



**Australian Government**

**Department of Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations**

# **Teaching and Learning Languages: A Guide**

**Practice example**

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**Connecting with students' language and culture**



**UniSA**

Research Centre for  
**Languages  
and Cultures**

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#### Disclaimer

The views expressed in the publication do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

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## Introduction to examples

Collected here are examples of teachers' work. These are drawn from teacher practice and are included here to exemplify aspects of teaching, learning and assessing languages, as discussed in the *Guide*. Teachers were invited to share their planning and programming documents and members of the project team worked with them to further develop aspects of their work.

### Programs

The collection of programs includes primary, middle and senior secondary long and short-term programs. These contain annotations designed to point out specific points of interest for you to consider in your reading of them. At the end of each program you will find a commentary that describes how the program exemplifies selected sections of the *Guide*.

### A selection of teachers' work

This is a selection of programs and parts of programs, plans for classroom teaching, planned assessment tasks, descriptions of the teaching and learning contexts, investigations and evaluations of practice, and reflections on current practices. It shows teachers engaged in professional thinking, planning, reassessing and evaluating what they teach, how they teach and who they teach.

### About the examples

- These examples of teachers' planning, practice and reflection are provided for you to examine, consider and perhaps use in expanding your own understanding of language teaching and learning. We know that teachers learn best from other teachers and so we encourage you to look across the set of examples in all languages rather than just the language(s) you teach.
- The examples of teachers' work included here belong to individual teachers and are taught in a particular context which means that you will not find models that you can instantly adopt and teach. Rather, you will find ideas about teaching and learning that you can use by adapting and reworking them to produce programs, and classroom teaching, and learning and assessment practices that you can use in your own context.
- The examples of teachers' work are not included here because they constitute 'best practice' or are exemplars of definitive programs for languages teaching and learning. You will find some outstanding approaches to planning and teaching that advance our understanding of how to make languages teaching and learning a rich and effective learning experience for students. You will also find teachers' honest reflections and evaluations of their pedagogies, questioning what they do and rethinking what they will do.
- The examples of teachers' work may include some pedagogies of which you may be critical. However, you will also find professional educators striving to make sense of their work with students, language teaching and language learning.

<b>Example</b>	Connecting students' own language and culture to those of the target language
<b>Language</b>	Japanese
<b>Level</b>	Primary
<b>Teacher</b>	Renee Smith (Queensland) The teacher investigates the language and culture of her mostly Indigenous students in order to help them compare and connections between their own language and culture and Japanese.

<p><b>Language, culture and learning</b>  What is language?  What is culture?  Understanding learning  Understanding language learning  Intercultural language learning</p>	<p>The teacher, wanting to find out how much her students know about their own language and culture, develops a survey to establish this with a view to help her students compare their own language and culture with Japanese, which they are learning.</p> <p>The students' responses show her that most could give a definition of both culture and language, that language is '...a way of communicating with voice, body, hands and expressions' (girl, 11 years) and that culture is 'your way of life' (Indigenous student, girl, 12 years). As seen by her students, their language and culture are dynamic, encompass tradition and give them identity. The teacher reflects that her understanding of Indigenous culture has grown through the investigation. The teacher finds that the investigation has led her to change some classroom practices. She now uses more discussion about the students' culture, the culture-language connections and concepts in her teaching of Japanese language. The intercultural stance seeks to facilitate the student's connection between their language and culture (their 'intracultural' connection) and the target language and culture. It is exemplified here through the teacher contextualising for her students, the Japanese language she teaches.</p>
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## Japanese Year 3 to Year 7

Due to the unique context in which I teach (a very high percentage of students identify as Aboriginal), I wanted to find out how much my students knew about their own language and culture. I wanted them to reflect on and become more aware of various aspects of their own culture and language. I hoped that this investigation into their knowledge of their own language and culture would also give me a greater understanding. I wanted to use the information gathered as a starting point to help them compare their language and culture to that of the target language (Japanese). Through the survey I also wanted to gather data about my students in regard to languages that they speak and how they view their own culture.

