



Australian Government

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

Teaching and Learning Languages: A Guide

Practice example

Reflecting on language, culture and learning

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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, 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	Teacher reflection on program design
Language	Chinese
Level	Secondary
Teacher	Stephanie Andrews (SA) This example is made up of a teacher's reflections on developing of a long-term program and the experience of teaching a part of it. The reflections demonstrate a professional engaged with learning at many levels.

Developing a professional learning culture	<p>The reporting and reflection on the creative process show a teacher who thinks deeply about her professional choices. She contextualises her teaching and is in contact with the needs and abilities of the students and the complexities of her subject. The teacher analyses and reflects on her program design and on the processes and elements that drive her planning. The quality and extent of the reflection demonstrates that the teacher is aware of the practices and changes in her profession and maintains an ongoing dialogue with peers, professional networks and mentors. Apart from the teacher's reflections on her program and the considerations about language, culture and learning related to developing a concept-based approach to teaching and learning, the reflections also show a commitment to developing a learning culture in her students, in herself as a user of the language and culture she teaches, and as a teaching professional.</p> <p>This reflection is compiled from the teacher's ILTLP Phase 1 Teacher's program and the full text can be found in the ILTLP site: www.iltlp.unisa.edu.au</p>
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Chinese Year 10

Reflection on Program Design

There are a number of fundamental changes in programming for intercultural language learning: the shift from planning using topics to using concepts as the basis for module design; the highlighting of connections across and between modules; and the highlighting of the interactions through which language learning takes place. These connections occur at all levels in the program: at the concept level, at the linguistic level and at the task level. It is also important to consider the context in which the teaching and learning takes place, as it is this which sets the parameters of the program.

When designing a long-term program, it is important to consider the context in which the teaching and learning is going to take place. It is necessary to remember that what works in a particular school with a certain teacher and group of students will not necessarily work in another school with a different cohort of students and set of circumstances. The context needs to reflect all aspects of place where the teaching and learning will happen; it is necessary to consider the whole package. This includes considering the nature of the school and where the language program sits in that school's curriculum; the nature of the student cohort; and the teacher's own personal context, including educational beliefs, background and experience.

When designing my program, I focused on the overarching concept of relationships. Each of the modules focuses on relationships in different contexts: relationships created through the use of technology and communication, relationships and their impact on leisure, the impact of the human and natural environment on relationships, and relationships within educational settings. These major concepts – 'technology and communication', 'the human environment', 'leisure', 'education' and 'the natural environment', can also be used as concepts in earlier or later years with a different focus. Four key intercultural concepts run horizontally through the program within each of the modules: 'social organisation', 'relationships/impact', 'values systems' and 'change'. Within each of the modules, the key intercultural concepts highlight the different aspects which are to be the focus of that section of the program. Together with the modules, the key intercultural concepts form the conceptual basis from which the program's linguistic concepts and tasks are derived.

It is important to realise that linguistic elements are still an essential part of the program, and that there are linguistic connections evident both within and across each of the modules. However, instead of the program being developed with the linguistic components at the forefront as was previously the case, the key language concepts are derived from the modules and key intercultural concepts. As such, they reflect the linguistic learning which takes place as a result of students' engaging with the concepts being covered.

The key language concepts are the linguistic building blocks through which intercultural language learning takes place and are largely dependent on text choice and student interests. That being said, they are guides only, as inevitably the linguistic learning varies and usually extends beyond the parameters listed. Within each of the modules, the key language concepts consist of vocabulary and grammar concepts related to the module that students could expect to find, communicative functions (which inform task design and through which learning takes place), text inputs and characters. Across the modules, the connections and student growth are evident in the increasing depth of language and the greater variety of communicative functions and text inputs used in the course of their learning. It is through these linguistic building blocks that the students can access the concepts and intercultural language learning takes place. Through the use of the language the students gain an understanding of the aspects of Chinese culture being studied and can engage in dialogue with Chinese speakers about aspects of culture. By understanding the

importance of language and culture and the choices made (both linguistic and personal) students can make considered decisions about how they present themselves to the world.

