

ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
Gerard Tyndall	Big Hill PS 5644 Calder Highway Big Hill 3555	French	Year 5/6

CONTEXT

A prelude to this investigation included two particular experiences, one in Education Week and another early in Term 3. As part of an intercultural day of celebration, a local French chef demonstrated the preparation of a traditional French menu which included an appetiser of snails (les escargots), a salmon entrée (feuilleté de saumon fumé sauce grelette), asparagus in chicken (suprême de poulet aux asperges) and a salad (salade d'avocats et de tomates à l'orientale). All students participated in a tasting of each course (with a particularly mixed reaction to the snails).

The second experience related directly to a reflection of the 2007 Tour de France, including nutrition to fuel physical endurance. This focus was based on a newspaper article featuring Cadel Evans and his preparation for the Tour.

Furthermore, the investigation linked closely with the class Inquiry for Term 3 titled "Healthy Choices", which also involved the Year 6 students' participation in a Preparation for Puberty program.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

The big question for the investigation asks "If You Are What You Eat, Are You How You Eat?" Generally, these senior students were both informed and inquisitive about a range of concepts that connected with their own lives in relation to physical health and habits. The passion demonstrated by our French chef earlier in the year while preparing his menu was matched by his strong recommendation to the students to try eating different foods, and to take time to appreciate the tastes, at least more than once!

Our French Assistant (semester 2) would also be representative as an authentic model of support throughout the Unit generally, and the investigation specifically. Planning needed to include a meaningful platform of introductory information in the second language to complement the aspect of intercultural language and learning initially established through the prior school experiences.

Food charts, samples of realia, the Food Pyramid, survey of both personal eating choices and meal durations, comparisons between survey results and French models, questions and opinions that may reflect both broader and personal thinking and considerations were all to be included in the project.

One major change to my regular practice was the necessity for an increased usage of English, especially when the focus was on survey materials and responses.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Initially, a brief reflection of Cadel Evans' fitness and endurance levels, body structure (including body fat) were linked to the general opinion that his nutrition would need to be very controlled, especially in relation to his demanding physical schedule of training over a long period of time for the Tour. This led directly to introducing realia models supported with visual charts of "Les Fruits" and in the following week "La Nourriture". Students were issued with a double-sided model sheet and urged to add colours to produce a realistic presentation. From here, they prepared in their workbooks a response chart to show their own preferences under the headings of "J'aime .. / Je n'aime pas .." A brief discussion ensued on real choices of daily "brain-food" samples at school, including an emphasis of small portions only to help save time (school expectation). A large model of "La Pyramide Alimentaire" was introduced to the class for some table-talk and report back to the whole class (mostly in English but food samples in French if possible). The activity that followed was designing a large-scale blank pyramid in workbooks and students completing their own selection of foods for each section in accordance with the labels, and with direct reference to their own food model sheets (from previous lessons) and table-group discussions to assist the process. The next prelude activity in class involved the students having an opportunity to produce their own one-day healthy menu, again based on the visual examples of food evident in their prior experiences in class, but with the expectation of completing the task in written French.

At this point the requirement of a personal survey was introduced to the class, as a response to our French Assistant's (Marie) personal explanation of her normal breakfast routines at home now, and her family's practices in France while still a schoolgirl (senior primary). Parents were informed of this record-keeping activity through the school's weekly newsletter under our heading of the French Quarter. By this stage some students were asking why the survey was necessary, to which the question was redirected to them, "Why do you think?" One student suggested that we were probably going to compare our own responses with what we know about some French habits of eating. This was the appropriate time to distribute a one-page copy to each student of another source titled "Food and Drink" (reference: Bourdais, D. & Finnie, S.(2003), *French Alive!*, Oxford University Press. Page 24.), in support of Marie's previous personal explanation. The combination of this data linking to what follows, we had created a recipe for sharing responses through varied opinions, thoughtful interpretations and challenging questions, but with all communications in English.

