This paper was originally published in the IHLA Newsletter in Fall-Winter 2013-14.

Learning through the Heritage Language: Learners make a research poster
Dr. Olenka Bilash (Obilash@ualberta.ca)

There are many approaches to heritage language (HL) programs. For some learners it is a program that offers an ***introduction*** to the language of family members or to a language of travel with their family. This might be called learning the language. For others it is a ***language development*** program, building on exposure to the language in the home. This creates opportunities to use the language orally and in written form (the four skills). Still others look to the HL community school as a place for opportunities to ***increase exposure*** to language domains. By learning history, geography, art, dance, or music through the language, HL learners expand their vocabulary and ability to interact about many more topics. Asking students to conduct research through the internet will expose them to many more contexts in which the language is used (for example, information sites, songs, film clips, menus, catalogues, news reports, picture captions, or weather reports). As soon as a learner has developed a base or foundation in the language, the primary goal should be ***learning through*** the HL.

With internet giving access to news and information, radio, youtube, and picture captions in so many languages of the world, not to mention opportunities to connect through email, skype and messaging, learners have more opportunities to "use" or communicate in the HL than ever before. The challenge of the HL instructor is to become familiar with such sites in order to be able to imagine how they might be tapped into during class or as homework. This can take time, but will yield worthwhile dividends.

In this article I offer a series of scaffolded steps for teaching a research project in a HL context. The project includes making and presenting a research poster. The sequencing, charts and templates provide degrees of support for learners of different abilities. Please translate them into your HL before giving them to students.

The topics of a research poster are broad in possibilities. In this paper two examples are provided: research about an animal is given in the body of the paper while research about a famous person is provided in Appendix A.

Introducing the task

Introducing the task involves four key steps: 1. Creating a model or example; 2. Completing a task analysis; 3. Determining the criteria for students; and 4. Using the poster to present the criteria to students.

Creating an example

Many teachers fear that by providing a model, learners will only 'copy it'; however, most learners use models as an example that makes the expectations of the task clear. Those

who do 'copy' it may need to do so for their own process of learning. Where possible create several examples. One could represent minimum expectations and the other high expectations. See Figures 1, 2 and 3.

Figure 1: Example of an animal poster – koalas (lower level)

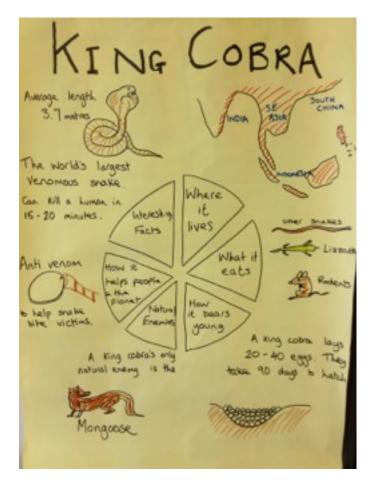Figure 2: Example of an animal poster – wombat

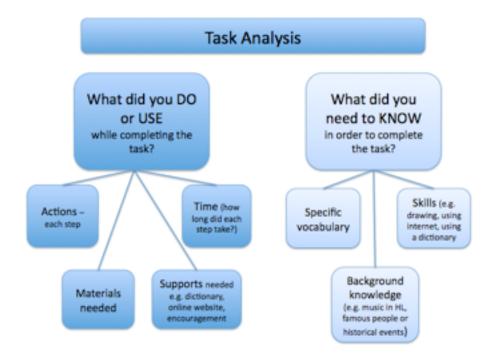Figure 3: Example of an animal poster – king cobra (higher level)

Task analysis

To provide a good model or example requires some teacher preparation. While preparing exemplars or model posters, the teacher becomes clearer about what is required to complete the task. This is called a task analysis. See Figure 4. A task analysis helps identify:

– the steps needed to complete the poster

– what materials are required

– which resources were consulted

– how much time was needed and

– what background knowledge is necessary.

This will help you insure that your students have the ability to carry out this project in their HL and that you allot sufficient time for completion, and provide appropriate age- and ability- related supports.
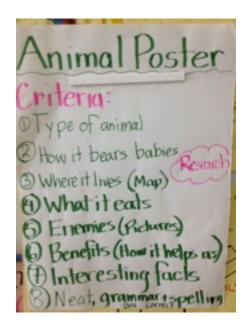
See Figure 4: What a task analysis can tell us

After the first group of students has prepared posters, the teacher can ask to keep copies for display and use in the future. Most students consider this a compliment and displaying their posters act as models and builds expectations for other students in future years. Their posters also inform the instructor as to how to improve the assignment for future use. For example, if students did not include a map or visuals the teacher may make this explicit as criteria in another year.

Determining criteria

Preparing a model enables the teacher to 'plan backwards' and determine which criteria to identify for students. Such criteria will eventually align with feedback sheets and assessment forms such as rubrics. Students often like to see the criteria as they are working on the task.

At this point it is also useful to decide whether the research poster will be an individual or group task.

