

Linking Language - the Journey

“The Sum of the Parts is greater than the whole”

Jeanette Jennings



As an educator, one of the best gifts we can give our students lies not just in the passing on of knowledge and information but in resourcing and combining the skills of others, which in turn enhances the talents of each individual. Our shared abilities generate a creative force stronger than the individual can produce alone.

The goals of the art enrichment program are to develop these skills through consultation and collaboration. The more links we can make for students, in as many ways as possible, the richer their educational and artistic experience. Pivotal to the development of this program is the way in which it is consciously extended into other areas of the curriculum, into our school community and further into the public arena. As well as developing as individuals, our students are encouraged to use their ideas and skills as part of a larger team, both in the classroom and in the broader community. Learning cooperation, developing listening skills and being accepting of other's opinions and ideas are crucial life lessons.

The ambience of our school reflects the collaborative nature of our work. Poetic text greets you as you walk along the pathway to our school, the Music Room is filled with text and visual narratives, our Library and Art are well integrated and we work in unison in what are

called Lart sessions where we combine language and art in an integrated approach.

Although we have initiated this strong base for our literacy program, the introduction of the Chinese language taught across levels Prep to Year 5 is also a literacy based component of the curriculum; yet we had not explored the potential of extending this into our program.

This year we celebrated the year of the Water Dragon, a significant cultural event for the Chinese, as this particular creature is only celebrated every 60 years. Taking this into account the idea came to me to use this as an opportunity to bring Chinese language into our broader collaborative program. The Chinese teacher works very much in isolation, coming into each classroom three times weekly for a total of 100 minutes. This is the only contact students have with the language. Spending some planning time with the Chinese teacher to make links across our areas and into our library program has provided a great starting point. We are in the early stages of developing a program that will be both linguistically inclusive and visually rich. Through this planning and shared experiences the LOTE program is now being supported by visual references developed in the art room and research in the library.

Our Librarians and research technician actively provided rich resources to support our art program in developing the imaginative content and immersing the students in the wonder of Dragons. Mini group sessions for discussions about Dragons were a strong component of the Library curriculum. These small group sessions led to whole group discussion and the development of larger questions to be answered.

Our Librarian has developed a performance task of creating a Picture Storybook for the Year of Reading with our Year 4 students this year and connections are being made with Jacqui Morris's story 'Tell me a Dragon'. Where the timetable allows we engage students in combined Library/Art sessions. These sessions are held in an impromptu way as the journey dictates how our combined resources will fit together. An initial session was held where two classes came together and we studied the book in detail looking at both the text and illustrations. Half the group remained in the library and the other half came to the art room to commence their water colour paintings. We used this medium to remain true to the book's illustrations. This group took on the process followed by Jacqui Morris and created their images first and the text followed the visual interpretation. The second group who remained in the Library looked closely at the language, and built a text based interpretation of the story. We found that this opportunity for students to explore the correlation between the visual and language components of a story provided direct insight into the collaboration of authors and illustrators.

ICT is always intertwined within the program and video clips of Dragons that include imaginative and stimulating visual resources are used across Art, Library, and Chinese sessions.

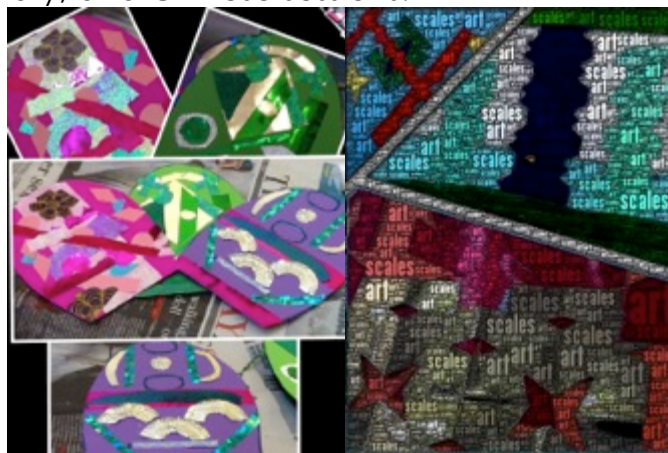


Photo of Digital artwork

ICT artistic connections are being made through the use of the ipad where students used their scales manipulated them into computer graphics. Students worked in art sessions and emailed their results and these were directly transferred to the TV screen as we worked. I pads were also used for the design of their actual artwork.

