

Teaching and Learning Languages

A Guide



Angela Scarino and Anthony J Liddicoat



Australian Government

**Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations**

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Statement

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Foreword



The Australian Government is committed to languages education in Australian schools and recognises the important role it plays in equipping young Australians with the knowledge, skills and capabilities to communicate and work with our international neighbours.

The Government is making a substantial investment in Australia's schools. The new National Education Agreement will provide \$18 billion to the states and territories over the period 2009 to 2012, offering flexibility to target resources towards key areas such as languages education.

The development of *Teaching and Learning Languages: A Guide* represents a key part of the Government's commitment to support teachers in delivering quality language education programs for all young Australians.

Learning a language should involve understanding how languages and cultures are a fundamental part of people's lives. Teaching languages from an intercultural perspective improves the engagement and learning outcomes of students of languages in Australian schools.

This Guide is a multi-modal package that is accompanied by a series of web-based materials which provide online practical examples of how the principles for developing intercultural language learning outlined in this Guide can be incorporated in language education. The online examples are drawn from the work of experienced language teachers who are working to implement new ways of teaching and learning in their classrooms.

This Guide is a significant new resource for teachers, schools and communities, which can be used to create inspiring language learning environments.

It will give students the opportunity to come to understand their own place in the world through their language learning, and will help them to use their learning to develop Australia's economic, social and cultural relations in an increasingly globalised world.

I commend this Guide and hope teachers will find it useful in their language teaching endeavours.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia Gillard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.

Julia Gillard
Minister for Education

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1

Orientation of the Guide

Purpose

This Guide is a resource for languages teachers to use in reflecting on languages education, their role as languages teachers, and their programs and pedagogies in relation to contemporary educational understandings and contexts. It invites teachers to think about the content, process and outcomes of their work in teaching, learning and assessment. The Guide is based on recent work by members of the languages teaching profession: teachers and researchers based in classrooms, schools and universities.

At times this Guide describes the field of languages teaching today generally; at times it describes actual practice in schools and in classrooms; and at times it reports on current research and thinking in languages education. At all times, it seeks to inspire members of our profession to challenge long-held beliefs about the teaching of languages with the intention of confirming their worth or changing them.

A key message of this Guide is that teachers need to analyse their personal, professional teaching 'stance': the professional big-picture understanding and position they bring to their work which shapes their programs and pedagogies. This Guide encourages teachers to consider their stance and develop it with regard to:

- professionalism and knowledge of education, teaching and learning
- personal and professional experience and self-understandings
- understandings of new and different contexts for students, teachers and communities and their impacts on learning
- contemporary understandings, including complexities and ambiguities, of languages and pedagogy
- the relationship of experience and past practices to new situations and new understandings as their stance develops and changes.

None of our personal and professional beliefs, perspectives or commitments are ever static, and the Guide addresses those aspects that teachers think about when considering the development of a personal and professional stance. At the end of each section, there are questions to encourage consideration of these aspects in relation to stance and to invite teachers to make changes to their thinking and to the practices of their work.

“A key message of this Guide is that teachers need to analyse their personal, professional teaching *stance*: the professional big-picture understanding and position they bring to their work which shapes their programs and pedagogies.”

Using the Guide

The Guide is supported by additional materials available at www.tllg.unisa.edu.au. These materials consist of a number of related resources designed to support teachers in developing a teaching stance and the practices that follow. Each section of this Guide is supported online with examples from classroom practice. The examples act as companion guides to the information provided in each section and present teaching activities in six languages. These online resources are provided as examples of what real teachers do when they are working in real contexts. They can be used for reflection on teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation. We know that teachers learn best from other teachers and so we encourage teachers to look across the sets of examples in all languages rather than just in languages they teach.

The Guide does not purport to be a methodology manual, though the online examples of programs will enable languages teachers to relate ideas discussed in the Guide to their daily classroom practices. The nature of teaching and learning means that teachers are, by nature and necessity, professionals who think about their work with their particular students in their particular context, and who learn and change through thinking and reflecting on practice. This Guide provides an opportunity to engage with the increasingly sophisticated theoretical and practical work of language teaching and learning, and using languages for communication in increasingly diverse settings.

Curriculum material has often come to teachers as prescriptive practices that they have been required to adopt and adapt. But teaching and learning are complex processes that require sensitive judgments and decisions to be made in context. Prescriptions do not necessarily work. For this reason, this Guide focuses on developing understanding and professional self-awareness rather than prescription (Pinar, 2003). It is a resource for members of the profession to use as they continuously consider their own experiences in light of the ideas discussed and their own classroom practice, and their own self-understanding as teachers, as part of the ongoing development of their personal, professional stance.

Some teachers may wish to work through the Guide chapter by chapter on their own or with a group of colleagues. Others may just wish to work on particular aspects of their practice, though it is likely that working on one aspect of teaching and learning will naturally lead to a consideration of others, in an ongoing cycle of reflection.

Developing a personal, professional ‘stance’

KEY IDEAS

- Stance describes the positions that teachers take toward their work as languages teachers and to their knowledge and pedagogies
- A teacher’s stance is both personal and professional
- A teacher’s stance changes and evolves over time and in response to changing contexts

‘Stance’ is a term adopted by Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle, researchers in education in the USA. They describe common understandings of stance, including body postures, political positions and the various perspectives that researchers and educators use to frame their questions, observations and reports.

“In our work, we offer the term ... *stance* to describe the positions teachers and others who work together ... take toward knowledge and its relationships to practice. We use the metaphor of stance to suggest both orientational and positional ideas, to carry allusions to the physical placing of the body as well as the intellectual activities and perspectives over time. In this sense, the metaphor is intended to capture the ways we stand, the ways we see, and the lenses we see through. Teaching is a complex activity that occurs within webs of social, historical, cultural and political significance ... Stance provides a kind of grounding within the changing cultures of school reform and competing political agendas.”

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999:288–289)

The act of teaching and learning is intricate, not something that can be reduced to a few methodological prescriptions. Furthermore, the role of teachers is not one of simply receiving prescriptions from others that are subsequently ‘implemented’ in their context. Rather, teachers come to the act of teaching and learning with their own dynamic framework of knowledge and understanding of their own personal, social, cultural and linguistic make-up and that of their students. Their experiences, beliefs, ethical values, motivations and commitments are part of their framework of knowledge and contribute to their stance and identity as a teacher (Scarino 2007). In teaching, the teacher’s framework interacts with those of their students as they work together to develop new understandings.

This framework is continuously evolving, based on our distinctive experience and reflection on that experience. It provides the frame of reference through which, in day-to-day teaching, teachers create learning experiences for students and interpret and make meaning of their learning. It is through this framework that teachers appraise the value of their own teaching and new ideas with which they might wish to experiment, to further develop or change their ways of teaching.

In reading and working with the Guide, teachers will bring their own frameworks of understanding to make sense of their work. The ideas and understandings that follow are a way of contributing to the professional dialogue that teachers, as educators, have with themselves in developing a personal stance and with colleagues and others in developing a collective professional stance.

Working with complexity and change

KEY IDEAS

- The nature, contexts and purposes of using language and languages in our multilingual and multicultural world is increasingly complex and teachers need to work with this complexity
- The key concepts that are central to teaching and learning languages are constantly evolving and need to be open to deeper understanding

Our work as teachers of languages has always been complex and subject to change. In developing a contemporary stance, languages teachers must consider and respond to notions of complexity and change. Just as teaching cannot be reduced to methods or prescriptions, the key concepts of ‘language’, ‘languages’, ‘culture’ and ‘communication’ cannot, and should not, be reduced to something simple.

The nature, contexts and purposes of using language and languages for communication are increasingly complex and ever-changing in our multilingual and multicultural world where people use different languages and dialects for different purposes in a range of different contexts. The need to communicate (that is, create and exchange meanings with diverse peoples both within and across cultures, and use a variety of communication technologies) requires a sophisticated understanding and use of language and languages. Through the experience of communicating across cultures and reflecting on that process, people develop an intercultural capability and sensitivity.

Developing such a capability means interpreting and exchanging meanings in the variable contexts of human communication and interaction, both within a particular language and culture, and across languages and cultures. It involves coming to understand the nature of the interrelationship of language, culture and learning and their connection to the meanings, practices and identities of communicators as fundamental to language use in its variable contexts. From an educational perspective, this means that the starting point in developing a stance for the teaching and learning of languages must be an expansive understanding of language(s), culture(s), their interrelationship and a process of communication that takes into account this variability. Theories and practices related to language teaching, learning and assessment are subject to constant inquiry and change. This means recognising that understanding these concepts, theories and practices, and developing/ changing a personal, professional stance, is a matter of ongoing professional inquiry.

Understanding contemporary contexts

KEY IDEAS

- Context of time and place influences purpose, shape and orientation of teachers' role in education
- Changes in the context of education influence teachers' personal and professional stance
- Globalisation has focused the importance of developing capabilities in languages-literacy-communication and intercultural engagement
- Languages have a central role in Australian education because they mediate the interpretation and making of meaning among people
- Advances in technology alter the way people use language, communicate and relate with each other, with information and with learning (especially the learning of languages)

All educational thinking and discussion is set in a particular context of time and place that influences their purpose, shape and orientation. This section of the Guide explores:

- some contextual understandings of our contemporary world
- the changing educational landscape
- Australia and the world of languages education

as a means of considering the contemporary influences on our personal, professional stance.

Globalisation

Globalisation, including the growth of a globalised knowledge-based economy has brought about unprecedented access to information, global conversations and relationships, and economic growth and, in some places, exploitation. The rapid movement of people, ideas and knowledge has highlighted the need to better understand the diverse nature of society, cultures and values.

Globalisation has increased the diversity of teachers, students and community members engaged in education, in face-to-face and 'virtual' learning situations, who bring extraordinarily diverse histories, experiences, and backgrounds to learning. Australian educators are increasingly aware that knowledge is not made only in English, nor made available only in English. There is an increasing emphasis on the 'internationalisation' of education, which brings a variety of real and virtual interactions.

The reality of globalisation has brought an increasing recognition that people in all spheres of life, and particularly in education, need to develop an *intercultural capability*, that is, being able to negotiate meanings across languages and cultures. It has also brought an increasing realisation that a capability in English only is insufficient, despite its status in the world, and that being a bilingual, or indeed multilingual, person has become the norm. Contemporary information and communication technologies have become integral to people's lives, and increasingly mediate learning, knowledge and communication. They have altered the very way people relate with each other, with knowledge, with the economy and, most particularly, with learning.

Languages have a central role in this context because they mediate the interpretation and making of meaning among people within and across languages.

A changing educational landscape

Recognising the linguistic and cultural diversity in our world doesn't just mean giving a place to languages in the curriculum. It alters the very fabric of education, emphasising that languages are integral to the national curriculum and education as a whole.

National collaboration sustains the diversity of languages formally taught and assessed in Australia and the recognition, nationally, of multiple purposes of assessment opens up the possibility of moving beyond a view of outcomes as levers of change to a focus on understanding and working with the complex interrelationship of teaching, learning and assessment.

Languages education is an integral part of education in general. An intercultural orientation to education moves it from a monolingual to a multilingual phenomenon. Some points to note about the current educational landscape and understandings about learning are:

- that learners, teachers and their relationships are central to languages learning as a 'peopled' activity (Candlin 1999)
- that learning focuses on what learners with their distinctive linguistic, social and cultural profiles, experience, interests, desires, motivations and values bring to their learning environments and how that shapes their interactions with those learning environments
- that teachers, with their schools and wider communities, create a culture of language learning and using in the classroom and beyond
- that teachers need to come to know their students profoundly in their social, cultural, linguistic as well as cognitive diversity as the basis for developing and sustaining learning
- that teachers need to have an expanded view of language, culture and the relationship between them
- that teachers need to recognise that languages change, depending on the context in which you use them
- that the act of teaching languages entails teachers and students bridging home and peer cultures, as well as their cultural life in Australia and the cultures of the communities making connections between the language being learned.

Australia – national initiatives in education

A number of developments are taking place at policy and curriculum level that will influence languages education in distinctive ways. Much collaborative development has also taken place in languages education in recent times at a national level and further development is anticipated. Teachers of languages need to continue to engage with these developments and use them as a basis for reflection on their work in their particular contexts.

The new *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, a pivotal declaration in Australian education was released in December 2008. Languages have been included as a key learning area in the National Declaration, agreed by Ministers of Education of all states and territories of Australia. In 2007, a report prepared by the states and territories of Australia stated that:

“... skills for future participation in society must include *intercultural engagement, communication and understanding*, recognising the diversity in the Australian workforce and the significant number of Australians employed in companies operating globally.”

(Council for the Australian Federation, 2007:17 – emphasis added)

This report also, appropriately, includes languages among the learning areas that it proposes for all students. What is clear from the current context is that languages are integral to education in general and, as such, should continue to be an essential part of the learning experience of all students in Australian education.

Another dimension of the changing educational landscape in Australia is the contemporary work on a *national curriculum* resulting from collaboration between the states and territories and the Commonwealth and supported by the establishment of a National Curriculum Board. Languages have been highlighted as one of the areas to be considered in early discussions in this context.

National collaboration is a key feature of languages education in Australia and has always been based on a national desire to harness the full range of linguistic expertise available across all states and territories and to share the load in extending the range of languages offered.

One of the most distinctive accomplishments of languages education in Australia is that through collaboration nationally, across sectors and across states, and through a range of providers and technologies, the educational systems continue to offer a range and diversity of languages at different levels (beginners, continuers, background speakers) that are formally taught and assessed at upper secondary level (Mercurio and Scarino, 2005). The commitment to continuing to sustain and develop this degree of diversity is fundamental.

At a *policy level*, this has been achieved through policy statements such as the National Policy on Languages (Lo Bianco, 1987); the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1991); the report: *Asian languages and Australia's economic future* (Council of Australian Governments, 1994) and its accompanying National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) strategy. Most recently, at a policy level, national collaboration across states, territories and the Commonwealth has centred on the *National statement for languages education in Australian schools and the National plan for languages education in Australian schools 2005–2008* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2005).

At a *curriculum level*, there is a longstanding history of national collaboration which began with the publication of the *Australian Language Levels (ALL) Guidelines* (Scarino, Vale, McKay & Clark, 1988), and continued with collaborative, national curriculum development in four specific languages (Italian, Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese); national collaboration at senior secondary level, through the National Assessment Framework for Languages at Senior Secondary Level (NAFLaSSL); and the Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Framework for Languages (CCAFL). A further highly significant, national collaborative development was *Australia's Indigenous Languages Framework* (SSABSA, 1996a, 1996b). Since 2005, national collaboration has continued predominantly in the areas of research and professional development through national level projects funded by the Australian Government through its School Languages Program. These projects include work in investigating the state and nature of language learning in schools, teacher education, investigating Indigenous languages programs, the promotion of language learning, improving the national coordination and quality assurance of languages programs in after-hours ethnic schools, leading languages and implementing professional standards.

In addition, a large professional learning project, the *Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning in Practice* (June 2006 – December 2007), was funded under the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program to allow teachers to learn about intercultural language learning and conduct classroom-based investigations incorporating this orientation towards language teaching and learning (www.iltlp.unisa.edu.au).

National initiatives in *assessment* have recognised that assessment serves multiple purposes, only one of which is the reporting of learning outcomes. Additionally and fundamentally, assessment provides information that teachers, parents and other interested parties need to improve students' learning (assessment for learning). This usability of assessment information to improve student learning depends on richness and quality which entails much more than simply articulating outcomes. These two purposes of assessment can no longer be seen as separate. Rather, they are both a part of the complex interrelationship of contemporary teaching, learning and assessment processes.

Our profession has identified assessment and reporting of languages learning as a priority in our own further professional learning. As languages education emerges from the era of outcomes framed exclusively in terms of the typical curriculum development categories (ie skills, discourse forms, tasks, linguistic features, etc), there is increasing emphasis on the ultimate value of learning languages; that is, what is it that learners should/can take away from an experience of learning their particular language?

For over a decade, the focus of educational systems has been on prescribing curriculum and assessment requirements. What is needed now is a shift towards understanding how the complex processes of curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment actually work in particular contexts.

Early childhood and primary education

The focus, at a national level, on early childhood education and the centrality of the primary years involves discussion about important learning experiences for all young children. Languages will need to be part of this discussion, recognising both the range of languages that children bring to education and the need to expand the integrated language-literacy-and-communication repertoires of all students. In the past two decades, there has been a major increase in languages learning in the primary setting and this remains an important area for development.

Central role of teachers

Research highlights the central role of teachers in students' learning. At a national level, there has been an important recognition of the central role that teachers play in students' learning. The teachers' charter released by Teaching Australia in 2008 describes the complex professional, social and ethical role of teachers. The Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations (AFMLTA), the major professional body for the language teaching profession, has developed professional standards for the accomplished teaching of languages (Kohler, Harbon, McLaughlin & Liddicoat, 2006; Liddicoat, 2006). The AFMLTA's statement of standards recognises both the value, and the professional and ethical responsibilities, of language teachers. The overarching standard is described as follows.

