

ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
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AREA OF INVESTIGATION

My investigation was on the topic of Social Issues: the Environment, with an emphasis on recycling and forests. This is a topic I use at Year 12 to complete the VCE unit 4 SAC outcome 1 requirement (see <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/studies/lote/german/germansd.pdf>).

I have a small class of 6 female students, three of whom have been to Germany on the Bavarian Student Exchange program.

I selected this area of investigation, as I have covered this topic in the past and wanted to see if there was a difference in student participation, using an intercultural language and teaching approach.

I included reflection time which I have never really done before. The students were required to think about various aspects of culture and language and compare this with their own experiences. My connection to language and culture has previously been accidental, as it arises in the classroom. For example: "When I was in Germany..." or "Good observation! Why do think this is so?"

My investigation required me to think about the topic more and reflect on it myself. I included questions for the students to answer whilst completing the unit of work.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Below is a table of the activities I planned for my class. We did 2 of the 3 listening tasks and only tasks 1 and 4 of the final evaluation process, as we were running out of time.

My approach to this topic was very different this time. In the past, I have used the set textbook as a lead into the topic and then supplemented with pictures, cartoons, articles, research from the internet and newspapers where relevant.

This time I commenced with reflection time. Students commenced the unit by reflecting on the words *recyclen* and *Umweltverschmutzung*. What is their attitude and what are their family attitudes to this topic? How does this possibly compare to Germany? Rate yourself against the Germans. This task was completed in English at this stage.

As the topic progressed students were introduced to various text-types, further questions and other activities.

The class reacted positively to the reflection time and they felt connected with the topic.

Activities, Resources	Text Types	Intercultural Focus
1. Reflection questions before starting topic. 2. Vocabulary List 3. The Living standard in Germany and Australia and how does this connect	E-mails Exchange	1. Maintain a workbook and reflect on issues before, during and after.

<p>Australia and how does this connect with recycling and attitudes towards the environment?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Comparing the location and population of Germany to Australia; and the impact this might have on the environment. 5. Discuss: consumerism - Is there an excess of goods and what is the attitude towards disposing of goods? <i>Spermmüll?</i> How does this compare with Australia? Why is it different? Lifestyle? 6. Cartoon: <i>die Umwelt in Deutschland ist und wird geschädigt</i> 7. Individual research of current articles on the environment in www.nachrichtenfuerkinder.de . Read an article of interest on the topic of environment and write a letter to a politician stating your concern. 8. Text: Genau Senior chapter 7: <i>die Umwelt</i> – emails 9. Guest speaker: German exchange student – how does she rate Australia compared to Germany, in its environmental awareness and action. What does she, and her family do for the environment? 10. Discuss recycling in Germany and compare these with Australia. 11. How have Germans valued the natural environment in the past? Discuss the importance of forests to Germans looking at traditions, fairytales, songs, foods and poetry. 12. Read article: <i>Australien will Wälder schützen</i>. Does the German article reflect positively on Australians? 13. Grammar: Review of adjectival endings; writing formal and informal letters; adverbs; superlative and comparative. 14. Listening tasks: 3 items [on CD] testing recall and understanding the issues covered, answer interpretive questions demonstrating understanding. 15. Reading: various articles on the theme of recycling and forests 16. Speaking: Responding to questions; presenting a summary of an article in German 17. Writing: letters, comments, answers in German on the topic 	<p>Student</p> <p>Cartoons</p> <p>Articles</p> <p>Photographs</p> <p>Poem</p> <p>Listening Tasks</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. What is my attitude/ my family's attitude to the environment?...to Recycling? 3. Before and After: How do I rate Germans compared to Australians on a scale from 1 to 10 on their awareness of environmental issues? Why is this? 4. Geographical and demographical need for recycling 5. Consumerism in Germany, production and disposal of goods 6. Early community recycling efforts very strong, ahead of Australia 7. What was the exchange student's attitude to the environment? to Recycling? Were they different from my own? How did she rate German awareness of the environment compared to Australians? What were her reasons? 8. What are students doing in a school in Germany and at home? What about our own school and family? 9. The importance of forests to Germans: fairytales [Hänsel and Grete], traditions [walking, hiking], foods [blackforest cake] and what is happening to them? Do forests have the same meaning for Australians and for myself?
<p>Conclusion</p> <p>Student Evaluation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write reflections and make notes in English and in German 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What have I learnt in this unit about myself, my family, my school, and Germany?

