

# BLENDDED LEARNING IN VICTORIA'S CHINESE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

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## INTRODUCTION

*Blended learning* is a term that has traditionally meant learning as a result of being taught using more than one method. Despite continuing scholarly arguments over its definition and form, most recently it has come to signify, specifically, the continued use of technology and face-to-face (FTF) methods in teaching and learning (Motterram & Sharma, 2009). Furthermore, the contemporary term *blended learning* carries not only the idea of two forms of instructional method, but also a greater complexity of presentation, which requires new pedagogy, role modification of learner and teacher, and the students' acquisition of new, '21<sup>st</sup> Century skills' (DEECD, 2012). The speed and significance of the advent of this form of blended learning can be seen in the more than 300 action research projects to have been conducted into the use of technology in Victorian schools in recent years (DEECD, 2013). The findings of this research show that a blend of mobile and online techniques and FTF instruction can increase learning opportunities, promote active learning strategies, and assist flexibility, learner motivation and engagement, as well as compensate for certain program inadequacies (DEECD, 2012).

## The Project

This report is the result of an investigation into the use of blended learning in Chinese language classrooms in Victoria undertaken by the Chinese Teacher Training Centre (CTTC) in 2013. For the purposes of the study, 'blended learning' is defined as a systematic and strategic combination of teaching and learning methods from both FTF, mobile and online possibilities in order to enhance active learning. The aim of the study was to:

1. present practices and perspectives of Victorian Chinese teachers towards adopting blended provision;
2. profile three representative Chinese blended learning programs;
3. propose future directions and relevant training for the development of blended learning.

## Procedure

The project was carried out in two stages: (1) a state-wide, anonymous, online survey was conducted to ascertain how Chinese teachers carry out blended provision; and, (2) individual interviews with Survey participants from three representative schools were conducted to explore actual practice and gain insight into the process of adopting blended provision in Chinese programs.

## Instruments

The Survey was constructed using *Qualtrics Survey Software*. Questions in an initial section were asked to determine whether the responding teacher's program would qualify as blended learning, as defined above. Those whose programs met the criteria were asked to complete the remainder of the Survey, which comprised 17 questions in 4 sections asking about the teacher's values and practice of using blended learning. The Survey required a maximum of 20 minutes to complete.

Questions for the interviews were designed in light of two objectives: (1) to elicit the nature and extent of the teachers' blended program; and, (2) to discover the deeper attitudinal and practical factors that had contributed to their program choices through discussion of the major trends identified in the Survey.

## Method

1. The Principals of Victorian day schools in all sectors where there is a Chinese program were approached to permit their Chinese teachers to take part in the Survey.
2. The Chinese teachers were then invited to complete the online Survey.
3. Survey data were analysed to reveal the major trends and gaps in provision.
4. Principals from four schools were approached to permit their staff to take part in interviews. These schools were already widely known to be running programs of blended provision. They

included two major regional Chinese language 'hubs' set up to transmit lessons to primary schools in their district, and two secondary programs in the city, one at a State secondary with a large number of Chinese background speakers, the other at an independent school with a long-standing P-12 Chinese program.

5. Six individual interviews of up to one hour were carried out. In a process congruent with the project itself, five interviews were conducted FTF and the sixth was held on *Blackboard Collaborate*. All interviews were audio taped.

## Data Analysis

### Survey

There were 117 respondents to the Survey (estimated at roughly 65 per cent of the day school Chinese teacher cohort), among whom 65 were eligible to enter the second stage and 52 agreed to do so.

Survey responses were coded according to the key categories derived from the data with respect to the method of provision, pedagogical practices and strategies, technologies and resources used, and support and guidance available, as well as the teachers' meta-cognitive thinking about teaching. General descriptive statistics were generated using frequencies, averages and percentage distribution of responses. The results were grouped to show a picture of existing blended provision modes, and the significance and key challenges in the programs.

### Interviews

The Principals of the four schools all permitted their senior staff knowledgeable about the Chinese program and their teachers of Chinese to be interviewed. In the end, however, due to persistent difficulties in making suitable arrangements, data were gathered at only three sites: the two country schools and the State secondary school in the city. The six interviewees comprised two senior staff and four teachers of Chinese. The teachers of Chinese were asked to complete the online Survey prior to the interview.

Interview data were analysed into themes using open coding and axial coding to identify and define the relationships between attitudes and beliefs and practices, as well as the range of actual provision. Results from the Survey were used to raise and illustrate key issues for discussion in interviews and the results of these conversations were used to illuminate Survey results, as well as to identify matters which had not emerged from the Survey.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. 86 per cent of the blended program providers are first language speakers of Chinese, with Mainlanders making up two-thirds of total respondents. Program providers are predominantly female at a ratio of 3:1. The average age of the group is around 40 years old, with nearly even distribution across the age range 20-60 years. There are twice as many relatively inexperienced teachers (1-10 years) using blended learning than their more experienced colleagues (10 years and above).
2. Technology is commonly used in current Chinese language classrooms, although almost half of the initial 117 Survey respondents do not use technology regularly or systematically. Respondents who use technology regularly and systematically tend to use it on a daily or weekly basis. Most stick with a small number of digital tools, but use them with thoroughness and consistency, but others embrace a much wider variety of digital tools, some using them only partially and some making comprehensive use of them. The students in the middle years (4-7) have more opportunities to learn Chinese using technology than those who are younger or older.
3. Three types of blended learning models have emerged from the study:
  - 1) The whole program is online and delivered through distance teaching and learning supported FTF by a non-Chinese teacher in the actual classroom.
  - 2) The program integrates a considerable amount of technology, perhaps even more digital than FTF activities, achieved through systematic and frequent use of one or a few major digital tools.
  - 3) The program is mainly FTF and is supplemented by the use of technology. The teacher is on site for all lessons and gives FTF instruction to students during activities, including digital tasks.
4. Within the current educational context, the majority of blended learning program providers use – and prefer to use – FTF teaching as the main approach supplemented with the use of technology.
5. The program providers' knowledge, skills and application strategies towards blended provision are limited. They are guided by intuition from their own experience and previous knowledge to form a simple understanding of what blended learning should be, what it consists of, as well as how it should be promoted. Although having very mixed beliefs, most program providers agree that the two fundamental features of good blended learning are:
  - 1) the integrity of the blend achieved with the FTF and technological methods complementing one another's strengths and weaknesses; and
  - 2) the seamless transition between learning activities using either mode.
6. Technology is viewed as a double-edged sword. It brings to the teaching and learning numerous benefits, such as increasing learner motivation, providing variety to learning activities and promoting personalized learning experience. At the same time, it is a source of overwhelming teacher frustration due to constant technical difficulties. This often leads to an increase in preparation time for teachers and a reservation about teaching using technology to the level they are capable of. An FTF approach is viewed as more reliable than technology within blended provision. It is also perceived as a channel to promote real-world conversational experience and provide instant and wide-ranging feedback on students' language learning.
7. The implementation of blended learning is influenced by the following critical factors:
  - 1) technological infrastructure provision;
  - 2) compatibility of technological equipment among users;
  - 3) level of teacher interest, confidence and competency with technology;
  - 4) technological assistance and learning support available to teachers;
  - 5) support from leadership and other teaching staff involved in the program.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the principle that teaching and learning should be specifically tailored to the context of the individual school and program (DEECD, 2012; Holkner et al, 2008), there can be no standard model of blended learning. The factors emerging from this study which need to be considered by a school seeking to develop its own effective mode of blended learning are set out in the diagram below.

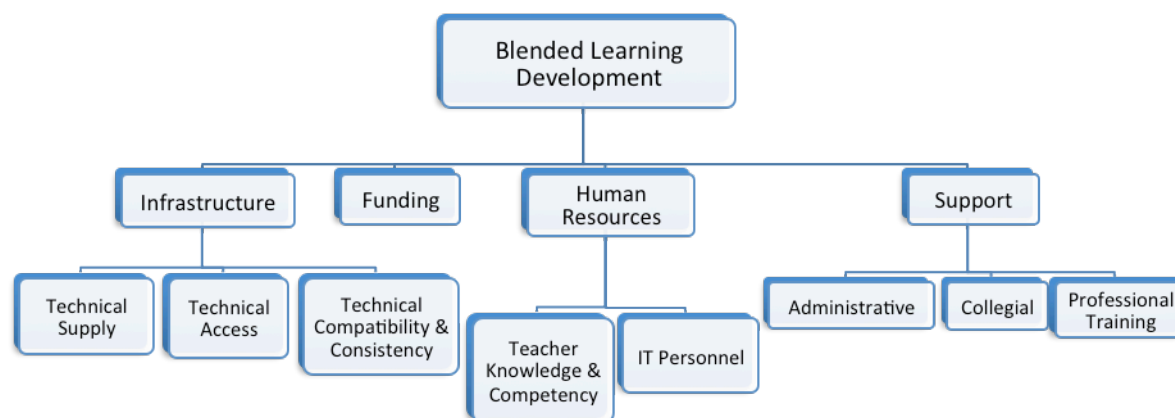


Figure 1: Critical Factors in Blended Learning Development

1. Schools and teachers who consider setting up a new blended learning Chinese program, or revising an existing one, should primarily assess the school's and/or regional infrastructure to determine: the variety of technical equipment available (e.g. IWB, document camera); the ratio of digital devices such as iPads and computers to student numbers, and evaluate the breadth and quality of network access for both teacher and students. It is also important to check for software consistency and compatibility across schools if one set of devices is to be used communally in the region.
2. Prior to setting up the blended learning program, possible sources of financial provision, and prospects of funding continuing should be considered in the school's long-term budget. When faced with insufficient or discontinued funding, alternative sources of funding or change of delivery modality should be sought.
3. Schools and teachers should decide before implementation the relation between technology and FTF contact time in their blended learning program based on their resources, budget, learners' needs and characteristics. They should develop their meta-cognitive understanding of the role played by technology and FTF methods, appreciating that both components are vital in blended learning, and need to be balanced and complementary. Not least, the teacher needs to gain confidence and competency in teaching with technology and be able to assist students to effectively use technology as a learning tool. The teacher should also anticipate difficulties and observe successes in their implementation process, so as to develop a set of implementation and coping strategies.
4. An efficient and resourceful team of IT personnel needs to participate in development of the program and be available to provide ongoing support. These people should be able to provide preventive advice (e.g. about catastrophic failure, network restrictions, and data management and backup) prior to any investment or change in technological implementation; to troubleshoot on-site, to provide training and give feedback post implementation. They should also be involved early on in the preliminary infrastructure assessment phases of the planning to advise on the full potential of the available infrastructure and its possible limitations.
5. The school should allocate protected time to the teacher for development of new blended learning materials and activities. The time should be used by the teacher to carry out the



following: to explore potential digital resources and experiment with how they may be used in the classrooms; to design activities that aim to familiarise students with operating the technology and to use it for learning content; and to assess the effectiveness of using the technology. In addition, joint planning time should be allocated to all contributing. Regional networks should be promoted and collegial interaction and cooperation should also be encouraged to form intelligence support and psychological back up.

