

ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
Ans van Heyster	Cosgrove High School PO Box 153 Glenorchy – 7010 Tasmania Phone 62 71 11 11	French/German Language for this project: German	7 – 10 Grade 8 for this project Most students had no prior knowledge of the target language (Our school re-introduced German, alongside French, this year)

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

- Assessment.
- I chose this area because I was interested in seeing how much target language I could use in assessing students not only on language proficiency but also on intercultural understanding. If we say that language and culture are inextricably linked then shouldn't it also be possible to develop assessment tasks that capture both the language and intercultural development. What would such a task look like for beginners?
- The ILL focussed on the students noticing, comparing and reflecting on similarities and differences in school life in Germany and Australia. I wanted to see how far I could take students' interactions in the target language. Title of unit of work was "School! Boring? How can that be?" (Schule! Langweilig? Wieso das denn?)
- In my planning I endeavoured to use the principles of ILL (active construction, making connections, social interaction, reflection and responsibility) to take the students through the processes and practices of noticing, comparing, interacting and reflecting.
- It forced me to think about when, how and what questions to ask. How much and what could be done in the target language? How could I maximise the use of German with beginners while going through the processes described above? ILL questions need to go deeper than the usual surface questions I may have asked before. How could I get the students to use the target language in a task that could tell me something about their intercultural understanding?

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

- I devised the unit of work on “School” (see above) with the aim to use as much target language as possible. This included teaching the usual vocab and structures that go with “School” such as days of the week, times, school subjects, leisure time vocab, school vocab in general. I also taught the class opinion giving vocabulary. I wanted them to learn the opinion words so they would be able to use them at a later stage to express their opinion on aspects of school in the target language.
- Instead of being decided beforehand what aspects of school we would look at, I planned activities for students to have input into this. We started with watching the School episode of the series “Hallo aus Berlin”. In pairs students listed different/similar aspects of school life. Students were presented with simple sentences in German that captured these differences and similarities. The class was divided in pairs/small groups and was asked to list other aspects (not mentioned in the video) they wanted to know more about (active construction, making connections, social interaction). Students called out their responses in English and I wrote them down on a poster in German. (see Appendix A).
- The class reacted well to this. It was very noisy as usual in this class but all pairs came up with ideas. They included things I hadn’t thought about e.g. the school bell and the school song and they expressed great interest in what schools are like in Germany. Students were also highly interested in the fact that I didn’t immediately know the word for school bell in German. (I could of course have given them a literal translation but I had to ask a German friend for the word that is actually used). This raised the point that maybe not all countries or schools use school bells. This led to a discussion on how people do not have words for things they don’t have.
- I had never before explicitly taught a class a series of opinion words (thank you to Kate Neasy, French teacher in Hobart, for this idea). Using both English and the target language in one set of exchanges is also quite novel for me. (see ILTLP discussion paper 5).
- Towards the end of the unit of work I used posters of opinion words (one with “positive words”, one with “indifferent” words and one with “negative” words (see Appendix B). I pinned the posters on a wall. “positive” at one end, “negative” at the other and “indifferent” in the middle. When I called out “Wie findest du.....? (What do you think of.....?) using aspects of schooling, the students had to move in front of the poster of their choice. I then asked them to give their opinion using one of the words on the poster behind them. This activity allowed me to assess pronunciation as well as an insight into their thinking and understanding of aspects of schooling in Germany and in Australia.

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

- Speaking: opinion giving on aspects of schooling in Germany and in Australia using prepared posters of “opinion” words, in German. (not recorded). During the activity I made a quick note of each student’s pronunciation and appropriate use of vocabulary. All students could take part in this activity since the posters were on the wall. However, some words were not suited to certain aspects, e.g. the word “trocken” (dry) is not suitable to use in combination with the school bell. Students needed to know what aspect was being talked about and they needed to know what words would suit that aspect. Students were given several opportunities to voice their opinion. They were very sincere in doing so and didn’t mind having a different view from their friends.
- Written: opinion giving on aspects of their own school using the prepared posters of “opinion words” and the poster with aspects of schooling, in German. (sample, see Appendix C). Students were asked to use a particular opinion word no more than twice. Again, the opinion word had to “suit” the aspect of schooling.
- Written: reflection on schooling in Germany and Australia. Teacher Questions in English, answers in English. (samples, see Appendix D). In analysing the data I looked for sincerity and effort. Some students did not bother to think about the issue. Other students made an effort but found it clearly very difficult to imagine themselves going to school in Germany or empathising with a German teenager coming to school in Australia. Some students cannot move away from the view that all German teenagers will love it here because everything in Australia is great.
- Students loved the speaking activity, probably because they could run around and be noisy! They all readily used the German words.
- Students were well engaged in the written opinion giving exercise.
- Most students, but not all, took the written reflection task seriously.

