

Professional Standards Project

L A N G U A G E S

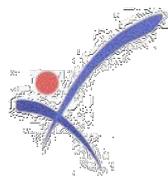


Teacher participant investigation

Claire Lucas

**Japanese, Prep to Year 10
Community Program**

Tasmania



UniSA

Research Centre for
**Languages
and Cultures**

© Commonwealth of Australia 2009

This work is copyright. It may be reproduced in whole or in part for study or training purposes subject to the inclusion of an acknowledgment of the source and no commercial usage or sale. Reproduction for purposes other than those indicated above requires prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600, or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in the publication do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Acknowledgment

This work was funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations under the School Languages Program.

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
and Workplace Relations



PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS PROJECT CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

| TEACHER | SCHOOL | LANGUAGE | YEAR LEVELS |
|--------------|---|----------|-----------------|
| Claire Lucas | Glenora District High School, Tas. Phone: (03) 62861301 Fax: (03) 62861425 | Japanese | Prep to Year 10 |

CONTEXT

Glenora District High School is a Prep to Year 10 District High School in southern Tasmania. The school has approximately 180 students with a large proportion of its community being socially disadvantaged. The primary school has composite classes because of small numbers, and the high school has one class each of Year 7 through to Year 10.

About 98% of students at Glenora District High use the school bus service to get to school. Glenora District High students travel from remote areas of the Central Highlands, Ouse, Bothwell, Ellendale, Bushy Park, Westerway, and Maydena. Students arrive en masse and leave en masse. School is where they meet and socialise. It is extremely difficult for students to participate in after-school activities and weekend sport. There is no bus service from Hobart to Glenora or neighbouring regions. Buses from Hobart go only to New Norfolk, which is the main town in the Derwent Valley, about 20 km from Glenora. This bus does not run on Sunday. Consequently, this leaves the wider community isolated and, with rising petrol costs, taking the car is often not an option.

The Derwent Valley is a very scenic region of Tasmania, has many tourist attractions, and is part of the spectacular 'wild way' route to attractions such as the National Park, Lake Pedder, Strathgordon, and the South West Heritage area. Glenora is an agricultural area approximately 1 hour's drive north-west of Hobart. The school is surrounded by hop fields, cherry orchards, and sheep and cattle grazing properties, where many families obtain seasonal part-time work.

The Derwent Valley is, and has always been, a very monocultural area. All students at school are from English-speaking backgrounds. The school has a successful sister school relationship with a junior high school in Japan, but numbers participating in this exchange are declining because of the cost of the trip overseas and the rising cost of hosting students.

In the past, Japanese has been taught from Prep to Year 10. Last year's students were able to study Japanese at a pre-tertiary level through the Glenora Skill Centre. This year, because of declining numbers of students wanting to study Japanese, small classes were unable to be held in the secondary school because of school constraints.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

Because of a myopic attitude in the wider community, Japanese is seen as an irrelevant, difficult subject. This general negativity, coupled with a declining student interest in learning Japanese, encouraged me to run a 'Taster Course' in Japanese for parents and interested community members. My aim was to actively involve parents and the community in my language program so that they could appreciate the skills involved in learning another language. I hoped that they would then begin to value the language program that was being offered to their children.

I intended the course to be very similar to my primary Japanese lessons; however, the main focus would not be the Japanese language, but to highlight the intrinsic developmental worth of language learning to students. I wanted participants to experience the cognitive discipline involved in remembering a foreign vocabulary and to experience learning a different script with the use of mnemonics. I wanted participants to experience its beneficial effect on learning and immediate memory retention. I wanted participants to realise that a subject that actively taught memory retention and recall training was an important subject to have, and that if being able to communicate in another language was a secondary by-product of this memory training, then language learning was indeed a very worthwhile area of study.

I also wanted participants to realise that cultural knowledge and cultural understanding would be necessary qualities for success in the future global community and for gaining employment. However, most importantly, I wanted participants to have fun and relax as the 'Taster Course' was also going to be about obtaining a privileged insight into what their children did in their Japanese lessons, consequently allowing parents and carers to relate to and share learning with their children.

