ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
Concetta Andreana	Gladstone Park Secondary College Taylor Drive Gladstone Park 3043	Italian	Year 10

CONTEXT

Gladstone Park Secondary College opened in 1974. It caters for a large enrolment incorporating a diversity of interests, needs and abilities. Many nationalities are represented amongst the student population.

The school regards learning and academic success as important. At the same time, camps and excursions are regarded as an important aspect of the curriculum and involvement in interschool sport and extra-curricula activities is encouraged.

Three languages are offered at GPSC. In 2007, Italian operated from Yr 7 to Year 12, French from Year 7 to Year 10 and Indonesian at Year 8 and Year 10. Students have two 75-minute periods for LOTE per week from Year 7 to Year 9. At Year 10, students have ten 75-minute lessons over a three-week cycle.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

The focus of my investigation was to develop a unit planner consistent with adopting an intercultural approach to LOTE teaching and learning. I developed a Unit for Year 10 Italian Term 3.

I was interested in developing a tool which captured this intercultural approach and at the same time was consistent with planning requirements determined at the school level as well as the current curriculum framework of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). I felt that the Unit Planner, in its development and if ultimately adopted, could become a vehicle for discussion and negotiation around the need for updating the common planning format to be used across all languages and levels at GPSC. At the same time, it would give me an opportunity to determine whether I could provide a practical example, at the planning level, of using the intercultural approach in GPSC LOTE courses consistent with VELS.

The changes made to my regular practice, at the planning level, involved
  • determining which questions to pose to students to engage them in thinking more deeply about the similarities and differences within and between cultures and what they understood about the nature of these
  • being more explicit with incorporating activities consistent with developing the student as an 'intercultural being'

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

My classroom teaching of the Year 10 Italian course in term three was used to trial the Unit Planner and informed my thinking in relation to adjustments made to the planner itself. In addition, teachers teaching at the same level were asked for feedback on the Unit Planner.

The major modification in the planned **content** was the need to identify the 'essential questions' of my intercultural stance for the unit to drive the planning of the other elements of the LOTE program. Defining the essential questions gave me a context within which to build the unit itself: to define its elements as well as plan the activities for students. I was determined to 'build in' an intercultural approach to the current course (using the current textbook and course book) as I knew that, at a practical level, this is what teachers would most likely do. Initially I struggled with this, as the linguistic elements for the unit I was planning had, as its focus, clothing and the weather. I could not define the intercultural stance I could take. I reminded myself that all language is embedded in culture and that the skill I had to develop as a teacher was to define the appropriate 'intercultural' perspective I wanted the students to explore and understand. I then realised that I needed to do more thinking. The intercultural focus for the unit became understanding of the importance of Italian design as exemplified by the "Made in Italy" brand as well as the notion of 'fare bella figura' (literally meaning 'to look good'). In addition, I asked students to consider what the "Made in Australia" brand meant to them and more generally on a global level and to reflect on the differences and similarities and discuss reasons for this. The 'essential questions' flowed naturally from that once I had defined the intercultural scope of the unit.

The major modification in the planned **tasks** assigned to students was asking students to complete a reflective piece of writing in relation to what they understood about 'Made in Italy' and 'fare bella figura' and developing open ended questions in relation to the topic to use during the discussion and investigation phases.

The major modification to **teaching practice** was in the planning of the 'essential questions' based on taking an intercultural stance to drive the planning and teaching of the other elements of the LOTE program.

Teachers of Italian teaching at this level commented that the Unit Planner was easy to understand as well as being comprehensive, and included the most important elements of information needed at this planning level.

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

The data I collected for this project related to my reflections and understandings as I underwent the process of developing the Unit Planner to incorporate an intercultural stance. I collected my reflections and understandings as a way of documenting the processes I underwent, the obstacles I met and overcame as I completed the task and the changes in my thinking as a result of having gone through this process. I divided these into three categories listed below:

DEFINING CULTURE

1. Definition of Australian culture, as a starting point, must come from the student's own understanding and experience. This informs their own thinking about a definition of Australian culture.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

2. One important skill for students to develop is to make comparisons between the experience of their own culture, what they discover about other cultures, and how they respond to that. To do this effectively, they need the tools (language and knowledge) as well as opportunities to form and voice their opinions and understandings.