The Chinese teaching staff has made an enormous contribution to this project and a feeling of enthusiasm resonates throughout the school. Planning together has given them a broader base from which to work and provided new ways of making the students learning visible. This has not previously been the case with our LOTE curriculum. Seeing the Chinese language out in our community space visually supports learning outcomes and promotes interest from all staff and visitors to the school. In their Chinese classes students are creating banners about Dragons through ICT resources, translating text so that both languages are clearly visible alongside the work and exploring resources with their teachers.



Photo of Display - The Chinese / English translations sit side by side on each art piece and the process documentation.

Our Library is filled with the children's imaginative thoughts and our corridors are coming alive with visual representations of Dragons, Lanterns and language.

Apart from this visual extravaganza we are on an educational journey to see what will be the overall educational benefits to the students.

With our visual records on display our journey through literacy has extended into more collaborative art experiences for the students and staff. Working closely with our upper primary students, LOTE staff and parents we now have our large Dragon on display. This Dragon represents the graphic design work of our Year 5 and 6 students and includes the characteristics of the Dragon written in Chinese language classes. The blending of the art process and language components allows the viewer to enjoy a rich and informative experience. The Chinese staff was provided with colourful paper scales and they encouraged the students in their language classes to research the characteristics of the Dragon and write their findings in both Chinese and English onto each scale. These scales were incorporated into the design amongst the decorative work.



Photo of scales

The LOTE teacher has created a banner inscribed in authentic Chinese characters to complement the work. With our resident Dragon in place we are now focusing on another cultural aspect of China, the magic of opera. LOTE staff is using ICT resources to provide a background for students in their language sessions and these resources are being used for stimulus in our Art sessions.



Chinese teacher Hattie taking a class session

Student outcomes are so much richer for having specialists in their field work so closely together to provide the best resources. This being said, it is paramount that instructions be clear at all times as we have had some minor issues with understanding each stage of the process. Our LOTE staff speak English well in everyday conversation; however sometimes instructions can be lost in translation. An example of this being that the younger students were informed in their language classes they would be making Chinese Opera Masks. They arrived at the art room door full of excitement and anticipation. However I had only intended to work with the upper school. Rather than disappoint, we are all working on masks. Such is the art of flexibility!

In our art sessions we have created 3D Dragons and now with the LOTE resources we are working toward the creation of Chinese Opera Masks across most year levels. Students have gained substantial knowledge of the meaning behind these cultural and drama based images and can relate to both the colours and decorative qualities of each character. The planning has been sequential from the Chinese lesson based learning through to the design phase and finished artwork. ICT has also played a role in providing a visual backdrop in using our ipads to both manipulate images of their artwork through to using ICT as a design tool.

Students worked in their art sessions creating images, sending them through on email and viewing them on the TV screen as they completed them. This has proved to be an exciting phase of the overall project.



Photo – iPads being used for designs in our Chinese sessions
Images of iPad art

Our completed Dragon now adorns the hallway and we then moved on to completing our Opera Masks. These were created using the research from the students' Chinese language classes and in our Art sessions we transferred this learning into ceramic based masks with our upper students. A study of clay and its properties will be included as this ancient material is the absolute basis of Chinese culture and indeed the name of China its from the roots of this practical and decorative medium.



Photo – Our publication – Dragon Dreaming – Front cover

Our book publication *Dragon Dreaming* has been printed and represents a powerful statement on the outcomes that can be achieved through cross curricula collaboration. These experiences offer students a rich learning opportunity and also validate their place in the educational journey. Students now understand the authorship process and the relationship between illustration and language and the correlation of the two.