- Students do have an interest in school life in other countries (Germany in this case).
- Beginners are prepared and capable of learning vocabulary that is not necessarily simple but that they perceive as useful and, (dare I use the word?) “fun” in a task. This was true even for students who are not motivated at all to learn another language.
- Each student has his/her own intercultural journey to make. Some students were willing and capable to think deeper about their own and other people’s cultures and lives. Other students clearly have not reached that stage. This raises important questions on the assessment of intercultural understanding.
- Most of my students were prepared to discuss their own and other cultures but frequently expressed frustration and unwillingness to learn another language. They adhere to the widespread view that learning another language is not necessary when you speak English. I am not sure whether I have even begun to dispel this myth in teaching this unit of work

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

- The findings confirm that we all make our own intercultural journey in our own time and in our own way and that some students need a lot of persuasion to start the journey.
- Beginners are capable of using a range of vocabulary.
- I am not sure whether the “giving your opinion, using set vocabulary” task elicited intercultural understanding. Since the task did not call for reasons for your opinion to be given, the responses remained moments in time where you say what you think of something without having to give it a lot of thought. On the other hand, my students had probably never thought about school in another country and this could have been a first step on a long journey. This task asked them to express their opinion in German, the reflection task in English offered them the opportunity to expand on this. (Tasks were not carried out in the same lesson).
- I expected them to be more interested in learning the language since their curiosity was clearly raised at the beginning when we worked on aspects of schooling in Germany and Australia.
- The problems I encountered in carrying out this unit of work were of a practical nature. In August (when I taught this unit of work) students were absent frequently because of illness and also due to taking part in a literacy project with their English teacher. This slowed down the pace of the work and caused gaps in some students’ learning. It is therefore quite amazing that more than half of the class completed the unit of work at all.
- The value of this investigation for me is that I know I need to keep looking for ways of increasing the target language input in the class room and in assessment tasks. It also taught me that there is a long way to go before students in our school will embrace the learning of languages as a normal part of their schooling.
- I was disappointed that not all students made an effort in reflecting on their and other people’s lives and cultures. At age 14 they should be willing to at least start their intercultural journey or am I expecting too much at the end of a short (4 weeks) unit of work.
- I was pleased with the efforts of the majority of the students who took the reflection seriously. They may not have an increased motivation in learning a language persé, but they were more engaged in the lessons because the subject matter appealed to them in other ways.

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

- For the poster with aspects of schooling, recorded in class by students calling out in English and the teacher writing down in German, see Appendix A.
- For the opinion word posters, see Appendix B.

EVALUATION

- I am happy with the investigation because it forced me to think more carefully about assessment.
- I am passionate about intercultural language learning and teaching and I think that the ILLT principles align beautifully with the ideas of “Teaching for Understanding”.
- I believe that trying to get my head around ILLT has made me a better teacher, in that I try to ask more pertinent and deeper questions about difference and similarity, about being “the other”, self and empathy and about daring to get out of your comfort zone.
- This investigation has taught me that even a relatively simple exercise like the one on eliciting opinions in the target language on cultural matters may be a first step for students on their intercultural journey. Doing an exercise like this in the target language increases not only students’ language proficiency but also their awareness that people can express ideas and opinions in another language about different cultures. How can I expand this for beginners requiring them to negotiate meaning?
- The students enjoyed the oral work more than the written work. At the same time they are at their most undisciplined when we do oral work. So much so that I have been reluctant to introduce dialogues/role plays. I must find a way of overcoming this hurdle.
- Some students resisted being asked to reflect on cultural differences and similarities. Is it because of where they are at in their intercultural journey or could there be other reasons?
- There will always be a place for reflection work in English, especially for beginners. ILLT must continue to find ways of engaging students in reflection using the target language.
- In my next investigation, and this could be a similar question, the oral opinion giving exercise will be followed immediately by a circle discussion in English addressing questions like: how did it feel to give your opinion in German? How did you decide which word to use? Is it different to give your opinion in German about things German as opposed to things Australian? Why do you think this is so? Do you think the German words we have used are as expressive as English ones? Why do you think this is so?
- In order to move towards negotiating meaning (see ILTLP discussion paper 6) I would like to incorporate a dialogue/role play in my next investigation. It may have to be scripted for the students, perhaps with gaps at certain places where culturally sensitive information needs to be inserted.

