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Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

comments from students who participated in Teaching from Country

The Yolŋu Studies program tries to place Yolŋu knowledge at the centre of the classroom experience, and tries to place students within a Yolŋu network of kinship. How successful do you feel this has been for you?

- In order to learn the language, it is important for us to learn its culture.
- Getting Mälk made me more motivated.
- I was happy with getting my Mälk, but I couldn't feel it realistic.
- To be a member of Yolŋu could make me feel motivated and interested in Yolŋu culture.
- Though we are far way from each other, I felt we were near to each other.
- Almost great! I can learn Yolŋu culture and history through the lectures from Yiniya , John, Kiyoshi, and other nice people and through the film (→This student refers to 'Ten Canoes') about Yolŋu people.
- I think we cannot understand the language itself without knowing its culture.
- Thinking about the kinship system as a member of the family can make it easier to understand the whole system.
- This program made me feel a bond with Yolŋu people, and this enabled me to study a lot easier.
- I think that it is an interesting way of studying. However, original identity of students must be considered. (→I'm not sure of what this student want to say.)
- Since I got my mälk, I had a sense of responsibility as a member of Yolŋu, and I tried to study harder and more seriously.
- To learn Yolŋu culture can help to learn and understand the structure of Yolŋu languages.
- This class betrayed my expectations in a positive way!

How is the Yolŋu studies classroom different from or the same as other classes you take at the university?

- There is a big difference, because in the Yolŋu studies classroom Yolŋu elders themselves teaches us their languages and culture unlike language classes in Japan.
- Very different in that we can learn the culture directly from native speakers of Yolŋu.
- It is rare for native speakers of exotic languages like Yolŋu to teach their language.
- This class was different from other language classes in that teachers put a high priority on teaching culture.
- The most different point is that native people lecture us directly at every session.
- It means a lot to us to be able to listen to Yolŋu authorities, though it is sometimes difficult to me to understand their English.

- We are very happy to have both a Japanese teacher, who knows Yolŋu language and culture well, and Yolŋu teachers, who are authorities of Yolŋu languages and culture.
- In this class, I can not only put new information of Yolŋu but also feel the way of their thinking and what they believe.
- When I learned Native American's language here in tufts, the teacher tried to make us understand its culture while teaching its language. At that time, I didn't understand why we needed to understand the culture, but now I could understand the reason thanks to this Yolŋu lecture.
- I'm taking another language course now, but in the class, the lecturer place emphasis on linguistic aspects. I found this Yolŋu class much better and more interesting, because lecturers teach us both culture and languages.
- Using Skype, we can be taught by Yolŋu elders.
- The biggest difference is that we can learn from the local people.
- Compared with other classes, we can communicate with teachers better, which is good for us.
- In other classes, we learn about linguistic aspect only, but here we can learn not only grammars or sound systems but its culture as well. This is very nice.
- Placing mush value on culture and using Skype can be really different from other classes.
- The different points are: the aim of the lesson was to learn culture mainly; not to cling to accuracy of grammar or pronunciation.

With this project, we have tried to introduce more Yolŋu knowledge authority into the classroom using remote computer technology. Has this project made any difference to your learning?

- Yes, it has.
- Yes, I feel it easier to ask a question than ordinary lectures.
- I found it a little hard to follow the lecture in English, but this lecture made me motivated.
- In spite of being far away from each other, we could meet and listen to each other, which was really wonderful.
- Yes, it has. It's really great idea that native people who have a lot of knowledge can teach us in the first place.
- Yes, I've changed a lot.
- Yes. I am not yet fully accustomed to this way of teaching, but still this teaching method is really helpful.
- I began to study by using Internet in many subjects.
- Yinjya's way of talking was so humble and friendly that we couldn't believe he is a very important and influential person, but I like him all the better for it.
- It helps me with studying a lot. It is very interesting that I can learn the social system from an expert of it.
- Actually I found it difficult to understand Yolŋu culture, but enthusiasm of the teachers who love Yolŋu culture and people, made me feel moved.
- The fact that the great elder in Yolŋu, Yinjya, teaches us directly makes me feel grateful and motivated.

Can you tell us about any particular teaching episodes which worked well for you or which didn't work well?

- I was satisfied with the native speakers' pronunciation.
- The practice of pronunciation was very helpful.
- The projected images could help us to understand what lecturers said.
- It worked well for me when I knew that Yolŋu people respect their nature, history and each other because these ideas gave me chances reflecting over myself who sometimes think just of myself instead of taking care of other important things.
- I learned a lot from Yinjya's story, and I came to understand the importance of people helping and supporting each other.
- Practicing pronunciation together with John or Waymamba was really helpful and fun!
- Yinjya's explanation of mälk system was really easy to understand, because he took his family as an example.

Did the teaching sessions change the way that you think of yourself as a learner of Yolŋu languages and culture?

No answers

The Yolŋu lecturers, especially Yinjya talk about the land as breathing and actively taking part in the teaching of young Yolŋu. Did you feel this when you were listening to Yinjya, Dhäŋgal or Waymamba?

- Yes, I did.
- Yes, I did.
- Yes.
- Yes, very much.
- I felt Yolŋu people live with nature.
- Yes!
- Yes, I felt it very much.
- Yes, I did.
- Yes, I did.
- Yes, Yinjya always seemed to eager to talk longer than the schedule, which made me feel his passion.
- Yes.
- Yes, I did. Their lectures are very impressive.
- Yes, of course!
- Yes.
- Yes.

Did the screen and the technical hitches prevent you (or help you?) learning in a different way from the everyday classroom?

- Yes, they really worked well.

- Yes, they were helpful. Without Skype, I would never meet Yolŋu now and in future years.
- Helpful.
- Helpful.
- Very helpful, but sometimes we were sorry that we couldn't connect to each other.
- No, not at all(→This means 'the screen and the technical hitches didn't prevent me at all').
- Skype can help me to learn more easily, because I can feel the local atmosphere in Darwin, NT.
- Yes.
- Though they were not so efficient but really fun, and made me motivated.
- Using Skype is new and interesting enough, I think.
- I think that it is very helpful for us to be exposed to the real voice of Yolŋu people.
- I found Skype helpful, because we could listen to genuine sounds of the language, and can ask a question directly.

What else did you learn from your sessions with your Yolŋu lecturers?

- I came to know about Australian life style a little.
- We could learn a different type of English than that of American accent, which was good.
- The great variety of human cultures and the importance of having an inquiring mind
- I feel closer to the local atmosphere.
- The importance of generosity. I can understand Yolŋu people have full of kindness, patience and generosity.
- I've enjoyed studying Yolŋu culture and history.
- In the near future, I'm going to Myanmar to carry out fieldwork. I learned from this lecture that I must respect the culture, the way of thinking and their faith in the course of fieldwork.
- I came to have more interest in minority languages.
- At first, some cultural aspect may not be accepted, but as we learned more and more about it, we came to accept it.
- I learned a lot from the characters of Yolŋu people.
- I learned everyday manner of Yolŋu just by attending this class and listening to them.
- My listening skill for English has been better.
- I came to know about Charles Darwin University.
- I learned a new way of seeing or thinking of the world.

Other comments:

- Universities in Japan should adopt the same distant learning system as Skype.
- I do wish to visit Arnhem Land in future.
- It seems to me that every single wisdom of Yolŋu people will be designed to avoid conflicts.
- This is amazing!
- I do wish keep in touch with Yolŋu people!