6. Basic, advanced and ad hoc professional training should be tailored for blended program providers who are at different developmental stages of knowledge and expertise in implementing blended provision. Training should also be developed for teachers who will teach students who will attend lessons solely online.

If multiple aspects of the program cannot be attended to concurrently, schools and program providers are advised to target one area and build a strong base for it first. The critical areas to begin with are: solid technological equipment supply and network access; durable teacher interest and expertise in using technology to teach; strong cooperation with cluster schools to ensure compatible equipment and solid support from these schools' leaders and participating staff members; and on-going IT support.

## PARTICIPANT PROFILES

### Survey Respondents

65 of the 117 teachers who responded to the initial section of the Survey were engaged in programs that met the definition of blended learning provision and 52 of them agreed to continue. Only three of the 117 claimed to use no technology in their teaching at all, while the majority of the respondents eliminated said that although they integrated technology in their teaching, they did not consider their use of technology was systematic and/or consistent. Personal and professional details of 46 of the 52 were collected and these are set out below (Table 1). The remaining six did not provide their personal details.

Table 1: Survey Respondents' Personal & Professional Profile (N=46)

Gender	Female				Male		
	74%				26%		
Age	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	Average Age (Years)		
	22%	28%	24%	26%	39.54		
Country of Origin	China	Taiwan	Australia	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Vietnam	Russia
	67%	13%	11%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Years of Teaching in Australia	1-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-20 Years	21+ Years	Average Years of Teaching in Australia		
	39%	28%	30%	2%	8.61		
School Sector	Government		Independent		Catholic		
	66%		25%		8%		

The 3 : 1 female to male ratio of respondents shown in Table 1 is the same as that in the CTTC research *Digital Resources and their Use in Chinese Language Classrooms and Beyond* (Zhao, 2012), and is much higher than the national ratio of 3:2 female to male revealed in data in Orton (2008). This may simply reflect higher participation by female teachers, or it may mean that more female than male teachers use blended provision. Figures for the various sectors show a slightly higher rate for Government school participation than was the case in the *Digital Resources* survey, and a slightly lower rate of participation from both Independent and Catholic sector schools.

Providers of blended programs are remarkably evenly spread across the age range 20-60 years. The vast majority of these teachers (86 per cent) are first language speakers of Chinese, and two-thirds of them are Mainland Chinese.

The majority of respondents are in the first ten years of their teaching career, with a high proportion (39 per cent) having less than five years' experience. However, a solid one third has been teaching for up to and even over 20 years. Thus, while the young or new graduates are more strongly represented, quite evidently teachers of all ages are making use of technology in their teaching.

### Interviewees

Members of staff from three schools were interviewed. They comprised the Humanities Area Leader and one primary teacher from one regional hub; an Assistant Principal, plus one primary and one secondary teacher from another regional hub; and one secondary teacher from a metropolitan high

school. No one in the leadership group at this third school felt they had enough knowledge of their Chinese program to comment.

The two secondary teachers were male and speak Chinese as a second language, while the two primary teachers were first language speakers of Chinese, one a male from China and one a female from Taiwan.

The primary teachers were both working in more than one school in their region. One taught students from Years 3-6 at four schools each week. The other primary teacher taught weekly or fortnightly lessons at four primary schools and twice a week at a secondary school. Her male colleague taught Years 7-9 in the secondary school. The city-based secondary teacher taught Chinese to Year 8 and Year 10 students, as well as Year 9 Humanities.

## RESULTS

Results of the study are presented in light of the objectives listed in the Introduction: (1) a description of the practice of blended provision in Victorian Chinese programs, (2) teacher perspectives about blended learning, (3) profile of three representative blended learning programs, and (4) teacher suggestions for future directions. The results of the Survey are presented in charts and tables. Data from each interview are synthesised and used to present representative programs, as well as to inform future directions.

### The Practice of Blended Provision

This section sets out Survey respondents' practices concerning the proportion and style of using technology, their frequently used technological tools and their ways of using them, and their methods of learning about blended provision.

#### Use of Technology

The 52 respondents were asked about their general usage of technology and their actual use of some self-nominated digital tools in relation to FTF teaching. Although the raw data input by individual respondents indicates the lowest use of technology in their teaching as 15 per cent of the time and the highest as 100 per cent, the majority of respondents use technology within the range of 40 to 80 per cent of total teaching time.

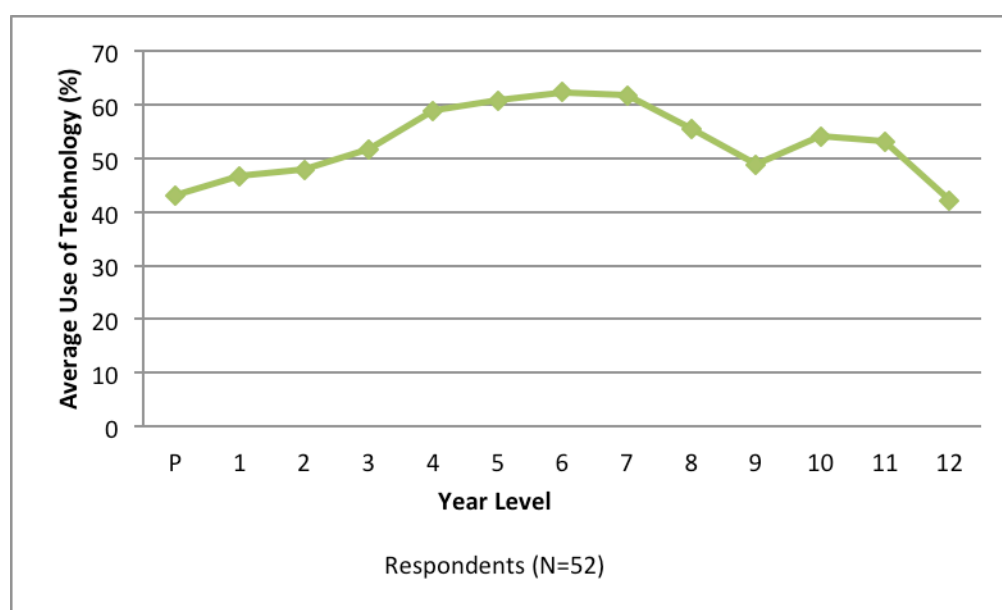


Chart 1: Average Teaching Time Using Technology by Year Level (N=52)

Chart 1 above showing the percentage of class time in which the Survey respondents use technology by year level, reveals that, on average, respondents use somewhat less technology with their youngest and oldest students than with those in the middle years (4-7).

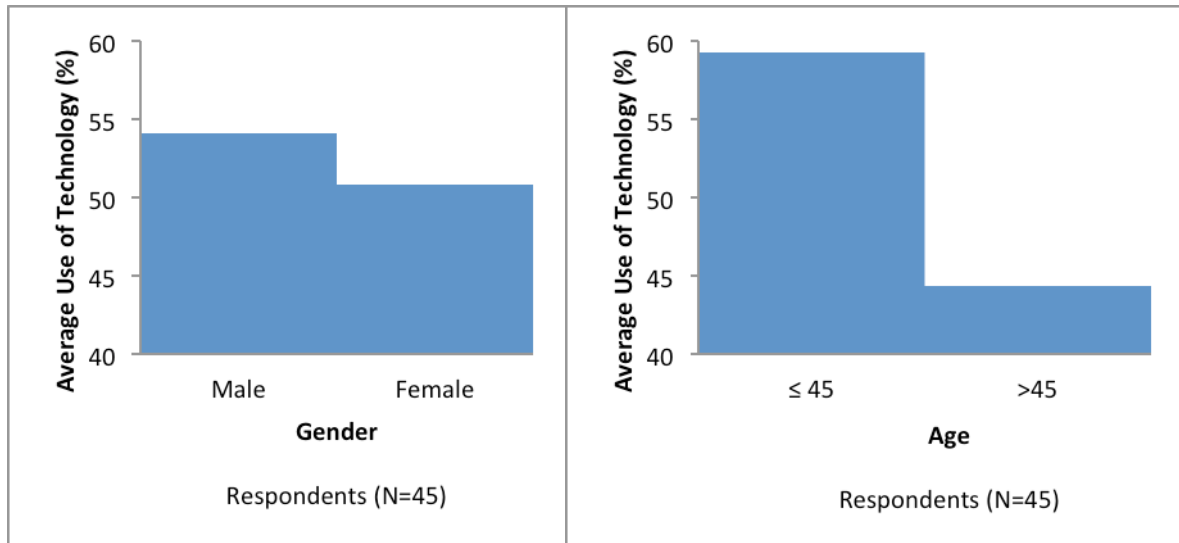


Chart 2: Average Use of Technology by Gender & Age (N=45)

Data comparing the integration of technology in their teaching between genders and among age groups (Chart 2) show no obvious difference between male and female teachers; however, there is a significant drop in the use of technology among teachers aged more than 45 years.