“Being an accomplished teacher of languages and cultures means being a person who knows, uses and teaches language and culture in an ethical and reflective way. It involves a continuous engagement with and commitment to learning, both as a teacher and as a lifelong learner. It means more than teaching knowledge of languages and cultures and includes teaching learners to value, respect and engage with languages and cultures in their own lives and to interact with others across linguistic and cultural borders. It means creating a culture of learning which approaches language, culture and learning with respect, empathy, commitment, enthusiasm and personal responsibility.”

(Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, 2005)

These aspirational standards developed by the profession, for the profession, describe the kind of teaching that will promote learning in our current times and shape the personal, professional stances adopted by languages teachers to their work, their students and their communities.

Role of parents and caregivers

The role of parents as participants in the educational experiences and decision-making of their child, in creating a culture of learning, has a distinctive flavour and purpose in languages education.

Contemporary understandings of education emphasise that learning is both continuous and lifelong and that it occurs at home, in the community, in school and beyond. Parents are not only a child's first educators, they continue to shape the learning and attitudes to learning of their children into adulthood. Parents seek opportunities to participate in, and contribute to schooling by sharing curriculum related information, knowledge, experience and skills, and through the understandings they have of their children and their aspirations for them. The professional stance adopted by teachers to their role and work will recognise parents and other community members as active contributors to learning, ensuring that parents receive meaningful information about the curriculum and teaching program, and about their child's learning and progress, so they can participate in their child's learning, achievements and decision-making.

In relation to learning languages, parents have distinctive roles and responsibilities. In intercultural language teaching and learning, parents can support their children in analysing cultural and linguistic similarities and differences within and across languages and cultures. Parents and community members can offer historical and regional perspectives on cultural and linguistic developments and engage in developing intercultural understanding with their children. Some parents will also be users of the language their child is learning and their contribution will be directly useful. Parents who speak other languages will be able to support their children in developing a broad linguistic understanding of how languages work and of interactions across language and culture generally. In all families, the child's language learning affords the opportunity to parents to work with their child to learn something new together by relating their own knowledge of history, geography and social systems and their own understandings of language and culture.

Questions for reflection

- 1 Think about your own personal, professional stance as a languages teacher. How does it reflect your particular personal social, cultural and linguistic make-up and values?
- 2 To what extent do your current beliefs, ethical values, motivations and commitments reflect the contemporary and global educational landscape?
- 3 What gaps in your current knowledge and understanding do you instinctively feel you need to investigate by learning more about? How does this influence your stance?
- 4 How do you currently engage with parents in relation to language teaching and learning? To what extent do you utilise the diversity of family experiences?

2

Language, Culture and Learning

What is language?

KEY IDEAS

- Language is more than just the code: it also involves social practices of interpreting and making meanings
- The way we teach language reflects the way we understand language
- What is learned in the language classroom, and what students can learn, results from the teacher's understandings of language
- There is a fundamental relationship between language and culture
- It is important to consider how language as code and language as social practice are balanced in the curriculum

Understanding language

Language is at the heart of language teaching and learning and teachers need to constantly reflect on what language is. This is because our understandings of language affect the ways we teach languages.

Language as code

Traditionally, language is viewed as a code. In this view, language is made up of words and a series of rules that connect words together. If language is only viewed in this way, language learning just involves learning vocabulary and the rules for constructing sentences. This understanding of language is, however, a very narrow one. It sees language as fixed and finite and does not explore the complexities involved in using language for communication.

Language as social practice

An understanding of language as 'open, dynamic, energetic, constantly evolving and personal' (Shohamy, 2007:5) encompasses the rich complexities of communication. This expanded view of language also makes educational experience more engaging for students. Language is not a thing to be studied but a way of seeing, understanding and communicating about the world and each language user uses his or her language(s) differently to do this. People use language for purposeful communication and learning a new language involves learning how to use words, rules and knowledge about language and its use in order to communicate with speakers of the language. This understanding of language sees a language not simply as a body of knowledge to be learnt but as a social practice in which to participate (Kramsch, 1994). Language is something that people do in their daily lives and something they use to express, create and interpret meanings and to establish and maintain social and interpersonal relationships.

If language is a social practice of meaning-making and interpretation, then it is not enough for language learners just to know grammar and vocabulary. They also need to know how that language is used to create and represent meanings and how to communicate with others and to engage with the communication of others. This requires the development of awareness of the nature of language and its impact on the world (Svalberg, 2007).

Our understanding of language, as languages educators, becomes part of our professional stance and, as such, influences our curriculum, planning and classroom pedagogies. Teachers who view language simply as code make acquiring grammar and vocabulary the primary, if not the only, goal of language learning. Within such a limited approach, students do not begin to engage with language as a communicative reality but simply as an intellectual exercise or as a work requiring memorising.

“

A professional stance that understands language as a social practice requires students to engage in tasks in which they create and interpret meaning, and in which they communicate their own personal meanings and develop personal connections with the new language.

”

The understanding of language that is part of our stance also affects what happens in the classroom and the ways in which learners begin to understand the relationship between their own languages and the languages of their learning. If the language learning program focuses on the code, then it models a theory of language in which the relationship between two languages is simply a matter of code replacement, where the only difference is a difference in words. If the language pedagogies focus on the interpretation and creation of meaning, language is learned as a system of personal engagement with a new world, where learners necessarily engage with diversity at a personal level.

Within a professional stance that understands language as a social practice, teachers need to ensure that students are provided with opportunities to go beyond what they already know and to learn to engage with unplanned and unpredictable aspects of language. Learning language as a complex, personal communication system involves ongoing investigation of language as a dynamic system and of the way it works to create and convey meanings. This involves learners in analysis and in talking analytically about language. Kramsch (1993:264) notes that: ‘talk about talk is what the classroom does best and yet this potential source of knowledge has not been sufficiently tapped, even in communicatively oriented classrooms’. The emphasis on ongoing investigation and analysis assumes that learners are involved in learning which promotes exploration and discovery rather than only being passive recipients of knowledge as it is transmitted to them by others. These learners require learning skills which will give them independence as users and analysers of language (Svalberg, 2007).

Language and culture

Understanding the nature of the relationship between language and culture is central to the process of learning another language. In actual language use, it is not the case that it is only the forms of language that convey meaning. It is language in its cultural context that creates meaning: creating and interpreting meaning is done within a cultural framework. In language learning classrooms, learners need to engage with the ways in which context affects what is communicated and how. Both the learner's culture and the culture in which meaning is created or communicated have an influence on the ways in which possible meanings are understood. This context is not a single culture as both the target language and culture and the learner's own language and culture are simultaneously present and can be simultaneously engaged. Learning to communicate in an additional language involves developing an awareness of the ways in which culture interrelates with language whenever it is used (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino, & Kohler, 2003).

A matter of balance

In developing a professional stance to language teaching, it is important to consider how language as code and language as social practice are balanced in the curriculum. In developing language capabilities, students need to develop their knowledge and understanding of the code and also to come to see language as a way of communicating between people. Both of these goals need to be present in language teaching and learning from the beginning.

Questions for reflection

- 1 Consider the tasks you have used for a particular class or module. What do these tasks show about what you have been emphasising in your own teaching? Do these show a balance between treating language as a code and as a social practice of meaning-making and interpreting?
- 2 How might you develop new tasks for use in the classroom which present a more balanced or more elaborated understanding of language?

What is culture?

KEY IDEAS

- Culture can be seen as practices or as information
- Culture plays a central role in the way meanings are interpreted
- Cultures are characterised by variability and diversity
- The intercultural is not the same as culture but is a process which goes beyond the idea of 'knowing a culture'
- Culture is fundamentally related to language

The way in which we understand culture, just as the way we understand language, affects the way we teach culture in language learning. In developing our stance, there are two fundamentally connected issues to consider:

- what we understand culture to be
- how we understand the place of culture within language learning.

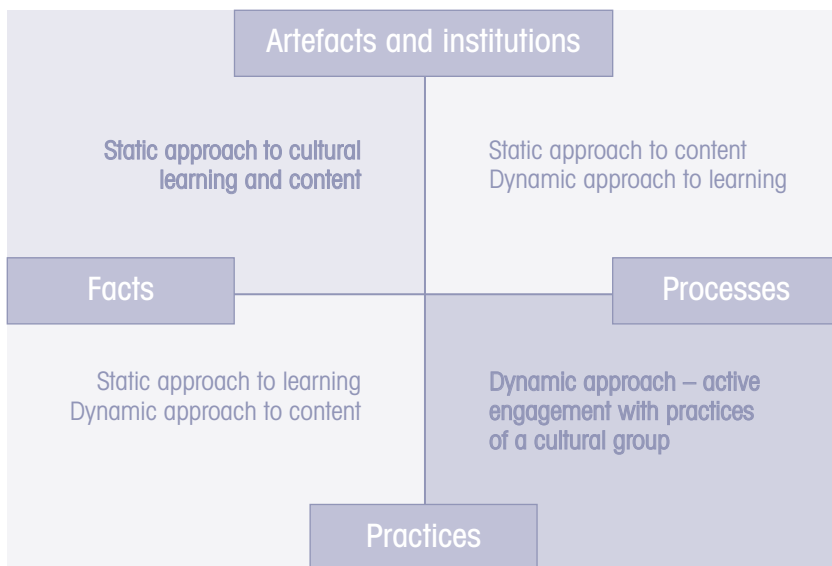
Understanding culture

One way in which culture has often been understood is as a body of knowledge that people have about a particular society. This body of knowledge can be seen in various ways: as knowledge about cultural artefacts or works of art; as knowledge about places and institutions; as knowledge about events and symbols; or as knowledge about ways of living. It is also possible to consider this aspect of culture in terms of information and to teach the culture as if it were a set of the learnable rules which can be mastered by students. When translated into language teaching and learning, this knowledge-based view of culture often takes the form of teaching information about another country, its people, its institutions, and so on. Culture is not, however, simply a body of knowledge but rather a framework in which people live their lives and communicate shared meanings with each other.

Static and dynamic approaches to culture

In thinking about how to teach culture in the language classroom, it is useful to consider how the ways in which culture is presented can be categorised. The diagram below (adapted from Liddicoat, 2005) is one way of thinking this through.

Approaches to teaching culture



One dimension is the axis of culture as facts or as processes: that is, whether culture is seen as a static body of information about characteristics of a society or as a dynamic system through which a society constructs, represents, enacts and understands itself. The second axis represents the way in which culture is conceived in terms of educational content. It makes a distinction between artefacts and institutions and practices: that is, whether culture is seen in terms of the things produced by a society or as the things said and done by members of a society.

The most static way to approach the teaching of a culture typically emphasises artefacts, institutions and factual knowledge. Both the approach to culture learning and the content itself are static. The lower left quadrant adopts a static approach to the nature of learning, but a more dynamic approach to the content, whereas the top right quadrant is static in terms of its content, but dynamic in terms of its approach to learning (eg as in activities in which learners engaged with cultural artefacts in a hands on way). The most dynamic approach to culture is represented by the lower right hand quadrant, which sees learners actively engage with the practices of a cultural group.

The intercultural dimension

Knowledge of cultures is important for facilitating communication with people. Therefore learners of languages need to learn about and understand cultures. Understanding culture as practices with which people engage becomes centrally important. This means that in the language classroom it is not just a question of learners developing knowledge about another culture but of learners coming to understand themselves in relation to some other culture. This is why there is a contemporary emphasis on 'intercultural'. Learning to be intercultural involves much more than just knowing about another culture: it involves learning to understand how one's own culture shapes perceptions of oneself, of the world, and of our relationship with others. Learners need to become familiar with how they can personally engage with linguistic and cultural diversity.

There is another way to think about culture in language teaching: the distinction between a cultural perspective and an intercultural perspective (Liddicoat, 2005).

This 'cultural' pole implies the development of knowledge about culture which remains external to the learner and is not intended to confront or transform the learner's existing identity, practices, values, attitudes, beliefs and worldview. The 'intercultural' pole implies the transformational engagement of the learner in the act of learning.

“The goal of learning is to decentre learners from their own culture-based assumptions and to develop an intercultural identity as a result of an engagement with an additional culture. Here the borders between self and other are explored, problematised and redrawn.”



Taking an intercultural perspective in language teaching and learning involves more than developing knowledge of other people and places. It means learning that all human beings are shaped by their cultures and that communicating across cultures involves accepting both one's own culturally conditioned nature and that of others and the ways in which these are at play in communication. Learning another language can be like placing a mirror up to one's own culture and one's own assumptions about how communication happens, what particular messages mean and what assumptions one makes in one's daily life. Effective intercultural learning therefore occurs as the student engages in the relationships between the cultures that are at play in the language classroom. Such learning involves much more than just developing knowledge about some other culture and its language.

The intercultural framework proposed here, then, consists of three intersecting dimensions for understanding approaches to the teaching of culture in language learning:

- the nature of content: artefact-practice
- the nature of learning: fact-process
- the nature of the educational effect: cultural-intercultural.

In learning about culture in the language classroom, we need to draw on our own experiences of language and culture as they are encountered when trying to create and interpret meanings. The ability to learn beyond the classroom is probably more important than any particular information that students may learn about another culture during their schooling. This is because it is impossible to teach *all* of any culture because cultures are variable and diverse. As languages educators, we know that what we can teach in the classroom is inevitably only a partial picture of a language and culture. By acknowledging that limitation in our own teaching, we are less likely to develop stereotypical views of the cultures we are teaching about. Learning how to learn about culture means that, as people engage with new aspects of culture, they develop their knowledge and awareness and find ways of acting according to their new learning.

One way of developing intercultural capabilities is through an interconnected set of activities involving:

- noticing cultural similarities and differences as they are made evident through language
- comparing what one has noticed about another language and culture with what one already knows about other languages and cultures
- reflecting on what one's experience of linguistic and cultural diversity means for oneself: how one reacts to diversity, how one thinks about diversity, how one feels about diversity and how one will find ways of engaging constructively with diversity
- interacting on the basis of one's learning and experiences of diversity in order to create personal meanings about one's experiences, communicate those meanings, explore those meanings and reshape them in response to others.

A dynamic relationship between language and culture is always at play. It is through exploration of the interactions of language and culture that this awareness and the ability to act on it can be developed.

Questions for reflection

- 1 Collect the tasks you have used to teach and assess culture for a particular class or module. What do these tasks show about the way you have presented culture in your teaching? Do they show that you have used culture explicitly to develop the interculturality of your learners or do they show a focus on acquiring information about others? Do these tasks explicitly include opportunities for activities such as noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting?
- 2 How significantly does your stance as a languages educator focus on interculturality?
- 3 How might you modify your teaching to focus more on developing the ability to learn how to learn?
- 4 How would you explain intercultural language learning to parents?

Understanding learning

KEY IDEAS

- There are changing views about learning in general and languages in particular in contemporary education
- The learning theories that teachers hold implicitly or explicitly influence their teaching, learning and assessment practices
- Theories of learning have changed from behaviourism to cognitive and sociocultural theories. They have been described through acquisition and participation metaphors and it is recognised that both are needed
- Language, culture and learning together form the basis for the languages curriculum

Rationale for considering learning theories

In thinking about teaching, learning and assessing in languages education, it is essential for us to consider the understandings that we hold and the assumptions that we make about learning. This is because these understandings, be they implicit or explicit, influence our professional stance as language educators and our teaching, learning and assessment practices. Our understandings of learning are not simply acquired as knowledge that is put into practice; rather, they develop over time and in diverse contexts working with diverse students, based on ongoing experience and reflection.

In such an ongoing process, often 'dominant theories of the past continue to operate as the default framework affecting and driving current practices and perspectives' (Shepard, 2000:4). Thus, it is important to have a sense of past theories as well as more contemporary conceptualisations of learning as a basis for examining understandings and assumptions about how students learn. Teachers as social beings construct the world of teaching and learning according to their values and dispositions. As such, their biographies are central to what they see and how they interpret their world. As Shepard points out, changing conceptions of learning

are closely entwined with changing conceptions of curriculum and assessment. She observes that, at present, there is a mismatch between current views of learning on the one hand, and teaching and assessment practices on the other. This mismatch warrants further consideration in each particular context of teaching and learning.

Some teachers find engaging with theory to be of limited direct value and prefer to focus on practice. Theory versus practice dichotomies do not reflect current understandings as theory and practice are not seen as opposites. Contemporary understandings show that there is an important relationship between the two: a good theory can be immensely practical, just as excellent practice informs theory-making. It is learning theory that provides big picture understandings when teachers wish to reconsider and potentially change their practices.

