Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Teaching and Learning Languages: A Guide

Practice example

Student engagement

UniSA | Research Centre for **Languages and Cultures**

Disclaimer

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

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, classroom teaching, 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.

Example	Concepts and student engagement
Language	Chinese
Level	Junior Primary
Teacher	My Hoa Lam (Victoria)
	A teacher of primary Chinese sets out to engage her junior primary class by choosing a topic concept for a module that reflects the students' interests and stage of development. The topic explores cultural meanings attached to the concept of colour in Chinese and Australian culture. She finds that this demands discussion in English, and feels that she has to sacrifice some linguistic practice to do this. Her thoughts about the choice of the concept and her comments on the students' responses to the unit are given here.

| **Teaching and learning**
Classroom interactions
The nature of interactional language
Tasks and task-types
Student engagement
Recognising the diversity of learners and their life-worlds
Technology in language teaching and learning | This teacher used an interactive process to introduce the concept of colour symbolism to very young learners. The students were given opportunities to construct, explore and express their own interpretations of colours, which enabled them to actively construct their own knowledge about the concept. The teacher guided and scaffolded the learners' interactions which enabled the learners to *develop* understanding rather than having these *explained* to them. |

Chinese: Preparatory/ reception

This unit of work examines the concept of colour and the relationships between colours and cultures. We are not only living in a multicultural world but also in a world full of colours which play an important role in our daily life. The effect of colours on human behaviour and feeling cannot be underestimated, in particular when colours are associated with cultural traditions.

The same colour can signify different messages to different cultural groups; an in-depth knowledge of this colour symbolism will assist students to respect cultures other than their own and to understand better the reasons for certain perceptions about colour. Only when students recognise nuances in meaning and demonstrate an awareness of mannerisms can they interact appropriately in a range of cultural settings.

This is a four-part unit and each part investigates one colour. The four colours are: red, yellow, black and white. The primary reason for this choice is the influence these colours exercise on Chinese traditions, customs, art, history, daily life and language. Red is a lucky colour according to Chinese traditions; yellow is an ancient imperial colour; black and white are generally thought of as negative colours traditionally, but with positive elements.

Through various activities students understand a colour as a pure colour, a universal symbol, an international convention, a signal, an emotional indicator, and as having a particular significance for some cultures and countries.

In addition, the students understand that these 'meanings' attributed to colours change over time, under influences from other countries and most importantly, the perceptions of people today.

The linguistic focus is on the names of colours and names of items involved. Students use modelled sentences to respond to questions.

Students were encouraged to share their ideas, experiences, understandings, assumptions and perceptions freely; however, at this level it was really a challenge for them to use the target language to converse. Hence, the linguistic component had to be reduced and this enabled a broader coverage of the concept aiming for a comprehensive understanding of the colours studied. The linguistic component was limited to the names of colours and items presented.

The unit started with red, a symbol of good luck, prosperity and celebrations in Chinese culture. To introduce the unit, many red and other coloured items were displayed randomly around the classroom. Students were asked to collect and bring to class, a red and a 'non red' item as preparation for the unit. Indeed, many copies of the same items were displayed around the classroom for the purpose of language development that followed.

Materials and resources

Many items were produced and collected to engage the students' interest at the start of the unit. The variety of resources displayed captured the students' attention and stimulated their curiosity. Three types of red envelopes were collected for different purposes. The one with a red heart and a double lucky sign was a real inspiration for the discussion. The oval shape suggested a red egg; eggs dyed in red are used to celebrate the birth of a baby, when he/she is one month or a hundred days old, and are also used for birthday celebrations in Chinese culture. This shape led to the discussion of another intercultural aspect.

The resources collected and displayed were: shapes (triangles, circles, ovals, heart), red envelopes (different designs for different purposes), paper cuttings, postcards, Chinese New Year cards, Christmas cards, lanterns, Chinese costumes, strings, fire crackers, tassels, crepe paper, candles, Chinese spinning tops, traffic signs, a set of compasses in a red container, coloured pencils, paint, icy pole sticks, feathers, dictionary, folders, a red cross, couplets for New Year, a red rose, Lego blocks and red cardboard.

Comments and reflections on classroom discussions

All students became very curious and fascinated when they saw so many items displayed in the classroom: they all wondered what was going on. As the students were from a bilingual program, they could understand instruction in Chinese and responded well, using modelled sentences at the beginning of the task. They were all very keen to participate in the discussion. They were getting even more involved when dealing with the colour symbolism and students could not wait to share their knowledge and personal experiences with the colours.

One student recalled her experience with the traffic lights on a dark rainy day. She said that the red traffic light was highly visible enabling the driver to stop in ample time. Not all students agreed with her, so a class experiment was conducted to test her point of view. Three sentences were written in three different colours (yellow, red, black) on the whiteboard and students, standing about eight metres away, tried to read the sentences. Disagreement and discussion occurred in reaching a conclusion. Some students said that the sentence written in black could be seen as clearly as the red one from a long distance while other students disagreed and explained that on a rainy dark day, red was the most visible and suitable colour to denote a warning. All students enjoyed this unit and participated in full; it brought them a valuable learning experience.

The unit of study covered more than just the recognition of the colour itself and the role it played in Chinese culture. This student-centred task assisted them to recognise similarities and differences in ideas and values in a variety of situations.

Oral interaction was used throughout the unit. Discussions with individual students about their drawings showed that they gained valuable experiences. The observations collected showed that students understood red as a pure colour; as a symbol of humanitarianism; or as a warning or danger signal (e.g. for traffic signs when it is used as a convention and cannot be replaced by another colour); as a conveyor of special emotional messages e.g. red roses and red hearts on St Valentine's Day; as a symbol of good luck in Chinese culture, used to represent happiness in all celebrations, festivals and weddings. We also explored how different meanings can be assigned according to cultural backgrounds.

Students' overwhelmingly positive reactions to the unit showed that this was a topic of great interest for them and they participated in it with a high level of interest and enthusiasm. I spent a considerable amount of time in researching and gathering resources and planning suitable activities. The outcomes met my expectations and even surprised me. This group of students was not able to use Mandarin to articulate their thoughts; thus the discussion was conducted in English most of the time, but I plan to increase the use of the target language in the future.

Activities	Languages used	Linguistic features in Chinese
Colour introduction What is red? Red cardboard was shown to students to introduce the colour	Mandarin	这是红色。(This is red) The character 红 is shown to students

Colour recognition. Sorting activities 2 categories: Red and non-red items Sitting in a circle, students classified the colour of items collected, and displayed non-red items in the centre of the circle. They followed the modelled sentences to answer.	Mandarin	这是红色吗？(Is this red?) 是，这是红色。(Yes, this is red) 不是，这不是红色。(No, this is not red）
Colour symbolism **Can this colour be replaced by another colour?** **Yes/No.** **Why?**	Mandarin When students were asked to justify their choice, English was the main language used. They were very keen to share their knowledge and personal experiences and tried to defend their choices with persuasive reasons when disagreement occurred.	这可以是别的颜色吗？(Can this be another colour?) 可以(It can) 不可(it cannot) 为什么？(Why?)
Colour convention From the above discussion students understood the significance of the colour red in diverse settings and came to the conclusion that red on the stop sign could not be replaced by another colour.	English mainly	
Special meaning of the colour in other cultures	English mainly	
Colour in Chinese culture and celebration	English and Mandarin Students repeated the names of items collected in Chinese.	这是红…………。 春节、生日、红包、春联、心、双喜、贺年卡、蜡烛、鞭炮…….

Evaluation	English and Mandarin Interpretation of students' drawings	这是红………。