

Educating for change

INTERNATIONAL-MINDEDNESS TOWARDS AUSTRALIA'S EAST-SIDE NEIGHBOURS

FLORENCE MONIQUE BOULARD

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

Aim

This project is not proposing new sets of teaching tools or innovative pedagogy for second language teaching; rather it is about acknowledging an important gap in the curriculum, the absence of some of our closest neighbours, the East-side neighbours. This absence is currently being emphasised by the Asian century that is focusing much of our attention to the North. All of this at a time when many Australian schools are attempting to develop global citizens who will one day become the future leaders of this country. The importance of engaging with Asia is unquestionable and there are many strong arguments that justify why one should engage in Asia, but it is in the interest of all Australians to have knowledge of all of their close neighbours.

Findings from this research could assist in transforming current teaching practice in the French language classroom and in the long term contribute to placing Australia in a stronger position to collaborate with all countries in its region and create a better future for all.

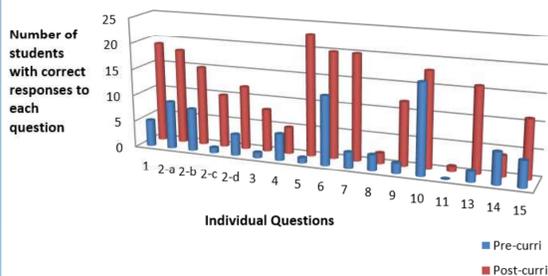
Methodology

This research project is a qualitative and quantitative inquiry guided by a transformative paradigm which incorporates ideas linked with change-orientated, interventionist, political and critical theory. It uses a participatory action research approach and is therefore composed of three main parts: the reconnaissance, the intervention and the evaluation. One of the objectives of this study is to develop a change-orientated curriculum for Grade 8 French which will contribute to developing students' international-mindedness and knowledge of their East-side neighbours, whilst remaining responsive to the linguistic requirements set by the Australian Curriculum.

The investigator has worked in collaboration with 14 other teachers from both Australia and overseas. The data collected during the intervention phase mainly comes from one class of 25 Grade 8 students all attending one of the largest state high schools in North Queensland, Australia.

Selected Results: Intervention Phase

Development of Student International Mindedness (Knowledge Component) towards Australia's East-side Neighbours



Initial results show significant gains in student knowledge (a component of International Mindedness) of the East-side neighbours over the course of a 10 week school term during which the students were exposed to a transformative curriculum.

From the Researcher

Education is critical in growing internationally minded citizens who will be able to succeed in this part of the world. A world where people from the North and the East play both a crucial role in the future of Australia. A world in which Australia conducts itself as a good neighbour. For this reason, it is important that the East-side neighbours are emphasised in the curriculum and I believe that the French classroom is an ideal place to start, although ultimately it would be great to see the East-side neighbours in other areas of the curriculum. If you would like more information about this research please contact me at florence.boulard@jcu.edu.au

"No nation can escape its geography", Percy Spender, Australia's Minister for External Affairs, in 1950.



ABSTRACT: Learning about Australia's neighbours has become a recent government priority that is reflected in the Australian curriculum. The focus is strongly on Asia, but what about Australia's other close neighbours? The results presented are part of the reconnaissance stage of an action research project conducted in schools located in North Queensland, Australia. The project aims to develop a French-language curriculum that focuses on increasing students' 'international-mindedness' towards Australia's East-side neighbours – New-Caledonia, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia. The data presented in this poster will indicate the levels of knowledge of Australian high school students towards these countries and, based upon these understandings, contribute to the debate about future directions of the curriculum. The future of Australia and its East-side neighbours are interwoven for economic, environmental and social reasons. It is necessary to reimagine how the curriculum connects Australian students with their East-side neighbours.

The Visible North and the Invisible East

Asia is important for the future of Australia because Asia is growing, Asia is innovative, Asia is influential, Asia is close to our nation, but most importantly, Asia is visible.

