## ILTLP CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION REPORT

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<tr>
<th>TEACHER’S NAME</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>YEAR LEVEL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diana Irons</td>
<td>St Mary’s College, 164 Harrington Street, Hobart Tasmana 7001</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Gr 9 and 10</td>
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### AREA OF INVESTIGATION

At the start of the ILTLP project, a school trip to Japan was already planned and I was encouraged to make use of this in choosing my area of investigation. There are a number of students in this class, however, who did not go to Japan and I was keen for my project to benefit those students as much as possible also.

In reflecting on which areas to address in trying to support students to become more intercultural, I came to the conclusion that the following issues are the ones I was most keen to address.

### Interculturality

Students in general are surprisingly unaware of the differences and similarities between the cultures of native-born Australians, as well as between their own and Aboriginal or non-Australian cultures in Australia.

While they cannot help but become aware of the obvious similarities and differences between their own culture and that of others, in my experience, students tend to take these experiences on face value and as indicative of the whole picture. This applies to students from all spheres – those who study Japanese only, those who have already participated in trips to Japan, those who have hosted or met visiting students, or those who have encountered people of different cultures here in Australia.

Both of the above results in generalisations which in turn can lead to either negative or positive stereotyping and personal expectations. In general, without prompting, they are not in the habit of investigating further to test the veracity of these or to increase their knowledge beyond their actual experience or what is ‘taught’ in class.

My aim therefore was to encourage students to avoid just experiencing passively but rather to actively strive to develop the habit of questioning and analysing what they see and hear regarding both their personal experiences as well as aspects outside of these, with their own culture as a basis.

### Language

I was keen to stimulate students to become more competent in the language by helping them to become more aware of the language they lack to:

- operate on a normal daily basis
- question people about their culture in order to allow them to put the above aims into practice
- to encourage them to try to find strategies for dealing with this lack of language while in-country or when dealing with visitors here from other countries

I decided to use a questionnaire format with discussion around the questions and answers with students keeping a journal of their reflections and experiences. My hopes were that this would also best serve those students who did not have the in-country experience through sharing of information with those who did.

My quandary was whether to aim my investigation at a specific area of their experience or to aim for a general overview. I chose the latter.
I was keen for the purposes of the project for students to explore their pre-departure thoughts and preconceptions and to influence their thinking as little as possible. I felt, therefore, that by giving a minimal amount of cultural information pre-departure, students would be compelled to observe, question, experiment, discover and develop their own strategies in order to complete the questionnaire. I also decided not to supply any Japanese (besides the language that I felt was necessary for safety or politeness) in order for students to develop their own strategies to deal with their lack of language.

The questions were designed to act as a spring board to give the students a starting point and some tools to start this intercultural journey by:
- increasing students’ awareness of what it means to become an ‘intercultural’ person so that they were more aware of what to aim for
- attempting to ‘train’ the students to develop a life-long habit of actively striving to do this
- asking them to assess their existing levels of interculturality at the start of the project for later comparison

Through the questionnaire, I was keen for students to reflect on and clarify in their own minds:
- their existing perceptions and expectations about their own culture and that of other Australians for later sharing and comparison
- their existing perceptions and expectations about Japan, it’s people and it’s customs for later sharing and comparison

The aim was that through the questions, students would be alerted to and be more observant and reflective about:
- the visible aspects of culture as well as aspects of “unseen culture” both in Australia and in Japan
- their own language, reactions and behaviour in different situations here in Australia as well as how they might react in similar situations as well as totally unfamiliar situations
- the language, reactions and behaviour of Japanese people in various situations
- any aspects that they discovered that were not covered in the questionnaire or that sparked their interest

Section A
This section was designed to help students to become more aware of what it means to be an intercultural person, the interconnectedness of language-learning and cultural awareness, and the importance of actively striving to become this way in today’s world.

Section B
This section consisted of two parts.

The first part was a reading which was included to help alert students to the differences between culture, personal culture and universal culture.

The second part consisted of questions each of which are divided into those which were to be answered before the trip commenced (denoted by “B” after the question number), and those which were to be answered either after or during the trip (denoted by “AD” after the question number).

These were designed to give just a few examples of some cultural behaviours and language that are a part of any culture in any country. Included were some open-ended questions designed to:
- urge students to reflect more deeply on and try to clarify their thinking about some of their existing experiences, perceptions and expectations about these
- give some ideas about how to be observant by giving students examples of the types of questions they might pose themselves about their cultural experiences on the trip and in the future.

