

# **Professional Standards Project**

L A N G U A G E S



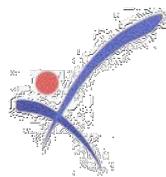
## Teacher participant investigation

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**Hilary James**

**Japanese, Years 8 to 12**

**Western Australia**



  
**UniSA**

Research Centre for  
**Languages  
and Cultures**

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#### Disclaimer

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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.



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment  
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## PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS PROJECT CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVELS
Hilary James	Australind Senior High School Break O'Day Drive Australind WA 6233	Japanese	8 to 12

### CONTEXT

This investigation took place at a government secondary school in regional Western Australia. The school has approximately 1200 students from Year 8 to Year 12.

The school offers languages programs in French and Japanese. Languages at the school are compulsory for students in Years 8 and 9, and students do two 60-minute lessons per week. In Year 10, apart from Maths, English, Society and Environment, Science and Health, and Physical Education, students have two elective choices. Year 10 students who elect to study a language also have two 60-minute periods a week.

Distance Japanese language courses are also taught from Australind SHS. This mostly involves teaching students in both TEE and non-TEE post-compulsory courses.

The school has a sister-school relationship with Moka Junior High School. This involves incoming exchange groups and Australind students travelling to Japan in alternate years.

On a personal level, I studied all my Japanese in Australia and spent no extended periods of time in Japan. Although I have completed many hours of study in many different courses, I often find my language skills insufficient for my requirements. In addition, I have recently had 2 years' leave and returned to work part time, therefore my opportunities to use my language skills during this time have been limited.

## AREA OF INVESTIGATION

I decided to focus my investigation on the area of Language and Culture from the Standards. After reflecting on the suggested questions I recognised that it was an area that I could probably do more in to improve my language teaching. In particular, I recognised that outside the classroom context I rarely, if ever, used Japanese and that this was limiting my ability to improve my language skills and cultural understanding.

I focused my investigation on the Japanese-specific annotations and looked specifically at my language use outside the language classroom. I chose this area as I had identified a need to improve my own language skills and examine ways that I could achieve this goal. I decided to analyse each of the points listed in the annotations for language use outside the classroom in order to assess my own abilities in this area and investigate methods I could use to improve my skills.

This need was identified as I often have a need to use language at a higher level than generally required in the classroom. In negotiating and interacting with teachers and other visitors from our sister school I often find that my language skills are not adequate. I often need to negotiate with native speakers (such as native-speaker tutors) and improving my language skills will make this easier. I also need to develop my skills in order to be more confident and fluent in assisting post-compulsory students in their study generally and, in particular, in their oral work.

## CLASSROOM PRACTICE

In order to analyse my own language abilities I wanted to complete a 'language stocktake'. I developed a chart to record my own feelings and reflections for each of the annotations relating to Japanese language use outside the classroom. I then added a column for looking at possible strategies for overcoming any shortcomings identified. The final column of the chart was set aside for a priority rating and comment. I recognised that I would be unable to work on all areas identified; therefore some way of recording priorities and reasons for these decisions was important.

The headings in my language stocktake table were:

- Language feature
- How I feel about my capabilities
- Reflection
- Strategy to address gaps
- Comment and priority (1–5).

The table is shown in Appendix A.

## DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

Once the table was developed I completed each of the sections. I honestly reflected on each of the language features listed in the annotations. These reflections were very useful in identifying my strengths and weaknesses, and my attitudes to the various features listed.

I then investigated possible strategies for addressing any weakness I had identified. In most cases this involved investigating language practice opportunities available on the Internet and considering opportunities available in my own community.

When considering priorities I carefully considered my needs, based on my individual work context and life circumstances. As a mother with two pre-school children living in a regional area I had to take this into account when developing my priorities. Although some areas may have been identified as significant gaps in my language use, I had to determine whether or not I had the capacity to address those issues. It was important still to acknowledge these so that when I revisit the stocktake in the future I will be able to easily revise my plan as my circumstances change.

The completed table is shown in Appendix B.

## **FINDINGS**

In completing the language stocktake I discovered that I was able to adequately address most of the language features listed in the annotations. All areas, however, required at least some development. The stocktake did highlight some areas in which I have very limited use of Japanese outside the classroom.