<p>English and in German.</p> <p>2. You are an exchange student in Germany. Write an email to your family back home in Australia. Your first email informs your family on life [recycling] around the home. Compare this with home.</p> <p>3. Write a poem about forests in Germany.</p> <p>4. Write a conversation between two trees: a German tree from the Blackforest and a tree from forest in Australia.</p>		
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Assessment

Unit 4 : German

Outcome 1: Analyse and use information from written texts.

Task: A response to specific questions, messages or instructions, extracting and using information requested.

Text type: Persuasive letter to the editor.

Audience: Readers of a newspaper.

Context: The destruction of forests in Germany.

Purpose: Making people aware of the dying forests in Germany through a letter to the editor of a German newspaper from the point of view an Australian.

Word Length: **220 - 250 words**

Time: 80 minutes

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

The information that I used to evaluate the process was based on the students' workbooks and what I observed in class. I collected their workbooks, marked their essays, other tasks as set and read their reflection comments, as they progressed through the unit.

FINDINGS

I liked having the reflective questions for the students. They quietly thought about the theme for themselves before, during and after the topic. It enabled them to become more involved in the learning process by reflecting about what they actually know before, during and after; and compared this against themselves and their personal world. The students were making connections with what they already know from home, school, media and for some their personal experience as an exchange student in Germany. As a result, it made the topic more personal and connected to the student. The student was involved in the active construction of their own knowledge of the world. They developed an awareness of the ways in which Australian language and culture shape our actions and thinking about the environment as compared to German culture, language and thinking.

Students were required to reflect on the importance of *forests*. One student commented that the word *forest* or *Wald* for her was an exotic setting rather than an Australian forest. That meant, pine trees which would be a more European type forest. She explained that in Australia, a *forest* is the *bush*. For Germans, *forests* have strong traditional bonds to their way of living and especially towards German literature. This was supported with *Hänsel and Gretel*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *O Tannenbaum* song [the

Christmas Tree]. The student continued by stating that the *bush* is somewhat important to Australians but more importance is placed on the coast and deserts.

Another student had a similar reflection and quoted literature Nobel Prize winner Elias Canetti, who wrote *In keinem modernen Land [der Wald] sei das Waldgefühl so lebendig geblieben wie in Deutschland* [-in no modern country of the world has the feeling for forests stayed so vibrant, as in Germany].

At the end of the unit, one student drew on the geographical content of the unit and commented on Australia's and Germany's location and how this impacts on *Australian and German thinking* about the environment. The impact of population density and Germany's central position in Europe has forced people to act upon environmental issues and be pro-active. Germans are very efficient at sorting packaging and rubbish. In the past, I have given the students the idea, whereas this time they have drawn their own conclusion and connected with the topic.

The students wrote in German, an email and a letter from an Australian and from a German point of view. The students also wrote a script between two trees, a tree from the Blackforest and a tree from Australia. There were a number of listening and reading tasks too. For the final assessment task students wrote a letter from an Australian perspective to a German newspaper about dying forests in Germany. The students also listened and interacted with an exchange student from Germany. This lesson was not structured. The exchange student was invited to talk on *Was machen sie zu Hause, um die Umwelt zu schützen* [What do you do at home, to help the environment?] The students were to make notes and ask questions. All communication was in the target language. An interesting discussion was introduced by the exchange student about hard rubbish. She introduced the term of *Sperrmüll* and the Australian students discovered this meant *hard rubbish*. From here discussion revolved around the meaning of hard rubbish for both countries. Hard rubbish often meant rubbish ready for the tip in Australia. Any good items were sent off to a welfare organization. However, in Germany this was the time where many families from the East and *Gastarbeiter* came to collect the goods for their homes. In Germany, the standard of living is high, the population is dense and many live in flats. The *home* or living indoors is different to Australia. Many don't have backyards. Winter in Germany means living inside more and as a result, many Germans tend to renovate their homes or replace things quite regularly. Students learnt the meaning of *Sperrmüll*, the *Gastarbeiter* and asked *why the Germans renovate so much* because of this interaction with the exchange student. It made the topic interesting. The Australian students were connected and positive. Everyone was involved in a social act of discovering and creating meaning through language. It involved interactions between student and student, student and teacher, and student and native speaker.

