Exploring Effective and Sustainable Language Programs in NSW Independent Schools

A Snapshot of Language Learning in 2014

Dr Ruth Fielding
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About the Author

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“Effective languages and cultures programs are actively valued within the school culture. Languages and cultures teaching and learning are valued explicitly in schools’ statements and implicitly in the schools’ planning, timetabling and resourcing for languages. Schools actively acknowledge and foster connections between languages and other curriculum areas.” (AFMLTA, 2005)

Acknowledgements

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As Australia continues to explore how language learning can, and should, feature in the education of young Australians, we increasingly see the importance of language and intercultural skills appearing in the discussion about the skills that Australia's school graduates should develop. There has been much media coverage in both Australia (see http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/06/12/4024019.htm) and the UK (see http://www.theguardian.com/education/0014/jun/19/learning-language-key-to-economic-success) indicating an urgent need for languages to become an integral part of all students' education.

We have seen over the past four years the development of an Australian Curriculum shape paper and syllabuses for languages. This has prompted schools, jurisdictions and state governments to consider what language learning should entail in Australian schools, how many hours language learning should comprise, and what quality languages education looks like. Yet no agreement has been reached nationally about a base level of languages education, or the most effective modes of delivery for high quality languages education.

The literature on Languages Education indicates that language learning has been in crisis in Australian Education for some years (Board of Studies New South Wales, 2013; Lo Bianco & Gvozdenko, 2006). Knowledge of a language is often cited by politicians and policy makers as of essential importance in children's education although no policy implementation has been forthcoming to mandate the study of languages in Australia (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2012). In his 2009 report Lo Bianco indicated that changes were needed to ensure the success of languages education (Lo Bianco, 2009). He suggested the need to close programs which deliver less than one hour of language per week and replace them with more bilingual and immersion programs. He also suggested that it may be wise to focus on seven key languages in Australian education (Lo Bianco, 2009).
ACARA have written and released curricula for eleven languages in the Australian Curriculum with another four languages in development (Australian Curriculum 2014), and politicians have cited an aim of having 40% of all school students by 2020 leaving school with proficiency in a language (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2012). Yet implementation of a mandate for language learning has not occurred and children already enrolled at school in Year 6 will be those graduates in 2020 supposedly leaving school with proficiency in a language. Language study is only mandatory for 100 hours between Years 7 and 10 in New South Wales, and this will not enable learners to reach the desired increase in language study through to the end of school. BOSTES (The Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards) are citing bilingual education as one means to achieving the Federal Government’s aims for increased language learners matriculating from school with proficiency in a language by embedding content and language learning in the primary school (BOSTES, 2013). For example one proposal states: “New BOSTES-developed modules will support the delivery of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programs in primary schools” (BOSTES, 2013, p.7). Yet this may not lead to improved retention of language learners beyond the mandatory years, without further incentives at the matriculation level.

To achieve the aims of improved and increased language learning across Australia, a robust and ongoing education in a language is a necessity.

**Strong programs operating throughout Years K-12 are needed to allow students the access to ongoing, sustained learning in a language.**

In order to explore how successful languages programs operate and how schools manage to sustain long-term programs, the Association of Independent Schools (AIS) NSW planned to undertake research within independent schools in NSW to explore factors which make languages programs both successful and sustainable. This research comprises case studies of four schools across NSW who have operated languages programs in their schools for a number of years.
Successful Language Programs

Prior work exploring languages education programs has indicated that it is difficult to identify the specific elements making a languages education program successful. Very little empirical research exists exploring what it means to have a successful language program or a sustainable language program. 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). Much of the work places the onus on the learner as the only player in the learning process, equating success in language learning with individual learner motivation (see for a comprehensive review Masgoret & Gardner, 2002) with key variables that have historically been explored including elements such as cognitive aptitude, learning strategies, learning styles, personality, motivation, and anxiety. All of these elements place responsibility with the learner (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). While the learner undoubtedly plays a large role in their own success at language learning, we cannot deny the important role played by the teachers, the program and the learning environment. Yet there is very little empirical research evidence showing what makes a good program for languages learning.

Nevertheless various professional teaching groups have made attempts to define success in languages education. They have highlighted the need to explore what occurs at the program level in order to understand success in languages learning. The small amount of prior work in this area shows that it is not simply what happens at an individual teacher and classroom level that leads to a successful and sustainable program. It is also the whole school approach to languages learning.
The national peak body for language teachers in Australia - The Australian Federation of Modern Language Teacher Associations (AFMLTA) developed a set of professional standards for what it called “accomplished” languages teaching (AFMLTA, 2005). In this document they identified what is considered “high standard” for a languages program.

The **key elements** for a successful languages program identified in the program standards were programs which were:

1. actively valuing languages within the school culture and explicitly in school statements, planning, timetabling and resourcing
2. focussing on language progression both during each year and across years
3. having suitable time on task and timetabling of languages classes
4. having adequate and long-term staffing (preferably more than one teacher)
5. allocating dedicated languages space/ classrooms
6. providing a suitable budget for resources
7. recognising the practical and performance based nature of languages learning and allowing small enough class sizes to do this well
8. facilitating transition into the school for new learners acknowledging different prior knowledge (AFMLTA 2005).
Similarly, Browett’s (2009, p.5) report on learning languages in the primary school identified some key elements which she believed were essential for a successful program in the primary school context. She listed the following elements:

• Languages programs have a stated rationale, purpose and clearly defined outcomes that are developed by teachers and the school leadership, owned by all staff and communicated by them to students and parents.

• Time is allocated for frequent and regular languages lessons and resources are allocated and distributed to languages learning on the basis of its being a key area of learning.

• Choice of language reflects the local context, availability of teachers and resources, student background and the need for program continuity.

• Whenever possible schools work together to improve continuity across levels of schooling, so as to retain students’ engagement and promote retention of languages learning, particularly at transition points.

• Languages programs are an integral part of the wider curriculum and create pathways to higher levels of intercultural learning. Languages teachers work within the school’s overall curriculum context. Their work is supported by all staff.

• Languages learning is meaningful, relevant and applied, so that students have intrinsic motivation to continue learning. The languages and cultures that students already have are acknowledged and valued.

• Teaching methods and strategies suited to students’ enthusiasm and interest at each level of schooling are clearly articulated. The relevance of the language to students, and evidence of their progress in the language are used as indicators of successful programs.

• The school encourages all its teachers to participate in the sort of ongoing professional learning in languages education that develops their own linguistic, cultural and pedagogical proficiencies.

• The languages teacher is a valued member of the school and has a collegial community with whom to develop skills and pedagogies. Time for teachers to plan together and to make connections across the school is planned and allocated. Languages teachers are located in teaching teams so that they can share information about effective teaching practices and participate in whole school curriculum planning.

• A strong profile for the school’s languages program is developed through the involvement of members of the school community. When there is pride in and ownership of the program by the school’s community, languages programs are strengthened.
Internationally it is more difficult to find explicit standards for successful languages programs, but there is a comprehensive review of program conditions that lead to successful dual language (or bilingual) education set out by Lindholm-Leary (2005) which can be extrapolated more broadly to all styles of language learning program.

She identifies the key elements of a successful program as including:

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

Therefore it can be seen that key elements of good bilingual programs can be understood more broadly to apply also to successful languages education programs in many various forms using the broader terms developed above.

One UK study sought to explore success in language learning and delivery at primary level (McLachlan, 2009) and identified some key factors influencing success based on a review of a range of explorations of earlier British attempts to make languages mandatory at the primary school level. McLachlan said: “success of the primary entitlement depends to a great extent on the availability of a sustainable supply of appropriately trained teachers; progression in language learning and transfer to the secondary school are interrelated, and central to any meaningful attainment in language proficiency; continuum of planning across the primary and secondary communities is crucial if the initiative is to succeed” (2009, p 186). A similar study conducted by Hunt et al (2005) indicated that...

*the key factors leading to success in primary languages education were the style of the program, the quality of the teacher training and the availability of continuity of learning for students into secondary school.*
At a lesson level Conway, Richards, Harvey and Roskvist (2012) suggest particular strategies for successful language lessons using a framework called EESR – which they suggest is a useful frame for successful lessons.

1. Establish engagement
   a. gain learners’ attention
   b. provide opportunities for learners to work from known to new through e.g. revision, personalising, asking questions
   c. provide clear transitions/links

2. Ensure learners can complete the task
   a. provide sufficient language exposure e.g. through revision of language, repetition and clarification of known and new vocabulary and structures
   b. give clear, staged instructions
   c. check instructions
   d. organise resources

3. Sustain engagement
   a. monitor learners: provide encouragement, feedback, clarification, timing
   b. notice learning

4. Reflect on learning
   a. provide opportunities for teacher and learner reflection on successes and weaknesses
   b. provide closure to activity/lesson

Table 1: EESR Framework (Conway et al, 2012)

So, it can be seen that there is a small amount of prior work highlighting the need for a supportive program across the whole school for languages learning at the classroom level to be successful.

*Key elements identified in strong programs are a school-wide vision for language learning, high expectations, school level support (both financial and time), and a need for support at all levels of school decision-making.*
In addition to exploring what it means to have a successful languages program it is also important to look at what it is to have a sustainable languages program, as a successful program is only useful to the students enrolled in it if it is likely to stay in existence in the longer term, to allow students continuity in their language learning.

**Sustainable Languages Programs**

Some of the key elements from the literature on successful languages education also have an impact upon what it means to have a sustainable languages program. For example key factors which apply to both success and sustainability are the need for a school-wide vision, goals and ongoing and continuous planning (Lindholm-Leary, 2005) and the need for adequate long-term staffing (AFMLTA, 2005). In addition, in recent years within the Australian context the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) has identified some elements that sustainable languages programs commonly feature (AEF, 2014a). The AEF identifies that sustainable languages programs have a clear rationale, clear purpose and clearly defined outcomes (AEF, 2014a). They also identify that a sustainable languages program has sufficient resources and clear teaching strategies that are suitable for each level of schooling (AEF, 2014a). One key factor they identify is that...

*sustainable languages programs move beyond being integrated and move into being “incorporated” by which they mean “language permeates the life of a school and its community, and that there is a pride and ownership of the program by that school’s community”* (AEF, 2014a, resource 38).

The AEF in a further document, state that “sustainable” languages programs teach language intensively throughout Years K to 12 (i.e. throughout both primary and secondary schooling and that language is viewed in such programs as central to their internationalisation aims (AEF, 2014b, Resource 41). They also state that ideally all teachers in the school would be involved in a sustainable program; that students in such programs develop local and global skills; and that intercultural understanding is seen in these schools as core learning (AEF, 2014b, resource 41).
Orton, Pavlidis, Ainalis and McRae (2013), in their work looking specifically at Chinese language programs in the Australian context, identify the key factors in creating a sustainable Chinese program as being: general public awareness, parental interest and involvement, and the belief that languages form part of the school’s identity. They identify a number of key personnel and roles which require dedication for a sustainable program:

- A clear, deep recognition by the Principal of the educational importance of language learning and regard for Chinese as a language abundantly able to effect this development.

- Relentless championing of the program by the Principal in all spheres of engagement inside and outside the school: promoting it to all stakeholders; moving it into the mainstream school profile; protecting it, and even privileging it where deemed necessary, with respect to money, time and staffing.

- Hardworking, flexible, intelligent teachers, willing and interested in working regularly beyond their comfort zone, undergoing formal and informal re-training, and reconsidering deeply held, often hitherto unexamined assumptions.

