

Professional Standards Project

L A N G U A G E S

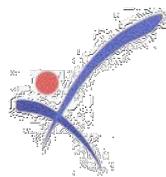


Teacher participant investigation

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German, Year 7

Tasmania




UniSA

Research Centre for
**Languages
and Cultures**

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TEACHERS' CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATIONS

Welcome to the examples of teachers' classroom-based investigations that have been drawn from their work in the Professional Standards Project. Teachers were asked to conduct an investigation into their own practice based on their work with the Standards.

A range of investigation topics and processes from across the states and territories of Australia have been chosen, although not all investigations that teachers provided have been posted on this website. These examples are provided for you to consider and use, while expanding your own understanding of the Standards and their use in the teaching and learning of languages.

However, you will not find examples of programming or practice that you can instantly adopt and use in your teaching. That was never the intention.

Furthermore, you will not find 'best practice' or exemplars of definitive investigations of languages teaching and learning.

So, what kinds of materials can you expect?

- You will find ideas about practice that teachers have investigated. You can use these ideas to stimulate further thinking when working in your own context.
- You will find some outstanding approaches to thinking about practice that advance our understanding of how to make teaching and learning languages a rich and effective learning experience for students, and a satisfying professional experience for teachers.
- You will also find professional educators striving to make sense of their work in teaching and learning languages. You will find a great deal from which you can learn.

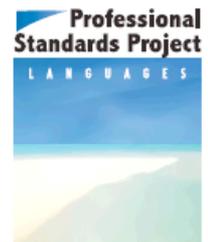
What these programs show are 'teachers at work', examining their practices and pedagogies in relation to the Standards. The teachers responded to their particular contexts, the curriculum and assessment frameworks in which they work, the particular demands they and their students face in languages education, and their own 'learning-by-doing' from using the Standards in teaching and learning languages. The details about the specific context and the elaboration of the teachers' investigations give professional insights into the interaction of thinking and practice.

Reading across the full set of investigations you will get a sense of the ideas and issues that the Standards raise about languages teaching for teachers, for students, for whole schools, and for communities, across languages and age groups, and in the range of contexts in which languages are taught in Australia.



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PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS PROJECT CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
Jenni Lane	Woodbridge School Tasmania	German	7

CONTEXT

Woodbridge School is a K–10 district high school located about 40 minutes south of Hobart. Students participate in a compulsory German program from Year 3 to Year 7. The school has had a long-standing German program, and this is the first year I have taught at the school.

There is one Year 7 class of twenty-three students. Students in Year 7 mostly come from the primary section of the school or from Bruny Island District School, where I also teach German. This year two students started who had never learnt German before (one had never learnt a foreign language before), and a few students with a small amount of experience in German in Year 6.

There is a large group in the class (at least one-third) who are enthusiastic about learning German. The rest of the students are fairly ambivalent, and only a small (but vocal) number of students demonstrate a negative attitude to learning German.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

I focused my investigation on Module 6 – Language learning and language awareness. I selected one of the suggestions for school-based investigations:

Examine the tasks and materials you use for teaching one particular module of your program. What does this material show about the views of language you present to your students? What aspects of language do you not include in your teaching?

I chose to examine a learning sequence (unit of work) that I designed and taught for the first time this year, and expect to work on with next year's Year 7 cohort. The learning sequence is titled 'Where do you live? Where do you come from?' This learning sequence involves students learning vocabulary related to country names, saying where they live and come from, and describing the location.

I wanted to review this learning sequence because, upon reflection, I felt that it focused too heavily on the macro skills of writing and reading, and not enough on speaking and listening.

First, I asked myself why the learning sequence ended up this way, and came up with a few reasons:

- Listening activities involving CD/cassette posed a problem because the school has a poor range of current audio resources. I also did not have an easily accessible functioning stereo.
- The students responded poorly to activities involving speaking earlier in the year. For many students, this seemed to be related to a lack of confidence.
- The vocal minority in this class exhibit really poor control of their own behaviour, and there are several students whose main aim genuinely seems to be to talk louder than anyone else (including the teacher) at all times. This makes it not only extremely difficult for me to explain new activities and concepts to the class (and for students to hear me clearly), but also makes it a very intimidating speaking environment for many of the other students in the class.