Shortly afterwards, the Surveys went home (to be completed by students only), a change from the original plan of also including one parent at home to complete the survey. At this point, the class reaction was mostly positive, especially their very first response to fill out their own breakfast data (as a model) for that very Monday morning at home. This was the first week-long homework task set for the class in French, quite different from my usual approach, and which clearly set an autonomous agenda for which the students were fully responsible.

Throughout this period of implementing the investigation, we endured several interruptions to the normal timetable e.g. Athletics, Senior Production, Planning Week and Curriculum Day, which did impact on our quality contact time and the necessity to accelerate some activities and responses.

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

All students completed their personal introductory reference sheets for "Les Fruits" and "La Nourriture", a written chart categorising fruit and food samples by gender, a personal opinion chart that determined "likes" and "dislikes", a French Food Pyramid by images (French labels for the 3 sections of the pyramid e.g. limiter la consommation / quelques fois par semaine / tous les jours), and an individual sample of a healthy one-day menu written in French (with significant reference for images drawn from their own model sheets of fruits and food).

Generally, the students were attentive to and fascinated by Marie's personal presentation of her eating habits at breakfast (20-30 minutes duration shared with her husband). An immediate follow-up to present an adult-based Australian comparison included three university student teachers in the room and me, whose collective eating durations for breakfast ranged from 5-10 minutes. The common

explanations for such short durations were a combination of eating alone or being in a hurry. The

Surveys were distributed at about this time, and all recipients were directed to fill in "Monday's Breakfast" responses on this very day (both the food eaten and the duration for eating).

During the following week, 15 students returned Surveys completed from the class of 23. Due to school-routine interruptions, follow-up activities were required the next week again in class. Between the distribution and return of the Surveys, students read and shared discussion of the one-page document taken from a reference text titled *French Alive!*. It included one photo of a school canteen scene and two separate bar graphs on "Food Facts" and "Average Time Spent Eating Meals". Following is a broad sample of written observations (by teacher) and written reflections (by students), with teacher's emphasis on encouraging students to think broadly and consider their personal wonderings:

The France people take longer to eat because they have more courses of food

Why do French people spend more % of money in the 1960's and less than 2000's?

French people have a snack between 4pm and 5pm so they are not hungry until 7.00pm / It takes them 96 minutes to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner

They have big meals / Some kids eat sponge cake for breakfast, maybe because it's sugary so they get energy / When kids come home for lunch I found it strange that the parents come home and make sure a meal is prepared for them / When the students eat with friends, if they want to talk they put their cutlery down completely

My opinion is because French people eat and talk in between

Dinner is usually spent with family or friends / It takes longer because you use communication / Food at lunch is spent longer because they always talk about how their day has been / Why do they spend so long eating? / It takes so long eating because they stopped eating and they talked

Snack at about 4.00 to 5.00 to keep them going

Some people have at least 3-course meals for lunch / They have a long tea because there might be several courses at dinners

Aussies eat faster than French people because we don't talk so much while eating

Why do French people take so long to eat? Because they love food so much? Why do French people have courses?

We take shorter because French people eat much slower than us because they have more time

Are there any problems with French people fat? / Why is food so important to French people?

They get more time so they don't have to rush

There may have been more food in France

Because they like to enjoy their food

They eat heaps of meals but only in small portions / Why don't teenagers bring packed lunch to school?

Because they like to have varieties of food each night

Even though students had more than a week to return their Surveys, it was a little disappointing that several did not respond to this request. To cater for this situation in class, non-returnees were directed to calculate their times from either memory or honest estimates. Both groups were issued the same instructions to calculate their personal "average" times to eat each of their meal-types (add up your 7 separate time-duration records and divide this total by 7) with remainders to move up or remain (as appropriate) at the calculated minute e.g. $7 \frac{3}{7} = 7\text{min.}$, whereas $7 \frac{4}{7} = 8\text{min.}$ With our issues of classroom contact time being limited, mathematical efficiencies were necessary. "Agreed" averages were based on duration clusters as follows for each meal:

1 – 5 min (no. students) = 3 x (no. students) = ? min (average)

6 - 10 “ (“ . “) = 8 x (“ . “) = ? min (“)

