



Australian Government

Quality Teacher Programme



Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning in Practice

## ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
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### AREA OF INVESTIGATION

I decided to focus on the pedagogy aspect of the project. I wanted to look, in particular, at how I currently use the resource of German exchange students in my school for my German classes, and if I could make this a richer learning experience for my students. I did not want to focus on language, but rather the culture of a country and what it is like to live in another culture. My questions were:

- How is the intercultural understood by my students in the lesson I have each year with the German exchange students who come to talk to the class about Germany and their experiences in Australia?
- Do the intercultural language learning principles already apply to what I do?
- If not, how can I make these principles apply?
- How can I question my students so that they gain an understanding of the intercultural from this experience?

I decided to focus on this in particular because I felt that I was not making good enough use of a 'resource' (in this case, German exchange students) that is regularly available to me and this is something that most language teachers would love to have. I also often find that my students are not very open to new languages and cultures as I regularly have to field questions and comments such as: 'that's stupid', 'what do they do that for?', 'why can't everyone just speak English?' (we've all heard them before). Yet the demographic in my school (a private girl's school) is mostly of wealthy girls, the majority of whom will probably end up travelling one day, going to university and possibly ending up in jobs where having a language and intercultural understanding will be enormously beneficial.

The exchange students come to the school in February each year which limited me from actually performing the class, so I decided to focus just on the planning and trying to incorporate the principles and practices of intercultural language learning. I am looking forward to seeing how the lessons go next year and whether it will make a difference to how the students see themselves in the world.

### CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Each year we have between 3 and 5 students who participate in the BJR (Bayerischer Jugendring) exchange program which means that the students' exchange partners come to Australia for 10 weeks from February to April. Each year I invite the students (either individually or in groups) to come to my Year 8 German class to talk to them about Germany and life in Germany. I choose my Year 8 class for a couple of reasons, the first being that I only teach Year 7 & 8 German, the other because the Year 8s at my school must choose their optional subjects towards the end of year 8. They do not have to continue

to learn a language and in an attempt to woo them away from the so-called 'soft options' it is good to give them something like an exchange to work towards (they must be studying German to be able to go on the exchange). I find that in Year 8 the students get a little fed up with all the vocab learning and grammar and a negative attitude tends to creep in, which sees them not choose the language, only to regret this decision in later years. They also do not see the point in learning another language so these are my reasons for choosing the Year 8s.

Up until now, my 'method' for this lesson has been to inform the students that the German exchange students will be visiting the class for the next lesson and to get the students to think about some questions that they might like to ask the Germans for homework.

This method has one obvious benefit, and several drawbacks. Firstly, it is an easy lesson for me to prepare (obviously a benefit), but if the personalities in the class or among the Germans are fairly shy and reticent, it can be difficult to make this last for a full lesson (of course I have questions or comments that I can make to help move things along). Also, what do my students actually learn from this? They may learn that school starts much earlier and finishes much earlier (I told them this anyway!), or that Germans usually eat their main meal at lunchtime not at night, or that Germans can be unbelievably punctual (very hard to get used to coming from Australia) but these are all things that I can tell them anyway (although they do seem to take more in when it is coming from someone their age!)

Being a part of the intercultural language learning project has enabled me to come up with a unit of work that will hopefully make this a much more meaningful experience for everyone. The main change in practice is that instead of just focusing on the German students and German culture, I am trying to get the Australians to focus on firstly their own culture and where they fit in the world, and then to compare that to how the Germans see their own cultural identity, to find the similarities and differences in their responses and then to talk about what being intercultural is and to assess the benefits of being intercultural.

#### **DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED**

I used the Carla website for inspiration for my lesson plan and worksheets to encourage the students thinking processes. I also gathered some information from a native speaker for the cultural, personal and universal worksheet and of course I used the material from the PD days we had already had.