- An enthusiastic, energetic and able person at senior level (such as a Deputy Principal or a Head of Languages) who can work between the other two levels: appreciating the demand on the teachers and able to engage with them over the nitty-gritty of their day-to-day matters, including supporting them in team building with other staff; and also capable of working with the Principal to get parents and staff on side with the program and with its special aspects, such as a China sojourn, special school events, and changes to what have hitherto been routines and norms.”
Orton et al (2013, P7) frame the key components of a sustainable program in the following diagram:

**Dynamics of a Quality Sustainable Chinese Program**

**General Public Awareness**

- **Principal (Champion)**
  - Begin program early

- **Facilitator (Operator)**
  - Sufficient time and frequency
  - Enriched with supplementary school activities

- **Teacher (Practitioner)**

- **Students**

- **Other Staff**

*Orton et al (2013, p7)*

As this diagram illustrates, a successful program generally involves many committed staff members and a whole school approach. Orton et al (2013) argue that it is not sufficient for there to be one champion of languages in a school. As shown in this diagram the Principal is a key player in the promotion of the program and in the expansion of a whole school approach, but in addition another high level person is needed to facilitate the successful planning of languages at an operational level in addition to the language teacher or teachers themselves.

It is clear therefore that research into why programs of language study are successful or sustainable are few and that although there are system documents or professional association documents which offer guidelines, the factors have not been explored through extensive research. The common thread amongst the guidelines are the importance of a whole school approach, with language teaching reflecting what happens in the rest of the school and with a whole school commitment to the importance of language learning (AEF, 2014c). This current project takes steps forward in the field to explore four case study contexts of schools with long-running languages programs, using the previously developed frameworks as valuable background tools. It is important, during a time when languages are repeatedly held up as necessary in our nation's schooling, to explore how schools might be doing this well and in a sustainable manner to develop some guidelines for the future of languages education.
methodology

In order to explore what teachers and school executive staff believe it is that makes their school languages program successful, four Independent Schools in NSW were identified to participate as case study participants for the research. The key aims in this research were to explore what different models of success may look like, to explore the common elements in defining success in language learning in NSW independent schools, and to identify common areas of support that teachers and schools believe makes a difference in developing a successful school languages program.

Interviews

Teachers and Executive staff in each school answered questions within informal interviews. Interview Questions marked * are taken from the AFMLTA (2005) Professional Standards for the Accomplished Teaching of Languages and Cultures from their section which identifies program standards. Additional questions were added by the researcher. These questions served as a guide for a semi-structured interview.
Interview Questions

- How would you define success in language learning? or How would you define a successful School Languages program?
- What factors/elements are needed in a school to foster that success?
- What would you identify as the strengths and weaknesses of the languages program in your school?
- How does the school demonstrate that it values the learning of languages and cultures? *
- How does the school demonstrate and foster connections between languages and cultures and other curriculum areas?*
- How would you say the school values languages in comparison to other curriculum areas?
- How is the programme planned to build on learners’ knowledge across the years of schooling?*
- How does the school support sustained language learning over a number of years?*
- How do you (as an individual) support sustained language learning over a number of years?*
- How does the school decide what is adequate time for language learning? *
- Do you believe that this is sufficient time for language learning and/or what, in your opinion, would be the minimum amount of time (hours/ week or compulsory years) needed for language learning?
- How does the school make adequate time available for language teaching and ensure frequent and regular language lessons?*
- Do you think there are any improvements to the time and frequency that would make language learning more successful?
- How do staffing levels for languages in the school affect the language program?*
- Do you see any challenges with staffing a languages program adequately?
- How do staffing decisions in the school have an impact on the teachers'/ your work and the presence and visibility of languages in the school?*
- What space is made available for the teaching and learning of languages in your school?
- How does this affect the nature of the program?*
- How does the school decide what is an adequate budget for languages learning?*
- What resources does the school make available for languages learning?*
- How do these decisions affect language learning in the school?*
- How does the school decide on class sizes and class groupings for language learning?*
- How do these decisions affect language learning in the school?*
- How does the school promote language and culture learning to the community?*
- Does your language program have a rationale?
- How does your language program measure its outcomes/ success?
- What do you view as “quality teaching” in languages?
- Are there any other factors which you think influence the success (or could improve the success) of the language program in this school?
- If you could think of one thing you need to make languages work better in your school what would that be?
Lesson Observation

Lessons were also observed across a range of year groups to see how language learning takes place in each school context. At least two full days was spent in each school, enabling the researcher to observe lessons across a range of stages, speak extensively to languages staff and executive, and to understand the running of the languages program. In some schools this meant observing a number of different languages and year groups, and speaking to up to ten staff members.

Due to the varying size and scope of the programs in each school, there were observations of up to 10 lessons per school, across different year groups ranging from pre-school and kindergarten through to Year 12 and extension classes. The schools included in the study represent a broad range of contexts, from inner city to regional, from co-educational to single sex schools. In this way, we hope to represent the possibilities for successful language learning in a range of different contexts and to explore what types of success may be possible in different types and styles of independent schooling.
School 1 is a co-educational and secular independent school in the inner city of Sydney, offering education from Pre-school to Year 12. It has a particular focus upon languages with a bilingual mode of delivery from pre-school onwards. In the secondary school students continue with their primary school language and also select another (third) language to start as a beginner.

1.1 Contextual Factors Impacting upon the Program

This school is located in an inner city urban location, which means there is limited physical space, and as a result, limited classroom space. As a school with a particular language focus there are a large number of languages staff (over 30), and several executive roles for language leadership - a Director of Languages, a Head of High School Languages and a Head of Primary Languages. There is a whole school commitment to a languages philosophy. The school motto of Unity through Diversity embraces language and cultural diversity as being at the heart of the school belief system. The school was founded upon language learning (using immersion) being the cornerstone of this school’s educational goals, and therefore language learning is embedded within the school's planning, decision-making, timetabling, and is considered the key factor differentiating this school from others.

1.2 Languages

Languages are taught from pre-school. The website says: “The daily program in Early Learning includes a 30 minute language lesson in either French, German, Italian or Japanese. Language is natural and authentic, and is absorbed through revision and immersion in songs, rhymes and games around theme areas, facilitating good pronunciation and retention”. Parents indicate a preference for which language they would like their child to study and the school tries to accommodate these requests. There are limits set on how many students can study each language, and therefore some students may end up studying their second choice language if one language receives many more requests than the other three. Quality of teaching delivery through suitable class sizes takes precedence over accommodating all requests. In the high school children take up a further language with the opportunity to add Chinese or Spanish to their repertoire.
### 1.3 Structure of the Program

Upon enrolment children are entered into a stream for French, German, Italian or Japanese. All students continue to study that second language (French, Japanese, German or Italian) to the end of Year 10. New students entering the school at Year 7, join a beginner level class in one second language. Only one language is offered as a beginners course for the Year 7 cohort and this language may differ from year to year according to teacher availability, student numbers and timetabling.

All students in Years 7 and 8 study a third language (currently Chinese or Spanish) at beginner level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>No. of Classes</th>
<th>Lesson Length/ Lesson Time</th>
<th>Multiple Level/ Course Offerings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FRENCH</strong></td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30 mins per day</td>
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<td></td>
<td>K-6</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>K = 40 mins per day</td>
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<td>Yrs 1-6 = 80 mins per day</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40 min lesson</td>
<td>Beginners/Continuers</td>
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<td>Beginners/Continuers/ Extension</td>
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<td></td>
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### 1.3 Structure of the Program

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<th>Year Level</th>
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<th>No. of Classes</th>
<th>Lesson Length/Lesson Time</th>
<th>Multiple Level/Course Offerings</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Preschool</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>30 mins per day</td>
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<td></td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>K = 40 mins per day</td>
<td>Beginners/Continuers</td>
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<td>Yrs 1-6 = 80 mins per day</td>
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Retention

The underlying beliefs held by the executive about the aims of education in their school indicate that the experience of language learning for each individual child is more important, on the whole, than the levels of retention through to Year 12.

Through interviews with staff, it is clear that the school has strong levels of retention through to Year 12.

Nevertheless some teachers and executive would like to see higher levels of retention through to matriculation, as one of the measures of the success of the program.

One executive member indicated that retention levels will always vary from year to year, with different student preferences: “It depends on the year group. We’ve been tracking about 50% of the cohort through to Year 11 and 12 and this year we have a smaller cohort, but it just depends, that it turns out they’ve gone for the maths and sciences, but we’ve had very good numbers the last few years going through...”

The school indicates that while they acknowledge retention into Years 11 and 12 as one measure of success, for them it is not the most important measure of success. Fostering a love of languages is placed above retention in the school’s vision for success. The school acknowledge that in the NSW context often languages aren’t selected at HSC because they are particularly academically challenging. Often students are focused upon university entry scores and so despite being committed to language learning, they sometimes select subjects that they feel will place them more strongly for university.

In terms of the retention of students through to Year 12, all teachers acknowledge the impact of the Australian Tertiary Admissions Ranking upon subject selection, and the pressure students feel to make the right choices to give them the opportunity for the best ranking possible. While this might incorporate misunderstanding about the nature of the calculation it nevertheless has an impact upon subject selection when students reach Year 11.
1.4 Staff

The school has an extensive languages staff. There are three leadership roles in the department: A Director of Languages, a Head of High School Languages and a Head of Primary School Languages. There are over 30 languages teachers. The size of the department undoubtedly gives the rest of the school a strong message about the value of language learning – it is a large department with a large, new staffroom. The space allocated to the staffroom is identified by the teachers as something which makes them feel valued and shows the rest of the school that languages are valued. The staff are very highly regarded for their language skill and teaching skill.

Language Leaders

The three leadership roles have different representative functions within the executive of the school:

**Director of Languages:** Representing languages at the leadership level, influencing decision-making in the school, managing staffing and budget.

**Head of High School Languages:** Managing the secondary school languages staff, providing mentoring and professional learning for the languages staff, delivering specific training and development for teachers in this unique setting. Preparing and supporting teachers to deliver teaching at both primary and secondary levels, encouraging all teachers to continually reflect and improve their practice.

**Head of Primary School Languages:** Managing the primary school languages staff, overseeing programming and implementation, assisting teachers to develop their skills, bridging the gap from early years into primary, professional development of teachers as per the role of head of high school languages.

The languages leadership team identify that their strength is in having a clear and shared vision for the languages program with a lot of ongoing dialogue between the leaders, so that all three leaders present a united front to the staff. They believe it is important for the leaders of languages to ensure that teachers don't need to spend time trying to meet a different set of requirements for different managers, so that teachers can focus upon their teaching. One of the leaders said: “We have a clear transparent Languages department. Expectations are very clear and consistent.”

“Teachers need to be able to focus on the teaching and learning, not on having to second guess what you want from them”.
Language Teachers

There are over thirty languages teachers in the school. The language teachers believe that there are some skills which are of more importance in this setting because of the style of education taking place – specifically immersion and extension classes. Teachers need to be sufficiently competent in the language to be able to deliver immersion lessons, but also have the education skills to be able to plan appropriate lessons for the NSW education context. The school also likes to employ teachers who can teach across both primary and secondary languages. When teachers come to the school without the sufficient skills, the school provides tailored professional development to assist the teachers to develop skills across the curriculum years. One of the executive staff said:

“Having teachers that are trained in languages and have experience but also are open to what the NSW and Australian education system is, is important. One of the key factors is the ability of the teacher to engage with the students and if there is a lack of understanding of what the education system is then barriers can go up. The quality of the teacher and teaching is very important. We have a mixture of overseas trained and trained here, but the important thing is constant professional development. We’re learners just like our students. Being flexible is a key element.”

Teacher quality and flexibility was identified as key factors for success. In addition, the context of the school has led to a desire for teachers to be able to teach across all levels of education in order to ensure smooth transition and continuity of language learning.

“Being able to teach across primary and secondary is important and being able to teach across levels, from beginner through to extension.”

The school executive are fully aware that it can be difficult, or impossible to find teachers with the appropriate training and experience across levels, particularly across primary and secondary levels, and they have put in place measures to address that once teachers are hired. The school acknowledges that it is rare to find teachers with all the required skills, and therefore plans to support teachers to develop the additional skills they need once employed at the school. One of the head teachers of languages said: “A lot of my time is mentoring. A lot of time is spent PDing staff on how to teach at different levels”.

