Asia capable teacher
Agnes Water State School QLD

Peta Swan

We acknowledge that a language does not exist in isolation so intercultural investigations are also a key component of our language studies. For example, we may begin a unit looking at introductions and greetings. Before we can create our own introductions and greetings to send, we need to view what is culturally appropriate and relate it to our target audience. So while our school curriculum focus is on the study of Asian languages, we combine this with some cultural studies of our target country.

Peta Swan, Agnes Water State School, QLD

The next step to familiarisation with ICT tools to increase teaching and learning productivity in the classroom is integrating the use of ICT in lesson planning and utilising ICT–based generic pedagogical skills. Quality pedagogy underpins the use of ICT, which ceases to be merely a tool, but becomes an approach to facilitating learning (UNESCO, 2004, 2011).

Learning is facilitated when ICT is used to search for, create and/or present content in a manner that enables students to learn more deeply and meaningfully. Students draw quicker, more visible connections between themes and concepts, which improves their understanding of the subject matter.
Agnes Water State School, QLD, demonstrates how teachers can use ICT to teach Asian languages and develop students' intercultural understanding with positive results.

The use of ICT to facilitate learning connections based on people–to–people links was observed at Agnes Water, with students developing greater awareness and appreciation of the reasons for learning the Indonesian language through interaction with an Indonesian sister–school.

Peta Swan describes:

ICT is integrated throughout student learning. It is vital to the learning of a second language as it brings our countries so much closer together. By sharing learning, we are creating links between our two countries, breaking down stereotypes and giving students a real reason to learn a second language.

The commitment to using ICT and setting up a virtual classroom at Agnes Water in order to achieve these specific learning outcomes was motivated by the desire for real-time interaction.

Peta described the benefits of ICT for sustainable sister school relationships:

In the past we had tried to create links with an Indonesian school, but the time delay between writing a letter and a reply being received meant that most students had lost interest. This

motivated us to apply for funding to cover the additional costs of both training and the time to set up and maintain a virtual classroom. Our goal was to allow students to communicate in real-time in a safe learning environment. This could only be achieved through the use of ICT.

The establishment of a virtual classroom at the school enabled synchronous language learning to occur, which also allowed intercultural understandings to be explored and developed within an authentic learning environment.

According to Peta:

Having access to ICT gave students a platform to communicate in real-time with our sister school in Indonesia. Through using Indonesian to communicate with peers in Indonesia, we are also allowing students to make friends and to explore similarities and differences between our two countries. This in itself supports the intercultural learning experience.

Using ICT to promote synchronous language learning and intercultural experiences comes with its challenges. But in recognising the learning potential provided by their virtual classroom, teachers at Agnes Water persisted with the idea and sought workarounds to ensure that the learning experience would not be affected adversely. This persistence has also led to increased student engagement within the Indonesian program.

Commenting on virtual classrooms, Peta says:

Honestly, I have been so happy with increased student engagement through the use of ICT. If anything, I would say that the virtual classroom, while easy to access and enrol students here in Australia, has been problematic in terms of enrolling students from our sister–school in Indonesia. One way we overcame this was to set up generic passwords for students in Indonesia, which is not ideal, but at least allows both our students to communicate in a safe shared learning space. We are looking at solutions to this. In future we also hope to incorporate Skype and/or comic chat, once this feature becomes available through the Learning Place.

From What Works 4: Using ICT in schools to support the development of Asia-relevant capabilities