#### **FINDINGS**

The process of setting up the lesson plans reinforced for me the importance for students of comparing something they know with something new to aid the learning process. I also had to think very carefully about the questions that I would ask the students, and in some ways actually presenting the lesson is crucial in finding out if you have asked the right questions. I wanted to focus on the principles of intercultural language learning (active construction, making connections, social interaction, reflection and responsibility) and found that these applied nicely to the lesson I had in mind. The practices used in intercultural language learning became a focus as well as I got into the writing of the lesson plans.

#### **INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION**

What I discovered is that some of the principles of intercultural language learning have already been used in my teaching practice, although not explicitly and not as a day to day method (chalk and talk is often less work to set up!). I did not expect to find the reflection part of the practice so important, but I can see the benefit in setting the reflection up as the major learning point, where the light bulb goes on, so to speak. I found this investigation extremely interesting and I am looking forward to seeing how the lesson goes next year.

## MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

See attachments below.

## EVALUATION

I feel really positive about my investigation and I am looking forward to actually working through it with my class next year. I found it a valuable experience because it forced me to take the time to think about how I was teaching my class and the sorts of activities that I was giving them and the actual learning that was taking place.

## REFLECTION

I found the whole process of the project very challenging. After the first 2\_ days I literally felt as though my head was exploding, but it was incredibly stimulating to be talking about learning and teaching with a few years in schools under my belt. As a language teacher I have always included cultural experiences in my teaching, but I have always struggled with the purpose of them and what the students actually learn from them. The real struggle, though, is the premise that language learning and cultural learning go hand in hand with each other. My teaching has always separated the two (until the students language skills are good enough to cope with the language required). The investigation that I chose necessitated this separation again, so my challenge in the future is to see how I can incorporate the two.

### The “German students’ visit” lesson.

Aims:

- to have the students think more deeply about themselves as cultural beings
- to gain an understanding of the cultural issues that face people when they visit or move to another country
- to learn more about Germany, German people and German culture.
- to have the experience of speaking with a German speaker, probably for the first time.

### Lesson 1 – noticing

Start with this activity in a lead up lesson with the Australian students. Write down eight words that identify you and your cultural identity. What is your culture? (Attachment 1)

Anticipated answers may be:

Australian	Catholic
Tasmanian	Anglican
English speaker	student
sister	swimmer
volleyball player	dancer

Gather the words on the board to see how different and how similar their ideas were; noting down ideas that are common, and ideas that only come up for individuals.

Questions for discussion:

- What does this mean? (that there are some ideas that relate to everyone and others that only relate to individuals)
- We are all Australian, and supposedly share a culture, but why don't we all share the same ideas about who we are culturally?
- What is culture?
- What makes cultures different?
- What is Australian culture?
- Do your responses to the initial question demonstrate your "Australianness"?

This should (hopefully) lead into a nice discussion on the personal, cultural and universal, starting off with a story about my brother going to a swimming complex in Germany where he was much confronted to find that when people went to the spa or sauna, they took their bathers off and went in naked. He found this very odd! Is the fact that this happened personal, cultural or universal? Firstly what are the definitions for these three types of behaviour:

**Personal:** refers to ways in which each person is different from everyone else, including those in the same group.

**Cultural:** refers to what a group of people have in common with each other and how they are different from other groups.

**Universal:** refers to ways in which all people in all groups are basically the same

Now have the students fill out the 'differentiating the cultural from the universal and the personal' questions sheet: (See Attachment 2)

The answers are most likely to be:

Cultural: 1, 2, 5, 6, 10

Universal: 4, 5, 7, 8

Personal: 3, 9

(I would argue that 7 could be personal too, because what one person thinks of as cold, another person may not.)

Questions for discussion:

- Why would it be important to understand the difference between the cultural, personal and universal?
- How might this knowledge help you to cope when/if you go to another country?
- How might this knowledge help you to understand people of other cultures who you come into contact with in Australia?