I resolved that I needed to at least attempt to overcome these obstacles and decided to investigate how I could modify this learning sequence to incorporate more speaking and listening, and at the same time look at strategies I could use to improve the approach of this particular class to such activities.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

I decided that the most practical and useful ways of finding ideas to modify the learning sequence would be to:

- consult with language teaching colleagues
- undertake some professional reading on the topic
- participate in some professional development.

Through the Professional Standards Project I had the opportunity to discuss strategies with and get fresh ideas from my language teaching colleagues. During much of the project I was also involved in the organising committee for the state conference of the Modern Language Teachers' Association of Tasmania (MLTAT). This involved meeting regularly with other language teachers from southern Tasmania and provided opportunities for me to informally discuss and exchange ideas with colleagues.

I also re-discovered a book called *Getting the Buggers into Languages* by Amanda Barton, which is subtitled 'How to motivate students to speak, listen, read and write in a modern foreign language'. As suggested in the subtitle, this book contains chapters on both speaking and listening, and gives an insight into the reasons for poor motivation, as well as offering practical suggestions about how to engage students.

I was also fortunate enough to be able to participate in a workshop at the MLTAT State conference about incorporating drama in the languages classroom. This workshop was really eye-opening and provided many ideas that I felt I could use.

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

As my investigation was based around reviewing my own planning, the only information gathering I undertook was taking notes during discussions with colleagues and from professional reading.

FINDINGS

Eventually I came up with an action plan of where to go from here. It involved:

- including more drama activities in the teaching program from the beginning of the year. These can be tailored to fit the learning sequence.
- developing a repertoire of 'quick' speaking activities that can easily be included in most lessons as time permits.
- developing a repertoire of more complicated speaking activities (i.e. those requiring prior preparation by the teacher).

I have begun to collect ideas for activities that fit into each of these areas, but as there are so many ideas out there, I will continue to gather further ideas as time goes on.

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

Now that I have begun to collect a range of activities and ideas, I have been able to think of ways that I can begin to modify the learning sequence 'Where do you live? Where do you come from?' Activities that can be included are:

Drama Activities

- Students work in pairs. One student reads a short text aloud; the other student tells him/her how it should be read — slowly, loudly, quietly, etc.
- Students undertake voice projection activities using target phrases such as *Ich komme aus Australien*.

'Quick' Speaking Activities

- Stand up and say the target phrase, such as *Ich wohne in Woodbridge*, to three classmates in 1 minute.
- Students 'mouth' target language, such as names of countries, to a partner. Partner must lip-read the name of the country.

Longer Speaking Activities

- Each student receives a strip of paper with a question or answer phrase written on it. These will be based on language learnt in the year up to this point (e.g. *Woher kommst du? Ich komme aus Australien*). Students with questions must move around the room and ask their fellow students, aiming to find the student with the answer that matches their question.
- Reverse Celebrity Head — One student stands in front of the class thinking of a country. They give clues about their country to the class and their classmates must guess which country they are. This links with a written activity the students undertake as part of this learning sequence.

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

Some sample activities have been included in the 'Interpreting the Information' section. I have not yet begun to compile my ideas in written form.

EVALUATION

If I were to conduct an investigation in this area again, I would probably include the ideas and opinions of my students in some way, perhaps having them complete a survey about the types of activities they enjoy and the types of activities from which they feel they learn best.

I feel that the ideas and activities that I have collected during this project will improve this learning sequence. I have had the opportunity to sit down and really consider what I was doing in the classroom and how I can make a positive change that will enhance my students' learning. The ideas I have gathered will benefit my practice beyond this one learning sequence, as I will be able to apply them across a range of topics, as well as across the different grade levels I teach. I aim to keep collecting ideas that promote speaking and listening in the classroom, as I feel that this is an area that I sometimes avoid because of practical concerns.

REFLECTION

I feel that this project was definitely valuable for my professional practice; however, as with my students, lack of motivation on my part was a negative and significant factor. Although I felt really enthusiastic about the project on the days when we met as a group, it always seems difficult when you are left to work on your own. This is probably an issue that most languages teachers face, as we are so often the only one of our kind in our school.

The opportunity to discuss quality language teaching with colleagues was a particularly valuable facet of the project, and the opportunity to more closely examine an element of my practice was an excellent experience. I have come away from the project with renewed enthusiasm for planning to include speaking activities, and a range of new ideas to try in the classroom.

Overall, I found the project an extremely valuable experience.