

Lao Language Integration

Teaching Plans

Primary 1-6

Introduction

A few years ago one of our VIS families moved to Vietnam. In Vietnam the children joined a well-known and highly regarded international school. Later, the family came back to VIS on a visit. We asked them about the Vietnamese language programme at their new school. The parents said that all students took Vietnamese until Grade 4 when students could choose to either continue with Vietnamese or start French. “What do most choose to do?” we asked. “About 90% switch to French,” answered the parents.

Recently I visited a school in Indonesia as a member of an accreditation team. Our team met with twenty students from grades 3 to 12. We asked them if they could speak some Bahasa Indonesian. A large number raised their hands. Knowing that the school taught Bahasa at all grades levels, we asked these students if they had learned their Bahasa at the school. About 90% put their hands down.

At Vientiane International School one of our primary purposes is to help students appreciate the people, history, culture and environment of Lao.

As one way to progress toward this purpose, we have designed a non-traditional approach to teaching Lao language in the Primary grades. In Primary 1-6 we have teaching teams:

the Teacher Assistant is the specialist in Lao language and the Homeroom Teacher is the specialist in teaching methodologies. Together, they plan and teach lessons with the aim of helping the children do two things:

- Actually *use* some Lao language, even in limited amounts.
- Enjoy learning and using Lao.

With these objectives in mind, we have designed some simple Lao language learning activities that can be ***practiced repeatedly -- but naturally -- as part of the daily class routine***. We do not necessarily set aside a “Lao language” period. Rather, we weave short learning and practice sessions into the fabric of the school day. Some possible examples are:

- A Lao song sung every morning.
- Lao greetings and farewells every day.
- Certain requests by students that are always made in Lao (*e.g.*, to go to the toilet).
- A quick vocabulary game that is played when the class has five minutes at the end of a period.
- Use of Lao words or phrases to organise class dismissals, etc.
- Asking students to find and request help from a Lao grounds staff member.
- Activities in the school neighbourhood that require repeated use of the same vocabulary (visits to the corner school, the wat, a nearby home).

The goal of all of this is to provide repeated practice in more natural, more realistic settings with many more opportunities to actually use (and therefore acquire) the language than is typically the case in separate “host country” language classes at

international schools. At the same time, we want to create and use activities that students enjoy – like many of their other activities through the day -- so that their attitude toward Lao language stays positive.

Our Primary Homeroom Teachers and Teacher Assistants, as well as Primary Co-Teachers, worked on this approach through the 2003-2004 school year. With the able coordination of **Mai Phoumivong** and **Mark Gordon**, all of the Teachers and Teacher Assistants met approximately every six weeks to share lesson plans. These lesson plans are now compiled here for use in all grades.

In 2004-2005 we will continue to develop this programme, coordinated by Mai and Mark. Homeroom Teachers and Teacher Assistants should continue to:

- Use their lessons developed in the past; adapt and use lessons from other classes; develop, record, and share new lessons.
- Plan and *teach as a team with both staff members planning and participating* in each lesson. Lao language is *not* taught as separate lesson by the Teacher Assistant.
- Weave Lao learning sessions into the routine of the day with many opportunities for practice.

During last year we observed that students really were using and enjoying some Lao around school. ***Congratulations!*** And thank you, Mai, Mark, and all of the Teachers and Teacher Assistants for all of your hard work and initiative in launching this new and promising approach. We are looking forward to another good year in which we discover and design more ways to help our students use and enjoy their host country's language.

-- John Ritter
-- 13 August 2004

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