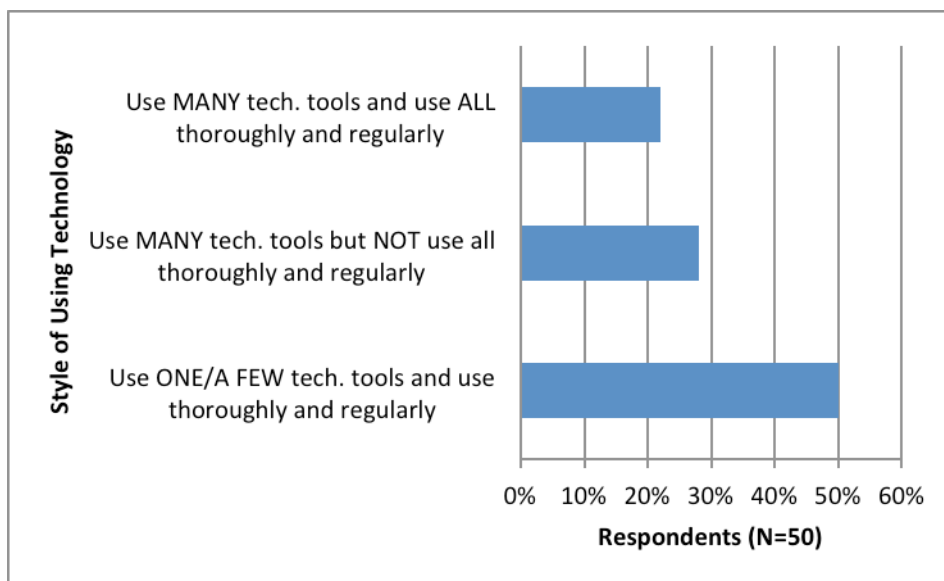


Chart 3: Style of Using Technology (N=50)

As Chart 3 shows, only a little over one fifth of the teachers use a variety of technologies very thoroughly and consistently. A further 28 per cent, although employing a wide range of technologies, do not use each one to its maximum capacity, but are selective in the functions they employ. By contrast, the remaining half of respondents tend to use only a small number of digital tools, but to use them in a thorough and consistent way.

## Implementation of Blended Learning

Table 2 below shows the range of tools, including digital devices, websites, software and applications, employed by Survey respondents and the number of respondents each was cited by.

Table 2: Technology Tools Used by Respondents (N=50)

Name of Tool	Frequency
iPad (13 apps are particularly commonly used)	36
Microsoft Word & PowerPoint	30
Smartboard/Interactive Whiteboard (IWB)	11
<i>Youtube</i>	11
e-Textbook ( <i>Nihao, Haojile, Kuailehanyu, Chinese Paradise</i> )	10
<i>Language Perfect</i>	10
<i>Quizlet</i>	9
<i>Voki, Audacity</i> & other voice recording software	7
DVD & CD	6
<i>Edmodo</i>	5
Google suite (Translate, Pinyin, Map, Search,)	5
Mobile phone	4
<i>iMovie</i>	4
<i>Language Online</i>	3
<i>Real Player &amp; Media Player</i>	3
<i>Moodle</i>	3
<i>Language Learning Space (LLS)</i>	2
<i>FUSE</i>	2
<i>Ultraset</i>	2
Digital camera	2
<i>Wikispaces</i>	2
<i>Skype</i>	2
<i>Wechat</i>	2

Among them, the iPad and various iPad applications are used most frequently, while Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, which have been well established for a very long time, come in close behind. The popularity of other tools, such as *Language Perfect* and some e-Textbooks, may be due to heavy advertising, while others, for example, *Language Learning Space (LLS)*, *FUSE*, *Ultraset*, and *Moodle*, have been promoted by the DEECD. Programs often used in daily life, such as *Youtube*, *iMovie*, *Skype*, *Wechat*, have begun to be widely explored for educational purposes.

Table 3 below sets out the use Survey respondents make of the tool they use most frequently.

Selection Rate	Name of Tech.	Year Level			Frequency of Use						Highlighted Features of Use	Purpose of use					Student Response				
		P-6	7-9	10-12	More than 1 mnth	1 mnth	2-3 time/mnth	1 time/wk	2-3 time/wk	Daily		To use as filler	To motivate learning	To extend learning time	To complement FTF method	Other	Dislike	Some like, others dislike	Neutral	Like	Very excited
1	IPad	7	9	3	0	0	1	6	0	6	Group work	1	11	6	7	For home practice	0	4	0	2	7
3																					
6	Language Perfect e-Textbook	0	6	2	0	0	1	3	2	0	Vocab learning	1	5	2	2	0	0	0	1	3	2
6		1	5	2	0	0	0	1	2	3	Listening & speaking	1	4	2	4	0	0	0	0	3	2
5	Quizlet	1	4	1	0	0	1	3	1	0	Review & assessment	1	5	2	4	To cater for different pace	0	1	0	2	2
4	IWB	4	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	Listening	0	1	1	3	To improve independence & self-control	0	0	0	2	2
3	Youtube	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	Introducing topics	1	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	2	1
3	Power-Point	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	Demonstration	1	2	0	3	To better present content	0	0	0	3	0
4	Total	15	28	11	1	0	3	15	7	14		6	30	14	26		0	5	1	17	16

Table 3: Mode of Use of the Most Frequently Used Tools (N=49)

Table 3 confirms the popularity of the few tools that head the general ranking list. Although used across all year levels, middle year students appear to have many more opportunities to explore these tools than do their younger or older school mates. Teachers who employ the most-frequently used tools shown in Table 3 do so mostly on a weekly or even daily basis. Most said they use them in conjunction with FTF methods and claim the tools motivate students. They say student feedback is largely positive, although there are a few students who do not embrace the use of technology.

The nearly 1/3 of respondents nominating the iPad as their most-frequently used technology mainly use it to facilitate group work and assist with learning outside the classroom. Two out of the four teachers interviewed, one secondary and one primary, said their students had access to iPads. The secondary teacher uses iPads regularly with his Year 7s to access various online resources, including language learning websites and apps, learning content management tools, and e-Textbooks. The primary teacher employs iPads to play language games with her students and design self-directed learning tasks for individual students who have their own iPads.

Language Perfect, a commercial website that runs the largest vocabulary competition in more than ten foreign languages, has recently received massive attention from language teachers and learners. A number of Survey respondents have exploited the website's competitive nature to engage their students and to increase their inner motivation for learning Chinese.

Table 3 shows the IWB is more commonly used with primary students. One of the two primary interviewees said she uses IWB almost every lesson or every other lesson, mainly to present such things as song lyrics, and electronic worksheets for different levels of students. Her secondary colleague also uses IWB to prepare and introduce lessons.

## Professional Learning Methods

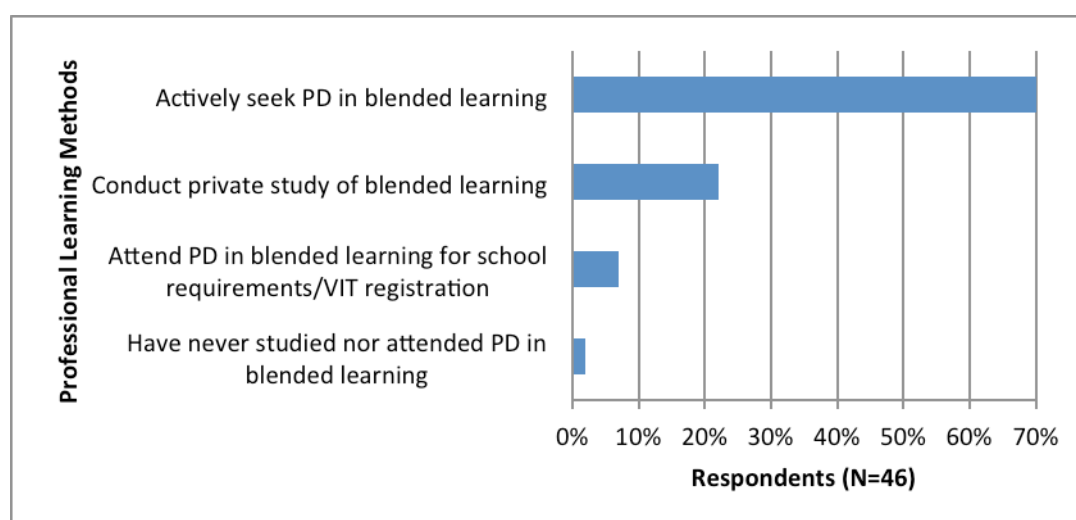


Chart 4: Professional Learning Methods (N=46)

As shown in Chart 4, more than three times as many Survey respondents (70 per cent) actively seek professional guidance in blended learning than those (22 per cent) who have taught themselves how to do it. 7 per cent of them go to workshops to fulfil their job obligation while only one respondent has never been to any form of blended learning preparation.

## Perspectives on Blended Learning

This section shows how Survey respondents perceive the relationship between technology and FTF teaching, their reasoning about using technology, their view of the pros and cons of using technology, and the level of program support they receive.



## The Relationship between Technology and FTF Teaching

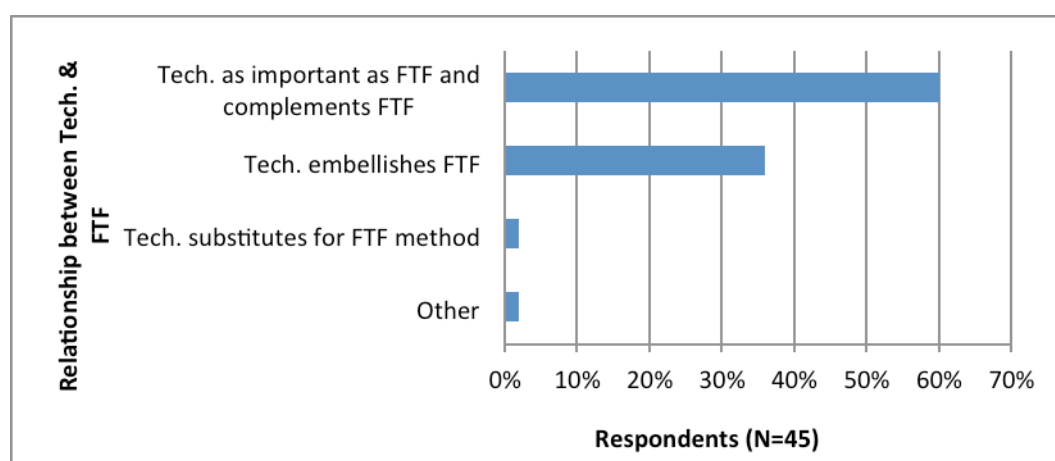


Chart 5: Relationship between Technology and FTF Teaching (N=45)

60 per cent of the Survey respondents believe using technology is equally as important as teaching FTF and can even accomplish what the FTF method cannot achieve (Chart 5 above). Most of the remaining respondents consider that technology adds glamour to conventional FTF teaching. One respondent thinks technology could replace FTF and one holds the opinion that technology plays different roles with different student age groups. Specifically, it is more useful as an interest booster for younger students while it is an actual tool to promote and manage older students' learning.