3. "Taking an intercultural stance" in the planning of the LOTE course allowed me build in activities which I felt would make more connections with the great variety of students in my compulsory LOTE course – potentially making it more relevant to them and allowing them to take something else away with them at the end of the course which they could keep as a life long skill.

4. In defining the "essential questions" for the unit, I found I had to increase my own understanding of the concept/s embedded in the questions. This signalled to be that I had not always fully exploited the intercultural perspective in these materials in the past.

COURSE PLANNING

5. The challenge was to identify the key elements necessary to developing a planning proforma which mapped out the 'stance'. How these key elements interacted in the planning document was also important.

6. Taking an intercultural stance in the delivery of the LOTE program allowed me to easily incorporate interdisciplinary VELS goals.

7. It is possible to "take an intercultural stance" in planning and delivery of the LOTE course without having to abandon the use of the student textbook and work book.

8. I started to phrase my planning to bring out intercultural perspectives.

9. I was initially perplexed about the proportion of class time that would need to be dedicated to "taking an intercultural stance" in the planning and delivery of the LOTE program and how much time that would take away from class time dedicated to teaching students how to use and understand the target language.

10. In developing the course planning proforma, I found it easy to define the aspects of language development in terms of vocabulary items, functions, text types and so on. When I came to considering categories I needed to deconstruct the "intercultural stance" I was building into my program, I found I had no categories and that made it harder for planning.

FINDINGS

In this section, I outline how I responded to each of the above reflections and understandings. My responses allowed me to complete the task of developing the Unit Planner.

DEFINING CULTURE

1. Definition of Australian culture, as a starting point, must come from the student's own understanding and experience. This informs their own thinking about a definition of Australian culture.

> I understood the need to build into the planning, opportunities for students to share their own perception of Australian culture. I also did this because I needed to understand the perception of Australian culture the students themselves had. I felt that giving students the opportunity to gain a shared understanding of Australian culture was a necessary step towards comparing what happens in the target language culture, their own culture and developing intercultural

understanding. This was reflected in the planning.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

2. One important skill for students to develop is to make comparisons between the experience of their own culture, what they discover about other cultures and how they respond to that. To do this effectively, they need the tools (language and knowledge) as well as opportunities to form and voice their opinions and understandings.

> My past experience taught me that some students displayed a strong sense of being pro Australian, pro their home language culture, and/or pro the LOTE culture – sometimes at the expense of the other culture they were comparing. Firstly, I understood that students would need to feel comfortable about discussing their cultural practices and have the confidence to share this with other class members. I planned for pair work, small group work and then whole class sharing (through the use of Venn diagrams, for example) as a way of providing individual students as many opportunities as possible to share as much of their own cultural practices as they felt comfortable to do. I knew the teaching focus would also have to be on the language associated with making generalisations about cultural practices and comparing. In my planning, I provided students with opportunities to ask questions, make observations and engage in discussions so that they could try out their ideas on other students and refine their thinking. A writing task set at the end of the unit based on their own reflections served as an opportunity for them to show how far they had progressed in their understanding of the essential questions.

3. "Taking an intercultural stance" in the planning of the LOTE course allowed me build in activities which I felt would make more connections with the great variety of students in my compulsory LOTE course – potentially making it more relevant to them and allowing them to take something else away with them at the end of the course which they could keep as a life long skill.

> LOTE students who seem unmotivated when learning the target language as a system would be given the opportunity to participate in discussions about themselves and the way they react and understand the world around them. I was making a contribution to the development of the LOTE student as an intercultural person. I felt that I had broadened the scope of my LOTE course and would make it more relevant to the needs of a greater proportion of my students.

4. In defining the "essential questions" for the unit, I found I had to increase my own understanding of the concept/s embedded in the questions. This signalled to be that I had not always fully exploited the intercultural perspective in these materials in the past.

> After defining the 'essential questions', apart from the knowledge and understanding I already had, I gathered information from the Italian Language Assistant, other teachers, other speakers of the target language culture and the Internet. In doing this, I understood the process that students would need to go through – that gaining intercultural understanding means you need to connect to a wide

variety of people and sources of information to gain knowledge about and have an understanding of a complex notion.

COURSE PLANNING

5. The challenge was to identify the key elements necessary to developing a planning proforma which mapped out the 'stance'. How these key elements interacted in the planning document was also important.

