

## ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

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### CONTEXT

Magdalene Catholic High School is predominately mono-cultural and its students come from a relatively stable and affluent socio-economic area. The school is forward thinking regarding technology and as a result the students are technologically savvy.

I chose to work with my Year 9 Italian class of 25 students, 6 of whom come from Italian speaking backgrounds, ranging from first to third generation. The remainder of the class is predominately Anglo-Saxon. All of the students had displayed an interest in the language and culture; however, their interest seemed to be wavering. I hoped to re-engage the students in their learning of the Italian language and culture and to stir up some passion.

### AREA OF INVESTIGATION

My class was at the tail end of a unit of work that focused on socialising and pastimes in Italy. Seeing as though 15 year olds are mainly interested in their social groups and technology, I decided to extend the unit of work to include youth culture and technology in Italy and Australia. In particular we looked at youth sub-cultures and how they communicate. We focussed on Italian language used in SMS, blogging and internet sites and discussed similarities and differences with the Australian culture. We also looked at current trends and the influences that technology have on youth today.

Having a technology and youth culture focus was quite simple to put into action as my school is equipped with all the necessary tools. I simply needed to think ahead and pre-book the laptops so that students could access the internet.

### CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Youth culture and technology flowed on from the unit of work that the students were completing: La gioventù d'oggi, a unit of work that focuses on pastimes and socialising in Italy.

I explained to the students that in order to have a better appreciation of the Italian language we needed to make a link with the culture, "language and culture are intertwined; you can't have one without the other".

We brainstormed CULTURE, what it meant and its influences. I asked for their understandings hence no answer or comment was considered wrong or invalid, and the students responded very well. I steered the dialogue to focus on their own culture, i.e. youth. At this point I had everyone's attention because the lesson was about them. Once we had some concepts about youth, I asked them, "Do you think it is any different for youth in Italy?" They couldn't answer. We started to look at how youth communicate in

Australia and in Italy, the first being mobile phones and SMS.

I presented the students with a list of SMS abbreviations in Italian and we discussed the meanings and cultural significance of some of the symbols. Students drew similarities to English, for example the use of acronyms and abbreviations. Students then wrote their own SMS notes in Italian and they swapped, deciphered and responded to the message.

We then moved on to other forms of communication and focused on internet web browsers and blogs. I had the students search Italian blogs, specifically of young people, and we deconstructed the language and features of the blog pages. I modelled this process on the board using a blog entitled "A little bit of me" The students quickly realised that the features were very similar to English speaking blogs as the Italians used the same internet browsers to produce their blog pages. What was interesting was the amount of English used on the Blog and the use of SMS language.

Students were then asked to plan, draft and produce their own blog in Italian. The class seemed to enjoy this task as they were interested in the technology and were keen to discover the likes and dislikes of young people in Italy. The task invited young Italians into the classroom via the digital world.

During this time, I was required to use more technology that I would usually use and this often meant that I had to learn how to use some of the applications. Often the students would be teaching me how to use the technology. The aspect that I found most liberating was that I did not look at the textbook and simply drew from the students' interests.

### **DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED**

During the teaching cycle component of the investigation I made a couple of interesting observations. I noticed that students who were typically more interested in gossiping were now focused and engaged and the students who struggled with Italian were now more relaxed and looked forward to coming to the lessons. Overall students were more engaged in the lessons and they started to experiment with language appropriate to the context.

My data is in the form of the tasks that the students completed and some observations. Students completed SMS messages, responded to an article about the influences of technology on Italian youth and planned and produced a Blog in Italian. Students were more than happy to contribute to the project, however a couple of students were embarrassed and did not want their work presented as part of the project, because the blog pages included photos and they did not feel comfortable having their photos published.

### **FINDINGS**

This investigation confirmed my belief that students are engaged in their learning when the content of the lesson is relevant and interesting for them. It has also renewed my enthusiasm and passion for teaching Italian. Italy is on the other side of the world and apart from organising a holiday experience for the students it is very difficult for them to be immersed in a culture that is not their own. The use of technology enabled me to invite the Italian culture into the classroom. My students realised that Italian young people are not all that different to them, they were surprised to discover that Italians listen to English language music and that the blog pages had a lot of English language.

When connecting the link between language and culture in Italian the students were able to transfer that knowledge to English. For example, they realised that Italian and English SMS use numbers and symbols to abbreviate the language, and that Sony play station and X-box are just as popular in Italy as they are in Australia.

