Effecting Change in Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom: Meeting the Needs of Graduates in the Globalised World

Helen Muir, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia
Kayo Nakazawa, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia

Abstract: Imperatives in tertiary education to prepare our graduates for the rapidly changing needs of the Globalised world and internationalised workplace has lead to changes in the demands on academic programs. The language disciplines have much to offer this renewed model of tertiary education. This paper will examine how the adaptation of contemporary learning/teaching practices and the support of ICT into a redesigned language curriculum are helping to improve overall outcomes for students. The paper focuses on the integration of practices of co-operative group work, authentic communication, autonomous learning, peer and self evaluation. ICT support is embedded throughout the learning process in accordance with the learning and assessment needs. The normalisation of the place of reliable ICT within the curriculum is a part of this teaching approach. In addition to language skills students achieve outcomes in generic skills such as improved communication, research skills and greater awareness of issues relating to ICT. Even more importantly this approach allows the development of students' intercultural understanding to take a more central role in the teaching and learning process in the language classroom. The paper will include discussion of a trial conducted across beginner and intermediate levels of a tertiary education Japanese Studies program.

Keywords: Japanese Language Teaching, Intercultural Understanding, ICT Facilitated Learning, Group Work, Generic Capabilities

Introduction

THIS PAPER DISCUSSES the importance of teaching for Intercultural Understanding and examines the role that language studies has to play in this crucial aspect of modern education. The move toward Intercultural Communication as the model for language teaching places the Languages discipline close to the heart of the Intercultural Understanding goal. By focusing on aspects of contemporary teaching practice and utilising readily available technologies, language classrooms can move beyond their usual boundaries to fill a greater portion of the Intercultural Understanding goal.

In-country programs have been successful in promoting intercultural understanding within language programs. Specialised technologies have also proven effective in supporting the development of intercultural understanding when integrated into language studies programs. Such approaches, however typically require a considerable investment of both funds and teacher time, and as beneficial as they are for the participants, they are usually peripheral to the main teaching / learning program.

By integrating an approach to teaching for intercultural understanding throughout a languages teaching and learning program it is believed that students in language classes can approximate the understandings usually only achieved in more specific study programs.

Teaching for Intercultural Understanding

Our role as educators is not simply to develop in our students the knowledge, skills and understandings that are essential within our narrow disciplines. It is also to prepare our students for their lives beyond graduation. This is confirmed by the broad acceptance in our tertiary institutions of notion such as graduate competencies. That is, sets of knowledge, skills and understandings that cross traditional boundaries between disciplines. Ideas of intercultural understanding are included in such skills. For example, listing of graduate capabilities from the Macquarie University website include "Respect, dignity and recognition", defined as 'Being able to have respect for oneself and for and from others, being treated with dignity, not being diminished or devalued because of one's gender, social class, religion or race, valuing other languages, other religions and spiritual practices and human diversity.'[1] And the University of Sydney lists among its overarching graduate attributes "global citizenship" which is described as 'global citizens , who will aspire to contribute to a society in a full and meaningful way

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[1] Macquarie University, *Graduate Capabilities*.

through their role as members of local, national and global communities'.[2]

Teaching for intercultural understanding is increasingly being acknowledged as a way to ensure that our graduates are more fully equipped for their future in a globalised world. In his Introduction to the volume *Creating Our Common Future,* [3] Campbell states " The overarching theme of this book is that if education is to avoid the risk of condemning itself to irrelevance, it must contribute to the resolution of what is seen to be humanity's most pressing challenge – the achievement of unity while retaining, respecting , valuing and encouraging diversity." We have been alerted to the pivotal role that students' international understanding will have on their '…capacity to deal with the challenges, conflicts and decisions they will face throughout their lives.'[4] Tilbury and Henderson state 'The need to educate for intercultural understanding is being recognised as vital to achieving peace and sustainable development in a world shaken by fear of exploitation, terrorism and anxiety of war.'[5]

To help achieve this they describe a "transformative learning approach" and list the following elements as essential components of this.

