

# Introduction

## Language, Culture, and Language Education

The study of an additional language has long been understood as a way of coming to understand another culture and its people. As a goal of language teaching, understanding others has been prominent in educational rationales in different ways, but has often been in the background of educational practice. As the processes of globalization, increased mobility, and technological development have come to shape ways of living and communicating, there has been a growing recognition of the fundamental importance of integrating intercultural capabilities into language teaching and learning. One of the challenges facing this integration has been to move from recognition of the need for an intercultural focus in language education to the development of practice. Early in the development of intercultural language teaching and learning, Zarate (1986) argued that the teaching and learning of culture in language education had been problematic because sufficient attention had not been given to considering what is to be taught and how. One important theme to emerge early in consideration of what and how to teach was the need to integrate language and culture in an interculturally oriented view of language education (e.g. Byram, 1991). This theme in turn has led to a rethinking of what is involved in the teaching of a second or foreign language.

Kramsch (2008) argues that in the teaching of any language the focus is not only on teaching a linguistic code but also on teaching meaning. The focus on meaning involves important shifts in understanding the fundamental concerns of language teaching and learning, which do not replace traditional foci, but add broadly to them. In particular it means engaging with broader ways of understanding the fundamental concepts involved in the theory and practice of language education: language, culture, and learning, and the relationships between them. To teach meaning is to actively engage with the processes involved in making and interpreting meaning. These go well beyond processes of comprehension of

forms and structures, to consider meanings as subjective and intersubjective, growing out of not only the language in which meaning is communicated but also from the memories, emotions, perceptions, experiences, and life worlds of those who participate in the communication. Moreover, teaching meaning involves recognizing that as part of learning any additional language the learner inevitably brings more than one language and culture to the processes of meaning-making and interpretation. That is, there are inherent intercultural processes in language learning in which meanings are made and interpreted across and between languages and cultures and in which the linguistic and cultural repertoires of each individual exist in complex interrelationships. Languages and cultures in language learning are not independent of each other. Phipps and Gonzalez (2004) argue that: “The student of a language other than their own can be given an extraordinary opportunity to enter the languaging of others, to understand the complexity of the experience of others to enrich their own. *To enter other cultures is to re-enter one’s own*” (p. 3; emphasis in original). That is, language learning, because languages and cultures are always in complex interrelationship, is both an act of learning about the other and about the self and of the relationships which exist between self and other.

In this book, we present a view of language education that is a complex engagement with linguistic and cultural diversity through the possibilities that a focus on meaning affords the processes of teaching and learning. We see language teaching as an art that is developed over time and which remains in a constant state of development. It is a thoughtful, mindful activity that is not reducible to prescriptions for practice. For us then, it is important to think beyond an understanding of teaching practice as *method* to consider how the complexity of lived experiences of linguistic and cultural diversity shape both the focus of language teaching and learning and the processes through which it happens in classrooms – what we call a *perspective*. To frame this idea it is useful to consider the concept of method and how it has been understood in language teaching.

## The Concept of Method

“Method” has been a well-established construct in language education and has a long history as an organizing concept in the field. In fact, the recent history of language teaching can be understood as a series of innovations in method, and a number of established named methods have come to be recognized (e.g. Grammar–Translation Method, Audiolingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching). The distinctions between methods and the comparative advantages of different methods have become a key element in debates around language teaching.

In one of the earliest formulations of method, Anthony (1963) makes a basic hierarchical distinction in his model of language teaching between approaches, methods, and techniques. For Anthony, an approach is an overarching category involving a set of assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning and focuses on describing the nature of the material to be taught and learned. Methods are a middle-level construct that outlines the “orderly presentation of language material” (p. 65), given a particular approach. A technique is the most local level: techniques are the particular activities or strategies

adopted in the classroom to accomplish a particular learning goal. In Anthony's model, methods were viewed as procedural accounts of teaching and learning through which broader, philosophical accounts of languages teaching and learning could be enacted in classrooms. It is a point of intersection between theory and practice.

In distinguishing levels of organization in language education, Anthony did not elaborate the nature of method as a construct, as Richards and Rodgers (1986) have noted. Beginning with Anthony's model, Richards and Rodgers argue that an approach is theoretical in its orientation and becomes a method, in Anthony's sense, through a process of design that maps theory onto practice to create an instructional system. That is, method relates to instruction and is a systematized way of implementing language teaching and learning in classrooms. This system comprises objectives for learning, principles for selecting and organizing content, preferred learning tasks and activities, and roles for teachers, learners, and materials. In their model, Richards and Rodgers propose three tiers, labeled approach, design, and procedures, which essentially replicate Anthony's model and uses "method" to refer to a superordinate category that encapsulates all three levels. In this case, method becomes a tight fusing of broader philosophy and classroom practice.