11-15 “ (“ . “) = 13 x (“ . “) = ? min (“)

16-20 “ (“ . “) = 18 x (“ . “) = ? min (“)

21-25 “ (“ . “) = 23 x (“ . “) = ? min (“)

26-30 “ (“ . “) = 28 x (“ . “) = ? min (“)

7) total = “Agreed” Average for class

All students had access to calculators, but also had opportunity to apply manual whole-class addition skills (in French), which worked well for many of them. As they all had access to the relevant French data prior to these calculations, they recognised immediately that their own class averages were considerably lower than the French samples. In fact, from their individual Survey data some comparisons had already been made which I believe reflected in a number of responses evident in the previous list of written observations/reflections.

Our analysis of the Survey data was limited to a brief and immediate oral response with a couple of students writing their response. One notable example that clearly hit the target from the intercultural perspective of comparing the data was as follows: “the time we eat dinner in, they eat breakfast in”. Despite the limited opportunity to follow-up this data, it was evident that student-interest in the Survey was high (for respondents) by the quality and detail of food-types consumed as well, over this one week in their lives. I really think that such personal engagement (and responsibility) adds relevance and connects students with their learning experience tasks. This aspect is meaningful and interesting for the students and teachers alike.

FINDINGS

The value of uninterrupted contact time is crucial to the application and success of any short-term investigation. Also making links with the current topic of Inquiry is valuable in that some prior knowledge, and at least a little awareness of same, provide students with some confidence to explore other tangents of learning. Intercultural connections and comparisons create other challenges for different thinking styles and modes of response. From the language acquisition perspective, prelude activities set a focus and created a foundation upon which to scaffold further learning experiences. It was evident through their active participation that many students felt connected to the content aspects of this investigation. They were especially stimulated in small group opportunities to discuss, question, debate or explain any point of interest in their analysis of data, and share their opinions willingly in front of the class. Cooperative learning contacts were signalled by an obvious buzz throughout the room. In keeping with the popular phenomena of reality television for our young folk, imbedding reality into learning experiences added a special dimension to the students’ learning. From our Surveys and their comparison with the French-based data, the results (duration of eating meals) are as follows:

French - Breakfast 18 min. Lunch 33 min. Dinner 45 min.

Class - Breakfast 6 min. Lunch 9 min. Dinner 18 min.

Some other comments recorded include the following:

The average French time for breakfast-eating per day is 18 min., in comparison to us in Australia is 6 min

Our class average for dinner is their breakfast average.

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

In relation to the statistical data, the students recognised the differences through their comparisons of

this information (Making Connections). As these connections linked directly to their own Survey materials (Active Construction), their opportunity to discuss the data (Social Interaction) was paramount to effective learning by way of the students' varied responses (Reflection).

Though necessary to provide examples of relevant material (France Alive), the more powerful model of a French "expert" oral presentation provided authenticity of information. From the start, a meaningful learning context was established.

Completed Surveys were returned by more than half the class, with the data collected being aligned with the initial instructions. These students were successful in calculating their personal average times spent eating each meal-type. They also understood the special method used to calculate the class average of duration for eating each meal-type.

Ideally, all Surveys would have been returned, including a sample from one parent in each family. The latter had no opportunity except to support the accuracy of the children's data collection at home. There was no classroom contact time to analyse the food data in relation to the plan of the investigation.

Several problems were encountered in my investigation design. Too much emphasis on food-types required more time than anticipated, obviously limiting the focus time on the record of eating durations and the analysis of these in relation to self. From the intercultural aspect, a clear picture emerged of the French and their appreciation of food and making time to enjoy eating. However, the students were restricted in developing any picture of their own habits (e.g. weekend compared to school days) and possible impact on self and lifestyle. Although the big question "Are You How You Eat?" was not clearly established in the design for the students, the investigation still provided a valuable exercise to make some comparisons between cultures based on a universal theme.

The investigation topic succeeded in creating some wonderings in students when reflecting on the first question posed after introducing the home-based Survey, "Mr. T, why are we doing this?" The student appeared satisfied with my response that this will be a free trip on one leg of his intercultural journey. All aboard!!

