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LANGUAGE  
Chinese For Background Speakers

YEAR LEVEL  
11

CONTEXT

University Senior College is a co-ed senior secondary school that offers Year 11 and 12 to students who aim to enter tertiary education. The school has a significant number (20%) of international students who are mainly from China. As a result, Chinese for Background Speakers is offered as one of the subjects for students at Years 11 and 12. Currently, there are two Year 11 classes, and two Year 12 classes of Chinese for Background Speakers. There are 10 to 14 students in each class. There are two 2-hour lessons per class per week. Lessons are delivered in Chinese. The classes use the SSABSA curriculum framework as a basis, but there is no text book. Materials are drawn from contemporary sources and tasks are developed by the teacher. Both Year 11 classes were chosen for this project.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

The Focus of Investigation: How can I enhance my teaching of the current SSABSA curriculum to make content, processes and outcomes more intercultural?

To enhance my teaching, I have incorporated the intercultural principles in my planning and teaching practice. I understand that Intercultural Language Learning in Chinese first language programs involves thinking about the context of the program, which is learning and living in the context of Australian language and culture. This language program requires a connection between the Chinese language and culture experience of teacher and students and their lived experience in Australia, negotiated through Chinese texts and English texts, explored and expressed in their first language – Chinese. It aims to help learners to become more comfortable being a Chinese (linguistic and cultural) student in the Australian social and educational context, as well as to develop their intercultural skills, knowledge and understanding of themselves and others (Australians) through exploring texts with different perspectives.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Review teaching program

The topic ‘Youth Issues’ is under the theme ‘Modernisation and Social Change’. I made the content of this topic more student-centred by focusing on how Chinese and Australian students view and understand each other. In order to encourage intercultural language learning and reflection, we maybe need to change the themes from a content driven to a conceptual approach.

Change to my practice

The changes in my teaching practice are as follows:

- spending more time getting to know my students and eliciting their prior knowledge and opinion on this topic
- using texts with multiple, cross-cultural perspectives, as well as texts generated by students from their survey results
- interactions between the teacher and students in classroom changing from ‘what’ questions to ‘why or how’ questions; more interactions between students, incorporating surveys to find out a) students own concerns, b) Australian students concerns etc.
 change to assessment; Main Task & Reflection

I changed my assessment from a traditional 500 character essay format to a more negotiated format where students contributed to or discussed openly the task, criteria and resources available for the tasks. The tasks were more personal and reflective; the criteria were expanded to provide clearer evidence of what was expected. Students were given more encouragement to use a wider range of resources.

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

First, I gave the students a personal written task to reflect on issues of interest and concern to them about living and studying in Australia. Then from that data I decided that we should focus on how Chinese and Australian students view and understand each other, and developed survey questions to help them explore stereotypes held by themselves and Australians about each other.

I collected their self-survey data, and together we designed a survey which my students then used to gather data on Aussies impressions of Chinese students. Chinese students also completed a survey about their impression on Aussie students. This information was collated and discussed to develop insights into different people’s understandings and interpretations of each other. Students then viewed a range of texts on issues facing teenagers in Australia and China in preparation for their final tasks. This research activity was the focus of their preparation for their main task of writing about their new understanding towards Australians, their culture, and the students’ future prospects of living and studying in this country.

When my students collected data, most of them found it difficult to survey others due to cultural and linguistic barriers. They were afraid to appear to be pushy or show ‘foreigners’ too much enthusiasm. However, they generally were surprised how accessible and friendly Aussies are. There were also surprised to know that ‘kai fang (liberated)’ Aussies kids can be shy like them as well.

The result of two surveys, Chinese students to Aussies students, Australian students to Chinese students, shows that Australian students are generally more positive towards the Chinese students than the Chinese students towards Australian students. Again this finding is different from the Chinese students’ expectation.

FINDINGS

About my old program – and my new program

About topics – changed from China-focus to student-focus – their life and needs here in Australia.

About texts - the same types, but influenced by new topics – looking for more diverse perspectives etc. These changes improved students’ attitudes towards this subject, as well as their ability in looking at things from a broader context and from different angles.

• My teaching practice

About classroom discussions – less content focussed, more concept focussed, more attention to learners own ideas, and experience, rather than knowing about the content (e.g. facts, knowledge). I discovered that my students were eager to express and share their personal views. My students felt that their opinions were valued and this has improved our relationship and made our learning environment a safe and relaxed one.

• Learners engagement with topic/ activity in class

Learners were more enthusiastic and more involved. Previously they felt detached from topics, and not engaged with texts. Learners’ performance was more personal, more reflective, rather than showing indifference in expressing their knowledge and completing their tasks.