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

I found that the intercultural focus meant a shift in presentation of content. There was no real change in the content. I used reflective questions which I never have before. I tried to restructure some tasks, so students thought about the topic from an Australian and a German perspective. I tried to do this with the conversation between two trees. The students wrote about the drought and logging issues here and acid rains in Germany. The assessment task involved writing a formal letter to the editor of a German newspaper about the writer's concerns for Germany's dying forests from the perspective of an Australian student. Students used the necessary formal conventions of writing a letter whilst expressing their knowledge of what they have read from an article, cartoons and an explanation of acid rain. I feel that the shift in tasks, made the students more interested and connected to the topic. They seemed more involved.

I didn't expect the students to be as interested in the topic, as they became. At the end of the unit the students made comment that they liked the topic. This was a change from previous times, when I did this topic in class. I attribute this change in attitude to the reflection questions and continually connecting the content to the student and their personal world. It definitely heightened motivation and engagement.

This investigation has shown me that purposely linking students through designed activities can heighten their engagement. I intend to try to involve the student more by using reflection time and restructuring tasks slightly to further stimulate the interest in the language and its culture.

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

Unit 4 : German

Outcome 1 : Analyse and use information from written texts.

Task: A response to specific questions, messages or instructions, extracting and using information requested.

Text type: Persuasive letter to the editor.

Audience: Readers of a newspaper.

Context: The destruction of forests in Germany.

Purpose: Making people aware of the dying forests in Germany through a letter to the editor of a German newspaper from the point of view of an Australian.

Word Length: **220 - 250 words**

Time: 80 minutes

Dictionary: Yes

Total Marks: 10

Task: **Sie machen sich Sorgen um das Problem des Waldsterbens. Lesen Sie den Artikel "Der deutsche Wald stirbt", die Tatsachen über Luftverschmutzung und die Entstehung des sauren Regens und schauen Sie sich die drei Karikaturen an. Beantworten Sie folgende Fragen in einem Brief an den Redakteur einer Zeitung.**

You are concerned about the dying forests.

Read the article "Der deutsche Wald stirbt", the facts about air pollution and the cause of acid rain and look at the three cartoons.

Answer the following questions in a letter to the editor of a newspaper.

Warum sind die Wälder wichtig für alle? Warum sterben die deutschen Wälder? Was sind die Ursachen dieses Problems? Wer ist schuld? Warum ist Waldsterben ein gefährliches Problem für ganz Europa? Was macht die deutsche Regierung dagegen? Könnte man mehr machen? Glauben Sie, dass eine Lösung möglich ist?

EVALUATION

I think the investigation went well but I feel that I can improve on my reflective questions.

I had hoped to broaden the language and cultural contact with email exchanges but the students didn't receive responses to their emails. In order to use this medium effectively in future, it needs teacher commitment from both ends.

From here, I hope to incorporate what I have learnt into other classes. I aim to use reflection time. I aim to change some activities, so that I actively encourage students to reflect, notice and compare language and culture. In the past, I have had the "culture" project. This used to be researched in isolation from language or our own culture[s] but I have learnt that more can be achieved through intercultural language learning and teaching.

REFLECTION

Initially, it took quite a bit of thinking and time in trying to understand the concept of intercultural language learning. After some reflection, I believe that I have always had a form of intercultural language learning in my classes but I never formalized it in the classroom. During my classes, I always refer back to my own experiences in the country and my own up bringing when it is relevant. I might say: "When I was in Germany..." or "When I grew up.....". From here, I try to involve the students by asking: "What about you?", "How is it at home?", "Has anyone experienced the same thing?" This approach connects the student to the language and culture. Also, students participate in role-play, create their own cartoons or write their own letters and stories. I encourage students to notice things such as _ or the use of *Sie* and *du* in German. The combination of all these makes it meaningful to the learner and links them to the language and culture more than just reading and doing exercises from a book.

For me the experience was valuable. I found that the content of the topic did not change but my approach to the content changed. What I did differently in my year 12 class was that I had the students purposely thinking and reflecting throughout the topic about recycling, the environment, forests, themselves, Australia and Germany based on their own learning, personal world and experiences before, during and after the presentation of the unit. This was completed mainly in English, as I wanted the students to communicate their thoughts and experiences without any language restrictions, which they might have in trying to communicate only in German. Personal reflection made the topic immediately more personal and connected the student.

I think that the change in my approach was valuable for the student, as the process heightened the student's motivation and involvement in the topic. At the end of the unit, a student made a verbal comment that she enjoyed the topic and I believe this is the result of the intercultural learning and teaching focus.