

Methodology to enhance Proficiency and foster Positive Attitudes

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Table of Contents

Abstract

The Presenter

I INTRODUCTION

II THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT OF AUSTRALIA

II.1 The Multicultural Social Context

II.2 Australia's Global Context

II.3 The Language Education Policy Context

II.4 The Need for Teaching Reform

III THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT

IV THE METHODOLOGY

V TEACHING PROJECTS

V.1 On-Arrival Programme for Immigrants

V.2 College French

V.2.i Project Description

V.2.ii Project Outcomes

V.3 University Language Programme

V.3.i Project Justification

V.3.ii Project Description

V.3.iii Project Outcomes

Problems

Teachers' Responses

Overall Assessment

Confidence

Use of English

Language Proficiency

Cross-Cultural Attitudes

Range of contacts

Timing

Amount of Time

Response of Community Members

VI CONCLUSION

REFERENCES

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Abstract

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This paper outlines research undertaken by the presenter over the last twenty years into aspects of methodology in second language teaching. The paper discusses the theoretical factors that have led to the author's use of "community involvement" (i.e., the involvement of the learners in the surrounding communities, especially the community of speakers of the language) as the central organising factor in language teaching. It refers to studies of the effect of such methods on the development of language proficiency and of more positive cross-cultural attitudes. It also discusses implications for syllabus design and assessment and reports on a number of empirical studies incorporating the methods discussed. In particular, reference is made to a major, nationally funded research and development project undertaken at Griffith University in 2000-2001 under the leadership of Elaine Wylie and the presenter. The project incorporates "community involvement" methods into the teaching programmes of Chinese, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish. The results, which point to the considerable success of the methodology, are reported, as are the difficulties encountered.

The Presenter

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Innovations in Methodology for the Teaching of Heritage and Other Languages

D. E. Ingram

I INTRODUCTION

The basic principles of the methodology to be discussed here are not new and rely for their justification on evidence related to the nature of language and language learning, influenced by a realisation of the social and educational context in which the students live and learn. The methodology to be discussed and the programmes in which it has been implemented and evaluated are considered in two broad contexts: the social and educational context of Australia and the basic theoretical (i.e., linguistic and psycholinguistic) context.

II THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT OF AUSTRALIA

Three broad contexts will be considered: the nature of Australian society as represented in the multicultural social context, the global context within which the nation trades, and the language education context.

II.1 The Multicultural Social Context: A major and abiding influence on Australian language policy and, supposedly, on language teaching practice since the early 1970s has been the concept of Australia as a multicultural society [see the first national policy in Lo Bianco 1987, and the earlier reports, SSCEA 1984, Galbally Review 1978, Department of Education 1976]. Ethnically, Australia is one of the more diverse nations. Demographic data show that 22% of the Australian population were born overseas and a further 27% have at least one parent born overseas. This diversity escalated through the last half of the 20th century: in 1947, only 10% of the Australian population was born overseas with 81% of those coming from English-speaking countries whereas, by 1998, only 39% of the overseas born had come from English-speaking countries. The 1996 census data indicated that 15% of the population speaks a language other than English at home while 81% spoke only English though the wording of the question suggests that these figures greatly under-estimate the actual number of speakers of other languages. [Figures taken from the website of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and based on the 1996 census data: www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40].

II.2 Australia's Global Context: This domestic diversity is complemented by the increasing globalisation of Australian business, whose international trade is predominantly with non-European, non-English speaking countries, a fact which, since 1991, has profoundly influenced Australian language education policy [see DEET 1991, 1991a, COAG 1994]. In 1997-98, for example, 85% of

Australia's export merchandise went to countries other than the United States and New Zealand, about 55% went to East Asia, and 70% went to countries whose populations are predominantly non-European [Market Development Task Force Secretariat and the Trade and Economic Analysis Branch 1998]. Also of economic significance and adding considerably to the diversity of the people living in Australia are the numbers of foreign tourists and students who, in 1999 but with substantial increases since then, totalled approximately 3.4 million, equivalent to 18% or one in six of the Australian population [Market Development Task Force Secretariat and the Trade and Economic Analysis Branch 1999a: 32].

II.3 The Language Education Policy Context: This situation, in which the population is culturally and linguistically diverse and international relations (especially trade) are increasingly with non-English speaking nations, has profound implications for the language education system, the goals for which, in the present writer's view but also accepted in the various State and national language education policies, are:

- the development of language proficiency,
- the development of cultural knowledge and understanding, and
- the fostering of favourable cross-cultural attitudes.

So, for example, the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, citing the earlier 1987 policy, states:

... language learning and maintenance are valuable because:

1. *proficiency in languages other than English enriches our community intellectually, educationally and culturally;*
2. *language proficiency and associated cross-cultural knowledge contribute to economic, diplomatic, strategic, scientific and technological development ...; and*
3. *language proficiency improves social cohesion, communication and understanding throughout the Australian community. [DEET 1991a: 62]*

In justifying the strong focus it places on the learning of Asian languages, the National Asian Languages Strategy sets as goals the attainment of both language skills and cultural understanding, saying:

... it is critical that Australia attaches the highest priority to the adoption and implementation of a long-term strategy to ensure that the Australian workforce of the future is equipped with language skills, and associated skills of cultural awareness, of direct relevance to our national economic interest. [COAG 1994: 14]

The Queensland language syllabuses set common global aims, which fall into four broad categories: the development of language proficiency, development

of better understanding of their own and the target cultures, fostering positive attitudes (especially cross-cultural attitudes and attitudes to language learning), and the attainment of aims relevant to other vocational, economic, and academic activities [e.g., Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies 2001: 5]

Such considerations have led to a very diverse language education system. The current national language policy, adopted in 1991 and much neglected since the advent of the present Federal government in 1996, identifies fourteen priority languages: Aboriginal languages, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese (the largest language in the education system), Korean, Modern Greek, Russian, Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese [Department of Employment, Education and Training 1991: 16]. The more recently adopted national Asian languages strategy, which is still actively supported, identifies as the four highest priority Asian languages, Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Indonesian [Council of Australian Governments 1994: v]. In fact, many more languages are taught in the Australian education system, with the most recently available figures showing that approximately 60 languages other than English (or LOTEs) are taught in Primary schools and more than 50 in Secondary schools [cf. Australian Language and Literacy Council 1996: 5 – 6, Appendix IV].

