

ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
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CONTEXT

South Grafton High School is a comprehensive High School on the North Coast of NSW. The school has approximately one thousand students mainly of Anglo-Saxon background. There are also about 90 students of Indigenous background and a few families with Asian heritage from the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. In the class, which I have targeted for this investigation, there are 28 students. One student's mother is from the Philippines and another has an Indonesian mother, the rest are predominately of Anglo Saxon background.

I have been teaching at the school since 1984 and have just returned to the school after a two-year assignment with Australian Volunteers International in Indonesia working as a teacher trainer at an Islamic Boarding School in Kediri, East Java. My wife is Indonesian and we have two young children who we encourage to speak Indonesian. During my assignment in Indonesia I made contact with many schools and have a good network of Indonesian teacher friends who are very keen for their students to correspond in either English or Indonesian with my students in Australia. I also had the opportunity to work with many of these students myself during school visits and my involvement in English clubs, an interactive English radio show, news reading competitions and speech contests.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

My area of investigation was based on a series of tasks which I hoped would increase the students' intercultural interaction and develop a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences of schools within Indonesia and compare them with their own school experiences in Australia.

I chose this area of investigation because it coincided with a unit of work, which I planned to do on school life that I wanted to revamp in light of my experiences working in Indonesian schools for the past two years. I also wanted to continue and develop relationships with some of the many teachers, students and schools I had worked with during this assignment.

For the purpose of this investigation I wanted to include more discussion in the unit so that I could relate my own personal experiences and give the students an opportunity to discuss, compare and reflect upon their own personal experiences in relation to the topic of school life. In order to do this I planned discussion sessions throughout the unit, normally at the end of an activity. I also arranged with an Indonesian teacher who had limited access to internet facilities to encourage her students to correspond with my students and answer questions that my students raised about school life in Indonesia. I also introduced a journal for this topic to encourage students to reflect on what they had learned and to personalise their language learning experience. Most of these changes to my usual teaching practice involved the students using English rather than the Target language but I would hope that with scaffolding the students would be able to use Indonesian to complete some tasks especially those which involve comparing and discussing similarities and differences between cultures.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Due to a series of circumstances many of the activities for this investigation was compressed into a shorter time frame than I originally planned. I had hoped to be a further 2-3 weeks into the unit before doing these activities and consequently the students didn't have as much vocabulary and background knowledge on the topic as I would have liked.

I used a unit on school life as the focus for my investigation. Having seen journals used very successfully for teaching English while working in Indonesia, I wanted to trial the use of a journal with my Year 8 Indonesian class. The main purpose for introducing the journal was to engage the students in their learning and to make their language learning more meaningful. The journal included a range of activities to help the students to reflect on the topic and individual lessons so that their interest was stimulated and they could respond individually to what they had learned. I also wanted to challenge the students and to encourage them to use higher order thinking skills to achieve a more thorough understanding of the topic. After the first ILTLP meeting I decided that I would like to incorporate ILTLP into my teaching practice by becoming more familiar with the students in my class, examining the questions I ask the students in general discussions and using the journal to allow the students to show evidence of Intercultural learning and understanding. With all these things in mind I included the following activities in the journal:

- Revision and consolidation of vocabulary and structures
- Reverse Thinkers Keys
- Mind maps
- Indonesia in the news
- Plus Minus Interesting
- Guided reflection on lessons
- De Bono's 6 thinking hats

For my investigation I focused on the students responses to one of the journal pages. I divided the students into groups of 5 or 6 and asked them to look at a selection of unseen texts in the Target language. After they had been given an opportunity to look at the texts I gave each group a mini whiteboard and asked them to make a list of what they had discovered about Indonesian schooling. One member from each group then reported their findings back to the whole group and a class discussion ensued based on their responses. At the conclusion of the discussion the students were given time to fill out the PMI page of their journal. The students were asked to ...

Think about today's lesson and then make some comments in the spaces below.

What did you learn which was new about today's topic?

What did you already know about today's topic?

What part of today's topic would you like to know more about?

The responses to the last section were compiled and sent by email to students at a state Islamic school MAN 3 in Kediri, Indonesia. When the responses were emailed back I showed them to my students and then I recorded the discussion which ensued which was based on the students' questions and the responses of the Indonesian students from MAN 3.

The students were very enthusiastic about being given the opportunity to send their questions about school life in Indonesia to the students at MAN 3, Kediri. Originally I had planned to do this activity by SMS but logistically it proved too difficult to organise and I was concerned about how I would collect the data. Unfortunately we only received a few responses and had limited time to show the students the responses to the questions before we had the recorded class discussion. Nevertheless the students whose questions were answered were very excited and the discussion which ensued was still quite lively.

