

Developing a personal, professional ‘stance’

KEY IDEAS

- Stance describes the positions that teachers take toward their work as language 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.