II.4 The Need for Teaching Reform: However, despite the social and global context, the societal and individual needs that arise from them, and the language education policies, one has to conclude that the language education system is not working. Since 1996 when the present Federal Government came to power, the language education system has declined rapidly both in extent and quality but the situation was already bad, not least because of a shortage of qualified teachers. In 1995-96, Australian Language and Literacy Council produced a major report on the quality and supply of language teachers. The Chair of the Council, in his preface to the report, stated:

In the course of preparing this Advice, the Council apprehended that, inadvertently, it was asking the question why Australian schools teach languages so badly. That Australia's schools teach languages badly was not itself in doubt. All of the evidence, accumulated here in depressing detail, puts that matter beyond any doubt...[Australian Language and Literacy Council 1996: xi]

Later, he went on to argue that the situation was not irremediable but that it required “wholesale reorganisation of schools to support language learning” and a different approach to methodology to emphasise the development of usable levels of language proficiency and, *inter alia*, to take advantage of

... the rich resources available in so many school communities through Australians born in other lands. [Australian Language and Literacy Council 1996: xiii]

The approach to methodology described in this paper is one which takes maximum advantage of the language resources in the local community and in the world community, which is available electronically or by travel. It is an approach which sees community interaction, not as an incidental add-on to traditional classroom-based language teaching but as the central teaching-learning activity with the traditional classroom-based teaching and learning being subservient to and supportive of this central activity. The approach is designed to maximise proficiency development but also to foster improved cultural understanding and intercultural attitudes.

III THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The development of language teaching methodology should be a rational process based on the nature of language, the nature of language learning, the nature of the language learner, and the nature of the society, especially the learner's relationship to the society within which he moves and uses the language [cf. Ingram 1980, 1978, 1994, 1999, 1999a; Ingram, O'Neill and Townley-O'Neill 1999]. These provide the basic framework that underlies the present writer's approach to language teaching, language policy-making, and language education planning over the last two decades [see, for example, the publications listed under the present writer's name in the Reference list to this paper]. In particular, the approach adopted here seeks to respond to what is known about the way in which language develops and the role that language education can play in fostering more positive cross-cultural attitudes.

It is not possible to discuss at length here the theoretical context that underlies the methodology to be described but that has been discussed at length in other papers and in a book currently in preparation [e.g., Ingram 1999, 1999a, 1995, 1992, 1980a, b, c, d, 1979, 1978; Ingram, O'Neill and Townley-O'Neill 1999, Wylie 2000]. The view of language learning underlying the methodology is commonplace enough and widely attested in the literature. In summary,

- Humans know innately how to acquire language; the role of teaching is to facilitate learning.
- Language is most effectively learned when learners are actively involved in using language as a means to communicate and achieve desired ends.
- Learners seek, impose, learn and use rules, progressively modifying their rule system with experience and use of the language. The most effective stimulus to this process is the learners' wish and attempts to communicate and gradually develop their language systems in order to communicate successfully. There is also a contemplative process in this wherein learners focus on the language, perceive relationships and how they are expressed, and internalise the language systems. This is the

process of “cerebration”, as described in Ingram 1978, 1979, 1999 and 1999a. [see also Grenfell 2000: 24 – 25].

- The grammar of the language may be learned by both formal and informal means with formal teaching most effective in response to need and when designed to assist the learner to perceive and comprehend the form of the rules that comprise the linguistic system and to apply them spontaneously.
- Language learning is greatly promoted by social interaction and wide, diverse experience of the language (not least in active and purposeful listening and speaking but also in using the other macroskills).
- Language learning progresses most rapidly in a receptive, accepting environment.
- Language exists and is best learned in context, including its cultural context.
- Language learning is an active, dynamic and heuristic process. Language teaching should encourage learners to use and develop their own language learning capacities and encourage independence rather than dependence.
- Language development occurs in response to need. Need takes many forms but, broadly, at the macro level, the need is to use the language to achieve desired purposes (especially to communicate) while, at the micro level, the need is to acquire certain elements of the language at the appropriate time in the progressive development of the language. One of the teacher’s aims should be to ensure that the needs are both felt by the learners and answered appropriately at the appropriate time.
- Meaningful and contextually appropriate language is inextricably related to the culture: both are learned and should desirably be taught together.
- Language learning entails matching the forms being learned to the meaning system or culture that underlies the language. To communicate fluently, it also entails re-organising the learners’ own knowledge system to match the requirements of the new language, i.e., the learners have to learn to see their own world as well as the new “world” of the new culture through the eyes of the target culture.
- The development of positive cross-cultural attitudes is dependent on the way in which the language is learned and experienced rather than on the fact of language learning: in particular, interaction with speakers of the language is essential [see Ingram 1999 and Ingram,

O'Neill and Townley-O'Neill 1999]. In addition, learners need to experience both the similarities and differences that exist across cultures and, in doing so, to learn to recognise the adventitious nature of their own and other cultures, to recognise the cultural differences that occur, but also to recognise the universal human features that exist across cultures.

