

ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME	SCHOOL	LANGUAGE	YEAR LEVEL
Lynn Davis	Salisbury Heights Schools	Chinese	Yr 4/5, 6/7

AREA OF INVESTIGATION

Questions

I considered two questions in relation to my pedagogical practice. These were:

What questions best elicit intercultural understandings at each year level?

Are the questions and tasks I use intercultural?

Area to investigate

I am concerned with how students articulate intercultural understandings. Through working with intercultural language learning over a number of years, I felt there was insufficient data on what students can actually articulate and understand about intercultural learning. I felt there was a need for an investigation to discover what students could say and how they say it, to address this gap.

I felt I needed to use appropriate questions to allow students to construct their own learning of language and culture, and that it is the nature of the questions I use that will allow students to show their intercultural understandings. I wanted to collect data that will indicate the student's perceptions at this year level, and to find appropriate questions to elicit this information.

I have also been interested in the talk around language in English and how this can aid and inform student learning. I focus, in this investigation, on the use of authentic texts and teacher – student interaction and student – student interaction to elicit understandings. I taped 3 lessons of different year levels to get an idea of different or similar levels of understandings.

Aspect of intercultural language and learning

Eating out in China and Australia is the topic on which I focused, from a long term plan already developed from work I did in ILTLP Phase 1.

I posed the question:

What do students already think and know about eating out and what can they notice and identify from a discussion through exploration of authentic texts?

I gave the students a placemat/menu from a Chinese fast food chicken restaurant with both Chinese and English language, and a placemat/menu from Australia in English only. I asked the students to discuss and think about the language and culture of eating out in China compared with their experience in Australia. I wanted to examine my questioning and the answers at different year levels to ascertain whether there is an inkling of evidence to show different levels or capacities for understanding, and to see if students would answer and think interculturally and if this differed across the year levels.

Planning

To plan this properly – I had to look closely at the menus myself, scrutinise the Chinese and break it down for myself, to consider what questions I needed to ask.

I also experimented with questions about texts with other year levels as a precursor to this.

It took some time to decide which texts to focus on and how to plan the negotiation of the text. I needed to think about what students could manage in one lesson and how questions would develop understanding through engagement with the text. For the purposes of this project I decided to examine one lesson closely. I hoped the conversation I recorded would show evidence of intercultural understandings. It was hoped that by using bilingual authentic texts, followed up with targeted questions would encourage students to notice difference and similarities; and to compare with and reflect on their own prior knowledge.

Change to practice

The changes to practice I made were that I took time to prepare and reflect more on the nature of my questioning; the taping of classes; and listening to what students and I say. I already discuss issues in English with students, so I felt that they would be able to comment freely in a relaxed classroom environment, in a way that they are used to. I don't always keep the teacher directed part of the lesson as long as I did for this investigation, and could tell from listening to the tape that it went on too long to keep all of the students' attention.

CLASSROOM PRACTICE

I explained to students that we would be looking closely at the text and would record the classroom brainstorm during the lesson. I organised them in pairs to discuss what they think. I handed out two placemats simultaneously and taped their reactions. This was followed by me asking them a number of questions. These were:

What do you notice?

What can you tell me about the language?

What is the same (with the two menus)?

What is different?

What do you notice is missing (from one or both menus)?

What patterns do you see in the characters?

What is missing in the language?

Why is the chicken expensive in China?

Why is the restaurant expensive?

DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

I taped three classes of different year levels and all of the data is interesting for different reasons.

Yr 6/7 'G' class

This is a very noisy group. They were mainly engaged, apart from a few who felt they had to disrupt the discussion. We all examined the two menus. One was English only and from a Chinese restaurant in Australia and one was bilingual, from a chicken restaurant in China. I asked the students to look at both. At first they were very motivated, keen, and interested in discussing lots of observations with each other. I then asked lots of questions. I knew it would take lots of questions to get the students in and engaged and the questioning changed a lot as we went in response to comments and observations. This was no surprise to me! Originally a student asked what is chop suey? – It surprised me that they didn't know that! They also asked questions about the two different prices of meatloaf. One was meatloaf only and one with other food which I explained!