## Why Integrate Technology?

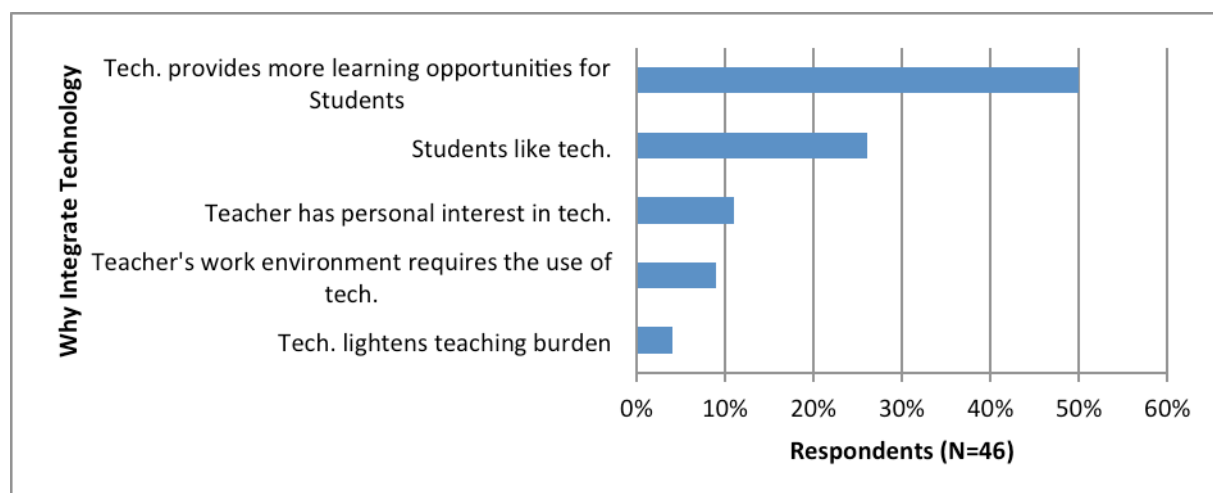


Chart 6: Respondents' Reasons for Integrating Technology (N=46)

Chart 6 shows Survey respondents' reasoning about why they decided to integrate technology into their teaching. Half of the respondents use technology to provide more learning opportunities for their students. A quarter of them do it to accommodate their students' interests. A little over 1/10 of the respondents admit that they do it out of personal interest, while slightly less than 1/10 use it to fulfil their job requirements. Only two respondents employ technology to ease their teaching burden.

## Pros and Cons of Using Technology

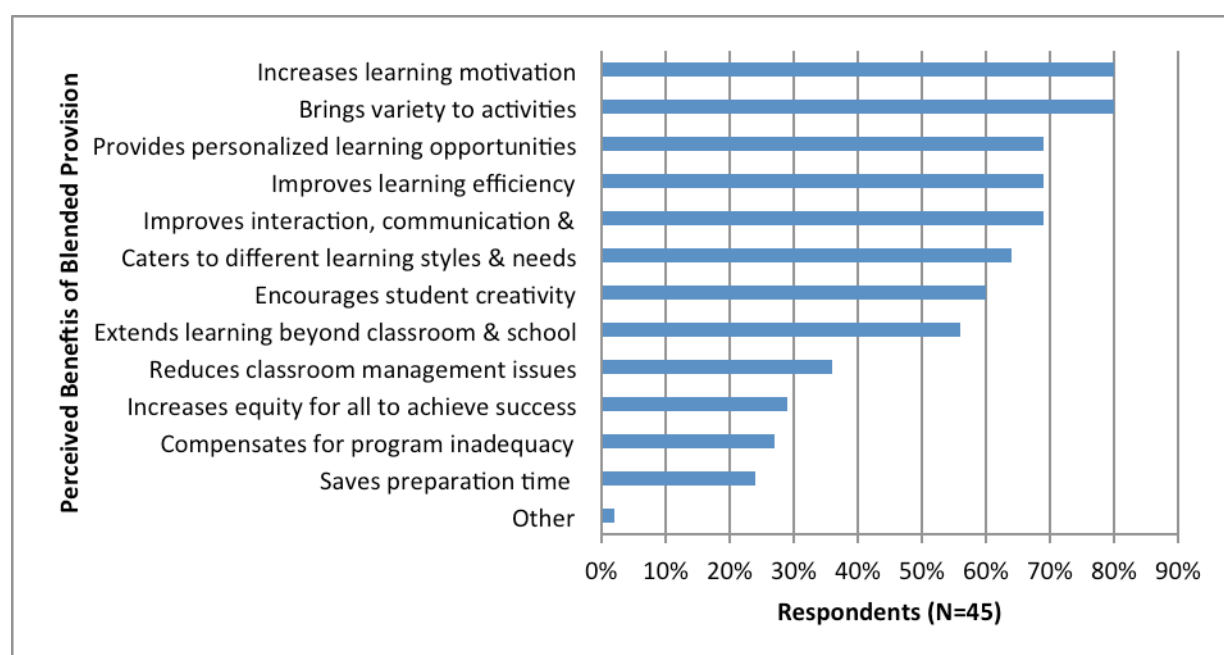


Chart 7: Perceived Benefits of Blended Learning (N=45)

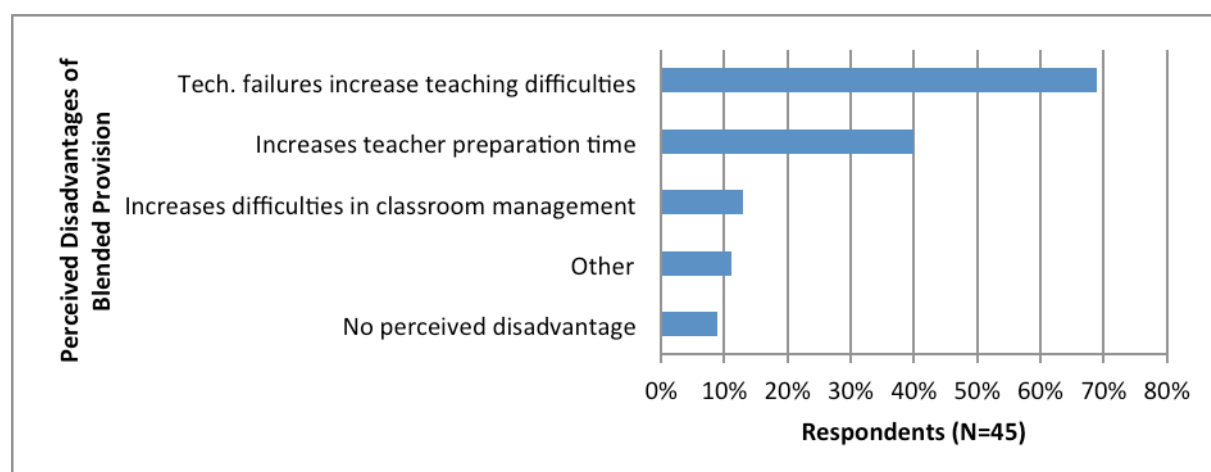


Chart 8: Perceived Disadvantages of Blended Provision (N=45)

Chart 7 shows Survey respondents' view of the benefits of teaching and learning through technology. Highly consistent with the Chinese teachers' perspectives revealed in the 2012 *Digital Resources* report, the few major benefits agreed on by the majority of these blended learning providers are that the integration of technology can increase learners' motivation and can bring variety to their learning activities. Once again, they believe the use of technology can cater to individual differences in learning and can personalize learning opportunities. Only about a third of respondents think the integration of technology can help them manage their classroom. Only one of every four or five respondents thinks combining technology with FTF teaching can save them course preparation time.

Nearly 70 per cent of the Survey respondents agree that constant technical failures have inhibited their use of technology in teaching, and this forms the biggest problem in their blended provision (Chart 8). This result was also reflected in the 2012 *Digital Resources* project report, in which participants propose a number of solutions to reduce technical obstacles. 40 per cent of the respondents consider that blended provision increases teachers' preparation time rather than saving

time, while a little more than 1/10 of the teachers think the addition of technological elements actually creates more difficulties for managing the class. In addition, a few respondents believe teaching using technology weakens students' ability in performing VCE exams, or that it is simply not as effective as FTF teaching.

### Perceived Program Support

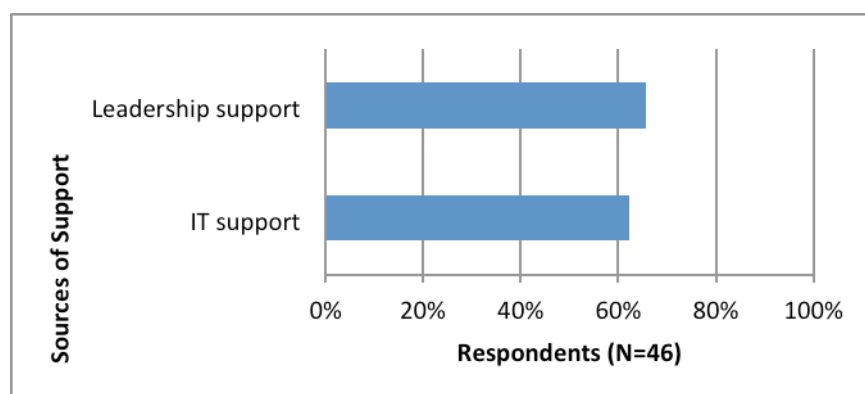


Chart 9: Program Support Received from Leadership and IT Units (N=46)

As Chart 9 shows, 46 Survey respondents rate the support they receive from their school leadership and IT units to be only slightly over 60 per cent of the level of support they would like.

### Representative Chinese Blended Learning Programs

This section outlines three representative blended learning Chinese programs from the standpoint of school leadership and the teachers. It provides a consolidated picture for each school of the leader's overarching values and vision for the blended provision, and teachers' pedagogical techniques and practices, their view of program strengths and weaknesses, and of the support that is received and still being sought.