- Lave suggests that a main aim of teaching is to create situations that optimise the learner's "successive approximations of mature practice" within a speech community [Lave 1990: 314]. Lave refers to Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development", the gap between the learners' actual developmental level and the level of potential development as determined by problem-solving under the teacher's guidance. Sensitivity to the learners' "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) can create the condition under which learners carry out tasks that encourage further development or, as Vygotsky says, that "force him to rise above himself" [cf. Vygotsky 1978: 86, 1987: 213].
- Language is socially constituted and cannot be viewed in isolation from its cultural and social context [cf. Halliday 1974, 1975]. Devoid of its social and communicative context, as often occurs in formal classroom teaching especially at university level, language becomes an end in itself, in Bourdieu's words, "a purely internal and formal analysis with the charm of a game devoid of consequences" [Bourdieu 1991: 34]. Communicative ability is best achieved through social interaction in a range of naturalistic settings in which learners make use of their growing linguistic and sociolinguistic resources to participate in the construction and exchange of meaning and in which the success or failure of their efforts has some communicative significance [cf. Firth and Wagner 1997].
- Motivation for language learning can be enhanced if students have the opportunity to interact with speakers of the language, first, because there is evidence that many students want such experience [e.g., Howell 1997]. Second, integrative motivation which, as Gardner and Lambert [1972] note, can be a powerful factor in promoting effective language learning, is enhanced if students have favourable experiences of meeting with native speakers and find that they can communicate, and can develop friendly relationships, with them.
- Finally, the native speaking community in a multicultural society provides authentic cultural, linguistic and social contexts for the performance of language tasks and, hence, the learning of language. Teachers have long recognised the value of informal interaction with native speakers and have used a "buddy system", encouraged language clubs, and encouraged students to spend time abroad in the country of origin of the language. There is also strong empirical evidence that the experience of using the language

in the local community strongly benefits language learning. Reference is made subsequently to both large-scale and small-scale projects in which the present writer has successfully incorporated community involvement [Ingram 1980a, b, c and d]. Eisenchlas and Hortiguera also used community involvement with second year students of Spanish at Griffith University and reported greatly enhanced learner performance, the use of “typical idiomatic expressions” which did not occur in language classes, favourable affective outcomes, and dramatically improved enrolments [Eisenchlas and Hortiguera 1997: 242]. Leaver reports on the success of teaming students of Russian in the FSI School of Language Studies with Russian immigrants [Leaver 1989].

IV THE METHODOLOGY

Out of the theoretical framework just sketched, there emerge a number of key principles of methodology, which may be summarised as:

- Focus on the learner
- Focus on use
- Focus on communication
- Contextualise the language
- Provide wide, diverse experience
- Respond to the learner’s felt needs, and, most fundamentally,
- Focus on social interaction.

In addition, since language and language learning are systematic and diverse and language development is best promoted by a wide range of experiences involving the numerous aspects of language and culture, it is essential that a language course provide diverse experience but also be coherent and integrated, with clearly established goals and objectives reflective of the learners’ long-term and on-going developmental needs. It should, desirably, be based around some cohering and integrating principle. The central activity in the approach to methodology described here is social interaction or “community involvement”, i.e., from the earliest stages of language learning, the learners use the language out in the real world around them as they talk about their own environment (not just from within the four walls of a classroom but out in the environment, experiencing it as they have experienced it in and through their first language), as they interact with speakers of the language who live in the learners’ own community as well as elsewhere in the world. In other words, community involvement is not just the occasional involvement of native speakers in classroom visits or occasional social gatherings but it entails the continual involvement of the learners in the environment and social community that surround them. In this approach, community involvement is not peripheral, a minor add-on to a regular teaching programme, but the central learning activity which determines the nature of the rest of the programme and provides the point of coherence for it. The classroom activity is designed to support and respond to needs that arise from the community involvement activities; the teaching and formal learning occur either in

preparation for the community involvement activities or in response to needs felt during those activities.

This approach has been implemented in Australia in large-scale migrant education programmes, used to teach French at College level, and, most recently, used in University classes in a variety of languages including Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Italian and Spanish. The methodology has been devised to respond to the dual goals of developing the learners' practical language skills and to encourage the development of balanced cultural understanding and more positive cross-cultural attitudes, in other words, to develop skills, knowledge and attitudes that are highly relevant to life in multicultural societies in a multicultural world.

The methodology has been discussed at length in papers elsewhere and exemplified in both small and large-scale teaching projects [e.g., Ingram 1980a, b, c, d, 1979, 1978, Ingram 2001a, Wylie 2000]. Here it will be outlined only briefly with most attention being given to the outcomes of the projects, especially the most recent. Here, reference will be made to six key issues in the methodology:

First, the basic foundation of the methodology, the central learning activity, is interaction or "community involvement" in which learners are given continual opportunities to interact with speakers of the target language and to use it for real communicative purposes and for normal social interaction, whether that is face-to-face or over the web. Through "community involvement", the learners use the language communicatively, they are stimulated to develop their linguistic system to improve their ability to communicate and express their own ideas, and, through interaction with speakers of the language, they experience the other culture at an individual level, a critical factor in fostering cultural understanding [see Ingram 1999, 2001a].

There are three broad (but obviously overlapping) forms of community involvement (CI):

1. *Extramural CI activities* extend the language learning beyond the classroom in activities that essentially enable learners to re-experience their own environment and concepts through the foreign language. Typical activities include, for example,
 - field trips or excursions where students talk about their environment in the target language,
 - use of newspapers, magazines, and other publications produced by the relevant ethnic community or in the country of origin of the language, and
 - use of radio and television programmes about the world in the target language: in Australia, these are readily

available from "ethnic" radio and television and also from foreign radio and television via satellite or the internet.

2. *Formal CI activities* are a formal course requirement that mandates interaction with speakers of the language. At the most elementary levels, such activities might involve very simple tasks such as seeking directions from native speakers in the community or even the simple enquiries that visitors to Japan continually encounter from Japanese students of English. Such activities should, however, involve natural exchanges rather than the sort of laborious reading out of textbook phrases followed by responses which, in the Japanese context just referred to, often seem to be of no significance. As proficiency levels increase, formal community involvement activities might entail such tasks as finding out how a business operated by a speaker of the language operates, extensive enquiries about a person's lifestyle, cultural activities, or an historical or sociological project on, for example, the history of that ethnic group in the students' home town or country. Such activities give a context in which interaction can occur and can lead to less formal or structured interaction but also give learners the opportunity to learn about the other community.

Formal community involvement can occur in many face-to-face situations but modern technology also facilitates it by telephone, email, chatrooms, webcams, and other internet-based activities. Virtual reality associated with the net also allows excellent opportunities for realistic interaction in a virtual environment.