I found, when looking at strategies for improving my language skills, that there were many options available to me, even outside the metropolitan area. There are a number of excellent websites that can be used quickly and simply for language development. I also have a number of 'human resources' in my own network that I underuse at present. It helped me to identify ways I can practise Japanese more outside the classroom, with limited extra time and effort required on my part.

## **INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION**

Once I had completed the language stocktake table I used the information to prepare a Language Development Plan, using the weaknesses, strategies, and priorities identified in the stocktake. The plan was developed in order to provide specific strategies to use in a limited time frame in order to focus efforts in the most productive and beneficial manner.

The plan was developed in order to meet my needs during the next 12 months. It was important that it reflected my work context, current personal situation, and perceived needs. I limited my plan to five main goals to be achieved in the given time frame in order to make the plan achievable.

The Language Development Plan is shown in Appendix C.

## **MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS**

Materials used were:

- Language Skills Stocktake chart                      Appendix A
- Language Skills Stocktake                              Appendix B
- Language Skills Development Plan                  Appendix C

## **EVALUATION**

This investigation was extremely beneficial. It was an excellent self-reflection tool, which also allowed for planning to occur. It allowed me to analyse my own language skills in an honest and realistic manner. I also recognised that my own attitudes and beliefs are evident in my reflections on each language feature and that some of these attitudes may be hindering my own language development.

The process also allowed me to investigate specific strategies to address the needs I had identified in an organised and systematic fashion. The number of strategies available will differ, depending on personal circumstances, and it was helpful for me to list all the strategies that were available.

The main benefit of this process, in my opinion, was that it allowed me to set priorities for my language learning. This was different from previous efforts, as they had been completed in an *ad hoc* way and did not necessarily address my own specific needs. This also helped me to recognise that I do not have to try to achieve all the goals at the one time and that the process of language learning is a lifelong journey.

Finally, it enabled me to develop a plan that is achievable and meets my needs. A plan that is overly ambitious is destined to fail, and so it was very important not to attempt to achieve too much. I am happy that the plan is achievable, given my limited time and resources available.

The process has provided a structure and blueprint that can now be used for many years. I am able to revisit my language stocktake every year and reassess my language skills and priorities. Access to resources will also change over time and so I am now able to reassess these each year. As my skills and priorities change, my plan will be able to be changed to meet these needs.

The only addition I would make in the future is to add an area of reflection on my Language Development Plan. This will allow me to reflect on my completion of the plan, whether I feel it led to improvement in my language skills and cultural understanding and whether it really was achievable. This will help me in developing future plans.

## REFLECTION

This process was personally very worthwhile. It gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own abilities and to determine my own attitudes and priorities. Rather than seeing the need to improve language skills as overwhelming and unachievable, I was able to set clear priorities and to develop a plan that was achievable and based on my individual needs. It has helped me to focus my efforts in particular areas of need, rather than in a more random and *ad hoc* fashion.

I believe that this process would be beneficial for all language teachers. It has definitely helped me to see the task of improving my language skills as less overwhelming. I also believed that I did not have time to work on my skills, but the plan helped me to identify ways in which I could work on my language skills which did not require very much time commitment and which I could easily access from work or home. It is also useful in planning for my own professional development needs and in performance management sessions with my line managers.

This is certainly a process I would complete again. The format is now established so that I may use it again in the future. I feel that the self-reflection opportunities that it provided were extremely beneficial.

