

# 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"> <li>• language and culture and learning</li> <li>• existing conceptions – new understandings</li> <li>• language and thinking</li> <li>• first language – additional language(s)</li> <li>• previous experiences – new experiences</li> <li>• the intercultural self – intracultural self – others.</li> </ul>
3	Interaction	Learning and communication are social and interactive. Interacting and communicating intercultural 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.