### **INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION**

Most of the information gathered during the investigation indicated that the students were engaged in their learning and that they found the content of the lesson relevant. Unfortunately the students didn't have enough time to complete the blog pages to the best of their ability. Due to school events, such as Year 12 final assemblies and excursions, we lost about 4 lessons. Therefore the students had limited

time to work on their tasks in class and the quality of the work submitted was not the best for each of the students. I also did not have the time to check their language structures as I usually would. As a result their work is raw, un-edited.

The most valuable outcome was that the students found learning Italian relevant and enjoyable again. They found that they had many interests and pastimes in common with young Italians.

### **MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS**

I collected samples of each of the tasks that the students completed, including samples of the resources I used.

- Brainstorm - I started the investigation with a collaborative brainstorm about culture. It indicated the students' insight on culture and youth culture. There was a lot of discussion about the sub-groups within youth, for example: nerds, emos, skaterboys etc. Some students were quite passionate about their "group" being labelled and others learned to appreciate the complexities of the different groups.
- SMS notes and hand out – We looked at SMS language and I gave students a list of Italian SMS language. Students were then asked to write SMS notes. It was interesting that some students wrote notes only using the words on the list. This could be for a number of reasons: laziness, my instructions may not have been clear or the students didn't have the ability to reflect on their knowledge of Italian and incorporate it. Other students were able to extend their language and write more complex messages.
- Articles about the influence of technology on young people and student responses – students were given a number of different articles about technology in Italian and were asked to decipher what they understood about the articles, mainly from reading the headlines and then answer the following question, "What do the articles tell you about Italian young people? Support your answer with evidence from the articles". Students were able to draw on their knowledge of technology in English to help them understand the Italian articles. They were quite surprised to discover that play stations and SMS had the same influence all over the world. They also gained an appreciation for Italy's large population. One student pointed out that there are 18 million people play Play Station in Italy, almost the population of Australia.
- Student Italian Blog pages, plans and notes – I showed the class an example of an Italian blog page and we looked at the features and language. Students were then asked to surf the web and look at specific features of Italian blogs. They had to take notes to give them ideas for their own blog page. The students then had to plan and produce their own blog page. We used an i-web program to complete this task. Some students did this very well and used their time wisely; others got carried away taking photos for the blog page. My proudest moment was when one of my students, who struggles writing Italian, happily worked on the task and wrote the most Italian he had written all year. Unfortunately, he didn't save his work properly and could not retrieve it the next lesson.

### **EVALUATION**

This youth culture and technology component of the unit was taught over approximately 5 weeks. Considering the time I had to work on it (due to other work commitments) I am satisfied with how it went. Fortunately, the students already knew how to use most of the technology that was needed for the tasks. I on the other hand had to learn how to use certain applications such as i-web and had to search the internet carefully for suitable web sites.

The investigation has been a valuable experience as it has renewed my enthusiasm for teaching language and culture and has given me a greater insight on the link between culture and language. As a language teacher I have always tried to address the Moving Between Cultures outcomes and feel that culture has been embedded in my teaching. The Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning investigation has forced me to make my teaching of culture explicit.

The investigation has also been a valuable experience for most of my students as it has made learning

Italian more relevant to them. It taps into their passion of learning another language and also gives them an appreciation of people from another culture.

Where to from here?? Rather than focusing on the basic grammatical structures in Italian I will place more emphasis on the culture from which the language comes. I will be placing more emphasis on the moving between culture outcomes.

### **REFLECTION**

I feel that the investigation was worthwhile, however, I was not able to dedicate the time necessary to get the most out of it.

The process of the investigation was not that different to my normal classroom teaching. Whenever I teach a new concept, I always give some background knowledge and then model the task that the students have to complete. This was the basic principle behind my investigation, give background knowledge about the culture and then guide the students to complete the task at hand. Unfortunately, due to time constraints I was not able to complete some things as thoroughly as I would've liked for the purposes of this investigation. I will however revise the tasks and get the students to refine their work after this investigation.

Although I had the students complete in class tasks, they were not regarded as formal assessment by any means. The tasks have been used as tools for assessment for learning rather than of learning. The knowledge and understanding that the students have gained during this investigation will then be assessed formally in term 4.

The investigation gave me great insights into youth culture in both Australia and Italy. It gave the students a better understanding of Italians and me a better understanding about how I can relate to my students to engage them in their learning.