Theories of learning

Behaviourism

Behaviourism, one of the most pervasive theories of learning in the 1940s and 1950s was based on stimulus-response associations. Its focus is on *observable* behaviour rather than thinking. Learning within this theory entails the accumulation of atomised bits of knowledge that are sequenced and ordered hierarchically. Each item of knowledge (called 'objectives' in curriculums and programs) is to be learned independently on the assumption that this makes learning more manageable. All the constituent parts of learning are to be mastered before proceeding to the next part (objective) in the hierarchy, gradually leading to a complex whole. In this theory, learning is seen as developing associations between stimuli and responses. Motivation involves positive reinforcement of the many small steps in learning and forming good habits. Development is seen as occurring through a series of required stages, in a step-by-step process.

The major concerns with this theory are that:

- learning is broken down into ever-smaller, analytic parts that are no longer integrated to form a whole
- learning entails much more than a response to a stimulus
- learning is task and context dependent.

Cognitive theories

The various cognitive theories, which challenged behaviourism, introduced the concept of a thinking mind. Learning within these theories is understood as a process of active construction whereby each individual makes sense of new information in his/her mind by mapping it onto his/her existing framework of knowledge and understanding. The incorporation of new knowledge leads to a restructuring of the individual's conceptual map. These theories also highlight the fact that learning is context-dependent – that is, 'situated' – and that new knowledge can only be taken in when connected to existing knowledge structures. In this sense, learning involves a process of making connections – reorganising unrelated bits of knowledge and experience into new patterns, integrated wholes. Students learn by relating new experiences to what they already know. Learning involves making new meanings which are generally expressed through language. In this way learning, language, meaning and thinking are closely related. Within this perspective, beyond the accumulation and restructuring of information, developing knowledge involves developing processes of self-monitoring and awareness that we refer to as metacognition.

Sociocultural theories

Whereas cognitive theories highlight thinking as it occurs *in the mind of the individual*, sociocultural theories consider the relationship between thinking and the social, cultural, historical and institutional context in which it occurs. The rediscovery of the work of Vygotsky (1978) has led to the understanding that learning and development are culturally embedded and socially supported or mediated processes. As Lantolf, one of the major researchers who has developed sociocultural theory in the field of applied linguistics, explains:

“ Sociocultural theory holds that specifically human forms of mental activity arise in the interactions we enter into with other members of our culture and with the specific experiences we have with the artefacts produced by our ancestors and by our contemporaries. Rather than dichotomising the mental and the social, the theory insists on a seamless and dialectic relationship between these two domains. In other words, not only does our mental activity determine the nature of our social world, but this world of human relationships and artefacts also determines to a large extent how we regulate our mental processes.

(Lantolf, 2000:79)

”

Learning according to this theory is developed through *social interaction* with more knowledgeable or more proficient others. This social process of interaction (through language, as well as other systems and tools such as gestures, narratives, technologies) *mediates* the construction of knowledge and leads to the individual's development of a framework for making sense of experience that is congruent with the cultural system in which the learner and learning are located. It is through this social and cultural process that students are socialised to act, communicate and 'be' in ways that are culturally appropriate to the groups in which they participate as members, and through which identities are formed.

Within sociocultural theories, development occurs twice: firstly in the process of social interaction (that is, on an *interpersonal* plane) and then within the mind of the individual (that is, on an *intrapersonal* plane). *Language is integral to learning in that it is the major means by which we make and share meanings with ourselves and with others, and by which we negotiate social relationships and social values.* It is language that makes it possible for people to objectify and conceptualise themselves in the world – to give names to experiences, and make sense of the environment, objects, experiences, events and interactions. In short, language is central to the process of conceiving meaning, which is integral to learning.

Sociocultural theory is concerned with the *development* of individuals over time. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is not fixed but dynamic and developmental. In this sense, the developmental focus is on an individual's *potential* abilities. An individual's learning potential depends fundamentally on mediation – that is, learning support or scaffolds that are made available. These scaffolds might include reminders, examples, models, graphics, illustrations, explanations, further questions and elaborations, as well as encouragement. They are designed to move the learning forward in the zone of proximal development. An individual's learning and achievement are mediated by supportive interactions with others. This interaction is fundamental to learning. To understand learners' learning and potential development, it's important to take into account both what they are able to do independently and what they can do, with others, in and through social interaction – what they are able to do at any particular time and what they continue to learn to do over time.

The cultural dimension of sociocultural theories of learning is highlighted by Gee.

“A sociocultural approach places a premium on learners’ experiences, social participation, use of mediating devices (tools and technologies), and position within various activity systems and communities of practice. The word ‘culture’ has taken on a wide variety of different meanings in different disciplines. Nonetheless, it is clear that as part and parcel of our early socialisation in life, we each learn ways of being in the world, of acting, and interacting, thinking and valuing and using language, objects and tools that critically shape our early sense of self. A situated/sociocultural perspective amounts to an argument that students learn new academic ‘cultures’ at school (new ways of acting, interacting, valuing and using language, objects and tools) and, as in the case of acquiring any new culture, the acquisition of these new cultures interacts formidably with learners’ initial cultures.”
(Gee, 2008:100)

Thus the diverse cultural understanding and experiences that students bring are highly influential and need to be taken into account. The implication of this for us as a profession is that we need to enlarge our understanding of learners, recognise the extraordinary differences in their social and cultural life-worlds, experiences, motivations, aspirations, and incorporate this diversity into our teaching and learning.

Merged theories

While there is much debate within and among cognitive, constructivist and sociocultural theories, Shepard (2000:6), among others, maintains that it is some kind of combined or ‘merged’ theory that will end up being ‘accepted as common wisdom and carried into practice’. Learning, then, is socially constructed, mediated through language and other tools that are congruent with the culture in which the learner and learning are situated, and develops over time. As Broadfoot says:

“

What we can and should do is ... recognise that learners are first and foremost sentient beings and, hence, that the quality and scope of their learning is likely to be at least as closely related to their feelings and beliefs about it as it is to their intellectual capacity.

”

(Broadfoot, 2005:138–139)

Students bring with them their own conceptions, misconceptions, understandings, experiences and feelings that shape their learning.

Acquisition and participation

Anna Sfard (1998) discusses learning theory through two metaphors: an acquisition metaphor and a participation metaphor. Learning within the acquisition metaphor involves the accumulation of a body of facts or items of knowledge that are abstracted and generalised. The process may involve either reception or development by construction, but the focus is on ‘gaining ownership’ (Sfard, 1998:5) or possession of something. Within the participation metaphor, learning involves participating within a community of more knowledgeable others to construct understanding. Participation takes place in the context of culture through social mediation. The focus within this metaphor is not on possession but on participation in various kinds of activities characteristic of a learning area as the learner gradually becomes a member of the subject community. Sfard highlights that ‘each (metaphor) has something to offer that the other cannot provide’ (Sfard, 1998:10).

Questions for reflection

- 1 How does your stance to language learning reflect your views on learning?
- 2 Where do your views on learning come from?
- 3 How are your views of learning evident in your teaching and assessment practice?
- 4 What are some implications of these learning theories for your own teaching?
- 5 Why do you think Sfard emphasises the merging of the two metaphors?
- 6 Are there dimensions of learning that are not captured by the acquisition and participation metaphors?

Understanding language learning

KEY IDEAS

- Second language acquisition and learning theories need to account for language learning by learners from diverse life-worlds, learning with diverse needs, interests, motivations and desires in diverse contexts
- Intercultural language teaching and learning focuses on the relationship between language, culture and learning
- Using languages, hence learning languages, is:
 - an intrapersonal and interpersonal process of meaning-making
 - interactional
 - developmental/dynamic
 - interpretive, imaginative and creative

Second language learning

Theories that have been developed to account for second language learning, or acquisition, are closely related to those discussed above as general learning theories.

A behaviourist approach to second language learning focuses on imitation, practice, encouragement and habit formation. Learning a second language necessarily involves comparison with the learner's first language, but the latter is generally perceived as causing 'interference' in the learning of additional one(s). This approach is seen now to offer an insufficient explanation of the complexity of language learning.

The linguist Noam Chomsky (1957) provided a major critique of behaviourism and its view of second language learning as imitation and habit formation. He developed a theory of first language learning that suggests that language learning is an innate capacity – that children are programmed to acquire language thanks to their in-built knowledge of a Universal Grammar. He called this knowledge 'competence', to distinguish it from what might actually be said on a particular occasion.

For Chomsky, this abstract knowledge of language consists of a limited set of rules that enabled an infinite number of sentences to be constructed. While he did not specifically address second language learning, his theory has been applied to it.

With regard to teaching methodology, behaviourism can be linked to grammar/translation methods that tend to focus on the parts of grammatical knowledge with less attention on how these parts might be brought together in communication. The audiovisual and audio-lingual approaches were based on stimulus-response psychology – that is, training students through practising patterns to form ‘habits’.

One of the most influential of the innatist theories (ie theories that argue that language is innate, is that of Stephen Krashen and it is this theory that influenced communicative language teaching (for more information, see Lightblown & Spada, 1999, Chapter 2).

Within cognitive theories of second language acquisition, learning involves building up the knowledge system or architecture which over time and through practice becomes automatically accessible in reception and production. Some theorists within the cognitivist tradition have argued that interaction is essential for language learning to take place, with the modification of input, by teachers for example, to render it comprehensible to the learner (see Long, 1983).

The sociocultural perspective on second language learning, based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), highlights that all learning, including language learning, is based on social interaction (see Lantolf, 2000) with more proficient others, on an interpersonal and intrapersonal plane as described above. Through the concept of the zone of proximal development, it highlights that language learning is developmental. The characteristic of ‘prior knowledge’ is very important. It recognises that new learning is built on prior learning – that is, the ideas and concepts that students bring to learning. Teachers work with these preconceptions in order to facilitate learning.

The characteristic of ‘metacognition’, or awareness about how we learn, is integral to learning. Students need to understand how they learn. They need to continuously reflect on their learning and develop self-awareness of themselves as learners. There is a strong connection between learning and identity: learners need to negotiate constantly who they are, and how they can be/ should be/ would like to be in the language and culture they are learning.

The role of language

The role of language in learning cannot be over-emphasised. Language is the prime resource teachers have and use for mediating learning. When learning languages, then, teachers and students are working with language simultaneously as an object of study and as a medium for learning. In teaching languages, the target language is not simply a new code – new labels for the same concepts; rather, effectively taught, the new language and culture being learned offer the opportunity for learning new concepts and new ways of understanding the world.

While these theories of second language learning provide insights on aspects of second language learning, there is no comprehensive or 'complete' theory that can guide the practices of teaching and learning. Nonetheless, this does not mean that 'anything goes'. Rather, it becomes necessary for teachers to become aware of and understand what they do and why, by examining their own, often tacit, theories about learning in relation to insights from current and best theories, and by considering the implications of these for teaching. Both teachers and students need to develop a rich conception of what language and culture are and do, and how they interrelate to interpret and create meaning.

Questions for reflection

- 1 How do you elicit and use students' prior knowledge?
- 2 How do you understand 'metacognition' and how would you discuss this with your students?
- 3 How does your current stance on languages teaching reflect differing, and perhaps oppositional, aspects of the theories discussed in this section?

Intercultural language learning

KEY IDEAS

- The intercultural orientation to language learning is intended to give salience to:
 - the fundamental integration of language, culture and learning in learning and using any language, and
 - the reality of at least two languages being constantly at play in learning an additional language
- Intercultural language learning can be considered through five principles:
 - active construction, making connections, interaction, reflection and responsibility

A stance to languages teaching that has intercultural language learning at its heart involves developing with students an understanding of their own 'situatedness' in their own language and culture, and the recognition of the same in others. It also involves understanding the way in which this recognition influences the process of communication within their own language and culture, and across languages and cultures. Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler describe it as follows.



Intercultural language learning involves developing with learners an understanding of their own language(s) and culture(s) in relation to an additional language and culture. It is a dialogue that allows for reaching a common ground for negotiation to take place, and where variable points of view are recognised, mediated, and accepted.

Learners engaged in intercultural language learning develop a reflective stance towards language and culture, both specifically as instances of first, second, and additional languages and cultures, and generally as understandings of the variable ways in which language and culture exist in the world.

(Liddicoat et al, 2003:46)



Through intercultural language learning, students engage with and learn to understand and interpret human communication and interaction in increasingly sophisticated ways. They do so both as participants in communication and as observers who notice, describe, analyse and interpret ideas, experiences and feelings shared when communicating with others. In doing so, they engage with interpreting their own and others' meanings, with each experience of participation and reflection leading to a greater awareness of self in relation to others. The ongoing interactive exchange of meanings, and the reflection on both the meanings exchanged and the process of interaction, are an integral part of life in our world. As such, intercultural language learning is best understood not as something to be added to teaching and learning but rather something that is integral to the interactions that already (and inevitably) takes place in the classroom and beyond.

Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler (2003) propose a set of five principles which provide a starting point for developing intercultural language learning, as shown in the (adapted) table on page 35.

Questions for reflection

- 1 How would you describe intercultural language learning to a colleague who is new to teaching languages?
- 2 What do you see as implications of the five principles for your teaching?

Principles for developing intercultural language learning

1	Active construction	Learning involves purposeful, active engagement in interpreting and creating meaning in interaction with others, and continuously reflecting on one's self and others in communication and meaning-making in variable contexts. For students, it is more than a process of absorption of facts but continuously developing as thinking, feeling, changing intercultural beings.
2	Making connections	<p>Learning is developed firstly through social interactions (<i>interpersonally</i>) and then internally within the mind of the individual (<i>intrapersonally</i>). In the interpersonal process previous knowledge is challenged, creating new insights through which students connect, reorganise, elaborate and extend their understanding. In this process, constant connections are made between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • language and culture and learning • existing conceptions – new understandings • language and thinking • first language – additional language(s) • previous experiences – new experiences • the intercultural self – intracultural self – others.
3	Interaction	Learning and communication are social and interactive. Interacting and communicating interculturally means continuously developing one's understanding of the relationship between one's own framework of language and culture and that of others. In interaction, participants engage in a continuous dialogue in negotiating meaning across variable perspectives held by diverse participants, and continuously learn from and build upon the experience.
4	Reflection	Learning involves becoming aware of how we think, know and learn about language (first and additional), culture, knowing, understanding and their relationship as well as concepts such as diversity, identity, experiences and one's own intercultural thoughts and feelings.
5	Responsibility	Learning depends on learners' attitudes, dispositions and values, developed over time. In communication, it involves accepting responsibility for one's way of interacting with others within and across languages and for striving continuously to better understand self and others in the ongoing development of intercultural sensitivity.

Summary

Taking the above discussion into account, some key dimensions of language learning include the following.

- Learning is both *intrapersonal* (ie takes place within the individual) and *interpersonal* (ie accomplished socially in interaction with others). It is also personal in the sense of pertaining to the person, shaping who they are and their identity. The most important point here is that learning is about personal meaning-making – how children and young people make meaning within themselves and with others, in and through learning.
- Learning is developmental – that is, a continuous process where students engage with increasing complexity.
- Learning builds on prior knowledge and cannot occur without attending to students' prior conceptions/misconceptions.
- Learning is interactive where interaction is focused on meaning-making.

Learning is mediated primarily through language – all the languages of the students' repertoires.

- Feedback is critical to learning – students need to know where they stand and what they need to do and understand in order to take the next steps in their learning.
- Learning involves transfer; it needs to be applied in diverse contexts. Through use in different situations, with different participants etc, students learn how to adjust their learning to the particular local context, circumstances and requirements.
- Learning is self-awareness and relates to metacognition (ie learners being aware of how they learn, and why they learn as they do).

These characteristics of learning are also features of *intercultural* language learning.

An expanded view of learning and using languages in the context of culture recognises these as intra- and interpersonal processes of meaning-making: interactional, developmental, interpretive, imaginative and creative. The implication for teaching is, fundamentally, that learning extends beyond 'exposure' to focus on interaction and the life-worlds of all people involved. As such, it is a 'peopled' view of language learning.

Questions for reflection

- 1 Consider your view of language learning in the light of the discussion and summary above. Which characteristics are regular parts of your teaching? In what ways are these characteristics evident?
- 2 Which characteristics are less evident in your teaching? In what ways might you incorporate these characteristics? How will this change your 'stance'?

3

Teaching and Learning

Classroom interactions

KEY IDEAS

- Interaction is a social process of meaning-making and interpreting
- Interaction has an important place in education as it allows active engagement with ideas and interpretation
- Interaction must be purposeful and meaningful for participants

Interaction as structural

Languages classrooms are fundamentally interactive. However, the nature and quality of the interaction varies according to the ways in which it is understood and constructed.