Animal Poster
Criteria:
① Type of animal
② How it bears babies — Research
③ Where it lives (Map)
④ What it eats
⑤ Enemies (Pictures)
⑥ Benefits (How it helps us)
⑦ Interesting facts
⑧ Neat, grammar & spelling are correct

Using the model

Once a model or example has been created, the teacher can use it to ensure that learners understand the expectations. I often ask learners to stand in front of several posters and answer guiding questions related to the criteria. E.g. What is the name of this animal? Where does it live? What does it eat? What are its enemies? How does the animal benefit us/the planet? Interesting facts?

Alternatively, the teacher could divide students into groups of students to answer questions as a group. See Figure 5 for discussion questions. With three poster examples, one could have three groups of students. Each group is given three copies of the following questions to discuss orally (not to answer in writing). After a few minutes the teacher can ring a bell or create a signal for students to move to the next poster.

Figure 5: Discussion sheet: Give one copy to each group to discuss each poster.

Discussion sheet: Look at one poster and answer the following questions:
1. What is the name of this animal?
2. Where does it live?
3. What does it eat?
4. What are its enemies?
5. How does the animal benefit us/the planet?
6. Interesting facts?

7. Is the poster neat and attracting to the eye? Why?

8. What do you like about the poster?

9. How could the poster be improved?

10. What do you like about this poster that you would like to include in your poster?

Getting started

Now that students are clear about the final product that they are expected to create, some may need additional guidance in creating it. There are three important points to keep in mind.

First and foremost, learners need to know that research means learning something they already do not know. Thus, while students may choose an animal about which they already know a lot, they must strive to learn something new. Some students may choose to focus their research project on a personal pet to deepen their understandings. In this case, it may be useful to research the specific breed as opposed to the generic category. For example, they might research a german shepherd or a beagle, instead of only a dog.

Second, they may need help finding books or websites about animals in the HL. I recommend that teachers do prior research on websites that are available and age appropriate prior to presenting the task. Then they might limit students' choices to those that can be researched in the HL. Students will increase their investment in a project when they have *choice,* so offering a choice from ten or more animals should still develop student motivation.

Third, learners may need guidance and support in conducting the research. A research chart such as found below can help students see clearly what to look for and organize what they are learning. I may also enable them to learn that one source of information may not answer all of the questions of the research project and the reason why several sites or books must be consulted. See Figure 6.

Figure 6: A research chart to help students record what they are learning

<u>Research Record for poster</u>

SOURCE (website, book, newspaper...page, date...)	Number of Babies	What it eats	Where it lives	Enemies	How it helps	Interesting facts	Pictures/map

The booklet in Appendix B may provide students further guidance in progressing through the steps of the task. It may also be of interest to parents to see what their children are expected to complete.

A rubric of how the assignment will be graded may also offer help. As can be seen in Figure 7, the criteria of the rubric must align with the criteria given and discussed in class. Note that the criteria of language and accuracy focuses learner attention on spelling, grammar, and use of vocabulary. It is the teacher's responsibility to identify specifics in this category. Note also that "something special" enables students to be more creative and find a way to express something more unique such as including photos of their own pet or three-dimensional objects.

Figure 7: Animal Poster Criteria

Animal Poster Criteria   Names: _____   Final Score: _____/24

Criteria	4 Excellent	3 Good	2 Strong Effort	1 Please try harder	Score	Advice/Tips
Research Chart: Completed Used at least 3 sources of information Listed the sources						
Does the poster tell us: (x2) The name of the animal Type What it eats Where it lives How it bears young Its enemies How it helps people/ planet Interesting facts					X2	
Visual appeal Map Pictures Neat Colourful Easy to read						
Language - Accuracy Spelling Grammar Punctuation Does it include at least (e.g. 5 adjectives; certain verbs, verb tenses…)						
Other: Attitude Teamwork Good research Something special Other						

Sharing the results

The highlight of the hard work of making a poster often comes with its presentation, not just mounting it on the wall for others to see, but also an oral presentation about its content. Learners, especially the shy ones, develop confidence and many valuable life-long skills from presentations.

Even though related to the poster, an oral presentation is a second task and as such requires its own criteria. It is useful to discuss with students what makes a good presentation and generate criteria from their responses. The rubric in Figure 8 may also guide your discussion.

Figure 8: Animal Poster Presentation Criteria

Animal Poster Presentation Criteria   Name(s): _____   Final Score: _____/20

Criteria	4 Excellent	3 Good	2 Strong Effort	1 Please try harder	Score	Advice/Tips
Voice Loud Clear Good pronunciation **Confidence** Eye contact Gestures Posture						
Audience Awareness Use the poster Don't read Interaction with the audience						
Did you tell us: (x2) The name of the animal Type What it eats Where it lives How it bears young Its enemies How it helps people/ planet Interesting facts					X2	
Overall impression: Attitude Teamwork Good research Something special about how you presented						
Other						

Since students are able to prepare and practice their presentations at home, some believe that they offer only a limited glimpse of student ability. In fact, they do not reveal spontaneous use of interactional language. Thus, if desired, an additional criterion could be included for question-answer time. It works like this: after each presentation one or two students from the audience are asked to prepare questions for the presenter to answer. This helps to develop more spontaneous use of the HL for both the presenter and the audience and also increases listening attention.