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION
I discovered that focusing on more relevant issues, using more diverse texts with different perspectives, asking more open-ended questions, seeking more learner input into classroom teaching, and setting tasks which are more related to students’ lives and experiences creates an experience for students, that assists them meaningfully in their lives beyond the classroom.

The main problem I faced was not being able to prepare adequately for exploratory questioning – how to keep the interest and flow of discussion going in a dynamic way.

For learners there is still a major issue with their assumptions about the classroom, and the teaching-learning practice they are accustomed to. They don’t necessarily want to share their inner thoughts, and some of them would rather deal with personal topics (e.g. youth culture) rather than topics in relation to their country or political ideology.

Chinese students also find it difficult to research, select and read English texts to gain alternative perspectives on issues, and have not yet developed the skills to evaluate or interpret the meaning of texts. I can understand why they are reluctant in selecting their own resources since they have always been given ‘the information, the knowledge’ from their teachers who represent the authority, therefore, they are not equipped with skills in selecting resources, let alone in evaluating them. Referencing is another difficult issue Chinese students face in the Australian education system. Influenced by their previous education, they often take information on face value, they don’t question who wrote it or why, or where it came from. They think that whatever texts are given to them by teachers must be correct, so there is no need to analyse a text by asking who writes what, to whom, for what purpose. The Chinese students firmly believed the job of a teacher is like what Confucius says, “to teach, to mentor, to enlighten.” Therefore, they tend to rely on teachers for knowledge input. Old habits die hard, so it’s going to take some time and effort for them to unlearn their old habits and to accept the new habit of being an independent and responsible learner. However, as learners are not accustomed to this, they may always have some reluctance to do so, especially where alternative perspectives might challenge their own assumptions of ‘facts’.

The subject itself is a bit of an issue. For start, the name of the subject gives students the false impression that if they can read/speak Chinese, they would achieve a good grade without putting in much effort. They don’t take the subject seriously and tend to put off their Chinese work till the last minute.

### MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

I produced a new teaching program to teach the concept of youth issues, some surveys to help students explore the issue, and a new main task for the unit in which learners could express their own views.

Students undertook 2 surveys – for themselves and their Aussie classmates in order to learn more about the values and beliefs of each other, reflection (critique) about class activities or texts given, one text analysis task and one main reflective task.

All are attached, including

- Attachment one - Program (2007 Stage 1 program for Term 3)
- Attachment Two - samples of student work: text response: Is China unfairly looked on by Western eyes?
- Attachment Three - Oral Criteria (English and Chinese version)
- Attachment Four – criteria for text analysis
- Attachment Five – criteria for writing in Chinese (English and Chinese version)

### EVALUATION

- How well do you feel the investigation went? Was it valuable for you? Why/why not?

I think it was a valuable experience – it made me think more deeply about WHAT learners should explore in this program, WHAT texts and sources of texts students should engage with, WHAT types of lesson planning – including types of questions to ask that would engage learners in thinking about concepts.
through these texts, and what types of tasks would best draw out learners’ personal perspectives on the issues, and provide adequate opportunity for self-reflection.

• Was it valuable for your students? Why/why not?
I think it was very valuable for my students. However, it’s a bit hard to tell when the research was undertaken over less than a term. Whether there has been a real shift in their thinking will take longer to discover. However, they were interested in the program, actively engaged in discussion, and did, I think, learn more about themselves and others than they would do otherwise. In the past, some students ended up feeling negative about their country or government after going through a series of topics like human rights, one child policy, environmental issues, etc. This intercultural approach has made them aware not to label people/things/culture/political system as good or bad, but rather to look at things and understand why things are the way they are.

This project has influenced my thinking about planning. Teaching and assessing for this course and each topic I now cover will reflect the changes in my thinking because of this project.

REFLECTION
It was definitely a rewarding experience to participate in this project. I have learned so much about myself, my students and how engaging teaching and learning can be by taking an intercultural approach. My course has become more relevant and meaningful to my students. However, it takes up a lot of time and energy to record my lessons, keep a reflection journal, gathering data and analyse them. I think my old teaching practice was also intercultural; however, it wasn’t done holistically. After participating in this project, I realised that I have to re-consider many aspects of my teaching, for example, the whole teaching program, the texts, the questions to ask in class and the tasks for students. I intend to generate a checklist for each area of my work to make sure my teaching is consistently intercultural.

During the process of investigation, I found there wasn’t enough time to complete everything. I am quite clear about the intercultural theory; however, it’s not easy to put into practice. For example, the questioning part. I found my students couldn’t cope with the open-ended questions very well at the beginning. They were hesitant to give their answers. I need to ask them questions half way between closed and open-ended questions. When I first participated in this project, I felt I was enlightened and saved by this approach. I thought I finally know a good reason why Chinese students should take this course. Although my students enjoyed the different approach in class, I still think they don’t take the Chinese subject seriously.

