

Turning Japanese at Heathmont East Primary School

Introduction

Heathmont East Primary School has approximately 250 students and is located in Melbourne's outer eastern suburbs.

LOTE teacher, Sue Fraser, takes an integrated approach to the school's LOTE program, making links where possible with what the children are studying with their class teacher. For example, when Level 3 students study housing in Humanities, Japanese language learning is based around the topic "Visiting a Japanese Home". Students learn language appropriate for that situation and cultural awareness about Japanese homes is an integral part of that unit of work. Sue also works together with the ICT specialist teacher to plan learning experiences for the children that will address the ICT domain in LOTE classes. The Communication and Personal Learning domains are integrated into the LOTE program.

As you read the "Turning Japanese" story, you will recognise that all of the Principles of Learning and Teaching underpin Sue's design of the Heathmont East PS LOTE program. Principles 3 and 6 are particularly evident. Principle 3 - *Students' needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests are reflected in the learning program* Principle 6 - *learning connects strongly with the communities and practice beyond the classroom*

Authentic language for real communication

Teaching LOTE at Heathmont East Primary school is a busy and exciting affair. Students are enthusiastic and active learners who love to come to Japanese lessons. On arrival, they line up at the Japanese room door and are greeted by "Sensei" (teacher) or the Japanese intern and are invited to "Haite Kudasai" (come in). At this point they become real Japanese students as they bow to greet their teacher in Japanese and follow classroom instructions also given in Japanese.



Students enjoy authentic Japanese cultural experiences provided by our intern Yuko.

Early Years strategies (Targeting the teaching)

At Heathmont East Primary School, Japanese lessons across all year levels are conducted using Early Years strategies. In practice, this means that students first meet together as a whole group to hear about the concept being introduced in the lesson through a big book story, a picture chat, a song or video. Students then work in small activity groups where the teaching is able to be matched more closely to their needs. In addition, the small groups enable different learning styles to be addressed as students participate in a variety of activities with a different focus, visual, oral and hands on approaches. Learning centres include a teacher focus group, vocabulary games, reading and writing practice, listening post, computer activities, role plays, cultural activities and writing to Japanese pen pals. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, particularly when they are working independently. Students are asked, "Why do you think you are going to do this activity?" What do you think you can learn/ achieve? At the end of the lesson the class gathers again to discuss what they have learnt. Students are also invited to share their feelings about the activity and explore their learning strategies. Did they find it difficult? Did they find something just "clicked" for them? How did they work it out?

This approach supports students to achieve the standards in the Personal Learning domain. Students take greater responsibility for their own learning as they work in both teacher-led groups and independent activities. They develop a sense of themselves as learners and develop the knowledge and skills to manage their own learning.

For the Personal learning domain see

<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/essential/personal/learning/index.html>

Information and Communications Technology (Keeping it current)

ICT plays an important part in the Japanese program. The Japanese room has four computers and they are used for independent activities such as learning about Japanese lifestyle on designated sites, practising Japanese vocabulary and writing through Japanese Learning CDs. Students have sent letters to Japanese pen pals using Japanese font and inserting digital photos of themselves and school activities. We also participate in regular videoconferencing meetings with our sister school and other students in Japan through the Language Discovery Group. Students think about what they can say to the Japanese students (their language skills) and what might interest children from a different language and culture in order to prepare for the video conference. This develops high motivation to practise their self introduction and other useful phrases such as commenting about the weather etc. Students also find themselves thinking more deeply about the differences and similarities between Australia and Japan.

For the ICT domain see <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/essential/interdisciplinary/ict/index.html>



Independent work groups include working together accessing information about Japanese daily life via the internet.

Japanese visitors (Making the language live)

Hosting a Japanese intern at Heathmont East Primary school is a crucial component of our LOTE program. Having a Japanese person in the school really brings the language alive for our students. In the classroom, the intern conducts one of our learning centres, maximising learning time for students. The intern provides an authentic model of Japanese language and ensures that our teaching of culture is accurate and current. Outside the classroom, the intern interacts with students, parents and staff and thereby promotes interest in Japanese. Members of the Heathmont East community have the opportunity to host our interns and these families really benefit as they learn so much from the experience.