1. Critical reflective thinking;
2. Holistic approaches;
3. Active learning;
4. Values clarification and education;
5. Experiential learning;
6. Inquiry learning;
7. Dialogue;
8. Critical Empowerment; and
9. Intercultural communication.

Intercultural communication, listed as one of these essential components clearly places contemporary approaches to language teaching in a key role in achieving these goals. An examination of the approaches to intercultural communication in languages reveals significant commonality with the broader approached to teaching for intercultural understanding. Liddicoat et al [6]describe the 'Culture as Practice' approach to culture in language teaching. 'The target for the language learner is to develop an intercultural perspective in which the native culture and language is made apparent alongside the target culture…the learner needs to develop an intercultural position, which can form a basis for ongoing development of intercultural communicative skills.'

If one look at the 'Intercultural Education Ladder' developed by Tilbury and Henderson [7] which lists seven stages of intercultural understanding it is clear that the two approaches to teaching are in harmony.

Table 1

7. Intercultural Education	Where an education program, strategy or organisation facilitated learning for change and provides learners with tools to construct a more peaceful, sustainable and just future.
6. Intercultural Proficiency	Where an education program, strategy or organisation facilitates learning about the social structures and actions which influence how we perceive and interact with other cultures. It promotes awareness of the dynamics existing between dominant and oppressed or minority cultures.
5. Intercultural Competency	Where an education program, strategy or organisation engenders the ability to undertake cultural self-assessment in order to see how one's actions affect people from other cultures.
4. Intercultural Respect	Where an education program, strategy or organisation facilitates learning about other cultures and promote principles of multi-cultural and global education by encouraging acceptance and respect for diversity.
3. Intercultural Blindness	Promotes learning that all people should treat all cultures as if they were the same.
2. Intercultural Incapacity	Does little to promote learning or appreciation of other cultures.
1. Intercultural Bias	Promotes learning about cultural stereotypes or cultural destructiveness.

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[2] University of Sydney, *Graduate Attributes.*
[3] Campbell, 'Creating Our Common Future', 1
[4] Tilbury, 'Education for Intercultural Understanding in Australian Schools', 82
[5] Tilbury, 'Education for Intercultural Understanding in Australian Schools', 82
[6] Liddicoat, *Report on Intercultural Language Learning*, 6
[7] Ibid, 83

By identifying the natural place of languages in the broader cross-discipline context of teaching for intercultural understanding, the languages discipline can continue its development via teaching approaches.

The Role of Languages

'The study of language exposes learners to another way of viewing the world as it develops flexibility and independence from a single linguistic and conceptual system through which to view the world' [8]

While teaching for intercultural understanding is desirable across all fields, it is clear that the languages have a special role to play. The connection between the two has long been understood within language teaching. A survey of Australian language studies managers indicated that 'Respondents saw connections between language learning and 'identity', 'multiculturalism', 'interdependence', 'literacy', and 'intercultural learning' and other concepts that were seen to be related to language and culture learning included: 'global literacies', 'intercultural competence', 'discourse', 'otherness', 'and 'inclusivity'. [9]

In recent years many Australian Universities have introduced degrees in international studies to better cater for the changing needs of their graduates. Optional or compulsory language studies are frequently a component of such programs. This indicates that the sector generally recognises the vital role of language studies in preparing our graduates for an international future. A search of the first ten pages (100 of 679,000 listings) of results from a Google Australia search engine search (conducted 21/8/07) with a "Bachelor of International Studies" descriptor, listed 23 Australian Universities offering at least one award with this title. Of the 23 standard degree programs, 19 include language studies as components of the program and of these, four had language units as a compulsory component.

In-Country Programs and Intercultural Understanding

Initiatives within languages studies programs have been contributing to the development of students' understanding of the complexities of cross-cultural communication and understanding. In-country language program praticipants have shown the value of cross-cultural experiences in developing intercultural understanding in language learners. The many students who have successfully participated in in-

country programs offered by schools, service clubs (e.g., Rotary Clubs), and universities across the world have provided a context for such expreiential learning and the literature has demonstrated the value of in-country experiences that are included within these study programs. Experiences ranging from short study tours to full year internships have been shown to benefit students.[10] Hanihara Chow [11] describes the experience of students from a Japanese Studies In-Country Corporate Traineeship Program in which students combined university studies with a one year traineeship within an organisation in Japan. It was found that 'Students' self assessment and our (the author's) subsequent analysis presents solid evidence that students gained substantially from the traineeship experience, not only in each category of the generic skills, but in their knowledge and understanding of broader spectrums. Furthermore, students perceive that the benefits of their experience will be amplified as they progress through their careers.