Richards and Rodgers' model effectively removes some of the inherent diversity Anthony articulated in his understanding of method. For Anthony, approach was the prime organizing mechanism for language teaching, with any approach effectively generating multiple methods that could translate the theoretical positions of the approach into practice. For Richards and Rodgers, however, methods are not a collection of diverse ways of enacting theoretical understandings – they are unities of thought and practice that organize how languages are taught and learned. Most conventional discussions of method emphasize the unity of method as the superordinate category, and method itself has come to be seen as a statement of orthodox practice to be adopted in order to achieve effective language learning.

## Critiques of Method

Although the idea of method has been powerful in understanding, describing, and evaluating teaching practice, it has not been without criticism. In particular, in spite of research on method in language teaching, the idea of method itself has often been accepted as either self-evident or as little more than a convenient heuristic for talking about ways of doing language teaching and learning. The lack of attention to the idea of method led Clarke (1983, p. 109) to maintain that "the term 'method' is a label without substance." He noted that "method is so vague that it means just about anything that anyone wants it to mean, with the result that, in fact, it means nothing" (p. 111). In many cases, the term has been used in quite different ways and some fluidity is found in the meanings attributed to the term.

The critique of method, however, has not simply focused on the vagueness of the term, but also on its utility for understanding how language teaching and learning actually happen. Stern (1983) has suggested that there is a "fundamental weakness" in the concept of method and that the complexities of language teaching could not be reduced to methods alone. He argued that the focus on the comparative benefits of methods had become

“unproductive and misguided” (p. 251) and that more sophisticated ways are needed to understand the nature of language teaching and learning in practice. We can see in work on methods a desire to establish unified parameters for language teaching practice, usually based on claims of effectiveness or efficiency, which constitute methods as homogeneous bodies of practice. In reality, teaching practice is highly diverse and variable and is influenced by the complexities of context (Liddicoat, 2004b). This means that the idea of method is insufficient to capture the necessary variability in practice that is responsive to local needs and conditions. In fact, Pennycook (1989) has argued that the debate around method has not led to a developing understanding of how languages can be taught, but rather has limited what can be known about language teaching.

The way in which methods have been presented as unified bodies of practice has led to methods often being understood statements of orthodox practice in language education. As Pennycook has claimed, “the Method concept is ultimately prescriptive rather than descriptive: Rather than analysing what is happening in language classrooms, it is a prescription for classroom behaviour” (1989, p. 611). Thus, there is a powerful discourse around methods as statements of what teachers should or must do, with the result that changes in practice in language teaching and learning have often been understood as processes of transmitting new orthodoxies. The method concept has therefore been a force for promoting homogeneity in practice and has often constructed diversity of practices as deviations from accepted norms. Moreover, the idea of method has privileged the role of the method developer over the role of the teacher as a decision-maker in the practice of teaching, subordinating practice to theory (Clarke and Silberstein, 1988). The prescriptive view of method has reproduced a view of methods as templates that constrain the options for practice. This view effectively constrains what can be done in language classrooms and limits the ways in which teachers and learners can engage with language and culture.

### Moving beyond Methods

One response to the constraining effects of methods is that teachers have come to use them eclectically in language teaching, selecting from various recommendations for different purposes from the range available (e.g. Fanselow, 1987; Hammerley, 1991; Rivers, 1981). Thus, advocates of eclecticism resolve the problem of the prescriptivity of methods by challenging the prescriptivity and favoring teacher selection. Such views, however, remain located within a method paradigm and continue to imply a conceptual unity in methods themselves. Eclecticism does not address the prescriptivism of methods, nor does it address critique of methods themselves, rather, it locates practice in a problematic relationship with theory. If methods are considered theoretically coherent and defensible, then eclecticism runs the risk of being seen to work outside or even in contradiction to theory, and the gap between theory and practice is reinforced. In fact, even sympathetic treatments of eclecticism in teaching typically contrast eclectic approaches with “scientific” approaches. Freeman and Richards (1993) contrast theory-based teaching and “art/craft” teaching, with the former systematic and principled and the latter more *ad hoc* and intuitive. Diller (1975)

contrasts eclecticism with reason, noting a transformation in language teaching in which a “temporary phase of eclecticism is giving way to a reasoned choice of methods and techniques” (p. 65).