## APPENDIX A: Language Skills Stocktake Chart

Language feature	How I feel about my capabilities	Reflection	Strategy to address gaps	Comment and priority (1–5)
Managing the transactional needs of basic living and travelling in Japan				
Writing Japanese texts using a computer (e.g. word-processing, email)				
Engaging in casual conversation with other speakers of Japanese, including non-native speakers				
Participating in some formal language contexts (such as visiting a school or local community members)				
Making telephone calls				
Reading and writing short emails and/or letters for personal and professional purposes				
Understanding the gist of newspaper and magazine articles for own purposes				
Watching television broadcasts and listening to radio broadcasts with a general understanding of the gist				
Using/engaging with contemporary media (e.g. magazines, <i>manga</i> , Internet, television, films) for enjoyment				
Using a dictionary to identify unfamiliar words and <i>kanji</i>				

## APPENDIX B: Language Skills Stocktake

Hilary James

August/September 2008

Language feature	How I feel about my capabilities	Reflection	Strategy to address gaps	Comment and priority (1–5)
Managing the transactional needs of basic living and travelling in Japan	Adequate skills in this area	Never having lived in Japan, or even travelled independently in the country, it is difficult for me to assess my skills. I feel from my limited experiences that I can communicate reasonably well in most common situations encountered in Japan. Still have vocabulary that is unfamiliar to me.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Use of <a href="http://Japanesepod101.com">Japanesepod101.com</a> to build vocabulary on everyday living and travelling vocabulary.</li> <li>* Independent travel to Japan</li> </ul>	<p>1 – Main priority to complete lessons on topics relating to living in Japan (such as banking and moving)</p> <p>4 – Not possible at the present time, but this is my goal</p>
Writing Japanese texts using a computer (e.g. word processing, email)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Adequate word processing skills</li> <li>* Limited knowledge of standard phrases relating to emails and computing generally</li> </ul>	<p>Although I can use the computer for producing worksheets and general Japanese text, I am unsure of the standard language of computers in Japanese. Having learnt all my Japanese in the pre-computer age, I have never had the opportunity to learn this language formally.</p> <p>Would like to be able to write communications with other Japanese teachers in appropriate Japanese, but do not feel able to do this at this stage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Take particular note of communications sent to me in Japanese to build a repertoire of standard phrases to use in my own communications</li> <li>* Write some standard emails and have them checked by Yumiko</li> </ul>	<p>2 – Ongoing, whenever communication received</p> <p>2 – Possible during Term 4</p>
Engaging in casual conversation with other speakers of Japanese, including non-native speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Adequate conversational ability in Japanese</li> <li>* Topics limited and general in nature</li> </ul>	This is the area I get the most practice in at present, so it is probably the area that needs the least attention. I am happy to speak conversational Japanese with Japanese visitors and colleagues; however, conversations of a more professional nature cause issues with lack of appropriate vocabulary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Continue to conduct conversations with Yumiko and other Japanese visitors in Japanese</li> <li>* Increase use of Japanese with other colleagues</li> </ul>	<p>1 – This is the easiest strategy to achieve for me and can potentially give the greatest reward</p> <p>3 – Not a high priority at this stage</p>
Participating in some formal language contexts (such as visiting a school or local community members)	* Skills in this area need upgrading	This is probably the area that causes me the greatest stress in terms of language use. Use of appropriate honorifics and set expressions is difficult, as I use this language so infrequently that I forget it between uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Compile a list of appropriate phrases for use in more formal situations</li> <li>* Search <a href="http://japanesepod101.com">japanesepod101</a> for related lesson</li> <li>* Role-play with Japanese native speaker to improve skills</li> </ul>	<p>1 – This is probably the area of greatest need in terms of developing my language skills</p> <p>1 – Easily achieved</p> <p>2 – Would be good practice, but time is a factor</p>