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

The two main sources of data for my investigation were the questions posed by the students for their Indonesian counterparts and the class discussion which I recorded, that was based on the students' reflections on the topic of school life and in particular their reactions to the responses to their questions from the students at MAN 3 Kediri.

As both these activities were conducted in English there was very little use of the target language. However in both tasks the students were enthusiastic and more energetic than usual in their participation. In the discussion it was evident that the students were much more responsive when they could relate to the questions or when the questions allowed them to relate their own experiences.

I found the transcript below quite interesting. The purpose of my questioning was to draw a comparison between our school system, where the idea of repeating a year because of failure is very uncommon whereas in Indonesia, especially at report time, the concept of 'naik kelas' is very real and often the topic of discussion for students, teachers, family and the general public. What surprised me about the discussion was that the students seemed to have a common understanding of what the definition of failure is in our system. For them to fail was to get zero.

T: In Indonesia there is the idea of 'naik kelas' and when we looked at the school reports some of you commented on this. If you don't 'naik kelas' it means you don't go up to the next year.

H: That's like here though.

B: Don't we still have that here too?

T: Well we do have it here but basically if your parents object or...it's very...how often do you hear of people here not going up a class, going up a year?

H: Not very, but like if we didn't pass music or language or SRE it wouldn't matter because them subjects...

B: Yeah but like Science and English if you fail them...

H: Yeah the KLA's.....the Key Learning Areas.

T: But if you failed Maths, Science or English would you go up here or not...?

B: No.

H: No, or history... history, geography, if you fail one of them you do all year 8 again.

T: Have you heard of anyone ever doing that?

H: No.....but if you got... have zero...

T: But lots of people fail don't they?

H: But if you have zero...zero..

T: But that's different though isn't it...zero....?

H: You have to have at least one mark....Emma.. history.....one mark

B: I got five

E: No, I got ten more....

R: No I got eight....

E: That's eleven...

In the recorded discussion the direction of the conversation was often lead by the students' interests. Although I had a plan for the discussion the students often instigated the discussion with their own questions. While discussing school discos and socials for example there was a question

about rewards.

E: Do they get like a reward at the end of the year?

T: Yeah, often what's done in Indonesia is that at the end of the year they will go on a school bus trip. And for them if they're in Java for example they might have a school bus trip to Jakarta, the capital city or they might have a bus trip to Bali.

B: What about Waterbom park?

T: Or a cultural tour to Borobudur or Prambanan. So that's quite common in Indonesia to do things like that.

I found questions such as these really showed that the students were interested in the discussion and throughout the conversation I could sense the students using their prior knowledge, relating the discussion to themselves and processing the new information they were given. The aside in the above extract "What about Waterbom park?" is a good example of a student drawing on prior learning and applying it in a new context. The students had learnt about Waterbom park in Bali in the previous unit and had made a brochure promoting it as a tourist attraction.

As part of the discussion I also included questions which I hoped would give the students an opportunity to indicate to me that they were becoming more aware of the intercultural. I wanted to see if they were able to respond to the questions in an informed way using the information they had learned about the similarities and differences in the Indonesian and Australian school systems. Below are two examples of the type of questions I asked the students. These questions were deliberately asked towards the end of the discussion so that the students could answer them based on what they had learned in the activities and discussion leading up to this.

T: If you had an Indonesian exchange student coming to our school, what sort of advice would you give them? I want you to think now, if you could change this school to make it more like an Indonesian school, what would you adopt from their system that you think might improve our school system?

The responses of the students weren't always as culturally sensitive as I had hoped eg.

B: Change their types of clothes so they don't wear robes and things like that, like normal clothes.

I followed up this response by asking...

T: If it was part of their religion to do that, how do you think that person might feel?

I was pleasantly surprised at the responses to this question.

H: Probably be offended

B: They mightn't want to do it because it's like part of their religion.

Responses such as these indicated to me that the students were engaging interculturally albeit on a fairly basic level. What particularly pleased me was that there were none of the racist comments and interjections I often seem to get from my students and that the comments reflected a definite sense of empathy and appreciation for other people's feelings. For me the process of becoming an intercultural person is a journey and these were some of the first indications that my students were willing to embark on that journey.

FINDINGS

The main thing I have learned from this investigation is the importance of approaching language teaching and learning from a student centred perspective. The teacher as a facilitator needs to have a good understanding of his students' background and be constantly aware of this when developing programmes and designing learning activities and tasks. It is also important that the teacher encourages his students to explore their own identity because this is the first step in learning to relate interculturally with others. "When we come to recognise the ways in which we are affected by

our own experiences of language(s) and culture(s), we can more readily come to understand how others' experiences of different languages and cultures affect them". (ILTLP Professional Learning Program, Module 2 p 39)

It was evident that my students were more motivated and actively engaged when the tasks they were doing or the discussion they were involved in related to their own personal experiences and interests. This could be seen by the level of class participation in the discussions, their interaction with each other and the follow up questions they asked.

