

## ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
Sue Palmer	Balgowlah Heights PS Ph 9948 2225 Fax 9948	Japanese	K-4

### CONTEXT

**School** – Located near Manly on the Sydney's northern beaches. 600 students. 24 classes K-6 (5 K, 4 Y1, 3 Y2, 2/3 Comp, 2 Y3, 3/4 Comp, 2 Y4, 5/4 Comp, 2 Y5, 3 Y6)

**Staffing** – Total 40 including full time and part time teaching staff. All are women except for the principal and the occasional casual teacher.

**Area / School Demographic** - predominantly high achieving mono lingual white Anglo-Saxon Australians and English (large expat community) Middle -upper socio economic group eg professional/business. Approximately 5 ~10 families from European countries at any one time (eg France, Norway, Sweden). Others include South African (2) Japanese (1) Peruvian (1)

**Language** – Japanese has been taught at the school since mid 90's. Parent funded. Families invoiced per term (some don't pay!?) One teacher only. 3 days part time. Japanese is offered for years K-4 only.

**Lessons** - 1 per week 40 minute duration (19 classes across 3 learning stages). Class sizes vary from 20~35. Total no. of children involved 450

**Student profile** – Due the numbers of children taught necessary to generalise. Would describe as affluent and indulged. Many have travelled overseas. Rate high in basic skills tests. Some with behavioural and learning difficulties. Overall classroom management not an issue. Most engage in classroom activities well.

#### Japanese within the school context

I am the only staff member that speaks a second language. The school principal is very supportive. Many of the parents travel to Japan for business and more recently for holidays (skiing). There has been as a result a greater interest, support for and appreciation for the language in the school from some members of the parent community. As the language is parent funded I feel it very important to keep parents informed of what I am doing and aiming to achieve. Letters are sent home each term detailing program undertaken, terminology learned etc. Parents are encouraged to be involved in their child's learning and are occasionally invited into the classroom to assist particularly in craft activities.

Over the past year I have endeavoured to work more closely with classroom teachers and their individual programs. The aim here is to establish the connection between language and learning and to give the language (Japanese) more relevance in the overall curriculum 'teaching and learning together rather than in isolation'. Some teachers appreciate and embrace this new approach and involvement. Others are not as amicable and willing to exchange ideas.

Unfortunately there is no available classroom for teaching. RFF\* teachers are expected to move from classroom to classroom. There is no resources space or desk available and presently I work out of a cupboard. Most teaching resources are stored at home as is all preparation etc undertaken. This is not

an ideal situation. The school infrastructure and the teaching and learning facilities are very inadequate.

\* RFF: Release from face to face: the primary classroom teacher is replaced by a specialist teacher referred to as the RFF, for a language, craft, library lesson, while the regular class teacher takes RFF.

### AREA OF INVESTIGATION

The School was involved in preparations for a major school fundraiser – Spring Fair

I wanted in some way to do something through the medium of language and culture which would involve the children and have them contribute to this event and to see if could we achieve the following:

- Develop an understanding of the importance of ‘community’ in culture
- Develop an understanding of the importance of ‘giving’, of ‘contributing’ (important in all cultures but particularly in Japan) through working together towards a common goal.

It was also hoped we could in addition bring about an enhanced profile and changed perception of language learning within the school (by involving parents and teachers also) that demonstrated it could be not only purposeful, but also relevant to other important areas of learning and life.

**Step 1.** Select a defining aspect of Japanese culture that was of interest to the children. Many children love origami, so focussed on paper craft in particular the use of the exquisite Japanese ‘washi’ paper

**Step 2.** Research and select stage appropriate activities / craft for each year which could involve all children and was doable in a 2~3 week time frame

**Step 3.** Seek permission and approval from principal, staff, parents, fair committee etc advising of intentions – letter sent home and memos in school newsletter

**Step 4.** Source suppliers / wholesalers – necessary equipment eg washi paper, glue, cards coasters, lacquer shells, leather etc. Planned and costed activity to ensure no financial liability / costed items to be produced and sold.

**Step 5.** Plan and prepare activity for each class. Enlist parent helpers to assist in preparation of items to be produced. All students currently learning Japanese K-4 involved.

### CLASSROOM PRACTICE

#### 1. Discussion – (English)

- Spring Fair – What is it? What purpose does it serve? Why are we having it? Who is it for? Aimed to motivate them and get them excited about this community event. Focus on their ‘community’.
- Discussed what is a ‘community’? What does it mean to belong? What makes a community work? Discussed responsibility and working together. (Japanese society importance of the ‘group’ rather than the ‘individual’) How can we contribute as members of our school community in Japanese class to this event?
- Discussed ways in which we could ‘contribute’ and give to our ‘community’ by making and presenting items distinctly Japanese that we could sell at the Spring Fair. Therefore passed ownership of the task and its success to the students.

