

Report on the Tasmanian Intercultural Language Learning Project, 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the latest phase of exploring intercultural language learning in Tasmanian schools.

Background

Languages (LOTE) teaching and learning in Tasmania takes place in the context of the *Tasmanian Curriculum*. Recent curriculum reform processes have encouraged reflection, innovation and change in curriculum content and delivery.

The Asian Languages Professional Learning Project (ALPLP) Phase I in 2003 and ALPLP Phase 2 in 2004 introduced intercultural language learning (IcLL) to a range of primary and some secondary schools across Australia.

Following these two highly successful national projects, it was decided to target Tasmanian secondary schools for IcLL professional learning in 2005. This was titled the SILLiSS Project. It supported the directions outlined in the *MCEETYA National Statement and National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005 – 2008*.

The Tasmanian Intercultural Language Learning Project (TIcLL) in 2006 built on the work done by participants in ALPLP Phase 1 and 2 and SILLiSS. Primary and secondary schools and colleges were involved.

Defining intercultural language learning

Intercultural language learning is an emerging approach that has strong connections to inquiry and reflective thinking, requiring learners to adopt an inquiring state of mind, to notice and question assumptions and to reorient themselves in relation to others. A critical dimension of understanding language in use is that language cannot be separated from its social and cultural contexts. An intercultural language learning approach facilitates teaching a culture through its language.

Purposes of the Tasmanian Intercultural Language Learning Project (2006)

- To assist participating primary and secondary schools in integrating languages (LOTE) programs within the curriculum context of their schools.

- To enable participants to undertake a structured program of professional development in intercultural language learning.
- To strengthen links between languages (LOTE) programs and other areas of the curriculum, through collaborative planning with other teachers in their schools.
- To support participants to explore the ideas underlying intercultural language learning across the curriculum in their own school contexts.

Participating schools (2006)

Bothwell District High School; Brent Street Primary School; Burnie Primary School; Cosgrove High School; Distance Education Tasmania; Dunalley Primary School; Havenvue Primary School; Kingston Primary School; New Norfolk High School; Perth Primary School; Port Dalrymple School; Queechy High School; Rosny College; Scotch Oakburn College; South Hobart Primary School.

Professional learning for the teacher participants

Professional learning for the participating teachers followed a spaced learning model, allowing for reflection time and including provision of individual feedback and support for school teams in their planning process. Many of the participating teachers had previous experience in intercultural language learning projects.

Professional learning was provided for one day in March 2006, a second day in May, and a sharing day in August. The program was managed by Janine Davison from School Education Division, Department of Education.

The scope of the professional learning program included:

- Exploring language, culture and identity
- An introduction to intercultural language learning
- A focus on student outcomes
- Learning from previous intercultural language learning projects
- Examples of practice
- Planning for school-based investigation and implementation
- Reflection on progress

Feedback and support were provided for the collaborative planning process, with individual support as needed. A listserv was established to facilitate email communication between participants.

Achievements

Teachers have confidently engaged in a re-appraisal of their knowledge and understanding of language and culture and of their own pedagogy. They have explored

and reflected upon models of planning for, and assessing, intercultural language teaching and learning. As a result, their teaching has been appropriate for students and provided authentic reasons for language learning. Support at central and local levels has enabled the teachers to share their journeys with other educators.

Students have gained deeper understandings of their own and other cultures and languages. They have experienced language as a medium for culture. They have combined learning of language and culture with learning across the curriculum and have experienced increased motivation and engagement. Above all, perhaps, their self-knowledge has been supported and extended.

Questions for future exploration

- ICT often enhances student engagement. It provides access to authentic materials for teaching and learning, allows for individualisation of the learning program through self-paced learning, provides access to native speaker models and supports communication between learners. For teachers two key questions may be: Which of the technologies at my disposal are the most pertinent to this learning sequence? How can they best be utilised?
- Several teachers mentioned the issue of maintaining a balance between the use of English and the target language. Is there a 'correct' balance between English and the target language in the intercultural language learning context? If so, how do teachers maintain that balance?
- Effective teaching stimulates students to continually question their own understandings. Participating teachers often commented on the importance of developing inquiry and reflective thinking in their students. What thinking strategies are most useful to language learners?
- Teachers have re-affirmed the importance of Understanding Goals and how they underpinned what was done. How can Understanding Goals be expressed most effectively? Why do we need associated guiding questions? Should students be made explicitly aware of the Goals for a learning sequence? When, and for what purposes should the Goals be revisited during the course of the learning sequence?

Future directions for intercultural language learning

Intercultural language learning is now an established and major direction in Languages education in Australia. In recognition of this, a national project has been commissioned and funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training under the AGQTP.

The Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning in Practice (ILTLP) project will build on the success of the Asian Languages Professional Learning (ALPLP) project as well as a

range of national and state-based research and development initiatives in intercultural language learning. The project is to be developed and managed by the Research Centre for Languages and Cultural Education at the University of South Australia.

In 2007, up to 400 teachers will take part in a coordinated process focused specifically on strengthening intercultural language teaching and learning. The key focus areas will be:

- long-term planning and
- the development of assessment processes and ways of describing outcomes of intercultural language learning.

There will be twenty places for Tasmanian teachers in the project. They will be engaged in a stepped model for professional learning, similar to that used in past years.

Further details of the ILTLP project are available from Janine Davison, SEO Languages. janine.davison@education.tas.gov.au



Photo: Indonesian market simulation, Havenview Primary

Intercultural language learning connects the study of culture to language learning and sees them as integrated and holistic.