By leaving methods intact, eclecticism may attempt to deal with the limitations that methods can impose on practice but risk diverse practice being considered in some way less rigorous or inferior when compared to methods-based practice. Other ways of dealing with method have tried to address the utility of methods as ways of describing language-teaching practice. Prabhu (1990) contrasts arguments for eclecticism – that different methods apply to different contexts or that methods are only partial truths – with an argument against the notion of a best method. He maintains that the pursuit of an objectively best method is misplaced and unrealistic because methods omit much that is important in teaching. Rather than defining good teaching as the implementation of a good method, Prabhu argues that it is necessary “to think of good teaching as an activity in which there is a sense of involvement by the teacher” (p. 171). That is, the engagement of the teacher in the act of teaching is fundamental to good teaching. A prescriptive method implemented routinely or mechanistically will not constitute good teaching because the method does not embody the teacher or the learner. Rather than focusing on methods as templates for teaching, he argues that the focus should be on more subjective aspects of teachers’ understanding of their work: “There is a factor more basic than the choice between methods, namely, teachers’ subjective understanding of the teaching they do. Teachers need to operate with some practical conceptualisation of how their teaching leads to the desired learning – with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility” (p. 172). Prabhu calls this subjective understanding teachers’ sense of plausibility and argues that the important issue for good teaching is whether the sense of plausibility is demonstrably active and alive, not whether it is based on some particular method. In effect, this decouples the idea of the use of a method as an instructional system from good language teaching and opens up greater complexity for understanding what constitutes teaching. Prabhu sees the sense of plausibility not as an entrenched body of subjective knowledge, but as an open capacity to evolve in the process of teaching; and he maintains that openness to investigate practice, to change and to draw on experiences, is fundamental to teachers’ professional learning. At the same time, teaching practice must be accepted as inherently open to diversity both between teachers and for individual teachers at different times.

Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2003) contends that language teaching now faces a post-method condition, that is, language education has moved beyond method as a basic organizer of practice. He argues that the post-method condition gives more recognition to the role of the teacher in the act of teaching and constructs the relationship between theory and practice as closer and multivalent. In particular, there is a recognition that practice needs to be location-specific and student- and classroom-oriented rather than imposed from outside. This idea gives the teachers the ability and the responsibility of drawing on their experience as language learners and language users in constructing learner experiences.

In the post-method condition, methods can no longer be framed as the core way in which practice is organized or developed and so the elaboration of new methods is not a valid response to any desire to change practice in language teaching and learning. Rather, taking language education into new directions necessitates articulating theories of language, culture, and learning in ways that generate new possibilities for teachers to develop and

theorize their own practices of teaching and learning. The focus is not, however, one which proposes an eclectic view of teaching. If eclecticism is understood simply as selection between available possibilities, it runs the risk of becoming a random assortment of techniques assembled unsystematically and uncritically. Rather, what is needed for post-methods language teaching is what Kumaravadivelu (1994) calls “principled pragmatism.” Principled pragmatism encompasses both practice and theory in an integrated and mutually reinforcing way. It recognizes diversity in pragmatism but bases this diversity on a clear articulation of the nature, purpose, and context of teaching and learning. In this way, selections of aspects of practice are guided by a rationale for practice that allows possibilities to be evaluated critically. The alternate to methods, therefore, is not simply eclecticism but rather a principled and professional selection to address teaching and learning needs.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) propose the idea of *stance* as a way of understanding how teachers adopt principled positions in their teaching. Stance emphasizes the idea that, in teaching, teachers are positioned in particular ways, intellectually and in practice, in relation to what and how they teach:

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. (pp. 288–289)

The stance that teachers adopt in relation to their teaching provides a framing in which choices about practice are shaped and in which theory and practice are brought into relationship. In all teaching, teachers, and also their learners, adopt a stance in the sense of a set of valued positions about what is to be taught and learned and how this is to be done.