The most desirable mode of interaction is, ultimately, *informal CI activities*. These involve normal social interaction as between friends or passing acquaintances and allow learners to meet and interact with native speakers in the course of normal, informal social situations which might include, for example, parties, excursions, home visits, or part-time employment or work experience in a company where the language is used in the workplace. The internet also provides many opportunities for informal interaction [cf. Trim 1997: 62] though undoubtedly live face-to-face interaction still has cultural, sociolinguistic, linguistic and paralinguistic advantages, which, however, are rapidly becoming less as voicemail, oral chatrooms, webcams and forms of virtual reality develop and enhance the contextualisation of the exchanges.

Clearly all these forms of community involvement lend themselves to the integration of real purpose reading and writing activities in the form of reports, letters, invitations, and so on.

Second, culture learning is a vital part of any language programme both because the culture is the meaning system that underlies the language, because cultural knowledge and understanding are usually major goals, and because culture learning has an important role to play in fostering positive attitudes [cf. Ingram 1978, 1999, 2001a]. Culture learning can take place incidentally to the language learning, through specific systematic teaching, and as a result of interaction with native speakers through community involvement. By combining these approaches, learners acquire not only generalised knowledge about the other culture (which has the danger of fostering a stereotypic image of the other people) but also the personal, individual culture that governs the everyday lives of real speakers of the language. Inclusion of community involvement helps learners to come to realise the individuality that exists within the universality of a culture and helps to overcome the stereotyping which is often the basis of negative attitudes.

Third, complementary to culture learning is the need for learners to re-conceptualise their own experience both to facilitate its expression through the target language and to realise that both their own culture and the target culture have their own equally defensible internal logic. For this purpose, learners need the opportunity to interact with native speakers, both orally and in writing, about their own experiences and their own environment [see also Ingram 1978, 1980b, and 1980c; and Morgan 1993]. The various forms of community involvement provide such opportunities.

Fourth, "cerebration" or "cognitive processing" plays a vital role in language learning, in the internalisation of the language systems and in fostering cultural understanding and positive cross-cultural attitudes. Some of the repetitive practice that occurs in language programmes can be seen most appropriately as not so much habitualisation or rote memorisation of responses but providing opportunities for learners to think about the linguistic system and eventually internalise it. On the attitudinal level, teachers need to encourage learners to think about issues of inter-cultural relations and help them to exteriorise their often sub-conscious reactions and entrenched attitudes for rational examination and modification. In this context, community involvement activities can raise issues for discussion and, not least, cause major or minor "culture shock" experiences which seem to be a necessary element in activities designed to foster cross-cultural understanding and more positive attitudes. Teachers need to be trained to be sensitive to cross-cultural issues, to manage such discussions, and to move the learners towards a balanced cultural understanding and positive attitudes. [For further elaboration on this, see Ingram 1978, 1980b, 1980c, 1999; Mantle-Bromley 1995, Triandis 1971, Morgan 1993, and especially Ingram 1999a, 2001a, Ingram, O'Neill and Townley-O'Neill 1999. See also Grenfell 2000: esp. 24 - 25].

Fifth, the so-called "community involvement" approach does not neglect the teaching of the elements of the language (i.e., the grammar in the broadest sense) but they are taught either in the context of preparing for the community involvement experiences or in response to needs identified during them.

Sixth, the approach to assessment used in community involvement-based courses should also reflect the emphasis on the development of practical skills. In the teaching projects to be referred to subsequently, the *International Second Language Proficiency Ratings* (ISLPR) [Ingram and Wylie 1979/99] were used to measure the learners' proficiency, i.e., a form of direct proficiency assessment is used. However, since the methodology is designed to maximise the learners' language development without neglecting the direct teaching of language forms, one would expect significant progress to be demonstrated in acquisition of the formal elements of the language and for that progress to be seen even if more traditional, analytic assessment methods are used.

V TEACHING PROJECTS

This approach to language teaching has been systematically implemented and evaluated in three language teaching projects: a large scale project teaching English as a second language to newly arrived immigrants in Australia, a small project teaching French as a foreign language to first and third year College students in Brisbane, Australia, and, over the last two years, in the School of Languages and Linguistics in Griffith University teaching Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish.

V.1 On-Arrival Programme for Immigrants: "Community involvement" was first implemented on a large scale in the early 1980s in the on-arrival segment of the Adult Migrant Education Program. The programme, catering for more than 100,000 adult learners, was essentially a "survival" based programme in English as a second language for newly arrived immigrants in Australia. It was a modular programme using themes responding to the survival needs of newly arrived immigrants. The central teaching-learning activities took the form of community involvement in which the students were set tasks to carry out in the community, ranging from such simple things as asking a passer-by directions to informal interaction with, for example, community organisations who visited the migrant hostels or invited the learners to their homes or social gatherings. The basis of assessment and accountability in this government-funded programme was in terms of the ISLPR. Nunan [1988] has commented on the significant proficiency gains that were made by learners in the programme.

V.2 College French: This approach, including the syllabus design implications, was first implemented at university level in first and third year College French programmes at the then Mount Gravatt College of Advanced Education (now a part of Griffith University). The project and its results have been discussed in other papers [see Ingram 1980 c and d] and will be mentioned only briefly here.

Project Description: The central learning activity was "community involvement" in which students had to set up meetings with French speakers

in the Brisbane community and go and discuss some issue with them (e.g., their life in Australia in comparison with the country from which they had come, how their particular French restaurant or oil company operates, or any other topic that interested them). Afterwards, the students presented and discussed a detailed oral report to their class and submitted a written report to the lecturer. In most cases, this formal activity led to informal social interaction with the community members often in their homes or in a social event. The course also contained formal teaching of the language in response to student need, another segment focussed different registers and genres of the language, there was a course of French and Australian social studies taught in French once a week, and there were many opportunities given to listen to daily Radio Australia newsbulletins in French and to view and discuss French films or slide shows. Regular discussions were held of intercultural and interracial relationships and attitudes and occasionally games were used that highlighted issues of relationships between dominant and smaller societies or communities.

