ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
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CONTEXT

The school is in a north eastern suburb of Adelaide with an enrolment of 155 students. The year 6/7 class have been studying the Italian language since reception and partake in 2 - 45 minute lessons a week. There are 28 students in the year 6/7 class 12 female and 14 male the average age is 12.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

Area of investigation: Pedagogy

To investigate the discourse of my classroom to determine or understand the balance of teacher/student talk, the nature of that talk and whether it provides evidence of intercultural language learning. I choose this area in order to enhance the intercultural aspects of my lesson content and delivery.

Method

In order to conduct an analysis of the lesson 'discourse', I recorded lessons on audiotape. To analyse the discourse, while playing back the tape, I focused on the amount of time during the lesson allocated to the following

- teacher focus ~student focus
- teacher talk ~student talk
- student talk~ student talk
- silence ~how long do I wait for a response?

I investigated and compared the following

- how long I spoke and students were required to listen
- how long I spoke and students listened and actively participated
- how much time was devoted to children speaking with my help
- how much time the students spoke while I watched

Whilst reflecting on the content or 'script of the lesson' I focused on the following questions

- what do I need to keep doing?
- what do I need to stop doing?

- what do I need to start doing?
- what do I need to do differently?

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

I continued with my programme as I had planned it and recorded lessons in order to evaluate my practise. I asked myself

- what do I want the students to learn?
- why does that learning matter?
- what will the students produce?
- how well do I expect the students to do this?

I presented a unit of work on the topic 'families' using cartoon dialogues of a family conversing about different day to day activities i.e. a family having dinner. I read the dialogue to the students who had a copy each, highlighted 'new' or unfamiliar words (these were highlighted within the sentences and then in a list) used questions to get children to predict meaning. The students in smaller groups role played the scenario. I followed this up with written activities focusing on grammatical functions highlighted in the passages in these lessons the focus was the use of verbs in the first and second person.

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

The data I gathered was the tape recordings of the lessons for the unit of work (4 lessons)

I was able to interpret and look at how I ran the lessons. I analysed the data taking note of how much time I spoke, the number and types of questions I asked, the answers students gave and their overall input.

FINDINGS

The findings did not surprise me - I was the one who mainly spoke. I dominated in my presentation. The students were required to listen and were encouraged to respond but the questions I asked were not conducive to discussion. Rather, they were deliberately worded so the response would provide a specific Italian word or phrase, or explain a grammatical structure e.g. who can tell me what Giorgio is asking in this question? Why do these words have different endings? (seeking a masculine/feminine response).

Roughly 75% of the lesson content presentation time was teacher talk; student talk making up the remaining 25% of time. Student talk was mainly to clarify a point, or to answer a direct question from me. I did make a very conscious attempt to draw in as many students as possible (with an equal gender balance) but nevertheless there were four students who dominated the student talk time as they were the students with a better understanding of the vocabulary (and are high achievers in most areas).

There was no provision for student to student talk during this time. As my questions were focused on a specific correct answer and the students either knew the answer or not, I waited for approximately 5 seconds for a reply. Logically, the fact that student talk comprised 25% of this part of the lesson meant they were required to listen passively for 75% of the time.

I realise that where possible I did make connections with and drew attention to the application of cultural features in the language being taught. I attempted to get the students to contribute by thinking about differences and similarities by studying the photographs that formed part of the dialogue we were learning about. I noted, however, that this part of the lesson was dominated by me as well. I steered the children to elicit a response and tended to give information more than I allowed for student to student discourse or research.

I realised that I very conscious of the time I have with students and with this in mind, tended to bring them to a conclusion rather than allow them to come too ne of their own.

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

Analysing my findings against my initial questions, it is clear that in my classroom there is a teacher rather than a student focus, in that I dominate and control the lessons. This is not to say that the lessons are not student learning directed, however, as my focus is on providing students with maximum information and input from me to assist their learning. 'Talk time' is greatly skewed towards the teacher (me), and, where students do talk, it is mostly to answer direct questions with a specific answer required. This means that the discourse of the classroom is focused on correct usage and recall of the language and culture, as I have described it to them and not on interpretation and reflection on the students' part. There is a factual orientation to this discourse, a 'right or wrong' focus, and one that favours students whose recall is fast and whose memories are good.

Considering my findings raises some interesting points about my pedagogical practice and rationale for me. To fully engage students, I believe they should be more in control: 'they do, I watch'. However, in language learning, I feared that students would accomplish less if I took a less dominant stance, as I was the students' main point or source of information and therefore no matter how exhausting it may be I was the one who needed to impart this knowledge to them. As many of the students are of non Italian background, and even those who are, speak Italian dialects. I believed that to learn the language they must hear it from me. Therefore I have, in my presentation of lessons, particularly with the older students, used a highly structured lesson delivery with the intent of making full use of my limited time with the students, whom I see for only 2 x 45minute lessons a week. I feel I put pressure on myself to 'give' the students as much information as possible, to enable them to make links with other vocabulary I have introduced, with two main aims: that they become conversant in the language; and that they be better able to cope in secondary school in second language learning.

I have not had behavioural issues as a general rule and the children mostly enjoy the lessons and look forward to attending. Because of this, I have felt comfortable with a more formal approach in my teaching. I have also had consistently very positive feedback from my feeder secondary schools. In this regard, in addressing my aim of helping students to use the language, in a manner and at a level that would assist their secondary school learning, I have been very successful.

My involvement with the ILTLP project has given me a new focus which has challenged my thinking. The new focus is on maintaining language content but going beyond this, to explore intercultural aspects at a greater depth, but still in a deliberate and planned way, which suits my personal teaching style. The (next) question I will focus on is 'how can I "tweak" my lesson content to make my lessons more intercultural?' I would like to connect language and culture, not in an incidental manner, as in the past, but in a planned and deliberate way integrated with the language and grammar- that is, to explore the culture through the language and the language through the culture.

As an example, I have used the unit of work on the family, and encouraged the students to explore differences and similarities in the roles of the mother and father portrayed in the dialogues and in their own families. In this way, the learning becomes more relevant to them, and gives it a comparative significance that was not present before, when it was something separate, as a thing to be learned in isolation.

By looking at my old practise, I am aiming to' tweak' the content and delivery, and therefore implement a new pedagogical orientation to my practise. I believe intercultural understandings result in students' better understanding themselves and this is achievable by gaining diverse perspectives on the culture through the language. Interestingly, I think this will help students with my second aim, which is to help them make the transition to secondary school. As people with a greater understanding of themselves, and how languages and cultures contribute to understanding who we are, they should be better prepared for this transition. I intend to work on finding a balance between my desire to provide rich and deep language learning experiences while also allowing space for students to take more control. To do so, I am considering a range of methodological approaches, including the Freebody model for teaching Guided Reading.

Through using this opportunity to investigate my practice and through developing greater understandings myself about the benefits of an intercultural orientation to languages and cultures learning, I have opened possibilities for improving my pedagogical practice that I will continue to explore.