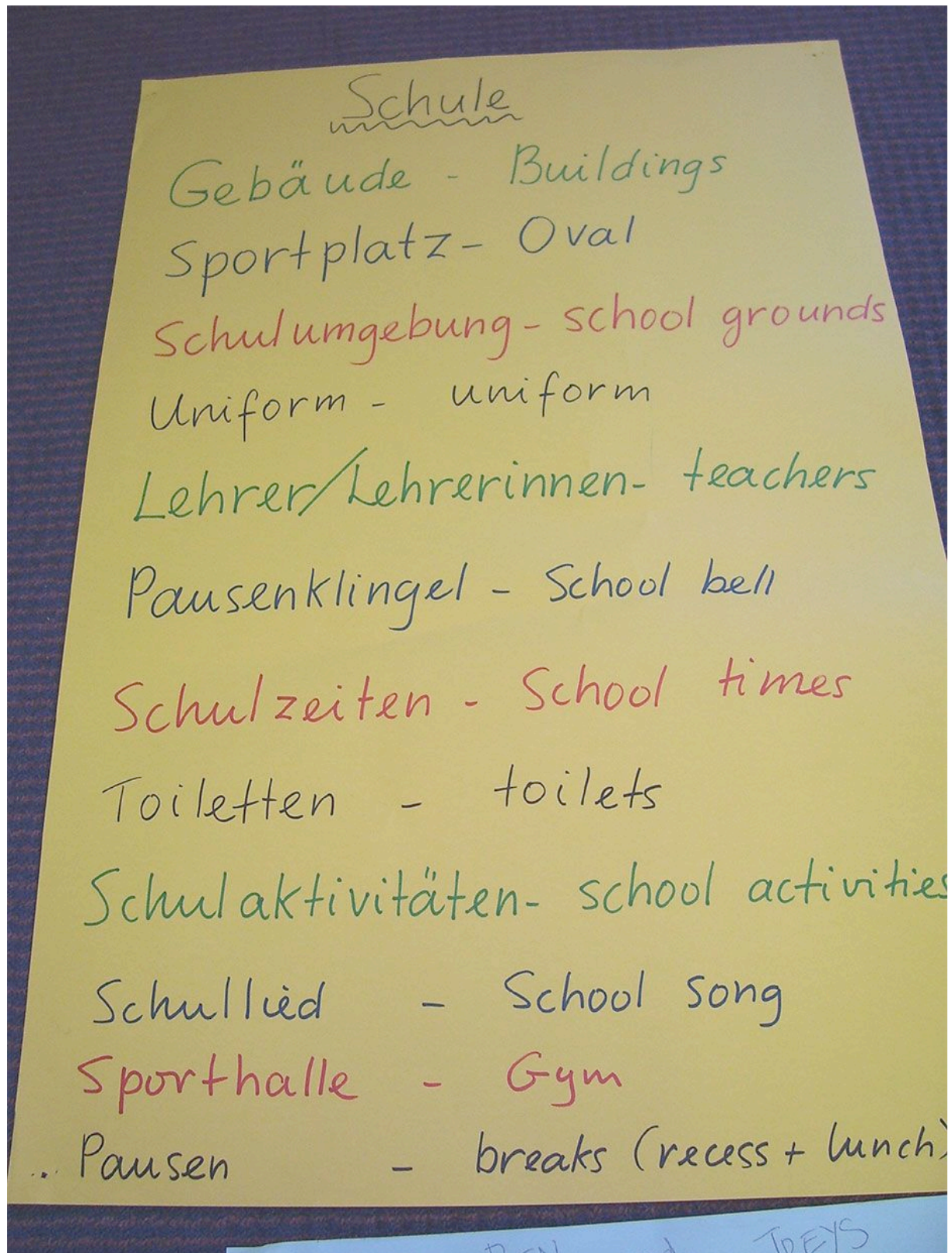
REFLECTION

The above sections contain reflection as it flowed naturally in addressing certain questions.

I find taking part in an investigation like this one very rewarding. Age-old topics gain new life and something as mundane as School can be used to engage students in thinking about themselves and others in ways it didn’t happen before. It is also very exciting to see students taking their first steps on a life-long intercultural journey. Teaching this way also allows me to share aspects of my own intercultural journey with my students. In one of the lessons they wanted to know more about school in my country (the Netherlands) and were very astonished that it is different again from school in Germany.

I would recommend to all languages teachers to take part in an investigation like this.