Having three lead teachers for languages results in there being scope for these leaders to mentor new staff, and play an ongoing role in supporting staff to develop their skills. The heads of department identify strongly that all teachers in their school are expected to be ongoing learners, and that the skill of teaching well across all years is never completely accomplished.
1.5 Exploring Success in this Context

The teachers and executive in this school believe that there are many different forms of success. These forms of success range from the measurable outcomes, through to the experience the students have and the feelings that they develop about learning languages. Several of the teachers rated how the child feels more highly than the tangible language outcomes in exams or external assessment. For example one teacher said that the ultimate aim is to end up with confidence and intercultural understanding. The teacher said that success is: “a child that feels confident with their languages and also has an intercultural understanding of the language that they've studied”.

Another teacher and leader said that there are a range of forms of success ranging from the marks and results through to more affective outcomes: “There are different measures of success. Of course there’s your straight numerical measure. What are we getting for the HSC. So we can’t ignore that. That question is always asked. But I think we’ve learnt as a school that that isn’t generally what we’re here for. We really and truly are here for the kids.”

That is not to say that the school doesn’t value academic success. The teachers acknowledged that they aim for strong results, but not at the expense of the students’ enjoyment, development, and keeping each student’s long-term happiness and success in mind.

The academic side is acknowledged, but it is also acknowledged that to reach a high standard in languages can be more difficult than for other curriculum areas: “We do have some really good successes at HSC. We always have a good number of band sixes, and... we have to look at who gets the band 5 and 6. It’s not about just the band 6. The band 6 is good, band 5 is also quite a bit of a trek to get for the language student because it’s a very academic subject.”

However, the academic outcome of success is counter-balanced by a belief that the love of language and culture is much more valuable in the long-term:

“The biggest success for us is that these kids literally live the language. They love it, they go overseas after. They follow up with it. More and more are getting into this International Studies because they want to be able to study something at uni but they don’t want to get rid of these languages. They really can see that it’s an asset. And that’s one success.”
The students’ investment in their own learning of language is one indicator cited as a factor showing success in the school. The students’ desire to travel is one indicator of their enjoyment, but also the relationship that the students develop with their teachers is identified as playing a large role in the students feeling invested in continuing with the language throughout their school years. Although earlier statements about retention indicated that it might not be that high, one teacher believes the retention in this school is strong. This teacher indicates that because the children learn the language as they grow up at the school, so they develop strong bonds with their teachers which make it difficult for them to feel they could give up on their language learning: “*We have good retention numbers into Year 11 and 12 and that is a measure of success. I think the fact that kids almost feel guilty about giving up their languages... they understand themselves that they've invested in this language ... They feel a bond. They feel a belongingness to that cultural group even if it's not their own family group.*”

It is acknowledged in this school’s ethos that the individual child is important, and fostering their individual strengths and passions are of the utmost value. One teacher indicated that this is part of the reason behind not focussing as single-mindedly upon HSC results as the only measure of success. There is an acknowledgement that some students just do not fit into the standardised exam process, and that it’s still possible to see them as successful language learners even if they don’t aim for a band 6 at HSC level. This teacher measures student success as being able to express themselves and having meaningful ideas that they can express in the language. She said:

“I measure success when I see students yapping away to their exchange students and they’re very comfortable, they’re very happy and I can hear them speaking very well and they’ve got something to say.”

She also said they may not end up being the band 6 performers because “...their interest doesn’t lie in meeting the criteria of an exam.”

In the primary years there was more focus upon the individual skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) when the teachers identified what they look for in their students to deem them successful. However, when talking about the outcome at the culmination of learning more holistic outcomes were cited such as life skills, and confidence to be able to speak and feel comfortable in the target country rather than measurable fluency or outcomes in the language.
“We expect them to develop across the four different skills. I would expect that the skill they will be most proficient in is the listening, and they would be able to understand a lot. The speaking depends on the child. Some will be more confident earlier in the primary years, others when they get to secondary school.”

The value of useful everyday skills was highlighted as a successful outcome for a primary program:

“Simple everyday life skills are what I would expect from them [successful students].”

Affective outcomes were also cited such as feeling comfortable and natural in the language. One teacher said her aim for the primary school learners was: “Communication and feeling comfortable in the country...and it would feel natural.”

It is valuable to note, that although there is a focus upon academic success in this school, this is tempered by a vision of the importance of fostering the whole child’s development, and igniting a love of learning and a love of language that will extend beyond the school years.

1.5.1 Factors that Staff Identify as Impacting on Success

Staff identified a number of factors that they see impacting upon the success of languages programs in general, and which assist them to develop a strong program in their school. Most commonly cited factors were the time allocation provided in the school timetable for languages, seeing a clear valuing of language learning throughout the school, having a robust and rich program, receiving adequate financial support, and a strong feeling of continuity from pre-school through to Year 12.

The first factor mentioned as important to the success of the program is **time**.

“It has to be the time – it physically has to be there both in the primary and the high school. Having the timetable there.”

Within that time, the teachers then indicated that the **strength of the program** is of paramount importance to the success of languages in the school. Several teachers said this in different ways: “I also think a program that’s rich in setting expectations of students of the language studied and having clear achievements. It’s quite explicit what our goal is and it’s clear to the students.”

“a rich program – when it’s thematic and where the kids can produce either a physical item that they've made or created on the computer – an article or a film – a tangible outcome, but also that it allows for creative and critical thinking along the way... it’s placed in a broader topic that fosters intercultural understanding”.  

One key element of this rich program was also the school’s **focus on the individual student**. Teachers in this school believed this to be a particular focus of their school and apparent in the way the program operates: ‘*We are* very centred on the student [*it*] comes through in our assessment, and ... the exam is about achievement, catered to each class and what is happening in that moment*’.

The focus on the individual also leads to fostering inclusion and a strong sense of community: “*A feeling of inclusion. Well the fact that they start at the age of three, and they will follow up with the same group of kids. Every home class in primary school changes every year ... but the language class never does.*”

The consistency of the language class groupings was acknowledged as a means for students to form a bond with the language, the teacher and with the peer-group in the language class. One teacher said of that relationship: “*Often they will see the same teachers throughout – not every year but they will see the same teachers at various stages as they grow up. So I have kids in Year 12 who present me with a photo of them from when I taught them in Kindy and that’s really lovely. So that helps engender that feeling of belongingness.*”

Alongside the community built between the class group, and the relationship, also the **importance of the teachers** and their variety of skills were also strongly acknowledged: “*Having a variety of teachers allows for a lot of collegiality and a lot of sharing, that leads to a dynamic program because we can feed off each other*. 

“We work hard on it, new people coming into the school work hard to understand and become part of the ethos”.

The particular skills that accomplished language teachers possess were also cited throughout the interviews with particular frequency given to passion, proficiency and skill in the language: “*I think being proficient in the language is very important. Having a passion for the teaching of the language. Understanding how immersion works, and our philosophy here, because we have a program that has to be administered and the teachers have to be confident in what they do.*”
“Commitment, passion, fluency, confidence and of course creativity are really important because we don’t have resources [for early years immersion].”

“The teachers are really passionate. Kids love passionate teachers.”

It was not only teachers and heads of department that valued the teachers’ skill in teaching languages well. The principal also identified that excellent teaching has led to the success of the program. She said:

“*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. The teachers are incredibly committed*”.

1.5.2 How does the School Value Languages

Throughout the interviews all staff indicated that there is a need for languages to be seen more widely throughout the school as valuable. This valuing was needed from other teachers, school leaders, and also other students: “That they see that it’s not only valued by their teachers but their peers and older peers too. Whether that’s through highlighting students that achieve very well at HSC. Other times at assemblies we have students speak their language. It’s not something that you hide away. It’s very visible”.

**Resourcing**

One means of this value being visible is through the budgeting and resourcing of the department. This was mentioned by several teachers as showing that the school values their department:

“We have cupboard space so we can actually see what we have [in the way of resources]”.

“They've been pretty generous with us. Hardware, books, technology. Compared to other schools they're generous and compared to other departments I think we're resourced pretty well”.

The teachers indicated a number of ways in which they think the school shows to them and to their students that languages are valued by the whole school community.
Visibility
Languages are seen throughout the school in a number of ways, and the teachers identify this visibility as a key factor in showing the value of language learning.

“It (Languages) is always in the documentation, it’s in our motto, visually there’s language walls, assemblies, kids are presenting and MCing, international day,“

Value in the Timetable Allocation - Quantity of Time and Quality of Time
The teachers identify that it is important not only to have sufficient lessons in the timetable, but also to have those lessons allocated at regular intervals in the weekly or fortnightly schedule to ensure regular access to language for the students. The teachers believe that being positioned in the timetable in a way that ensures success also indicates a valuing of language learning by the school community.

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

Leadership Roles
It was clearly identified by all participants that having more than one leadership role related to language sends a strong message to the school community that languages are important. It also means that the languages representatives are able to do more to continue to promote languages and ensure that the program runs well, so it is a factor which enables the program to continue growing and developing in ways that may not be possible with less leadership.

“there’s a primary head of languages, high school head of languages and director of languages. Seeing that you have three positions in the one department shows value.”

One key role that was highlighted was that of the Director’s role of being a representative for languages at Senior Executive level and thus being able to have a languages voice in all decision- making.

One teacher said a vital factor was:

“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.”
Dialogue
Inter-related with the allocation of three leadership roles, the teachers identified that this meant they felt that their department had an ongoing dialogue with the decision-makers in the school. They felt consulted on matters that affected their programs, because it was possible for an ongoing dialogue between the executive and the department through the three representatives. They also perceived that other departments saw languages as important because on major decisions, the languages department is consulted to see how new innovations might impact upon language offerings.

“The expectation that there’s a dialogue. Saying let’s check with languages how that’s going to work.”

Physical Space
Teachers identified that being allocated physical space indicated to the school community a true valuing of the department. As the school has limited space in an urban area, it is considered particularly important to have enough room, and to have a dedicated language staff room.

“I think it’s fantastic that we have our own staffroom. As a languages department we need to be able to communicate and constantly share. With a lot of work we got this wonderful space. Having a key area that’s just yours is really important.”

Class Sizes
Class sizes were identified as a key factor in the successful implementation of a language program by all teachers. The teachers indicated that class sizes hadn’t always been optimal but there was growing support from the decision-makers to facilitate smaller classes for languages, in recognition of the importance of this factor for the program to function well. Teachers said the following things about class sizes: “It changes from year to year. Some years they’ve been quite large and that has led to large language classes in particular classes in the high school. So we’ve had large year 7 classes. There can be issues because of our physical environment. We have lots of students but not lots of rooms. So that isn’t optimal for the best language learning. 28 or 29 in a class we just don’t have the physical space to house in the classroom. I think the school are more aware now of what we physically can do.”

“Budget wise now if we have 60 students in a group we are given three classes instead of two”.
The languages leaders in the school indicated that they have worked hard to ensure that class sizes are designed to best suit the students. They indicated that where a year group needs to be split into a continuers and extension stream, they will not insist on the classes being equal in size. They would rather place students more accurately with where their ability and experience lies, even if that means uneven class sizes: “If there’s 17 in Continuers and 10 in Extension that’s fine. We’re not going to split it completely evenly. It’s really about the level of the student. Focusing on the student and the quality of teaching and learning in that classroom.”

There is also awareness in the school and acknowledgement that language learning cannot work optimally if classes are too large. The school has worked towards ensuring that there are suitable maximum sizes placed on classes, with a cap of about 21 as the maximum class size whenever possible.