There was a big discussion about prices and though they knew of exchange rates no one could remember exactly what the exchange rate was. They were very interested in costs and the nature of the

items of food. They were really trying to work out the maths and the costs

Even though some students were not engaged and only some participated, it was a very worthwhile discussion. Some students brought prior knowledge to the discussion and some were comparing their experience and knowledge with their knowledge of China – which I suggest is the point, and is evidence of the articulation of intercultural understandings.

At times the students were more interested in giving their opinions and talking with each other than listening to my insights. This is an interesting observation, as the shift of focus from the teacher and my understandings to students providing their own understandings and taking more a lead in the lesson is also evidence of a more intercultural learning environment. The conversation was dominated by some main participants. Others passively listened while others talked together; some about the task and some not.

Selection of questioning and answering transcript during Yr 6/7 discussion

T: What can you tell me about the menus? What can you tell me about the menus – straight off?

S:The roasted one is not really a traditional Chinese one – like they sell spaghetti...cheese, mashed potatoes....,

T: What else can you tell me about the menus?

S: They are in English!

T: They are in Englishbut what about one of them? One of them is not only....

S: Its got Chinese as well

T: Right, so what can you tell me about the menus – where would you expect to see these menus?

S: I don't know

T: Would you expect to see both of the menus in China?

S: No

T: Right

S: Which one is the Chinese menu?

.....

T: Why has the Chinese menu got both Chinese and English in it, if it is from China?

S: For the tourists

T: What else do you notice about the menus? Give me more information that you notice about either menu?

S: The Chinese one has its currency in Yuan

T: Very Good. Only one has its currency in Yuan, how did you know that?

S: Lots of discussion

T: It doesn't say Yuan does it? – What is there that lets you know?

S: The symbols

T: Don't call out all at once

S: What's the signs?

T: What signs? – tell me about the signs

S: The y with the lines in the middle

T: Which means what?

T :More information

S: Yuan is money

*T: So you know that sign is Yuan money. So If the cost is 20 Yuan - how much is that really?
Did you think these prices were expensive on this menu?*

S: Yes (one said no)

S: It's because it's a rip off over there

T: It's because it's a rip off over there? Is that the case? What's actually the case?

You'll learn something from this Michael.

S: It's China

T: It's China..so?

20 Yuan is one dollar, is that the correct exchange rate? (Lots of discussion....) \$ 20 in Chinese in our money.

S: Who would pay \$ 20 for a chicken?

T: What is the exact exchange rate do you know? (Lots of discussion)

Hang on, hang on, you are all talking at once. I won't pick this up on the tape if you are all talking at once.

Ssh ssh listen

It's interesting that you have worked out that Yuan is a Chinese dollar.

Selection of student questions

What is chop suey?

Why is the price different for the two meatloaf dishes?

Who would pay you \$20 for a chicken?

Why would you go all the way to China to buy a chicken?

Would you be able to barter at a restaurant?

No – because it's a restaurant

Yr 5 'E' class

This was taped during the last lesson of the day and the students were unsettled and noisy. I was getting impatient as the students were not cooperating as much as I would have liked.

T: Ok, I want you to look at the menus and I want you to tell me what you notice about the menus.

Students stated the obvious and laughed as they weren't sure why I was asking about them.

S: It's big. They are in English and in Chinese.

I find I often repeat student statements for the tape and to reinforce to them that I understand what they have said.

T: Good observation

S: There are no drinks on the menu

T: I hadn't noticed that!

S: There are a lot of chicken dishes.

T: Very good

S: The big one is Chinese food and the little one isn't

S: One is a take away and one is a dine in.

T: Which one is a menu from Australia and which one is a menu from somewhere else?

S: That one's from China and that one is

T: On the little one, what do you notice about the money values?

S: They are all Yuan.

T: How much is it for the whole chicken? Y80.00 divided by 6

Lots of discussion about costs and China. They include information about bird flu and the fact they eat dogs in their answers. Students were telling each other to shush.

Yr 4/5 'C' class

T: What do you notice about the menus?

S: Titles, prices, food names, in English and in Chinese. The one in Chinese and in English is better. Some have pictures.

Teacher questions :

What do you think about the Yuan price?

What do you know about the Yuan?

Is 80 Yuan expensive for a chicken?

T: Why do you think chicken is so expensive?

S: They kill them straight away.

S: The Chinese are poor. – They want to make lots of money?