Even short term in-country programs can make an impact on attitudes and understandings that go beyond actual language skills that students develop. Reflections from students involved in a three week study tour to Okinawa indicate an increased awareness of intercultural issues. Comments such as "I have also learnt a lot of how to communicate with people from different nationalities" and "It was a great chance to exchange cultural opinions. Through these chats we were able to share the differences between cultures." Such comments give insight into students development.

The literature indicates that these experiences are valuable to the participants. However, the time factor, the significant financial investment, institutional restrictions and other factors restrict the number of language students who have the opportunity for such in-country experiences. One study [12] reported that average participation rate for Australian students participating in student exchange programs is 0.4%. Anecdotal evidence available to the authors would suggest this this is a modest figure for languages students, but there are indications that the proportion of participating students is still small.

Technology Based Student Exchange

With increased access to communication technologies, a number of initiatives have been taken by language educators to bring authentic technology mediated cross-cultural experiences to students. The tandem language learning approach is one that is based

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[8] Liddicoat, *Report on Intercultural Language Learning*, 7

[9] Ibid, 4

[10] Hutchings, 'Exploiting the Links', 55-71, Nunan, 'An exploration', 1-10, Daly, 'Comparative Predictions', 1-14

[11] Hanihara Chow, 'Benefits of an In-Country Training Program', 53

[12] Daly, 'Australia and New Zealand University Students' Participation in International Exchange programs', 7

on 'collaboration and simultaneity'. And in the context of language learning it refers to a partnership between two learners who are learning each other's mother tongue.' [13]Email technology has allowed international learning partnerships to form between learners in distant countries. Vinagre's case study [14] discusses a tandem language program between Antonio de Nebrija University in Madrid and the University of Massachusetts Amhers in the US. In the German Studies program at Macquarie University, Tandem Language tasks were conducted through an online discussion board, extending the notion of tandem language learning to intercultural group discussion. Because this medium allows for extended periods of communication, students have time to become familiar with their peers in the partner university and build relationships that allow for expression of thoughts and opinions. This exposure to sometimes differing or alternative views and opinions in the guided context of a language studies program is likely to contribute to the development of students' intercultural understanding.

Video Conferencing technology has also been used to connect students in this international context of language learning. In a trial conducted between Japan's National Institute of Multimedia Education (NIME) and Macquarie University Japanese Studies that in 1996, a series of five live classes were conducted with students from Kanda University of International Studies and Advanced level Japanese language students at Macquarie University. The report of this trial [15] showed that technology-mediated shared learning experiences between students of different cultures can create an environment in which students can begin to openly share thoughts and opinions. In this example, with voice and image facilities, students could observe details such as their peers' voice and body language. This combined with the discussion, built students' familiarity with the cross-cultural communication context and began to bridge the gaps in their mutual understanding.

The innovative uses of technology such as this are impressive and it is probably safe to assume that it adds value to the students' learning experience. However, the management of complex ICT resources, and the costs involved, create sizable hurdles for such projects.

The Shift from Teaching Culture to Teaching for Intercultural Understanding

In order to achieve outcomes for the broader idea of intercultural understanding learning tasks have been designed to build more than the skills in Intercultural

Communication. The learning tasks that are included as examples in this paper utilise a variety of learning approaches. Some tasks adopt a constructivist learning approach in which students begin with examining their existing knowledge and understandings and through accessing new information, discussions with peers (etc) to develop and present new understandings. Some tasks require a problem based learning approach where students begin with a pool of information and their existing knowledge and then complete a set task. Co-operative group work in lesser or greater extents forms part of most of the tasks. Skills of group participation, communication, management and co-operation are in themselves of value. Where tasks require group consensus on issues students have the opportunity to develop skills in analysing, making comparisons, forming judgements and sometimes debating - all of which support critical thinking. It is understood that many of these teaching approaches that are designed to develop intercultural understanding are the same processes that will allow language students to develop the 'intercultural position' that is necessary for intercultural communication.