#### Zephyr Senior Secondary College

Zephyr Senior Secondary College is a Year 11 and Year 12 government school situated in a Victorian regional centre with an enrolment of over 1700 students. It offers five languages: Indonesian, French, German, Auslan and Mandarin. Zephyr Senior has made systematic and consistent use of its technology to transmit Chinese lessons to surrounding primary schools from its Confucius Classroom.

#### School Leader

The Humanities Learning Area Coordinator at Zephyr Senior, Betty Quinn, recalled that the Year 11 and 12 Chinese programs had already been established before she arrived at the school in 2006. In 2011, the Confucius Classroom was launched, and in the three years since, she has seen the Confucius Classroom program grow significantly, with more and longer lessons distributed to local primary schools and with more participating schools, as well as an increase in the quality of staff and pedagogical practice. The program uses a transmission model, where the Chinese teacher physically goes to a participating school and teaches. Some of the primary schools have contributed to the cost of the program, but not all have the funding to support the program, so Zephyr Senior is currently paying for some of the primary schools to receive Chinese lessons.

Betty thinks the program has been well resourced in the early implementation period, with hard copy material and e-resources provided by the *Hanban* (China's National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language). Currently, the program is serving 12 primary schools, a big jump in three years from just two schools at the start. These days, one full-time Chinese teacher, Kunlun Ma, and two supporting teachers from China, travel to participating schools to teach, rather than having the students coming to Zephyr Senior, as was done in the initial stage of the program. During the two

half-day Cultural Immersion Days each year, however, the students do come in to the Language Centre at Zephyr Senior for Chinese language and culture activities.

Zephyr has made it policy to give “a definite priority” to blended learning school-wide. Given that the Confucius Classroom program was not in blended mode for its initial 12 months, Betty is very appreciative of the success of the current teaching. She considers Kunlun to be a “talented teacher”, who is able to use technology effectively. Indeed, she declared he is quite simply “the right person for the job!” Betty believes that blended learning can bring an array of benefits, such as allowing students to readily access information without needing the teacher, be self-pacing and able to differentiate their learning. She thinks the ideal ratio between technology and FTF teaching should be 40 to 60 per cent, “provided the online resources are really good”. She says FTF contact time becomes most useful when the learning content needs to be put into practical use and hands-on skills need to be developed. Betty considers the level of teacher confidence in using technology, the reliability of internet connections, and the capacity for individual students to be catered to and supervised, all have a big impact on the ultimate degree and quality of the blend. “The best model is where students have choice, and where they can be encouraged and be taught in accordance with their learning style and their learning readiness”.

Zephyr Senior has created “Team China”, to be a highly effective group of staff members in close contact with the Assistant Principal to provide strong support to the Chinese language program. Although she was not entirely sure about the extent of IT support for the Chinese teacher specifically, Betty thought the school’s general IT provision of equipment and help in problem solving was very good. She predicted that significant financial support would be needed to continue to grow the Chinese program across the Zephyr area, and she expressed concern several times about whether or not the current level of funding would be maintained for this rapidly growing program with its increasing demand for staff and resources.

Last but not least, Betty believes having the Confucius Classroom in Zephyr Senior has been an exciting opportunity, and a successful model which could be used in the teaching of other Asian languages such as Indonesian. “We could try implementing more Asian languages...I think it’s just the beginning and I think it’ll really develop,” she said.

### *The Teacher of Chinese*

Kunlun Ma is the only Victorian Institute of Teaching registered teacher in the Confucius Classroom program at Zephyr Senior Secondary School. He and two Chinese teachers who were provided directly from China through the *Hanban* either teach directly, or provide teaching support weekly, to ten local primary schools and two secondary schools. Kunlun teaches nine classes in four primary schools, mainly at Years 5-6, with some at Years 3-4. Most classes have 20-25 students, and all have just begun to study Chinese, with the exception of 5 or 6 who had already spent a year in the program.

Kunlun sees the program as a joint enterprise and he and four other teachers from the region get together at the beginning of each term to develop a teaching plan, share ideas and create resources. “We are a combined effort,” he said, “and my main role is to provide suggestions on the use of ICT.” Kunlun graduated with an English major and has long been learning technology by himself. He is always keen to explore the educational value and function of the latest device. He reasons that the integration of technology into 21<sup>st</sup> Century teaching has become an essential and the last thing a school should do is separate students from the technology which has already become part of their life. The modern classroom should “align with the change in contemporary students’ learning needs, life style and learning methods,” he said. Besides, the variety of online activities and learning material can really help students with their learning, and the one-on-one feature of computer technology can support differentiated learning, which often has a positive effect on classroom management. An additional benefit of technology specific to learning Chinese, Kunlun finds, is its potential to help students learn characters.

Kunlun varies the ratio of technology he uses from 40 to 70 per cent, depending on each school's facilities and needs. The integration of technology can be affected by many factors, such as class size, teaching time, teacher preparation and knowledge, students' level of competency and learning readiness, the availability of facilities and technical support, and even the Principal's support and suggestions. Some schools wanted knowledge for specific things. For example, in a primary school that is working on a collaborative project using *Wikispaces* with their sister school in China, the students spend 70 to 80 per cent of their Chinese class time working on *Wikispaces*.

Kunlun combines the use of a series of digital tools regularly in his classes. For instance, he has created a website on which a number of Web 2.0 programs are embedded to enhance different language skills, e.g. stroke recognition and character writing, reading and listening. He also employs a number of iPad apps, as well as accessing the Victorian School of Languages online course that was launched in 2011. His greatest use of technology is to have students review and revise their new language, and for doing homework and learning projects. Meanwhile, FTF instruction is used for introducing topics and language points, practising speaking, and in one-on-one Q & A sessions. As he said, "sometimes FTF is more efficient for demonstration because students can see you!"

While thinking technology and FTF instruction are complementary and neither is replaceable by the other, Kunlun draws a divide between primary and secondary students. He believes that FTF contact time is absolutely essential for primary students: "You can have no online stuff and still have a program, but you can't do it without FTF content!" Younger students need to be guided by the teacher to develop skills using online material, but secondary students, or those with stronger learning abilities, can manage with no FTF contact time and only have online learning.

Kunlun thinks his Year 5s and Year 6s are provided with sufficient technical equipment and that he receives reasonable support and useful advice from the IT units at the schools. However, due to network restrictions, he has not been able to realise his plan to use iPads with the students. He believes his teaching would greatly benefit from having access to the internet increased. He is appreciative of the different ideas that his fellow teachers bring to their lesson planning and that they can share the workload, but he feels he is not well backed up in the ICT area. "To establish a successful blended learning program, a team must be formed...I wish more and more teachers could develop their knowledge and skills in ICT in order to provide support to each other." He also hopes the results of the current study could make public the ICT training needs of teachers with advanced skills such as himself.

### **Program Summary**

The Confucius Classroom program at Zephyr Senior Secondary School has significantly expanded its program size and the range of beneficiaries in the district since it was founded three years ago. It has grown from non-blended to blended during this time, largely dependent on the endeavours and skill sets that the current teacher brings to the program. As a technology enthusiast, the teacher expends much personal time investigating the use of technology for educational purposes. The merging of personal and professional interests has made him a devoted provider of learning through technology, and a systematic user of technology in his lessons.

This program is still young, yet rapidly expanding. All foresee the need for greater support if it is to continue to flourish, including more funding to keep up with its fast growth and more quality teachers who have an orientation towards blended learning. There is also a need to provide a suitable level of training in blended provision for the less expert teachers in the program, and to improve access to the network and purchase further equipment.

### **Cadenza College**

Cadenza College is a government secondary school with an enrolment of 1200 students located in regional Victoria. The school set up the first Confucius Classroom in Victoria in 2009. At the same time, Chinese was introduced running side by side with Japanese. Cadenza is currently serving as a

hub for Chinese teaching in the region, offering lessons to ten primary schools, as well as second language Chinese to its own students in Years 7-9 and first language Chinese to its Years 11-12.

### *School Leader*

The Assistant Principal at Cadenza College, Kathy Churchill, looks after student and staff wellbeing, international programs and the languages area. She explained that the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture in the school was part of the whole school strategic plan. "We really have a passion for international...our students get a lot of global awareness and they do have the skills to be able to operate in the world as it changes," she said. Besides offering Japanese and Chinese, the school runs a five-week Intercultural LINKS program in Years 7-12 in which students, most of whom are from a monocultural background, are given opportunities to study other cultures and learn about tolerance and care. The school has developed sister school relationships with a number of Chinese schools and one Turkish school. They have also formed a partnership with a teacher training centre in China to provide professional development for the teachers there to teach English. Kathy believes that in the last five years the school has really developed an international focus, with Japanese and Chinese as the centre. She perceives the two language programs and the sister school relationships are contributing significantly to realisation of the holistic international vision in the school.

Similarly, Kathy sees the school's timetabled Chinese classes and the lessons distributed to local primary schools from the Confucius Classroom to both be part of Cadenza's Chinese program. "It is a bit difficult to differentiate what's Confucius Classroom and what's not...The Confucius Classroom is the umbrella under which the whole Chinese program runs." Under this umbrella, regular classroom teaching, language immersion sessions, community language learning, and even the regional Principal Forums that endeavour to develop local relationships, all thrive. Due to a concerted effort by staff, the Cadenza region's Chinese programs have mushroomed so that "Mandarin is probably taught in the majority of the primary schools in this area".

Within the school, Chinese is taught in Years 7-9 for four or five 50-minute lessons each week, while the primary program timetables vary. Kathy estimates that each primary school on average has a total of 120 minutes per week for Chinese. She is confident that the teachers are provided with ample technological equipment, including IWB, iPads, school-wide internet access, and the e-resources offered at the Language Centre. She thinks the Chinese teaching team uses "lots and lots of technology!" Kathy views technology as a necessity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century classroom, because it forms an indivisible part of contemporary life for students, and also because it allows real-time access to infinite resources for language learning. "You can bring China now into your iPad. It's there now and it's very engaging for kids. So blended, yes!" Kathy thinks blended learning opens up more opportunities for students to use the target language, to differentiate their learning levels, and to assist them with becoming independent learners. It allows small schools to get a few hours of language through online teaching. One bonus is that the self-explanatory features of many online learning modules can free the Chinese teacher from needing to attend to the students at all times, so that even when he/she is not in the school the class can be looked after by non-expert in Chinese language.