Interactions

No longer is a program a list of linguistic elements arranged around a topic. The anticipated interactions need to be located and made explicit, as it is through the interactions that intercultural teaching and learning takes place. These interactions consist primarily of a sequence of noticing, comparing and reflecting. Through noticing, students are encouraged to examine and analyse language and culture, which they can then compare with their own linguistic and cultural backgrounds. When comparing, students are able to contrast and consider advantages and disadvantages, and are encouraged to consider other options. Reflecting gives students a chance to make sense of what they have learned, and make considered choices.

In the program this is reflected at the level of 'key interactions' or task. It is through these key interactions that learning takes place; the interactions are used to stimulate or activate language learning. Students are initially asked to notice information through examining or analysing texts; then they are asked to compare and contrast that information with their prior knowledge, or aspects of their own experience. Finally, students are given the opportunity to put what they learned into practice and reflect on what they are doing and what they have learned.

Assessment

The 'key assessment task' is the end point of that sequence of student learning. It promotes and gives meaning to everything that has happened in the classroom throughout the course of the module and even earlier modules. It reflects the conceptual nature of the teaching and learning sequence, the nature of the interactions and the task-based approach to student learning. It encourages the student to notice and compare, and then gives them an opportunity to reflect on their learning, both through productive target language use and the opportunity to discuss what they have learned in English.

Implementing a learning task

I chose to implement a learning task from the module 'The Human Environment' with my Year 10 Chinese class. This is a small class of eight students, seven of whom are from an Anglo-Australian background, and one from a non-Chinese-speaking Vietnamese background. They had been learning about housing and this task fitted into our program. The particular task I chose was to for students to explore Chinese real estate advertisements and then create an advertisement selling their own house in a Chinese real estate newspaper. In creating their own advertisement, the students needed to consider those features that would appeal to a Chinese family moving to Adelaide.

To begin this particular task we explored pages from the 16 January 2005 edition of the *Shanghai Real Estate Weekly*, gradually narrowing our focus to a number of pages that contained a range of housing advertisements. The students engaged with the task from the beginning and enjoyed the use of authentic texts. They were amazed that so much factual and implicit information could come from such texts. Even the photos and other images contained data that informed their cultural understanding of China. The revelation that such texts could be an avenue to learning about and understanding aspects of the Chinese culture made this a positive learning experience and helped them to understand more than just the language. The students had an understanding of the types of housing available for rent and purchase in Shanghai, as well as an understanding of the language used to advertise them. They made connections with the housing market in Shanghai and with that in their home town. They saw the implicit values placed on attributes of housing (number and type of rooms, importance of space or m²) and were able to compare these with the implied

values contained in local real estate advertisements. It was a much richer learning experience for the students; making the language more real as they learnt about the 'big picture', about what China is actually like in its modern context.

We began this section of work together as a class, and had some useful class discussions about the texts, usually with the same students contributing. However, while the students were engaged with the discussion and the broader cultural information they were being asked to consider, some of the students found it difficult to follow the characters in the texts themselves, particularly when there were sequences of unfamiliar characters. While the class as a whole understood the gist of the texts, the cultural data contained within the texts, and the different ways in which language was being used in this context, for some students the specifics of the language (in particular the characters) were missing; the amount of new vocabulary was too great. In order to consolidate their understanding and to make sure that each student was able to follow and understand the type of language contained within the texts, I adapted the discussion part of the task dealing with the language to enable students to engage with a specific text on a personal level, and reflect individually on what they did and did not know. The questions for this task were mainly linguistic as we had already covered the cultural issues in our earlier class discussions and I felt it necessary to focus on the linguistic at this point. Students were asked to complete the reflection component of the task after they had completed the other sections.

Students were able to choose an advertisement for their analysis from a range over three pages of the paper. These advertisements ranged from quite large and detailed with a broad range of new vocabulary, to small and simple with a smaller number of new words; some had photos and others were just character texts. Interestingly, the students did not choose the smaller and simpler advertisements as I had expected, but ones they were interested in. Some chose advertisements that we had already looked at in class.

