



**Australian Government**

**Department of Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations**

# **Teaching and Learning Languages: A Guide**

**Practice example**

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**A reflection on teaching and learning**

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#### Disclaimer

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

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## Introduction to examples

Collected here are examples of teachers' work. These are drawn from teacher practice and are included here to exemplify aspects of teaching, learning and assessing languages, as discussed in the *Guide*. Teachers were invited to share their planning and programming documents and members of the project team worked with them to further develop aspects of their work.

### Programs

The collection of programs includes primary, middle and senior secondary long and short-term programs. These contain annotations designed to point out specific points of interest for you to consider in your reading of them. At the end of each program you will find a commentary that describes how the program exemplifies selected sections of the *Guide*.

### A selection of teachers' work

This is a selection of programs and parts of programs, plans for classroom teaching, planned assessment tasks, descriptions of the teaching and learning contexts, investigations and evaluations of practice, and reflections on current practices. It shows teachers engaged in professional thinking, planning, reassessing, and evaluating what they teach, how they teach and who they teach.

### About the examples

- These examples of teachers' planning, practice and reflection are provided for you to examine, consider and perhaps use in expanding your own understanding of language teaching and learning. We know that teachers learn best from other teachers and so we encourage you to look across the set of examples in all languages rather than just the language(s) you teach.
- The examples of teachers' work included here belong to individual teachers and are taught in a particular context which means that you will not find models that you can instantly adopt and teach. Rather, you will find ideas about teaching and learning that you can use by adapting and reworking them to produce programs, classroom teaching, learning and assessment practices that you can use in your own context.
- The examples of teachers' work are not included here because they constitute 'best practice' or are exemplars of definitive programs for languages teaching and learning. You will find some outstanding approaches to planning and teaching that advance our understanding of how to make languages teaching and learning a rich and effective learning experience for students. You will also find teachers' honest reflections and evaluations of their pedagogies, questioning what they do and rethinking what they will do.
- The examples of teachers' work may include some pedagogies of which you may be critical. However, you will also find professional educators striving to make sense of their work with students, language teaching and language learning.

<b>Example</b>	A reflection on teaching and learning
<b>Language</b>	Chinese
<b>Level</b>	Secondary
<b>Teacher</b>	Toni Chen (SA) In the following reflection a teacher discusses her practice in the light of intercultural language teaching and learning.

<p><b>Teaching and learning</b>  Classroom interactions  The nature of interactional language  Tasks and task-types  <i>Student engagement</i>  <i>Recognising the diversity of learners and their life-worlds</i>  Technology in language teaching and learning</p>	<p>This reflection on teaching and learning in an intercultural way reinforces the idea that all people are social beings who interpret the world through their own social and cultural perceptions and values i.e. their intra-culturality. This means that teachers need to understand their students as individual, social and cultural beings who bring this diversity to the learning process – as well as cognitive diversity. The students are then central to the learning process rather than the learning materials or tasks occupying this prominent place.</p>
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## **Reflection (Chinese background speaker/first language program)**

To enhance my teaching I have incorporated intercultural principles into my planning and teaching practice. I understand that intercultural language learning in Chinese first language programs involves thinking about the context, 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.

To teach the topic 'Youth Issues' I made the content more student-centred by focusing on how Chinese and Australian students view and understand each other. In order to encourage intercultural language learning and reflections, I changed from a content-driven style to a conceptual approach.

My teaching practice changed in three important ways:

- I spent more time getting to know my students and eliciting their prior knowledge and opinions on this topic.
- I used texts with multiple, cross-cultural perspectives, as well as texts generated by students from their survey results.
- My interactions with students in the classroom changed from 'what' questions to 'why or how' questions; I encouraged more interactions between students, incorporating surveys to find out Chinese students' own concerns, and Australian students' concerns.
- I changed my assessment from a traditional 500-character essay format to a more negotiated format where students contributed to or discussed the task openly, including criteria and resources available. The tasks set were more personal and reflective; the assessment criteria were expanded to provide clearer evidence of what was expected. Students were encouraged to use a wider range of resources.