Kathy believes technology can empower teaching and learning in many ways, yet it is "only a tool for the program...as an add-on to support". The FTF contact time is irreplaceable, she says, because "you need the interaction with the native speaker, or with the teacher". There are certain messages and body language that can only be read when facing someone, "which is very hard to put in a computer"! Kathy also sees the value of FTF teaching in character writing. In fact, she believes "nothing beats FTF teaching with languages...there is nothing better than sitting down one on one with students, being able to talk to students." Since both technology and FTF teaching are vital, the difference between good and bad in a blended learning program relies on the "relationship" between the two and the "balance" of the blend. Kathy suggests that the time and content involving technology should not exceed half the program. She described the school's trial using video conferencing to



teach a few primary schools the year before as “very, very resource intense”. She thinks to enable success in such a teaching model requires not only a lot of planning by the Chinese teachers, but also a high degree of cooperation from the classroom teacher at the primary school. She disagrees with the idea of having only video conferencing to present lessons: “The combination is good, but not the whole [program] online or by video conferencing... That’s not a quality program.”

Kathy commented that the whole school, especially the Principal, was very supportive of the Chinese program and that it had received a lot of community and regional support. They had been able to trial a number of blended learning programs and to develop many online resources as a result of funding from the DEECD Innovation Language Provision in Clusters project. Overall, Kathy is pleased that they have an evolving program which has already achieved merit and success. She recommends future efforts be made to obtain more time for Chinese in the curriculum, and to getting all languages staff on board, as well as continuously educating parents about the advantages of studying languages.

### *First Teacher of Chinese*

Steve Muller is the only full-time teacher of Chinese at Cadenza College. He teaches a total of six classes of approximately 20 students each in Years 7 and 8 and an elective Year 9 class of 14 students. Due to a number of pressures on him, such as the sudden responsibility for Year 9 this year, the need to make differentiated teaching resources for all his classes, and staff changes, Steve feels in urgent need of help in preparing the curriculum and for a Confucius Classroom teacher to help promote Chinese culture and language learning, which he also has to do.

Steve thinks his Year 7 group who have iPads are exposed to a much broader range of learning activities than their peers in Years 8-9, who only have access to computers which have to be booked. He said, “Year 8s are completely different classes. It’s not as engaged. It’s traditional.” Steve generally uses the IWB to introduce lessons and Moodle to share resources with students as well as to monitor the course. iPads are employed to learn vocabulary, practise characters and listen to audio material, as well as to provide an alternative method for students to create their assignments. *Language Perfect*, a commercial language learning program that is iPad-compatible, is extensively used by Steve’s students to memorise and practise with Chinese vocabulary. He likes the program’s competitive feature and thinks this can engage young learners. Steve asked his students to participate in the program’s world championship and several of them received awards. This has not just promoted language learning, but as a bonus has “raised our profile a little bit”. He regularly uses the learners’ data recorded in *Language Perfect* to monitor students’ learning progress and to improve accuracy in assessing students formatively and summatively. He also employs another program, *ActivEngage2*, to collect live results from language tasks he sets students. He finds the instant feedback collected about the learners can help him determine how he should proceed with the lesson.

Steve thinks there are not enough classroom hours to learn a language properly. However, he is sceptical of whether or not being able to access resources beyond the classroom could improve learning or could help learners to become fluent language speakers. Nevertheless, he is quite stunned by the “hundreds and hundreds of hours” his students spend on learning vocabulary recorded in the learners’ data on *Language Perfect*. He said this had never happened prior to using iPads. The adoption of iPads for his current Year 7s has helped them become “the better ones” compared to last year’s Year 7s, who did not have the variety available through the technology. He hopes to use technology regularly next year to sustain the current Year 7s’ learning interest and to help them understand how they are going in the course by monitoring their own progress. This may mean that many of them decide to select Chinese at Year 9.

Steve strongly disapproves of the term *blended learning*: “I just find the whole thing weird. ... Isn’t it just normal practice? There’s no other way!” Yet, he sees technology as just a tool with the potential to provide opportunities in the Chinese classroom: “It’s not really just the technology. It’s what you do with it.” He believes that ineffective use of technology would not make any difference to the quality of teaching and learning, any more than just shifting an exercise from a textbook to an iPad is making

proper use of technology. “Really it’s what happens in there [the classroom] that matters”, he said. Steve is critical of the practice of using technology to keep students busy. “Learning is not just matching things on the computer or the iPad, but learners need to enter deep thought processes, where they ask how and why to use the language,” he said. Steve pointed out that the dividing line between the FTF approach and the use of technology has begun to change recently, from very clear to blurry. He finds the two methods are often interwoven or jointly used for a common learning objective. He pursues “a fluid state”, in which one activity flows into another smoothly and naturally. At other times, he either doesn’t open the iPads at all, or assigns students culture projects which require them to only use computers for a set period of time. Steve believes “it is a good habit to make notes”, so he encourages students to write things down by hand.

Overall, Steve is happy with the support given by the leadership and the school’s IT unit. He is especially appreciative of the school’s effort to organise iPads for the Year 7s. The biggest lack in the program is in human support, particularly the promised teaching assistance through the Confucius Classroom program which has not eventuated. He still has hopes of getting help from first language speakers through the program to make materials and in day-to-day classroom activities. He says, “With the right people in the right place, so much happens. But if you don’t support it ... by employing people, then the resources dry out.” The good news is that he has been told there will be two new teachers at the end of the year and he now has the pleasant task of thinking up what to do with them.

### *Second Teacher of Chinese*

Except for doing a little fortnightly teaching in Years 7-9 at Cadenza College, Helen Dong is mainly employed there to teach lessons to a number of primary Chinese programs in the district. She teaches P-6 to four primary schools on a schedule that ranges from two days a week to one lesson per fortnight. She said she was hired for these lessons because she is a VIT registered teacher, which she undertakes quite independently of the Confucius Classroom. “There has been only one Confucius Classroom teacher, and we don’t collaborate at all”, she said.

Helen uses IWB almost every lesson or every other lesson. From time to time, she uses iPads or laptops, depending on a school’s provision. Last year, with some government funding, two remote primary schools were able to set up an online Chinese class for a 40-45 minute lesson once a fortnight. Helen and another Chinese teacher present the lessons using Polycom video conferencing program. The two classes had a total of 40 children from Prep to Year 2. She said she had to spend a lot of time familiarizing herself with Polycom, as well as preparing the course and communicating with the schools. They found one school responded well to the Chinese teachers’ needs, with the classroom teacher actively taking part in the lessons as well, while at the other school there was little cooperation. As a result, the outcomes were different, with one school better than the other. The program did not continue this year because the two schools pulled out once they were told they would have to pay to continue.

Helen believes that neither technology nor FTF teaching should be neglected in a good program, but should supplement each other. She uses technology to give instructions and to ask students to work on individual tasks, while using the FTF method to greet the students, check their worksheets, read books, maintain simple conversations and dialogues, and play games with them. She usually sets up a teaching plan prior to each term that clearly indicates the type and sequence of tasks she will use during the term. She intentionally changes activities between technology and FTF methods, and makes on-going adjustments as the context changes. She stressed that her allocation of FTF time was “in principle” higher than the use of technology, the latter comprising only 30 to 40 per cent of her teaching time.

Helen supports her adoption of technology with the following reasoning: firstly, e-generation students have grown up with multimedia and new technologies; secondly, online teaching has the potential to enable multiple participating school classes to receive lessons synchronously. This may reduce the cost for individual schools at which a full-time or part-time teacher cannot be afforded; and thirdly,



online teaching allows lessons to be recorded and used asynchronously for review purposes and to serve a wider range of audiences. Yet she thinks her experience of using online teaching in the year before was to some extent disappointing, due to the limited class time and the exclusion of school visits. Having contact only on screen led to some discomfort between the teacher and students. The time lag on the screen display also did not help to produce a smooth lesson: "The most challenging was trying to teach songs over the internet because of the time lag." Despite her less than positive experience, Helen thinks there is a lot of room for such programs, provided better communication and collaboration with the classroom teacher on the other end can be established. She also suggested it would be useful to have a class seating plan, and to find other ways to link teacher and students personally. While Helen believes multimedia is "indeed a good thing", she feels it pushes the teacher to be an "entertainer", someone to amuse the students by providing fun things to do using technology. She often found that challenging and when the stimulation had passed and the 'show' was over, the students often cannot easily calm down and do their actual work.

The biggest technical difficulty she has found is that different primary schools have different IWB systems. Thus she had to design multiple versions of materials to suit different operating systems. She said that small faults, such as broken IWB light bulbs, need to be corrected in time. That would allow her to increase her access to iPads or laptops as a specialist teacher in the school. In addition, she feels the nature of the job, travelling among several schools, makes it especially hard to receive proper support from the IT units. She thinks the school leadership support is also "a bit small" because her request for some joint planning time with another Chinese teacher has been rejected a number of times. Helen is confident that with the above issues cleared up, she could provide better blended learning opportunities to her students.

### **Program Summary**

Cadenza College's Chinese teaching has taken off since their Confucius Classroom was launched in 2009. The Assistant Principal considers Chinese as a focus in the school's strategic plan and the Confucius Classroom program as a channel to realise this plan. The two teachers of Chinese in the school, however, see the Confucius Classroom program more as a source of teaching resources and teaching aids, but otherwise as an operation that is independent of their own teaching.

The level of technology provision has been increasing at the school, although the two teachers do not always find they have the resources they would like to carry out blended provision. This is due to such things as school restrictions, technical difficulties, and the changing teaching contexts. With the primary teacher having fewer digital resources to dispose of than her secondary colleague, both endeavour to optimise whatever is available to them. Both teachers mix technology with FTF activities to provide greater variety in students' learning experience, and the secondary teacher aims to achieve a flow in his activities. Neither employs a fixed structure to blend their FTF teaching with technology. Instead, they decide when and what method to use based on their immediate needs and evolving teaching contexts.

