



Australian Government

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

Teaching and Learning Languages: A Guide

Practice example

Evaluating a languages program

© Commonwealth of Australia 2008

This work is copyright. It may be reproduced in whole or in part for study or training purposes subject to the inclusion of an acknowledgment of the source and no commercial usage or sale. Reproduction for purposes other than those indicated above, requires the prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>.

Disclaimer

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

Acknowledgment

This work was funded by 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	Evaluating a language program
Language	Chinese
Level	Year 7, 8
Teacher	Marianna Valeri (NSW) This is an example of a teacher's thinking and questioning in evaluating a Chinese language and culture program of study at Years 7 and 8.

<p>Evaluating language programs Evaluation as an ongoing process Evaluation in context Purpose and scope of evaluation Evaluation as inquiry</p>	<p>The teacher evaluates the Year 7 and 8 Chinese programs in her school in relation to their potential to enhance students' understanding of cultural issues in a less teacher-directed way. She approaches evaluation of the program in two ways: firstly, she devises and applies a series of questions to interrogate the existing programs and at the same time, provide new interactions and activities for the students in those programs. Secondly, she comments on the rationale for the current cultural programs and notes some shortcomings in the delivery style. She finds that the programs offer scope for student engagement but that this is not followed through because learning about culture remains subsidiary to language learning at a vocabulary and structural level, and is teacher-driven. She concludes that to encourage a more independent approach to intercultural understanding and learning the program needs to include the kinds of questions and interactions that allow students to see themselves as participants in, and interpreters of, the culture.</p>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Chinese: Year 7, 8

Evaluating the programs

Programming is an area that I had intended to focus on this year as part of my personal professional development. The ILTLP project provided a specific focus that I could investigate and translate into the planning of more detailed and effective teaching activities. My regular practices changed in order to 'test run' some different ideas and activities that could be included in future programs - it got me looking at how to move away from helping students learn about culture towards helping them understand culture.

The evaluation process

The investigation into what was being taught, and how, highlighted that the current program essentially emphasises grammatical structures through topic areas, following the content of the main textbook used at school, and in reality, cultural aspects are sometimes tacked on.

It was important to understand the aim of each unit of work- all had a cultural focus- rather than the learning of set vocabulary. Following this analysis we looked into the current approaches of teaching about cultural aspects and their effectiveness. Next, we set out to think of methods by which to develop a more intercultural method of delivering the desired content.

We developed key questions to be used to critically evaluate all current language programs. Some different approaches with class activities were trialled with different classes to ascertain what worked more effectively and what succeeded in fostering greater intercultural understanding. The common link was putting the student at the centre of learning and allowing them to discover. This is different from the current approach, which is more two-dimensional, requiring a great deal of teacher support, and based on student dependency. Reactions to the alternative methods varied between students and across classes. Many enjoyed the greater freedom to actually figure out how to say things they wanted to say, and others were confused and unsure of just how to proceed. This highlighted the need for students to learn how to work more independently.

While many programs have the appearance of focusing on culture and the aim is to work towards this, time is lost when teaching is bogged down on getting through vocabulary. The next step looked at how current programs could be re-written, to highlight interculturality, so that the vocabulary and grammatical structures become tools of lesson work rather than the aim. Ultimately the aim is to move away from the text book 'path of enlightenment' towards a more realistic cultural and linguistic progression for junior high school students: understanding, not learning, culture.

Approach to gathering information on the current programs

Observation during the teaching of different activities in class suggested which were more successful than others. However, no formal data was recorded as the aim was to investigate programming. This process involved a great deal of analysis and evaluation that included programs and a close analysis and description of the teaching context.

I read through the current programs with the following questions/focus areas in mind:

- When was the program written?
- By whom, for whom, for what purpose? Motivation for writing the program?
- Level of program use, application, and accessibility of materials presented.

I then reviewed the effectiveness of the process and considered how current it is. I considered:

- What target language is used and why this focus was taken (vocabulary, grammar)?
- What is left out and why?

- Why the current layout is used- how this impacts on what is put in/ left out.

These questions evolved through discussion with colleagues at work but more so from ILTLP sessions- through both presentations and table discussions.

After this I developed some key questions that I used to narrow my focus and increase the level of manageability of the investigation.

- What's the aim?
- What's currently being done? How well?
- Relevance to students of current vocabulary and structures taught? (Why this selection)
- How is it being delivered? What is the level of effectiveness?
- What role does the student have in the learning?

The aim of all programs was cultural but the evaluation questions focused on vocabulary and structures, the language being taught rather than looking at the cultural aspects, with the aim of finding a means of teaching the desired vocabulary through the use of cultural activities, rather than language with token cultural aspects randomly inserted.

Information gathered

Unit of work 1

Evaluation:

What is the aim?

To learn about family life in China- family members, pets, homes etc.

What's currently being done?

Focus is more on learning lists of words and key structures, cultural aspects are incorporated as a means of filling out the unit and taught mostly in English.

*What is the relevance of current vocabulary and structures used to students?
(Why this selection?)*

Programming follows the progression of the text book (*Ni Hao 1*).

How is it being delivered? What is the level of effectiveness?

Vocabulary and structures are memorised well by few students; majority are able to use correctly in an 'open book' situation, others require prompting and support. Cultural elements are taught, not necessarily 'learnt or understood' with depth of meaning and self reflection.

What role does the student have in the learning?