Being a relatively young school, some teachers identified that it had been a balancing act to ensure the growth of the school while not making classes too large. It was indicated that at times class sizes may have grown more quickly than staffing but that this had been recognised as a key need for the teaching to be optimal, and so class sizes have subsequently been made smaller to facilitate the teaching of languages.

“We’re in our 30th year so we’re a very young school and one of the priorities for many years was to grow the school. We have gotten better at saying to parents that we have enough people in that language, so we can only offer you a place in another language. We try to accommodate preferences but when we can’t we’ve gotten a lot better at saying so.”
1.6 Sustainability of Languages in this Context

Through exploring some of the notions of success it was also possible to ascertain some of the elements in the school program that lead to the sustainability of the program.

*Inter-related to sustainability is the retention of students in the program, and the opportunity to continue their language(s) throughout all the years of school.*

Teachers identified a number of affective elements that they believe leads to the sustainability of the program. Uppermost is enjoyment of the learning process and of the language itself. In order for children to obtain this enjoyment the teacher-student relationship is also a key factor that all the teachers identified. A focus upon fun in learning was also identified as a key factor leading to a long-term program.

The following quotes illustrate this: "I think enjoyment. In primary it's compulsory so they don't have a choice, but that doesn't mean that we don't worry about it, we want them to enjoy their learning."

“Finding a balance, in early learning, through play, fun and keeping it going and having a sequential program that slowly builds up.”

Intertwined with the quality of the teacher-student relationship, teachers also indicated that it is imperative that the program is well-planned and suits the language learning trajectory. They see the program and the quality of teaching going hand-in-hand to ensure the ongoing success of the program over many years.

"[for early years immersion] we've chosen subjects that we know the children will be interested in and that are language appropriate".

“In the pattern of study they have to continue the language they began with through to Year 10 – it's a mandate, and then pick up their next language in Year 7 so it's embedded in the structures".
Leadership

The sustainability of the program is also strongly impacted upon by the leadership model in the school. Teachers identified that it was very important that the leadership had a commitment to the school continuing the language learning program, and identified that it was important to have support from the top-down as well as bottom-up. The principal indicated the view that languages are integral to the school, thus showing a view that languages will continue to be a focus in the school. She said:

“It’s actually part of the school’s life, not just on international day but every day. I walk around the corridors and I hear languages being spoken”.

It is important that the school principal sees languages being embedded within the school culture, and that languages are not just a part of promotional days. The principal also indicates that it is important to value languages not just in terms of the academic outcomes but also the love of the language and culture: “To me the academic results are extremely important but I like the fact that the culture of the school values the immersion, the love of, and the ability to go overseas and speak it”.

Of course for the leadership there may be challenges in reconciling the aims of high academic standards with the ideology that language learning at any level is of value. The leadership acknowledges that the affective success of the program is extremely important, but also that the academic success is vital too.

“I’d like to also feel that ... at upper secondary level the teachers can take that immersion and lead the students to academic success as well. And I know there’s a philosophical issue with some of those aspects. The philosophical approach to immersion is almost at odds with academic results”.

The leadership of the school identified that the success of the program is in students feeling not only that they know the language but that they are a part of the culture they are learning. There is an actual change of identity associated with learning language throughout all the years of schooling. One leader said: “one of the kindergarten teachers says the children identify as French, so it’s not just “I speak French” it’s “I am French” and I thought if that’s the point that you’re at when you’re in Kindergarten and it carries through, that’s as good as it gets.”
1.7 Future Vision for Languages

However strong the program, one of the factors identified as having a particular impact upon the success of the languages program, was the need to continually strive to do better. Teachers identified things they would still like to improve about their program. Amongst these factors were, the ongoing challenge to engage stage five students, and to retain students beyond the mandated years; the desire for more space and appropriate space; and always aiming for more hours teaching languages, and having the lessons appropriately spaced out within the timetable. Teachers said challenges were:

• “Trying to get that Year 10 – Stage 5 – to get them fully engaged.”

• “One thing we are hindered by is the physical building in that we don’t have dedicated language classrooms. That’s been a constant goal for us but with a school with limited space that is a barrier.”

• “Always wanting more hours – as new subjects are added, there are always challenges to have enough time in the timetable”

• “What is important is the spacing to have them [language lessons] spaced throughout the week.” “one of the key things with languages is having that consistent exposure to the language”.

The teachers clearly identify the ongoing challenges for all programs as the Year 10 to Year 11 transition, the need for the right classroom space and the need for suitable timetabling of regular language lessons.
School Two is located in a regional centre in New South Wales. The town consists of 23,500 people. The school currently is predominantly a boys' school – with boys only in the secondary school, and a co-educational junior school. It caters for 200 boy boarders who come both from regional NSW and further afield. There are 620 students in the whole school (K-12). The school is an Anglican, non-selective school set on a 25 hectare campus. The school’s philosophy emphasises the importance of a well-rounded education for boys including music, the arts, languages as well as sports.

2.1 Contextual Factors Impacting upon the Program

The regional location of this school means that many students live in isolated areas of the State where languages and cultures are not diverse, and where the future life plan might involve remaining in a rural location. The school is committed to a well-rounded education for boys. This means including a language where possible and development of international awareness. The school has invested (with the aid of a government grant) in extensive building and renovation to provide state-of-the-art languages space. The languages department has a whole building to itself with each room purpose built to the design requests of the teachers. This means the building includes a languages kitchen, and immersive spaces for the teaching of French and Japanese. The school has been accepted as an IB Candidate School in the Primary Years Program (PYP) commencing in 2015, and will work towards verification in 2017. This will raise the profile of languages in the junior school and increase language learning time.

2.2 Languages

The school teaches French and Japanese. Both French and Japanese are offered in the junior and secondary school. The school currently provides 1 x 45 minute lesson per week of French or Japanese in the Junior school to Years K-5. However, upon becoming an IB PYP Candidate School in 2015, this will increase the language learning in the junior school to three French lessons per fortnight and one lesson of Japanese per week in Years 4 and 5.

The school currently operates a Middle Years Program to facilitate the transition of students through to the high school. Year 8 addresses the mandatory 100 hours for the NSW syllabus. Classes become elective from Year 9. The school also supports a number of students to undertake study of additional languages through the Open High School. It also supports international students who are on exchange at the school through the Round Square Program.
### 2.3 Structure of the Program

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<th>No. of Classes</th>
<th>Lesson Length/ Lesson Time</th>
<th>Multiple Level/ Course Offerings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K-3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 and 5</td>
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<td>45 mins (from 2015, 3 x 45 mins per fortnight)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4 x 45 mins per fortnight</td>
<td></td>
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<td>7 x 45 mins per fortnight</td>
<td>1 x French (OHS)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7 x 45 mins per fortnight</td>
<td>2 x Spanish (OHS)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>12 (Continuers)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1 x French Beginners (OHS)</td>
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2.3 Structure of the Program

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Year Level</th>
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<th>No. of Classes</th>
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<th>Multiple Level/ Course Offerings</th>
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<tr>
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<td>3 x 45 mins per fortnight</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 x 45 mins per fortnight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8 x 45 mins per fortnight (100 hours)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 (combined with Year 10)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3 (Continuers)</td>
<td>1 (combined with Year 9)</td>
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<td>2 x Japanese (OHS)</td>
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<td>1 (combined with Year 12)</td>
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<td>1 x Japanese Beginners (OHS)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3 (Continuers)</td>
<td>1 (combined with Year 11)</td>
<td>10 x 45 mins per fortnight</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Hours**

As indicated in the table above, the hours are considered to be generous across all stages. The Junior school hours will increase further in 2015 as the school begins its process as a Candidate IB PYP school.

**Retention**

Retention into the elective years is quite strong for French, and less strong for Japanese. However, from 2015 there will be a focus upon French in the Junior years. Students have to select which language to continue with at the end of Year 6. This may account for less students selecting Japanese at that stage, and only students who show real commitment to the language continuing through to the Senior years.

**2.4 Staff**

There are three languages teachers at the Armidale School. The French teacher in the Senior School is also the Head of Department. There is a full-time Japanese teacher who teaches across the Junior and Senior School and there is a part-time French teacher who teaches in the Junior School.

> The staff believe it is vital to their program's success that they have a head of department who is a languages teacher.

Many small departments in other schools have a head teacher from another faculty, and the teachers at TAS identify their presence in the school as being related to having a pro-active head of department who is also a dynamic language teacher.

**2.5 Exploring Success in this Context**

The definition and understanding of success in language learning at this school is specifically linked to its regional location and the likely future trajectory of the boys in the school.

The Head of Languages identifies that thinking about success in languages learning means understanding your students and knowing that the goals for your students might be different to other contexts. The Head of Languages is also the Senior School French teacher and she identifies that the key measure of success for her is seeing that the boys enjoy learning French and want to continue with it. For her, part of ensuring this success and enjoyment is
setting clear and appropriate aims for students, and making sure they can see their own success through the ways
the teacher tracks and celebrates achievement. She said:

“I think especially when they’re middle-school age, they won’t go on with their studies unless they feel that success and
so what you try and do is not give them huge things to learn. You say ‘right we’re going to do this’ and you make it very
transparent. So I still use progress cards, always will, because at the beginning of the unit you can say ‘right in this unit this
is what we’re going to do’ and at the end of the unit you go through and say ‘oh my goodness look at all of those things – well
done you’ so you make it really easy for them to measure success.”

Success is further defined by the Head of Languages and French teacher as enjoyment of the learning process.

“Success to us is about really enjoying the language and saying ‘I’m doing French
and I really love it’. Reminding them that this is a real language and we’re not
in a vacuum but in a real discernible social context.”

One teacher said:

“It’s just something that they do and
that they like, and while they keep liking
it they’ll keep doing it. And so I guess
that’s our approach here”.

The French teacher believes that
if students enjoy their learning,
they will choose to continue doing
something they love. So her aim is therefore to make lessons and learning enjoyable. This teacher also emphasises
how important it is to highlight to students when they’re doing well, but to ensure that praise and congratulations
are genuine. She also emphasises the importance of planning work that progresses at an appropriate pace for the
learners. She said:

“[I use] lots of congratulations, lots of praise, but genuine, no fake stuff. If they haven’t done the work you say ‘look you
really need to do this’ but when they’re getting it, it’s like ‘look at what you are doing’ and you just keep reminding them,
building them up and that little steps approach so I don’t go really quickly at this school. I consolidate a lot but then we just
broaden it.”
The teacher also emphasises the importance of making sure expectations are really clear, making sure there are not too many assessment tasks, and making sure that assessment is not too frequent. The language teacher said:

“We make sure there are learning goals in student-friendly language, make sure they know what’s going on. With the tasks we tend to not over-assess because I don’t think that’s helpful either, we focus on just enjoying the language and... it’s scaffolded.”

One key element that the Head of Languages identifies in the success of the program is the focus on the learner, their needs and expectations. This can mean ensuring that classes are aimed at all learning styles and preferences, but also acknowledging where the students in that class ultimately want to head in their lives as a whole. Acknowledging that for many students this will mean returning to a rural and isolated life rather than following their studies into a tertiary environment:

“The other thing is we’re not a selective school, as you know, and so you teach who you’ve got in front of you and quite often it’ll be a country boy, like in Year 9 I’ve got a boy from Burren Junction, and for him to do French is pretty incredible, and there’s another boy from Coola who’ll go back to the farm probably when he’s finished but they’re doing French and I think that’s fantastic.”

This indicates that success in this context might mean something quite different to other contexts. The teachers see success as ensuring that the students have the opportunity to study a language, to enjoy studying that language and engaging with the culture, but that they might not envisage continuing to study that language beyond school because that is not where their future plans lie. Nevertheless, the school finds a large number of boys elect to continue with languages throughout the senior school, and the school identifies the teaching and the subsequent enjoyment of the students as the reason behind the popularity of language learning in this school.