I applied for, and was granted, funding from a LOTE/Literacy grant for my 'Taster Course'. I advertised my 'Taster Course' in the school newsletter. Five interested community members contacted me. My group consisted of two grandmothers, two mothers, and one young adult.

I planned 2-hourly sessions to be held over 5 weeks, with a different theme each week. Each lesson would have a simple song, theme-based vocabulary, a listening exercise, a Japanese fable, and a component of Hiragana familiarisation, reading, and writing. I planned to finish each lesson with the frustrating fun of origami.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

I arranged a time to suit all interested participants and booked the morning tea room at the Glenora Skill Centre. This room had an urn, cooking facilities, and cups, etc. We were able to start in a relaxed environment with a 'cuppa' in hand.

I prepared materials and made booklets for lessons based around the weekly theme.

I took a deep breath and hoped for the best! I approached the course with a little anxiety. I felt the group might be expecting something more sophisticated than I had to offer. However, I stressed that I wanted them to experience exactly what the children did in class. The only difference might be that I would explain things a little more quickly to adults.

With much awkwardness we started the first lesson with a song that reinforced the 'greeting' words in Japanese — listening first, then, after going through the vocabulary, all joining in if possible. We listened to the song a few times then moved on to other exercises.

The weekly sessions progressed through vocabulary related to the theme, concentrating on correct usage and pronunciation. Interesting discussions regarding equivalent English-related expressions often resulted.

The listening exercises were always a great challenge. Participants had never really experienced having to concentrate on a foreign language in order to obtain information. They needed to listen several times and use every visual clue given in worksheets to feel confident enough to suggest an answer. I constantly needed to remind participants to use their mnemonic clues to assist memory recall.

Everyone enjoyed listening to the weekly fable. It was a chance to relax and appreciate the easiness of listening to the 'mother tongue', as most of the story was told in English, except for a few Japanese theme-related focus words, which naturally were said in Japanese. The repetition of target vocabulary in the story aided memorisation and helped participants to accept these strange new sounds as just being 'words'. The Japanese fable always had a keen social message and resulted in interesting conversations about social mores, morals, and ethics. It was a good way to approach cultural differences and social norms.

The next part of the lesson involved learning to read and write at least five new Hiragana letters. This was the most enjoyable part of the lesson. The participants and I really had fun. I showed the letters and told the mnemonic clues, just as I do in class. The participants were always slow to recall correct pronunciation of Hiragana, but they knew they eventually would, using the 'how are we going to remember this' training. Initially recall was slow and sometimes incorrect, and when a mistake occurred they were angry with themselves as they felt that they should know better. As the weeks passed the group's confidence drastically improved. All participants were happily having 'Hiragana time trials' against the clock (quickest time to read Hiragana wins) and Hiragana challenges, just as I do with primary students. The participants were keen to learn stroke order in writing Hiragana and were very fussy with their handwriting. They truly enjoyed being able to write a different script and were keen to show their children.

Origami at the end of every session was approached with moans and sighs. I could only agree and sympathise with this feeling as I also have many difficulties following and understanding the instructions. As a prelude to illustrate the benefits of this activity, I read to the participants an article 'Nipponia Discovering Japan', by Professor Kawashima Ryuta, outlining all the cognitive benefits of origami in both the young growing brain and the deteriorating older brain. Professor Kawashima has demonstrated that doing origami increases the amount of blood flowing in the prefrontal area of the brain's cerebrum, helping the brain to function better. After this article had been read and digested by all, we were keen and agreed that we all needed to do as much origami as possible!

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

Each weekly lesson followed this plan; however, every week I was able to cover less material because of the growing frequency of excited, animated conversations that grew from the participants' learning experiences and their growing confidence.

Participants could not believe how much their children were learning and remembering. They were keen to show their children that they could do it too. All participants were keen to share the fun 'family learning moments' with other participants.