Studies of classroom interaction have tended to focus on the organisation of talk in the classroom and on identifying structures, such as the Initiation-Response-Feedback structure of teacher-student talk (eg Cazden, 1988; Stubbs, 1986). They have also examined patterns of teacher talk directed to students (eg the use of questions, feedback, recasts) or of student talk in small group interaction (eg the use of learners' clarification requests, comprehension and confirmation checks, how students interpret instructions). Much work in Communicative Language Teaching has also focused on the idea that classroom interactions should be 'natural', by which it is assumed that they will resemble conversations in a number of ways: unequal participation, the negotiation of meaning, topic nomination and negotiation by more than one speaker, and the right of interlocutors to decide whether to contribute to an interaction or not (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Such studies assume that language instruction is enhanced by certain ways of talking designed to provide students with opportunities for original utterances in the target language, clarifying the meaning of units of language, and modelling grammatically correct versions of learners' talk. These studies portray interaction as any and every opportunity to use the target language and see interaction as successful if meanings are understood.

What is missing from such a view of interaction is an appreciation of the fact that interaction is *purposeful*. People do not talk in order to use language: they use language in order to talk. Therefore people need to have something to talk about and someone they wish to talk about these things with. By removing communicative purpose as a relevant consideration in classroom action, language teaching has tended to construct interaction as a sterile and pointless activity. Moreover, by removing communicative purpose from interaction, such views make it difficult to determine the educational purpose of interaction: what learning is being developed, supported or enhanced by interaction? If the purpose of interaction is solely to use the target language, and any target language use is unproblematically seen as 'learning', then the sorts of learning through which interaction can be developed are necessarily limited and superficial.

Interaction as social

More recent understandings of interaction, and its roles and purpose in teaching and learning, see it as more than just the exchange of target language talk. Interaction is fundamentally a social process of meaning-making and interpreting, and the educational value of interaction grows out of developing and elaborating interaction as a social process. It is through interaction that learners engage with ideas and concepts and the diverse interpretations and understandings of these held by their interlocutors. In interaction, the participant is both performer and analyser of what is happening. Educationally purposeful interaction must engage the learner in both roles.

Understanding communication as a social process does not simply mean that language is used for 'socialising', it means that there is a social purpose for the interaction. In classrooms, the social purpose of interaction is related to learning, through the discussion of ideas, insights and interpretations. Classroom interaction is more than a simulation of everyday interaction: it is interaction with learning as its central concern.

A social view of interaction also means considering the participants in interaction in different ways. It involves interactions between teachers and students and between students and teachers, between students, between students and others (including the voices of others as they are encountered through texts, video, digital technologies, etc). Interactions need to bring opportunities to students to explore their ideas, interpretations and reactions as they encounter the ideas, interpretations and reactions of others. Such learning involves:

- using language as a starting point for interaction to generate ideas, interpretations and responses
- seeking opinions and the reasoning behind these
- probing responses to elaborate deeper and more complex understandings
- drawing out, analysing and building on personal experiences
- eliciting variability in contributions, and engaging with the diversity found as a resource for further interaction
- engaging in open dialogues between participants in which all have opportunities to explore their own perceptions and understandings
- developing language abilities to meet interactional needs rather than limiting interactional opportunities to current language capabilities.

In planning for interactions, it is important to consider the tasks with which students are to engage. As each task constructs an experience of language and culture, there needs to be variation in the types of tasks to which students are exposed over the course of the program. If too much class time is devoted to a particular type of activity – for example language practice, small group discussion, text analysis, projects – the range of experiences of language, culture and learning available to the students will be reduced and skewed towards certain capabilities rather than others.

In considering tasks, it is important to take into account not only what students will do but also what they will learn. If tasks are understood as activities, then it is the carrying out of the activity itself that becomes the goal and learning is only understood in relation to whether and how well the task could be done (that is, knowing the procedure). This form of learning leaves out the deeper conceptual, reflective elements which are central to the process. To move deeper, it is important to consider what students will gain from doing the task, what they will take away from the learning experience and be able to draw on in other contexts and at other times. In considering what learners will take from a learning experience, it is also important to consider what learners bring to that experience that can be drawn upon, developed and/or challenged. It is important to consider what the students will engage with in the task, the central ideas or concepts which will be the basis of their deeper learning, and how the task will bring them to such engagement. Moving to this view of task design strengthens the purposefulness of the interactions in which students engage and possibilities that they offer.

Questions for reflection

- 1 What kinds of interactions are evident in your classroom teaching and learning?
How would you characterise them?
- 2 Using a task from your current program or textbook, describe how you could modify it to strengthen interaction as discussed above.
- 3 Imagine interaction in your language classroom from the point of view of one of your students. How do you think they might be experiencing the interactions you create? Ask them and compare their responses with yours.
- 4 Audio-record an interaction from one of your classes. Analyse it using the distinction between doing and learning made above. What do you notice?

The nature of interactional language

KEY IDEAS

- An interactive classroom requires attention to the nature and quality of language use
- Questioning is a central element in intercultural language teaching and learning and requires a thoughtful approach to the purpose of questions in learning

In the language classroom, language provides the starting point for learning and interactional language contributes directly to the nature and quality of the learning. This effectiveness is not simply a product of the amount of talk, but is influenced fundamentally by the quality of the talk. Talk needs to be *about* something and the substance of the talk needs to have value in its own right.

In planning for interaction, teachers plan the sorts of things that students will be able to say, whether in speaking or in writing. What sorts of ideas will they be able to explore? What sorts of ideas, interpretations and responses are likely to result from the experiences in which they participate? How will they be able to participate in these experiences? What roles are constructed for students in the interaction: initiator, respondent, critic, investigator, etc?

Explaining

Explanations are a typical element of teacher talk in which teachers introduce new concepts or information for students to assimilate into their own knowledge. In providing an explanation, a teacher is the sole source of the information being delivered and the teacher's authority is the sole validation of the information. Explanations are mostly monologues and may occupy an extensive period of class time. During an explanation, students are often expected to be passive receivers of the information being provided by the teachers, although they may be encouraged to seek clarification if they do not understand aspects of the explanation. As a part of any instructional approach, explanations need to be interactive to promote active forms of engagement with the material by students.

Concepts can be introduced in other ways which allow learners the possibility of constructing, exploring and expressing their own interpretations of the material to which they are exposed. Where learners are given experiences of meaningful communication in the target language in which ideas, attitudes or perspectives of others are present, these can be used as a starting point for exploration in which learners actively construct their own knowledge about the concept. The process is interactive in multiple senses. It involves interactions between students and the originator of the text in which they make interpretations of the language and its meaning for themselves. It needs to be guided interactively by teachers as they scaffold the processes of assembling and interpretation through questions, hints, reminders and modelling. Ideally, it should also involve opportunities for students to interact in developing and refining their interpretations, in communicating their interpretations to others and in commenting on and reflecting on the interpretations of others. While an explanation delivers information which needs to be remembered, the interactive investigation of information provides opportunities and processes for developing learners' understandings of the material.

Questioning

Questioning is a central part of developing interactive language in the classroom. Teachers allocate significant teaching time to asking questions and it is these questions which give shape to the lesson. Students' questions tend to be less frequent and are often restricted to clarification or confirmation functions. In an interactive classroom, questions need to be distributed across participants in a way which allows for collaborative exploration of ideas. It is not just who asks questions and how often that is important in the intercultural language classroom, but also what sorts of questions are asked. In studies of teachers' questioning, two main question types are described:

- *display questions* in which the answer is known by the teacher and used to elicit recall of information from students
- *referential questions* in which the answer is not known by the teacher and used to elicit a meaningful communication from the student.

Of these two types, display questions are specific to instructional contexts while referential questions are found in many types of social interaction. Display questions include, for example:

What did Marc lose on the train?

Does Paulo have a cat?

Why did Taroo not go to school today?

How did José get to work?

Referential questions can be closed or open. Closed questions are those which have only a single response, which is right or wrong, or true or false. For example:

How do you get to school in the morning?

When do you play sport?

These questions elicit facts, are relatively easy to answer, can be answered relatively quickly and keep control of the interaction with the questioner, almost always the teacher. They do not open up possibilities for going beyond the frame developed by the question.

Open questions are those which are designed to lead to a broad range of possible responses. For example:

What did you do during the holidays?

How do you spend your leisure time?

What do you think about nuclear power?

Open questions allow for the possibility of opening up discussion and of developing more questions on the basis of the initial response. They ask the respondent to think and reflect, to give opinions and feelings and they hand greater control of the interaction to the respondent.

Other types of questions include the following.

- Polar questions, to which the answer is either yes or no: *Do you like ice-cream?*
- Alternative questions, to which the answer is a choice between possibilities:
Do you prefer the red one or the blue one?
- *What*, *where* and *who* questions, which elicit facts: *What is your name?*
Who gave you the book? Where is the Eiffel Tower?
- *Why* and *how*, which elicit opinion or reasoning: *Why is Mari unhappy?*
How can Hans solve the problem?

The conventional distinctions between questions are not enough to provide a basis for developing interactional language in the classroom. They are all question types and do not consider the types of answers which come from the questions. The most important element for understanding the nature and role of questions is to consider the purpose of the question for it is the purpose which shapes the possibilities of the answers. For example:

- eliciting information
- exploring possibilities
- investigating connections
- eliciting interpretations
- eliciting assumptions
- promoting reflection.

These purposes can be elicited by a diverse range of question types. The focus of planning interaction here is not so much to ensure a diverse range of question types as to ensure that questions are used with a diverse range of purposes, appropriate to the learning focus. For example:

Why do you say that?

What is your interpretation based on?

What do you think about that?

Why do you think X thinks this way?

How do X's ideas differ from your own?

How could this be seen differently?

How does your interpretation relate to X's?

Quite often the purpose is not achieved by a single question. Rather, a question launches an interaction which is then elaborated through other questioning possibilities with multiple participants contributing questions and answers.

Questions for reflection

- 1 How would you characterise the kinds of questions you pose your students? The ones they pose to you? The ones they pose to each other?
- 2 Prior to your next class, consider the tasks/materials/ideas that you will be working with. Prepare two or three key questions that will extend your students' engagement. After the class, take note of additional questions you posed. What do you notice?
- 3 Describe how you might use questions to extend students' thinking.

Tasks and task-types

KEY IDEAS

- Task-based language teaching shifted the focus of language learning from knowledge of language to a focus on its use to achieve communicative purposes
- The value of tasks in language learning resides in their focus on purposeful use of language in diverse contexts
- Task-types provide a means for ensuring that students experience a comprehensive range of learning experiences
- The difficulty with using tasks as the basis for curriculum design resides in the issue of sequencing

One of the major developments in language teaching and learning in the 1980s, in concert with communicative language teaching, was the emergence of task-based language teaching and learning. This was an important movement that highlighted that students not only need to have knowledge of a language but also need to develop the ability to actually use it to achieve communicative purposes. Thus, students' learning was no longer to be described only in terms of inventories of language items, but also, and most importantly, in terms of tasks that they would accomplish – that is, what students do.

The nature of tasks

There has been an extensive debate on what constitutes a 'task' for the purposes of languages teaching and learning. Some distinctions have been drawn, for example, between 'exercises' (focused on noticing and developing aspects of the form of language) and 'tasks' (focused on integrated use of language) or between 'pedagogic' tasks (tasks accomplished for the purposes of classroom learning) and 'real-life' tasks (tasks involving the use of language in the real-world). More recently, emphasis in general education has been placed on developing 'higher order thinking tasks' or 'rich tasks'. Teachers developing these rich tasks build deep, elaborated thinking into the tasks

they ask students to do. As languages educators, we consider not only the need to develop accuracy (through a focus on form) and fluency (through active use of the target language in tasks) but also, and importantly, the need to develop complexity (Skehan, 1998) in interpreting and using language and in reflecting upon language and culture in the context of use. Thus, in developing tasks we also need to consider how each task builds on or extends previous learning and how it contributes to continuous and cumulative learning. Some of these distinctions are worth considering in developing the range of learning experiences that comprise a teaching and learning program for our students.

Tasks might be described as purposeful and contextualised instances of language use. They include:

A purpose	an underlying reason for undertaking the task (beyond the mere display of subject knowledge)
A context	the thematic, situational, and interactive circumstances in which the task is undertaken. The context may be real, simulated or imaginary. Considering context includes knowing where the task is taking place, when, who are involved, what previous experiences they share and what relationships they have
A process	a mode or process of inquiry, thinking, problem-solving, performing, creating
A product	the result of completing a task

(Clark, Scarino & Brownell, 1994)

Good language learning tasks, then, involve the judicious use of existing knowledge and above all an intellectual challenge (in both content and processes) for students; they involve interaction; they appeal to students' imagination and expand their interests; they develop confidence and provide a sense of achievement and enjoyment; and they contribute to learners' ever-developing communicative and learning repertoires.

Task-types

The value of tasks resides in the fact that they represent a worthwhile, integrative, purposeful, contextualised piece of work. Building on this value, tasks may be grouped in different ways to ensure a comprehensive range and variety of experiences for learners. These groupings are called task-types. The most frequently used way of categorising tasks is according to the four macro-skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Another way was developed in the six activity-types of the *Australian Language Levels Guidelines* (Scarino et al, 1988). These include:

- interacting and discussing
- interacting and deciding/transacting
- obtaining information and using it
- giving information
- personal response
- personal expression.

Another system of task-types focuses on higher order thinking skills:

- enquiring, interpreting
- presenting
- problem-solving
- performing
- creating, designing, composing
- judging, evaluating, responding (see Clark, Scarino & Brownell, 1994).

The task-type categories provide a means for ensuring that students engage with a range of learning experiences, participate in a range of language use in different contexts and, through this, learn increasingly to manage the variability of context. A dimension that is not sufficiently captured in these systems of task-type categorisations is a focus on reflection. This focus requires further elaboration.

Difficulties in using tasks

Tasks can be seen as a 'one-off' experience. There is a danger, then, that the task, no matter how engaging, becomes an end in itself, rather than a meaningful experience that leads to further *learning* in a conceptually, well-sequenced program. From an assessment point of view, teachers may be tempted to 'teach to the task', which again is not necessarily conducive to developing language learning over time. Another difficulty is sequencing. While principles can be offered to provide a basis for sequencing tasks (eg extendedness, complexity, application) the way in which these are used is not obvious.

Questions for reflection

- 1 In your languages teaching, do you draw a distinction between exercises and tasks or pedagogic tasks and real-life tasks? Why? Why not?
- 2 How do you ensure that your students experience a range of tasks through your program and interactions with you?
- 3 How might you modify one of the tasks you currently use to make it more complex and worthwhile for your students from a language-and-culture learning point of view?

Student engagement

KEY IDEA

- In planning student learning experiences, it is important to consider:
‘How does this matter to the learner?’

The orientation towards intercultural language learning brings further considerations in the development of tasks or interactions for language learning. The focus is on students interacting in the target language and culture in ways that develop their understanding of themselves as located in their particular language and culture (and the same for others with whom they interact). For both the student and the others with whom they interact, their frames of reference for interpreting their worlds, themselves and others have been constructed over time through interactions in their distinctive enculturation. These frames of reference influence how they see themselves and others moving across languages and cultures. This focus shifts the lens away from the task(s) per se and foregrounds people and human communication, specifically the role of the student as a participant in acts of communication with others. The focus is on learning to become ever mindful of the interpretations that they make and why, and how, in turn, they themselves are being interpreted by others. For each experience in and beyond the classroom teachers need to consider ‘How does this interaction position the learner?’ and ‘How does this matter to the learners?’. It is through addressing these questions from the perspective of the learners themselves that teachers address student engagement.

Questions for reflection

- 1 Take a task or unit from your program or textbook and consider how it might matter to your students. What do you notice about, for example, the nature of the task itself, its orientation, its participants?
- 2 How can you enhance student engagement in your program? Ask your students and compare their responses.

The diversity of learners and their life-worlds

KEY IDEAS

- Learner differences have traditionally been understood as differences in ‘ability’, a fixed, cognitive characteristic of students. The shift now is to ‘capability’ which focuses on each student’s potential
- It is necessary to understand the biographies of students, both as learners and young people, as a basis for developing their continuing learning
- Communicative interactions need to incorporate learner diversity

In traditional second language learning, students’ learning has been construed as an individual accomplishment and ‘learner differences’ have been considered essentially from a cognitive point of view.

Within a sociocultural perspective, Caroline Gipps highlights that:

“We are social beings who construe the world according to our values and perceptions; thus, our biographies are central to what we see and how we interpret it.”

(Gipps, 1999:370)

Students and their teachers are ‘social beings’ who interpret the world through their own social and cultural perceptions and values. This quality of people can also be described as their intraculturality. The biographies of students are important because the totality of their life experiences in their cultural life-world, their history (ie experiences over time), their geography (their location), their interactions, their opportunities to participate and learn, their motivations, their aspirations and so on, that influence how, what and why they learn. It is in this sense that teachers need to understand their students as diverse, individual, social and cultural beings, who bring this diversity to the learning process – not just cognitive diversity but social, cultural and linguistic diversity.

The Gipps quotation also highlights the importance of seeing students as young *people*. This seems self-evident but it can be argued that curriculum teaching, learning and assessment – foregrounding ‘skills’, ‘tasks’, ‘outcomes’, ‘standards’, etc – have become ‘de-peopled’. The current emphasis on pedagogy in general education represents a move towards addressing the less-than-ecological view of teaching and learning that has prevailed.

