

# **Professional Standards Project**

L A N G U A G E S



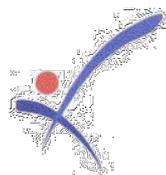
## Teacher participant investigation

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**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
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### CONTEXT

Strathfield Girls High School (SGHS) is situated in a well-established and highly sought after residential area. The school was established as a single-sex comprehensive high school in 1953 and designated a languages high school in 1990. Fifty-six different cultural groups are represented in the school population.

Strathfield Girls High School has approximately 1100 students and ninety staff members. The teaching staff is experienced, innovative, and devoted to meeting the learning needs of our students. Strathfield Girls High School is often held up as a lighthouse school for progressive pedagogy and success. The school enjoys strong community support, which enhances our strong school culture of high personal expectations.

The languages high school designation of the school is a symbol promoting multicultural environment, acceptance, and understanding of cultural diversity.

The languages faculty at SGHS has one head teacher and 3.5 classroom teachers in 2008. We offer five languages in Stages 4, 5, and 6: Chinese, French, German, Italian, and Japanese. German is currently being re-introduced into the curriculum after a substantial absence. The languages classes created are generally based on student choice.

Adapted from the SGHS School Management Plan

## AREA OF INVESTIGATION

My investigation focused on student feedback and evaluation. As a result of my appointment as head teacher to the faculty in 2007, I identified the need to develop a user-friendly scope and sequence for Italian as well as to embark on a comprehensive upgrade of all the Italian programs across all stages of learning. I used my involvement in this project as an opportunity to begin with Stage 4 and to commence the rewriting of the Italian program for Year 7. All Year 7 students study Italian (along with three other languages) for one term as part of their introductory experience in languages learning at SGHS. They then have the opportunity to select a language to study in Year 8 for the 100-hour mandatory course.

## CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Presenting this area of investigation required preliminary planning in order to ensure that adequate and appropriate opportunities were provided for students to engage in honest feedback with their teacher about what they are learning. Student booklets were designed with this in mind and contained a 'reflection page', which was to be completed at the conclusion of each part of the course. Opportunities were also provided for students to discuss their observations with their teacher during class time in order to provide immediate feedback to students if there were any areas of concern. Students reacted well to the introduction of the 'reflection page' and they quickly understood the purpose of it once they were given the opportunity to openly discuss aspects of it as a class group. While I would usually discuss student learning with students throughout their course of study, I had not actively engaged in such an explicit means of obtaining feedback from students about specific elements of a course. I quickly experienced the benefits of doing this and immediately noticed the impact of their comments on my subsequent planning.

## DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

I gathered the written responses from the 'reflection page' in the student booklet. The entire course of study for Year 7 Italian at the moment consists of six parts, but for the purposes of this investigation I focused on the comments students made during the first three parts. I then collated all the comments so that I could determine whether or not there were any emerging patterns that would help to inform my teaching of this particular cohort.

## FINDINGS

Here are the collated comments from students.

*Please Note:* Totals in each category in all three parts do not add up because details were taken from photocopies and these were at times difficult to read.

### Reflection - Part 1

#### Introduction to Italy and the Italian language

**Unit description:** This is the first unit in the Stage 4 (Year 7) introductory course of study. The purpose of this unit is to introduce Italy and the Italian language. Students draw on their own experience to identify the things they already know about Italy and to broaden their knowledge of the European community and Italian-speaking communities throughout the world.

**1. I learnt that...**

- Italian is a fun language to learn
- in Italian there are words very similar to the words in English and those words are called cognates
- Italian is a very interesting language to learn. It is sometimes easy because some Italian words are similar to English words
- Italy is cool! Italian is a cool and fun language. I think it is good how some of the English words are similar to the Italian ones
- Italian is quite similar to English
- Italian has a lot of words derived from English
- Italian is not so similar to French
- Italy has many regions and many different dialects
- most words are spelt the same as English or sound the same
- there are many regions in Italy
- Italy has twenty regions. It is not divided into states like Australia
- the European Union is made up of a group of countries in Europe
- words of the English language are borrowed from the Italian language (cognates)
- some words in Italian sound similar in English
- Italian is spoken by about 70 million people around the world

**2. I learnt how to...**

- speak a bit of Italian and about the country itself
- identify words in Italian that are the same in English
- relate the Italian language to English
- pronounce some words that are similar to English words
- pronounce Italian words; it is very different to French
- find Italy on a world map
- locate the different regions of Italy
- say new Italian words
- locate Italy's bordering countries
- colour the flag x 2
- look up information about Italy on the Internet
- say some new Italian words and how to locate Rome on a map of Italy
- speak a bit of Italian and how to write in Italian
- say some Italian words
- say some Italian cities in Italian
- recognise Italian words
- say a few words in Italian
- say some words in Italian and where Italy is