A task conducted in a first year university unit required students to conduct an interview with a native Japanese and report on comparisons between their own upbringing and life experiences and those of their Japanese interviewee. Many students reported that whilst they had learnt many things about life in Japan, they had also come to realise and recognise many things about their own culture as well. Such observations included the pervasiveness of treating others according to stereotypes in Australian society, such as labelling and treatment based on geographic, ethnic, socio-economic, gender and level of education groupings.

The emphasised here is that a transition to a teaching for intercultural understanding approach does not require a significant restructuring of study programs or study units but more a shift in the orientation within the teaching and learning process and clearer articulation in the stated learning outcomes for units.

Such an approach has been adopted in the upper beginner level and intermediate level mainstream Japanese language units at Macquarie University. Rather than simply setting time aside to teach for intercultural understanding, significant amounts of the unit teaching and homework time (approximately 20-35%) has been devoted to integrating Japanese language skills, intercultural understanding and essential general competencies such as communication skills and ICT awareness.

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[13] Vinagre, 'Fostering Language Learning via Email', 370
[14] Ibid, 369-388
[15] Hinihara Chow, 'The Use of Video Conferencing', 1997

Group Work Research Project Approach

The integration takes place in the context of extended group work research project assignments involving aspects of Japanese culture and society. By participation in these project students have the opportunity to:

- Explore elements of Japanese society and culture;
- Explore aspects of cultural and societal difference and commonality;
- Explore their own and group members' reactions and responses to such differences and commonalities;
- Use spoken and written Japanese language in semi authentic communication contexts;
- Practise using learned vocabulary and language structures to express opinions and complex ideas;
- Develop cooperative group work skills;
- Develop autonomous learning practices;
- Improve communication and presentation skills;
- Build on skills in using ICT for academic and communication purposes; and
- Make judgements about information resources, especially those available through online media

The cultural areas that are used in these projects are designed to be broad in nature allowing students to investigate topics of personal interest. They often allow for studies which can be either historical or contemporary in nature. Topic areas covered in recent years include festivals, employment, education, pastimes and weekend activities, shopping, humour and comedy, and gift giving. While these are presented as the topic areas, the research questions themselves require students to work between the Japanese and at least one other cultural context and to explore the notions of culture. While students' knowledge of Japan is naturally increased, the tasks assigned involve them in analysing, comparing, contrasting, forming opinions and in other ways building their understanding about the complexity of intercultural issues.

While each project is structured somewhat differently, there are certain common elements to the project structure. The typical stages of such projects are set out below:

Stage 1: General orientation to the topic area which may involve a reading, viewing of a video and so on, but always includes group discussion of students' existing thoughts, experiences or opinions related to aspects of the general topic area.

Stage 2: Information search
Stage 3: Formation of groups, selection of topic, further information search
Stage 4: Group Discussion, structuring of group content, and on-going refinement of this structure.
Stage 5: Expressing outcomes of the research in Japanese language and refinement of this through peer and lecturer feedback.
Stage 6: Development and Delivery of a presentation in Japanese of the group's finding to the class. (This is typically in the form of a spoken presentation but is sometimes in an on-line format.)
Stage 7: Reflections- Self-reflection on both their learning from the project and the learning process itself and Review of peer groups' presentations.

Included in each project are a number of smaller related tasks related to the building of language skills.

The Role of Common Technologies

'The web, as an educational reform tool, is a flexible multimedia communication network that can combine content presentation, interactive communication for collaboration and research for further leaning to be a production tool for students' hands-on activities.' [16]

The teaching and learning initiatives discussed here were included in the 'Whole Curriculum Approach to ICT Supported Teaching and Learning' project conducted within Japanese Studies at Macquarie University in 2005 and 2006.[17] The project took a holistic approach to the integration of ICT into mainstream teaching practice. In this project an extensive analysis of the targeted learning outcome was conducted and technologies were matched to these outcomes. The technologies were thoroughly evaluated using a specially designed set of Technology Evaluation Tools [18] to ensure that they were effective and efficient tools through which to enhance the quality of teaching.