When asked to reflect on the task as a whole, student responses were positive. All enjoyed engaging with the authentic texts, agreeing that it gave them a greater insight into the culture and values inherent in these texts, and hence their target audience, while also giving them an opportunity to reflect on their own values and culture. As one student said 'I really enjoyed going through the Chinese real estate pages because they were interesting and taught me more about the country, rather than just the language,' and another 'I liked discussing the culture and community aspects of housing'. Yet another student commented on the similarity of the papers we used reflecting that 'I think I would have liked to have read a newspaper from the country too'.

Although the language learning through completing this task was rich, the students learnt about more than the language. While most students commented on the language they learnt and the nature of advertising in China (or in the *Shanghai Real Estate Weekly*, to be more specific), most of them also learnt about 'values in regard to housing in Shanghai' and 'the different values between Chinese and Australian lifestyles'. Several of the students commented on the importance of nearby facilities such as parks and public transport evident in the advertising, and reflected on the prevalence of apartments, comparing this with their home town, where the majority of houses are stand-alone, most have gardens, and access to public transport is not seen as being as important. The impact this has on lifestyle also featured in our discussion. For another student it was 'the cultural changes and aspects having a small apartment brings and how important housing is in your daily life'. It was interesting that two of the students were able to internalise and personalise what we had been learning about and stated that they had learnt 'don't make broad spectrum generalisations: what seems small to us may seem reasonable to Chinese (people)' and 'my own bias towards judgments'.

In completing this task, several students commented that they had to consider more than the language that they needed to use. Students commented that '(the) target audience must be understood', and that they needed to consider 'what would appeal to Chinese rather than Australian people'. Another student considered 'the qualities that Chinese people value' when preparing her advertisement. One student tried to see 'how short and precise I could make it'. I feel that the students now have a clearer picture in their minds about housing in Chinese cities today and the broader human environment than they would have had, had they just used the textbook. They have a greater understanding of what is valued by the Chinese people in terms of housing and the impact that has on lifestyle. They were able to see the effect housing has on lifestyle and were able to reflect on their own situation; on the impact on their own lifestyle of our housing choices. Linguistically, they were able to apply new words and adapt their language to fit this situation. They were able to make their sentences shorter and catchier, and apply the new structures to their own advertisements. They learnt new words that have greater meaning to them given the context in which they were learnt, and which would not have been learnt using more traditional means.

The students considered the language they used and the messages they conveyed when preparing their advertisements. One student considered '(the) rooms, floor space and size because I feel that Chinese people value space as it is a rare commodity', while another felt that it was important to include '[the] garden – many Chinese houses don't have gardens so this would appeal to them'. Another student felt that she needed to promote '[the] bedrooms, living spaces and bathrooms as it was mentioned in every ad I read'.

I do not see a need to alter the nature of the original task as I feel that I achieved what I set out to achieve. I feel that the students have a very good understanding of the housing situation in Shanghai and can apply their knowledge to their own situations. They were able to discuss the effect housing has on lifestyle, and were able to compare what they learnt with their own situation. Students learnt about different values and not to project their own values onto other people. However, I think that the initial discussions we had as a class would have been better if they were first conducted in small groups, and then followed up as a class discussion. Certainly with a larger group of students it would be necessary to do this in order to ensure that more of the students engage with the initial texts. I would like to do more 'in-language' discussion, but am not sure about my own ability to lead this in Chinese.

Developing the task and its focus questions enabled the students to engage with the texts on a personal level and helped those students who were struggling to follow what was happening. I feel that there was too much discussion and not enough linguistic support for those students. Perhaps next time the discussion and the task need to be done in conjunction with each other, so that those students who need greater support can get it that way. I feel like I still need to get my head around what this will look like in the classroom.