Project Outcomes: The project proved to be very successful both in terms of the students' language proficiency and in producing more positive cross-cultural attitudes. In summary, the benefits as reported at the time included the following:

1. The amount of initiating and purposeful use of the language by the students was much greater than in previous courses.
2. Once the students' initial fear of contact with native speakers was overcome, the students showed considerable willingness to converse and participated much more readily and confidently in class than previously.
3. The students' oral fluency showed marked improvement, especially in the case of some of the weakest students, in particular because their self-doubt over using the language disappeared, they had something motivating to talk about, and the preparation for the interviews and the interactions themselves foregrounded vocabulary and structures that they had previously struggled to recall.
4. All the cohorts approved the design of the course and the variety of activities, especially the heavy emphasis on the oral language.
5. Experienced lecturers who had not participated in the programme evaluated the students in comparison with those they had encountered previously. Without exception they commented favourably on the students' progress, especially in such features as readiness to participate in conversation, confidence, fluency, comprehension, initiative in directing conversation, and poise.
6. The results on a simple cross-cultural attitude questionnaire administered pre- and post-course showed a considerable shift

towards more positive attitudes both towards French people and more generally.

7. The favourable attitudinal effects were seen not only in the students but also in the people whom they had met. [cf. Ingram 1980d]

V.3 University Language Programme: In late 1999, Elaine Wylie and the present writer were awarded a National Teaching Development Grant to be run over two years, 2000-2001, for a project entitled "Taking 'foreignness' out of Languages other than English: the Community as a Resource for improving Proficiency Outcomes". The project finished at the end of 2001, the results have been received, and the project report is being finalised.

V.3.i Project Justification: The theoretical justification for the project was that outlined earlier but the practical justification was the need to find a way to respond to the regrettable situation in which university language teaching finds itself, not just in the School of Languages and Linguistics in Griffith University, whose success rate has been no worse and probably better than elsewhere in Australia, but across the language teaching scene in Australian universities generally. Although for at least two decades, successive reports and policy statements have reiterated the importance of language skills and language learning to Australia [e.g., Martin 1972, Department of Education 1976, Schools Commission 1978, Galbally Review 1978, SSCEA 1984, Garnaut 1989, Lo Bianco 1987, Ingleson 1989, Leal *et al* 1991, DEET 1991 and 1991a, ALLC 1994, COAG 1994], there are few signs of significant improvement in the practice of language teaching. Enrolments at school and university remain low, proficiency attainments even by university majors remain impractically low, and both the supply and quality (in particular, the proficiency) of language teachers are inadequate [e.g., Ingleson 1989, Leal *et al* 1991, Nicholas *et al* 1993, COAG 1994, ALLC 1996]. Though the School of Languages and Linguistics in Griffith University enjoys state-of-the-art technology to support the teaching of the School's various languages (Chinese, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese), here, as elsewhere, serious concern remains over the ability of most of the languages other than Japanese and Spanish to attract enrolments, and proficiency levels, even of majors, are generally considered inadequate for employment purposes, few students, for example, reach the level required by Education Queensland to teach a language in Queensland State Schools (ISLPR 2+ or 3) and even fewer reach the levels recommended as the desirable minimum goals for university language programmes by the Australian Language and Literacy Council [1996] and by the Council of Australian Governments in the national policy on Asian languages [COAG 1994].

This project sought to respond to this situation:

First, one of the problems is undoubtedly the lack of pedagogical training of many university language teachers, which leads to poor course design and ineffective methodology [cf. Leal *et al* 1991,

Nicholas *et al* 1993, ALLC 1994 and 1996]: implementation of this project provided considerable inservice training for the teaching staff.

Second, a major cause of the low proficiency attainments is insufficient contact time. Embleton and Hagen, figures published by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the FSI's tables of expected proficiency levels all suggest from 500 to 700 hours of instruction as the minimum to reach ISLPR S/L:3 in Italian or Spanish and over 2000 hours in Japanese, Korean or Chinese [Embleton and Hagen 1992: 67-68, FSI 1973]. In contrast, at Griffith University, students commencing the language will spend between 400 and 500 hours in lectures and tutorials in the course of a major while those who have already studied the language in Secondary School will have had between 200 and 350 hours at school but fewer than 400 hours at university. Since the community involvement activities in this project took place outside the regular class hours, they significantly increased the time in which the learners were actively involved in language learning activities while also encouraging activities (i.e., interaction with native speakers) which earlier surveys showed that students wanted [see Howell 1996].

Third, university language courses are necessarily finite and, if the students' language proficiency is to continue to develop beyond the course, they must learn how to learn. The community provides an important basis for that on-going experience and learning of the language but the students need to develop the social and language learning skills and, especially, the confidence, that will enable them to make contact with native speakers and to interact with them.

Consequently, this project proposed to assess the effectiveness of introducing community involvement as a major methodological component in university language classes and was, in fact, the first sustained attempt in Australia to do so with a variety of European and Asian languages.

V.3.ii *Project Description:* Despite enjoying the full cooperation of the School and the various language groups, the project was not able to change the whole course design since this would have required the courses to be re-accredited, but, for the most part, added a community involvement component to existing courses. The grant application for the project described it thus:

This project seeks to improve the proficiency outcomes of language students by using volunteer native speakers in the community as a resource. Having been matched with volunteers, students will be required to interact with them in the target language to carry out specific tasks. The students' proficiency levels on the International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR) will be a guide to the kinds of tasks that will provide an optimal level of challenge. ...

The proposed methodology engages students in the negotiation of meaning in the target languages, a process which is central to current

theories of second language acquisition, in a supportive community of practice ...

Models for systematic integration of CI [community involvement] into the curriculum which are developed and refined during the project will be applicable to other Australian tertiary institutions. Additional benefits to students are expected to include greater understanding of, and improved attitudes to, the target culture, and increased autonomy as language learners. LOTE programs will be more coherent and rationally articulated, with entry requirements and goals defined in terms of proficiency levels; attraction and retention rates are expected to increase. Moreover, the tasks will provide links between the university and the community, and links between ethnic groups will promote social cohesion ...