T: Who will go in the restaurant and buy them?

What else do you notice about the menus?

S: Chow Mein?

T: The words Chow Mein? Is that a? What language is Chow Mein do you think?

S: Russian?

I then stumbled through an n explanation of chowmein that was not well explained. – It didn't matter!

T: Good question G. What is chop suey?

What do you notice about the headings on the menus?

S: They are big, they have main courses and stuff

T: They are both English headings? What is missing?

FINDINGS

My findings confirmed what I thought was the case.

My questions are many and varied and changed along with the particular conversations.

Broad open questioning, like 'what do you notice?' can bring a multitude of responses that are not what you expect or not necessarily what you desire. However, every comment is valid as the student circles around the area of intercultural conversation.

At primary level, lots of specific questions, rather than broad questions, can allow you to guide the conversation. It is important to ask a mixture of different kinds of questions. It is interesting to find the students' interests and personal focus.

It is hard to have a whole classroom discussion for a great length of time – it can feel frustrating when not all are involved and talk over the discussion.

Some learners are a lot more engaged and deep thinking than others.

The students like to talk and discuss things amongst themselves, but this is difficult to record.

Many students were interested and motivated by discussions about authentic texts.

Some comments were negative, but not too offensive. One student, who is often negative, hates Chinese and will not engage in language at all, took delight in calling out 'what a rip off'.

It is excruciating at times asking lots of questions and even more frustrating listening to the transcript.

Some of my questions are large and complex and are only partially formed in my mind.

Sometimes I ask questions one after the other and change them to form the exact question for the exact response.

The word 'chow Mein' caused some discussion and I didn't explain it very well.

I used a variety of questions, and some answers from the students I value more than others. It is clear which answers I value from my responses on the tape. I sometimes say 'good observation' etc

INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

I was pleased with the level of detail in the conversations and discussion.

The students were interested and endeavoured to answer the questions. It took a while to get to the point or the answer I was seeking.

It doesn't matter what answer they arrive at. The main thing is they look, discuss, interact and think (so maybe need to question the 'what I am seeking' part of my classroom practice).

I believe I have a lot of data in three lessons that would need more time to interpret more fully.

It is very time consuming listening to the tape and typing up the content.

I need more time to listen to the tapes in order to delve into more thoughts and could provide more evidence to support some of my claims.

The tapes show

- that the classes were engaged, interested and curious
- able to articulate opinions of an intercultural nature
- that the students were not overly intimidated by the language in Chinese
- students endeavouring to answer questions honestly and openly
- it took a lot of questions to get to what I deemed to be the nitty gritty
- many students brought prior knowledge to the conversation, and some of this was surprising (how well do I know my students?)
- the students all showed some common interests and focus even though they were different ages
- the older children appeared to go a little deeper earlier (I was interested in whether there would be differences between the groups)
- it felt like the younger students took longer to shift into intercultural understandings
- the yr 4/5 class started with physical, obvious, observations, such as 'it's big ...'
- I would constantly need to relate students' comments to my knowledge and experience
- sometimes I needed to discuss the students' comments and meaning more to understand where they were coming from
- the students like to ask questions as well as answer them
- the students like discussing things with each other, and some like to talk to the teacher

MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

I attach two menus that were shown to the students and a tape of three classes of discussion (not included on the website).

I don't include student work as the focus is on teacher questioning and student answers.

I've included only small transcripts of some conversations as I found this time consuming and difficult to do correctly.

EVALUATION

It was very useful to look at my questioning and the students' answers.

I don't think it led me to any great surprises.

I felt our discussions have been interesting in the past and the interactions led to great conversations that allow the students to think outside the square.

More projects of this type would reap more data and more guided questioning would provoke more evidence of intercultural understandings.

I feel I will continue to discuss and compare, and use authentic texts in the future.

It is worthwhile to persevere with student – teacher and student – student interaction like this even though it can be tiresome and frustrating at times. These exchanges can encourage thinking skills and give time for students to air their opinions and insights.

REFLECTION

Much of my reflection has been incorporated into the rest of the document except to say that I found my record of the tape may not be absolutely accurate and would rather someone transcribed the important pieces to ensure accuracy.

This has been an interesting project- next time it would be useful to have a day allowed to write up the project and fewer days used for the other aspects of the project.