- recognise Italian words with English words using cognates and I also learnt a bit about the Italian culture
- compare English and Italian words that look and sound the same (cognates)
- speak a little Italian
- say a few things in Italian

### **3. I'd like to know more about...**

- Italian people and the way of life
- the way you say the words properly and more fluently
- the basic Italian language
- the Italian language and about the country
- how to say very hard stuff
- the language and the country, and also the regions
- how to say greetings and conversational language
- the country's traditions and culture
- the culture in Italy
- Italy and its capital city Rome because it seems fascinating to learn about a country
- the language of Italy and more of the history
- Italy and Italian foods
- things to do in Italy and more about their culture and language
- Italy the country
- the language and the culture
- how to speak Italian
- Italian history and foods
- Italy and the words that are unrecognisable
- how to say the greetings
- the foods and how to write Italian correctly
- the language like we did in French

### **4. I was surprised to learn that...**

- Catholicism is the religion and I was surprised about cognates x 2
- Italian is a very similar language to English which makes it easy to learn x 5
- Italian is as difficult as French
- Italy is divided into so many different regions x 2
- cappuccino is Italian
- Italy is a part of the EEU x 5
- Italy is in the shape of a boot x 3
- 70 million people around the world speak Italian

## Reflection - Part 2

### Informal and formal greetings and goodbyes

**Unit description:** This is the second unit in the Stage 4 (Year 7) introductory course of study. Our focus is on greetings and goodbyes in a range of social contexts. Students learn about the appropriate use of Italian gestures in both informal and formal settings.

#### 1. I learnt that...

- there are different types of greetings, formal and informal, and the titles (Mrs and Mr, etc.) x 6
- depending on who the person is, you have to say things to them in a different manner
- there is more than one way of saying something in Italian, although it means one thing in English
- it is rude in Italy not to say hello and goodbye to shopkeepers x 3
- there are different greetings for different groups of people x 2
- there are titles in Italian x 2
- there are different ways to say hi and bye depending on the time of the day
- the age of women is important and the way you call and greet them
- in Italian you pronounce what you see when you read

#### 2. I learnt how to...

- greet in Italian x 6
- greet people depending on the time of the day x 2
- say hi/bye in an informal and formal way x 9
- greet someone correctly depending on who they are
- pronounce the greetings better
- develop my Italian accent
- say arrivederci and arrivederLa
- start a conversation

#### 3. I'd like to know more about...

- the food in Italy x 5
- the Italian accents
- Italian family members
- how to say things like how you are
- more Italian words
- Italians and their way of life x 2
- having conversations with Italians x 2
- ages and numbers in Italian

- food, the country, traditional clothing, dances, and music
- the country's festivals
- how to give directions

#### 4. I was surprised to learn that...

- some words are similar to French and Spanish x 2
- some words are the same in English and there are different words for different levels of formality
- if you do not say hi/bye to the shopkeeper in Italy you will be considered rude x 5
- some words are both formal and informal x 4
- Italy was voted Europe's favourite country and that the cost of living in Italy is high
- Italians kiss as part of their greeting
- Italian and French are quite similar x 2
- Italian is very hard to learn

### Reflection - Part 3

#### Saying your name and how you are

**Unit description:** This is the third unit in the Stage 4 (Year 7) introductory course of study. The focus is on saying your name, responding to a question asking how you are in a range of social contexts, and spelling using the Italian alphabet. Students further consolidate their choice of appropriate vocabulary in both informal and formal settings.

#### 1. I learnt that...

- Italian is as hard as French
- most boys' names in Italian end in 'o' and 'a' for the girls
- the Italian alphabet doesn't have j, k, w, x, and y x 5
- there are only twenty-one letters in the Italian alphabet x 4
- there is a direct translation of 'mi chiamo' - I call myself
- you have to sound the letters out when saying the Italian alphabet

#### 2. I learnt how to...

- say the alphabet x 10
- spell in Italian and more on how to meet people
- say my name using the Italian alphabet
- say how I feel
- spell certain things, like my name x 5
- say and ask my name, say and ask how you are and the Italian alphabet x 3
- say j, k, w, x, and y in Italian x 2
- sing the alphabet quickly

