or Extension courses in Japanese and French, and Continuers courses in German and Chinese. Many students also choose to study background languages through the Saturday School of Community Languages.

Students in Year 8 at Cherrybrook Technology High School are twice as likely to nominate languages as one of their favourite subjects than Year 8 students at other schools. LBOTE students at Cherrybrook Technology High School are more likely to state that languages is one of their favourite subjects compared to non-LBOTE students. Year 8 students at Cherrybrook Technology High School are also twice as likely to state languages are one of the three subjects at school that they learn the most in (Department of Education [VALID] data 2016).



¹ ICSEA is a measure of school socio-educational advantage created by ACARA.

² German is currently being phased out and will not be offered from 2018

Classroom practices

The classroom practices that seem to be particularly relevant to ensuring high participation rates in languages at Cherrybrook Technology High School are highly structured teaching practices and high expectations of students.

Highly structured teaching practices

At Cherrybrook Technology High School, all language teaching is structured in the same way, irrespective of the individual language being taught. All language classes focus on the same classroom practice, at the same time, in the same year. For example, in Year 7, all language students have three language classes over a two week timetable cycle and all classes emphasise skill development. In Year 8, students study their chosen language for six periods over two weeks and emphasis is placed on skill development and basic language content across all languages. There is an expectation that all students will achieve greater levels of communication skill in their chosen language whilst also enhancing their cultural understanding. In Years 9 and 10, all language courses build on the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills developed in Year 8 and each language program offers opportunities for students to spend time overseas. All language students in Years 9 and 10 are also offered the opportunity to participate in email exchanges and collaborative projects with Cherrybrook's sister schools in China, France, Germany and Japan. In Years 10 and 11, students across all languages typically spend 2 to 3 weeks at a partner school extending their communication skills, as well as nurturing their intercultural knowledge.

Interestingly, while students are given a choice as to which language they would like to study, their first choice cannot always be accommodated. This would appear to be counter-intuitive to increasing language participation, but it does not appear to have a negative impact at Cherrybrook Technology High School given the numbers of student studying languages. Some students mentioned that at first they were unhappy about not getting their first language choice, but most of them did not mind in the long term. This suggests that the quality of the teaching and the structured practices that are in place become more important over time than the choice of language.

High expectations

Cherrybrook Technology High School is a high performing school and has high expectations for both students and staff. In 2016, eight students at Cherrybrook Technology High School scored Australian Tertiary Admission Ranks (ATARs) greater than 99, and 100 students scored ATARs greater than 90. In recent years, students from the school gained a first in the state in HSC Japanese Extension, and first and second in HSC Japanese Continuers. High performance fosters a culture of

high expectations at the school. For example, according to the principal, knowledge of good HSC results in languages filters down to younger students. Many of these students subsequently enrol in languages, knowing the potential exists to perform well, and that high expectations are set by highly committed and experienced languages teachers.

The school offers 'languages extension group' in Year 8. Certain language students are identified by the school as having an aptitude and interest in languages and are offered the opportunity to be part of an extension group. Letters are sent to parents explaining that their child has been selected for this group. The extension group follows the normal Year 8 language program but also receives another program of additional content. Being invited to be part of the extension group not only creates high expectations among both students and parents, but also acts as an extrinsic motivator to keep students interested in languages, and inspires them to continue to participate in languages in Years 9 and 10.



School-based practices

While structured teaching practices and high expectations were identified as important factors contributing to language participation at Cherrybrook Technology High School, some school-based practices are also seen as significant in increasing participation in languages. These include strong faculty leadership, and embedding languages within the broader school community.

Strong faculty leadership

One of the school-based practices at Cherrybrook Technology High School that appears to be contributing to participation in languages, is strong faculty leadership. Since the school was established in 1992, it has had a dedicated languages faculty, led by a Head Teacher, Languages. The consistency of program delivery has been supported by stability in leadership, with only two people holding the Head Teacher, Languages position over this period.