Another language teacher in the school indicated that success in languages, particularly in the junior school setting, is seeing students invested in continuing with the language, and also having the confidence to attempt to use the language when they are travelling or in a situation that requires it.
“They have a positive attitude to the language and it shows. They want to keep on learning the language ... I’d like them to be able to, if they travel somewhere, to use the language. Even if it's just in little tidbits the fact that they want to use it and are willing to and have the confidence to use it, that would be a big indicator for me [of success].”

Another executive staff member in charge of curriculum indicated that success in languages is shown by the amount of students continuing to study the language in the elective years. She also said that seeing how much interest there is in some of the external trips also indicates that students are committed to the subject:

“Take-up at elective level is really important and we’ve had massive growth there which is really important. At the Year 11 and 12 level it’s the fact that it contributes positively to their ATAR calculations or goals after school, but we’ve got boys who are doing a language because they know they will need the language and not necessarily be ATAR related. The fact that our kids talk positively about their language experiences in the mandatory years and there’s a huge take up of the offerings associated with that like the overseas trips and other experiences. That indicates the buy-in level.”

In reflecting upon the context of their school and the nature of success in that setting, the principal indicated that it can be harder to emphasise the importance of languages in their context, and he identified the teacher as the key player in making a language program successful in a more remote area. He said:

“So they start from behind I think [in a regional context] and that means that the teachers need to work harder to make sure that their students lift the priority level of their language learning. How much time are you spending on it? How important do you think that it is to get this homework done or to be studying for this exam? Or to be doing some practice on your own? Or to be speaking to me in the language when you see me around? And teachers to be successful in this environment need to work harder.”

In defining the rationale for languages learning at their school, the principal said:

“Certainly they [languages] are important for boys and in a cultural sense as well as a learning or HSC sense because they indicate a view of the world and a view of liberal education that I think is important for boys to see and that includes those boys who don’t take languages to the HSC. The fact that they are there influences their idea of what an education is”. 
2.5.1 Factors that Staff Identify as Impacting on Success

Financial Support

Both language teacher and executive staff acknowledge that being supported financially is crucial in running a successful program. The principal said:

“The critical part [in retaining good teachers] is supporting them. It’s not a mistake that we’ve got a new languages centre. It has been very well resourced I think and creates an attractiveness to work there and have a particular home. It’s not just a regular classroom. That’s been important. I would hope there’s a sense that languages are seen as important here”

A language teacher said: “I guess we’re lucky. We’re very very supported here so we’re lucky.”

One teacher identified that financial support comes in three types – time for collaboration with colleagues, support for undertaking professional learning and a budget for resources:

“It definitely helps that there are other colleagues. We can collaborate. Not to say that we get together that often but we email and it’s communication so that’s good. PD – that they’re willing to spend money on us to send us somewhere. And then it boils down to money in some ways – so money for resources.”

Financial support signals to teachers that they and their work are valued. While the budget isn’t necessarily large, teachers appreciate the message that the school understands that teaching a language requires a different set of resources than many other subject areas require. One teacher said:

“I make a trip home [to Canada] and I stock up, on exciting things, and for them to say we have a budget and we value that you’re willing to do that on your time off and we’ll reimburse you some of it. They value that what we’re doing is maybe a bit different from the maths program or the English program and that we have to “entertain” with the little ones so that they want to choose to take it when it becomes an elective.”
Building Community Support

The principal also indicates that it is essential to indicate to the school community within a regional area, what the school believes is a well-rounded education. As access to a variety of experiences is limited in such a location, it falls to the school to ensure that students are offered the best education possible in that context. The principal believes this includes opening students’ eyes to the world and to an international perspective through the study of languages. He said: “I come back to that idea of languages being a defining element. One of the things that’s critical to us in a regional area is in making sure that we are presenting the best of what is going to be presented in a relatively small school.”

Whole-School Support

The principal identifies that there is a whole team of people behind the success of the languages program. However, he also signifies that success leads to more success, and that it requires the support of a range of people to get the cycle of success started. He said:

“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 that makes decision-making about resourcing it much easier. That creates a cycle of success.”

The teachers feel that having a head of languages is a signal that the school values and supports languages:

“Oh we’re a very small department – two and a half teachers … Being such a small department to have a head teacher is quite unusual. In my last school it was a history head teacher”.

Also allowing small classes to run as combined classes means a level of support for ensuring that Japanese continues alongside French:

“They’re being so supportive because my numbers are so small. I’m doing combined classes.”

The teachers also believe that support is shown through the timetabling allocation for languages:

“We’re very lucky with the number of Year 7 lessons we have – twice a week.”
The principal believes the school fosters languages in a number of ways through the whole school approach. He identifies the IB scheme as one way of showing the support for a robust language program:

“What we will be doing as we take on the IB program, is expanding languages in the primary school. So we have had specialist language learning in the primary school for some time and I think that's important. But expanding it to more than the lip service of one period is going to be important. Showing that it's an important part of the curriculum. The second thing is giving it attention in terms of choice and specialisation within the first years of high school. So we used to have what was really a taster program here where students would have French and Japanese and they'd do a bit of this and then a bit of that and I think that was a problem. In that it didn't show that continuity is going to be important so we now enable a choice of languages earlier, and specialisation then so that it becomes a full option. That will encourage continuation and that's a critical part of it.”

Interestingly, the comments from another staff member about taking on the IB highlighted how their research with parents indicated that parents really wanted the students to be learning languages in the early years through a rigorous program:

“Junior school's a big thing, and that's where we've just decided to apply for IB the Primary Years Program and one of the big things from my perspective with that was the languages aspect. I looked at how to improve our junior school and how to make us different than the local market and knowing what our families valued, so when we did our parent forums languages were the thing that the parents talked about. I didn't really realise that I guess until we made the decision to talk to them about the IB but...

“all the feedback from the parents that came to me was all about how important it was to do languages from an early year consistently through our junior school.”
Physical Space

The physical space allocated to languages is identified as a major element showing that the whole-school values languages and supports it as an important learning area. The principal sees the physical space alongside the timetabling and flexibility given to languages as key indicators that the school supports languages. He said:

“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.”

Similarly, the language teachers themselves know that the space they have to work in is a special area, and that it is particularly unusual to have such a large working space:

“If you’ve seen the Japanese and the French rooms you know that is a special space.”

Specifically this space allows teachers to be creative in the ways they run their classes. The Japanese room and the French room each has both a formal seated classroom area with tables and chairs that can be moved to various configurations, and also a relaxed seating area with sofas and bean bags. The Japanese room also has a tatami seating area. Both classrooms have both whiteboards and interactive whiteboards, and lots of space for storage and display of resources, student work and materials.

Similarly another executive staff member identified that the school fosters languages in two key ways, through the physical space allocated to languages in the brand new building they have developed especially for languages, and in the school deciding to take on the IB in the primary school:

“There’s no doubt that the physical resource is something. Now it’s much more inviting. That matters.”

The Japanese teacher said: “I put in my dream list and I was extremely fortunate with the outcome.”
The Teachers

Teachers are identified throughout the data as the key element making this a successful program. It was clear that without the teachers' passion and dedication the school wouldn't have such a strong program, and wouldn't be able to ensure ongoing financial and other support. The principal indicated his belief that ultimately it is the teacher that determines the success of a program. He believes that regardless of the whole school support, a great teacher will ultimately attract students to their subject:

“Whatever the whole school does or whatever the executive does, in terms of supporting with timetables and the way options are chosen and the number of periods given in junior school, ultimately it's the teacher that will attract the students. That's by far and away the number one factor.”

He also said:

“There is nothing compared to having good teaching. The quality of the teacher and the attractiveness of what is presented in the classroom beyond whatever you do if you're program writing, it's the attractiveness of what the teacher is presenting. And we have some very good languages teachers here.”

The Principal believes that in developing a rapport with students and fostering the students' love of languages, this creates the desire in the students to please the teacher, and also to want to continue spending time in that teacher's classes. Having developed a strong relationship with students, the students then want to work hard for the sake of the teacher as well as themselves. He said:

“Everyone knows science is important and maths is important. To have them lift languages to be pushing even harder than those subjects is a big ask but I think it's something we've been successful with here...Sometimes they're not doing it for the language, they're doing it for the teacher.”

Another executive staff member also identified the teachers as the biggest factor impacting upon the success of the program. She said:

“The teachers. There’s no doubt they’re good. They’re loved by the kids. They have an absolute enthusiasm and they never waver.

There’s a huge buy-in just in personality. It's grown because they've seen success at Year 11 and 12 level especially in French. Our top academic kids are choosing French therefore more kids choose French.”
According to the principal quality teaching is the same for any curriculum area – it involves showing genuine care for your students and genuine passion for your subject. He said:

“The most critical elements are that first and foremost the teacher shows in everything that they do that they genuinely care about the students in their class as individuals and in their progress in all areas of their lives.”

“The next most important would be a passion and a depth of knowledge and expertise in the subject area, so that when they go into the classroom students believe that the teacher is passionate about this, and they can feel that and gather their own energy from that.”

2.6 Sustainability of Languages in this Context

As indicated in the quotes above, the principal and the executive staff are committed to the sustainability of the program and have shown this by supporting the expansion of the junior school language program into a rigorous IB program which will involve three of four lessons per week of language for junior school students. The principal also emphasised the importance of showing the students and parents that continuity is important in language learning and this is shown by offering a robust program at all stages of schooling.

However, the principal also indicated that support for languages has been easy to offer and sustain while the program is so successful and while such excellent teachers run the program. It was indicated that success leads to more support and more success, but that if the program were to falter the school might not be able to support languages in such a strong way.

The school executive see that investing in the IB program is a way of ensuring ongoing success and sustainability in the languages program. If the Junior school program is strengthened, there is a belief that this will lead to stronger success in the Senior school as students progress through the years of schooling. Thus this step can be seen as an investment in the future of the program.
The teachers believe that the school executive send a message to the whole community that languages are an essential part of a well-rounded education. This is also echoed by parent beliefs that were cited during the consultation about introducing the IB. Teachers believe that sending out the message that a well-rounded education is essential helps to ensure the sustainability of the languages program as an integral part of a complete education. One teacher said:

“The arts and languages are about the well-rounded individual. If we shut it down it’ll never come back.”

There is an understanding that once a language program is lost it would be very difficult to reinstate it, and therefore there is value in thinking about how to sustain the program into the future.

2.7 Future Vision for Languages

The IB Primary Years Program is seen as an investment in the future and the teachers identify that it is important to always look for more time allocation for languages learning. The junior school teacher indicated that: “I’m a firm believer that even if I only had them for 25 minutes every day, I would love that. That would be great.”

The teachers are able to identify that to plan for the future of the language learning program means constantly considering who your learners are and ensuring the program continues to suit their needs. The fact that the teachers are continually striving to do better shows their commitment to the continual renewal of the program.
School Three is a Uniting Church school for girls in the northern suburbs of Sydney. The school teaches from Kindergarten to Year 12 and the school strategic plan states that they aim to equip their students to contribute to global society. Therefore the balanced education that Ravenswood delivers incorporates a strong focus upon language learning. The school is non-selective. In the school mission statement they strive for their students to be “Confident Capable and Caring” and one of the key outlined outcomes for their students is for them to be “Engaged with the wider world through a clearly defined global connections program”. This program highlights intercultural learning through language study and exchange.

3.1 Contextual Factors Impacting upon the Program

The languages building “casa lingua” provides a permanent space for languages on the school site, and comprises staff rooms and small classrooms for senior languages classes. However, junior secondary classes cannot be held in the building as there is not a classroom of sufficient size for the middle school groups. Nevertheless, the dedicated space for languages enables the department to have a solid presence in the school. There is a Confucius classroom for all Chinese lessons in the school. Funded by a Confucius Institute grant, this provides an immersive space for the students in all year groups to visit for their lessons. There is also a language lab which can be used by all languages.