Section C
These questions were an extension of the above. The questions concerned their home-stay but my hopes were that this would urge students to extend these kinds of reflections to other areas of their experience also.

Section D
Areas covered were (a) Family (b) Housing (c) House Rules (d) Daily Routine and School.

Section E
General suggestions about completing the questionnaire.
CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Students were given the questionnaire and a general explanation of how the project would be conducted. I decided not to go into too much detail about my aims for the project as I felt this would influence the students’ thinking prevent me from gaining a true reflection on the effectiveness of the questionnaire itself.

Students were asked to respond to each question (where applicable) in three ways. They were asked to:

1. Give information about their own culture and lifestyle as well as their own thoughts and opinions before the trip. My aim was to enable students to share and compare this information to help them become more aware of the similarities and differences within their own culture.

2. Try to predict the answers to the same questions when applied to Japan and the Japanese people. My aim was to enable students to identify their existing perceptions and expectations for later sharing and comparison.

3. Students who participated in the trip were then asked to answer the questions based on their observations during their in-country experience for later sharing and comparison.
DATA OR INFORMATION GATHERED

▲ Before the trip, all the “before” questions were answered by students. Section A and E were answered and discussed at some length before the trip to check students’ understanding. There was also some discussion about students’ answers to a few of the questions from Section B.
▲ The remainder of the questionnaire was completed during and after the trip. All students’ journals were then distributed to all students. Students were asked to read everyone else’s journals. Only one section discussed with photo sharing in class due to time pressures.
▲ At the end of the project, I explained my original aims for the project in detail in order that the students could evaluate the effectiveness of the project in light of these. Students were asked to do this evaluation by completing a survey. The aims of the survey were also explained in detail. An appropriate survey with slightly different wording was given according to whether students had or had not participated in the trip (brackets in survey questions indicate the wording on non-participants’ surveys). The survey consisted of questions which required the students to give a comment. Most questions also required the students to use the following ratings in their evaluation:
  a. not at all / none
  b. not very / not much / a little
  c. quite a lot
  d. a lot / very
▲ The survey was broken down into the following sections:
  A. Your own culture and Australian culture in general
  B. Different cultures
  C. Personal perceptions and expectations
  D. General
▲ In order to try and identify a trend in students’ answers:
  - I collated all the students’ comments for each question.
  - I generated a table containing all students’ ratings on effectiveness for each question.

**Survey Questions and Table of Results**

**A. Your own culture and Australian culture in general**

1. Throughout the questionnaire, you were asked to reflect on aspects of your own culture and lifestyle as well as that of other Australians. Were you in the habit of doing this before completing this project?

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2. In striving to become more intercultural in your thinking, it is important to reflect on and become more aware of the differences and similarities within the Australian culture. Through the questionnaire, you were able to compare other peoples’ answers about their own culture with your own. How useful was this project for alerting you to these?

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3. Have you come to any new conclusions about other Australian people or about the Australian culture in general through this process?

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4. Try to give as many examples as you can about anything in other people’s answers about their own culture that surprised you.

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**B. Different cultures**
FINDINGS AND INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION

Below is a summary of student responses under each heading, along with my personal responses to these findings.

A. Your own culture and Australian culture in general

▲ Summary of student responses:
- Most responded that they were not in the habit of reflecting on their own culture but more often reflect on that of other nationalities overseas.
- Many felt that the project was beneficial in compelling them to do this more.
- Most felt that the project had shown up a real lack in their knowledge about the Australian culture.
- Some found few differences between their own culture and that of their classmates. The indicated that because they all attend the same school and come from fairly similar backgrounds, they would have learned more by comparing with other schools in other parts of the state or country or people of differing economic and social backgrounds.
- Some were surprised on hearing the differences between others’ own cultures and their own and indicated that as a result, they are more aware of the diversity within the Australian culture.
- Many indicated that their opinions about Australian culture had been changed to varying degrees on hearing these.
- Some recognised that they have some stereo-typical views about some other Australians as well as other nationalities living in Australia.
- Some indicated that they intend to be more open-minded about others in the future.
- Some indicated that they feel more motivated to make people from a different nationality feel more accepted.

▲ The aim of this section was to gauge whether the questionnaire had been successful in increasing students’ awareness about their own culture as well as that of other Australians in general. It was also to assess whether this had changed their thinking in any way and whether these changes had caused any potential changes in their behaviour.

Part of the aim was for students to consider not only those of a different nationality living in Australia, but also Australian-born people with different personal cultures. Some commented in response to the former only. On the whole, however, I feel the aims of this section were mostly achieved.