Student motivation and interest was also increased when activities involved direct communication with native speakers. I recall the first time I suggested the possibility of setting aside a lesson to have SMS conversations with the students at MAN 3. This idea immediately grabbed their attention and the room was buzzing with ideas and possibilities and suggestions for the lesson. Although I wasn't able to organise this activity at the time the alternative email task achieved a similar result.

At year 8 level I believe that discussions and journal reflections in English are the most efficient way to promote intercultural understanding. Students can also be encouraged to use Indonesian words and expressions that they know and I believe they should be actively encouraged to mix English and Indonesian as much as possible. As this is an ongoing process the students can gradually learn to express themselves in the target language through scaffolding and using sentence starters eg.

Saya kira.....,

Menurut pendapat saya....

Saya merasa.....

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

The implication of these findings for my classroom teaching is quite significant. It has reinforced much of what I already knew about teaching languages. I used to feel guilty if I spent too much time on activities that didn't use the target language. I am now of the opinion, especially in the early stages of learning a language, that it is desirable to engage the students in discussions about themselves and the topics being studied. If these discussions promote interest and motivate and encourage the students to explore relationships between their own language and culture and that of the target language it can only make the learning experience more meaningful and worthwhile.

Overall my investigation proceeded much as I expected. I had expected the students would be enthusiastic to discuss topics that interested them personally and that they could relate to. The main thing that surprised me was some of their particular responses in the course of the discussions. The students' concept or definition of 'failing' was most unexpected. I was also surprised by the overall level of maturity in their responses given that there are several students in the class who are not averse to making racist or random comments just for the sake of it.

Probably the main problem in the design of my investigation from my point of view was the collection of data and how to process, collate and interpret it. I was clear from the start that I wanted to trial using a journal as well as look at the types of questions I asked students so that I could help students to make connections between their language and culture and that of the target language, Indonesian. I am still not really comfortable with my interpretation of the data and I hope that as I develop these ideas for other units of work that I become clearer in my own mind about what I want to achieve.

In terms of my own classroom practice for intercultural language teaching and learning this investigation has been an invaluable experience. The time frame for the project and the recall days being spread apart allowed me to gradually develop my own understanding of what intercultural language teaching and learning is all about. I now feel reasonably confident with the principles of ILTLP and believe that I will continue to try to incorporate them in my own teaching practice.

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

I have attached three examples of the work produced by my students during this investigation. The first is a page from a student's journal where the students were asked to reflect on a language activity they had done in class and answer the questions as outlined. This example is typical of the journal entries for this activity and was chosen for this reason. On the whole the responses were limited due to the fact that the students were only given a short time at the end of the lesson to write their journal entries. Also this was the first time I have used a journal with this class and I believe it will take some time to train the students so that they are aware of my expectations and so that their responses become more spontaneous. I thought the questions, which I asked, gave me a good insight into what the students learnt in the lesson. In future I will try to give the students more time at the end of the lesson to fill in their journals. If time is limited I will set the journal entry as homework or begin the next lesson by giving the students time to complete their journals. These journal entries also give me a good indication of what I can do in follow up lessons in terms of revision, explanation and clarification of points which arise.

The second example is an example of the responses emailed to my students from the students at MAN 3 in Kediri. On the bottom of this attachment I have added the questions to which they were responding. It is interesting that the one question that the Indonesian students did not understand was a very common occurring question from my students. It was also something which I would not normally discuss in this topic.

"Do have school discos over there?" – "I am sorry i don't understand what you ask to me!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

In our recorded discussion I was able to explain to my students why this question was such a difficult one for the Indonesian students. This activity was very fruitful in that it gave me an insight into the aspects of school life that are most interesting for my students. Many of their questions related to punishments, smoking, drugs, music and activities at recess and lunchtime. When I do this topic in the future I will endeavour to include more material which relates to these aspects of school life.

The third attachment is a random sample of the questions that the students wanted to ask their Indonesian friends. There is quite a wide variety of questions and some of the questions are not directly related to school life but stem from their own curiosity and classroom activities.

EVALUATION

I was disappointed that I was not able to complete my investigation in my original time frame. As a result many of the activities were rushed and I felt that I was often asking the students to complete tasks which they were under prepared to undertake. Nevertheless the response from the students and their engagement in the activities was very pleasing. I believe that the approach I have taken to this unit will influence how I develop other units of work. I intend to continue using a journal with this class and will also continue to give them time for discussion. Although nearly all the discussion is in English I believe the students are more actively engaged and have a more thorough understanding of the topic. This in turn motivates them and the subject becomes more meaningful and relevant. I have found that one of the main problems with teaching a language is providing relevance for the students and it is a constant battle to justify the learning of a language to the students, their parents and the school community as a whole. I know from experience that for students who have the opportunity to go on study tours to Indonesia relevance and justification are no longer an issue. The other advantage of these discussions is that I have learned a lot more about individual students' backgrounds, interests, values and life experiences. By sharing my experiences and listening to theirs I feel that it has improved my rapport with the class and that they will be more responsive in class on the whole.