This intercultural approach made me question everything I did. Do I know what the learners know? Do I know what they don’t know? How am I going to plan my lessons in order to help them build up skills they need to equip them for the Australian education system? If I think the curriculum framework too content driven, how do I change it to a more conceptual one? What concepts? How do I approach it? What does it look like? Or is it even more intercultural if we make the curriculum framework based on what’s taught in other disciplinary subjects- for example, what they teach in politics, in relation to China? I plan to observe other teachers lessons to understand the importance of intercultural approach in teaching and learning process.

The outcomes of the investigation is to make me think more about how to involve my students in the process of choosing resources, asking questions, listing criteria, setting tasks. I also need to work on breaking their stereotypes. So they won’t simply accept statements like ‘Chinese is like this, Australian is like that.’ I want my students to break their old learning habits and be critical and active learners. I can really see the important role my subject can play in making their education a smoother transition from China to Australia.

From the result of the survey, it tells me it’s definitely necessary to teach a language with an intercultural approach. When the learner knows the cultural message embedded in the language, they know they need to put the language in the context in order to know the nuance. Quite often the first language speakers mistakenly think that everyone has the same notion of a word. It’s quite true within your own culture, but it’s not always the case when it’s used in other cultures. A simple example is this, weekend means Saturday and Sunday in many cultures, however, it’s not so in places like Oman. A more complicated situation is adjectival words which need to be put into cultural context, for example, ‘kai fang’ (open). The meaning of word changes when it’s referring to different people or matters. It means open-minded when you use it to describe someone’s parents, it means reform when it’s used in ‘Economic Reform Policy’, it means promiscuous behaviour when it is used to describe a teenage girl or a woman.
This realisation of difference won’t happen if no one challenges the meaning of the word. The stereotypes Chinese people hold about western people being ‘kai fang’ will be further confirmed by the influence of films or media they have come across, so also need to be challenged.

After this survey, the students understand that Australian youths aren’t that much different from them. Deep inside, every human yearns for friendship, yearns for love. Human nature is the same whether your skin is white or yellow; your nose is high or flat. Everyone enjoys good food. Chinese students can’t understand how Australians can enjoy sandwiches for lunch. They think sandwiches are bland, they think fried noodles and rice are the best. It doesn’t mean Australians don’t like delicious food but your delicious food is not necessary mine. What you like is what you are accustomed to. It’s pointless to say whose food is better. By the same token, it’s meaningless to judge a culture as bad or good, but rather to understand why it is this way. From my students’ reflections, I can tell that they are aware of themselves using their Chinese cultural value as a standard to judge people outside of Chinese culture. This shows that they are now more receptive to people with different cultures, and they know to think twice before jumping to conclusions.
Attachment One - Program

2007 Stage 1 program for Term 3

Theme: Modernisation and social change

Content areas / issues: youth issues (adapting to Australian life; education, social life/culture)

Resources (texts):
1. Knowledge of self
   - response to questionnaire
   - articles
     - Embracing Western ways while cleaving to tradition
     - Trilogy of bitter and sweet overseas studying
     - it makes me think of Fei xiao tong
     - A film review on Qing Hong
   - Film
     - Qing hong
   - Responses in writing:
     - If I were… I would…
     - Reflection
     - Critique (views after reading an article)

2. Knowledge of others
   - local responses to survey
   - articles
     - Is China unfairly looked on by Western eyes?
     - A warning letter from Adelaide tuition centre about copyright
     - Youth issues in SA (www.shinesa.org.au)
     - My life with the Brethren
     - Speaking of young people:
       - Wearing uniforms is not a good idea
       - Computer games might be harmful

Key Interactions – key questions for discussion
1. What are youth issues for
   - Chinese overseas students?
   - Local students?
   - Students in other Chinese speaking communities?
2. What causes these issues? – which are local / global?
3. What are the similarities and differences in issues for these 3 groups?
4. How do they deal with their issues?
5. What help do they get to deal with their issues?

Process: Make process clear to develop their research skills
1. Background information of youth issues
2. Gathering information
3. Sorting information
4. Evaluate information
5. Employ information

Research focus;
- (the human nature is the same but the distance between people widen by different way of doing things)
  - Are we so different?
    - Knowledge of self
    - Knowledge of others
Do we worry different things? Why?
- Chinese international students
- Local students
- Students in China

**Classroom Tasks**
- Text analysis: interpret and respond personally to the writer’s intention, style and impact.
  - What is your personal reaction to the text?
  - What Youth Issues arise and how are they dealt with in the text?
  - Are these issues local or global?
  - How does the representation of the issue compare to your culture/experience, what is similar different?

