



Australian Government

Quality Teacher



Intercultural Language  
Teaching and Learning  
in Practice

## ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
Margaret Kennedy	Hillarys Primary School Lymburner Drive Hillarys WA 6025 Ph (08)9307 6365 Fax (08)9307 8511	Japanese	Years 4-5

### CONTEXT

Hillarys Primary School is a Government primary school in a beachside suburban location. The suburb of Hillarys grew slowly over a period of thirty years and there is a range of housing, from small starter cottages and duplexes of the 1970s to the million dollar mansions of the 2000s. The clientele of the school ranges accordingly, with many of the students destined for the local private school as soon as there is a vacancy. The two classes which I chose to work with in this project are the two largest classes in the school in the two smallest classrooms. One class of Year Four students has thirty one students, one of whom has cerebral palsy and is in a wheelchair. He has an assistant, and is often missing from class for toileting and other needs. The other class, a Year Four and Five composite class, has thirty five students, three with quite severe learning and developmental delay problems, and one of these also has behavioural problems. The majority of the Year Fours have been learning Japanese since Pre Primary and the Year Fives since Year One. There are also many students who have entered the school in the years since then so there is a range of experience with Japanese learning. Several students are from a non- English speaking background, though all are fluent in English.

The classes have two forty minute lessons each week. I chose these classes for the investigation because they are an enthusiastic group with a positive attitude and they have more time than the younger classes, and less pressure to produce results at Level Two and above, which is experienced with Year Six and Seven. There is a range of student abilities, both in their Japanese proficiency and general classroom progress.

### AREA OF INVESTIGATION

I originally chose to work on the theme of Genki, with the intention of exploring the aspects of life which go to make a healthy life and explore how this was similar or different in Japan and Australia. Mindful of the fact that this is a language class and the focus must be on language acquisition rather than Studies of Society and Environment and Health Education, this evolved into a study of School and Home Life in Japan and Australia. I attempted to incorporate an intercultural emphasis into the programme I would usually be doing, continuing to develop students' recognition and writing of hiragana characters and making the language they use meaningful. I wanted to make the contexts in which they would be 'using' the language to be potentially useful contexts. (Up till this year, when our sister school withdrew, we had enjoyed a valuable exchange programme with a middle school in Japan.) I also wanted to develop previous learning, using previously learned vocabulary and sentence patterns in new contexts.

## CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Originally I intended to proceed through a typical student's day, but for organisational reasons, we began with classroom language and proceeded from there to home scenarios and the language used in those contexts. Topics included following instructions in the classroom, asking for and describing what you want, using appropriate language at meals and when leaving and returning to the home. Appropriate behaviours such as bowing, removing shoes and table manners were discussed, with the emphasis being on comparing with the actions of the students. The videos "Discovering Japan – Home and School" and a collection of videos which I taped while in Japan were used, along with large pictures from Japan Forum Photo Panel bank and a PowerPoint presentation of Food pictures, to provide a stimulus for discussion. The CD ROMs "Michio Teaches Japanese" and "Sugoi" and the "Kids Web Japan" website also provided language practice tasks and background information. Simple role plays and barrier games provided the opportunities for students to put spoken language to use, while labelling and writing short sentences and then reading them.

The programme was also adapted to include a visit from the Japanese Language Advisor in Western Australia, Mrs Yuko Fujimitsu, so there was more time spent on the school aspect of the programme than I had originally envisaged. Yuko showed the students her son's Japanese schoolbag and a variety of contents which he used in school in Japan

In introducing the room and articles in a Japanese home, I moved from the 'known' to the 'unknown', getting students to consider their own school and home context and comparing with their own other experiences and those of their classmates before discussing the Japanese students which they saw on videos, pictures and websites. I wanted to avoid a teacher dominated approach which tends to become more like a Society and Environment lesson and introduce Japanese words which they could use in a potentially realistic context. By comparing their own experiences, I hoped to make clear to them that the lives and experiences of Japanese students would also vary and that there is a danger of stereotyping when we say "In Japan they..."

## DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

Classroom instructions and items were introduced in Year Three and were revised at the beginning of this topic, with the focus being on asking if students had the items (arimasu ka) and asking whose items they were (dare no?). Questioning games and role plays and a listening task were used to assess the understanding of these words and their use in this context.

Four of the tasks involved the students completing a reflection sheet to record their observations and conclusions. With the randoseru task, students examined the backpacks of two students in the class before observing Hiroki's. One student had a backpack she had obtained while living in Switzerland which the students were able to compare with both Australian and Japanese bags. The students were fascinated with the soroban (abacus) and several were keen to learn to use it. A couple had done Kumon maths and were familiar with the soroban. The lack of a lunch box led to the finding that Japanese students are provided with lunch at school – a useful segue into the next topic. The reflection sheet asked them to compare the similarities and differences. Students also wrote thank you letters to Fujimitsu Sensei. The letters revealed the deep impression actually seeing the randoseru and its contents, rather than seeing pictures or hearing about it, had on them; a reminder to teachers that seeing and touching are so very useful in the learning process.