The secondary teacher warmly embraces technology, but he sees it as a "tool" rather than a factor that determines the learning outcome. Ultimately, it is stimulating "deep thought processes" that promotes effective language learning, not whether technology is used or not. It is a priority for him to retain students in the Chinese program and he finds technology has enabled such a possibility. The primary teacher feels she is sometimes obliged to use technology to meet her students' needs and interests. Like the Assistant Principal, she believes FTF time plays an irreplaceable role in language teaching and learning for the richness of information it can bring to communication. Despite differences in their beliefs and practices, the two teachers both teach using more FTF contact time than with technology.

## Aurora High School

Aurora High School is a State secondary school located in Melbourne's inner north. Chinese has been taught there for some 19 years and currently it is offered to students from Year 7 to Year 12. Apart from a large intake of international students mainly around Year 10 and above, the majority of students taking Chinese are non-background classroom learners. Foreign language is mandatory for students in Years 7-9, after which it becomes optional. The four languages offered at the school are Chinese, Greek, Italian and French.

## *The Teacher of Chinese*

Currently teaching Chinese to the whole cohort in Year 8 and to one Year 10 class, Ted Norton also has responsibility for Year 9 Humanities. He finds the technical provision at each year level varies. For example, Year 7 students have iPads and Year 9s to Year 11s have laptops, while Year 8s and Year 12s do not have any devices of their own, although where possible those classes are given rooms that have computers. As a result, his lesson planning and teaching approach for the Year 8s are largely determined by the availability of facilities. In practice his teaching of Year 8 is "mainly FTF with a little bit of ICT". When they have access to the computers, he asks his students to use a particular electronic dictionary and to work on activities from the LLS that have recently opened online. He has also asked the students who own personal mobile devices to download the electronic dictionary onto their machines, which gives him more pedagogical choices in teaching when students do not have access to the school equipment. With his Year 10s, who have laptops to use in class, Ted has a little bit more flexibility, "but it's still pretty largely FTF... but there is a large ICT component and it's a bit more consistently used." He considers himself someone who leads his Year 10 students in using technology, constantly introducing digital resources and encouraging them to explore the resources at their own pace. This is especially useful as there is a wide range of language ability in this group, from non-background speakers to background speakers to L1 speakers. He is particularly pleased with the outcomes of a trial for using Skype chat to provide personalized conversational opportunities for a group of Year 10 students after school hours. He believes this has provoked them to think about how to use the language in authentic contexts.

Ted very much embraces the concept of blended learning to create the "best product". He sees the two components forming an integral part of the classroom, rather than thinking this is technology and that is FTF. Each aspect has its own strengths. For instance, although claiming technology is not much different from pen and paper, he thinks the former has greater potential to create learning possibilities and generate personalized learning opportunities. Technology enables the provision of instant feedback and continuous data to monitor a learner's progress. Specifically in the teaching of Chinese, he finds technology makes Chinese resources more accessible, as well as providing learners with "heaps of opportunities to hear native speakers speak" and to hear "different accents, different pronunciations, and different ways of expressing things". He has already proposed in the coming year that his languages department replace the hard copy textbook with an e-dictionary that enables optical character recognition. He thinks this investment is both inexpensive and has the potential to better connect students with the real world.

For different groups of students, Ted sees technology playing different roles. For example, for his L1 and Background speaker learners, it is a tool to present ideas and "a real source of information that doesn't need me to scaffold". For non-background speakers, he uses technology as a supplement to teach lessons. The ready-to-use digital resources such as those on the LLS can save teachers time from having to explore and organise resources themselves. However, as he points out, "that is assuming you care at all. If you don't care, you don't even want to do it once."

Ted explained that being physically situated in the same room enables the teacher in FTF contact time to immediately respond to students' needs, and promotes teacher-student interaction through multiple channels. He believes that, as the ultimate goal of language learning is to enhance FTF

communication, students can be better prepared for real-world communication if they are exposed to FTF time in the classroom, with the teacher modelling how the language is actually used.

Ted described the support he receives from his school leadership as “hands off”. He is glad that no one complains about his students’ using phones to access an electronic dictionary in the class and feels that, although not fully aware of what he is doing, the leadership is happy about his teaching because of the positive feedback they hear from parents and students. A recent concern raised with him is the school’s requirement for consistency in assessment across all languages. His response has been “consistency at what cost?” and he has developed his own assessment after negotiating with the Year 10 students about what they would like to explore within the VCE topic range. He said he was “pretty proud of” this action. Ideally, he would like to receive more collegial support in exchanging ideas and for them to decide as a team on what their priorities are and what skills they would like their students to achieve at all year levels.

Ted said he receives friendly and helpful support from the IT unit in the school, although he still experiences frequent technical failures such as slow internet speed and slow computer start-up, website access error, firewall block, and the uneven distribution of devices to different student cohorts. He describes these as “the overwhelming source of my frustration”. He thinks the integration of technology is a double-edged sword, one that adds great complexity and unreliability to teaching in addition to its obvious strengths.

Feeling restricted by the school and state infrastructure, Ted reflects that he has “not gone far enough” in using technology as he would like and is capable of. He emphasized a few times that he would like to use ICT a bit more, such as using videos and online games more often, exploring Skype further and use of the electronic dictionary *PLECO*, as well as experimenting with new tools like *Google Hangouts*. However, he thinks there are other things that also require urgent attention from him, such as dealing with motivation, methods to teach characters, and so on. “You have to pick your battles in teaching”, he said.

In order to promote blended provision, Ted believes teachers should always take care to explore a piece of technology before they put it to actual use in their teaching. They should also “try and see things through the kids’ eyes as much as possible”. Last but not least, students should be asked to carry out some specific activities focusing on navigating the software prior to proceeding to the actual learning task.

### **Program Summary**

Ted is the only person who has provided an account of Aurora High School’s teaching of Chinese. He thinks his advantages in teaching the school program is his personal interest and effort in using technology to help students learn, and the obstacles for him lie in large technical difficulties, uneven distribution of school technology in different year levels and lack of collegial network. Although restricted by short supply of technology, he exploits other possibilities, such as enabling students’ personal mobile devices and home devices for their language learning. He views blended learning as an integral pedagogical approach consisting of two aspects. FTF method is valuable in promoting real-life conversational experience for learners, while technology enables learning possibilities across countries and cultures. Ted has a number of aspirations to help students learn better using more technology. He is regretful that his current classes are still largely FTF with little technology, or needing more systematic but moderate use of technology.

## Summary of Interview Perspectives

### *Definition of Blended Learning*

All six interviewees perceive blended learning as that promoted by a combined use of technology and FTF instruction in teaching. It has two important features: the seamless transition between learning activities, including the shift between FTF tasks and technological activities, and the integrity of the blend, with FTF and technological methods complementing each other.

They believe there is no single prescription for an ideal blend. The mode of blend should be situation specific, depending on factors such as the students' age, the type and quality of support the program receives, and the capacity and skill sets the teacher possesses. On the whole, a balanced relationship between using technology and FTF method should be considered in all models of blended provision.

### *Between Technology and FTF Teaching*

All the interviewees believe both technology and FTF method are vital in creating an integral approach in which "you can't have one without the other". They agree that with the current provision of infrastructure and teaching environment, technology should play a supporting role to FTF teaching. Technology is a supplement and a way of extending the FTF approach, and a possible solution to weaknesses in a language program that would otherwise be carried out completely FTF.

Technology is viewed as a powerful tool in good hands and should have a significant role in contemporary classrooms. The interviewees believe the use of technology can increase learning opportunities and flexibility, personalise learning experiences, provide instant and continuous feedback to learners, and even raise the program profile as a bonus. There is evidence that students with whom more technology has been employed are "better" than those with whom less technology has been used, due to the greater variety of activity available through technology.

Although greatly valued, the use of technology is believed to be associated with very vexing experiences caused by constant technical failures and the time consumed in preparation. Some interviewees also think technology can not provide as wide a range of communication as a FTF approach; nor can it help learners, especially young learners, focus on the learning itself rather than on the dazzling packaging technology comes in. In addition, it particularly requires "a lot of extra steps" and careful planning, structuring and managing to implement a blended learning program. Whether or not the hundreds of hours of technology-enabled practice really leads to more effective language learning remains untested.

For all the interviewees, the FTF method is so far the more reliable way to proceed in language classroom teaching because: FTF instruction can provide real-time interaction, rich feedback and real-life conversational experiences for learners; it avoids the aggravations of technology break down; and it can engage learners all at the same time, while access to technology is not guaranteed for each individual. FTF teaching is seen as best when introducing a new topic, explaining a language point or a project, building rapport with students, writing characters, assisting with individual students and putting the learning content into practical use.

### *Blended Learning Strategies*

A series of blended provision strategies have emerged in the interviews. For example, the methods of blending are situation specified, determined by factors such as the immediate learning, learner needs and teacher expertise; the use of technology and FTF teaching are very mixed and should be interchangeable, as well as be connected with each other smoothly to ensure an integral pedagogy. Although differing in their actual time allocation from 50 to 70 per cent, all interviewees said they used more FTF instruction than technology.

In addition to these common strategies, there are some individual strategies used as appropriate to specific circumstances. One primary interviewee holds a guiding principle that a blended learning provider should always ask him/herself “Why should I use ICT for this? What are the benefits of doing so?” The criteria proposed for deciding are: “what would be most suitable for the teaching situation, and most efficient for the learners?” Due to the technology restriction on certain days, a secondary interviewee plans his lessons according to the availability of technical devices and at other times makes use of worksheets or reading tasks that can be done without devices. He also warmly encourages the students who have their own devices, such as mobile phones, to use apps like electronic dictionaries. Even this use of technology is strategically planned at different stages: he usually asks students to try and read something for gist rather than pushing them to looking up every character in the beginning. Only when students have progressed to a basic comprehension are they encouraged to explore further by using their devices.

### **Support**

Senior staff interviewed think the schools’ leadership support and IT support are better than the average rating either were given by the Survey respondents (Chart 9). They attribute this to the high effectiveness of school leadership as well as to their united strategies and vision. The four teachers interviewed report different levels of school support. Two acknowledge improvements in equipment, one is particularly happy about the level of liberty granted in teaching, and the fourth although declaring her school to be “very supportive”, still thinks her available resources are very limited.

In addition to school support, one school has received some regional support through which they were able to trial a number of blended learning programs for a period of time. This is believed to have provided “vital” learning opportunities to students. The same school has established a mutually beneficial relationship with the local community through providing and receiving home stay support for the school’s international exchanging programs.