Everyone started to enjoy the weekly songs. They would comment that a certain song had stuck in their mind and they would never forget a particular word because of the song. They appreciated and understood the importance of the simple song in language learning and wanted to encourage their children to sing songs learnt in school at home.

Japanese words became 'power' at home. Participants were delighted to be able to say something at home in Japanese to their child when other family members were unable to understand it.

Participants were also pleased to realise that their children were being taught to sit and actively listen for particular information. All participants agreed that not too many subjects demanded such concentrated and focused listening skills and they were glad to know that a subject still existed that required students to concentrate and listen, without a flashing screen in front of them.

Participants spoke about the efforts involved in language learning and were thankful that their child was learning a language. They were also very pleased to realise the cognitive benefits of language learning and immensely grateful for the opportunity to participate in such a 'Taster Course'. They started to chat to other mothers regarding what they were learning in the 'Taster Course' and of the other unseen cognitive benefits that language learning was providing their children.

Participants were disappointed when the 'Taster Course' came to an end. All participants were keen to speak to Jill Bignell, languages coordinator, regarding the appraisal of the course. The participants were very happy to know that approval had been given for another 'Taster Course'.

FINDINGS

I learnt that it was good to try something new and that the participants gained much more from the 'Taster Course' than just an insight into their child's Japanese lessons.

- The 'Taster Course' gave participants an understanding of both the value of learning another language and how it feels to engage with their own learning.
- Participants were better connected with their child, they could speak to their child, fully understanding what they were learning in Japanese classes, and able to confidently assist the child with homework.
- Participants were clearly richer for the 'Taster Course' experience, even though they would not continue with language learning.
- Participants appreciated and understood the different methods and activities in teaching and learning.
- Participants were aware of and appreciated the training involved with the individual skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in languages.
- Participants enjoyed learning about another culture.
- Participants thrived on the 'challenge' of learning a different script.
- The course provided an avenue for increased focused contact between the participants, their children, and the teacher.
- The course created a community interest in the benefits of learning another language.
- Participants were so committed that they were keen to see another course offered and wanted to tell other parents and friends to participate.
- Participants enjoyed the social side of meeting others and experiencing something different.

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

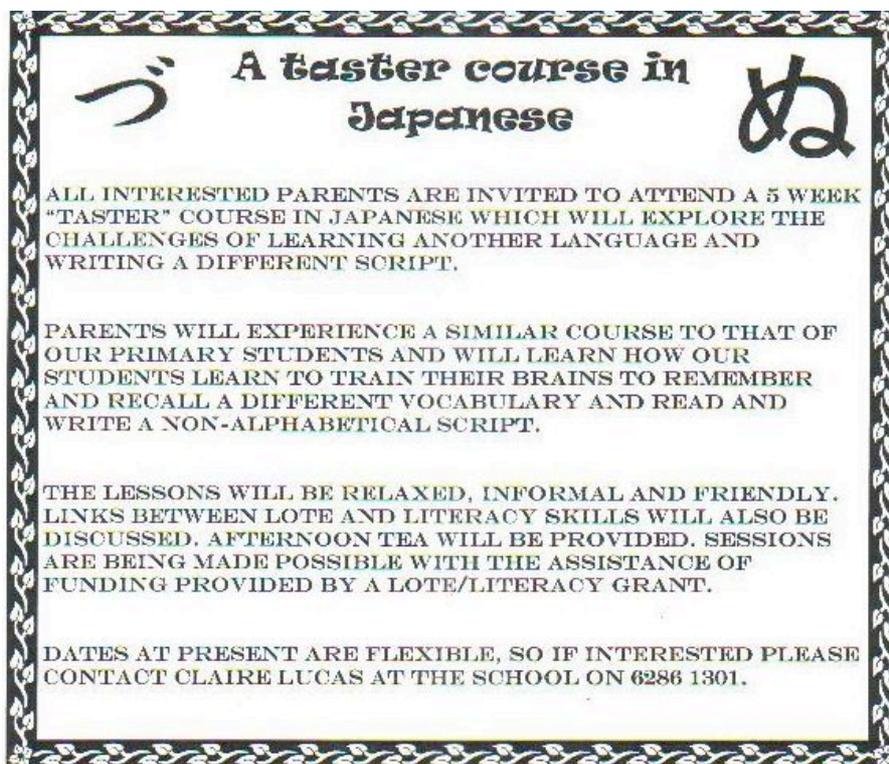
I was delighted with the way the participants received the course. I feel I am now reaping the rewards of my efforts as I am slowly starting to see a change in community views on the studying of Japanese. Community members are asking me when I will be holding the next Japanese 'Taster Course', and I am getting to know community members better. On the other hand, community members now know that I am friendly and approachable, and have their children's best interests at heart.