Photo – pages of the Dragon Dreaming book

Artistically they have explored a rich and diverse amount of materials and different mediums including drawing, collage, painting, sculpture and ceramics. Their language skills have been strengthened in both English and Chinese. Expressing their thoughts for their Dragon story has involved using more descriptive language and associating it with visual references. In Chinese, they have increased their vocabulary by researching the cultural aspects of the language and in translating the documentation of processes in both Chinese and English. Chinese surrounds them throughout the school and reinforces the characters that are associated with the language.



Photo – Back cover of Dragon Dreaming

Reflections on our Journey: The Students:

"I understand Chinese more because the Chinese is more around the school".

"I enjoy learning Chinese more with all the extra things I see because it makes me more confident with my Chinese."

"I feel that the opportunities are more interesting and more available because more people have the opportunity to speak in Chinese and other Specialists".

"I think it is more fun when we can share our work around the school".

"I am enjoying it more because you combine Library, Art and Chinese".

"It is more enjoyable because you can do more and use the Chinese Language".

"I love doing Chinese and learning all of the characters and I love it better now that we have made a book out of it".

"I have learnt more because more things are in Chinese".

The Chinese Staff:

Our LOTE staff kindly provided their own reflections on how this Linking Language and subsequent publication of "Dragon Dreaming" has affected their program. The excerpts below provide the reflections of our visiting Chinese teacher and our full time Chinese teacher.

Reflection by Lufei Wang – our visiting Chinese Teacher

I know that Language teaching is really a hard and complicated process but it's thoroughly enjoyable. I should do it step by step, and still I have a long way to go, but one thing I've learnt from this experience is that, cooperation makes miracles real. I am so appreciative of the teachers' cooperation here. We can never achieve something without the help of others, as we all have our own advantages and disadvantages. Once we co-operate with each other, we can realize something we could not do on our own but collectively achieve a better result. It is difficult to teach the students the whole experience of the Dragon and Peking Opera mask if we only focus on the Chinese language. Through combining art, library and language we create something special.

In Art lessons, students create wonderful Peking Opera masks by themselves, nothing like I could buy in China. Their work is so interesting and creative, actually we can see each kids different characteristic according to the masks they've made. It is kind of a mirror, letting us to know more about the kids as well. It is a reflection of themselves. The Year 6 students made the Peking Opera masks with clay. As we know clay or porcelain is actually all "china". The students will gain a better

appreciation of China through the use of "china". I am so excited to see the students' work, and I even had a joke with art teacher Jeanette "I want to bring all the works they've made here back to China, it is such unique creative work, different from anything I've ever seen." "You can make your own one, if you like "Jeanette told me. That is a great idea. I definitely will make one and take it back to China. It captures my experience here.

We can see how much sense of achievement will the students have. I believe it has had an immediate deep positive impact and will influence them in the future. It is a benchmark for Carey Donvale.

What we can see after this cross-subject teaching is the huge, colorful dragon on the corridor and all kinds of creative drawings of dragon on the wall. They are all created by the students and every work is different, unique and creative. What really makes a difference is that every student's work is associated with Chinese. The scales of dragon have the characteristic of dragon either writing in Chinese or printing in Chinese (we try to let the students to learn how to type Chinese in computer as well, that is also a very important skill for the students).The drawings of the students all have both simplified and traditional Chinese character "龙" and "龍" which means "dragon" and their Chinese name as well. We are so appreciated the works of the students. Once they understand the culture and use the information about the dragon, under the great guidance of art teacher, they are confident enough to make their own creative work of dragon. In library lessons, I've seen the students become more informed via their teacher and explore resources independently. They use brain storming as part of the process in developing their own creative artwork.

For primary school students in Australia learning Chinese, it is a completely different language from their own mother tongue, starting can be difficult, or they may believe they cannot learn it very well. By combining subject teaching, not only will the students feel that Chinese is more interesting and relevant, as we can give the students more opportunity of experiencing Chinese culture, but teachers also are more efficient and informed. In fact, I've had two years of volunteer teaching in Thailand before, and at that time, I simply didn't think of cross-subject teaching. I was just focusing on language teaching, doing it independently, which was difficult and inefficient.

