

ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
Louise Gallagher	Camden Haven High School Valley View Road Laurieton NSW 2443 Phone: (02) 6556 8100	French	Year 7

CONTEXT

Camden Haven High School is a relatively new school, it was inaugurated in 2000. It has approximately 800 students. It is situated approximately 10 kilometres inland from the coast. It has at least nine feeder primary schools, several of which are small schools (only one or two teachers). Although ethnically our student body is quite homogeneously of Anglo-Saxon descent (there is a small number of aboriginal students and an even smaller number of other students), it is very diverse in other ways. As we draw our students from small coastal towns and also from inland villages, culturally these two groups are very different. They have different interests, different ways of dressing, talking and behaving. Socio-economically there is diversity also, as parents are from many different walks of life. There are office-workers, blue-collar workers, professionals, unemployed people, pensioners, self-employed business people, farmers, and farm labourers – the whole gamut. There are a couple of groups of students in the school that belong to non-mainstream religions, and live in communities. A significant number of the students have grown up in a drug culture. There is a whole range of family composition, with nuclear families, blended families, single-parent families and even no-parent families.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

Different types of families in Australia and France I decided to plan a unit of work with an intercultural focus that would mesh with the program already set down for the second half of Term 3 (topic: Family). This seemed the least disruptive way to proceed. For one thing, at the end of each term the topics studied for that term are tested in a common test across all the Year 7 French classes. So it was necessary to teach the topics already programmed. I planned an 'add-on' unit to teach after the already programmed unit.

I decided the add-on unit should aim to increase students' awareness of the many different variations of 'family' that exist in our own society and similarly in French society.

Why? I wanted to do this because I have noticed that at our school, not only are there many single-parent families, but there is also a significant percentage of no-parent families, that is, families in which the care-giver is a grandparent, aunt, family friend or even older brother or sister. I first became clearly aware of this at one parent-teacher evening when from one Year 7 class, two grandmothers and one

aunt introduced themselves to me as the care-giver for their student.

It occurred to me that when studying the family in French class, it might be enlightening for the students to find out about some of the different types of families that there are, and possibly come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a 'normal' family or an 'abnormal' family, there is actually just an endless variety of families.

I felt that it might be beneficial to certain students who don't live in a traditional nuclear family (two parents plus their children) to realise that there are other students in their class who also do not.

More generally, I felt that students might get more of a sense of French people being real people, if they knew that they are not simply a homogeneous group

'Our own sense of being a member of a culture is an engagement with the diversity that exists within our own cultural groups, whether that is our family, our community, our country, or any other grouping. Coming to recognise one's place in a culturally diverse world means recognising and understanding that diversity is fundamental to human experience and that people from diverse societies need to be seen and understood as individuals'. (ILTLP Module 2, page 41). This statement from the ILTLP conference notes succinctly states what the add-on unit (Different types of families in Australia and France) is working towards.

The general aim is to develop an intercultural person who 'is open to seeing things from outside his/her own perspective and to communicating his/her own perspective to others who don't share it'. (Module 1, page 31).

In addition the follow-on unit enabled the students to practise and use the language points they had learned in the main unit (Family) and in previous units. Hopefully it enabled them to get a sense of satisfaction from operating in the TL in order to achieve something.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

See attached program (Attachment 1).

To understand the diversity of families in Australia, it was necessary first to explore the diversity of families in our class and our school, and then to compare that with the type of diversity you would find in different parts of Australia. In Sydney, for example, many schools have a great diversity of ethnicity and of religion in the student body. Our school doesn't have that.

The next step was to compare diversity of families in Australia with diversity of families in France. Are families diverse in France? If so, in what ways?

The add-on unit involved a lot more teacher-led discussion and student contribution of ideas than the units I normally teach for French. As quite a lot of the students have actually come to us from Sydney or other places, or have friends and relatives in other places, they were able to contribute information about families in other places. I think they enjoyed telling us about their personal knowledge and experience.

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

The students interviewed a student in the class and wrote notes in a table format (see attachment 2). They then wrote a report based on their notes, using the limited French they know (see attachment 3).

We made a graph showing the variations in composition of families in our class.

FINDINGS

We found that our class has a full gamut of different types of family composition.

We discussed different types of families in other parts of Australia. Students enjoyed contributing what they knew from their own personal knowledge. We concluded that although the families in our district differ in many ways, in some ways they are quite homogeneous but this is not the case in many other parts of Australia (ethnic, religious, language differences etc).

We researched families in France and discovered that there are many different ethnic groups in France, in that way it is not unlike Australia. We discovered that there are rural families and there are urban families. We discovered that there are single-parent families in France. The students were able to draw comparisons with our own district.

We discovered that there are a range of different religious groups in France, including a substantial number of Muslims.

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

I was surprised how willingly the students undertook the interview and reporting of it in French. I was expecting that they would be reluctant to work in French. One or two did do the work in English, and I had to ask them to re-do it, in French. Most students looked back through their French workbook and found out how to express what they needed to express, in French. Others asked me for help, which I was happy enough about. At least they were working.

The value of the whole investigation process for me was that it was a first attempt at creating a unit of work with an intercultural perspective. It showed me what to think about the next time, and where I would need to improve it (mainly in gathering resources, which is difficult).

The students were engaged and seemed to be happy to be using their French for a practical purpose.

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

See attachments 2 and 3.

I chose these samples because they illustrate that the students are not particularly high-achievers but nevertheless were able to carry out the task. They show how we were able to use simple French constructions and vocabulary that we had previously learned.

EVALUATION

The investigation went quite well but as a teaching and learning process could be developed further.

The internet research part was difficult, it was fine in theory, but it was hard to find information about enough different types of families in France, especially written in (English) language simple enough to engage Year 7 students. This was a big flaw in the unit design. I will have to work on that aspect.

REFLECTION

As a result of doing this investigation I feel that creating programs with an intercultural perspective will be worthwhile but that I need to refine and improve my approach. For me, the main problem was finding suitable resources, and maybe I needed to pick a different topic for my unit.