3.2 Languages

French and Chinese are taught in the Junior school for one lesson per week.

Year 7 students study two languages from a choice of French, German, Latin, Chinese (Mandarin) or Japanese. In Year 8 they continue with both, or continue with one plus Commerce or History.

In Year 9 students choose three electives, one of which must be a language that they studied in Year 7. Students continue with this language in Year 10 alongside their other electives.

In Year 11, students choose between the HSC or IB pathway. Within the IB pathway a language is compulsory, and a second language option is also possible. Spanish is offered as an ab initio language, and Chinese is offered as a Beginners HSC language. All other languages are offered as Continuers and Extension options within the HSC pathway or as IB Diploma Standard Level.
### 3.3 Structure of the Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>No. of Classes</th>
<th>Lesson Length/ Lesson Time</th>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>50 mins 2 x per week</td>
<td>Heritage</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>50 mins 6 x per fortnight</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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### 3.3 Structure of the Program

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<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>No. of Classes</th>
<th>Lesson Length/Lesson Time</th>
<th>Multiple Level/ Course Offerings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>JAPANESE</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50 mins 2 x per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50 mins 2 x per week</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50 mins 6 x per fortnight</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50 mins 7 x per fortnight</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>Above requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3 (HSC) 2 (IB)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Above requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LATIN</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
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<td>50 mins 6 x per fortnight</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>50 mins 7 x per fortnight</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5 (HSC) 4 (IB)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Above requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1 (HSC) 1 (IB)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Above requirements</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SPANISH</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9 (IB ab initio)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Above requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9 (IB ab initio)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Above requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 Staff

The languages department is relatively large. There are ten languages teachers and one Chinese native speaker assistant. The majority of the teachers teach in the senior school. One of the Chinese teachers teaches across both the senior and Junior school, and the Spanish teacher teaches Year 6 and Senior classes. There is also one French teacher who teaches in the Junior school and in Year 7. The Head of Department is a teacher of French and German.
3.5 Exploring Success in this Context

There is a focus amongst the staff at this school on differentiating what success means for each student. Many of the languages staff indicated that success means different things for different students. They acknowledge that as a non-selective school it is about fostering each child's success and having students achieve the best that each individual can achieve. This might mean setting individual benchmarks and goals rather than focusing upon the external measures of success.

One teacher said:

"Ravenswood is not a selective school and so the way of thinking is that all different ability students should be encouraged to do subjects including an elective subject like ours which in many cases are much harder... Of course we want to get good results but we also want to encourage different ability students because that's the principle of the school."

Two of the school's principles: compassion and excellence counter-balance each other in defining what success might look like in the languages classroom. One teacher indicated:

"Our guiding principles are compassion, excellence, respect and courage and so I think those four really encapsulate what we are here and what I would want to see in the teachers. Compassion in the teachers and wanting to nurture them... Excellence to try and get the best results out of each of our students."

Two other teachers also indicated the individualised nature of defining success in this school. One said the aim was: "Getting the best out of each individual child."

Another said that: "success [is] tailored to the student's own capabilities"

Building on the idea that each student's experience of success may be different and that fostering a love and passion for the language is of the utmost importance, all of the teachers and the school principal mentioned this theme and indicated that it was one of the key measures of success in the languages program. The Head of Languages said:

"To me success in language learning is first of all students are engaged, they're passionate, they're inspired and they want to continue. Another sign of success is good numbers all the way through to Year 12 and then wanting to carry on languages into tertiary education and career and their future. They see the value in it, they want to use it, they want to continue with it. And good marks is just a by-product."
“You want good results which means the students are being taught effectively but I think the ultimate thing is the engagement and the numbers in classes and continuation of learning”.

This shows that fostering a lifelong love of language is the ultimate aim, beyond simply retention into the classes at school, success in this environment means students wanting languages to feature in their lives beyond school. Another teacher said that fostering a love of language was a key part of success:

“I think, [success is] creating in students a genuine excitement about the culture and language... I think a language teacher has to use so much drill and practice, somehow you've got to embed that in building a genuine excitement about acquiring the language and that sense of purpose”.

3.5.1 Factors that Staff Identify as Impacting on Success

Leadership

The teachers and the principal identify that strong leadership support for language learning is essential for a program to be successful.

“I think leadership commitment has to be there if you're going to have a strong languages program. If school leaders don't think it's worthwhile the languages department is going to be struggling.”

The principal believes that this support and commitment is present in this school. She said:

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

The teachers agree that the principal is extremely supportive of languages. One teacher said: “I think the first very important thing is you get support from the school leadership. For example our principal she really very strongly supports us. They encourage us so Year 7 have to do two languages. We really encourage them to choose one Asian language.”

Likewise, another teacher acknowledged how important it is for the principal to understand and foster languages for them to be successful:

“If you have someone at the head of a school or it's the same at the head of a country, who has knowledge of another language or has taught it, it's a different kettle of fish. Then and only then do you get true understanding.”
**Time**

All teachers in the school believed that they have a successful program and teach well within their schedule. Nevertheless all teachers and leadership identified that time is a factor which could strengthen the program further.

It was identified that for Years 7 and 8 where there are two lessons per week, most teachers felt that this wasn't the optimal amount, and that three or four lessons per week would be the ideal amount, with lessons evenly spread across the two-week teaching cycle. Teachers made a range of comments identifying their ideas about the ideal amount of time on task for language learning:

“in an ideal world three or four [lessons per week]”.

“Once we get into Year 9 where we have more hours it feels more comfortable. You can get a lot more covered and really spend quality time with the students.”

“I think two lessons a week for Years 7 and 8 is not enough. There should be three lessons a week, but you're struggling with fitting into the timetable. I've been in talks with the Head of Junior School to expand the access to language each week to being more often but less time. So one hour a week I'd rather have two half hours or three lots of twenty minutes even. So just to have it more regularly but for less time. Year 7 is adequate but not ideal.”

“If we had say instead of 4 a cycle if we had twice as many, 8 a cycle we could get through more content and we'd lose less lessons.”

“A little bit all the time is what you want rather than just once or twice a week”.

There is a clear consensus that more language lessons per week are desirable for junior secondary language learning. There is also consensus that shorter and more frequent lessons would be better than long lessons with a great deal of time in between lessons.

The principal reinforced the same belief about time, but acknowledged the need to have balance across the curriculum.

“In an ideal world I think there should be more time allocated for language learning and it needs to be intentionally positioned almost every second day. Ideally even more if you're going to be serious about language learning. I'm quite in favour of immersion programs but we're not a school that's committed to an immersion program so I think regular bursts of language is most effective. But we're balancing all the other demands and we're not just a languages focused school.”
Space

The teachers and the principal all identified the languages space in “casa lingua” as a positive aspect of the context of their program, and an element which showcased languages and gave it prominence within the school site. One person said:

“Having our languages centre gives a prominence to languages in the school that shows that we value it. So when students go in to Casa Lingua they feel they’ve entered the world of languages.”

Another said:

“I think we’re really lucky. Every languages teacher wants their own home room and our Chinese teacher has a wonderful Chinese classroom thanks to the Confucius institute, which is part of the Confucius classroom project. Unfortunately in the middle school we don’t have enough room, we cannot have a homeroom each, but we’re very lucky that we have this languages centre called “casa lingua” the languages centre for senior students. The classrooms are too small for middle school but we have a space which can be seen as being a languages building.”

Teachers still acknowledged that all languages teachers would ideally like their own classroom, but that this is not always possible within large and busy schools:

“If we had our own classrooms and they were all decorated and children came to us that would make a huge difference but those things are very rare in Australian schools.”
Good Teaching
The quality of teaching was indicated as another factor influencing the success of the languages program. The Head of Languages said it is important to have:

“Engaged and inspired teachers, up to date relevant programs which are relevant for outside in the world but also in engaging the students in terms of what is relevant to them, that they feel is useful and inspiring.”

In this way good teaching is not only about the teacher’s qualities but also about the program that they design and implement. The program needs to be engaging and relevant to the learners in that class.

3.5.2 How Does the School Value Languages
The teachers identified many ways in which the school shows that it values languages. This is shown through the mandate for studying a language through to Year 9, offering a wide range of languages and continuing to support all six languages, through the option to study either the IB or HSC from Year 11, and through the strong support for exchange programs. The Head of Languages indicated the school’s valuing of languages in the following extract:

“First of all it’s compulsory from K-6 in the junior school and we’ve tried lots of structures but now it’s French K-6 but in 5 and 6 they can choose Mandarin. I like the fact that we’ve thrown an extra element in there. The fact we are offering six languages is really good. At an IB and HSC level but 5 up until the end of Year 10. I think the fact that languages are compulsory until the end of Year 9. I feel well supported here.”

A number of other teachers identified the extension of compulsory language learning as a measure of support from the school: “Language is compulsory to the end of Year 9. And there’s some talk of extending that to the end of Year 10.”

A number of teachers identified the range of languages in the school as an indication of the school’s support for languages. One said:

“I think the biggest thing that I’ve noticed is that we offer so many [languages]. We offer six...I think the school is very supportive in that respect to try and continue with giving the girls the best choice.”

Another teacher said the variety meant students could select both Asian and European languages or modern and classical languages:

“Having the option of having 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.”
Another teacher said:

“The fact that they encourage us to offer so many languages. I mean it increases the competition between the languages but if you look at it globally as a languages department it's a good thing.”

Teachers agreed that having a range of languages was a positive aspect of their program.

**Timetabling**

Enabling classes to run with small numbers in the senior years was identified as a measure of support for languages that was shown by the school. One teacher said:

> “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.”

**Promoting Languages throughout the School**

The languages teachers also believed that they are supported to share their successes throughout the school and promote languages at assemblies and through a range of other means:

> “And we also are allowed to run our own languages news spot in the newsletter on a weekly basis. We also have a site on the portal that’s language based. We’re also developing for next year extra-curricular language classes booklet, a glossy brochure, so there’s more and more support to have a strong and good profile in the community.”

**3.6 Sustainability of Languages in this Context**

**Fostering Transition**

The sustainability of the program at this school is really fostered through the school's focus on ensuring a smooth transition at the various stages of learning. There has been a focus on re-considering the transition from Junior to Senior school, and the extension of compulsory language learning through to the end of Year 9 has been a strong transition support enabling students who wish to undertake the IB in Year 11 to have a stronger language grounding. One teacher said:

> “We’ve got Chinese and French in the primary for the moment and I think that’s going to continue and the wonderful thing about that is the flow-on effect in middle school.”
The Head of Department also explained a number of strategies that are used to facilitate transition into Year 7:

“The language teacher who works in the junior school is in our department here and she teaches in Year 7. And we’ve looked at the bridging problem from Year 6 continuing into Year 7 and what we offer here are continuers classes so they’re sorted out at the end of the previous Year and even in the first two weeks of Year 7 we do cross-year testing because there are some girls who come in from other primary schools with some experience, so…”

“we sort them out and put them into continuers classes so they can move at a different pace and do more lateral stuff to extend. Then we have straight out beginners in French and Chinese.”

Commitment
Teachers and executive indicated that the school leadership’s commitment to languages is a major factor ensuring the sustainability of the program. The principal said:

“I think commitment from leadership is a factor affecting success. Personally I value language learning greatly. From a cultural point of view. From the sheer pleasure of acquiring a language and the effort and reward that’s involved with that. I think in terms of opening students’ eyes to a world that’s out there beyond the one here is really important.”

Without such a commitment there is always a risk that a program will not be sustained without the existing passion of the teachers in a program. Numbers of students studying languages are considered a concern at senior secondary level, and there is still a need to dispel anxiety in the general view that languages do not score well at matriculation in the ATAR.
School Four is an Anglican boys’ independent school in the inner suburbs of Sydney. It is non-selective and offers a broad education to boys from Kindergarten to Year 12. In the Junior School the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program is operating with Mandarin as the language delivered from K-6. From Year 7 Boys undertake a taster program including Latin, French and German in addition to Mandarin. They then select their language for the 100 hours in Year 8.

