



# Achieving intercultural understanding in schools

## Sally Izzo, St Joseph's School, South Australia

St Joseph's School is a remote, co-educational R-12 Catholic (day and boarding) school located in Port Lincoln, South Australia. The school, which has total enrolments of over 700, has an above-average [Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage \(ICSEA\)](#) value. The student population is not culturally diverse. St Joseph's has been taking part in China BRIDGE since 2013. It has a partnership with Huantai Experimental School in Shandong, China. Students from F-1 and years 5-8 participate in the BRIDGE project.

### Janet's intercultural understanding definition

*Intercultural understanding is being able to join in and work with people in a variety of contexts. To do this requires an ability to know and understand your own culture and other cultures and being able to work between the two.*

### Intercultural understanding practice at the school

Sally Izzo teaches Asian Studies at St Joseph's and regularly uses AEF and Scootle curriculum resources in her classroom practice. BRIDGE has been instrumental in cementing the place of Asian Studies at the school, and Sally attempts to align her teaching and curriculum planning to the Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia cross-curriculum priority and (to a lesser extent) the Intercultural understanding general capability of the Australian Curriculum. In her Year 1 classroom, Sally has focused on Chinese New Year as part of a celebrations theme, and her

students have compared this celebration to other New Year's celebrations around the world. This has enabled students to also share experiences of their own cultural celebrations.

Sally describes her desire to expand intercultural experiences at the school through BRIDGE because of the largely mono-cultural nature of the student population. She wants her students to have a strong sense of their own cultural identity while appreciating cultural diversity. BRIDGE has enabled the development of collaborative activities, such as letter writing, between St Joseph's and Huantai. For example, Year 6 students from St Joseph's have written to their peers in China about special things in Australia and why they are proud to be Australian. The students from Huantai have reciprocated with a similar letter about their life in China and on being Chinese.

Year 9 students at St Joseph's explore Chinese and Australian cuisines during cooking classes and actively interact with their Huantai peers on Wikispace discussion forums. In 2014, 10 students and four teachers from Huantai visited St Joseph's. This was followed by a reciprocal visit to Huantai by a teacher and a student from St Joseph's. Further reciprocal visits by students and staff from both schools are being planned.

According to Sally, students at St Joseph's are learning to respect and value other cultures as they interact with their peers from China. They have further developed their cross-cultural communicative competence as well as the confidence to openly discuss cultural differences online and face-to-face.

The school's participation in BRIDGE provides an extension to the intercultural experiences and interactions that naturally occur within the school due to its culturally diverse student population.

## About AEF

The Asia Education Foundation provides teachers, education leaders and school communities with innovative programmes, curriculum resources and networks to support the achievement of Asia literacy for every young Australian.

AEF is a joint activity of Asialink at The University of Melbourne and Education Services Australia. It receives core funding from the Australian Government Department of Education and Training.

AEF leverages funding to support Asia literacy in Australian schools from a broad range of government, philanthropic and corporate partners in Australia and Asia.

These teaching and learning activities receive strong support from school leadership, and Sally credits this support for enabling staff and students from both partner schools to engage in cross-cultural visits. School leadership views these visits as important to the promotion of intercultural understanding across the entire school, which has contributed to staff and families becoming increasingly active in the area of intercultural learning.

For example, staff members display an open disposition towards the visitors from Huantai, allowing them to visit their classrooms and engaging in joint activities such as cooking. In 2015, families at St Joseph's are once again hosting visitors from Huantai after the success of the 2014 visit. The visitors participated in a community night and were treated to a welcome dinner by school council. The success of these activities and events has been the focus of several stories in the local newspaper. St Joseph's efforts have also gained the attention of other schools, with Sally networking with these schools in planning the next trip to China. Further, the Year 5 unit on the Willow Tree (a Chinese tale) was shared with another school and adapted.

Overall, St Joseph's has hosted two separate delegations from its partner school in the last 18 months, with another larger visit planned for July 2015. Many students are showing more interest in being involved in hosting a Chinese student or visiting China.

Some students are even interacting with their Chinese peers outside of school. Sally reports a heightened sense of intercultural understanding among teachers, students and parents, along with much stronger interest in China and Chinese language learning.

## What Works 9

>> This illustration was taken from *What Works 9: Achieving intercultural understanding in schools*, which can be found on AEF's Web portal at: [www.asiaeducation.edu.au/whatworks9](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/whatworks9)