With this recognition in mind, teaching needs to focus on:

“ ... what learners – with minds and bodies, home and peer cultures and languages, previous learning experiences, interests and values – bring to their learning environments and how that shapes their interactions with those learning environments.
... all of the questions about meaning, experience, language, culture, positioning, and so on, need to be asked about the interactions between *particular learners and their learning environments* as they evolve over time.”
(Haertel, Moss, Pullin & Gee, 2008:8)

The key questions for teachers are: What meaning is this student making of what we’re doing? How does this connect with prior experiences and who this student is? How does it contribute to the student’s learning trajectory? How does it contribute to developing the student’s identity?

Cope and Kalantzis also highlight the importance of recognising student diversity, their subjectivities and identities:

“To be relevant, learning processes need to recruit, rather than attempt to ignore and erase, the different subjectiveness, interests, intentions, commitments, and purposes that students bring to learning.”

(Cope & Kalantzis, 2000:18)

This thinking invites teachers to expand the traditional notion of ‘learner differences’ to a recognition of learners and their diverse life-worlds and the need to build on this diversity.

The implications of the expanded view of learner diversity is that teachers need to develop a rich picture of each individual student and incorporate this, in an ongoing way, in the teaching process. They also need to use the diversity of members of the class to inform interactions and discussions that invite students to recognise and work with diversity. Working ethically and responsibly with each student and each group of students means that teachers:

- do all that they can to know the students as young human beings *and* as learners
- are mindful of what they, as teachers, bring to interactions and how they mediate dialogue
- recognise the potential in all students and provide meaningful opportunities for all to learn.

Melissa Gould-Drakeley, a senior teacher in New South Wales, highlights her understanding of each student as *intracultural*.

But what is different for me is the INTRAcultural. And really coming to terms with it, looking at each student's background, and knowledge and experience and absolutely everything they bring to the classroom and how we are all moving together yet on a separate journey ... and that, if I don't understand and they don't understand their intracultural journey, they will never understand the intercultural. And to me that's the difference in the way I teach, I think. It's actually saying to them: what are your assumptions, and what do you think and what do you do ... and I think the students love that because they feel valued; but they also love it because they're actually able to recognise and analyse what they do. Because ... a lot of them don't even recognise what they do and why they do it; why they think that, and where they get that information from. For them it's a real eye-opener and in a sense for me as an educator it's very good too because it made me realise how subjective my teaching can be ... of course it is ... and I can't get away from that, it has to be ...

(Interviewed by Angela Scarino and Leo Papademetre, October 2007)

When teachers work with 'absolutely everything (students) bring', students develop both as language users and as language learners who become aware of how they learn and of the power of language over others. In this way, over time, they develop awareness of themselves as communicators across diverse languages.

Questions for reflection

- 1 How might you develop a rich understanding of your students' biographies?
- 2 In what ways can you use the diversity of students and their families in your class?
- 3 What do you make of Melissa's description? What implications do you draw from it for your own practice?

Scaffolding learning

KEY IDEA

- Scaffolding involves using a range of conceptual, material and linguistic tools and technologies to lead students towards understanding

Scaffolding is the process by which teachers use particular conceptual, material and linguistic tools and technologies to support student learning. Scaffolding can be used at any point of interaction between teachers and students – at the point of providing inputs and explanations, through to modelling, interacting and assessing.

Scaffolding might include:

- explaining a new concept through a concept map
- making deliberate comparisons with the first language and culture
- focusing on particular words to develop a metalanguage
- providing and explicating fruitful examples; asking students to notice particular aspects/features
- highlighting patterns, choices
- elaborating on an initial explanation
- using questions to probe students' conceptions and prompt them to describe their interpretations and challenge their opinions
- using various ways of representing ideas and concepts (eg visuals, diagrams, organisers, highlighting, various media and technologies)
- feedback that relates to improvement.

Through interactive talk, ongoing dialogue, rich, formative questioning, and careful listening and reading, teachers constantly judge what kinds of scaffolds are appropriate and how much scaffolding is appropriate for individual learners. Teachers monitor student responses and find ways to ensure that students *make personal meaning* of their experiences and develop a fuller understanding. This dialogue and questioning not only involves teacher-to-students and students-to-teacher interaction, but also peer discussion. The teacher's role is to encourage students to try to answer questions, ask more of their own and *listen* carefully to and build upon the responses of peers.

Scaffolding is also an important aspect of diagnostic assessment. By providing assistance through scaffolding, teachers are able to gauge what it is that students can do independently and what they can do with particular kinds of assistance. (See also the section on Formative Assessment.)

Questions for reflection

- 1 What kinds of scaffolds do you provide learners with when setting up tasks, explaining a new concept, examining visual texts, or engaging in ongoing interactive talk? What evidence do you have that they work?
- 2 Audio-record a segment of one of your classes. Review it in terms of (1) the way you use questioning and your own responses as a form of scaffolding and (2) the way you invite students to add to, elaborate, clarify, challenge the input and responses of another student.

Technologies in language teaching and learning

KEY IDEAS

- Communication and information technologies are integral to teaching and learning
- Technologies enable teachers and students to access contemporary materials and globalised communication interactions
- Technologies facilitate participation in the target language and with its communities
- Technologies increasingly provide students with personalised, flexible, asynchronous and networked learning opportunities

Information and communication technologies have become significant in social and economic development and increasingly important in education. As educators, we are faced with selecting and using appropriate technologies from an ever-increasing range. We know that technologies have the capacity to transform our teaching and our students' learning. We know that different technologies can change the ways our students learn and mediate the learning differently. We seek to make our use, and our students' use, of technologies integral to the whole language learning process and not an add-on to teaching or a replacement for teaching. We know that when we do this, our pedagogies engage students, enhance achievement, create new learning possibilities and extend interaction with local and global communities.

For many of us, the productive use of information and communication technologies presents a challenge in our teaching practice. Students are usually very engaged with technology and have developed expertise outside the classroom which the teacher may not have. This expertise can, however, be constructed as a resource upon which the teacher can draw, while scaffolding the linguistic and cultural dimensions of the students' engagement with language and culture through technology. We know that these technologies have a transformative role in languages education and our stance as languages educators must encompass them.

The role of teachers is to ensure that the use of technologies adds value to the intended learning. With sound educational direction, technologies support conceptual learning and enable the construction and creation of knowledge. Teachers can use technologies to achieve this by:

- requiring students to choose activities, applications and modes of communication
- selecting and using learning objects to create learning tasks and sequences
- exploring the use of games and programs that contextualise concepts
- exploring how texts may be constructed
- discussing how students are positioned in virtual spaces
- engaging students in language and culture simulations, modelling and creative tasks.

Technologies help build learning communities by enabling teachers and students to join online collaborative projects and connecting with other students, teachers and experts.

Digital technologies provide access to language and culture and also a means of self-expression through language (Debski, 1997). Our students use contemporary technologies to create a language and communication unique to themselves and their subcultural group. Technologies provide enhanced opportunities to interact with speakers of the target language in a variety of ways – websites, emails, videoconferences, podcasts, music and video streaming, etc. For language teaching, information technologies provide access to a vast range of contemporary material in the target language and about target language communities. This material makes the target language and target language communities available both in and out of class and therefore much more present in students' lives. Communication technologies allow for direct participation in the target language culture in a range of ways and with a range of different levels of engagement. They also allow learners to pursue their own interest and agendas in the target language community outside the classroom.

Questions for reflection

- 1 How can or do you incorporate technology in your own practice in language teaching and learning? Explain specifically the way in which the technology itself actually mediates learning.
- 2 Begin the process of building up a digitally sourced bank of contemporary material that you can use with your students. Think about the considerations you need to take into account in making your choices. Engage with your students in this task, acknowledge their expertise.

4

Resourcing and Materials

The purposes of resources

KEY IDEAS

- Resources are used for diverse purposes such as input, scaffolding and reflection
- The same resource can be used in multiple ways to enrich learning
- Teachers are critical users of resources

The multiple uses of resources

Resources are sources of input for language learning – that is, instances of language which present the learner with material to develop learning. They are a way of exposing learners to different modalities of language use; spoken, written, technologically mediated; to different registers; and to input beyond that provided by the teacher. Traditionally, the main resource for input has been the textbook, and this may be supplemented by authentic texts from a range of sources: written texts, video or audio texts, music, multimedia, etc.

Resources may also be used as ways of promoting output, either spoken or written. Such resources form a starting point for language use and may be linguistic or non-linguistic in form to prompt discussion, description, etc. Such resources include oral or written texts, artefacts, games, websites, etc. More recently, there have been a number of new technological resources which provide opportunities for both input and output by permitting interaction.

Resources can also be used to provide scaffolding for learning. Such resources may provide models to guide learners' language use. These may be exemplars of a particular spoken or written text type, or they may be frameworks for developing a text which provide partial structures to speaking or writing. Resources used as input can become resources for scaffolding either through modification or through different ways of using the text to focus beyond surface elements of grammar and vocabulary.

Resources can be used to stimulate reflection. This is different from using a text simply to generate language use in that the latter may be descriptive or narrative while reflective work is deeper and introspective. Again, such resources do not need to be different from the resources used for input. It is rather a case of using resources differently by developing questions and activities around them to stimulate deeper thought, affective response and analysis of feelings, conclusions and interpretations.

There is not a neat mapping between purposes and resources. Rather resources can be used in multiple ways. The key is to have resources which open up multiple possible uses and allow for flexibility and creativity in teaching and learning. The process of resourcing language learning involves much more than selecting the resource. Effective teaching involves being a critical user of all resources and using resources flexibly to enhance learning opportunities. Any resource is only an instance of possible representations of language, culture and learning and there will always be other possibilities not found in the particular resource.

Selecting resources

KEY IDEAS

- Selecting resources is based on theories of language learning and culture
- Selecting resources is a process of matching resources and learning goals

For many of us, the selection of a textbook that will support our languages learning program has been a critical resource decision. Textbooks by their nature pose some problems as resources for use in language learning as they are not designed to meet the needs of particular learners, respond to local needs or provide locally relevant content. For most of us, therefore, resourcing language learning involves more than a textbook and we are likely to supplement, or even replace, textbooks with other materials more relevant to our own learners and our teaching goals.

The process of selecting any resource is one of evaluation and evaluations need be made against our teaching stance and particular purposes. Such questions as 'Is the resource suitable for the level of the learner?', 'Will students like the resource?', or 'Can I use the resource in my teaching context?' are useful but need to be related to our theories of learning and our ethical positions. Developing a critical awareness of resources includes considering answers to questions such as the following.

- What does the resource contribute to developing meaning-making and interpretation, awareness of language and cultures and their relationship?
- What opportunities to explore language and culture does the resource provide?
- How does the resource allow learners to make connections between their own lives and experiences and the target language and its speakers?
- What opportunities for exploration does the resource afford students?
- How does the resource connect to other resources, or how do the components of a resource connect with each other?
- What sort of learning will the resource enable? What will it build on and what could be done next?
- What more will be needed to use the resource to its fullest effect?

Authentic resources

KEY IDEAS

- Authentic materials expose students to actual contemporary language use
- Authentic resources enlarge understandings of language and culture

One concern for language teachers is the authenticity of resources for languages learning. Authenticity can be seen in a range of ways. Materials may be considered authentic because they are designed by native speakers for native speakers rather than for second language learning. Alternatively, authenticity has been considered in terms of what is done with the resource rather than in terms of the resource itself, which may be purpose-made for the task. In reality, both are important in the selection and use of resources. Authentic materials expose learners to actual contemporary language use rather than idealised or old-fashioned structures. They bring learners into closer contact with the real world of the target language and culture and enlarge our understanding of what language and culture are. Most importantly, they are developed/created within the cultural context of native-speakers and are imbued with the assumptions, values and ways of communicating particular to that culture.

However, authentic resources do not of themselves guarantee relevant and authentic learning and resources do not exist independently of the teaching and learning context in which they are used. Arnold argues that the tension between the teaching-learning situation and the original communicative purpose of the resources being used is resolved if several types of authenticity come together: authentic materials and learners' purposes, authentic materials and authentic interactions, authentic responses, authentic participants, authentic status, settings and equipment and, authentic inputs and outputs (Arnold, 1991:237).

In adapting the resource, teachers need to be mindful of the following (Liddicoat et al, 2003:68).

Authenticity of purpose	The resource needs to be intrinsically of interest or have an extrinsic purpose (as in the case of maps, menus, etc) if it is to engage learners
Authenticity of response or task	Learners need to respond to the resource in an authentic way (thus what students are asked to do with a resource is, at least as important as its origin)
Authenticity of conditions	The conditions for language use need to be reflective of the conditions for use of the resource in the 'real world'

Authentic resources also need to be 'graded' to ensure that they are challenging for students, and extend their intercultural and linguistic development. Some factors influencing the complexity of the resource include: predictability (ie commonly used, predictable phrases); experiential knowledge (ie language used, social context or situation, and information provided are easily recognised by the learner); sociocultural distance; level and nature of support provided; and the level of cognitive processing required.

Adapting resources

KEY IDEAS

- Adapting resources allows teachers to maximise their value for particular learners
- Resources need to be personalised to allow for learners to connect with them

No resource can completely meet the needs of individual teachers and their learners: all will require adaptation for use with particular groups of students. While textbooks may be considered to be fixed and unchangeable – a resource to be followed faithfully and systematically – they are, like other resources, starting points for teaching and learning and can be supplemented, adapted or changed to suit teaching goals and students' interests (Littlejohn, 1998).

Authentic materials – resources not designed for language learning, but invaluable for promoting learning – may also need to be adapted for use in the classroom by:

- providing additional language support, for example a glossary, explanation of terms
- providing additional information relevant to understanding the resource, eg additional resources showing different aspects of the same basic issue
- providing scaffolding to assist in using the resource.

Materials developed specifically for learning present a generalised frame for learning, but this learning needs to be placed into a context, considering among other things: the goals of the teaching; the interests, needs, experiences and knowledge of the students; the age of the students; their language learning history, etc. Textbooks present generalised, fictional material designed to be used by any teacher with any learner anywhere. This means that there may be little that connects directly to individual students' lives and provides something with which they can engage. The key challenge facing teachers is to personalise the resource for their students. This means adapting

or supplementing resources so that there are links to the life and experiences of the learners and multiple paths to engagement with the resource. In many cases, personalising a resource may not be a case of personalising the stimulus material but rather of personalising the ways in which the learner works with the material, allowing space for interpretation and individual connections.

The selection and adaptation of the resource are important, but the most important element of resourcing is planning ways to use it. In particular, it is important to consider what learners will actually do with the resource. Each task developed around a resource, or set of resources, constructs a way of engaging with language and culture. Tasks can limit opportunities for student engagement: for example a text reading task may ask students to engage only with superficial issues of locating information in the text, however the same text could be used for developing interpretation, analysis and reflection, personal engagement with themes and issues, comparison with other texts or questioning aspects of the text's message.

Contemporary resources

KEY IDEAS

- Language and culture are dynamic
- Resources must have contemporary relevance for students

Languages and cultures change, as do the interests of students. It is important that students have access to contemporary resources which represent the language and its cultures as dynamic, vibrant and valid. Resources must have some relevance to the contemporary reality of the learner.

While not all resources need to be contemporary, it is important that students do experience the contemporary in language, whether this be the fads and fashions of youth culture or any other dimension of contemporary life. Technologies provide ready access to the contemporary world and provide many resources which can be adapted readily to teaching and learning. Technologies provide not just texts for input, but opportunities to explore new ways of using language. For example, text messaging provides connections between the learners' language experiences in their own communities and language practices in the target language.

Using resources critically

KEY IDEAS

- Effective teachers are critical users of their resources
- Any selection of resources only ever presents a partial picture of language and culture

Any resource, whether it be a textbook, a published teaching resource or a resource created by a teacher, needs to be used critically. All resources are developed through the understandings of language, culture and learning that the resource developer brings to the task. This means that every resource is both subjective (because it represents one individual's – or in some cases, a small group's – views and objectives) and constrained (because any resource can present only a limited insight into a language and its attendant cultures).

Resource development is subjective and subjectivity is a normal part of human functioning connected to the underlying values and theories that a person brings to any situation. When a teacher uses materials developed by someone else, these underlying values and theories may or may not be in accord with those of the teacher using the material. If there is a conflict, the use of the materials may be problematic and they may not achieve the learning the teacher had chosen the resource to develop. Similarly, if we design resources without awareness of the values and theories that we ourselves bring to the design, then we may discover that the material we develop does not work adequately to achieve our purposes.

