



**Australian Government**

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

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

**Practice example**

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**Teacher's evaluation of pedagogy**

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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, 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.

<b>Example</b>	Method for investigating practice
<b>Language</b>	Italian
<b>Level</b>	Primary
<b>Teacher</b>	Julia Panagakos (SA)
	The following is an example of the types of questions and observations that a teacher asks when examining her pedagogical practice.

<p><b>Evaluating language programs</b>  Evaluation as an ongoing process  Evaluation in context  Purpose and scope of evaluation  Evaluation as inquiry</p>	<p>The teacher sets out the parameters for evaluation of her teaching practice and the classroom discourse: teacher talk, student talk and silence. She sets out her method of investigation, which is to record a lesson, and analyse the content according to how much time is given to each of the parameters; then to compare these, and to reflect on the findings. The goal is to make changes to elements of her practice that impede or increase intercultural learning in the classroom. Through the evaluation the teacher concludes that the class time is dominated by her input and that this is because she sees herself is the giver of cultural information and language. She is aware that the students need to be more responsible for their own learning and in her reflections the teacher analyses why this is so and how, by taking a more intercultural approach, she will change this.</p>
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## **Italian: Year 6, 7**

### **Area of investigation: pedagogy**

My aim was to investigate the discourse of my classroom to better understand the balance of teacher/student talk, the nature of that talk and whether it provides evidence of intercultural language learning. I chose this area of practice in order to enhance the intercultural aspects of my lesson content and delivery.

### **Method**

In order to conduct an analysis of the lesson 'discourse' I recorded lessons on audiotape and then played back the tape. I focused on the amount of lesson time allocated to each of the following:

- Teacher focus – student focus.
- Teacher talk – student talk.
- Student talk – student talk.
- Silence – how long do I wait for a response?

I investigated and compared the following:

- How long I spoke and students were required to listen.
- How long I spoke and students listened and actively participated.
- How much time was devoted to children speaking with my help.
- How much time the students spoke while I watched.

In reflecting on the content or 'script of the lesson' I focused on the following questions:

- What do I need to keep doing?
- What do I need to stop doing?
- What do I need to start doing?
- What do I need to do differently?

### **Findings**

The findings did not surprise me - I was the one who mainly spoke. I dominated in my presentation. The students were required to listen and were encouraged to respond but the questions I asked were not conducive to discussion. Rather, they were deliberately worded so the response would provide a specific Italian word or phrase, or explain a grammatical structure, e.g. 'Who can tell me what Giorgio is asking in this question?' 'Why do these words have different endings?' (seeking a masculine/feminine response).

Roughly 75% of the lesson presentation time was teacher talk: student talk made up the remaining 25% of the time. Student talk was mainly to clarify a point, or to answer a direct question from me. I did make a very conscious attempt to draw in as many students as possible (with an equal gender balance) but nevertheless there were four students who dominated the student talk time as they were the students with a better understanding of the vocabulary (and who are high achievers in most areas).

There was no provision for student-to-student talk during this time. As my questions were focused on a specific correct answer and the students either knew the answer or did not, I waited for approximately five seconds for a reply. Logically, the fact that student talk

comprised 25% of this part of the lesson meant they were required to listen passively for 75% of the time.

I realise that where possible I did make connections with, and drew attention to, the application of cultural features in the language being taught. I attempted to get the students to contribute by thinking about differences and similarities when studying the photographs that formed part of the dialogue we were learning about. I noted, however, that this part of the lesson was dominated by me as well. I steered the children to elicit a particular response and tended to give information rather than making allowance for student-to-student discourse or research.

I realised that I am very conscious of the limited time I have with students and with this in mind I tend to bring them to a pre-determined conclusion rather than allowing them to come to their own.

### **Evaluation and reflection**

Analysing my findings against my initial questions, it is clear that in my classroom there is a teacher rather than a student focus, in that I dominate and control the lessons. This is not to say that the lessons have no student-directed learning; however, my focus is on providing students with maximum information and input from me to assist their learning. 'Talk time' is greatly skewed towards the teacher (me), and where students do talk it is mostly to answer direct questions with a specific answer required. This means that the discourse of the classroom is focused on correct usage and recall of the language and culture as I have described it to them and not on student interpretation and reflection. There is a factual orientation to this discourse, a 'right or wrong' focus, and one that favours students whose recall is fast and whose memories are good.

Considering my findings raises some interesting points for me about my pedagogical practice and rationale. To fully engage students, I believe they should be more in control: 'they do: I watch'. However, in language learning, I feared that students would accomplish less if I took a less dominant stance, as I was the students' main point or source of information. Therefore, no matter how exhausting it may be I was the one who needed to impart this knowledge to them. As many of the students are of non-Italian background, and even those who are speak Italian dialects, I believe that to learn the language they must hear it from me. This has led me in my presentation of lessons, particularly with the older students, to use a highly structured lesson delivery; I believed that this made best use of my limited time with the students, whom I see for only 2 x 45-minute lessons a week. I feel I put constant pressure on myself to 'give' the students as much information as possible. In doing so I enable them to make links with other vocabulary previously introduced, with two main aims: that they become conversant in the language, and that they should be better able to cope with second language learning in secondary school.

The new intercultural focus is on maintaining language content but goes beyond this, to explore intercultural aspects in more depth, but still in a deliberate and planned way, which suits my personal teaching style. The (next) question I will focus on is: 'How can I 'tweak' my lesson content to make my lessons more intercultural?' I would like to connect language and culture, not in an incidental manner, as in the past, but in a planned and deliberate way integrated with the language and grammar- that is, to explore the culture through the language and the language through the culture.

As an example, I have used the unit of work on the family, and encouraged the students to explore differences and similarities in the parental roles portrayed in the dialogues and in their own families. In this way, the learning becomes more relevant to them, and gives it a comparative significance that was not present before, when it was something separate, as a thing to be learned in isolation.

Having examined my old practices, I am now aiming to 'tweak' lesson content and delivery, and thereby implement a new pedagogical orientation to my teaching practice. I believe the intercultural understandings result in students' better understanding themselves and this is achievable by gaining diverse perspectives on culture through the study of language. Interestingly, I think this will help students with my secondary aim, which is to help them make the transition to secondary school. As people with a greater understanding of themselves, and how languages and cultures contribute to understanding who we are, they should be better prepared for this transition. I intend to work on finding a balance between my desire to provide rich and deep language learning experiences while also allowing space for students to take more control.