

ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
Lucy Leland	Butler P.S. (08) 9562 1804 East Butler P.S (08) 9562 4344	Italian	6/7

CONTEXT

Butler PS is a new school in a new suburb on the northern coastal outskirts of Perth. It has five Year 6/7 classes, of approximately 30 students each, which each have one 35 minute Italian lesson per week. There is no designated LOTE classroom; students are taught in their home classrooms or in a shared wet area in which I have managed to establish a small learning centre. Vocabulary is displayed on a pin-up board and I have access to a whiteboard and occasional access to an interactive whiteboard.

East Butler PS opened at the beginning of 2007 in the same suburb as above. It has one Year 6/7 class, of approximately 20 students, which has one 45 minute Italian lesson per week. I also take them for 30 minutes once a week for Music/Drama where I have the opportunity to reinforce their Italian language learning. There is a designated LOTE room and regular access to computers and an interactive whiteboard.

Both schools have a high migrant (particularly British) population and regular new enrolments (as many as 70 new students to one school in one term). Italian is the only LOTE the students study at both schools and I am the only LOTE teacher, although many children have had exposure to other LOTE at previous schools. Most children have been learning Italian for less than two years, many for only a few weeks.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

I had originally planned to develop a long term programme as the basis of my investigation. I had chosen the topic of "La Mia Casa" or "My Home" for a variety of reasons. I had had an interesting discussion with a group of students after the most recent eruption of Mt Etna about why people continued to live there and wanted to utilise their obvious fascination with the subject. Many of my students are migrants, recently arrived to Australia. I wanted to draw on the depth of their varied backgrounds. Many are from Britain, some from Asia, Africa and New Zealand, and some had travelled to other countries, including Italy. I also believed that the topic of "Home" would have a high level of personal relevance to the students, helping to provide intrinsic motivation. In Italian, "casa" means both "house" and "home".

For the purpose of this study I wanted to narrow my investigation into a more manageable "chunk" and therefore decided to focus on the area of assessment. There has been much discussion concerned with the amount of use of the target language in Intercultural Learning. I wanted to devise two tasks for students to complete, one in Italian and one in English, and compare their responses in an effort to determine which task proved more valuable in determining the level of Intercultural Learning.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Many things in my Italian classes stayed the same during this investigation. We still practised many of our routines, such as greetings, changing the calendar and taking the roll. I also continued to use a variety of competitive and physical games to introduce and practise vocabulary. These are invaluable for student memorisation, provide great motivation for learning and also act as an incentive for good behaviour and performance, and I was, therefore, reluctant to do away with them. But even amongst these “traditional” activities I made the conscious decision to allow students to be more instrumental in the course of incidental discussions that arose. I was determined to allow more time for student questions and to encourage other students to answer the questions of their peers.

My investigation did, however enable me to address an issue that had come to my attention during a Professional Development course on “Thinking Classrooms”. Although I am conscious of considering Gardner’s “Multiple Intelligences” during my planning I rarely provide opportunities for students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills as outlined in Bloom’s Taxonomy. I am impressed when my students remember things and overjoyed when they demonstrate understanding. Although I realise we can not work miracles in half an hour a week I still wanted to provide some opportunity for higher order thinking and included some strategies from “The Innovative Teacher’s Companion, 2007” in my programme. Completing Y-Charts (looks like, sounds like, feels like) and PMI (Plus, Minus, Interesting) Charts in groups led to some interesting discussions. After viewing photos of homes on the internet the children completed PMI charts and this activity seemed to help them get beyond the sheer novelty factor of the use of a bidet.

Students were set two open-ended but very different assessment tasks. In the first, the student was asked to write a description, in Italian, of his or her home. In English, I deliberately used the word “home” rather than house to give the children potential for greater depth in their writing. The second task was for students to develop and implement a questionnaire to ask a migrant about reasons for and consequences of their migration. Students will also be requested to write a summary of their findings but time has not permitted for this to happen as yet.

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

Although I did not record or collect data in this area, one of the most impressive effects of this investigation was the increased engagement of the usually more silent types. Incidental discussions gave some usually reluctant students a different opportunity to voluntarily participate.

Students’ written work was collected in its rawest form, rather than after it had been edited and assistance offered. My analysis merely involved searching for suggestions of evidence of an awareness of the notion of “home” rather than “house” and of explorations of differences in these across cultures.

FINDINGS

Most of the students’ descriptions were quite simplistic. Many students seemed to be taking their cues from what their peers were writing (location of vocab charts) and this may explain the inclusion of family members and pets in most pieces of work. A couple of students included information about the houses’ numbers of storeys and some stated that they didn’t live in apartments or cardboard boxes, suggesting an awareness of how others live. Students were happy to include language from previous units of work, such as the inclusion of pets. They did not appear to be interested in including information to which they did not have easy access. No-one included or asked for language to express emotional responses.

The students’ questionnaires, while proving much more difficult to interpret, contained a wealth of information about student understandings. Although there were questions pertaining to possessions and physical surroundings there were many more about emotional responses and value judgements. There was much more evidence of the students having the understanding that home is more than just a house and awareness that others may hold different values and opinions.

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

It was easy for me to jump to the conclusion that for the task completed in English the children had the language to demonstrate deeper understandings. Of course this is a simplistic finding and I realise that because the tasks were very different this may not be the only factor. If I had asked students to write descriptions in English they may have still written simple descriptions. The depth and difficulty of the second task is more than likely what provoked the richness of responses. But I could not have even set the second task to be completed in Italian as the students would not have known where to start.

Students may not necessarily even have the English language for the ideas in their heads but they are more likely to be able to express themselves in this language. Sometimes communication is more important than communication in the target language.

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

The students' questionnaires included some interesting questions. I have included a selection of these below. During our initial discussion of the task we talked about open and closed questions. I encouraged the children to formulate questions that would require more than a "yes" or "no" answer but suggested that just asking "Why did you move?" might not necessarily provoke more than a one-word answer. Some of the open questions students came up with include:

If you could change something, what would it be?

Would you give up your home for your previous one?

How did you feel when you left?

What was [sic] the traditions?

What were your neighbours like compared to hear [sic]?

What is a home to you?

I also found, though, that even some of the closed questions formulated showed some insight into the students' understanding.

Was it dirty or clean in your suburb?

Did you have a favourite place?

Did you buy new furniture or did you move it here?

EVALUATION

The greatest difficulty I had with this investigation involved time. I was certainly trying to do too much in too short a time. Although I don't feel that I did a particularly good job this time, the investigation has led me to ensure that intercultural learning is considered in my future planning and I will have the leisure of not working to such a rigid deadline. As an aside, students at one of my schools will be given more time for learning Italian in 2007.

REFLECTION

This investigation has provided me with another reminder that, as much as I want to, I can't work miracles. Given time constraints and other difficulties students will only be able to do so much. While I have always struggled to teach as much Italian language as possible I have often struggled to include cultural learning and have not provided experiences for higher order thinking. This investigation has forced me to attempt to address this. Although we have spent more time communicating in English, Italian language learning has still taken place. Perhaps a different motivation has been provided for those students who were previously having difficulty with engaging, and a greater motivation for those who wanted the opportunity to "think". I have certainly felt a sense of greater engagement amongst my students. I have also gotten to know more new things about them and have enjoyed them more.