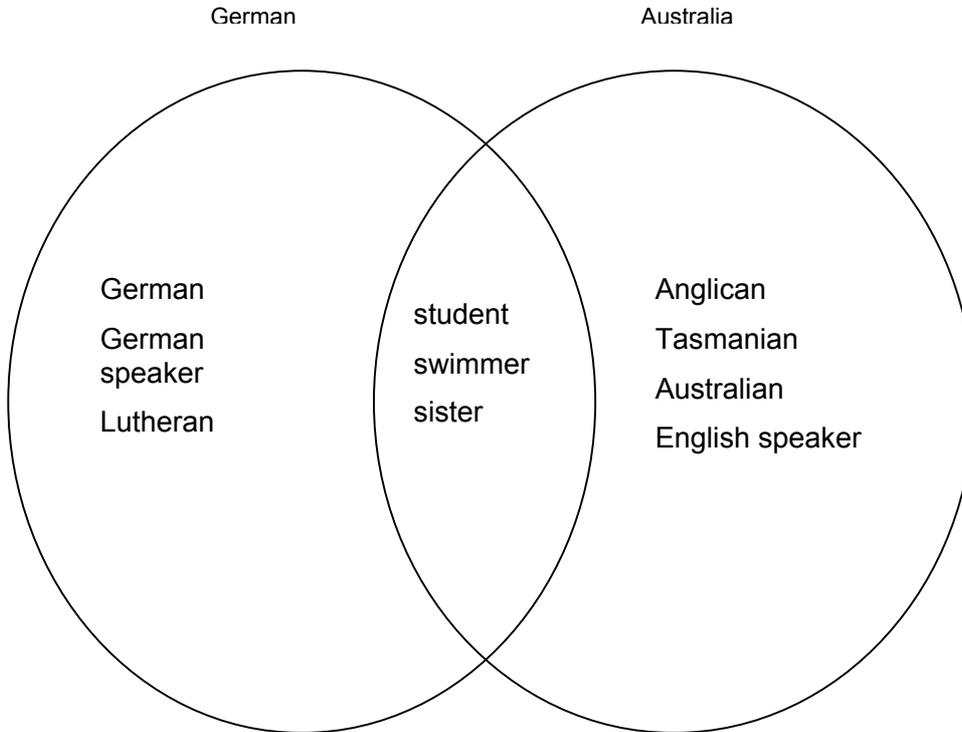
Students to retain their YOU sheets for the next lesson with the German students and for homework, think about some questions that they might like to ask the German exchange students about their experiences in Australia, what Germany is like, how they have coped in Australia.

## **Lesson 2 – noticing, comparing and interacting**

The German students will be with us, and have already filled in the YOU diagram.

On the whiteboard, fill in the venn diagram with words that only applied to the Germans, words that only applied to the Australians and words that applied to both.

Possible answers may be:



Questions for discussion for the Australian girls:

- How does this tie in with the cultural, the personal and the universal that we were talking about last lesson?
- Can we learn anything about German culture from the German girls' responses?
- What do the responses say about Australian culture?
- What differences and similarities would there be between Australian and German culture?

Questions for discussion for the German girls:

- What are some of the things that you have found culturally different about Australia,
- Have you had any problems or funny situations that arose from cultural misunderstandings during your stay?
- What strategies have you used to help you to cope with the cultural differences?
- Given your knowledge of Australia, now, what cultural differences might you want to tell an Australian about before they arrived in Germany, and what would you tell a German who was coming to Australia?