- Writing: balanced, informative account of youth issues (through research) and a personal reflection on issues arising from study of the theme.
- Individual oral presentation/contribution to class discussion of issues across the term.

**Main Assessment Tasks**

Now that you have surveyed yourself, and Australian students about attitudes and relationships between Chinese and Australian students … and read a range of texts on issues facing young people.

1. **Text analysis:**
   Read the text ‘______ ___________’ and
   
   a) Write a short summary of the text (author, purpose, style and impact)
   
   b) reflect on cultural reasons why these students experience these difficulties
   
   c) reflect on your own feelings as you read the text (emotional response, sense of dis/agreement, desire for action etc)

2. **Oral** - present a 5 minute talk (followed by discussion) on what you believe to be the main issue inhibiting close relations between Chinese and Australian students, what evidence there is of this difficulty, what the cause of this difficulty may be, and any solutions you may have.

   (Describe situations in which has arisen, and what beliefs practices or language issuers may have contributed.)

3. **Writing in Chinese (reflection)**

   Write a letter to your parents, a report to your teacher, or a personal journal entry for yourself; Outline how your understanding of yourself and Australia students has changed, and how this new understanding might help you better adjust to living and studying in Australia. Also explain what you still see as major hurdles to improving your relations with Australian students, and performing your best at school.

   Outline how your understanding of yourself and Australian students has changed, and what features of a) Australian and b) Chinese youth culture you 1) admire and 2) would like to change, and why.
Attachment Two - Text: In China unfairly looked on by Western eyes?

Activities:

- Translate (ability in reading English text)
- Critique (what does that tell me about your critical thinking ability)
- How should we critique a text? (provide a list of question to look at the text)
- What I should do → ask them to write a reflection again

Translation

Is China unfairly looked on by Western eyes? 被不公平地看待？ 中国是不是被西方不公平地看待？

在中国，不公平地看待中国的人们能够说，中国帮助中国在世界中取得地位，所以人们倾向于

这种不公平地看待中国的现象。他们说，中国应该被西方国家公平对待，因为中国是

一个大国。所以，中国在世界中的地位应该被西方国家公

平地看待。但是，西方国家对待中国的态度却是不公平的。他们认为中国

是一个大国，但是他们对中国的态度却是不公平的。中国在世界中的地位

应该被西方国家公平地看待。
How should we critique a text?
## Attachment Three - Oral Criteria (English version)

### Language
- Fluency, accuracy,
- Clarity of speech, appropriateness to audience

### Presentation
- Eye contact
- Body language
- Appropriate use of supports

### Content & Organisation
- **Introduction**
  - Clarity of purpose

- **Body**
  - Clear line of reasoning
  - Providing multiple perspectives
  - Relevance of data
  - Effective use of evidence – paraphrasing & limited direct quoting of sources / reference
  - Clear identification of sources

- **Conclusion**
  - Clear summary of main points
  - Connection to purpose (introduction)

### Intercultural criteria

#### Active construction
- Focus on own and others interpretations of data (self expression)
- Conceptualisation of issues (rather than presentation of content data)

#### Making connections
- Relating:
  - Topic to sources, texts/data to issues/concepts
  - Issues / concepts to own experience

#### Social interaction
- Degree of engagement with audience (relate to their interest, understanding of topic)
- Use of entertaining and persuasive style

#### Reflection
- Reflection on impact of information on own understandings

#### Responsibility
- Capacity to present new information in authoritative way – evidence of thought, research, and preparation
(Oral Criteria- Chinese version):

1. _____, ___ - __

2. _____ – ___
   • __________
   • ___
   • ___

3. _____ - ___
   • __________
   • ___
   • ___

4. _____ - __

5. ____________________________
   __________
   - ___
   - ___
Attachment Four – criteria for text analysis

Criteria:
1. identify and summarise the main points
   o examining the source
   o identifying the purpose of the article
   o identify the ways the writer employed to achieve his/her purpose
2. use the main points as the basis of your response to the question
3. language and culture:
   o the use of the language (degree of sophistication)
   o notice anything cultural specifically (compare to Australian culture)
   o notice anything linguistic specifically (compare to English language)
4. structure
   o paragraphs
   o sentences
   o text type

Attachment Five – criteria for writing in Chinese
1. ______ criteria

1 content
   • Topic sentence

2 research
   • Employ resources
   • examples

3 language
   • Cx
   • Literature

4 structure
   • Paragraphs
   • Sentences
   • Text type
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1. 引言
   背景
   策略
   文化
   服务

2. 结构
   研究框架
   数据来源
   分析方法

3. 结果
   实证
   个案
   理论
   模型

4. 讨论
   结论

23/08/07  explain - negotiate criteria with Chinese stage 1 student.
   We discuss the importance of each criterion.