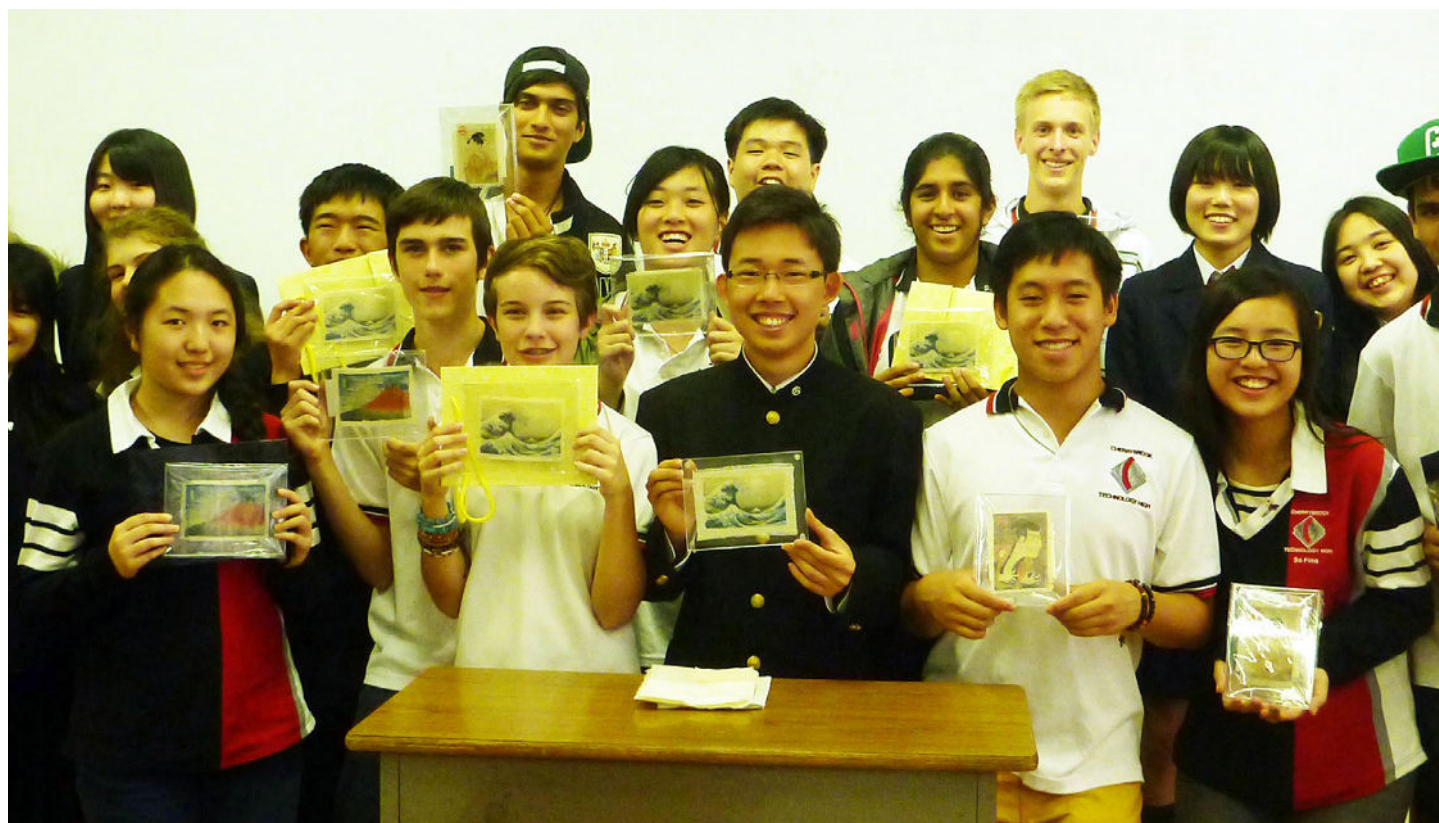
One of the benefits of strong faculty leadership at Cherrybrook Technology High School is the advocacy for languages that this affords. The head teacher has the vision, commitment and authority to share, activate, drive and monitor language programs across the school. For example, the head teacher visits all Year 8 language classes every year to ensure that every student knows how and when to sign up for elective languages in Years 9 and 10. The head teacher also advocates for languages with the principal to ensure that languages classes can be run despite class sizes that may be smaller than

for other subjects. She is involved in all aspects of recruitment processes, ensuring the employment of quality teachers, even those in temporary positions. Finally, the head teacher is also instrumental in creating partnerships with schools in China, Japan, France and Germany to enable language students to enhance their language learning in authentic contexts.

Embedding languages in the school

Cherrybrook Technology High School has successfully embedded languages across the school, ensuring that languages are valued not just by the languages faculty, but also by the school community more broadly. For example, each year the school holds a highly-valued and greatly anticipated multicultural day for the entire school. At the multicultural day, not only are different cultures celebrated, but students also listen to talks about the value of learning another language, and the opportunities language learning can bring.

A conscious effort is also made by the languages faculty to incorporate staff from other faculties into languages activities. For example, whenever there is an overseas excursion for language students, a member of staff from another faculty is included as one of the chaperones. The principal is also involved in many of the activities of the languages faculty, including visiting all the school's sister schools and regularly hosting BBQs for exchange students. Finally, the school also involves the broader community where possible, for example through its close relationship with the Cherrybrook Chinese Community Association.



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