I also intend to build on the pen-pal relationship we have made with MAN 3 and will encourage my students to develop individual friendships with these students both in and out of school time. From the reaction of the students this is probably one of the best ways to make learning a language relevant. With many students being very keen on technology and regularly using email, SMS, Facebook, MSN etc, I hope that the students will continue to correspond both in English and Indonesian and continue to discover more about each others culture.

REFLECTION

This has been a very worthwhile experience. From having almost no idea about ILTLP I now have a fair understanding of its principles and have seen from both my own experience and that of my colleagues the benefits of this approach to teaching languages.

One of the side benefits has been the opportunity to network with fellow language teachers during the course of the project. Nowadays, professional development of this kind is very limited especially for teachers working in isolation in country schools.

Jessic
Be
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Think about today's lesson and then make some comments in the spaces below.

What did you learn which was new about today's topic?

They have an important ceremonies on Monday mornings.
They study english Their food is provided by the school

What did you already know about today's topic?

that they go to school in the mornings and have the
afternoons free. They go to school on Saturdays.
They have school chores that have got to be done

What part of today's topic would you like to know more about?

Do they have different classes for people with different
traditions? What are their punishments? Are they allowed
to have mobile phones at school and can they take
phone calls during school hours? Do they get a say
in what subjects they learn?

Date: Thu, 27 Sep 2007 14:48:48 +0700 (ICT)

Subject: membalas surat

RATNA:

1. here many kind of type of toilet
2. memorize surat yaasin, clean masjid, clean front yard and also run aruond front yard
3. i am sorry i don't understand what you ask to me!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
4. no, i don't get sick of rice because i eat rice every day and it make me don't feel hungry
5. i eat rice pecel sometimes i eat rice tumpang etc
6. no, i don't get expelled for fighting
7. no, i don't have food like KFC at the canteen because canteen in my school is small
8. a lot of people go to my school over 800 students
9. i follow it. and i like play volyball, do you like to play it?

CHI-CHI:

1. because it is obligation for every moslem and it can be left for moslem.
2. yes, i like school because to look for knowledge beside that i can interaction who everyone
3. yes, i do PE and i play basket ball, softball, and others
4. no, i am not allowed to drink in class if it will be do a student, the student will get punishment from headmaster

for bill and tanelle

Bill	Tanelle
What type of toilet do you have?	How hard is it to fast from 6am – 6pm?
What kind of punishments do you have at school?	Do you like school?
Do have school discos over there?	Do you do PE (penjas) and what sports do you do?
Do you get sick of rice?	Are you allowed to drink in class?
What do you eat for lunch?	
Do you get expelled for fighting?	
Do you have food like KFC at the canteen?	
How many people go to your school?	
What do you do for sport?	

Lachlan

Do you have socials?

Do you have a clean school?

Does your school get broken into?
Are there many fights at school?
Why don't you have lunch at school?
Why do students have to clean the schools in Indonesia?

Shaun

Do you get sick of rice?
What do you have for recess and lunch?
Do you have discos at school?
Are you allowed to leave school at lunch and recess?
Do you eat steak?

Josie

What colour is your school uniform?
Do you have socials (they are like discos) at school?
Are you allowed to have mobiles at your school?
Can you tell me about your classes and what you learn?

Tyson

Do you have school discos?
Do you get sick of boarding school?
Where do you get lunch?
Do you get detention?

Brenden

Do Indonesians have different colour hair other than black or brown?
Do young people drink alcohol?
What subjects do you learn?

Hope/Emma/Georgia

Do you smoke/ drink in the toilets?
Do you put on plays, drama performances etc?
Do you do major science experiments?
Do you have groups at lunch/ recess or do you just sit anywhere?
Do you get sick of rice?
What happens if someone is allergic to rice?
Are there "popular" groups and "nerdy" groups of students?
Are the girls really bitchy? (no offence)
Do boys and girls "go out"?
Are you allowed to leave the school grounds during lunch and recess?
Do you do charity work?
Do you do a 40 hour famine?
What do you do at recess and lunch time?
Are your teachers very strict?

Do you have graded classes? Clever classes and dumb classes?
Is school uniform compulsory? If so what is your compulsory?

Alanna

What uniforms do you wear?

What is your favourite subject?

What subject do you hate?

What is your favourite food?

What are some of your school rules?

Can you tell me more about your culture?