4.1 Contextual Factors Impacting upon the Program

As the school is located in the inner suburbs of Sydney space is a consideration that might have an impact upon the program. Languages do have their own classrooms, however, the size and acoustics in the rooms were considered not ideal by some teachers. The languages staff have a large staff room which facilitates collaboration. The school has both the HSC and the IB programs for Years 11 and 12. This is considered a factor impacting on subject selection in the secondary school for students considering their trajectory through to Years 11 and 12.

4.2 Languages

The languages taught in the school are Chinese, Latin, French and German plus Classical Greek (for a small number of students).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>No. of Classes</th>
<th>Lesson Length/ Lesson Time</th>
<th>Multiple Level/ Course Offerings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHINESE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Students study two languages at a time, one lesson per language per week</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LATIN</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRENCH</td>
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<tr>
<td>GERMAN</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### 4.3 Structure of the Program

*Based on 2014 numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>No. of Classes</th>
<th>Lesson Length/ Lesson Time</th>
<th>Multiple Level/ Course Offerings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FRENCH</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Includes one small extension class</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>IB HL - 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IB Ab In - 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preliminary - 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beginners - 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Continuers - 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>HSC students taught in the most appropriate level IB class; AB Initio split into 2 classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beginners - 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>IB HL - 11</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IB Ab In - 17</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERMAN</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>100 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Through Open High School</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Continuers - 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>German Extension - 1 student/1 class outside the normal timetable</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IB HL - 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LATIN</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100 hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Including 1 small extension class</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Preliminary - 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IB HL - 2</td>
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<td>IB HL - 2</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* HL = Higher Level, SL = Standard Level
### 4.3 Structure of the Program

*Based on 2014 numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
<th>No. of Classes</th>
<th>Lesson Length/Lesson Time</th>
<th>Multiple Level/Course Offerings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MANDARIN</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-native speakers = 2 classes (32 students) Heritage/Background speakers = 1 class (16 students) 100 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-native speakers = 1 class (19 students) Heritage/Background speakers = 2 classes (27 students) 100 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-native speakers = 1 class (14 students) Heritage/Background speakers = 2 classes (16 students) including a small extension class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>IB Ab In - 5 IB HL SL - 11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Continuers - 5 Extension - 2 Ab Initio IB - 11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Extension taught outside the normal timetable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASSICAL GREEK</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>One period a week outside the normal timetable</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>One period a week outside the normal timetable</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>IB HL - 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Continuers - 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* HL = Higher Level, SL = Standard Level
4.4 Staff

There are eleven language teachers at School Four in the senior school. The junior school languages are run separately to the senior school, and follow the IB Primary Years Program for Mandarin. Junior school staff were not included in data collection.

4.5 Exploring Success in this Context

Success in this context is measured in a number of ways. Teachers identified that success is measured by the number of students choosing to study a language beyond the compulsory years, by the level of enjoyment of students, and by students envisaging languages being part of their lives beyond school.

The Head of Languages encapsulated all of those measures and indicated that for him there are several measures of success:

“The first measure would be how many students we can motivate to study the foreign language beyond the hundred hours. And on average I suppose you’d say we get between 50-60% of our students going on beyond the 100 hours. And then the next measure of success would be the transition from ten to eleven... the last measure of success is – one that I’ve always felt personally but I believe our staff here share – and that is we’d like our students to study the language at university and we hope that some of them may use it in their careers... I suppose the other measure is even if they don’t go on to University – do they enjoy it for the years that they’re doing it.”

Another language teacher indicated that the students’ behaviour in class indicates their engagement and enjoyment of the class. Managing to engage students and have them enjoy the class is one measure of success:

“Number one I guess it would be their behaviour and attitude in class, you see if they are interested, if they pay attention and want to participate ... “

“I think it’s important to establish a rapport with the kids. If they trust you, if they like you they will be more inclined to work and follow you in whatever you want to do with them...”

“It’s not a matter of trying to reach a certain standard, it’s trying to have them interested ... Somehow you have to make what they’re learning relevant to them.”
For another teacher it was also important that if students enjoyed their studies they might then select to continue with the language into Years 11 and 12. Her aim was to prepare all students adequately so that if they did continue with the language they would be well prepared for senior study:

“once they have done French for about two years they have selected to learn the language, and you’re looking at the bigger picture and ultimately I would like to prepare them for studying French in Years 11 and 12 so I make it clear, if you follow me in my crazy adventure you guys will be prepared in Year 11 and you will enjoy Years 11 and 12.”

One teacher indicated that success doesn’t mean reaching a certain level of achievement. It means each student doing the best that they are capable of. The teacher said:

“it’s not just a matter of them 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.”

One member of the executive looked at the number of students choosing to continue with a language as the main indicator of success. He said: "I think success really is measured by retention of student numbers and there’s reasons for that. I think in this day and age even getting students to do language is a measure of success in and of itself.”

Across the teachers and executive, retention is seen as a key measure of success. However, instilling a love of language learning that extends beyond the school is also highlighted as an affective measure of success.

4.5.1 Factors that Staff Identify as Impacting on Success

Leadership

A number of teachers indicated that leadership is a key factor for the success of the program. A clear and consistent message from senior executive is seen as imperative for the program to gain wide appeal and recognition across the student body. The teachers believed that the school has a champion at executive level supporting language study:

“There is one person at executive level who has consistently spread the message that languages are important. We could not have asked for a better director of studies because he speaks in front of all the Year 7 parents and has actually said to them we would encourage your boys to consider studying two languages.”
In addition the teachers believe that the principal also emphasises this message by permitting small classes for certain languages when only one or two students want to study a language at a particular level. They believe this shows a valuing and support for the language program from senior management:

“We have a headmaster who will allow an extension Chinese class of one boy and an extension German class of one boy and they actually have timetable time for that”.

Indeed, the senior executive themselves identified language learning as important for reasons beyond language use. There is a clear understanding at this leadership level of the wider benefits of language study and a genuine belief that this is essential for education. One executive staff member said:

“I have always talked up languages. I can't play favourites but I'll always defend languages for all sorts of reasons. I'm quite objective about the benefit that they have to general cognition, about the fact that every other nation learns languages, about the fact that if you learn a European language your English improves. All of those things I will talk up and I always have. I don't think that's to the detriment of other subjects.”

This level of support in senior executive staff is a key factor leading to the success of a languages program at all levels. For the program to be strong through to senior years in any school, it is important to have this type of belief in the value and benefit of language learning for general cognition and development.

**Accomplished Teaching**

The core elements of accomplished language teaching identified by the teachers in this school included skill in the language and an enthusiasm or passion for the teaching of that language.

“One is high level of competence and number two is a love of what they're doing which enthuses the kids. There's nothing else. Two criteria. We have an outstanding languages department and they're really passionate. That's the critical factor”.

The enthusiasm and passion is emphasised as particularly important when students reach the elective stage of language learning.

“One of the reasons why we have a solid program in the middle school is that we are very lucky here to have a staff that are very very passionate about the language they teach.”
Executive staff identified that this enthusiasm and passion is the key element above and beyond any other factor in the success of the program, and is essential in running a sound taster program at Year 7 level. This member of the executive believed that although taster courses can be problematic, the course in this school seems to be sufficiently rigorous and with high enough standards set that he believes it works well. He indicated that without such a solid program a taster course might serve to de-motivate students from language study. He said:

“Enthusiasm and passion of the teachers. That’s all it is. If you haven’t got the staff who are so enthusiastic [then the taster course might not work].”

4.5.2 How Does the School Value Languages

The school is viewed as valuing languages in a range of ways. Teachers believe that the inclusion of the International Baccalaureate as an optional alternative to the HSC, which is perceived by students and parents as a rigorous option, gives a strength to the languages program that isn’t seen within other curriculum frameworks. As languages are compulsory for all students in the IB scheme, it lends support to the rationale that languages are important. One teacher said:

“Firstly at the sharp end, Years 11 and 12, the most obvious thing [the school has done] is the introduction of the IB. The IB has given a validation to languages that the HSC doesn’t. And for that reason alone I would go into battle for the IB.”

In referring to the IB program, teachers felt that the program gives validation to what they say to parents about the importance of language study. One teacher said:

“It’s the first time in my career I can stand in front of Year 10 parents and talk about a compulsory component that is languages.” Another teacher said:

“The big advantage we have is offering the IB at Year 11 and 12. The language in the IB becomes like English or maths or science. There’s no competition whatsoever... So because of that teaching a language here is the same thing it was in France where we had to learn two languages and at no given point we had the option of dropping our language and it became part of the curriculum. Part of what we do at school.”
The teachers believe that the message this sends to students is a valuable one: that language is a key part of education, in line with maths and science. This is a notion the language teachers really find validates their work. Nevertheless a consistent message from colleagues across the school in regard to this is still something the language teachers strive to encourage. One teacher said:

“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.”

In terms of building staff and community support, the languages department feel they are given opportunities by the school to promote languages in a range of ways:

“We get opportunities to write in the school bulletin, I have the opportunity to speak to Year 7 and all of their parents once a year, we are free within our classrooms and at Year 7 level to encourage students to study more than one language. In the current Year 8 we've got 15 or 16 boys doing two languages.”

Being provided with a timetable that enables boys to study more than one language helps the language teachers to advocate for their program, and to encourage boys to consider learning more than one language. The teachers see this as a really valuable sign from the school that languages are valued. One teacher said:

“There are two electives and structurally a student can study any two languages – any combination [classical and modern or a combination].”

4.6 Sustainability of Languages in this Context

There is support for languages at Executive level of the school and this is exemplified by one particularly supportive and informed executive staff member. This means that there is dedication to sustaining language learning at the school. The staff member indicated that the school has implemented several measures to ensure the long-term viability of the program: the range of languages offered, and the introduction of the International Baccalaureate as a matriculation option. An executive staff member said:

“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...”
“... our IB that's important, and that we've preserved massive choice in our languages. We continue to have six languages in a time where schools are shutting languages down. We have two Asian languages, two classical languages and two modern European. It still comes at a cost because we're competing for the same type of boy, but the school has allowed smaller classes to run.”

While the element of excellent teaching is acknowledged, it is also necessary to identify where structures in the program, such as having compulsory languages in the Year 11 and 12 classes through the IB add strength to the program. Seeing languages as a core part of senior secondary education can lead to a strengthening of language choice in the middle senior years.

In addition, to ensure a sustainable languages program the teachers also identify that a clear and consistent message about the importance of language study is needed from all teachers and executive in addition to the language teachers. The school needs to indicate to students that a language is a core part of education. One teacher said:

“Where I think the school could do more and my colleagues could do more is to say things to students like 'well of course you're going to study at least one language aren't you til the end of Year 10? At least one language seems sensible in the modern age’”

Related to the notion of sustainability, some of the suggestions for the long-term improvement of the program at School 4 included a reinvigoration of the “taster” program in Year 7. Such a program needs to be sufficiently rigorous to enable students to make progress within the taster course, and to see where future study might lead them. An executive staff member said:

“I think restoring a more legitimate taster course would help [strengthen the program].”
Across the four case studies it is possible to see the similarly highlighted elements leading to a successful language program. Key factors identified include the dedication to suitable timetabling of lessons, the quality of teaching of languages, the allocation of suitable space for learning, and the dedication of adequate resourcing for languages. One key element which stands out from the case studies is the need for support for languages from executive staff and the principal in the school. In line with what Orton et al (2013) have indicated, it is not enough to have a passionate languages staff. In addition to this there need to be other champions supporting language learning in order to have an effective and successful program.

