Australian Government
Quality Teacher Programme

ITLP Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning in Practice

Discussion Paper 3

Developing programming for intercultural languages teaching and learning: insights from project team feedback

Anne-Marie Morgan

RCLCE Research Centre for Languages and Cultures Education

UniSA

Disclaimer
The views expressed in the publication do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training.

Discussion paper 3

Developing programming for intercultural languages teaching and learning: insights from project team feedback

Anne-Marie Morgan

Introduction

Phase 1 of the Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning in Practice (ILTLP) project involved languages teachers from across Australia gathering for a two day National Workshop in Adelaide, following which the teachers developed either a unit of work or a long term programme of intercultural languages learning, supported by one or more members of the project team. Teacher participants and project team members communicated through face-to-face meetings and an extensive feedback process. Written feedback from the project team to teacher participants was collected, reviewed and analysed in an attempt to capture what is involved in intercultural language learning. Findings from this process provide insights into the process of developing programmes of intercultural language learning and will be of interest to and have relevance for language teachers in Australian schools involved in implementing an intercultural orientation into their languages teaching.

Identification of common themes in the feedback

A number of themes emerge from the feedback. These are:

- multiple understandings of intercultural languages learning
- a need for clearer identification of objectives for student learning of intercultural aspects
- a need to bring out students' thinking as participants as well as observers
- the importance of links between language and culture underpinning the planning process
- a need in programming for intercultural language learning for the inclusion of insights into teachers' thinking
- a need for a programming style that better accommodates the intercultural languages learning context

These themes are illustrated through inclusion of quotes from the project team's feedback to teachers, identified in italics. The feedback process explored throughout Phase 1 of the project is further exemplified in Discussion Papers 7 and 8 (upcoming), that, respectively, consider a 'before and after' example of programming for a unit of work prepared by Nhu Trinh for a South Australian Years 4/5 Chinese language class; and Nhu's perspective on the feedback process. Other discussion papers within this series (Discussion Papers 2 and 4) also investigate programming issues for languages teachers adopting an intercultural stance, and may also be of interest to teachers involved in programming for intercultural language learning.

Multiple understandings of intercultural languages learning

The feedback process revealed multiple understandings of intercultural languages learning, for both participating teachers and team members. The view was also expressed that the

field of intercultural languages learning is still in its early stages of exploration and development. There was agreement amongst all participants that the work and learning that occurs through the ILTLP project will provide much needed exemplification to provide a basis for discussion for the 400 teachers who will be involved in Phase 3 of the project and the wider field of languages educators in deepening their understanding of intercultural languages learning.

> *We are all seeking to clarify what intercultural language learning is*
>
> *We are learning together, so there needs to be much discussion*

Identifying expectations of student learning

The feedback provided by the project team focused on the need for programming to include the teachers' thinking in terms of how the students would experience the language and what they wanted their students to gain from their units.

> *Ask yourselves: What does this mean to your students? How are they positioned in this work? How is it meaningful to students? How will it impact on them? What new insights, capability and knowledge will they develop?*
>
> *Extend your programming beyond the creation of an 'artefact' to include your motivation and rationale*

Teachers were asked what responses they were expecting from the students, to 'have a go' at anticipating these responses (albeit recognising that there is always an element of unpredictability in students' responses) and then to expand their own ideas on how the learning could then be developed and deepened with these responses in mind.

> *Anticipate and articulate the learning you think will occur, including likely responses from students*
>
> *Consider and articulate how students' thinking is likely to change during the course of the unit… show what you want students to learn/discover intercultural/linguistically*

Another suggestion to teachers was to more clearly identify the learning objectives they had for students in terms of core concepts, and how languages learning could provide a unique 'way in' to this learning, in a manner that was different from that pursued in other Key Learning Areas (KLAs) such as Studies of Society and Environment.

> *What is it about this work that gets at the concept you are exploring? How is language being used to reach these objectives? What differentiates what you are doing here, using languages, from what they might learn in a SOSE class?*

Positioning students as participants, as well as observers

Feedback also focused on the need to bring out the students' thinking, as participants, as well as observers, so that they experience the **inter**cultural dimension directly. Students are positioned not only to view an external or 'other' culture, seen from the outside looking in, but have shifted perspective to consider what it is like to 'be in' that culture as well as outside.

> *You need to bring out students' thinking: how do they see themselves in the situation, not only how do they observe things happening at a distance?*
>
> *It is difficult to see the 'intercultural' exchange in the material, as the cultures are remaining separate*
>
> *How are the students positioned in this? How do they participate? How might their perspectives change by the end of the unit? How are their experiences intercultural?*

In asking students to position themselves as participants in intercultural exchange, they would become more reflective **intra**cultural learners, developing their own self awareness and identity.

> *Remember that the intercultural is about transforming the self as much as it is about knowing the other*

Teachers were encouraged to consider how this transformation might occur, from the point of programmeming, so that it would remain an emphasis throughout the teaching process, and, after completing the unit, provide a focus for reflection on the success of this approach.