<p>Making telephone calls</p>	<p>* Skills in this area need upgrading</p>	<p>Although I know what to say in a general sense, I have had very limited need to make telephone calls in Japanese.</p>	<p>* Complete Japanesepod101 lessons on telephone conversations across a range of contexts</p>	<p>3 – Limited need for this skill at present and current skills are adequate, even if rusty</p>
<p>Reading and writing short emails and/or letters for personal and professional purposes</p>	<p>* Skills generally adequate in this area for personal use * Professional writing skills need some development</p>	<p>I can generally understand all communication sent to me personally and professionally so I feel that this area of skill is reasonably well developed.  I do not feel at all confident in writing skills. Although happy to write Japanese on a personal level, I am not confident enough to use it on a professional level.</p>	<p>* Begin a resource bank of Japanese communications to me – useful expressions highlighted  * Have Yumiko assist in writing Japanese language emails</p>	<p>2 – Easily achieved and not too time consuming  3 – Subject to time constraints in Term 4</p>
<p>Understanding the gist of newspaper and magazine articles for own purposes.</p>	<p>* Rarely use this skill, but <i>kanji</i> knowledge generally inadequate for most reading purposes</p>	<p>My <i>kanji</i> knowledge is such that only very general gist of written text is usually possible. Although I would love to be able to read more <i>kanji</i> I just don't believe that it is something that I can devote adequate time to.</p>	<p>* Take more notice of authentic text to focus on what I can understand  * Continue to complete the <i>kanji</i> sections of Japanesepod101 lessons to improve overall <i>kanji</i> skill</p>	<p>5 – Time factors make this skill difficult to improve. Will reconsider priorities at a later stage  1 – Easily integrated into any Japanese pod lesson</p>
<p>Watching television broadcasts and listening to radio broadcasts with a general understanding of the gist</p>	<p>* Rarely have the opportunity to practise this skill, but generally understand little authentic broadcasting.</p>	<p>I don't have time to watch television at all – let alone Japanese television! I do listen more carefully to the Japanese audio in movies and shows I share with students, but generally I have heard these many times to get understanding. In one off listening situations understanding is limited.</p>	<p>* Continue to practise listening to Japanese audio in movies rather than relying on subtitles</p>	<p>5 - Time factors make this skill difficult to improve. Will reconsider priorities at a later stage</p>
<p>Using/engaging with contemporary media (e.g. magazines, <i>manga</i>, Internet, television, films) for enjoyment.</p>	<p>* Poor skills in this area</p>	<p>I never do this!! As reading Japanese is quite a slow and academic task it is not something I would do for relaxation. <i>Kanji</i> and vocabulary skills would need to improve considerably before this was to happen. Unless you count <i>Cars</i>, I haven't seen any movie in years.</p>	<p>* Ask Kate for simple <i>manga</i>, which I can use for reading practice  * Try reading new magazines from Japan (see Kate)  * Seek out new Japanese movies available on DVD</p>	<p>3 – Possibly over the school holidays, may be able to devote some time to reading  3 – Try to achieve in school time  4 – Possible in school holidays  5 – This area would generally be rated at 5. I do not have time to do this</p>

<p>Using a dictionary to identify unfamiliar words and <i>kanji</i></p>	<p>* Good skills in this area</p>	<p>Skills in this area are quite good – because of lots of practice! I do not feel that this area of language use needs any extra skill than what is currently completed.</p>	<p>No action required</p>	
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## APPENDIX C: Language Skills Development Plan

Plan for improving Japanese language skills over the next 12 months (2008–2009) includes:

1. Complete at least one Japanesepod101 lesson each week.
  - Focus on lessons most related to needs — formal language, work language, computer/email-related.
  - Complete all areas of the lesson over the week, including flashcard drills and quiz.
2. Compile a list of appropriate phrases to be used in formal situations.
  - Get assistance from Yumiko, Atsuko, previously prepared speeches and Japanesepod to create a list of phrases I can learn and draw from in a variety of situations relating to school interactions.
  - Create headings including speeches, introductions, negotiations, and farewell phrases.
  - Complete any related lessons on Japanesepod101, including vocabulary and *kanji* drills. Retest over a series of weeks in order to aid understanding.
3. Complete *kanji* sections of Japanesepod101 lessons.
  - Create a resource book of *kanji* worksheets.
  - Complete writing practice sheets for each lesson.
  - Complete *kanji* practice tasks in premium package
  - Add appropriate *kanji* to personal *kanji* bank for flashcard practice.
4. Take opportunities to conduct casual conversations with speakers of Japanese.
  - Continue to use Japanese in casual communications with Yumiko.
  - Attempt to use Japanese for professional conversations with Yumiko.
  - Ask for words in Japanese when vocabulary knowledge is inadequate and attempt to incorporate these new words into future discussions.
5. Compile a resource file of computer-related phrases.
  - Keep copies of emails sent to me in Japanese.
  - Investigate resources available for computer-related language and add to resource file.
  - Write some sample email communications and have them checked by a native speaker.