Success was defined in a number of ways across the four schools. Academic achievement was acknowledged as one form of success in all of the schools, yet it was not highlighted as the most important measure of success at any of the schools. Fostering a lifelong love of language learning featured much more strongly in the measures of success cited by teachers and executive staff across all four schools. Most of the schools wanted their students to continue their language learning beyond their school education, to connect with the language and culture on a deep level, and to become part of the culture as an interculturally competent user of language.

All of the schools indicated the need to measure each student’s success at their own level, enabling students to measure their success against their own levels rather than being fixated on the matriculation score at the end of schooling.
Measures of success that the schools cited included:

- 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

A number of affective measures of success were cited across all four schools. These included:

- Confidence
- Comfort in using the language
- Enjoyment
- Love of language/ culture
- Engagement
- Excitement

Clearly, across these schools teachers do not simply aim for strong academic outcomes even though this might be the common measure of their success by others outside their department or school. It was evident that the language learning experience was deemed by most teachers to be of far more importance than the numerical measure or outcome.

*All teachers acknowledged that the outcome is important to schools and students, but almost all deemed the enjoyment of the experience as of more importance than the outcome.*
A number of factors were identified as leading to the success of language programs across the schools.

### Factors Leading to Success

#### Time in the form of:
- Quantity and quality
- Frequency of lessons
- Regularity of lessons

#### Leadership valuing languages including:
- Head of Languages
- Executive
- Principal

#### Space
- Classrooms
- Staffrooms
- Dedicated language space

#### The Teachers who are:
- Passionate
- Skilled
- Dedicated
- Enthusiastic
- Developing a rapport
- Making meaning relevant

#### Sufficient resourcing through:
- Equipment
- Buildings
- Technology
- Texts and resources

#### 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 elements & themes for success

A number of the themes highlighted by the teachers and executive in this study align with prior work exploring the success of language learning.

Closely aligned with one of the themes highlighted in the literature (Orton et al, 2013), was the evidence that schools believe it is...

...**imperative that there be a “champion” for languages at senior Executive level.**

All schools identified leadership above and beyond the head of department as essential to the success and sustainability of their program. A passionate and dedicated head of department is extremely important, but many teachers identified that the head of department alone cannot always make sufficient impact to develop an extremely strong program. Where there is also strong support at senior executive level it is possible to introduce some key factors which ensure higher levels of success. Such factors include: extending the compulsory years of language learning to the end of Year 9 or 10; providing space in the timetable for students to study two languages throughout the secondary school; providing space in the timetable for multiple levels such as beginners and continuers at junior secondary level; allowing classes to run with small numbers to enable multiple courses (such as beginners, continuers, extension, HSC and IB) to run alongside each other; to introduce programs which make languages an essential part of education (such as the IB). This aligns with prior work which indicated the need for leadership to also engage in program advocacy (Lindholm-Leary, 2005).

We can also see that a number of elements that teachers cite as important in their program align with prior work on successful language learning. For example the focus on engagement as an indicator of success was highlighted by Conway et al (2012) in their EESR framework, was also highlighted by many teachers in this study who deemed student engagement and enjoyment as a key element of their program being successful. The clear, structured, and sequential planning cited by School #2 as integral to their planning also emulates elements highlighted in Conway et al's (2012) framework for successful language learning and Browett's (2009) key elements for successful primary language learning.

At a program level we can see a number of the key elements highlighted by the schools in this study that are reflected in the prior research in this area. In particular, the need for school-wide support for languages which is cited in the literature as essential for strong language programs, was also cited by all schools in this study (Lindholm-Leary,
2005; AFMLTA, 2005). Similarly, the need for support for teachers to undertake professional learning is highlighted by both the teachers and the literature (Browett, 2009). It is also possible to see alignment between the teachers’ acknowledgement of...

...the importance of the allocation of suitable space and suitable time to language learning

and the program standards developed by the AFMLTA (2005) which also highlight dedicated space and suitable timetabling as key elements of a successful program for language learning. The focus on needing regular lessons within the timetable is also highlighted in Browett’s (2009) prior research and was a theme mentioned by all schools.

What is not clearly highlighted in prior work is the focus many teachers indicated in this study of the importance of...

...facilitating a lifelong love of language learning in their students.

Many of the teachers in this study had a vision of preparing their learners for life, rather than simply for University or school examinations. Many of the teachers spoke of the importance for them in seeing their learners develop a deep passion and commitment to their language and even becoming a part of the culture of that language. Teachers do not see their work as complete when their students take the HSC or IB examinations or complete their assessment tasks. The image of good teaching shown by these teachers, extends beyond the classroom and beyond standard measures of language learning. These teachers want to ensure that their students' lives are impacted by their experience of language learning and that they may take on the language and culture as an important part of their repertoire of skills. This shows the true passion and dedication many of these teachers feel for language teaching, and which is passed on to their learners who develop real and lasting connections to their languages and cultures. The successful language learner is one who is committed to the language and culture beyond the classroom and beyond the assessment. They develop a true love for the language and carry this on beyond any compulsory stages of learning.

Factors Leading to Sustainable Language Programs

A number of factors emerged from the case studies which indicate possible ways to facilitate the long-term success of the program.
Succession planning
Leadership arose as a key factor for sustainability as well as success. For a program to be sustainable it needs to be considered integral to the school beyond the employment of the current language teacher or head of department. This is where a champion for languages at executive level is essential in order to ensure that there is a plan for succession when current teachers move, retire or reduce their teaching load. Many teachers were concerned that if/when they were to leave the school the language program might not continue in the same way. In schools where there was strong leadership, teachers felt less individual pressure and responsibility for maintaining the program beyond their employment at the school. All teachers were active advocates for languages, and all were identified as key players in the success of the current program. However, the sustainable programs appeared to be those which didn’t pin all future success on the current teacher and had a vision and tangible plan for ensuring the ongoing success of the program. Succession plans included, increasing the mandatory years of study, supporting pre-service teachers in the school as future employees, encouraging current teachers to mentor less experienced teachers and instigating program-wide initiatives throughout the school.

Strengthening the Program throughout All Years of Schooling
Success at all levels of schooling appears to contribute to the sustainability of a languages program. Executive staff in schools are more willing to make strong statements about language learning when they see the program already running successfully. Indeed some schools identified a successful program as creating a cycle of success.

*However, for a program to become successful and sustainable, it seems important for the school to commit to strengthening language learning at all levels. Schools in these case studies strengthened their programs by expanding the mandatory years of language learning.*

In most schools language learning was compulsory throughout the junior school years (Kindergarten to Year 6 or at least Years 3 to 6) and in many of the schools language study was mandated in the secondary school beyond the 100 hours mandated in NSW. A number of schools mandated language study from Years 7 to 9, and one school mandated language study through to the end of Year 10. In addition, some of the schools use the IB program as a means of promoting language study, as it is a compulsory element in Years 11 and 12 either at beginner or higher level. Many of the schools see this having a flow-on effect to the lower secondary school particularly when parents and students plan ahead for their studies at matriculation.
Investing in Staff and Infrastructure

In a number of the schools it was visible that the school had invested in languages for the future. This was visible in terms of infrastructure investments such as dedicating a whole building to language space, providing extensive staffroom space for languages, and investing in language teaching equipment such as interactive whiteboards, language laboratories and specialist language classrooms.

Schools also invested in staff and this indicates a long-term view of the employment of good teachers, leading to a reciprocal feeling of appreciation between teachers and the school leadership. Schools invested in individuals by supporting staff to undertake professional learning, supporting them to travel, reimbursing staff for the purchase of language specific resources bought in-country, and supporting staff plans to lead languages trips and excursions.

Incentives

Although schools can do many things to work towards the sustainability of their languages programs, it is necessary to look to other levels of education for support for the sustainability of language learning. Tertiary education providers need to also value languages as indicators of students’ cognitive, creative and intercultural skill. To do so, tertiary providers might reward language study with incentives enabling easier access for students into sought-after tertiary courses if they have demonstrable language outcomes at secondary level.

As one executive at one of the schools indicated, this may need to be facilitated at policy level. One staff member said: “The discussion paper in NSW last year had two very promising proposals. One was that languages as a 2 unit subject might count as three and the other was that there might be some deal with the universities about the ATAR. I think if you did those things and it was coupled with a deliberate targeted attempt to build the supply of enthusiastic competent teachers then we might get somewhere”.

Therefore, the challenge of sustainability cannot be met by schools alone.

There needs to also be commitment from tertiary education institutions and from government and curriculum decision-makers at all levels to put in place requirements that will assist sustainable programs spanning all levels of education to develop.
What can your School do to Improve the Languages Program in your Context?

- Consider timetabling – could language lessons be placed more beneficially in the timetable?
- How regular are the lessons? Do lesson lengths suit languages (ie would shorter more frequent lessons work better?)
- Consider how languages leadership might be able to participate in decision-making Committees.
- Consider how languages could become more visible – a column in the newsletter, a presence in the weekly assemblies, a showcase, regular exhibitions of work.
- Consider resourcing – space, materials, staffroom.
- Consider what subjects languages are placed “against” languages in subject choices – is there scope to put languages in more lines of the timetable in elective years? Could two languages become an option at elective level?
- Consider how the leaders of the school feel about the place of languages in the curriculum.
- Is there scope to explore some of the benefits of language learning with the executive (cognitive, intercultural, global)?
- Is there scope for the same teachers to teach across year levels and across primary and secondary?
- Is there time that could be given to teachers across stages to talk to each other, program together, and collaborate?
- Consider raising school community awareness of the benefits of language learning and increasing parental engagement in the language program at school.
What can Policy-Makers do to Improve Language Learning Success and Sustainability?

One interviewee provided a clear description of what might be possible in terms of curriculum development that would support successful and sustainable language learning in NSW, and across Australia. This participant indicated that to have large-scale successful language learning there needs to be curriculum developed with clear articulation from primary, to secondary and to tertiary so that rigorous and challenging programs develop. Primary languages programs need to do more than just offer a “taste” of the language and culture. Solid foundations need to be laid at primary level in order for secondary language learning to build on those foundations and take students to higher levels of competence in their language. As the participant said:

“The biggest problem for language learning in terms of curriculum development is the fact that there is [not] any articulation from primary school to secondary school... the scandal of Australian language teaching at primary level is that it’s never serious... In countries where they take language learning seriously they start young and when they go to high school they articulate into the same language and you can actually have kids at a high level of competence by matriculation.”

In addition to the need to develop rigorous programs which articulate from primary to secondary, the incentives also need to be in place to position language learning as important beyond school. To do this there needs to be agreement at higher levels that there will be measures put in place to encourage school leavers to have language skill which will be recognised by tertiary institutions. Staff at one school highlighted that there is a need for change at policy level in NSW to ensure there are more incentives for students to study languages throughout school and into university. This would have an impact upon the sustainability of programs at all schools.
As one participant indicated:

“If the community is going to take language learning seriously then the incentives need to be put in place. Kids and parents are becoming more and more pragmatic ... And you can’t blame them. In a competitive world they go where the marks are. So we have masses of kids in Years 9 and 10 doing Commerce ... [or] Business Studies ...because it’s perceived to be vocational. You and I know that languages are highly vocational, in a range of ways that most people never imagine. But that’s not perceived and until that’s put on the national agenda and it’s valued and until there is some sort of scheme for bonus points... include languages in that and give kids some incentive to do languages to HSC level.”

The staff at one school believe that the message that the IB program sends to students about the importance of languages within matriculation subject choices could be emulated in State and National policy mandating language study and providing incentives for students to continue to learn a language not only throughout secondary school but also through to tertiary level and into their careers. Staff believed that such a policy change would be vital in changing community perceptions, and assisting students and parents to see language study not only as something that is possible for all students, but that a high level of success is possible through long-term language study.

Indeed these case studies have indicated that schools can do a lot to ensure strong, rigorous languages programs exist within the current policy context. However for serious improvements across contexts to occur, support for language learning needs to extend beyond the individual school.