The experience at Carey gives me lots of inspiration. I felt that it really makes a huge difference if staff work together with cross-subject teaching. Language learning is always associated with cultural learning, actually, culture is a part of language and language itself is culture. In no way should they be separated from each other. We've really created a win-win situation as we combined art, library and Chinese teaching. The Students have enjoyed the process as much as

we did. Our dragon cross subject teaching is complete, but our journey has only begun.

Lufei Wang

Reflections on our journey by our resident Chinese Teacher

Hattie Cao:

Some experience, thoughts and feelings about the cross subject teaching program

At the beginning of this year, the Art teacher at the Donvale campus, Jeannette Jennings, discussed with me if it was possible to run a new teaching project; a cross subject teaching and learning program. I thought it was a very good idea, and that this creative program would make much difference to teaching and learning. Looking back at our journey over the past half year, I have found that this new creative program, which I have never done before, was a great success.

According to the Chinese Lunar calendar, this year is the Year of the Water Dragon, which only occurs once every 60 years. To celebrate the Year of the Dragon, the Art, Library and LOTE department ran the project collaboratively.

In Chinese class, students not only learned the language but also its culture. Students explored and gained more knowledge about the Chinese culture during many library sessions. In Art lessons, students produced art works that reflected what they have learnt. For example, in Term 1, students learned to write characters, phrases and sentences about dragons in Chinese classes. In the Art lessons, students made dragon scales, dragon masks etc. Students even used new technology, like the iPad, to create posters. In Term 2, students learned about the traditional Chinese art culture --the Beijing Opera Mask culture. Having much more knowledge of it through exploring and researching, the students created their own imaginative mask. One of the exciting achievements, through all the efforts we three departments have made, is that the bilingual picture storybook – Dragon Dreaming, drawn and written by the Year 4 students, has been published.

As a Chinese teacher, I found this cross subject program absolutely beneficial to teaching and learning.

For the students' learning, firstly, through literary reading and doing artwork, students got more opportunities to consolidate their language and cultural knowledge. Students became more motivated and more interested in learning the language.

Secondly, through this creative project, we have achieved our goals. Not only did we improve students' literary and artistic skills, but we also developed their imaginations.

Regarding to teaching, for me, this new program -- the collaboration of three departments, the Art department, the Library and the LOTE department was very unique. It meant teamwork, and teamwork created a very supportive environment for everyone. I was no longer just teaching language alone, but teaching alongside a whole team, which was a whole new experience.

Also, working collaboratively with team members, allowed students to do things they could not have done previously in the Chinese class. For example, the knowledge they learnt in Chinese class could then be applied in Art class, such as making Chinese masks reinforcing the students' knowledge they have absorbed.

Furthermore, as a team member, we could share information and ideas, or even learn from each other from different aspects. As a result, it gave me more ideas on teaching. As a Chinese teacher, this was a very encouraging teaching experience for me. It has made much difference to teaching and learning.

Finally, in my opinion, working together in a team allowed one to feel supported and more confident in completing a task. We could easily achieve our goals. The achievement students made gave me a great sense of success in teaching.

Hattie Cao

I hope as Lufei indicates, that we may continue to work in close collaboration as a staff and provide rich learning experiences for the students under our guidance. I have been inspired by our cross curricula connections and the outcomes that this practice has produced and will endeavor to plan opportunities for this to happen on a regular basis. If we continue to share our work practices and learn from each other then this must lead to a broader learning environment for those that we teach.

Awarded the VIT Teacher of the Year award 2011, Jeanette is currently employed as an Art Specialist at Carey Donvale. Alongside this role she continuing to work as a practicing artist and consultant, designing and project managing public works of art for local government authorities and other schools. A passionate advocate for cross curricula integration in education, she regularly speaks at arts conferences both nationally and internationally. Case studies of teaching practice have been included in several publications including Teaching and Learning through the Contemporary

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Curriculum, Transforming schools through Collaborative Leadership and regular articles in various educational magazines. Jeanette believes that artistic pursuits assist children to be creative thinkers. This philosophy underpins her approach to education. As an artistic resource she provides consultation across all sectors of the educational system through educational journals practical workshops and curriculum based products on her website.