The constrained nature of resources is an inevitable result of the processes of selection, design and ordering. The more a resource is targeted at a generic population, the more constrained it is likely to be as the designers can assume little shared knowledge with the end users. As Yoshino (1992) argues, in spite of the best intentions of writers and editors, learning materials, and especially the cultural information in learning materials, is frequently characterised by cultural reductionism and cultural relativism. By cultural reductionism, she means that information is usually presented in a way which strips away the complexity, variability and subtlety of culture and represents speakers of target language as homogeneous and stereotypical. Cultural relativism involves the drawing of distinct differences between two cultures which establishes an 'us-them' relationship between the learner and the target language and cultures. This oversimplifies and over-emphasises the differences and makes it more difficult for learners to draw connections between themselves and others and to develop intercultural ways of seeing the world.

Any resource which is selected, adapted or created should be critically examined in relation to the following.

- How is sociocultural and linguistic learning included? Is there any bias?
- How is the cultural information linked to the target language?
- How is the cultural information linked to communication?
- Does the resource reflect contemporary or traditional culture?
- Does the resource present a cultural aspect from the locus of the target culture, from another culture's perspective or from the perspective of the culture's own diaspora?
- Are you in a position to judge? Why? Why not?

Being a critical user does not have to mean that the teacher has to abandon using a textbook or materials developed by others. It does mean thinking carefully about what the resources present to students. It involves seeing the limitations and omissions in the resource and deciding how to deal with these: by supplementing them with other perspectives, by replacing some parts of the resource with new material, or by working with students to see the limitations and omissions.

Relating resources to each other

KEY IDEA

- A resource does not exist in isolation but needs to connect with other resources as part of a learning program

The relationship among resources is also an important dimension for resourcing language learning. The resources used with a class are often the only experience of the language and culture available to most students. From these resources and the interactions around them, students gradually build up an image of the language and the cultures they are studying. If the resources are disparate and unconnected, focusing on the momentary learning episode only, then it may be impossible for students to develop any coherent sense of the language and cultures and to see only randomness and fragmentation.

Each resource is a single instance of language and culture. Learning occurs as students draw connections among these instances to develop deeper understandings. Connections among resources can be of several different types, including:

- resources which add new content
- resources which add new perspectives on existing content
- resources which add new information about aspects of existing content
- resources which add complexity to interpretations
- resources which introduce challenges to current understanding
- resources which introduce personal perspectives
- resources which respond to learners' questions or interests about content.

Learners as resources

KEY IDEA

- Resources are not simply texts and materials: learners themselves can become 'the resource'

The language produced by learners themselves is another key resource, especially when it involves interpretation and the expression of personal perspectives. Where learning activities promote open-ended possibilities, different interpretations or responses may be juxtaposed as a way of seeing multiple perspectives of the same issues and of generating commentary and further thinking. Students' written or oral responses can be the stimulus for further work. Learners' families and communities provide an extended resource base for linguistic and cultural analysis. Such an approach increases the scope of resources for learning, validates diversity of interpretation and provides challenges for further learning and analysis.

Developing a resource bank

KEY IDEA

- A resource bank should provide a range of engaging learning experiences

In order to provide resources for a range of learning experiences which are up to date and engaging, teachers need to gather, adapt and create resources for a resource bank. Resource banks can include 'hard' and digitised materials, and be organised by theme, purposes, modes, text-types, perspectives or tasks.

Questions for reflection

- 1 How do you use the resources available to you to construct an image of the target language and cultures for your learners?
- 2 If you use a textbook, what experiences of language and culture does it provide for your learners? What additional resources may be needed? Where could you get these resources from?
- 3 How could you use your own learners as a resource to support language learning?
- 4 In what ways could parents, families and communities provide opportunities for linguistic and cultural analysis?

5

Assessing

The purposes of assessment

KEY IDEAS

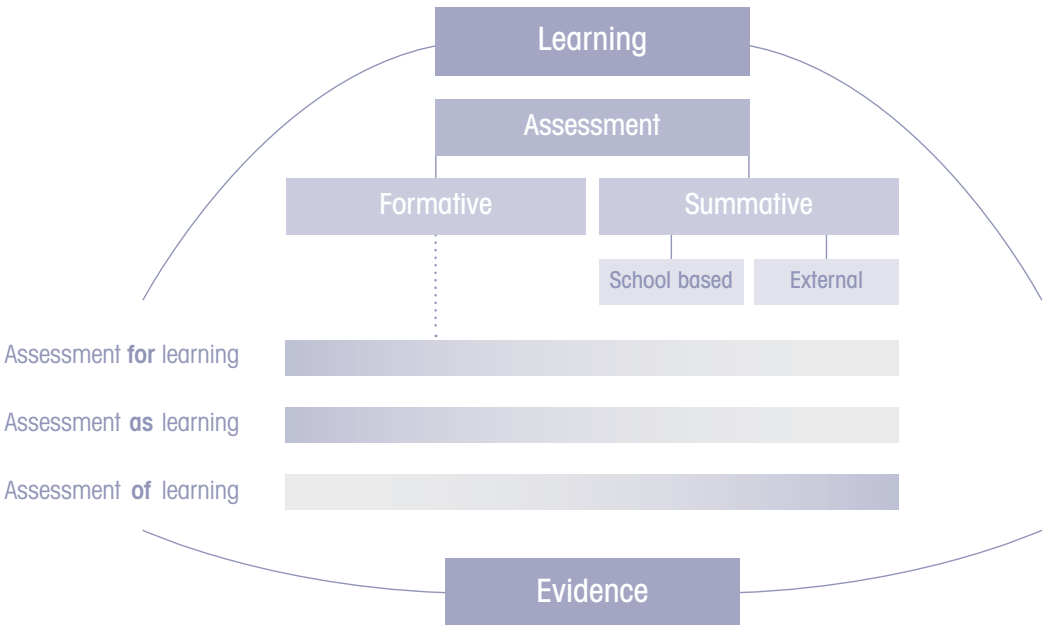
- Assessment is an integral part of learning
- Assessment is used for diverse purposes
- Assessment is both formative and summative

Assessment *for*, *of* and *as* learning

Assessment in any educational context and at any level is integral to student learning. It involves making considered judgments about what students have learned and understood, how they are learning, and where they are along their personal learning trajectory. The relationship between assessment and learning has been captured recently in general education with the distinctions among assessment *for* learning, assessment *of* learning and assessment *as* learning. The relationship is also captured in the distinction between *summative* end-of-unit or end-of-course judgments about students’ overall learning and progress, and ongoing, *formative* assessment.

Embedded within these distinctions is the important concept of purpose in assessment, which ranges from diagnostic, developmental, formative purposes oriented to learner progress through to reporting and certification. These different purposes centre on the issue of accountability and whether the accountability is internal to the immediate learning system (eg classroom) or external (eg system-wide accountability). Whereas these purposes have previously been held as distinct, there is now an increasing educational understanding that they are meshed in complex ways and teachers need to work with all these purposes simultaneously. Thus, while the distinctions are useful at one level, it needs to be recognised that the purposes are integrated, particularly when assessment includes a long-term perspective. For example, the summative assessment information gathered at the end of Year 8 can be seen as serving a formative purpose at the beginning of Year 9.

The diagram that follows depicts the idea that all assessment is connected to learning and that there are two major purposes of assessment: formative and summative. The latter of these may be school-based or external. Assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning foreground formative assessment and assessment *of* learning foregrounds summative assessment.



During the 1990s and into the 2000s, the purpose of systemic accountability was foregrounded through the development and use of state-wide frameworks of outcomes and standards. These were often generated through committee consensus without a base in research on what it is that students learn across the K-12 continuum. The emphasis was on the summative assessment *of* learning and more on reporting than on the assessment process itself. In recent years, research has established that formative assessment can raise standards of student achievement (Black & Jones, 2006) and systems have begun to emphasise the importance of assessment *for* learning and *as* learning alongside the assessment *of* learning.

Formative assessment

When linking assessment to learning, it is important to consider the *meaning* of formative assessment. Black and Jones (2006:4) highlight the meaning as follows.

“

Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability or of ranking or of certifying competence.

An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback, by teachers, and by their pupils in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes 'formative assessment' when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs.

”

The meaning of 'formative' here is that it actually forms or shapes learning. Thus, all that as teachers we believe about learning, and our stance to our role as languages educators, influences our teaching. Contemporary learning theories recognise that learning is a deeply social and cultural process that involves active construction through interaction, mediation, talk, questioning, and scaffolding with more knowledgeable others.

Connection points between learning and formative assessment include the following.

- **Eliciting prior knowledge**, that is teacher questioning of students to elicit their existing understanding as a basis for identifying ways of interacting, scaffolding; and building connections.
- **Ongoing interactive questioning and discussion**, that is teacher to student, student to teacher, student to peers – that build from simple to complex, that challenge students to elaborate their meanings, that invite students to reformulate, respond to or build upon the response of another in ways that shape their understanding.
- **A focus on transfer**, that is encouraging the application of knowledge in different contexts, building complexity. As Black and Jones (2006:5) state:
‘If teachers want to find out what pupils understand and/or can do ... then these pupils need to be challenged by activities that make them think and perform.’
- **A focus on scaffolding** in ways that are appropriate to the gap in understanding on the part of the student, as perceived by the teacher and ensuring that the teacher monitors, considers how the student responds to the scaffolding.
- **A focus on feedback** that actually moves learning forward by explaining what it is that students actually need to do in order to improve the piece of work, providing or clarifying the rationale behind particular tasks and monitoring the improvement so that students appreciate that it matters.
- **Encouraging self and peer assessment** such that students come to understand, for example, criteria for quality, problems and strengths of particular pieces of work, how to give and receive feedback, in the context of developing self-awareness as learners.

Ultimately assessment is formative, in the sense of influencing learning, when evidence from assessment is actually used to change what students do.

Another important connection between learning and assessment that emerges from contemporary learning theories is that assessment is not a single episode or event or task; rather, it is a dynamic process which involves coming to understand students’ performance and learning over time, in the context of their developmental trajectories. This, in turn, challenges the teacher to bring together the range of information gleaned from students’ responses, and determine how to act upon it in ways that will enhance students’ understanding and further learning.

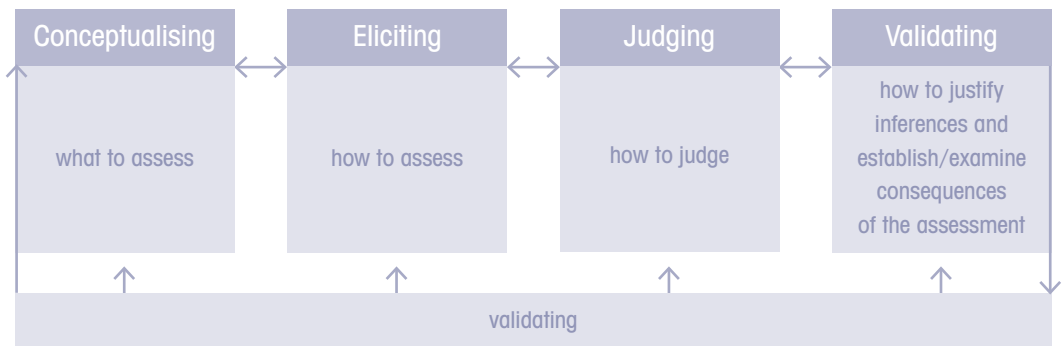
The assessment cycle

KEY IDEAS

- Assessment can be understood as a cycle of interrelated processes of conceptualising, eliciting, judging and validating
- There are varied ways of eliciting evidence of student learning which capture diverse dimensions of students' learning

The assessment cycle

The diagram that follows provides a means of understanding assessment itself as a set of interconnected processes (Scarino, 2006).



- **Conceptualising** (understanding deeply *what* is being assessed)
- **Eliciting** (developing ways of obtaining assessment information via a range of possible processes, including observation, interactive questioning, values questionnaires, self-assessment, peer-assessment, student journals and portfolios)
- **Judging** (interpreting performance and understanding evidence)
- **Validating** (ensuring that the inferences made about students' performance are fair and justifiable).

This cycle reminds us that assessment is a conceptual process, not just a technical one. It means that it needs to be thought through at every point especially in terms of what it is that is to be assessed.

Conceptualising

Conceptualising assessment in the context of language learning begins with the recognition that (at least) two languages, and therefore (at least) two systems of values and meaning, are involved. The process of conceptualising requires that questions on how language learning is understood be addressed. If, for example, the focus is on intercultural interaction, the conceptualisation implies acting/doing/recognising that a person's way of interpreting the world varies in different cultures; that it involves decentring from one's own cultural perspective; that it requires personal exchange of meaning, etc. In moving between the two languages, students need to 'make sense' of themselves and others and their world. They do so positioned both as young people actively using language in interaction with others and as learners who continuously make observations, noticing things about language, culture, communication and interpreting, and making meaning.

In considering what is to be assessed, conceptualise:

- what students know and can do in the target language and culture
- how they interpret/figure things out
- what they mean when they interact
- how they are using language and culture
- how they are participating in activities
- what positions they are enacting in relation to each other
- what identities they are developing as part of their own growing self-awareness.

Eliciting

Eliciting different kinds of evidence includes analyses of moment-to-moment action/interaction; written work (notebooks, projects, quizzes, tests); conversations that probe students' meanings; surveys; interviews and other self-reports; and summaries of actions and accomplishments. Moss (2008) highlights that by eliciting and analysing evidence in these different ways, teachers focus not only on knowledge and skill but on embodied experience, meaning, language, culture, participation, positioning and the identities enacted.

In eliciting intercultural language learning, assessment processes may focus on receptive (listening and reading) or productive tasks (speaking and writing). In receptive tasks the focus is on understanding (observing, noticing, comparing, interpreting) interactions, texts and attitudes. To ensure active engagement it is important to select texts that are meaningful to students, and to develop questions that encourage understanding and responding to the content, and also noticing, comparing, observing those subtle but fascinating things about the choice of words, tone, meaning, biases, implications, linguistic and cultural comparisons across languages, etc. These observations are part of meta-awareness of Language and Culture. If this dimension is absent from assessment, it is difficult for a teacher to see how students are understanding interculturality; that is, the intersection point of their first language and culture and the language and culture being learned.

In assessing through productive tasks, the focus is on participating in interactions, in 'critical moments'. The idea of 'critical moments' refers to the fact that there needs to be some kind of intercultural negotiation, that is, negotiating the exchange of meaning across the two languages and that this negotiation is meaningful to students, in the sense that it is a task in which it is worth investing from the students' point of view.

Given that intercultural capabilities develop over time, ways of gradually eliciting and building up evidence also need to be considered. It is therefore important to include a range of opportunities that allow students to perform their understanding. Each new opportunity adds to students' repertoires of participation and may include ongoing observations (teacher and student), portfolios, journals, recording experiences and extended projects. In both single episodes of assessment and cumulatively across episodes, it is important to consider the impact of the assessment procedures used.

A special note: young learners

Assessment processes necessarily vary across phases of schooling. For young learners, assessment in language learning is essentially formative – achieved through action-related talk, with the teacher continuously noting responses and questions. It is also important to record the kinds and extent of scaffolding provided so that the teacher has a picture of what students can do, both with and without assistance. One of the best ways of capturing evidence of learning in this context is audio- or video-recording classroom or small group interactions, then making them available for analysis and reflection.

Summary

Procedures for eliciting intercultural language learning need to:

- involve interactions in the target language on the part of students in which they negotiate meaning through the use of language in diverse contexts among communicators from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds
- elicit students' understanding of the social, cultural, and linguistic construction of human experience and the way our enculturation affects how we see the world, interact and communicate
- involve eliciting students' meta-awareness of the language-culture nexus in such interactions and their ability to analyse and explain, this awareness
- position students as both language user and language learner in interaction (though in any individual procedure one role may be foregrounded for different purposes)

- ensure that students learn from the ongoing direct experience of the target language and culture
- draw upon a range of assessment-types including interviews, conferences, journals, observations, storytelling as appropriate to the phase of schooling
- capture students' cumulative learning so that development and progress can be taken into account, for example, through the use of portfolios
- include self-assessment that recognises learning as a personal process
- include dimensions that require reflection on the part of students on their developing knowledge and understanding.

In developing assessment processes, then, consider the following questions.

- What is it important for students to know and understand in relation to the language and culture they are learning at the particular level? What questions should they address? What judgments should they make? What language do they need to do so?
- Why is this important?
- What kind of evidence is needed to support interpretations, decisions and actions?

Judging: considering criteria

The development of criteria for judging performance is interrelated with the conceptualisation of learning language and culture and the methods used to elicit this learning. Criteria provide an indication of the important features of performance. Most frequently, they are set in advance, as part of the process of designing assessment procedures so that they can be communicated to students. Recently, with alternative approaches to assessing complex tasks, it has been recognised that it is useful to allow for criteria to *emerge* from experience and reflection on student performance. What is important is that teachers consider carefully the bases of their judgments both at the point of designing assessment procedures and criteria and at the point of judging, and that they are able to articulate these to their students and colleagues. Teachers need to provide examples of work to illustrate the evidence of the features described in criteria.