**3. I'd like to know more about...**

- formal and informal greetings x 2
- introducing myself
- saying the alphabet better
- how to say more things in Italian
- borrowed words
- Italian food and drinks
- Italian culture x 2
- words used in conversation, for example, the weather, the way you say your hobbies
- Italy

**4. I was surprised to learn that...**

- the Italian alphabet is different from the English alphabet
- the way they spell their names with the sounds x 2
- Italian is quite fun when you say it and learn it
- boys' names end in 'o' and girls' names in 'a'
- there are only twenty-one letters in the Italian alphabet x 8
- some of the words are the same in French
- the learning is fun

It became very clear from the onset of the initial submitted 'reflection page' that students were engaging with the content and metalanguage used during the course. Students were able to explicitly draw on the content covered in each of the parts and describe what they had learnt and what they could do in Italian. I feel that this is partly because the new course of study is more structured and offers more to support students during the early stages of language acquisition.

**INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION**

The findings were most informative and served as a reminder of the importance of seeking feedback from students about what they are learning and to ensure that comments are taken on board when evaluating the whole unit as well as when preparing to teach subsequent parts of the program. This all helped me to continue to teach explicitly, to provide opportunities for students to comment on the work, and to openly share what they were learning as well as how this was happening. I did not expect the students to respond so explicitly from the very first time they filled in their 'reflection page'. Even though some students saw the task as yet another piece of writing to do, most students (at least ninety per cent of them) used the opportunity to express their opinion and to honestly establish a line of dialogue with me about what they were learning. Most students liked the idea of being able to express themselves in writing and to make comments (however brief) about their Italian experience. Part of the program was for the teacher to collect each student booklet as it was completed in order to check all activities had been completed and this included checking and reading through the 'reflection page'. Where necessary, I would also respond in writing to the students' comments and I think the students saw a real purpose for what they were writing and that the teacher actually spent time reading and responding to them. The comments that certain students made also alerted me to minor misconceptions that, because I had

discovered them early in the learning process, could be corrected before they became major issues. This is also useful in terms of the class discussion that was generated as it helped to consolidate the learning of those who had understood and also helped to correct the misinterpretation of the few students who may have misunderstood.

## MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

Throughout the course of the investigation, students produced quality comments that specifically addressed the key concepts of the parts of the course presented. In spending time to complete the 'reflection page' with adequate comment, students ended up with a course summary of what they had learnt, what they would like to learn, and what they found were the surprising elements of the Italian language at that particular point in time. In a similar fashion, I would reflect on the comments that the students made at the conclusion of each part and review what I had planned for the subsequent lessons in order to ensure that I was going to accurately address gaps in learning, as well as using the comments to inform me of the success of what I had already taught.

What the Reflection Page looked like:

## Reflection - Part 1

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Think about what you have learnt in Part 1. You may jot down your thoughts on the lines provided.

I learnt that.....  
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I learnt how .....  
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I'd like to know more about.....  
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I was surprised to learn that.....  
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If possible, share your thoughts with your teacher and classmates.  
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## EVALUATION

I felt the investigation progressed well. Initially I was a little worried whether the students would actually spend enough time on answering the questions properly, but once I saw the quality of responses my mind was set at ease. Most students addressed the questions in depth and really attempted to engage with the content and their perception of it. Conducting the investigation gave me the opportunity to trial something I had only ever previously undertaken occasionally in class if there was enough time. I realised the need to make time for reflection and to actively read and take notice of what the students had to say. In addition, their comments are essential for assessing whether or not what I was setting out to teach is actually being learnt. I hope to be able to use the concept of the 'reflection page' in all student booklets used in my faculty and to introduce this idea to the other staff members in my faculty.

## REFLECTION

The investigation helped me to focus on my teaching and whether what I thought I was teaching was really being learnt by my students. The process itself is not as daunting as it first seems — you just need to identify an area in need of improvement and then decide on the best way to investigate ways of making it better. In my particular case, I wanted to increase the student–teacher interaction as I was well aware that no real avenue existed for the students to comment on their learning, at any stage of the process. Being so actively involved in the process helped me to understand how my students learn, what thoughts were going through their minds as the first three parts of the Italian course of study were completed, and how I could better help them to understand what I was teaching. As a result of my involvement in this investigation, I feel better equipped to encourage other staff members to embark on a similar journey in order to be able to understand themselves better as teachers of languages and cultures. It is in the discovery of our gaps that we can strive to be even more accomplished as we continue to improve alongside our students as lifelong learners.