Current practice draws upon some student involvement and allows limited potential self reflection. Seems superficial in some aspects and lacks a progressive structure.

Unit of work 2

Evaluation:

What is the aim?

To understand food styles, choices and reasons for this.

What is currently being done? How well?

Limited to projects, may have opportunity to cook.

What is the relevance if current vocabulary and structures used to students?

(Why this selection) could be used to write recipes in Chinese, vocab for planting a garden etc.

How is it being delivered - level of effectiveness?

Lacks cohesion and flair

What role does the student have in learning?

Limited to a project, room for excellent students to extend but still high level teacher dependency.

Unit of work 3

Evaluation:

What is the aim?

Look at students' daily life.

What is currently being done? How well?

Lots of vocab. Limited applied 'realistic' use.

What is the relevance of current vocabulary and structures used to students? (Why this selection?)

How is it being delivered- level of effectiveness?

Daily routine could be enhanced - contact with sister school to actually discuss with someone what they are doing and when - make it real.

What role does the student have in learning? Is it still essentially passive?

The findings

With each new Chinese teacher, new programs have been introduced at the school. There has been a trend of teaching specific aspects of culture that related to the topic of study; for example, 'tea' in the food topic, Chinese sport in the sports unit, rather than leading students towards understanding what their Chinese counterparts do and why. Typically, these cultural inserts were completed in English with the addition of some simple Chinese vocabulary or headings in Chinese. (The current programs incorporate the new language syllabus and have moved away from culture segregation towards culture integration.) A point was reached earlier where a great deal of culture had been removed from programs. Another reason for this was the division of classes between two teachers. For each class then, lessons were divided: the Chinese trained teacher focused on language content and the other teacher focused on cultural aspects with limited to no language being used. This has developed into a situation where the language classroom is seemingly trying to war against the evils of the four 'F's, food, festivals, family and folklore, in an effort to be seen as a serious subject, not fun and games. This has also backfired in that students are missing out on developing a holistic feel for Chinese. Non-languages-trained teachers also felt the program itself was difficult to follow due to the amount of detail and areas that had to be covered. This is a problem to be addressed by professional development within the staff allocated to teach Chinese each year. However, it is possible to streamline some aspects, to include more explanation within the teaching context and then to provide greater detail in written explanations of activities themselves.

Many activities already had a cultural focus, with the use of culture as a means of getting the students interested in the task. They then moved on to look specifically at language, rather than let students explore language; many structures were given and then used by students in a set format and no further formal cultural study was conducted. Programs that had extension

activities involved the students more, were more engaging and potentially fun, and in fact, more intercultural.

To avoid excessive repetition, the need for incorporating and structuring of the intercultural approach into teaching should be included in the annual planning for teaching. Each program then should contain activities with a cultural focus (these can be highlighted if so desired): many programs already have several suitable activities. The focus would be on writing the activity up so that the intercultural teaching style is emphasised; the scaffolding/ prompting questions, the areas to investigate, means of directing activities and so on. Placing all the detail within the writing up of the activity itself leaves scope for experienced teachers to expand and follow tangents as desired/required but also provides enough detail for newer teachers to follow set guidelines, or scaffolding and still achieve desired outcomes. It also provides space to detail assessment of the activity.

Evaluation

Our current programs have solid cultural aims. However, current teaching practices have meant that often these cultural aims are not being met fully; instead they are often neglected in order for vocabulary and grammatical structures to be taught. Those students who choose to interact in class discussions and listen to anecdotes from the teachers are the few who, in reality, are achieving the aims. This evaluation has provided the opportunity to assess, discuss, re-evaluate and develop the means for the majority of students to formally achieve the aims.

As the author of the programs and the only trained Chinese teacher at the school, my evaluations and reflections have been the main source of data. My own evolving thought processes lead to several areas of concern –‘labelling’ of interculturality; the potential for subjective assessment (judging emotional intelligence); and developing prescriptive programming.

One of the main concerns from the outset was how to maintain focus as a language class and avoid the program becoming a series of social science lessons: what depth of cultural analysis would this approach actually allow? With the aim to teach culture using Chinese language, the amount of vocabulary required is huge! In open-ended activities, students tend to rely on the dictionary more than the teacher. Often, most of what they look up they don't remember for the next time. Such work leads to the idea of giving students tools rather than teaching them. Take language and pretend it is a house. Traditional classroom practice for me was to focus on the building the house, explaining how the tools (vocabulary) work and building a framework (grammatical structures) together with the class, then allowing students to fill in the blanks, or build their own house, according to learnt patterns.

An intercultural approach would in my mind, be like looking at a finished house and asking why it was built this way, how is it different from what you would have done, then asking students to build a house. This requires teaching students to be able to compare, contrast, reflect, self reflect and form opinions based on this process. The result is still a house, but which is more structurally sound? That depends too, on your perspective: one has a solid framework, the other is more aesthetically appropriate. What we want is a house that is sound both structurally and aesthetically. Getting students to understand the whys, wherefores, what 'fors' and 'hows', when they are not all emotionally at the same point and, as a teacher, being unable to give them all the time they need to reach a constructive end point, is a real challenge. Simplicity is the key to the answer in my mind. Keep ideas really simple: start from a big area e.g. the one child policy in china, and bring it right down to basics, e.g. 'How would you feel as a single child? In China? A single female child?' Such an approach enables the teacher to focus at the emotional and conceptual level of the student so that they can grasp the idea at their level and talk about it in the target language as appropriate to their learning stage.