If Australia as a nation is truly aiming to develop its young people to become internationally-minded citizens through the teaching and learning of different cultures and beliefs, then it does not seem unreasonable to say that young Australians also need to develop an appreciation for their less visible neighbours, the East-side neighbours.

If the national strategic decisions a country makes cannot escape its geography, then Australia should become, not the most Asia-literate country in the Western world, but rather the most Asia-Pacific literate country in the Western world. The Pacific ocean is full of seemingly invisible islands, yet it is home to over 11 million people, and this is predicated to increase to 15 million in 2035 (Pacific Regional Information System, 2011).

The Australian government and the literature in general agree that the learning of foreign languages is one of the keys to improving ties between Australia and its closest foreign neighbours. If this is the case, the French language classroom could be the window of opportunity to educate young Australians about some of their other closest neighbours. The French language is used in French Polynesia, Wallis & Futuna, Vanuatu (a former French colony) and New-Caledonia which are located only a few hours away from some of the most populous Australian cities. Australian educators, because of the geographical position of Australia, are uniquely placed to bring to the attention of all young Australian minds that what much of the world currently see as an invisible, empty, large blue patch of water, is in fact a region full of hidden treasures.

Teacher Quotes

"I think currently, it is at the teachers' discretion to talk about the French Pacific islands. There are some opportunities in the curriculum because we need to teach about the language and the culture. However, often I have found that the resources are a bit lacking. It has not been done very much at all. I think it is very important to try to include it in our curriculum now. I expect the kids to get a lot out of it."

Kathryn, Senior French Language Teacher

"I have found that the students have a preference to learn about France. It is extremely stereotypical. The students all want to go to Paris and climb the Eiffel tower. I think this new curriculum is going to be a good way to challenge their ideal of France and what it is all about."

Cathy, French Language Teacher

"This curriculum is going to break students' preconceived ideas. Most students think that only white people speak French. The idea of what they have of a French person will be challenged through this new program. A French speaking person is not just a white person living in Paris. This unit is about opening their mind to something else and challenging that status-quo. I think it's great!"

Pauline, French Language teacher

"I have been to four different schools and worked with three different French teachers. I have not really found that teachers were putting an emphasis on the East-side neighbours. I think teachers are using what resources are available to them. I have noticed that when teachers ask students what they think of the French language, students will automatically think of France."

Carla, Pre-service French High School Teacher

Student Quotes



Students raised community awareness of the East-side neighbours as part of the transformative curriculum. Students also fundraised for the New Caledonian Children's Charity AVEC.

"I have learnt about Vanuatu, New-Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna and French Polynesia. This class has exceeded my expectation. Initially, I thought that we were only going to learn about the French language but we also learnt about the culture. I was surprised that we didn't learn about the Eiffel tower and now when I think of a possible travel with my French class, I think of Noumea, New-Caledonia rather than Europe. I think it is a beautiful culture and it is so close to Australia. I heard that people eat bats in New-Caledonia, I want to try that!"

Amily, Year 8 Student

"I expected to learn more about Paris because usually, stereotypical French is all about Paris. I was not disappointed, I was just surprised that we didn't learn about France but rather about New-Caledonia, French Polynesia, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna. It was the first time for me to learn about these countries so it was very interesting. Now that I have learnt about these countries, I think I would like to go to Vanuatu or New-Caledonia. I am from the Philippines and I found some connections between these islands and my own culture. It was a very interesting unit. I believe that because the French islands are closer to Australia, it will motivate more students to learn the language because now we know that there are people who are living just next to us who speak French, we don't need to go to France, Paris, to use what we have learnt in class."

Jayson, Year 8 Student

Good neighbours learn to speak each other's languages [...] Good neighbours learn to respect each other's religious and cultural beliefs. Good neighbours learn to allow for differences and to be inclusive. Good neighbours spend time with each other. Good neighbours understand that contentious issues should be resolved through negotiation.

(General Sir Peter Cosgrove in National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools, 2006, p.4)