    I was curious to find out which elements were essential when planning for a "stance". What does the plan look like? How do you start? When do you know it is finished? Can other LOTE teachers notice the difference in the plan?

    The question for me was how to develop a planning preformed which could capture this holistic approach and be user friendly for teachers to use in planning and delivery of their current LOTE programs. The 'stance' involved adding another layer (more objectives for students!) but also repositioning, redefining entry points into the unit. It seemed to me more of a three-dimensional task than one which I could show on a flat piece of paper. I realised that the way I positioned the information on the page was important to my understanding of how to communicate to others what I understood about how 'taking a stance' could be captured at a planning level.

    The summary petal diagram at the beginning of the unit was developed to meet the above need. It shows how central the 'essential questions' are to the planning process and how it provides a context for the Strands and Domains.

6. Taking an intercultural stance in the delivery of the LOTE program allowed me to easily incorporate goals for student learning as outlined in the Victorian Essential Learning Framework (VELS).

    For this unit I was able to identify appropriate goals for student learning in the three core and interrelated Strands as follows:

    •   Discipline–Based Learning Strand

                - the LOTE Domain

    •   Physical, Personal and Social Learning Strand

                - the Interpersonal Development Domain

    •   Interdisciplinary Strand

                - Information and Communication Technology Domain

                - Thinking Domain

7. It is possible to "take an intercultural stance" in planning and delivery of the LOTE course without having to abandon the use of the student textbook and work book.

    I found it possible to use the textbook framework we were currently using at GPSC and build in a layer to bring out the intercultural perspective in the planning and delivery of the LOTE course. Initially I

did not think this was going to be possible – I became frustrated. It was only when I reflected on the nature of language – on the inbuilt cultural perspective or perspectives in all language - that I realised that all I had to do was indentify the link between the language that I wanted the students to know and use, and choose the cultural perspective embedded in this language, in a way that made it relevant to the interests of Year 10 students of Italian. In teaching the students to describe clothing, the weather and use the past tense I realised I could also exploit this context to promote an awareness in students about the significance of "fare bella figura" in Italian culture as well as the "Made in Italy" brand.

8. I started to phrase my planning to bring out intercultural perspectives.

    As I understood this approach, the language I used in planning and delivery changed. For example, in the year 9 Italian course I named the topic "Italian Food Culture" rather that "Italian Foods" as I had done in the past. My questions were open ended - "Why are there so many Italian restaurants here in Australia and no Australian restaurants in Italy? If you had to open an Australian restaurant in Italy, what food items would be on the menu? In answering these questions, students were able to show me the range of knowledge about and understanding of Italian and Australian food culture that they had. In addition, they examined their own reactions to different foods and the importance of foods across the great variety of foods available in Australia.

9. I was initially perplexed about the proportion of class time that would need to be dedicated to "taking an intercultural stance" in the planning and delivery of the LOTE program and how much time that would take away from class time dedicated to teaching students how to use and understand the target language.

    i. In planning activities to engage students to *think interculturally*, I realised that some of the discussion and written tasks would need to be in English because of the complexity of the language students needed to express themselves. However, it was essential to provide "input" activities in the target language which resulted in students continuing to be exposed to the target language and at the same time, build up their knowledge and understanding of the cultural perspective being considered. Without exposure to authentic texts and scenarios in the LOTE, students would not be in a position to analyse and understand the nature of the culture embedded in the language.

    ii. I came to the conclusion that students can *speak interculturally* in at least two ways: by expressing themselves in the LOTE they are learning and by expressing themselves in their English. Both methods of communication complement each other and relate to the overall goals for student learning as defined in the VELS. By *speaking interculturally* in the target language, students are able to demonstrate essential knowledge skills and behaviours in the LOTE Domain. When they *speak interculturally* in English (whether it is their first or second language), they are able to demonstrate essential knowledge skills and behaviours in the Physical, Personal and Social Learning Domain or the Interdisciplinary Learning Domain depending on that particular Unit.