*Comment – Had not previously approached the teaching of language from this perspective. By providing the children with a focus or purpose we could then use the target language and culture to achieve a relevant and important outcome.*

#### 2. Presented Language

E.g. in making the cards in Kindergarten used simple language such paper, glue, fold, paste etc. This involved revision of known terminology of numbers, body parts e.g. when making the dolls cards which included several steps.

*We learned new language by doing and actively participating.*

Children heard often ‘yoku mite, yoku kiite’ and learned quickly that it meant ‘look well, listen well’.

**3. Production of items.** Predominantly use of target language in this task. Parents also invited to assist in the classroom.

- Kindergarten      Cards (set of 5)
- Year 1                Notebooks
- Year 2                Japanese Recipe books
- Year 3                Drink Coasters (set of 6)
- Year 4                Pendants

*Children were engaged resulting in improved listening and attitude. Was predominately teacher directed which was not ideal. Parental involvement in the classroom positive and valuable.*

#### **4. Discussion – (English) Presentation and packaging of items for sale**

Japanese culture – Presentation is very important - an 'art' in itself. (Showed pictures) We looked at ways to present and how we could make items produced look good.

Prepared items for sale – plastic bags / ribbons / organza bags for pendants / pricing

**5. Sale of Items** – 75% of items produced were purchased – by the parents / children prior to the Spring Fair. (Total over \$3000 in profit made)

**6. Summing up** – Involved children in discussion of what was learned / What was gained / enjoyment/ language learned.

*What I could have done but failed to do at the time was to survey the children, teachers and parents which would have provided the appropriate evidence to determine and assess what was learned from an intercultural perspective. Recognise that more specific data was required.*

### **DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED**

#### **General observation**

- Children were engaged from the beginning as it involved them in a practical sense.
- There was a noticeable increase in motivation even among those students normally disengaged and disinterested in learning. Of the children that were absent on the day they asked to be able to do the activity during lunch hour or after school. Had a parent comment that their child even though he was very sick still wanted to go to school because he did not want to miss out on Japanese class.
- The children listened more intently and were able to produce items / work of surprising quality as a result. 'Learning by Doing'. 'Good listening is good learning' 'Good learning is good listening' in this case. They wanted to do a good job. Evidence is in how well they worked and the standard of items produced.
- Children were very proud and excited by their achievements. The fact that most wanted to buy their own items was evidence of this.
- The comments of the children and the comments of many of the parents and classroom teachers were positive. Classroom teachers used the activity to do 'recounts' and 'procedures' so utilised the activity in their teaching.
- It was a 'community' project. Parental involvement was important to the success of this investigation. Each class had several parent helpers come along to assist. Many of the parents were very surprised by what the children produced. I received many comments in passing and it was these positive comments in the presence of the children that greatly impacted on the children and their self esteem.
- Time constraints did not allow for much interaction with and between the students in the target language. This was a negative.

Data collected came mostly via comments from students, teachers and parents. Received emails and letters also. Am very disappointed that I did not audio or video record the lessons for this project.

### FINDINGS

- ‘The more you put in the more you get out’ This was a huge logistical undertaking but the results and what we collectively achieved as a school community made it worthwhile. *I believe the children also gained an understanding of this.*
- By approaching language learning from a very different perspective it enabled us as a group to learn in a different way, a practical way which achieved more than just learning language but incorporated learning about some important core ‘values’. Eg commitment, perseverance and contribution.
- Active participation is important to learning. ‘Learning by doing.’ The learning process is greatly enhanced if the experience is positive, meaningful and fun.
- Children did, I feel, develop the understanding of what it meant to ‘give’ and how much satisfaction can be achieved by working together to achieve an end. Positive outcome financially for the school.
- Children were able to notice, compare and reflect on the subtle differences in cultural behaviours between Japan and Australia eg when asked to look at ‘presentation’ and packaging.
- Time constraints inhibitive. 40 minutes to do what had been planned and aimed for just not enough. Frustrating. Rushed. Logistically all consuming.
- Children learned the importance of good listening and watching to achieve the best result. We had some minor mishaps and personal disappointments because they didn’t listen and they didn’t watch. Rectifiable.
- The importance of questioning. This allows the children time to conceptualise and to think based on their own experiences and observations of their world. This also provides a basis from which to approach teaching / learning. Understanding where they are at in their understanding of the world is vital.
- Parental involvement in learning process a useful tool. Can assist in validating what is learned and experienced if positively valued and supported at home.