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

My prime considerations in developing the task included relevance to current unit of Inquiry in the classroom and the personalise focus of exploring one's own eating habits. Secondly, our French Assistant had a great story to tell so the intercultural connection was real, but the further supportive information was delivered through the text reference *French Alive!*.

As second language acquisition often builds skills in first language structures, I thought that learning about another culture (eating habits of the French) might inspire the students to explore their own habits and challenge them to make comparisons with their French experiences. All planned activities linked to the task were included except for the adults' surveys. Some of the students' oral responses were included prior to the distribution of the Surveys. I was aware of issues with contact time and decided it was more appropriate to focus on the students' activities and responses.

After distribution of the Survey, instructions were given to name sheet and fill out dates in advance for each day of the week. Monday's breakfast and lunch records were filled out at school. I highlighted strongly to seek parent support at home to assist the accuracy of data collected and also to validate the Survey, but more importantly to prompt their involvement and even consideration of their own eating habits.

All the prelude activities (second language aural/oral/visual/creative) provided genuine interaction among the students, as did the comparisons with returned Surveys, in particular, the math calculations of individual averages of eating durations. The use of calculators really kept this aspect flowing.

The text reference page (French Alive) for which there was a class set made available, was first set as a silent reading activity. Several students were then selected to read the article aloud, including the two graph representations. Student interaction at this point was constant and many responses are recorded earlier in this document. Their immediate mode of response was oral but I later requested some written

responses on the back of their Survey sheets. They could work in pairs to document these comments. As an observer, it was evident that the students were truly engaged in their task.

EVALUATION

The investigation progressed well in relation to most aspects of the initial plan. I was challenged by and still question, the need to do most of the implementation in English. It was an enjoyable experience but somewhat prone to be rushed along. It was exciting to hear and acknowledge the many thoughtful questions, varied opinions and relevant explanations that in combination, demonstrated an appreciation and some understanding of another culture, and how it compares with the students' own experiences.

It was valuable in that the investigation reaffirmed the importance of planning with purpose, be open to challenge and change, and be vigilant to confronting the unexpected. It has also reinforced my professional swing to incorporate second language experiences to topics in which the students are already involved in their regular classroom studies.

The investigation was most valuable in the area of communication opportunities. Any initial response from a student served as a motivation for others, because it usually resulted in a rapid expression of thoughtful responses around the room. The content of most Surveys was also indicative of the project's value, as this aspect was the first longitudinal homework task for the French class.

Further development of the investigation would need to target the self-analysis of the data, linking it with the students' own lifestyle habits, and trying to establish any connecting patterns, for example:

- Do students eat lunch so quickly to maximise playing time?
- Is playing time more active or passive?
- Is the student more active or passive in class?
- Conversely: Does the student enjoy the taste of his lunch foods?
- Do students think about the tastes while eating or just eat by habit?
- Is this different for you on the weekends?

Professionally, my planning for French language lessons does focus on the unit of Inquiry topic at my different schools. Secondly, I attempt to make consistent links between cultures in a meaningful way for the students.

REFLECTION

Documentation is not my area of strength, so I have always felt under the pump with the big picture of this investigation. Timelines forced me to be proactive and they also provided a special motivation to perform, a key weapon in the professional artillery of a LOTE teacher (and mostly for all the right reasons!) A really valuable component has been the regular Hemisphere Centre experience. I still marvel at the genius and enthusiasm (never-ending) of my LOTE colleagues.

The process of my own planned investigation was heavily dependent on the supportive guidelines in the Manual, along with suggestions from the notes delivered at Conference and Recall days. It has been worthwhile as a professional experience because the flow-on allows me to develop my own teaching scaffolding that facilitates learning opportunities for students with the provision for personal connections.

For me too, the awareness and growth in understanding and application of intercultural language teaching and learning, has been a stepping-stone experience. Like my students, the toes have been dipped, there's a shiver of excitement, a few more deep breaths, ready for the plunge!!