My planning of units of work and individual lessons didn't change dramatically but I did encounter a shift in my teaching practice – I moved away from focusing largely on just the language and moved more towards combining language and culture. I found myself explaining the background of concepts more; explaining the cultural significance of language.

### CLASSROOM PRACTICE

In order to gather information about my students' knowledge of their own language and culture, I developed a survey (see Attachment). I conducted the survey with one Year 6 or 7 class at each of the three schools that I teach; a total of 54 students participated in the survey. Only one student was not allowed to participate in the survey due to the wishes of his parents.

I adjusted my teaching processes to include more discussion of comparisons between my students' culture and that of Japan. I started to have more discussions about the students' own culture and encouraged them to share information with me whenever the opportunity arose.

My students didn't report noticing any changes with regards to the way that I teach – as this is the first year that these students have learnt Japanese, they are still getting used to the subject and the way that I teach it.

### DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

When conducting the survey, students recorded their answers on the survey sheet and I also used a voice recorder to record all the discussions that occurred in response to the survey. There are many students across the three schools that have very low literacy levels, so it was very important that I recorded the survey as well – some students struggled to answer the questions on the actual survey but they were able to contribute to the discussions and gave some very good verbal answers to the questions. Some students struggled to comprehend the survey at all, while others gave very insightful answers.

During the discussions that occurred in response to the survey many interesting questions and comments arose. For example, when discussing the question 'What languages do you speak at home?' I referred to the Aboriginal 'lingo' (slang) words that they use with each other. There is one word in particular, *jooga*, that I hear the students calling each other on a very regular basis – I asked them what it means. The students couldn't give me a set definition because the word is so heavily dependent on cultural understanding and cultural context. Different students gave me very different definitions and I noticed that male students had a different understanding of the meaning of the word to that of the female students.

I collated the answers from the survey and listened to the voice recordings for any additional verbal answers to the questions. I looked for patterns in the answers that the students provided and noted any interesting answers to questions or questions that arose during discussions.

## FINDINGS

The survey indicated the following interesting statistics:

- Of the 54 students surveyed, 10 speak a language other than English at home. Languages included: Arunrinda\*(an Aboriginal language from the Northern Territory), various Filipino languages, Tuvaluan and Maori.
- Of the 54 students surveyed, 29 indicated that they identify with a specific culture other than Australian. Other cultures included: Aboriginal (specific tribes were also mentioned), Maori and Filipino.
- Of the 54 students surveyed, 51 indicated that English was their first language. Three students indicated that their first language was Filipino.
- Of the 54 students surveyed, 51 could give a definition of 'language' and 50 could give a definition of 'culture'

Some answers included:

*'Language is a way of communicating with voice, body, hands or expressions'* (Girl, 11 years)

*'Something we communicate with ...'* (Boy, 12 years)

*'[Culture is] your tradition, your background and your way of life'* (Girl, 12 years)

*'[Culture is] a person's background, traditions, values and beliefs..... [my culture is] Aboriginal (Kalkadoon)'* (Girl, 12 years) NB: Kalkadoon is the Aboriginal tribe from the Mount Isa region.

Interestingly, in response to the question, 'What is your culture?', one student answered, 'My culture is just normal but I don't know how to describe it.' This is one notion that I want to challenge during the students' time spent learning an additional language – 'What is normal?' and 'Is there such a thing as normal?'

I also included the question, 'Why do you think it's important to learn another language at school?' Many of the students answered along the lines of, 'When you grow up you might go to Japan, so if you learn Japanese at school you'll be able to understand what they say'. However, some students did give some very insightful answers to this question that I was very impressed with. Some of these impressive answers included:

*'... Maybe when you grow up you could teach your children, so they don't run down other little kids at school ... so they're not racist.'* (Year 7 boy)

*'So you have a better understanding of other people.'* (Yr 6 girl)

*'So if you go there you know how to show respect to them.'* (Year 6 boy)

\* I'm not sure of the correct spelling of this language and neither was the student.

## INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

Although my survey was conducted with only a small sample of the 500+ students that I teach, I feel that it gives a realistic snapshot of the highly unique context in which I teach. The results that I gathered from the survey indicate to me that many of my students are coming to Japanese lessons and learning about a third culture. Many of the students bring such a rich and diverse cultural standing into the classroom.

I expected that a high percentage of students would speak a language other than English at home, and the results indicated that this was in fact the case. However, I did expect that more of the Indigenous students would indicate that they speak their traditional languages at home. I also expected that a large percentage of the participants in the survey would identify with a particular culture other than Australian, and this expectation was met.

I do have the concern that some of the data I collected from the survey may not be completely accurate. In working with Indigenous students, I have begun to learn many things about their culture. One thing that I have learnt that is pertinent to this research is that Aboriginal students feel a lot of 'shame' when singled out or made to feel different. They tend to prefer to blend in and not stand out for negative or positive reasons. For example, if I ask a student to share their good work with the rest of the class, they may reply 'Oh no Miss, that's shame!' Therefore I feel that even if the Aboriginal students do perhaps speak their traditional language at home, they may not have indicated that on their survey or in the discussions for fear of being shamed.

I was very happy with the process of the survey and my findings; the survey opened up more opportunities for the students to share information about their language and culture with me. The survey has set the scene for the students to open up to me even more in the future, now that they know that I'm extremely interested and value the information that they share with me. Even since the completion of the survey, I have noticed that students are starting to share more information about their own language and culture during Japanese lessons.

This investigation has been very valuable for me in terms of shifting my teaching focus more towards an intercultural approach. I'm not so afraid to move away from focusing solely on the language and I'm allowing more time for discussion and reflection. I feel that the students I'm teaching out here in Mount Isa benefit more from reflecting, noticing and comparing their own language and culture to that of Japan, than focusing mainly on the language.

### **MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS**

I have attached a copy of the survey that I used as well as an annotated version that indicates the additional questions that I asked during discussions. I have also attached a small selection of completed student surveys with annotations where necessary. I chose those particular surveys as I feel they contain some very insightful answers and raise some important issues and questions for me to focus on in my teaching.

### **EVALUATION**

I'm very happy with the way that my investigation progressed. It was extremely valuable to me in terms of examining my teaching practices and causing me to shift my focus. I feel that the intercultural approach that I am shifting towards is a much more valuable and relevant approach to teaching languages to students from such a culturally diverse area.

Being a part of this project has made me stop and think – What do I want my students to take away from their time spent learning Japanese? Do I want them to be able to count to 10 and recite some colours, or do I want them to leave with a deeper understanding of their own language and culture and an appreciation of the Japanese language and culture?

From here I want to use what I have learnt to reshape units of work and continue to move towards an intercultural approach to teaching and learning in my classroom. I also look forward to the challenge of incorporating the intercultural approach into assessment practices.

### **REFLECTION**

I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the ILTLP project and feel very lucky to have been involved. Conducting the research in my classroom was so beneficial in terms of allowing me the opportunity to really examine my teaching practices and focus on individual lessons as well as entire units of work. I also feel very lucky to have worked with such a knowledgeable and professional group of educators; many of whom have given me renewed inspiration to continually update and improve my teaching practices.

From here, I honestly don't think I could go back to the way I previously approached the teaching of culture in my Language classroom. This project has made it very clear to me that culture is not external or visible; rather, it is linked to and carried by language.

### Knowledge of Language and Culture Survey

NAME:	AGE:	YEAR LEVEL:
What is language?		
Was English the first language you spoke?		
What languages do you speak at home?		
What languages do you speak with your friends?		
What is culture?		
What is your culture? Describe your culture. E.g.: Home culture versus School culture		
What makes your culture different from other cultures?		
What role does language have in your culture? Is language important in your culture?		

What have you learnt about the Japanese language so far this year?	
What have you learnt about Japanese culture so far?	
What would you like to learn about Japan and Japanese culture?	
Why does that interest you?	
Why do you think it's important to learn another language at school?	
Do you enjoy learning Japanese? Why/why not?	
What do you think would make learning Japanese even more enjoyable?	