*Keep it simple is the best approach. Outcomes are best achieved if the focus is limited, well planned and thought out. This investigation should have been better planned and would have had a better outcome if the focus was on perhaps just one class in just one year level where the data could have been more effectively gathered, interpreted and assessed.*

### INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

- ‘Time’ is an issue. Limited time where face to face contact is just 40 minutes once a week is in no way conducive to active language learning. As a result need to limit expectations of self and children.
- In acquiring language for communication we need to live the language, experience the language, to have time to understand, interact and reflect on the language. This is impossible in a classroom situation. The children can understand words and instructions but it did not have meaning and relevance to them outside of that situation. Somehow as the teacher I need to be able to engage the children more where they will want to use beyond the classroom. Focus of interest for them is important.
- The aim of using the uniqueness of the Japanese ‘art’ and culture to develop an understanding and perception of ‘community’ and ‘contribution’ was achieved. Language learned was minimal.
- Could have made the activities more interactive with teacher and students. E.g. teach older children how to do and have them teach the younger children in the target language eg involve ‘buddy’ classes
- Children were genuinely engaged. Were able to produce some very beautiful items. Better than expected result. Providing purpose and focus was important in achieving this.
- Could have involved children in the planning stages more but again time a problem.
- Classroom teachers have used the activity to do recounts and procedures. This was an unexpected

positive. It was exciting to learn that this project has involved classroom teachers and assisted in their teaching activities.

- Could have involved children more in the research process eg sourcing suppliers etc. One child did however of their own volition research the 'production of 'washi' paper via the internet. Most impressed.
- To do this with the all K-4 was too much!!! Huge amount of work involved.
- Parental involvement very positive. Comments and interest in their children's work very beneficial to developing children's self esteem and self worth. Hugely rewarding from this perspective.

### MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

Can provide samples of the products produced by the students which were sold for the Spring Fair. Some photographs are attached. Unfortunately did not take a video or adequately record the lessons. Was very involved in the production of items. Missed opportunity.

Sample of email comments include

*'thankyou so much for all the wonderful effort you have put into this, and I look forward to receiving my beautiful pendant and I will be stocking up on chrissie presents also!!'*

*'I was wondering if I could help out with the Japanese crafts for Ciara's class - I believe you are doing it next week. I think her class is after lunch on Wednesday. She said what they were doing is absolutely beautiful.'*

*'You did a marvellous job today! I'm full of admiration.*

*Just confirming that I will help you from 11 - 12.30 tomorrow. I will come to the Eastern staff area about 5 to 11, ready to help you carry the stuff to the classroom....*

*'The cards are really gorgeous - beautiful!*

### EVALUATION

- The aims were achieved but I do not believe this was done well from an intercultural teaching and learning perspective. Was totally consumed and too involved in 'getting the job done' (with 19 classes, 450 children and 5 different products.) in a short time frame. There just was not the time to focus on what and where the project was headed on an intellectual level. Hence failed to gather the right data required for a proper and adequate assessment.
- It was a valuable exercise in terms of involving the school community and extending the profile of language learning throughout the school.
- It helped to give children a sense of pride and satisfaction by producing something of quality. Several parents commented on how the items had become personal treasures of their children. Some were even being sent overseas to grandparents as presents.
- The interest and motivation for language learning through this exercise increased. A positive for future learning.
- Learned the value of questioning in terms of understanding 'where the children are at'. This is very beneficial in developing future units of work.
- Would be interesting to attempt this exercise again (scaled down), but to do so over a period of a term for example, to be more specific and to do it with just one class or year group where more thought goes into the intercultural learning process rather than focussing on an end product. For example, you could show them 'the product' and they could have determined for themselves what would be required to 'value add' in the production process and to take on the responsibility for investigative learning themselves.
- Despite the inadequacies in the planning and processes the children did learn through this experience and did enjoy it. They learned about the importance of working as a group to achieve a common goal. They learned of the merits that could bring. They learned about community and responsibility. They learned about Japanese paper craft and art and the importance of presentation. Over \$3000 was raised for our school directly through their efforts.

## REFLECTION

The Japanese paper craft project was not the investigation I had originally planned to undertake.

The project was born of a desire to inject some enthusiasm, involvement, support and commitment by the children and the parent community towards the upcoming Spring Fair which as a parent active on the P&C executive I felt was lacking. (Having grown up in 'the bush' you learn the value and importance of community spirit) I wanted the children to develop that understanding of what could be achieved collectively as group with a bit of effort and by working together.

The craft project was very laborious and all consuming but despite the amount of effort required it was personally very rewarding and worthwhile. It achieved a fantastic result financially for the school but that was not necessarily the intention.

I learned that anything is possible if the desire to achieve is there.

From an intercultural teaching and learning perspective I learned the importance and value of

- knowing and understanding the children in the teaching and learning process.
- questioning and scaffolding for interactive learning
- analysis and reflection in teaching practice
- nurturing and maintaining positive relationships
- an open approach to the language teaching and learning process

I learned that a great deal more thought is required in planning and programming to incorporate the 'intercultural' and to give meaning to language learning from the perspective of the learner. I have a lot more learning, investigation and discovery ahead of me .....

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in the ILTLP project.

Thank you for your time, patience, dedication and commitment to the teaching and learning of languages.