

Language Learning Profiles

Narangba Valley State High School



Narangba Valley State High School leads the way with 21st century Language Centre.



In recent years the Australian Federal Government has been promoting the teaching of languages in schools across the country. As part of this focus the Government in 2009 allocated significant funding to 537 schools to build 21st century Language Centres under the Building the Education Revolution program (BER).

One such school which has maximised its BER funding is Narangba Valley State High School. This school received a grant under the Science and Language Centres for 21st Century Secondary Schools to build its new language centre and a Zen garden. Narangba Valley State High School currently teaches French and Japanese as part of their curriculum.

Scott Shorten, the Head of Department for Social Sciences and LOTE at Narangba Valley SHS, was the person responsible for driving this project. His vision was to give the proposed language centre all the tools, both technological and environmental, that teachers needed to teach languages and he extended his vision to the gardens around the language centre. The Zen garden he created at the rear of the language centre has transformed the building itself and will be used as a cultural and social language tool for students.

One key piece of language technology Scott chose for the new language centre was the Sony Digital Language Learning Laboratory supplied by SANS Oceania. The Sony Virtuoso and Soloist software uses computers to deliver a controlled environment specifically for practising languages. When asked why he chose this solution

Scott said “All the research that I did highlighted the limitations of lots of the current software/hardware and language lab designs. Very few options were out there that gave the teachers the flexibility to deliver what they wanted to teach, in an innovative and individual way, whilst still getting the benefits of the “Language Lab” environment. Signing up to a content based system would give little or no flexibility for our needs”.

Sony Digital Language Laboratory is a controlled class environment which has advantages over an open class environment for language teaching, especially when practising listening and speaking activities. As Scott explains : “This is the reason that we chose the Sans Software solution. It allows the differentiation of teaching to learners of all skill levels without the loss of control or disruption to the language classroom. Speaking and Listening are the two hardest skills to build in an open classroom. Student embarrassment, lack of clear feedback and pronunciation are some of the issues that our SANS language lab has been able to overcome”.

Another big benefit of the language laboratory is the way students are motivated by it. Scott agrees : “Yes, by providing them with a professional place to learn, it sends a very clear message about the importance of languages, the classroom culture and their own learning that regular classrooms sometimes struggle to provide”. Also the student feedback has been very positive : “The best feedback is use, and currently we are having trouble keeping the students out of the lab, the teaching staff as

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well. Students are accessing the lab continuously and the staff are building their skills and extending the students. All of the students love the lab and the potential it has for changing how they learn” said Scott.

Another ambitious alliance that is a result of the new language centre is that the University of Queensland School of Languages and comparative culture studies will be working in partnership with Narangba Valley State High School to bridge the gap between learning languages in high school and tertiary institutions. Professor Mike Levy said at the opening: “Before visiting Narangba Valley State High School for the first time earlier this year, I really didn’t know what to expect. Coming from a well-resourced university environment like the University of Queensland, I had perhaps some of the pre-conceptions of a member of that institution, thinking perhaps that a Language Learning Centre in a high school environment would be somewhat low-key, without the benefits of truly state-of-the-art facilities, equipment and resources like a University. Well, did I have a surprise in store for me! As we can see all around us, the facilities and resources here are truly exceptional”.

Now that the Language Centre is fully up and running the full benefits are now becoming apparent. Scott summarises these benefits : "Our language lab has enhanced the culture of learning within our language classrooms. Students and staff are now working with a level of excitement and intensity, coupled with increased collaboration that we have not seen before. The combination of a professional space, individual learning, and

their capacity to be involved in their own educational needs and provide that feedback to the teacher, has fundamentally changed the way our students learn."

“It is also great to be able to give listening assessments to a whole class or individuals as required as well as being able to capture student speaking for evaluation or assessment – not possible in an open classroom. The lab also enables teachers to more readily set individual work to students than in a regular classroom”.