V.3.iii Project Outcomes: The funded project has now been completed, the last data is being accumulated, and the final report is being written. At the time this paper was written, most of the data on Japanese had been received and is reported here together with a little on other languages. Some information on the Italian aspect of the project is also available in Laura and Murray 2000.

The most serious of the **problems** reported was the complaint from staff that the project demands too much time. This arises from several factors which suggest that the real problem is not so much an increased workload as the teachers' unwillingness to let go and trust the students to be able to do things; in other words, the real weakness lies in the control or "motherhood" *complexes* that tend to characterise the attitudes of many language teachers. These complexes create a belief that teachers must retain control of what happens in their classes, that they cannot trust the students to do things, or that it is too much to expect the "poor students" to do such things as community involvement with the little bit of language that they have. This problem was particularly seen in the teachers' insistence that they set up the initial contacts between the students and the community members despite the arguments provided that students could do this for themselves and had to learn to do so if they were to go on interacting, using the language, and learning after the end of their university courses. For even one class of 20 or 30 students, this became a very time-consuming (and unnecessary) task.

This lack of faith in the students was also reflected in the insistence of many of the teachers that the students write out and memorise questions to be put to the community members rather than plan the meeting in advance but interact conversationally. This again led to excessive preparation and correction in advance of the meetings but, more seriously from a learning point of view, mitigated against the students' creative use of the language and their ability to interact naturally. In a written report on an interview, one student, for example, commented: *I think I read from the questions too much instead of letting the conversation flow along.*

A second problem that arose originated in the very short-term, *pragmatic outlook of the students*: according to their teachers, students' prime concerns

in recent years have increasingly been to get employment so as to have money to live on while at university, to do whatever minimal work is needed to pass the course, and, hence, to focus exclusively on whatever assessment is set. This meant that some students were reluctant to take time to interact with native speakers if they did not see such activities as part of the formal course assessment.

A third and very fundamental problem arose from the *teachers' notion of what language teaching* involves. Many of the teachers continue to believe that their role is to pour into the students a certain quantity of material as defined in the content-based syllabuses. They see their role as “doing” the defined grammar or presenting a specified number of characters with the result that activities such as community involvement that may develop the students’ practical skills, increase their cultural understanding, and improve their cross-cultural attitudes are seen as irrelevant and intrusive on teaching time.

The less favourable responses for the usefulness of the approach in developing reading and writing, especially in Chinese and Indonesian (see Table 6) underline the *importance of integrating community involvement in the whole programme* as a central core to the methodology and course design. In this project, community involvement was an add-on to the traditional university language programme and so focussed mainly around speaking and listening. Yet the same learning principles apply to all four macroskills and community involvement activities lend themselves to meaningful reading and writing activities, especially as the students prepare for and report on their activities. To obtain maximum benefit across all macroskills, community involvement should be the central cohering factor in the language programme and influence the design and choice of activities right across the programme.

In brief, most of the problems that occurred in the project originated from the *lack of pedagogical training* of many of the teachers who, in fact, are not so much language teachers as university lecturers who, in many cases, lack formal training in the nature of language learning, language teaching, and applied linguistics and see their role as lecturing on the grammar and other elements of the language rather than as providing activities which will facilitate the learners’ use, exploration, and learning of the language. In any case, not all the teachers demonstrated the sorts of problems referred to above. All the teachers involved are conscientious, committed to the well-being of their students, and keen to enhance their learning but, like many teachers in Australian universities’ language departments (in contrast to the teachers in university centres providing ESL to overseas students), most of them lack formal training in applied linguistics and, in particular, in language teaching methodology.

The salience of the problems just discussed should not be exaggerated, they were not universal across the students and teachers, and they were far outweighed by the project’s positive outcomes. The **teachers’ responses** were generally quite favourable and some, for example, have continued the approach beyond the life of the project, others have undertaken further research into it and have produced relevant publications, and one is further

examining the role of community involvement in university language teaching as her Ph.D. research project.

The students' **overall assessment** of the use of community involvement in their course was strongly favourable. This was particularly so in Japanese where 90% of one group and 100% of the other rated the project as "good" or "excellent".

Table 1: Overall Response of Two Japanese Groups:

Group	Total	Excellent	Good	So So	Bad	Terrible
Japanese 1	31	18 (58%)	10 (32%)	3 (10%)	0	0
Japanese 2	21	9 (43%)	12 (57%)	0	0	0
Total	52	24 (46%)	22 (42%)	3 (6%)	0	0

A strong indication of the students' **favourable response** was seen in their desire to participate in such a project again. Overall, 73% of the Japanese students said that they would participate again the next year if they were given the opportunity, 10% were uncertain and 17% said they would not (though 8 of these 9 students had indicated that they would not be continuing with Japanese) (see Table 2). 95% of the students surveyed said that the project should be run again for future students (Table 3).

Table 2: Participate again next year:

Group	Total	Yes	Uncertain	No
Japanese 1	31	21 (68%)	3 (10%)	7 (23%) Not want 1 Not do J. 6
Japanese 2	21	17 (81%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%) Not want 0 Not do J. 2
Total	52	38 (73%)	5 (10%)	9 (17%)

Table 3: Keep the project running for future students:

Group	Total	Yes	No	Unsure
Japanese 1		Question not asked		
Japanese 2	20	19 (95%)	0	1 (5%)
Total	20	19 (95%)	0	1 (5%)

Most saliently, both teachers and students reported a great increase in the students' **confidence** in using the language. One Chinese teacher, for instance, commented that she had never known a Second Year group to be so confident in speaking and this sort of view was expressed by most participants in all languages. The increased confidence was reflected in their

belief that the project had been "fairly" or, more frequently, "extremely" useful in improving their language skills (see Table 6). In particular, one group of 21 Japanese students was asked whether they felt nervous speaking Japanese with native speakers. Of the 20 who responded, 75% of the students said that, as a result of their experience, they did not feel so nervous (see Table 4).