B. Different cultures

▲ Summary of student responses:
- Most responded that they were not in the habit of reflecting on the similarities between Australian and different nationalities but are more aware of and more often reflect on the differences.
- Most responded that the questionnaire was effective in alerting them to these.
- Some responded that they do this instinctively as this makes it easier to relate to the other culture.
- These found that the questionnaire did not make a significant difference.
- Some felt that the questionnaire had made them more observant about these during the trip than they would have been.
- Some feel that an increased awareness of these encourages greater cultural understanding between nationalities and helps counter stereo-typical views.
- Some responses to Q9 indicated that students did not apply the skill of noticing similarities to this question, but rather answered generally about the project.
- Many felt that they had moved to varying degrees from just being aware of differences and similarities to using that awareness to interact in a more intercultural way.

▲ The aim of this section was to assess:
- whether students had become more aware of the many similarities as well as differences that exist between cultures of different countries
- whether this changed their thinking in any way
- whether these changes had caused any potential changes in their behaviour.

▲ It seems the aims of the first two aspects were well achieved on the whole but more for some than others. Regarding the third aspect, students’ expressed good intentions for positive behavioural change towards not only Japanese people, but towards anyone of a different culture. It remains to be
seen whether these intentions will be converted into action which I believe has some implications for my teaching.

C. Personal perceptions and expectations

▲ Summary of student responses:
- Most felt they were not in the habit of continually questioning and analysing their own perceptions and expectations about both Australia and Japan and their people.
- Most felt that the questionnaire was effective in alerting them to this.
- Most students indicated that hearing other peoples' answers was more effective for gaining deeper insights and a wider view of both cultures than if they had not had this opportunity, but expectedly more so in regards to the Japanese culture.
- The ratings to the above of students who did not participate on the trip were as expected, significantly higher than those who did.
- Most students felt that their existing perceptions and expectations were not all that accurate about either culture before the project, with a leaning to less accuracy about the Japanese culture.
- Most students misunderstood and answered Q15 in regard to Japan instead of Australia.
- The responses to Q19 asking for aspects that surprised them showed up students' pre-departure preconceptions and expectations over a wide range of cultural aspects. I believe not providing too much cultural information before the trip was effective for discovering these. It demonstrates the importance of establishing students' existing ideas when exploring new cultural topics. It also causes me to question how these preconceptions have developed and whether this is a reflection on my teaching up to now as well as text books and the like.
- Some students were surprised and some perhaps a little disappointed that the Japanese lifestyle is more Westernized than they thought.

▲ The aim of this section was to assess:
- whether students had become more aware of their own preconceptions and expectations
- whether these had been challenged for accuracy
- whether there had been any changes to their thinking through this
- whether any changes had caused any potential changes in their behaviour.

▲ I feel the aims of the first two aspects were achieved. Regarding the third and fourth, the ratings and comments did not really tie in but the comments indicated that there had been positive changes to varying degrees. Non-participants indicated a higher degree of positive change

D. In general

▲ Summary of student responses:
Regarding posing their own questions:
- Some indicated that the example questions had given them a better idea of the kinds of questions that they themselves could pose in the future
- Some felt they were good examples but that they need practise to pose their own.
- Some indicated that the questions had stimulated further questions to themselves aside from those on the questionnaire

▲ I believe the aim of giving students example questions was effective in giving students a starting point. My aim, however, of urging students to use these as a basis for posing their own questions was only partially successful in that some seemed to see this as a skill which must be acquired rather than trying to develop a questioning mind.

Regarding being more observant:
- Section D was in the questionnaire but as we had not completed this section pre-departure, many students had not read ahead. Some students’ responses indicated that they thought the question was based on this section only. As a result, theses students mostly indicated that they had been observant but that the questionnaire had not made much difference.
- Others based their answers on Sections B and C. Some indicated that they had observed some of these cultural behaviours just a little more than they would otherwise have.
I believe, therefore, that this aim of the questionnaire was not very successfully achieved due to lack of clarification by me, but seems to have been more so for non-participants.

Regarding student views on the most effective part of the questionnaire for contributing to changes in thinking and levels of interculturality, the responses were:

- Section A
- The “Before” and after “Questions”
- Comparison of answers
- Discovering similarities between cultures
- The project as a whole with no section standing out above the others

The students’ comments were very informative for my future teaching as particular aspects that were emphasised were:

- exploring what culture is
- lack of knowledge about Australia’s culture
- stereotyping

Regarding language:
All students indicated that they have been spurred on to becoming more competent in the language for the purposes of:
- travelling to Japan in the future
- gaining more cultural knowledge
Q25 was not applicable as no language was provided.