Appendix A



Schule

Gebäude - Buildings

Sportplatz - Oval

Schulumgebung - school grounds

Uniform - uniform

Lehrer/Lehrerinnen - teachers

Pausenklingel - School bell

Schulzeiten - School times

Toiletten - toilets

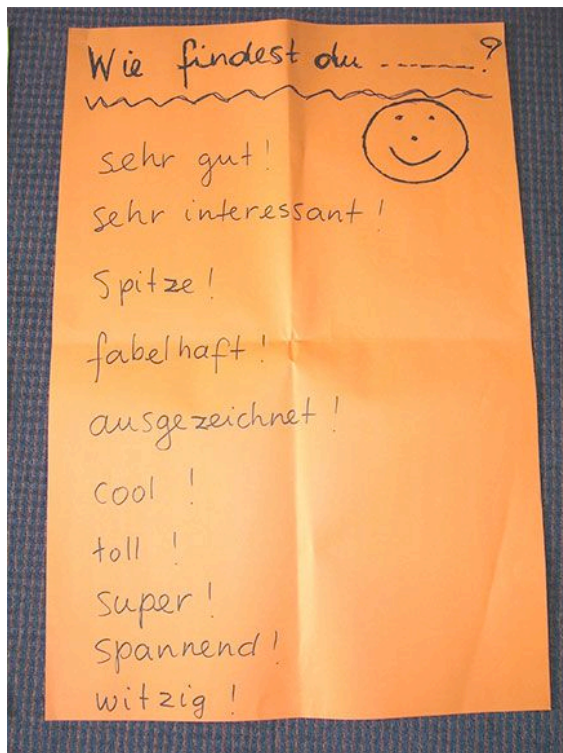
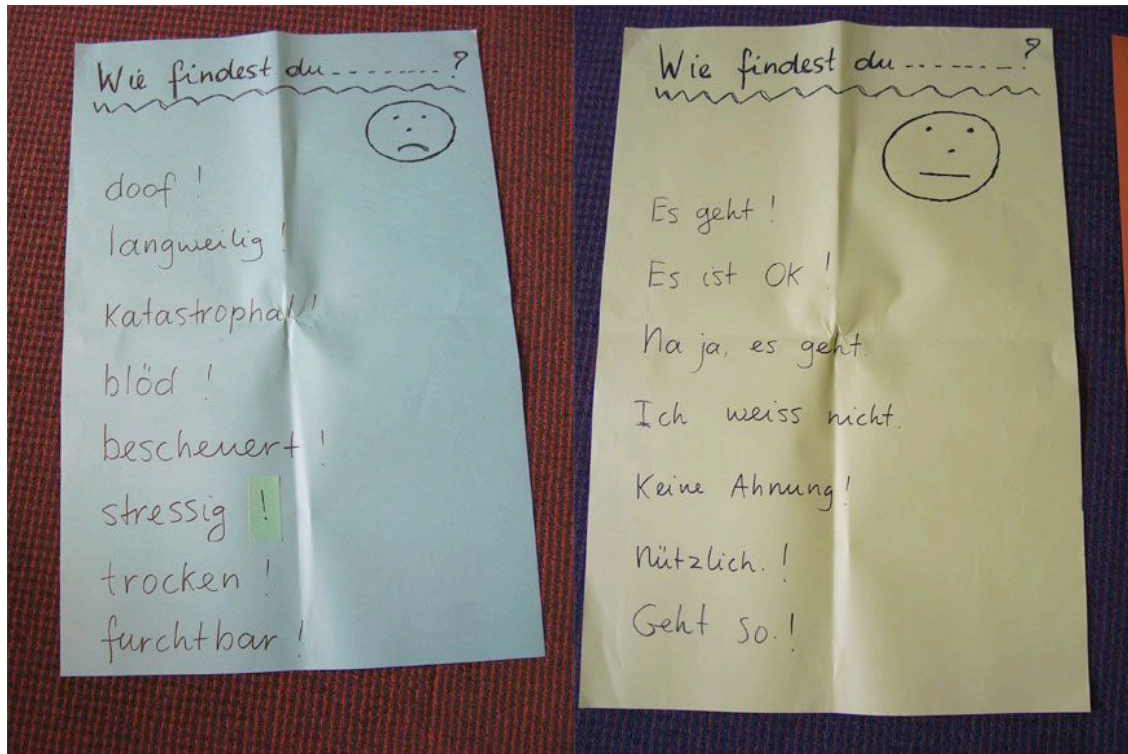
Schulaktivitäten - school activities

Schullied - School song

Sporthalle - Gym

.. Pausen - breaks (recess + lunch)

Appendix B



Name Mathew

Meine Schule und meine Meinung dazu

1. Wie findest du dein Klassenzimmer? es ist ok! 😊
2. Wie findest du den Sportplatz? sehr gut! 😊
3. Wie findest du das Schullied? Es geht! 😐
4. Wie findest du die Lehrer/Lehrerinnen? witzig! 😊
5. Wie findest du die Schuluniform? doof! 😐
6. Wie findest du die Toiletten? cool 😊
7. Wie findest du die Sporthalle? Super! 😊
8. Wie findest du die Schulzeiten? blöd! 😐
9. Wie findest du die Gebäude? keine ahnung! 😐
10. Wie findest du die Pausenklingel? langweilig 😐

ausgezeichnet Mathew

Appendix D