Garrison and Anderson [19] had warned that 'there is far more rhetoric than reality in the assertion that communities of inquiry in higher education today encourage students to approach leaning in a critical manner and process information in a deep and meaningful way.' With this in mind, the Japanese Studies ICT project endeavoured to ensure that the learning design would focus on pedagogy and the application of ICT would be limited to contexts

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[16] Gillani, *Learning Theory and the Design of E-Learning Environments*, 9
[17] Muir, 'Technology and Teaching',
[18] Gosper, 'Selecting ICT Based Solutions', 227-247
[19] Garrison, *E-Learning and the 21 st Century*, 5

where it would serve the pedagogy well. Because the main focus of this project was the learning outcomes and teaching processes, the simplicity of the technology was not a disadvantage.

ICT was used in supporting students' learning in a number of ways. Technologies employed included WebCT discussion boards, WebCT quizzes, chat room interfaces and PowerPoint presentations. The discussion board was used for both whole class and smaller group discussion tasks. ICT support played an important role in the previously described group projects.

Gillani [20] describes four features of the Web as 'a medium of instructional delivery' that provide a good framework around which to describe the contribution that ICT makes to the enhancement of the students' group research projects. In summary these four features are,

- content presentation;
- communication and collaboration;
- information seeking; and
- production capacity.

Content Presentation

Clear instructions about what is expected of students is vital. The detailed instructions are designed to both guide students' inquiry leaning processes and to ensure good group work practices and task completion. Instruction sheets and in-class project discussions are supplemented by web based materials in one of two ways. URL links to recommended websites and online library resources are also provided. An alternative approach delivers project outlines in the form of LAMS (Learning Activity Management System)[21] open source software. With LAMS software students' progress through the project's staged tasks in a more controlled and structured manner. This LAMS format also becomes the forum for some of the tasks themselves, for the sharing of resources, and for lecturers' monitoring of student participation.

Communication and Collaboration

The array of web based technologies that facilitate communication and collaboration significantly enhance the ability for students to function effectively in collaborative group work. The asynchronous nature of most of these tools allows communication and collaboration to take place within the varied study and work timetables of any given group of students. Technologies such as threaded discussion boards and wikis allow students to share resources and work collaboratively on idea development and content creation. There is evidence [22] that the asynchronous nature of these web-based discussions can enhance the quality of discussion by allowing participants to process new ideas and more deeply consider their responses than would happen in normal face-to-face discussion. For the Japanese Studies Projects each group enters into a private discussion board on the unit website for their collaboration.

Emails allow for easy communication in organisational matters. In cases where student face-to-face meeting arrangements prove difficult, Web-based synchronous communication tools such as chat rooms, voice chat and video conferencing facilities allow students to conduct group meetings online. With the support of shared document and image files, the effectiveness of such online meetings is further enhanced.

Information Seeking Capabilities

Of the four features of the Web, this is the one which is most vital to enabling the development of intercultural understanding from project work. To supplement traditional sources such as books, and journals in fostering this new approach to learning, students need to be able to access thoughts and opinions from the Japanese. From online newspapers students have access to the presentation of Japanese and international news stories as well as editorial opinion on current issues. Blogs and open discussion boards present opinions and thoughts. These examples and others provide students with materials that by their diversity require students to question, analyse, compare, reflect and in other ways engage their deeper thought processes. For their group projects students are encouraged to add this broad array of resources to the more traditional resources.

Production Capabilities

The fourth feature of the web is its capacity to allow students to create and present their own work in an online medium. The online technology such as iLecturer and the Live Classroom software can allows students to give live online presentations with voice and PowerPoint slides. However, while in these Japanese projects such technologies are sometimes used, the principal product of most of the group work is in the form of in-class oral presentations.