Linking language and culture

Another important theme that emerged from the feedback was the need to emphasise the connection between language(s) and culture(s) in intercultural language learning. The project team often noted that the links between language and culture must underpin the whole planning process, as this concept is central to the construct of intercultural language learning.

> *What is the language and culture connection? You need to consider the development of both simultaneously- the interconnection of language and culture must be present from the start*
>
> *You are tending to look at specific aspects of culture rather than notions of interculturality. The two must be connected*

Identifying teachers' thinking and the teacher's role in the classroom

The feedback responses suggested that in adopting an intercultural stance to languages teaching and learning, the role of the teacher needed to be elaborated, as the teacher is a key participant in the process of learning. It was suggested that the teacher's value to self and students culd be identified and provide meaning context to the intercultural learning process.

It might be easier to see what you are doing if more of your input is described, such as the subtlety of messages you are trying to get across

Articulate your own thoughts behind choices

Teachers were asked: What is distinctive about the contribution you make and how does this help your students achieve the learning objectives?

Ask yourself: What am I contributing? What do I expect students to contribute? What are the interactions?

One team member described the process of including teacher thinking as portraying the 'life' of the unit or programme. These inclusions enriched traditional programming.

Programming concepts not content

Another common theme evident from the collected feedback was the need to move from an emphasis on content and 'coverage' in programming to an emphasis on the larger concept, to capture the interculturality of programmes. What was apparent was an initial emphasis on 'topics', in both linguistic and cultural dimensions, and not on the concepts that could be related to and provide intercultural significance and learning opportunities.

Topic lists only provide broad sets of information that don't indicate what is being done

Draw a distinction between content and concept- we are looking for more detail around the thinking related to concepts than on content

Reflecting on the experience in project team discussion, it was suggested that the traditional emphasis on content was largely driven by the need to identify outcomes and learning tasks against curriculum documents also positioned in this way. For example, 'shopping' or 'markets' are topics, and considerable vocabulary and linguistic forms can be explored through units based on these topics. As unit descriptors, however, they do not identify the intercultural significance of positioning oneself, for example, to understand and perform the interactions involved in buying and selling in an Indonesian street market. As words on their own, they do not show how students will engage with the learning, taking into account their own perspectives and background knowledge. Identifying what students' backgrounds are, how students may respond to imagining themselves in an Indonesian street market, and the positioning of the teacher in the learning process, would all provide more information in a concept-driven programme. Such a programme might, in this instance, be focused on exploration and comparison of socio-cultural and socio-linguistic differences in negotiating financial transactions in different settings in Indonesia. In this context, the teacher may be wanting the students to engage with the underlying courtesies and cultural meaning attached to bargaining and transacting, and the relevant register in which to conduct these transactions, depending on one's age, gender, social status and education.

Developing programme formats for intercultural language learning

In line with traditional approaches to programming, many teachers used programming formats that did not include their thinking. A column for 'outcomes' included in a number of planning templates was often used to note dot points or numbers derived from curriculum

documents, without indicating how they were meaningful to the particular task and students. Similarly, assessment and reflection tasks were generic, rather than specific.

> *Your criteria for assessment/self-reflection (e.g. what have you learned?) are broad. You need to ask more specific questions*

Teachers were encouraged to state what they might normally never include in a programme, information that they carried in their heads. This level of information is needed when programmes are to be shared with others. By specifying this information, however, the thinking then became available to share more deliberately with their students. It was clear when talking to teachers that so much of what was described earlier as the 'life' of the programme, the teacher's input and thinking and driving of the programme, was considered to be assumed by the teachers, based on the idea that you don't need to articulate what you already know you are doing or will do. Being unstated, these elements could be lost in the teaching period in the desire to complete the 'topics' and language skills that were actually identified in the programme. Such an approach risks losing sight of the particular group of learners or their needs or skills and the intercultural focus.

Team members suggested trying more personalised formats that could include some of the elements identified as desirable in intercultural planning.

> *You need to identify you intercultural language learning objectives and clarify your aims (communication; language; culture; intercultural objectives)*

> *The use of an 'evidence' column is this programme format is very exciting- in this you can include your thinking about what you might expect to see, what students might say and do, which will further clarify objectives and provide rich material for assessment*

> *I've never seen a column for 'feedback' before, but I love it. Here you can provide students with more of your own thinking and presence, and it ensures that you think about what to say back to students, as participants in the same process*

Summary

Themes that emerged in this process of reviewing feedback from team members to teachers in Phase 1 of the project provide useful pointers of the issues to consider in programming for intercultural language teaching and learning. Further perspectives on the process of programming from an intercultural stance, and the experience of the feedback process from a teacher's perspective, discussed in other discussion papers in this series, amplify these themes and provide further insights into the process and emerging understandings arising from this project.