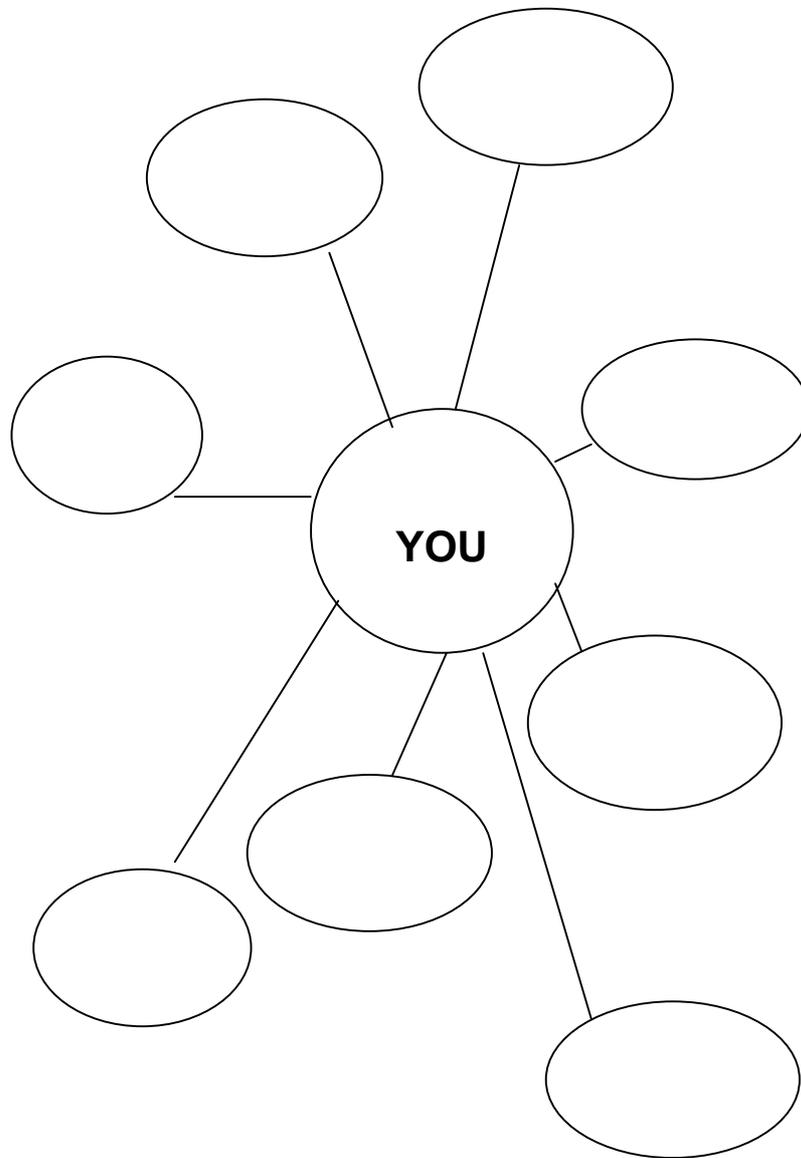
Then the Australians would be welcome to ask questions about the things that interest them; school, music, teenage language etc.

### **Lesson 3 – reflecting**

In this lesson the students will be expected to reflect on what we have been exploring in the past <>2 lessons. Questions for reflection are:

- The title of this unit of work is “being intercultural”. What do you think intercultural means?
- Fill in the cultural diversity diagram again with words that you identify with an intercultural person.
- What might be the benefits to society of being an intercultural person?
- What might be the benefits to you of being an intercultural person?

# BEING INTERCULTURAL – DISCOVERING YOUR CULTURAL DIVERSITY



## BEING INTERCULTURAL – DISCOVERING YOUR CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Read the list of behaviours below. Indicate if you think the behaviour is universal (u), cultural (c) or personal (p). If you feel that there is more than one answer, think of some examples to show how this might be true.

1. \_\_\_ Eating the main meal in the middle of the day.
2. \_\_\_ Eating with your left hand on the table, not on your lap.
3. \_\_\_ Walking rather than riding the bus.
4. \_\_\_ Feeling sorry after accidentally stepping on someone's foot.
5. \_\_\_ Respecting your elders.
6. \_\_\_ Using someone's surname when you talk to them or about them, even though you've know them for many years.
7. \_\_\_ Wearing warmer clothing when it is cold.
8. \_\_\_ Being depressed after the death of a loved one.
9. \_\_\_ Sleeping with a light on.
10. \_\_\_ Shaking hands with someone you first meet.

Attachment 2

"Differentiating Cultural from Personal and Universal" adapted from  
Carla – Centre for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition  
University of Minnesota

<http://www.carla.umn.edu/maxsa/guides.html>