[20] Gillani, *Learning Theory and the Design of E-Learning Environments*, 9-11
[21] Philip, 'Implementing New Technologies Across the Organisation', 657-662
[22] Vinagre, 'Fostering Language Learning via Email', 371

Discussion

Objective means of assessing improvement in students' intercultural understanding are somewhat elusive. The evaluation of initiatives in teaching for intercultural understanding discussed in this paper has been based on the reflections of the teaching staff and students' responses to project work and the learning processes as a whole.

The assessment task introduced above that involves interviewing a Japanese person, typically receives very positive feedback from the students as a valuable task which gives them insights into both the target culture, and also a new perspective on their own. Other projects such as those mentioned above have similarly had a positive response from both lecturers and students. But given the challenging and sometimes confronting nature of the learning process involved in this project work it would not have been surprising to encounter resistance from language students who were used to a more guided learning process. And yet, over the years that these projects have been conducted, the number of individuals who have expressed objections to the tasks is negligible. Most provide positive feedback and provide significant evidence of the growth in awareness of issues that support the development of intercultural understanding. Many other learning goals of these projects, and other positive impacts on the language classes in general, have similarly been reflected in staff and student feedback.

In terms of involvement in Japan related culture and society issues, the depth of not only knowledge and understanding but also engagement with students' own topics could not be compared to the more traditional approach. In addition, even the peer presentation approach appears to connect with students more than the traditional approach to learning about culture. This is indicated by the increased level of student discussion following the presentations. Students seem far more engaged than after traditional lessons on the same types of topics.

Teaching staff also believed that the project work impacted significantly on students' generic competencies and of particular note was the development of communication skills. On the personal communication level the group work nature of the tasks has been seen to support improvement in students' ability to communicate appropriately with each other. As a member of a small group students are often able stand up in front of the class and present their findings with significant confidence.

Also, in the area of generic competencies, there are improvements in the use of ICT. Some older students in particular have had relatively little exposure to communication technologies compared to recent high school graduates and the small group work context has shown itself to be a very effective way to bring such students' skills quickly up to necessary standards. In addition, students appear to be becoming more discerning in their use of technology. Of particular importance to lecturers is students' awareness of the reliability of online resources they use and the implications this has to their evaluation of materials. They seem better able to judge content they access on a personal opinion/ verified fact continuum.

In addition to these many advantages, lecturers also felt that in most cases the writings and class presentations by students indicated a shift away from simplistic or stereotypical representation of Japanese culture. The cross-cultural comparisons that are essential elements of most of the projects are typically dealt with in a sound and balanced way. Students are often able to present their issues in ways that appear to bridge the cultures as much as distinguish them.

Responses to projects by students in the form of written reflections largely mirror the positive feedback from the teaching staff. The format for student responses is very open and they are asked to review peer group presentations and respond to their own learning, reflecting on the learning process. The style and extent to which students write to this task are largely self determined.

Issues relating to the group work process itself suggest that it is not learning process that students are commonly exposed to, yet the responses to this learning experience are mostly positive. Discussing the collaborative nature of the group context, one student wrote "it provides you with the advantages of multiple sources of inspiration" and s/he expressed a personal desire to do well for the sake of the group. Students frequently make simple assessments such as "We cooperated very well." Some mention the support that the more skilled members of the group provide. Some of the negative comments related to students carrying an unfair share of the workload, but for the most part difficulties related to the practicalities of organising common work or meeting times. Many other responses such as 'group members have frequent contact via email and discussion in class' however, show that students are using the technology based options available to them to overcome this type of difficulty.

Students felt they had gained from different projects. Some students simply recount what was learnt in terms of a simple comparison between the two countries. More often, however, the reflections reveal quite enthusiastic responses to new understandings or knowledge they have acquired. They also frequently reflect a new interest in some aspect of Japanese culture or society.

An appreciation of the opportunity to actually use Japanese language skills in a serious communication context is also commonly expressed. This is particu-

larly so with the intermediate level students who have a greater language resource to call on.