In addition, through our networking with neighbouring schools, we have had a day visit from Japanese students. Now, in 2006, we are very excited to be a part of the Australia Japan Year of Exchange as we host a group of students from the city of Machida in Tokyo. These students will be with us for a week attending school with Heathmont East Primary School children on week days and participating in some activities (such as a visit to Healesville Sanctuary and the City of Melbourne) with their hosts. We were overwhelmed by the response from families volunteering to host our Japanese guests (we had many more offers to host than students), this is a reflection of the enthusiasm towards the learning of LOTE at Heathmont East Primary School. Current lessons in Japanese are highly focussed on practising useful language to use when the Japanese students arrive and learning as much about daily life in Japan so that we will understand the feelings of our visitors and will know what Australian experiences may be different and puzzling for them.

LOTE promotion (Keeping people motivated)

The Japanese program is shared with the school community at every opportunity. There are songs and performances at our weekly assembly as well as displays in the foyer, and anywhere else there is space! Regular contributions to the newsletter (with photos) keep everyone informed about our classroom program and special events. Press Releases go out to our local newspapers and photos and articles often result. Students participate in events such as the Japanese Teachers Association of Victoria (JLTAV) calligraphy competition and Japanese is promoted at Information Nights, during Education Week and even at the fete (we run a Japanese food stall). We participate in excursions offered by the National Gallery, Art play and anything else we find. Every year we have a Japanese

cultural event such as an Origami Night, Japanese Cooking Classes etc and parents are offered an Evening "crash course" in Japanese in order to help them support their children's learning. Our annual Multicultural day always has a strong Japanese presence and students have enjoyed Japanese Drumming concerts and workshops, sumo wrestling tournaments and tea ceremony to name a few. As a result of this sustained promotion of Japanese studies, students and parents have a very positive attitude to LOTE and respond enthusiastically to learning about Japan's language and culture. Whenever we ask for helpers for any project we are overwhelmed with volunteers and support.



When cooking Japanese food, students use the target language for counting and describing ingredients.

Involvement in all these activities supports students to achieve the standards in the Communication domain. Standards apply from level 4, with students working towards them in levels 1-3. Sharing the Japanese program with the school community requires students to be familiar with the forms, language and conventions used in different contexts and employ them to communicate effectively.

The Communication domain focuses on developing students who communicate clearly and confidently in a range of contexts both within and beyond school. They also need to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to effectively present information, ideas and opinions in a range of forms, including verbal, written, graphic, multimedia and performance, appropriate to their context, purpose and audience.

For the Communication domain see

<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/essential/interdisciplinary/communication/index.html>

Sister School (Living in a global world)

In 2002, thanks to a LOTE Project Grant, we were inspired at Heathmont East to visit Shimaya Elementary School in Osaka in order to form a Sister School relationship. At the debrief session for parents and students after the ten day trip, the overwhelming response was that we should continue to offer this opportunity for our students because the benefit to students is so great. Students who are selected to visit Japan are particularly advantaged, but all students benefit from the ongoing contact via pen pal letters, videoconferencing and exchange of photos and educational projects.



Heathmont East students have regular opportunities to video conference with Japanese primary and junior secondary school students.

Networking and professional learning (Staying out there/Give and take)

Heathmont East is host to the Eastern Region Japanese Teachers Network. The meetings held here each term are invaluable opportunities for specialist teachers who often work in isolation at their schools to share ideas, learn new strategies and be inspired to go back to their school feeling positive and empowered. At recent Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) workshops (2005) planned by the Eastern Region LOTE Consultant I was able to gain better understanding of the domains and their relationship to LOTE as I wrote a LOTE unit of work (which was submitted to the Knowledge Bank) and presented a LOTE specific workshop to other teachers in the region. I have been a member of the JLTAV since I worked on my Honours Thesis at Monash University and credit that association with much of my achievement as a LOTE teacher. Their exceptional Professional Development, informative Newsletter, website and Email Discussion Forum are so appropriate because they are developed by practising Japanese teachers for practising Japanese teachers. Now as a member of the JLTAV Committee I hope to give back some of what I have gained. I have presented Professional development for the Middle Years Unit, Eastern Region and the JLTAV and as a dedicated lifelong learner, I also attend professional development including ICT, Early Years, Thinking Curriculum, English, Student welfare as well as LOTE specific to gain new ideas and enhance my teaching skills.