A framework for developing criteria for judging performance, expressed at a non task-specific level, includes the following:

For receptive tasks (listening and reading)											
Nature and scope of the interaction	Level of complexity/sophistication										
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding of theme/concept from social life in texts, tasks, experiences 											
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognition of diverse assumptions/perspectives 											
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • response to different perspectives <table> <tr> <td>noticing</td><td>deciding</td></tr> <tr> <td>explaining</td><td>comparing</td></tr> <tr> <td>connecting</td><td>relating</td></tr> <tr> <td>applying</td><td>valuing</td></tr> <tr> <td>abstracting</td><td>questioning/challenging</td></tr> </table> 	noticing	deciding	explaining	comparing	connecting	relating	applying	valuing	abstracting	questioning/challenging	
noticing	deciding										
explaining	comparing										
connecting	relating										
applying	valuing										
abstracting	questioning/challenging										
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding the process of interpretation/understanding themselves as interpreters/ability to reflect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – questioning assumptions (own and others)/conceptions – managing variability (understanding how language use is enmeshed with variable contexts of culture) 											

For productive tasks (speaking and writing)											
Nature and scope of the interaction	Level of complexity/sophistication										
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spoken or written in 'critical moments' (ie moments where students' responses matter to their identity) 											
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • managing the interaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – giving a personal perspective/personal information – responding to other(s) – openness to the perspectives or expectations of others <table> <tr> <td>noticing</td><td>comparing</td></tr> <tr> <td>deciding</td><td>explaining</td></tr> <tr> <td>connecting</td><td>relating</td></tr> <tr> <td>valuing</td><td>applying</td></tr> <tr> <td>abstracting</td><td>questioning</td></tr> </table> 	noticing	comparing	deciding	explaining	connecting	relating	valuing	applying	abstracting	questioning	
noticing	comparing										
deciding	explaining										
connecting	relating										
valuing	applying										
abstracting	questioning										
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding the process of interpretation/understanding themselves as interpreters/ability to reflect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – interpreting contexts, roles, relationships – managing variability: understanding how language use is enmeshed with variable contexts of culture 											

Within a long-term perspective	
Cumulative questions to be addressed while building up a long-term picture of learning include the following	Level of complexity/sophistication
• What connections can the student draw within and across themes, topics and concepts?	
• What connections can the student draw between his/her responses/comments and those of others?	
• How has the student come up with these connections?	
• Does the student's engagement with these questions and his/her own/others' responses to them provide variable ways of understanding social life-worlds in the language and culture being learned and any other languages and cultures? How?	

These generic criteria provide a framework for developing criteria that are specific to assessment involving particular tasks, texts and experiences.

Validating

Validation is the process by which teachers consider the evidence they use to ensure that the inferences they make about students' performance are in fact fair and justifiable. They need to be able to justify their judgments to themselves, their students, parents, colleagues and educational administrators. Validation best occurs in dialogue with others through opportunities to compare students' work at a district or state level.

Questions for reflection

- 1 How do your current teaching and assessment practices reflect assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning?
- 2 How do you currently elicit evidence for assessment? How diverse are your assessment processes?
- 3 Considering your role as a languages educator, what is your stance on assessment?

6

Programming and Planning

Planning language programs

KEY IDEAS

- Program planning for languages is more than a description of activities and goals and includes the planning of conceptual and affective learning
- Planning a language program centres around a focus on language conceived as interpersonal and intrapersonal meaning-making and interpretation

Programs as valuable planning tools

Approaches to planning in languages education are shaped by two key issues:

- how the substance or 'content' of planning is understood
- how the process of planning is understood.

Planning language learning involves a number of things. Content (mostly conceived of as grammar and associated vocabulary) is just one of them. It is also important to articulate the overall and sustained learning that the learner will achieve. Many learners cannot or do not persist in language learning to the point at which they acquire high levels of proficiency in the language. Planning for learning needs to consider the value of the program for such learners, as well as those who will pursue their learning further.

It is also important to recognise that programs are no more than artefacts, or documented representations of learning priorities over a period of time. They are only representations of intentions, and their relationship to the enacted or realised curriculum cannot be fully anticipated. This means that the planned program needs to be used flexibly to accommodate what learners and teachers need to do in the classroom to develop learning. The program should encourage learning rather than covering the predetermined content. Teaching and learning will always be characterised by the unpredicted and unpredictable and this is often the catalyst for deep learning. At times, students' interests, needs and questions will lead teaching and learning away from the planned learning: the planned program should not be a rigid framework. However, the plan itself should remain the focus point for learning and a way to reconnect episodes of learning to a broader educational perspective. Long-term planning recognises that in the enacted curriculum the interactions may develop different emphases in response to learners' constructions, questions and statements of understanding. The program which results from long-term planning should be a flexible frame that can only be elaborated in practice: that is, planning is an open process which is responsive to the unfolding of the enacted curriculum.

Notwithstanding its limitations, a program is a valuable planning tool to be used to articulate the scope and sequence of learning ('content', as concepts and interactions), and for discussions with students and their parents, while recognising that its use will lead to anticipated and unanticipated learning experiences. The actual teaching and learning of the planned experiences will necessarily continue to change in response to teachers' developing understanding of learners, and of their own engagement, identities and perspectives through their participation in classroom interactions and language use experiences.

The place of context in planning programs

Planning a language program involves planning the learning of individuals in particular settings. For this reason, planning is an activity for all teachers and cannot be replaced with a pre-prepared curriculum or textbook as these too have to be adapted for a particular class. Planning with a focus on particular learners entails understanding the individual learners' contexts, the school setting, and social, cultural and linguistic profiles of learners and their changing and developing nature. The process of language teaching and learning begins with teachers and learners as people. It involves decisions and actions on the part of teachers as they respond to their particular learners and to the realities of their particular classroom and school context. It also involves decisions and actions on the part of learners based on their evolving learning and understanding. In particular, this requires attention to the prior language and culture experiences of learners, both within the classroom and beyond, including the diversity of language and cultural knowledge learners bring to the language classroom. By reflecting closely on the context for intercultural language learning, teachers ensure that programs are developed that reflect particular learners and their linguistic and cultural identities, and their prior experiences with diverse languages and cultures.

Scoping and sequencing of learning

Scoping learning provides an overall view of the comprehensiveness of the planned program, ensuring that a range of different experiences is included for learners (Tschirner, 1996). Concepts and learning can be mapped over time to provide a useful guide to intended learning and the variability of tasks and contexts used. However, there are limitations, in that learning cannot be fully planned for or related to the individual learners and their experiences and interactions. The overall scoping of learning needs to be framed in connection with a planned sequencing of learning.

Sequencing of learning relates to ways of connecting learning over time (Tschirner, 1996). Language learning is a continuous process of making connections between learners' prior knowledge and new sources of language and cultural input, while deepening, extending and elaborating each learner's framework of knowing, understanding, valuing their own and other languages and cultures, and applying that knowledge in interactions across languages and cultures. The scoping and sequencing of content and concepts are typically integrated into planning and the interactions through which the scoping and sequencing are achieved, are also part of the planned elements of teaching and learning. Interactions are seen as occurring naturally and organically in the classroom learning process and are therefore viewed as spontaneous and responsive to learner input, and are thus not easily planned in advance. Interactions themselves are not adjuncts to a language program but integral to the learning process. In order to plan effectively for intercultural language learning, it is necessary to include starting points that begin to elaborate the classroom interactions.

Planning for connections

Developing a long-term program requires that particular consideration be given to ways of representing connections across the program as a whole. These connections need to be made both at the local, short-term level and also at the long-term level, including at the critical transition point between primary and secondary learning (Scarino, 1995). Connections can and should be made at a number of different levels.

- *Global level connections* are connections between the overarching concepts and the topic or theme through which the concept is investigated. They organise and shape the overall experience of learners as they progress through their language learning.
- *Local level connections* are connections between particular episodes of learning (units of work, lessons) and overarching concepts which relate each topic or theme to some larger learning and the links between the individual episodes themselves as each builds on prior learning and provides a basis for new learning.
- *Personal connections* are connections that students will be able to make with the material they are presented with through their learning experiences and include issues such as how learners will come to see global and local connections, how learners will display the connections they make and what space is available for making additional personal connections. Personal connections also involve the unexpected connections which students may draw between their personal experiences and the current learning experience. While these cannot be planned in advance, planning needs to allow opportunities for such connections to be developed and explored when they occur. At the same time, such personal connections need to be integrated into an overall scope and sequence of learning in ways which reaffirm the connections and develop desired learnings.

At all these levels connections can also be made constantly between languages and literacy, and between languages and all other areas of the curriculum.

Planning for conceptual learning

In planning for language learning, it is important to consider how conceptual learning is to be integrated into language programs. Conceptual learning has become a central notion in education: most state and territory curriculum frameworks integrate aspects of it. More specifically, conceptual learning means students coming to:

- understand language, culture and their interrelationship and be able to discuss and describe these
- understand how language in context constructs, interprets and communicates meanings
- engage in reasoning and problem-solving on language and culture related issues
- pose questions about, and find personal responses to, linguistic and cultural diversity
- transfer their learning from the context in which they learned it to other contexts.

In focusing on conceptual learning, planning needs to foreground the concepts being dealt with in the program (Perkins & Unger, 1999). The concepts become the overarching focus of the long-term program and topics are selected as ways of dealing with the concept from different perspectives.

For example, a concept such as 'ways of understanding and using space' might be addressed through topics such as:

- ideas of personal space: private space and shared space in homes; how living space is organised and what this says about ways of life; whether people have private space (eg their own room) or whether they live in shared space; whether private space is made available to others (eg guests' access to the house); leisure activities at home, etc
- ideas of public space: what public spaces are available; how much public space is available; what are the expectations and obligations for using public space; leisure activities in public spaces, etc
- ideas of space in specific locations, eg schools: what are the expectations about space at school and the ways it is used (eg classrooms, sporting areas; space for leisure); how much of each sort of space is available and what does this indicate about how people use space; how is space organised at school, etc
- ideas of proximity and distance: what is considered geographically close or distant; how does this affect travel; what is considered to be a long way to travel; when, why and how often do people travel a long way; what is seen as a local, etc.

“ Conceptual learning involves deep learning and seeks to engage learners in more advanced, abstract thinking. In languages, this means thinking about language, culture and their relationship. Such learning needs to be planned if it is to be successful. Moreover, such learning needs a long-term consistent focus, which is developed through the process of planning. ”

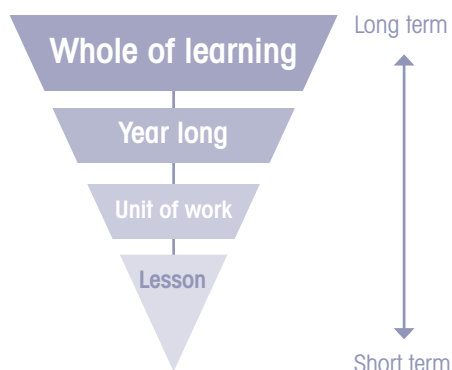
Long-term and short-term planning

KEY IDEAS

- Planning a language program is planning for long-term development of learning
- Planning involves making connections between learning activities and learning goals
- Planning happens at a range of different levels

Planning for language learning involves planning at a number of levels and these levels mutually influence and inform each other (Scarino, 1995).

At the broadest level of planning there is the level of the entire learning experience of a student over a number of years, from their entry into language learning to their exit from it.



Ideally, planning should take place at all these levels to ensure that students' experiences of language learning are developmental, coherent and consistent. In reality, longer term planning may rely on external sources such as textbooks, syllabuses or curriculum frameworks. While such documents may have some role in supporting such levels of planning, they are not in themselves plans of programs for particular learners. Adopting a textbook to cover a year or more of teaching does not equate with planning the same period of learning. The writers may have undertaken such a plan in developing the text, however simply following someone else's plan does not mean that the teacher understands, is aware of, or aims for, the learning goals of the original writers. The short-term or long-term use of any external plan requires adaptation to the purposes, needs and interests of teachers and students.

In planning, it is important to articulate how the experiences afforded to the learners in the program develop the intended learnings. This involves considering what learners will do in the program and how these activities will contribute to the learning that is being planned. Planning of activities needs to consider a number of dimensions.

- What concepts will learners explore?
- What language do they need for this exploration, and what language do they already have to build on?
- What tasks will the students undertake?
- What are the connections among tasks?
- How do the tasks individually contribute directly to learning goals?
- How do the tasks collectively contribute directly to learning goals?
- What interactions will the learners engage in? (For example, what questions will they explore, how and in what language? What meanings will they be asked to construct, interpret and communicate, how and in what language? What will learners bring to each interaction and how will they have the opportunity to use, question and reassess this?)
- How does each task or interaction build on previous learning and provide a platform for future learning?
- What support, scaffolding or other assistance will learners need to undertake tasks and interactions?
- What resources will be made available to learners to shape their experiences of language and culture?

All these dimensions are integrated in the practice of teaching and planning, but each also needs focused attention at all levels in the planning process.

Unit of work

Within the long-term plan, there are sequenced structures in which a group of lessons are developed and related to each other. For many teachers, this planning takes the form of a unit of work, which may span a few weeks or a whole term. The unit gives a focus to a series of lessons through a topic or theme which shapes choices about vocabulary, grammar, content, skills, strategies and communicative activities. Units of work are a way of ensuring that a series of lessons have a common thread and construct connections among lessons in terms of the overall content and focus of attention. Units of work themselves need to be framed in a broader context of teaching and learning. A year-long plan would provide a structure for planning units of work to ensure that the ways in which they are put together develop learning progressively over the course of the year. Such plans establish a coherent, connected focus of learning, with an emphasis on development of learning over time (Kohler, 2003).

Lesson planning

Lesson planning focuses on a single episode within a larger program of learning. Lesson planning has been recognised as an important way for ensuring that a lesson is focused and achieves its objectives (Farrell, 2002; Woodward, 2001). Such planning typically considers:

- objectives
- materials needed
- class activities
- homework.

Lesson planning focuses on the immediate and short-term needs of a single class and is designed in relation to other lessons, or it may be considered as a 'stand alone' experience. Lesson planning is an important dimension of the overall process, but, even where lessons are connected to each other, lesson planning is not sufficient to accomplish all the needs of teaching and learning. For this to happen, planning needs to consider longer stretches of time.

Conceptual learning involves a continuous process of personal meaning-making. It is a process of developing ways for learners to organise their experiences into broader and more abstract understandings and develop the capacity to use their understanding in new contexts for new purposes. One way of approaching concepts is through questions like the following.

- How does culture shape communication?
- How does culture influence the ways we understand language in use?
- How does language shape and reflect cultural identities?

Planning interactions

KEY IDEA

- Planning a language program involves planning the interactions in which learners engage and from which they will learn

One of the key elements of providing deeper learning in the language classroom is focusing on interactions where one frame of reference meets another, such as between teacher and student, student and student, student and text, teacher and text as planned classroom practice. Such interactions provide learning experiences that focus learners on the intercultural and draw their attention to, and encourage processes of, noticing, comparison and reflection. These interactions provide experiences for students and teachers, and reflection on, and analysis of, these experiences provides deeper and 'decentred' development of knowledge and understanding for the learner. In interactions students and teachers participate as performers and analysers of the languages and cultures present in the interaction. The learning experiences provided by interactions can be represented in a program as key questions which encourage a process of enquiry and dialogue and draw explicit connections between learners' own language(s) and culture(s) and experience and the concepts addressed in the resources provided.

Personalising learning experiences

KEY IDEA

- Planning and language programming involves personalising learning experiences

Personalised learning means viewing students as individuals who engage in a dynamic process of knowledge creation and exploration. Making learning meaningful goes beyond identifying topics of interest for learning to providing opportunities for learners to make their own connections with the topic and explore their own ideas, reactions and interests. It means providing space for developing a personal perspective on what is being learnt, rather than passively assimilating information.

Planning a program which offers personalised learning involves recognising that what individuals currently know affords and constrains what they can perceive, understand, and learn. Planning of learning, then, needs to consider what it is that students individually bring to the learning experience and what they need to use, question and develop their experiences and knowledge. Personalised learning works best when learners have opportunities to reflect on what they know, how they know it and what they need to learn next. Teachers need to plan their teaching approach in ways which are varied and allow for different configurations of the ways knowledge is imparted and exchanged: teacher to student, student to teacher, student to student, individual to individual, individual to group, etc.

Planning should not be seen as a finished process resulting in a finalised program. To be effective, planning has to become a dialogic process in which the results of planning are questioned and modified as the result of interactions with colleagues, students and one's own evolving perspectives as a teacher.

Questions for reflection

- 1 How do you approach planning your long-term and short-term language programs?
What are the main things you consider in your planning? How do you discuss your programs with your students and their parents?
- 2 How is conceptual learning integrated into your students' learning experiences?
What might you change or add to your program?
- 3 How do you determine the scoping and sequencing of your students' learning?
What connections are there between the elements that you have in your program (episodes, units of work, topics, concepts)?
- 4 What would personalised learning look like for a particular group of your students?