Table 4: Nervous about speaking Japanese with Native Speakers:

Group	Total	Yes	Not so much	No
Japanese 1	Question not asked			
Japanese 2	20	2 (10%)	15 (75%)	3 (15%)
Total	20	2 (10%)	15 (75%)	3 (15%)

This growing self-confidence in using the target language was probably reflected also in the students' lack of (reported) **use of English** in interaction with the community members. Of the Japanese students, 56% reported using English "rarely", 40 % reported using it only "sometimes", while only 2 of the 52 students reported using it "most of the time" or "always" (see Table 5).

Table 5: Use of English:

Group	Total	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Rarely
Japanese 1	31	0	0	14 (45%)	17 (55%)
Japanese 2	21	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	7 (33%)	12 (57%)
Total	52	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	21 (40%)	29 (56%)

The final report on the project is expected to include measures of the students' **language proficiency** change but detailed measures were not available at the time of writing. Nevertheless, student self-assessment measures have shown some improvement: in Second Year Chinese, for instance, self-assessed proficiency in speaking and listening increased from a mean of ISLPR 1+ pre-course to ISLPR 2 post-course (i.e., over the one semester when community involvement was incorporated into the programme). For reasons already stated, the changes in reading and writing were not so great. Though the self-assessed proficiency changes were paralleled by participants' comments attesting to a greater increase in proficiency than in more traditional courses, the self-assessment measures probably more reliably reflect the students' increased confidence in using their target language. One student of Japanese commented, for example, "I feel fantastic. I learn much more [than] I can learn from a book". Another commented, "I tend to enjoy my Japanese better and speak more effectively without notes." Another responded that the best thing about the project was, "Being able to use all the theory I have been learning for years."

When asked how useful the project was in improving their language skills, all language groups surveyed strongly approved of it. Of the Japanese, Chinese and Indonesian students, over 90% rated it as "extremely useful" or "fairly useful" in improving speaking and listening skills and cultural understanding. Even with reading and writing, more than half the students in these languages rated the project as "fairly useful" or "extremely useful" even though, as already noted, insufficient attempt was made to integrate community involvement into the teaching of these skills. (See Table 6)

It is relevant to note that a majority of the students in the Japanese groups (60%) had not previously had the opportunity to use Japanese with native speakers (other than, perhaps, a teacher) (see Table 7).

The student questionnaires did not specifically address the question of **cross-cultural attitudes** but it would seem reasonable in the light of the positive nature of the students' responses to expect that cross-cultural attitudes had also benefited [see also Ingram 1999, 1999a]. 97% of the students felt that the project was "fairly" or "extremely" useful in improving their cultural understanding (Table 6) but possibly the most relevant question related to whether the students planned to keep in touch with the community member they had been meeting with. Overall, 76% of the students of Japanese indicated that they did intend to keep in touch. However, these figures are a little distorted downwards because some of the partners with whom the second group interacted were visiting from overseas and so 18% of the second group were unsure, probably for reasons of practicality. (See Table 8)

Both for reasons of attitude change and language development, it was pleasing to note how the requirement to meet with a community member, often led the students to extend their **range of contacts**. This was a pleasing result since it indicated that the students were extending their community contacts and probably had increased opportunity for informal social interaction. A small majority (58%) in one Japanese group had met only with the community member they had been allocated but a substantial number (42% or 14 of 33 responses) indicated that they had also met with the community member's family or friends. The question was not asked of the second Japanese group because a number of the partners were, as already noted, from overseas and without other family members or friends nearby (see Table 9).

The students were asked several questions about the **timing** of the project. Most of the students were taking a second or third year subject though the streaming of the students in Griffith University's language programmes means that they might have been in any year of their university studies from first to fourth year. A substantial majority (75%) thought the timing in second or third year was appropriate though some 19% wanted to see it in Fourth Year (perhaps because they themselves were going on to that year) (see Table 10).

Approximately 80% of the students thought that the appropriate **amount of time** to be spent with the community member was once a week for 1½ or 2

hours and that it was reasonable to spend 10 hours a semester on meetings (see Tables 11, 12 and 13). They were more or less evenly split on whether there should be set topics for discussion with a small majority opting for “no” or “it depends” (see Table 14).

Table 6: Improving skills:

Group	Overall and Macroskill	Total Number	Extremely Useful	Fairly Useful	Not Very Useful	Useless
Japanese 1	Overall experience	31	17 (55%)	13 (42%)	1 (3%)	0
Japanese 2		21	12 (57%)	9 (43%)	0	0
Chinese		8	3 (38%)	5 (63%)	0	0
Indonesian ¹		7	2 (29%)	3 (43%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)
Total		67	34 (51%)	30 (45%)	2 (3%)	1 (2%)
Japanese 1	Speaking	31	21 (68%)	8 (26%)	2 (7%)	0
Japanese 2		21	11 (52%)	10 (48%)	0	0
Chinese		9	2 (22%)	7 (78%)	0	0
Indonesian		7	2 (29%)	3 (43%)	2 (29%)	0
Total		68	36 (53%)	28 (41%)	4 (6%)	0
Japanese 1	Listening	31	23 (74%)	7 (23%)	1 (3%)	0
Japanese 2		21	12 (57%)	9 (43%)	0	0
Chinese		9	5 (56%)	3 (33%)	1 (11%)	0
Indonesian		7	3 (43%)	2 (29%)	2 (29%)	0
Total		68	43 (63%)	21 (31%)	4 (6%)	0
Japanese 1	Reading	31	3 (10%)	17 (55%)	10 (32%)	1 (3%)
Japanese 2		21	1 (5%)	8 (38%)	9 (43%)	3 (14%)
Chinese		8	1 (13%)	2 (25%)	5 (63%)	0
Indonesian		7	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	4 (57%)	1 (14%)
Total		67	6 (9%)	28 (42%)	28 (42%)	5 (8%)
Japanese 1	Writing	31	1 (3%)	18 (58%)	12 (39%)	0
Japanese 2		21	0	9 (43%)	10 (48%)	2 (10%)
Chinese		9	0	6 (67%)	3 (33%)	0
Indonesian		7	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	3 (43%)	2 (29%)
Total		68	2 (3%)	34 (50%)	28 (41%)	4 (6%)
Japanese 1	Cultural understanding	28	18 (64%)	9 (32%)	1 (4%)	0
Japanese 2		19	11 (58%)	8 (42%)	0	0
Chinese		7	5 (71%)	2 (29%)	0	0
Indonesian		6	0	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	0
Total		60	34 (57%)	24 (40%)	1 (2%)	0
Grand Total	All skills & Overall	398	155 (39%)	165 (42%)	67 (17%)	10 (3%)
Total	S, L, C	196	113 (58%)	73 (37%)	9 (6%)	0

¹ Because the lecturer involved in the project was appointed late and the Indonesian students were not involved in CI until later than the other students, there was considerable negative comment about the timing of the project.