## Future Directions

Table 4: Respondents' Advice for Future Blended Programs (N=49)

Area of Advice	Comments
<b>Teacher Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be open-minded about new technology for educational purposes</li> <li>• nurture interest and motivation in developing blended program</li> <li>• develop familiarity and confidence over time to ease anxiety</li> <li>• understand and test run selected technology before use</li> <li>• learn and/or use one tool at a time</li> </ul>
<b>Program/Curriculum Design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explicitly apply the concepts and strategies in design of a blended learning program</li> <li>• assess the suitability of employing technology for learning content and activities</li> <li>• allocate more time for program and lesson planning</li> <li>• differentiate the needs of different year levels</li> <li>• develop a balance between digital tasks and FTF work</li> </ul>
<b>Activity/Material Quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create high-quality materials that can better engage learners</li> <li>• design easy, essential, efficient, useful and practical activities</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have access to organised and labelled teaching resources</li> <li>• have access to practical digital tools</li> <li>• observe experienced teachers at work</li> </ul>
<b>Program Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actively seek support from various sources – leadership, IT, parents, PD experts, colleagues, as well as searching for funding</li> <li>• develop level-appropriate and sustainable professional training for blended learning providers</li> </ul>

Table 4 presents five areas in which 49 Survey respondents offered advice as to how to improve an existing or future blended learning program. Primarily, the teachers are advised to embrace and actively exploit blended learning. It is also recommended that they master and consciously apply strategies and techniques to achieve a quality blended learning program. For example, they should test run a selected technology before using it with students, and strive to develop a balance between digital tasks and FTF work. The advice is mainly for teachers, but a few suggestions are made for school administrators and for the educational infrastructure, such as to allocate more time to teachers for program and lesson planning, and to develop more teaching resource databases and to introduce resources to teachers.

The teacher interviewees suggest similar ideas in light of their own teaching experience. The primary teacher from Cadenza proposes adding FTF contact time to an online program, especially at the primary level. She suggests that the classroom teacher who is delegated to help in the blended program should review and revisit the recorded online lessons with students; and the teachers should be allocated more planning time, particularly joint planning time with one another. The other primary teacher hopes the infrastructure can be improved so as to provide easier access to the internet, especially for external devices. The two secondary interviewees both yearn for collegial support, one for the practical purpose of creating teaching resources and the other for psychological back up and idea sharing.

Reflecting on professional development, the primary male teacher said it was not uncommon for a teacher with a great many school responsibilities not to spend much time on using technology without a strong commitment to it and, more importantly, without having a passion for embracing technology

in their life and teaching. Furthermore, even if one did make the effort to attend training, the importance of post-PD study was often ignored. A similar opinion was expressed in the 2012 *Digital Resources* report, where teachers said if they did not reinforce and review their learning after attending a workshop, the learning would vanish. Thus, it is urgent that teachers should be provided with training in blended provision that is relevant, appropriate to their levels, and support sustainable learning.



## DISCUSSION

### Blended Learning in Victoria's Chinese Classrooms

The study shows that technology is generally used in contemporary Chinese programs in Victoria, yet the volume and frequency of use, as well as the manner, vary greatly. This mirrors findings from the 2012 studies *Chinese Program Profiles* (Orton, et al.) and *Digital Resources* studies (Zhao). The reason that there exists such a scattered range of technology use is because teachers' implementation practices are determined by a mix of wide ranging factors comprising the school and State technological infrastructure, the individual school's curriculum design, and the teachers' own understanding and capability with blended provision.

Over half of the 117 Victorian Chinese teachers surveyed claim to integrate technology into their teaching regularly, systematically and strategically. Technology is mainly used by them to access unlimited learning resources including authentic language materials, to increase learning time and flexibility, and to differentiate language competencies and learning strategies. Some teachers even move FTF activities to the e-platform simply because of the ease of operation. Yet, at best technology is used either in only limited form or only moderately regardless of its numerous advantages in language education. This is because teachers think the FTF method is more reliable than technology, and can provide real-life experience and the full range of verbal and non-verbal messages, which are particularly valuable matters in language learning.

### Blended Learning Models

Three blended learning models have emerged in the study: (1) the whole program is developed online and the teacher of Chinese delivers the lesson through distance teaching and learning supported FTF by a non-Chinese teacher in the actual classroom; (2) the program integrates a considerable amount of technology, perhaps even more digital tasks than FTF activities, achieved through systematic and frequent use of one or a few major digital tools. In addition to a number of completely FTF learning tasks, FTF instruction is mainly used to illustrate and connect to digital tasks which are provided on an ad hoc basis; and (3) the program is mainly FTF and is supplemented by the use of technology. The teacher is on site for all lessons and gives FTF instruction to students during activities. Some digital tasks are used to support the FTF approach; during the former, the teacher moves around and provides supervision and assistance to students in a group or individually. Online tasks are also assigned to students for private learning beyond school hours.

Except one short-lived online program previously undertaken by a primary interviewee, and a few examples where technology is systematically and regularly used in the teaching, the programs that interviewees are currently teaching in fall into the third category – a FTF approach supplemented by technology. In these programs, technology usually serves as a teaser, or an interest booster, or provides additional variety to the regular curriculum. Thus, the FTF method forms the base of the blended learning model, with bits and pieces of technology being interwoven into the process.

In all the programs investigated, FTF activities and those that employ digital methods are used jointly and in mixed method. It is common for the FTF method to be used to introduce a topic and to create personal connection with the learner, while technology is often brought in for revision tasks and reinforcement.

Even when technology is used for the primary segment of a learning task, or to achieve certain learning objectives, it is rarely used as the sole channel. Although one interviewee says he involved students in deciding their preferred ways of learning using technology, most teachers retain the authority to decide on what, how much and how technology should be used by students. The exception is when students are assigned culture projects that require an information search on the internet, or performance tasks for which they can choose the format to showcase their learning.



## **The Knowledge and Skills of School Leader and Teacher of Chinese**

The two school leaders and all teachers interviewed demonstrate an evolving knowledge of blended learning, the latter, at the same time, developing a budding awareness of constructing modern, dynamic and participatory language classrooms. They have used their personal and professional experience and second-hand knowledge from colleagues and institutions to form their understanding and beliefs about how a blended learning program should be offered. Both school leaders interviewed specify that blended learning is achieved through using FTF and technology, but one believes an ideal blend should comprise 60 per cent online teaching and 40 per cent FTF time, while the other believes that in a quality blended program, the FTF segment must be larger than the technology segment. The majority of Survey respondents and teacher interviewees all believe technology should be used to supplement and support the FTF approach, although both components are vital to carrying out a successful blended learning program. Ultimately, all interviewees believe blended learning has no “one-size-fits-all” definition and structure. It should be determined in accordance with the learners’ characteristics and the specific educational context.

Participants in the study rarely cite any strategies they use to guide implementation of their blended learning. Instead, as noted in the literature (Burke & Sadler-Smith, 2006), the majority of teachers rely on their intuition and make decisions of whether or not a certain method and activity should be used based on their teaching experience and instantaneous judgements in actual situations. They have also developed coping strategies to deal with infrastructure deficiencies and program inadequacies. They design tasks appropriate to the accessible equipment, take advantage of students’ personal devices and exploit home internet to extend students’ learning opportunities. They suggest building students’ ability to use technology is efficient and will reduce disappointment in class.

## **Opportunities and Challenges**

Blended learning is a recent phenomenon in the area of Chinese teaching, but it has already received both policy support and solid funding. With hundreds of research projects conducted in the teaching of school languages in the last five years, schools and teachers have formed some understanding of the potential in technology and will continue to refine and improve their practices in blended provision. During this process, exemplary practices and effective models will emerge and can be used to guide new programs and provide benchmarks for future program improvement.

Participants in this study consider the major challenge in teaching a blended program lies in school and State infrastructure deficiencies, such as slow internet speed, firewall restrictions and different software packaging at different schools. If these issues were adequately addressed, they could more effectively use their time teaching rather than fretting about technical difficulties. They also suggest a mindset change will be needed to get some teachers involved. Due to lack of interest and expertise in operating technology, these teachers largely remain stuck in a FTF approach, missing out on the potential learning opportunities of technology. By contrast, the few who are personally interested in and motivated towards blended provision face the challenge of finding professional training appropriate to their level of expertise available.

In the view of one senior staff member, their blended Chinese program will soon face a shortage of funding to match the rapidly growing demand for service. One school has already experienced the termination of part of their blended program due to a cut in funds. The expansion of program size also brings the concern of finding new teaching staff who have both strong commitment and excellent skills in developing a blended learning Chinese program.

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## APPENDIX

Program Aspects	Estimation of Costs & Time- Zephyr Senior	Estimation of Costs & Time- Cadenza		Estimation of Costs & Time- Aurora High
		2012 Polycom Program	Current Secondary L2 Program	
<b>Technological Investment</b> (e.g., equipment, resources, maintenance, etc.)	(1) \$10,000 for three interactive LCD screens (shared with other Language programs at Zephyr) (2) Extra resources provided by the <i>Hanban</i> in the Language Centre (3) Projected investment: \$10,000 on iPads	(1) A small portion of ILPIC project funding (\$100,000 over three years) (2) Provision of equipment by participating primary schools	(1) Parent-invested iPads for all Year 7 students (2) Projected investment: parent-invested iPads for Years 8 & 9	(1) Approximately 25 computers (shared with other subjects) (2) One laptop for every Year 10 student (3) Projector & screen in classroom
<b>Cost of Time</b> (e.g., school leader, teacher, IT personnel, other persons, etc.)	(1) 1-2hrs per week by Assistant Principal (2) One full-time Chinese teacher with 0.45 fraction contributed to primary school teaching and 0.55 fraction for Confucius Classroom Coordination (3) 0.1 fraction of program management work for two other teachers each (4) Six IT personnel to provide assistance on an ad hoc basis	(1) A minimum of 2 hrs per lesson on planning and teaching (2) Preparation time is requested for non-Chinese classroom teacher who provides FTF assistance to students	(1) 5 hrs per week by school leaders (2) Teachers contribute full time to lesson planning and teaching	(1) Timetabled teaching, 7-8 hrs per week lesson planning, and 2 hrs per week exploring digital resources (2) Four IT staff to provide assistance on an ad hoc basis

### Costs for Representative Blended Learning Programs