In terms of matters of intercultural understanding, views are often not overtly expressed. Even when there are comments that show student awareness of this as an outcome such as …"which only enhanced my global view of …" it is not necessarily evidence of greater levels of intercultural understanding. Overall though, there is a relative absence of simple stereotyping and the presence of a world view in the general nature of student responses which would seem to indicate a reasonably promising approach in students' attitudes towards cross-cultural studies of Japan. One student's comment on the issue of *hikikomori* demonstrates this type of understanding. 'I think it is extremely difficult for people in western cultures to understand the phenomenon. A report I read from a psychologist in the US said that if it was his son he would knock the door down.' The student is able to talk about a 'major difference between the two cultures' without imposing judgement on either the Japanese based *hikikomori* problem or on the US psychologist. Neither does the student try to suggest simple solutions. There is simply recognition of the complexity of the issue.

Furthermore, comments such as, 'Since we have different cultural backgrounds: Hong Kong, local Australian and Korean, I benefited from their thoughts', and similar appreciation of mixed background student groups, suggesting that students understand that what they are studying about is not simply Japan, but matters that relate to different cultures.

Conclusions

Teaching for intercultural understanding undoubtedly has a key role to play in the education of students in our globalised world. Language studies provide an ideal context in which to truly explore the understanding our students need to achieve this goal. Contemporary approaches to teaching provide us with ways to create appropriate learning experiences to allow students to achieve this outcome.

Language studies initiatives such as in-country programs and the various technology based university partnership programs make a wonderful contribution to the development of students intercultural competencies and understandings and should be promoted whenever resources allow. At the same time, approaches to teaching and learning in mainstream language studies programs should foster in all students these same skills and understandings.

While a methodology to reliably assess the development of students' intercultural understanding is not a part of the teaching learning initiatives discussed in this paper, the evidence that this approach enhances students' learning experiences is sufficient to encourage its further development. Indications of growth in students' critical approach to notions of culture have been observed. In the pursuit of these new understandings, wide ranging benefits that impact on the growth of students' personal and generic competencies, as well as on their formal learning processes, have resulted. As lecturers increase their own understanding of the processes of teaching for intercultural understanding, task design and inquiry frameworks can be refined to better focus the development of these understandings in students. Further development of means to assess students' development of intercultural understanding is expected to further support this approach to teaching.

To help ensure that such learning tasks can work effectively, students need to be assured of access to a wide range of contemporary materials from the country of focus. For this we need reliable access to the common technologies that allow such access. While supporting Gillani's assertion that 'In order to effectively use the web as a reform tool to transform teaching and learning in the classroom…, we need to adapt new instructional techniques that are student-centred',[23] we also believe the inverse to be true. In order to transform teaching and learning in the classroom by adapting new student-centred instructional techniques, students need to have effective access to web based tools. In this quest to develop students intercultural understanding, where they require the means by which to access not only information but contemporary thought and opinion from all levels of the target culture, this would certainly seem to be true.

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About the Authors

Helen Muir

My research interests involve work with ICT supported teaching and learning in languages and issues of teaching and learning in Japanese language. This research covers the areas of teaching of intercultural understanding and generic skills in the higher education context. I have co-authored CD-ROM initiates including the later volumes of the Kantaro kanji teaching series and the Gengoro CD ROM for the teaching of introductory level Japanese. My most recent project was the "Whole Curriculum Approach to ICT Supported Teaching and Learning" trial conducted in Japanese Studies at Macquarie University in 2005 and 2006. I am currently involved with research into assessment issues.

Kayo Nakazawa

My major research interests are second language acquisition, computer assisted language learning, Japanese as foreign language acquisition, autonomous learning, task based teaching and kanji acquisition. I have been involved development and implementation of Kantaro (CD-Rom for Kanji learning), Gengoro (CD-Rom for beginner level Japanese language), and WebCT content. I did investigation and study mainly in five areas; mechanism in second language learning, task study in second language learning, kanji acquisition in Japanese, use of technology to facilitate kanji learning, use of technology to improve distance education. In 2005 & 2006, I was involved the project, "Whole Curriculum Approach to ICT Supported Teaching and Learning" trial conducted in Japanese Studies at Macquarie University.