Table 7: Substantial use of Japanese previously (apart from with teacher):

Group	Total	Yes	No
Japanese 1	31	13 (42%)	18 (58%)
Japanese 2	21	8 (38%)	13 (62%)
Total	52	21 (40%)	31 (60%)

Table 8: Plan to keep in touch with partner:

Group	Total	Yes	No	Depends or Unsure
Japanese 1	29	27 (93%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
Japanese 2	20	10 (50%)	2 (10%)	8 (40%)
Total	49	37 (76%)	3 (6%)	9 (18%)

Table 9: Who met with usually:

Group	Total	Just partner	Partner and family	Partner and friends
Japanese 1	33	19 (58%)	9 (27%)	5 (15%)
Japanese 2	Question not asked			
Total	33	19 (58%)	9 (27%)	5 (15%)

Table 10: Which year should have the project:

Group	Total	Not at all	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year
Japanese 1	48	0	3 (6%)	11 (23%)	24 (50%)	10 (21%)
Japanese 2	36	0	2 (6%)	11 (31%)	17 (47%)	6 (17%)
Total	84	0	5 (6%)	22 (26%)	41 (49%)	16 (19%)

Table 11: Ideal frequency of meetings with community partner:

Group	Total	More than once a week	Once a week	Once a fortnight	Less than once a fortnight
Japanese 1	31	0	26 (84%)	4 (13%)	1 (3%)
Japanese 2	21	1 (5%)	17 (81%)	3 (14%)	0
Total	52	1 (2%)	43 (83%)	7 (14%)	1 (2%)

Table 12: Ideal length of meeting with community partner:

Group	Total	>2 hours	2 hours	1.5 hours	1 hour	<1 hour
Japanese 1	31	2 (7%)	18 (58%)	10 (32%)	1 (3%)	0
Japanese 2	21	3 (14%)	12 (57%)	4 (19%)	2 (10%)	0
Total	52	5 (10%)	30 (58%)	14 (27%)	3 (6%)	0

Table 13: 10 hours per semester reasonable or not:

Group	Total	Short	Long	Reasonable
Japanese 1	31	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	25 (81%)
Japanese 2	20	4 (20%)	1 (5%)	15 (75%)
Total	51	7 (14%)	4 (8%)	40 (78%)

Table 14: Set topics for discussion:

Group	Total	Yes	No	It depends on ...
Japanese 1	31	13 (42%)	16 (52%)	2 (7%)
Japanese 2	20	8 (40%)	8 (40%)	4 (20%)
Total	51	21 (41%)	24 (47%)	6 (12%)

The **response of community members** to their involvement with students learning their language was also very favourable. As with the much earlier College French programme, the native speakers who were involved with the students seemed to appreciate the opportunity to make contact with them, the formal involvement often led to more informal social involvement in the community members' homes or elsewhere, and, in some instances, on-going friendships seemed to be developing. The only significant difficulties noted by the community members were practical problems such as arranging mutually convenient meeting times while other typical comments included that the community members found the experience "interesting and useful", that it is a positive experience to meet other people and to help students with their language, that the students are willing to communicate despite their limited language, and that they (the community members) would be happy to be involved again.

VI CONCLUSION

The approach to methodology discussed here grew out of an understanding of the basic determinants of methodology in the nature of language, the nature of the language learner, and the relationship between the learner and the society. This led to an approach to language teaching whose most basic principles can be encapsulated in four statements:

Focus on the learner
Focus on use
Respond to the learners' felt needs, and, especially,
Focus on social interaction.

In turn, these principles led to the use of community involvement as a core element of the methodology with, desirably, penetrating implications for the whole course design.

Educational policy makers and language teachers have had great difficulty believing that their traditional classroom-based approach to education and to language education in particular may not, alone, be the best way of achieving language skills and intercultural understanding. Formal teaching of students in serried ranks in the impoverished environment of most school or university classrooms and laboratories provides a language context that is unavoidably deficient contextually, sociolinguistically, socially and in the range of possible activities. Yet the answer in multicultural and multilingual communities is as simple as it is difficult for institutionalised educationalists to accept: to use the resources around the students and involve the students in real-life activities in the local community or via the internet.

Multicultural and multilingual communities such as Australia, which are only microcosms of the multicultural and multilingual world accessible by travel or the internet, provide an immense resource which language teachers have often been reluctant in the past to use. Yet, all we know about the nature of language learning suggests that programmes that encourage learners to interact with native speakers are much more likely to produce speakers of the language than are programmes that concentrate on transmitting dry linguistic knowledge; programmes that encourage interaction between students and native speakers of the target languages are much more likely to develop cultural knowledge and understanding and to foster positive cross-cultural attitudes than are programmes that merely present the culture as the dry facts that can be observed in a museum or an encyclopaedia.

Clearly, in the teaching projects reported here, not least in the opinion of the students in the university programmes, the use of community involvement has been a considerable success in all its major features: in the improvement of the students' language proficiency, in their confidence to use the language for everyday purposes, in their improved cultural understanding, and in the successful and agreeable contact they had with native speakers and the corollaries that suggests as likely in promoting more positive cross-cultural attitudes, and in the creation of on-going relationships that hold promise of continued improvement in both language skills and cultural understanding beyond the completion of the formal course.

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