As I was mindful that these are after all, language lessons, I attempted to use language and have the students use it in context rather than merely introducing vocabulary. Students acted out asking for items from the randoseru and saying who owned them. They made short plays which involved the removing of their shoes in the genkan of the house and using the appropriate words when leaving the house and returning. Once again, the approach used was "What would you say and do?" before showing them the Japanese way. Other language tasks involved writing labels on their pictures and worksheets

## **FINDINGS**

Students were very interested when real things were shown and a hands-on approach was used. With the website and PowerPoints, students were more passive, allowing a few more interested or outgoing students to ask the questions. Attempts to engage these students often elicited only brief answers. A similar result occurred when students were asked to write their observations and understandings. This reflects their usual approach to learning, some of these students being reluctant writers in English as well.

When discussing their own homes, students who had lived in other houses before their present home could readily explain that houses differ and give reasons for them "In Scotland we didn't have a pool". "In South Africa we had high fences and locked gates". "In New Zealand I had to share a bedroom with my brother". "When we first moved here we didn't have much furniture". These students were able to give reasons for the differences and students could readily observe that their houses differ from their friends in many ways, but that there were also many similarities. Students sorted pictures from Japanese and Australian newspaper ads into "Probably in Australia" and "Probably in Japan" and "We Can't Tell".

Students became familiar with the questions "How is it the same?" and "How is it Different?" and some students began to anticipate this and be ready with answers. Others seemed content to let them dominate the discussions. Many of these students were quite interested but have a more passive learning style and do only what is required of them.

## **INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION**

I found that the students were susceptible to forming conclusions based on the limited sampled they observed. It would be necessary to expose them to more examples in order for their observations would be valid. They were apt to generalise despite my attempts to get them to consider that there would be variations.

There were differences between the students in how they observed and formed conclusions, with some interested students making some mature and considered observations. Most of the observations were personal = "I'd hate to wear that bag" (because it's heavy) or factual – "The bag is made of leather and has no zips". "It was interesting how everyone has the same" (style of bag). Japanese bags stand by themselves and Australian bags don't". "They cost more but you have them for your whole life, Australian bags fall apart". I sometimes felt students wrote what they thought they had had to 'learn'. No doubt a consequence of the strategic questions I asked to direct observations to certain features.

## **MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS**

Pictures used for discussion

Websites used by students, either in small groups or as a whole class with data projector

Worksheets and reflection sheets used

Randoseru

Picture Think pair Share with Photo panel pictures

Organising pictures – housing words

Comparing houses - reflection sheet

## **EVALUATION**

I found time management to be a major issue. There were several interruptions to my planning – an excursion to the high school, a choir activity and sports practices to make up for sessions on other days which had been rained out, interrupted my planned lessons and meant opportunities to finish off tasks were decreased. It was hard to get back to things after a gap of over a week or more. Students were very interested in seeing how Japanese students live, especially where it was quite different from their own way of life. This sometimes led to many questions and students needing to see things a few times. They were not so interested in completing worksheets at the depth which I felt they needed to express ideas which they had discussed as a class. Many of the activities were not completed at a level I usually expect to achieve in a task and attempts to get them completed a week or so later did not have the same impact on the students. Thus, I feel the data I have collected does not truly reflect the students' experiences.

## **REFLECTION**

As I write these notes, I have a clearer picture now of what I could and should have done, instead of the approach I followed. I was remiss in having only sketchy notes of actual procedures and for various technical reasons, did not tape the lessons. Time management was a major issue for me – I tended to get very involved in interesting discussions and sharing experiences and did not allow sufficient time for the students to document their finding, leading to incomplete work. Time was also an issue as the programme had interruptions for excursions and sports practices, leading to shortened lessons and a couple of cancelled lessons.

There was a danger of the lessons becoming teacher dominated, which was likely to happen when my own experiences in Japan were discussed. However the main problem for me was that much of the lesson was about Japan and the Japanese and very little target language was used. I did try to have part of the lesson with the students using language as well as being exposed to it but I feel there was a trade off occurring. I do not feel the students used as much language as they would normally have experienced over the same time period (eight weeks). However, they learned some interesting things about Japan which they will be able to build on in their future lessons and in life in general.

Although I used a range of questions ranging from the explicit to the inferential, I feel most students are happy to let a few students answer these questions while they wait passively for what they "have" to do. It was challenging to get them to move from the obvious, perhaps I expected too much from students who are only eight and nine years old.

Although I feel that the language they are learning must come from an intercultural focus, I feel on this topic I did not really get to the cultural aspects of the language itself. The intercultural focus may have made the students more receptive to the use of phrases which are not a direct translation of what they would say themselves, they were still using phrases which students learn in a similar programme without an explicit intercultural focus.