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 Australian impressions of Chinese students. Chinese students also completed a survey about their impression of Australian 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 understandings of 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 display too much enthusiasm towards 'foreigners'. However, they generally were surprised how accessible and friendly Australians are. There were also surprised to know that *kai fang* (liberated) Australian students can also be shy, like them.

The result of two surveys, Chinese students to Australian students and 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.

As a result of the changes I made I noticed:

- improved student attitudes towards this subject, as well as their ability to look at things from a broader context and from different angles.
- less content-focused, more concept-focused classroom discussions, more attention to learners' own ideas, and experiences, rather than knowing about the factual content. 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' were more enthusiastic and more involved, whereas previously they had felt detached from topics, and not engaged with texts. In activities, their performance was more personal and more reflective, rather than showing indifference when expressing their knowledge or completing their tasks.

I discovered that focusing on more relevant issues, using more diverse texts with different perspectives, asking more open-ended questions and seeking more learner input into classroom teaching was beneficial. I also began to set tasks which were more related to students' lives and experiences and which therefore offered them a more meaningful learning experience, and which assisted them in their lives beyond the classroom. The main problem I faced was how 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 about selecting their own resources, because they have always been given such information or knowledge by their teachers. Teachers represent authority to Chinese students, and therefore, students are not equipped with skills in selecting resources, let alone in evaluating them. Referencing is another issue Chinese students' face in the Australian education system. Influenced by their previous education, they often take information at face value; they don't question who wrote it or why, or its authenticity. They think any text given by a teacher must be correct, so there is no need to analyse a text by asking who wrote it, to whom and for what purpose. The Chinese students firmly believe that the job of a teacher is just as 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 style of being an independent and responsible learner. However, as learners are not accustomed to this, there may always be some reluctance to do so, especially where alternative perspectives might challenge their own assumptions about what are facts.

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, gather data and analyse it. I think my old teaching practice was also intercultural; however, it wasn't done holistically. I realise now that I have to re-consider many aspects of my teaching; for example, the program, the texts, the questions to ask in class, and the tasks I set for students. I intend to generate a checklist for each area of my work to make sure my teaching is consistently intercultural.

While I am quite clear about the intercultural theory, I feel it is not easy to put into practice; for example, the questioning part. I found my students couldn't cope with open-ended questions very well at the beginning. They were hesitant to give their answers. I needed to ask them questions that were half-way between closed and open-ended questions. When I first participated in this project, I felt I was enlightened and saved by intercultural language learning.

This intercultural orientation has 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 be equipped within the Australian education system? If I think the curriculum framework is 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 design the curriculum framework to be based on what's taught in other disciplines? For example, what is taught in politics in relation to China? I plan to observe other teachers' lessons to understand the importance of the intercultural approach in the teaching and learning process. I also need to work on challenging students' stereotyped ideas, 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 become 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.

Results of the survey tell me it's definitely necessary to teach a language with an intercultural approach. When the learner understands cultural messages embedded in a language, they know they need to view the language in context in order to understand its nuances. Quite often, the first language speakers mistakenly think that everyone shares the same understanding 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 relates to adjectival words that need to be put into cultural context, for example, *kai fang* (open), the meaning of word changes when its socio-cultural setting changes. It means 'open-minded' when you use it to describe someone's parents, it means 'reform' when it's used as 'economic reform policy', it means 'promiscuous behaviour' when it is used to describe a teenage girl or a woman. This realisation won't happen if no one challenges the meaning of the word, and the stereotypical view some Chinese hold about western people being *kai fang* will be further confirmed by the influence of films or media they have encountered.

After completing the survey, the students come to understand that Australian youth are not very 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 far better. It doesn't mean Australians don't like delicious food, but one person's delicious food is not necessarily another's; what you like is what you are accustomed to. It's pointless to ask whose food is better. By the same token, it's meaningless to judge a culture as bad or good, but we should rather try to understand why it is a certain way. From my students'

reflections, I can tell that they are aware that they are using their Chinese cultural values as standards to judge people from outside the Chinese culture. This shows that they are now more receptive to people from different cultural backgrounds, and they know to think twice before jumping to conclusions.