

Transcript of workshop “Promoting your Language in Schools by Liza Allen

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This is the transcript from the recent MLTAQ conference in Brisbane which our members might find of interest.

- In light of Rob Welford’s comment that he as Minister of Education in Queensland supports the learning of a language in all schools, the content of the National Strategy for Languages and Peter Cosgrove’s comment that ‘Language skills and cultural sensitivity will be the new currency of this world order’ one would think that language teachers could start to feel at ease about the popularity of their subjects and about student numbers. You might think that they could just sit back and enjoy full classrooms with parents and students knocking down the doors to enrol. However, despite all this, the situation does not feel quite so comfortable. Most of us feel a degree of uneasiness about enrolments and the future of languages in schools. It can be an ongoing struggle to fill classrooms.

Being a LOTE teacher means you need to be a teacher, a marketing manager and a salesperson to promote your LOTE. There are many ways to promote a language in a school. This workshop is an opportunity to share some of these strategies.

The school newsletter

The school newsletter is generally the easiest and most efficient way to communicate with the parent body. Newsletters are often produced weekly or fortnightly and now are available on line as well as in hard copy so if your students leave them in the bottom of their school bags parents can still access them. The newsletter can be used to inform parent of what students are learning at a given point. The newsletter is also a good medium to inform parents of future plans you might have for the department. This information can be published in the newsletter to develop enthusiasm for future events. Newsletters are a good place to celebrate student achievement at all levels, whether it is the winning of an award, placing in a competition or achieving improvement in a particular area. Use the newsletter to publish information about upcoming visits from sister school, other overseas visitors or specialists who are visiting the school.

The newsletter is also a good forum to educate parents about language learning whether it be pedagogical theory or other items of interest. For Chinese I sometimes run short passages on the origins or writing of characters, simple explanations of syntax or language usage that demonstrate cultural or historical origins.

Chinese Characters.

- This week’s characters are the words for ‘small’ and ‘big’. Small is written with a vertical stroke in the middle separating two smaller ones giving the concept of a person standing with their arms close by their sides. □
- Big on the other hand is written with the ideographic representation of a person with arms stretched out to the limit. □

Newsletters can be used to engender interest in your subject by running a “Did you Know” column. Any amount of quirky and/or trivial information can be listed in this section to create interest in the subject by parent and students alike such as the history of chopsticks, places of interest, customs, food, festivals etc.

Did you know:

- Inner Mongolia is an autonomous region of China
- Outer Mongolia is a separate state

- Most of Inner Mongolia consists of high plateaus
- Farming of crops such as wheat takes precedence along the river valleys. In the more arid grasslands, herding of goats and sheep and so on is a traditional method of subsistence

Another use for the newsletter is as a vehicle for student language activities. A short quiz directed at different year levels can be printed to encourage student interest. Activities can be related to students' current topics of study and upon successful completion of the activity the student can be rewarded in some ways perhaps with stickers this further encouraging the student. Some examples of student activities are listed below:

Student Corner

Year 8s! Write down what this means and give it to me in class and you will receive a bonus sticker! Use your text book if you need to.

□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Student Corner

Year 3! Write down the English for what you read here and give it to me in class for a sticker.

Wǒ shì yú. Wǒ kě'ài. Wǒ xiǎo. Wǒ jiào Mandy

The Noticeboard

The Noticeboard is another effective tool in promoting your subject. Noticeboards are for students and parents alike. The display of student work will encourage students to value their efforts in the classroom and gives the parents an opportunity to view student work on a regular basis. Collections of photographs from student activities or excursions can also be displayed. These photograph collections arouse interest in the student body both from the subject and further afield. Noticeboards can also be used to advertise upcoming events in the school, in the department or in the community. Displays should be changed regularly to maintain interest and be colourful and attractive.