7

Evaluating Language Programs

Evaluation for program renewal

KEY IDEAS

- Evaluation is an ongoing process of building understanding of professional work
- Evaluation reflects the stance of the teacher
- Evaluation is an integral part of the process of curriculum renewal

Evaluation as an ongoing process

Evaluation involves making considered judgments about a program to ensure that what is being done in teaching, learning and assessment is worthwhile, effective and sufficient. The process necessarily reflects our stance as languages teachers. Its fundamental purpose is to improve the program/curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment. It involves teachers critically examining what they do in the light of contemporary developments and thinking. As such, evaluation is an integral part of the process of curriculum renewal and teacher professional development. It is an ongoing process of considering and trying out alternatives, reflecting on the outcomes, and making further refinements as needed. It is at the core of our work as professionals.

Evaluation is a systematic process which involves gathering information and giving feedback on the way the program works so that improvements can be made in an ongoing way. Like assessment, evaluation can be formative and summative. Formative evaluation is the regular ongoing reflection on how the program is going while summative evaluation occurs at the end of a program and provides a perspective on the effectiveness of the program. As educators, we reflect constantly on our daily work, often in an instinctive manner. While this is useful, the process can be more effective when it is systematic, explicit and articulated to others.

Evaluation in context

KEY IDEAS

- Evaluation is shaped by, and designed for, the context in which it is undertaken
- Evaluation is particularly valuable when it is a participatory process that includes all those involved

An evaluation may be carried out internally or externally depending on the purpose and context. The value of an external evaluation resides in the fact that it is conducted by someone who is independent vis-à-vis the program and, as such, can bring an 'outsider' perspective to the task. In recent times there has been a move towards evaluation as a participatory process, one that includes *all* those involved in the particular context: students, parents and members of the school's communities. They are the ones most affected by the findings and, if they are the ones who are to make changes, they need to be involved from the outset in planning, the processes and in articulating the outcomes of evaluation.

Context is central to program evaluation. Lynch (1996) has developed the concept of 'context-adaptive' evaluation as a set of processes in which the context (or culture) of the program – its people, their roles and relationships, the conditions, its artefacts – is taken into account at every turn: in planning the evaluation, in developing processes and criteria, in implementing the plan, in articulating the findings. This is in line with the idea that a program develops in its particular environment and needs to be considered in its own terms.

Purpose and scope of evaluation

KEY IDEAS

- The purpose of evaluation is to support improvement in teaching and learning
- The scope of evaluation may include particular dimensions and/or the program as a whole

The purpose of evaluation is to support long-term improvement in programs with the fundamental goal of improving student learning. Evaluation provides teachers with information about the effectiveness of their teaching in relation to students' progress. It enables teachers to think about what they do, how they do it and why, so that they develop awareness and understanding of the evolving culture of learning that they are creating. Evaluation becomes the basis for ongoing renewal when teachers continuously question and evaluate with a view to making explicit to themselves their goals, processes, attitudes and outcomes. They are then in a position to articulate what they are doing, how, and why, to their students, colleagues, administrators, parents and the wider community to whom they are accountable.

A range of dimensions are open to evaluation, as well as the program as a whole. It is important to begin the process of evaluation with a definition of its focus: identifying which particular area or issue needs to be investigated. After the identification of the focus, it will be necessary to plan the processes, implement the plan of action and gather the necessary information, systematically analyse the information gained, reflect critically upon it and use the information to plan further action.

Some important questions include the following.

- What is the goal of the evaluation?
- For whom is it being carried out?
- What criteria will be used for the evaluation?
- How will the evaluation take place?
- What information will be gathered and how?
- How will the information be analysed?
- How will the information be used?

Evaluation as inquiry

KEY IDEA

- Evaluation involves an ongoing process of inquiry

Given that any program is dynamic and ever-evolving, it is essential that teachers continuously evaluate their current programs. Self-evaluation in dialogue with colleagues or a local adviser (a local system or university colleague) can provide valuable professional learning for the teacher(s) involved, as well as a process for ensuring that the program provides fruitful learning for students. Important questions relate to the extent to which students are engaged and progressing in their learning. Evaluation in this way is closely linked to inquiry-based approaches to teaching and the overall *stance* the teacher develops.

Questions for reflection

- 1 What role does evaluation currently play in your own professional program and curriculum renewal?
- 2 What criteria would you use to evaluate your own curriculum? Where would these criteria come from?
- 3 How might you, and those you work with, take an inquiry stance to your work?

8

Developing a Professional Learning Culture

Commitment to growth and development

KEY IDEAS

- Effective language teachers are lifelong learners
- Involvement in a professional learning culture is a commitment to develop professionally and personally

Lifelong learners

A professional learning culture is one in which we, as educators, are committed to our own growth and development as professionals. It grows out of our deep professional desire to continue to develop our knowledge and practice and to maximise opportunities for learning. Such a culture is central to effective, high quality teaching. It means that, as educators, we see ourselves, and are seen by others, as lifelong learners both of the languages and cultures we teach and of teaching itself. As education is a changing field, we need to continue to keep up to date with new developments. Moreover, our professional drive is to continue to deepen and broaden our knowledge of our chosen field through ongoing learning throughout our careers and beyond.

Creating a culture of professional learning

KEY IDEAS

- A professional learning culture involves developing a deep and ongoing awareness of the practices and processes of teaching and learning
- A professional learning culture is an ongoing process of learning from, and reflecting on, a personal and professional stance, including understandings, ideas and experiences

Learning cultures can be considered in a range of ways, including the following.

- A learning culture has often been considered in terms of the environment and experiences created by teachers for students. A learning culture is one in which experiences are structured in such a way that students have opportunities to investigate, explore and take risks in developing new ideas and insights.
- A professional learning culture has often been thought of as something that is a feature of schools and of school leadership. In this sense a professional learning culture is the promotion of professional learning as a normal and valuable part of teachers' work and the collaborative development process and goals for professional learning. In addition, the culture supports, resources and rewards professional learning (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002).

While both of these views have elements of a professional learning culture they present the learning culture as something that is (or ought to be) created to support the learning of others. This, however, misses a crucial point about the nature of cultures, which is that they are something in which people participate not something which is done to them. Teachers create a culture of professional learning through their own actions.

Contexts of a professional learning culture

KEY IDEAS

- The focus of a learning culture is on learning in diverse contexts: teacher learning, student learning, community learning
- Professional learning happens in a range of different ways

A professional learning culture is one which engages with learning in many different contexts. It is not simply the students' learning or an individual teacher's learning, but rather it is a commitment to learning as a valued activity in its own right. Creating a culture of learning for students is an important part of this work, as is having a supportive environment in which to develop as a professional, however nothing can create a professional learning culture if this is not found in the practice of teachers themselves and their disposition to developing their professional learning.

A professional learning culture involves more than regular participation in organised learning activities, some of which are short, one-off seminars. It requires active engagement with ideas and issues and critical reflection of knowledge and practice. In engaging this way, teachers take an active responsibility to understand, develop and experiment with aspects of their professional work. Teachers are in this sense observers and analysers of what is occurring in their schools, classrooms and communities and not just planners and deliverers of a curriculum.

“Effective teaching is informed by personal knowledge, trial and error, reflection on practice, and conversations with colleagues. To be a teacher means to observe students and study classroom interactions, to explore a variety of effective ways of teaching, and to build conceptual frameworks that can guide one's work.”
(Fischer, 2001:29)

Observing and analysing add a critical dimension to teaching practice which seeks to continually experiment with and develop what happens in the process of teaching and learning in order to expand the opportunities for both teacher and learners. This in turn involves the development of an 'investigative stance'. In discussing the idea of an investigative stance Crichton notes:

“Teaching necessarily involves being alert to what is going on in the classroom, noticing developments and changes, attending to emergent needs, comparing achievements at one point in time with what has happened before and what might happen after, reflecting on teaching practice and assessment, evaluating activities and plans, developing and drawing on curriculums, and the host of other activities that contribute to effective teaching practice. Of course these activities do not happen in isolation; they inform each other through the lesson, the day, the week, and over the longer term, acknowledging the perspectives and changing needs of students, teachers and members of the broader school community.”
(Crichton, 2007:8)

An investigative stance is not something which teachers add to their practice. It is rather a way of doing what teachers regularly do in more systematic ways (Liddicoat & Jansen, 1998). In particular, an investigative stance involves:

- an orientation to noticing, documenting, and making sense of the actions of teachers and learners
- an ongoing interest in using information about the classroom to develop language teaching and learning practice.

This means more than keeping up-to-date with curriculum initiatives and planning units of work. Most teachers devote time to thinking about and developing their curriculum and many professional learning activities are focused on developing better understandings of curriculum documents. These activities focus on the intended curriculum (what is going to be taught). Less attention is often paid to important aspects of teaching work such as the implemented curriculum (what teachers actually teach) and to the attained curriculum (what students learn) (Marzano, 2003). Similarly, less attention is devoted to the *processes* of teaching, learning, assessment and evaluation or to questioning one's understanding of the basic constructs of the discipline, such as language, culture, learning and the intercultural.

As part of a culture of professional learning, teachers need an ongoing engagement with questions such as the following.

- What are my goals and values as a teacher of languages?
- What do I want each student to learn?
- How do I understand the constructs that I am teaching and how is this reflected in what I teach?
- How will I develop experiences and activities which promote this learning?
- How will I know when each student has learned it?
- How will I respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

Collaborating for a professional learning culture

KEY IDEA

- A professional learning culture is based on dialogue with others, including students, peers, mentors and professional networks

While a professional learning culture is characterised by the engagement of individual teachers in an ongoing process of learning, it does not mean that teachers learn in isolation from others. A culture is a shared enterprise and professional learning is at its most effective when it is done collaboratively. This means that a professional learning culture requires a communal dimension in which professional learning is both a formal and an informal process of sharing expertise and experiences as a professional learning community.

A professional learning community involves teachers working collaboratively together to identify and work with the issues and challenges raised by teaching and learning in individual or shared contexts. Such collaboration involves dialogue about issues and problems related to teaching and learning and to students' progress. Language teachers often work in isolation from other teachers of the same subject, and in some cases in isolation from other teachers in the school. For this reason, professional learning communities are vital. A professional learning community means developing a collaborative approach to, and mutual support for, personal learning by providing 'opportunities to learn that (involve) collaboration, dialogue, reflection, inquiry and leadership' (Lambert, 1998:xi). For language teachers, networks are therefore an important part of the professional learning culture. Such networks can be constructed in various ways, connecting:

- teachers within a school community across disciplines
- teachers of the same language
- teachers of diverse languages
- teachers at different levels of schooling
- teachers at the same level of schooling.

Each such network allows for different possibilities of dialogue and collaboration. Networks within a school facilitate dialogue and exchange about specific groups of learners and the ways in which teaching and learning happen at other times and in other subjects giving a deeper understanding of students' experiences of schooling. Language specific networks contribute to professional learning which is focused on the particularities of individual languages. Such networks are often made up of teachers at different levels of schooling and facilitate exchange about what happens at different stages in a learner's progression through language learning. Networks among teachers at the same level of schooling support teachers in working with the cognitive, social and developmental issues which are relevant to their area of work. Such networks typically include teachers from different languages and enrich the possible perspectives that teachers of any particular language bring to their reflection and investigation. A rich professional learning culture would allow opportunities for interactions with various different configurations of teachers. Learning communities can be developed using communication technologies that can include teachers who are in remote locations, often isolated from others teaching in their language.

A professional learning culture is not, however, simply a set of networks of teachers. It is fundamentally a dialogue about curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment which occurs among all educators who professionally contribute to developing understanding and reflection. A professional learning culture may include a mentoring relationship between a beginning teacher and a more experienced teacher. In this case, the relationship is not a simple 'master-apprentice' relationship, as learning in such contexts is a two-way process in which the knowledge and

experiences of the less experienced teacher provide possibilities for learning for the more experienced teacher as well. A professional learning culture also involves dialogue with students – a process of coming to understand their perspectives on, and experiences of, education – to develop an understanding of their needs, expectations and interests and of what it is that they bring to their classroom learning.

In developing a professional learning culture it is important to have a clear sense of one's own learning needs and professional standards, such as the AFMLTA's *Professional standards for accomplished teaching of languages and cultures* (AFMLTA, 2005) which are useful for working towards such a sense. These standards are designed to describe *accomplished* teachers of languages and cultures. They reflect an ideal to which teachers should aspire. Teachers can work with them to understand and to develop their own professional stance and practices. These standards are intended to benefit teachers at all levels of schooling as signposts for ongoing professional learning and as a resource for evaluating their own knowledge and practice as they reflect on their work as teachers (Liddicoat, 2006).

Working with professional standards enables all of us, as educators, to consider our own practice and professional capabilities in a critical way. Using such a document can help target professional learning, identify personal learning goals and develop personalised learning plans. The AFMLTA standards are accompanied by reflection questions which are designed for teachers to use in considering how each standard applies to their own professional context and to identify areas for future learning. They also have language specific annotations for some of the more commonly taught languages which can be used for more detailed focus on aspects of professional knowledge and practice.

Questions for reflection

- 1 How could you increase your opportunities for involvement in a learning community either within or outside your school?
- 2 What issues do you face in your professional practice which an investigative stance could help you understand and change?
- 3 How do you involve parents and members of the school community in developing and monitoring a learning culture?
- 4 What do the AFMLTA professional standards for languages teaching contribute to your understanding of your professional learning needs?

9

Further Resources

Teaching and Learning Languages:

A Guide: DEEWR

www.tllg.unisa.edu.au

This website includes examples of teachers' work. They are drawn from teacher practice and are included to exemplify aspects of teaching, learning and assessing languages. The examples include programs for short and long-term learning in Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian and Japanese at primary, middle and senior secondary levels, as well as segments of programs, assessment tasks, descriptions of contexts and reflection on practice.

An Investigation into the State and Nature of Languages in Australian Schools: DEEWR
www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/investigation_languages_in_schools.htm

Asian Languages Professional Learning Project: DEEWR

www.asiaeducation.edu.au/alplp/index.htm

Australian Council of State Schools Organisations (ACSSO)

www.acsso.org.au

Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations

www.afmlta.asn.au

Australian Parents Council (APC)

www.austparents.edu.au/html/affiliates.html

CARLA: Centre for Advanced Research on Languages Acquisition

www.carla.umn.edu/index.html

CILT: National Centre for Languages

www.cilt.org.uk

Community Languages Australia: Australian Federation of Ethnic Schools Associations

www.communitylanguagesaustralia.org.au

Council of Europe: *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*

www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR): Languages Education

www.deewr.gov.au/languageseducation

Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL)

www.fatsil.org.au

Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA)
www.isca.edu.au

National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC)
www.ncec.catholic.edu.au/pages/index.asp

National Curriculum Board
www.ncb.org.au

Language Teachers' Association of the Northern Territory
www.schools.nt.edu.au/ltant/

Leading Languages Education Project
www.apapdc.edu.au/leadinglanguages/

Modern Language Teachers' Association of New South Wales
www.mltansw.asn.au

Modern Language Teachers' Association of Queensland
www.mltaq.asn.au/

Modern Language Teachers Association of South Australia
www.mltasa.asn.au/

Modern Language Teachers' Association of Tasmania
www.education.tas.gov.au/school/educators/resources/lote/contacts/mltat

Modern Language Teachers' Association of Victoria
www.mltav.asn.au

Modern Language Teachers Association of Western Australia
www.mltawa.org

National Statement and Plan on Languages Education in Australian Schools
www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/default.asp?id=11912

National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools: DEEWR.
www.asiaeducation.edu.au/pdf/engaging_statement.pdf

Professional Standards Project: DEEWR
www.pspl.unisa.edu.au

Research Centre for Languages and Cultures (RCLC), University of South Australia
www.unisa.edu.au/rclc

School Languages Program: DEEWR
www.deewr.gov.au/languageeducation

The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century: DEEWR
www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/national_goals_for_schooling_in_the_twenty_first_century.htm

The Le@rning Federation
www.thelearningfederation.edu.au/default.asp

10

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Teaching and Learning Languages: A Guide is a key part of the Australian Government's commitment to educating young Australians. The Government recognises that the skills and knowledge necessary to communicate and work with diverse languages and cultures must be a core element of the Australian school curriculum.

The Guide is designed to lead language education in new directions and to help create inspiring learning environments. It invites teachers of languages to think about the content, process and outcomes of their work in teaching, learning and assessment. It is a resource for reflecting on languages education, the role of languages teachers, and their programs and pedagogies in relation to contemporary educational understandings and contexts.

The Guide presents recent work by members of the languages teaching profession, both teachers and researchers, based in classrooms, schools and universities. It pulls together the expertise that is available at a number of levels in this country in order to ensure an enriching language learning experience for all Australian students and to further develop Australia's international potential and capability.

The Guide is available, and is supported by additional materials, at www.tllg.unisa.edu.au