10. I felt I needed to define categories within the 'Intercultural knowledge and language awareness' dimension to help me to define the skills, knowledge and

behaviours to demonstrate student achievement in this level

In developing the course planning proforma, I found it easy to define the aspects of 'Communicating in LOTE' in terms of vocabulary items, functions, text types and so on. When I came to considering categories I needed to deconstruct the 'Intercultural knowledge and language awareness' dimension I found I had no categories initially and that made it harder for planning.

I understood the tension between not wanting to separate out the intercultural perspectives from the Communication in LOTE component but I felt that, from a planning point of view, teachers would want to have a separate space on a planning proforma to record the specific skills, knowledge and behaviours for 'Intercultural knowledge and language awareness'.

At first, I used two simple categories, *knowledge* and *understanding*. I discussed my dilemma with Angela Scarino who suggested the following categories: *concepts/meanings*, *processes of conceptualisation* and *reflections*.
I understood these to mean the following:
- *concepts/meanings* (the concepts and meanings the students will consider)
- *processes of conceptualisation* (how the students formulate their understandings),
- *reflections* (what they bring away with them as a result of going through the process).

In using this second set of categories, I seemed to be incorporating some of the skills, knowledge and behaviours which would belong to the Domains in the Interdisciplinary Learning and Physical, Personal and Social Learning Strands. There seemed to be overlap and I could understand why but I could not think of any other format or categorisation to avoid this. This point for me remained largely unresolved. I opted to retain the three categories even if I seemed to be repeating some skills, knowledge and behaviours elsewhere in the planning document.

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

When I defined my area of investigation, I was curious to determine whether it was possible to develop a unit planner consistent with adopting an intercultural approach to LOTE teaching and learning within the current Victorian curriculum context. The challenge was to be able to define how "taking an intercultural stance" was going to look like for Victorian teachers at a planning level. My intention was to develop the Unit Planner and the data I collected was to focus on the obstacles I faced (in my own mind) as well as to collect the reflections and understandings I gained in order to complete my task.

At the end of the development phase, I was confident that I had been able to incorporate key aspects of adopting an intercultural approach to LOTE teaching and learning within the current Victorian curriculum context by developing a Unit Planning proforma which I believe I could use in the future. In addition, I felt that I had a gained deeper understanding of the issues related to this because of the process I had been through.

The problem in my design relates to the scale of the investigation. Initially I wanted to develop the unit planner and trial it and report on that. During the process of developing the Unit Planner, I understood that, for the purposes of this investigation, I would focus on the process of developing the Unit Planner. Although the focus on my investigation was at the planning level, I felt that in trialling the Unit

Planner with my Year 10 students allowed me to experience the "cultural shift" in the classroom implicit in this approach. It was satisfying to experience these understandings at both the planning level and the classroom teaching level.

The investigation design would have benefitted from including other members of the LOTE team at GPSC at the ILTLP training and during the development phase of the Unit Planner. Another team member could have reported on the classroom trial component of this investigation.

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

Unit Planner – Year 10 Italian Gladstone Park Secondary College

EVALUATION

I felt the investigation went well as I was able to develop a Unit Planner proforma which I used in Term 3 with the Year 10 Italian class. By going through the process of developing the Unit Planning proforma and discussing it with other LOTE staff as it was being developed, this allowed me to clarify my own understanding of both the ILTLP objectives themselves and their broader curriculum implications in the Victorian context.

The investigation was valuable for my students as my classroom practice changed to reflect the importance of "taking an intercultural stance" in the delivery of my LOTE program. I exploited more fully another layer of understanding to teaching and learning languages, that is, the contribution that languages teaching can make to the development of students as intercultural beings. One of the ways I did this was by building in 'essential questions' related to the cultural component of the topic as a vehicle for the development of intercultural understandings. This is something I had not done in this way before.

The next step in further development of the investigation would be

•   for other teachers of Italian to use the Unit Planner proforma as a planning tool

•   to trial the Unit Planner proforma at another Year Level or for another language within the school

REFLECTION

Although completing the investigation seemed a daunting task initially, I found that the preparation given by the ILTLP team and the well timed reporting back/feedback sessions allowed me to pace myself towards completing the project and at the same time keep up with my workload at school.

I was pleased to be part of this process as I now feel I have a heightened awareness about the importance of 'taking an intercultural stance' in the planning and delivery of my LOTE program. In addition, I have gained practical experience in developing a planning tool which reflects this. I also had the opportunity to experience students' responses to this approach.