Assessment and record keeping

Because it is difficult for teachers to be able to assess oral presentations quickly I recommend that each presentation be recorded. With today's technology most cameras are appropriate for this purpose. The teacher only needs to be able to save the presentations on a flashdrive/memory stick. Since 21st century youth are considered digital natives, do not hesitate to ask for their help. Once the recorded presentations have been saved, the teacher can view the presentations at home and assess them more carefully. Further, the recordings can be viewed in class at another time both to show students their accomplishments and also their progress. Some HL schools may choose to show such video clips of each student years later during a graduation celebration.

Good luck with this assignment. Most students will learn the HL while also learning through the HL. Trust your students and be ready to see a new side of them – their creativity and interests! Let's bring our HL programs into the 21st century!
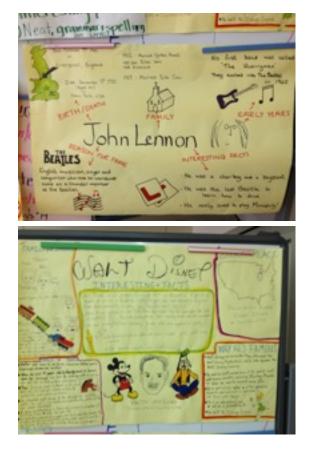
Thanks to many who helped create posters for this article: Andy Evans, Clare Evans, Fina Fa'amanatu, Alexandre Metsavas, Danielle Thomas, Megumi Chujo, Aya Hashimoto, Mayumi Kawase, Eiji Kikuchi, Keiichi Kojima, Yasuka Maeda, Maya Miyakoshi, Minami Nakamura, Chiharu Nozaki, Emu Sakurai, Chiaki Sato, Masaru Shinada, Motoko Sinkura, Miku Tashiro, Tomoaki Yamamoto.
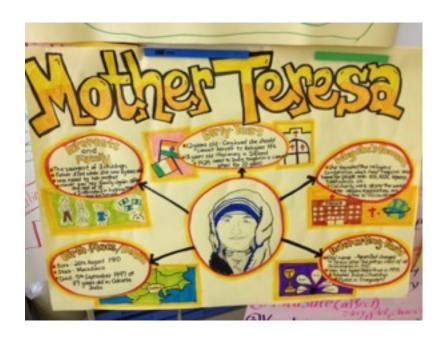
Appendix A: research poster about a Famous person

A research poster about a famous person could include the following criteria. The examples may also help you and your students understand the expectations.

Name
Birthdate and place (map)
Family and eaLife details
Early years
Why this person is famous
Interesting facts

Note: Adapt the discussion questions and rubrics found in this article as well as booklet in Appendix B to the task of researching a famous person or any other topic of interest.

Appendix B: Booklet for students and Parents about the poster task/assignment

Let's learn about animals.
TASK: Make an animal Poster

1.Genre/Form: Poster

2. Purpose of the form: People can learn a lot of information quickly from a poster. It can include one message in a few words. It can also include words, maps, diagrams, charts and pictures. The visuals, like pictures, "are worth a thousand words". Thus, it is easy to read.
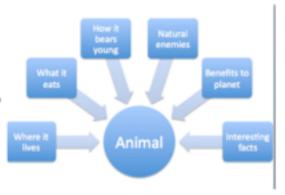
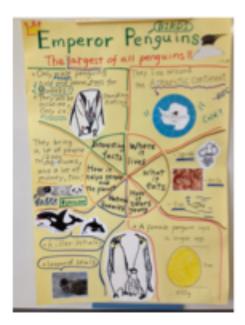**3. Contents or what to include:** Include the type of animal and how it bears its babies,
where the animal lives (and a map),
what the animal eats (and visuals),
the animal's enemies (and pictures),
how the animal helps us,
Some interesting facts about the animal.

4.Steps:

a. Choose an animal.
b. Read about it. Learn as much as you can. Look for information that matches the criteria.
c. Look at the examples to decide how to organize your poster.
d. Save room for visuals in each section of your poster.

> If you already know the answers it's not research!

Poster Criteria:

Make a poster about an animal.

Include:

- the type of animal and how it bears its babies,

- where the animal lives (and a map),

- what the animal eats (and visuals),

- the animal's enemies (and pictures),

-how the animal helps us,

- some interesting facts about the animal.

 Check spelling and grammar.

Make your poster neat and colourful.

Use pictures to interest your audience.

Information to help you 👉😪

- Complete the research chart before beginning to make your poster.

- Good researchers always review **many sources** of information.

- Check out the following websites and books to complete the research chart below.

Research Record for poster

SOURCE (website, book, newspaper...page, date...)	Number of Babies	What it eats	Where it lives	Enemies	How it helps	Interesting facts	Pictures/map

You will need poster paper and felt pens to complete your poster. You may also need printed content, a map and visuals, and glue.