G. Conclusion

Regarding the effectiveness of the project as a whole:

- Some felt that the project was very effective
- Some felt it was effective to a degree
- Most felt it would have been much more effective and interesting given much more time and discussion before the trip, as well as with more discussion and photo-sharing since our return
- Most felt that they have “started along the path” to becoming more intercultural and indicated the intention to continue on this path in the future.

My observations about the survey responses:

- Some students misinterpreted questions or did not read them properly. These should have been discussed more fully.
- Some a, b, c or d ratings did not tie in with the corresponding comments
- Some comments were not applicable to the question but were more applicable to other questions
- Some students did not comment on some questions
- Some ratings may have been influenced by the fact that one or two students’ comments showed a lack of reading of others’ journals as well as a lack of effort in responding to the questionnaire.
- Some students found it difficult to separate the degree of influence on their thinking between being in Japan and completing the project
- Some students seem to already be more intercultural than others due to such things as coming from a mixed background, travelling, hosting students etc.
- More intellectually able students understood the questions and could express their answers more easily, especially concerning more abstract concepts.
- Because the home-stay families and the school gave the students special treatment and changed their normal routines, students did not gain a true picture of everyday life.
- Because the home-stay and school experience both occurred in a small city, students tended to view this as representative of Japan’s culture as a whole.
- Following on from the above, Section D was completed after the trip. Students were only able to answer the observable aspects of these questions. My presumption that students would try to question people as best they could about the unobservable aspects without the necessary language being supplied was incorrect.
MATERIALS AND EXEMPLARS

- Materials supplied to the students (all of which can be supplied):
  - The Questionnaire
  - Final survey with instructions and advice about its aims
  - Questions in Section D in Japanese on our return
- Materials supplied by the students (all of which can be supplied):
  - Journals containing their answers and reflections about the questions in the questionnaire.
  - Comments and ratings for final survey questions

EVALUATION

I have learned a great deal from my project. At the start, I did really know how to begin. I was not clear myself about the meaning of interculturality and all it’s different aspects, and I certainly had no idea about how to encourage students to strive for this. Through having to prepare the project, as well as through reading and advice given by leaders and mentors, I feel much clearer now on what we are trying to achieve. I feel also that the project has given me some tools and methods which I would not otherwise have had. Based on my students’ responses, It has certainly showed me how much more effective this approach is compared to concentrating mainly on language, with a little culture stuffed in when time, and this just handed over as a set of facts.

I have always wanted to encourage students to not just accept what they are taught in class or what they read and hear, but to investigate further. Not having lived in Japan for longer than three weeks, however, I have never been completely confident in my own cultural knowledge. I feel that using the Intercultural Language Learning method will allow me to travel on a journey of enquiry and learning along with the students instead of feeling like I have to be all-knowing and the major source of their knowledge.

I feel on the whole, that the project was successful in a variety of ways. The following are the areas from which I feel most benefits have been gained:

- The combination of the student responses to the questionnaire and to the survey have been very informative for my future teaching. It is very clear now where there are ‘gaps’ in these students’ cultural knowledge and which topics and aspects need more exploration, reflection and discussion.
- I believe that I am more aware of their shortcomings in striving to become more intercultural and intend try and tackle these.
- While students found this project all-consuming and stressful at times, many have commented that they are looking forward to studying in this way in the next few years which is pleasing.

Problems that became apparent:

- I was far too ambitious in planning a project of this size in the time available as I did not take into account the actual amount of contact time I would have with students during the duration of the project. This meant that language learning (besides the language which was supplied for Section D after the trip) was badly neglected.
- I question my decision to not supply the language for students to be able to pose questions to their host families about school life and other aspects which they could not observe as in some situations, students were forced to develop strategies for lack of language. However, I think the opportunity to find out important cultural information was missed.
- There were flaws in the design of my survey. To the students, some of the questions seemed to be repeated as they found it hard to pick up some of the nuances which negated some comments.

In conclusion, had I not tried to use the trip as part of this project, I would not have conducted it in the way I did. In future, similar questions will be posed to students, but not collectively and over a number of years before participation in a trip. Some questions would be adapted, some left out and students would be asked to help design further questions based on finding out facts as well as topics in which they are interested.

REFLECTION

I genuinely feel I have gained an enormous amount of benefit from this and I am extremely grateful for all the continual help and support received from everyone involved in the ILTLP project.