I didn't expect such a warm, appreciative response.

- The community appreciated the opportunity to experience and learn about what the students did in Japanese lessons.
- The positive comments from the 'Taster Course' have only reinforced my classroom practice.
- The participants really enjoyed the 'Taster Course.' It could have been a few weeks longer.
- I now feel as if I have parental support and parents appreciate my efforts.
- The community/school is beginning to recognise the value of the Language Program.
- The Language Program is being valued for more than just its language component.

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

Newsletter Articles:



'Last term a small group of parents participated in the 5-week 'Japanese Taster Course.' It was a great opportunity to experience what the children learn in their Japanese lessons. We spoke about culture, listened to typical Japanese children's fables and songs, tried to learn some Hiragana script, experience origami, and learnt all about its benefits for brain development, but generally we had a lot of fun and many laughs.

This course was enjoyed so much that funding for a future course was requested and granted. Another 'Japanese Taster Course' will be held in second term, date as yet not set. Please contact Claire Lucas at the School.'



'...great opportunity to experience what the children learn in their Japanese lessons'
'I can now have some fun exchanging Japanese words with my granddaughter'

EVALUATION

I felt this exercise went extremely well. The course involved building professional relationships within the community and trying to intervene and change underlying negative perceptions around the language program by actively involving the school and community. The course started out a little awkwardly and I did not expect the participants to be as eager and as engaged as they were at the end of the 'course'. I feel the 'course' should have been longer, but stopping after 5 weeks worked to my advantage as it gave participants the chance to voice their eagerness for more lessons and to create wider community interest.

Running the course was a very valuable experience for me. The positive response and reinforcement to my classroom practice gave me a lot of confidence, I felt I had parental and community support. It was also nice for me to teach adults for a change. The frequently voiced relevant or irrelevant associations to class content sparked off many interesting conversations which, in turn, helped us relax and have fun while learning.

I feel the course was invaluable to community members. It gave them a privileged insight into classroom learning routines, and their experience of trying to learn another language, and demonstrated all the cognitive benefits to their children/students. During this 'course' it also became very clear to participants that a second language, and cultural knowledge and sensitivity will be extremely important for participation in the future global community, hence Japanese was an important subject to have on the school curriculum.

All in all, the Japanese 'Taster Course' achieved everything I hoped for and more.

If funding is available next year I will continue the 'Taster Course' and perhaps vary it a little, depending on the participants. I would like to bring in more 'new' experiences for the community, maybe some green tea with our lessons, or some sushi making. We could try some Japanese calligraphy or ikebana with the state's Japanese Language Assistant. However, my focus will always be on the importance of second language learning, its benefits, and the cognitive discipline it requires.

REFLECTION

The 'Taster Course' was a confidence-building exercise for me and a good public relations exercise for the school. It achieved all I hoped to achieve and certainly highlighted the importance of Japanese in the school curriculum.

The participants enjoyed the 'social' but 'learning' contact with the school and I enjoyed establishing relationships with parents and carers within the school community. I also very much enjoyed getting the community involved with another language and culture. I gained much pleasure from telling others about the benefits of language learning, and letting them experience the challenges of its discipline. I enjoyed the opportunity to get to know the participants better and looked forward to each weekly session. I, too, was also disappointed when the 'Taster Course' finished as I missed the participants' company and enthusiasm, which was truly invigorated by their new learning.