I found this to be a wonderful opportunity for me to extend my knowledge of intercultural teaching and learning in a practical and meaningful way. Having the opportunity to develop a Year 9 long-term plan as a part of this project has given me the impetus to make changes in my other teaching programs. My personal learning journey has been both interesting and satisfying. Some of the things I have discovered are that there are appropriate authentic texts on the Internet if you have the time to search; that students enjoy using authentic texts and enjoy learning about the Chinese culture in that way; that students will engage with their learning and see the value of this approach even if they don't fully understand the language; that there are not enough hours in the program for me to do all that I want to do. Through using authentic texts, I have found that the students are more engaged with their learning and have a better understanding of the Chinese culture; however, some students find it hard to learn about how to use language using this approach. Using this approach challenges my own language ability and I feel it is important to spend time upgrading my language skills. It also takes up a lot of energy, both in class and in preparation time, but the rewards are there in terms of student outcomes.

In terms of programming, the intercultural focus of this project necessitated greater thinking and preparation time than other approaches to language teaching I have used in the past. It required consideration of questioning techniques and a change in the types of questions that I ask in the class, to the more analytical and reflective. For instance, it was necessary to ask the students to be more critical about the information contained within texts, instead of just repeating what they saw. It was also necessary for the students to reflect on this information and relate it to their own experiences. By comparing and contrasting what they have learnt about China with what they know, and in some cases discover, about themselves, the students have a richer and more personal learning experience. This, hopefully, enables them to achieve a deeper understanding of the Chinese culture(s), their own culture and where they fit in the world. The cultural learning was more direct, less implied, as were the connections students made between their own situation(s) and their understanding of the Chinese culture. A fundamental change was the use of text as a stimulus for language and culture learning, not giving the language first and then looking at the text to support the language. This approach also necessitated greater use of the dictionary, both on my part and for the students. It was encouraging that towards the end of the implementation phase they would just go and get a dictionary when we started looking at the texts and use it not just to look up words in the text, but also to look up words to use in forming their responses to questions I posed in Chinese.

In terms of assessment, I have needed to ask the students to respond to reflection questions in order to get at the 'nuts and bolts' of their learning, in other words to work out exactly what changes in thinking they came away with, and to confirm the journey that they had made. Putting a grade or number on this still needs to be resolved in my mind. How do you equate one student's small steps with another's big steps, when for each student they are turning points in their thinking and as such are significant to them? Just as this project is a personal learning journey for me, this approach is also a personal learning journey for the students, and each student will take away something different. This issue of validly assessing each student's engagement with their learning and how they are progressing needs greater examination. Assessing the linguistic product is much easier than assessing a student's engagement with the cultural side of language learning.

I have noticed that when using this approach the students are more focused in class and engage at a greater level with the class activities. While there is greater student interest and motivation in class, the more difficult language, both in terms of vocabulary and structures, leads to sometimes questionable linguistic outcomes, particularly for those students who struggle with language learning. I found that more able students get more out of this approach while those students who struggle find it even harder than other approaches, as there is very little that is familiar in an authentic text to give them the assistance and support they need. This means that I need to develop greater scaffolding to support these students.

I am not yet sure how to do this as this approach appears to be considerably teacher-directed in the classroom. There is then the issue of managing the class and the discussions, so that I can also be there to support those students struggling with following the character text. This is particularly important for those students who have trouble reading characters.

In summary, intercultural language learning is a valuable tool in the language teaching toolbox; however, I feel that it still needs to be supported with explicit language teaching and careful thought needs to be given to the issue of supporting weaker students. I have been surprised at and encouraged by the positive response to the use of authentic texts by the students. I am looking forward to implementing my Year 9 program next year, and finding the answers to those questions that still remain in my mind. I feel that intercultural language learning has great value and potential to develop in our students a more global outlook and view of the world.

Reference

Liddicoat, A.J., Papademetre, L., Scarino, A., & Kohler, M. (2003). *Report on intercultural language learning* (Chapter 3, 'Framework for designing curriculum for intercultural language learning'). Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.