

Emerging developments in languages education

INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

Fundamental to intercultural language learning (ILL) is acknowledgement of an inextricable link between *language* and *culture*. Liddicoat (2002:5) noted “culture shapes what we say, when we say it, and how we say it from the simplest language we use to the most complex. It is fundamental to the way we speak, write, listen and read.” Language has a central role in the transmission of cultural codes; language forms and the messages conveyed by them provide cultural knowledge. Hence the impossibility of separating language and culture.

Culture can be understood in a variety of ways and the ways in which culture is constructed will impact on how teachers teach and how learners learn. Consequently, utilising ILL perspectives challenges language teachers to identify ways of appropriately incorporating culture into language learning and language into culture learning.

Philosophy

Crozet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco (1999) categorise four broad approaches to culture in language teaching:

- traditional (high culture) approach
- culture studies or area studies approach
- culture as practices/societal norms
- intercultural language learning.

Traditional approaches treat cultural competence as being able to identify an established target country canon. The canon is often embodied in the arts, music and literature of a particular group within the target country. Links between language and culture are tenuous, with texts being the object of study, rather than the expression of cultural positions being explored through the text's language choices. **Culture study approaches** treat cultural competence as knowledge about a target country (history, geography, institutions). It is possible to acquire this knowledge without engaging in the language. **Culture as societal norms** identifies cultural competence as knowing about what members of a particular cultural group are likely to do based upon known ways of acting or beliefs. The obvious limitation of this approach is culture being presented as static and homogenous.

ILL identifies culture as the lived experience of individuals. Interactions between people are context-sensitive, negotiated, mediated and variable. In terms of learning, students engage in developing cultural competence from the beginning of their language learning. Learners develop an intercultural perspective

where the culture and language contexts in which the student live (the First Place) are made apparent alongside the target culture and language contexts (the Second Place). Using this knowledge, learners move to a position (the Third Place) in which their developing intercultural competence informs their language choices in communication.

Learners engage in understanding their own language(s) and culture(s) in relation to the additional language and culture. Learners engage in processes facilitating negotiation of meaning, involving the recognition, mediation and acceptance of different perspectives. ILL is more than merely learning about a culture and comparing it to one's own. Learners must make choices about what to hold on to, what to adopt and what to let pass when engaging in meaningful communication in another language.

Principles

ILL is developed through five general principles, which guide curriculum design and inform classroom pedagogy (Liddicoat et al, 2003:50-54). These principles are:

- active construction
- making connections
- social interaction
- reflection
- responsibility.

Active construction explores language and culture through active engagement and developing a personal, multi-faceted intercultural space. **Making connections** occurs when relevant bridges are built between home language / culture and target language / culture, with existing knowledge positioned in light of new input. **Social interaction** involves communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries, identifying the boundaries and why they are constructed. **Reflection** involves engaging in critical, constructive analysis of linguistic and cultural similarity and difference; reflection on one's own intercultural behaviours and naming one's own identity. **Responsibility** encourages learners to accept responsibility for contributing to successful communication across languages and cultures, and for the development of intercultural perspectives.

Pedagogy

Meaningful implementation of ILL aligns classroom pedagogy with the philosophy and the principles of ILL (Liddicoat et al, 2003:67-68).

Aligning principles with pedagogy means that for **active construction**, classroom pedagogy is task-oriented, highlighting particular linguistic and sociocultural considerations. It refers back to

previous learning, foreshadows future learning, and allows learners to demonstrate learning by use of graphic organisers such as mind maps to make links across concepts. Pedagogy aligned with **making connections** incorporates learners' longitudinal development, builds on previous knowledge, combines learning of language and culture with learning across the curriculum, builds connections across texts and contexts and encourages learners to explain, integrate and inquire.

Social interaction means that learners will be engaged in tasks that facilitate interaction, especially interactive talk. Teachers scaffold learning to extend the intercultural connections learners are making, drawing on multiple examples from different contexts. Classroom interaction incorporating **reflection** asks learners to critically reflect on their own attitudes, beliefs and values and creates multiple pathways for bridging linguistic and sociocultural learning. **Responsibility** means that classroom pedagogy involves learners in setting personal goals, engaging positively with difference, taking a reflective stance, including self-monitoring, and developing an awareness of the ethical uses of knowledge.

ILL is being promoted in Australian schools through a government-funded project called the **Asian Languages Professional Learning Project (ALPLP)**. Through a series of workshops, language teachers deepened their knowledge of the principles and practices of ILL, and applied this knowledge to their classrooms. In the next phase, it is expected that schools will take an integrated approach to ILL, strengthening links between languages and other areas of the curriculum. For further information about the project, go to www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/aef/alplp.

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