A dedicated room

If it is at all possible secure a permanent room in the school for your language. Having a dedicated room has many benefits: it makes your teaching easier with resources readily at hand; it develops a sense of ownership in students and becomes a special place for them. Decorate the room with pictures, posters, realia and student work. Insist that the students keep the room clean and tidy. Having a dedicated room and creating a special cultural atmosphere also helps immerse student in the language.

Showcase your students

Showcase your students by having them perform on assembly or at other times. Students from Prep through to Senior will all enjoy performing. Performances give students the opportunity to show the school community what they are doing and how well they are doing with their language. Parents enjoy watching their children perform and other students see the sorts of thing that are taught in class. Students can perform short songs, poems or even short skits most of which do not take long to rehearse. In some cases you can organise a special day for your class where students perform for the cohort and their parents.

Activities at school

Another way to promote your LOTE is to organise activities in the school throughout the year. An example of this type of activity could be a multicultural day. Activities such as craft tables at morning tea, an international themed mufti day, singing and dancing performances in the hall at lunch time, food stalls, outside performers could all be part of a multicultural day.

Open Day

Opportunities on open day could be enhanced by having an attractive room display with a powerpoint running promoting your students' successes and the subject. Student performances could be organised to make people aware of the subject. A succinct and informative brochure could be available for those interested. To take away. Open day is a good opportunity to run a food stall which also makes the subject visible outside the confines of the classroom.

Subject selection evenings

On subject selection evenings ensure that you have brochures available with details of your programme. Videos of student performances could be showing in the classroom. Texts and examples of student work could also be on display.

Enter competitions

Yet another way to promote your language in the school is to organise to have students enter competitions as they become available. There are numerous competitions available dependant on the language and some competitions such as the MLTAQ competition can be entered by students from a wide age range. For Chinese there is the MLTAQ competition, the CLTAQ speaking competition, the Griffith University speaking competition, the University of Queensland writing competition and the ACER test. You may wish to make your own competitions as well such as Abacus making, dragon boat making, calligraphy etc. All these activities give you opportunities to announce and celebrate student success on assembly, on the noticeboard and in the newsletter.

Days of Excellence

Holding Days of Excellence is another way to promote your language. Days of Excellence can be open to other schools or in house. These days are great opportunities for your students to extend themselves and they create interest within the school. Parents see that there are opportunities for their children to be extended. Students return home after a full day to recount all the wonderful and varied things that they have experienced. In the case of the event where students are invited from other schools, there is an opportunity for students from those schools to see the teacher in action, the school and some of your students which may well encourage them to select your subject in the event that they do enrol at your school. Once again there is flow on marketing as a result of these events.

Class dinners

To encourage student enthusiasm about the subject organise class dinners at local language specific restaurants. It is my experience that students and their parents are very happy to attend and everyone enjoys the experience. Students have fun socialising outside of school and the teacher also has an opportunity to relate to the students in a different setting. Photos from the dinner go on the noticeboard and a paragraph finds its way to the newsletter. Students talk about their dining experiences for many weeks to come and ask for another to be organised before you have recovered from the last one.

Publish articles

Publishing articles is another way to promote your school in the community at large and at school. Articles can be about student activities or other events of importance at the school. Copies of published articles go on the noticeboard and a paragraph is added to the

newsletter about the publication of an article about the school. The students enjoy seeing their photos or articles written about them in print. Always try to have a page in the school year book on your activities throughout the year.

Overseas trips

Organising an overseas trip to the target country engenders a lot of interest in your subject both from your students and other students in the school. After the trip you have much to write about in the newsletter, you can possibly have an article put in the local newspaper and the photos go on the noticeboard.

Teaching practice

This area is another paper in itself and so I will simply outline some ideas here. After all is said and done, possibly the best way to promote your subject is through teaching practice. Making your subject accessible to students and an enjoyable subject to learn will encourage students to enrol and to remain enrolled in your subject. Students talk about their subjects and what they will select and why. Word of mouth is a powerful marketing tool. Lessons need to be innovative, relevant to the students and fun. This can be achieved by incorporating games and activities that students enjoy and rewarding students for their effort or achievement.

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