We understand intercultural language teaching and learning as an *intercultural perspective*, that is, as the self-awareness of the language teacher as a participant in linguistic and cultural diversity; it is therefore not simply a way of teaching, but a way of understanding lived experiences of language and culture as the framing for teaching. For us, an intercultural perspective can be understood as the lens through which the nature, purpose, and activity of language teaching and learning are viewed, and the focus which students develop through their language learning. The intercultural in language learning is then a way of viewing the nature of language, culture, and learning as they come together in the acquisition of a new language. The starting point for such a perspective is the view that language learning is fundamentally engagement in intercultural communication and that the addition of a new language to a person’s linguistic repertoire positions that person differently in relation to the world in which they live. Language learning from an intercultural perspective is therefore an exploration of the intercultural, used as a lens for understanding language teaching and learning as both theory and practice.

We use the ideas of stance and perspective to highlight that this book does not intend to provide a “method” or prescriptions for teaching and learning languages. What we present in this book is an attempt to explore what is involved when considering language



education from an intercultural perspective. In three key senses, it is not a method. First, it is not a method because it does not seek to formulate practice in particular ways, but rather to open up thinking about theory and processes of language teaching and learning in ways that can inform more elaborated understandings of both theory and practice. The act of teaching and learning is intricate and cannot be reduced to methodological prescriptions. Furthermore, the role of teachers is not one of simply receiving prescriptions from others that are subsequently “implemented” in their context. In addition, it is not a method because it sees language teaching as a fundamentally ecological activity in which those aspects of practice that are normally classed as method cannot be dissociated from the rest of the ecology. Language education is a synthesis of theory and practice, of teaching and learning, of pedagogy, resources, assessment, and evaluation. We see teaching, therefore, as a holistic process that is not reducible to compartmentalized categories such as approach, method, and technique. Finally, what we present is not a method because we understand teaching as dialogic relationships between theory and practice, between teaching and learning, and between teacher and student. Such dialogue is an opening to the complexities of teaching and what is taught. Teachers come to teaching with their own dynamic framework of knowledge and understanding, which encompasses both their own and their students’ personal, social, cultural, and linguistic make-up, as well as the experiences, beliefs, ethical values, motivations, and commitments that are part of their own identity as a teacher. This framework is continuously evolving, based on teachers’ distinctive worlds of experience and reflection on that experience (Scarino, 2005a). It provides the frame of reference through which, in their day-to-day teaching, teachers create learning experiences for students and through which they interpret and make meaning of their students’ learning. It is through this framing that they 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.

To teach from an intercultural perspective is a framing of the ways teachers understand the diversity of languages and cultures, their lives within this diversity and its relationship to their work as teachers. It also means teaching in such a way that the focus of learning is the development of an intercultural perspective by learners as their own experience of linguistic and cultural diversity. The enactment of an intercultural perspective occurs at each point within the ecology of teaching and learning and the articulation of an intercultural perspective is both a global and local feature of that ecology. This means that language teaching and learning from an intercultural perspective is an activity in which principles and theoretical positions affect practice at every level. In this way, such teaching is both personal, drawing on the dispositions of individual teachers and students, and coherent, integrating dispositions across the whole process of teaching and learning.

## **About this Book**

This book aims to investigate language teaching and learning in a way that is broadly applicable to a diversity of languages, contexts, and levels of learning. We endeavor to articulate important principles of intercultural teaching and learning, recognizing that their

enactment is realized in different ways in different contexts. We argue for a reconsideration of the fundamental principles that can guide language teaching and learning, and examine the consequences of such a reconsideration through the whole of the ecology of language education. In addressing language teaching and learning, this book focuses primarily on foreign language teaching, both because it is the context with which we are most familiar, and because foreign language teaching presents particular challenges for intercultural learning. This is because learners are often isolated from the communities they are studying and their experience of linguistic and cultural diversity as it relates to their language learning is necessarily mediated primarily through the classroom. While we wish to maintain a broad focus, selecting necessarily involves a focus on particular languages. In selecting examples, we have drawn from a range of different languages and cultures the general principles that can be adopted into the teaching of any language and culture, rather than focusing on the specific details of a particular language and its associated cultures.

The book is divided into two parts. Chapters 2 to 4 explore what is meant by the idea of an intercultural perspective in language teaching and learning, and the remaining chapters work through how an intercultural perspective affects aspects of practice. In Chapter 2, we explore understandings of language and culture as they apply to the contemporary context of language teaching. We examine the evolving understanding of the nature of language and culture and their interrelationship and the consequences that this has for how languages are taught. We develop a view of language as a complex, contextualized phenomenon that cannot be understood in terms of the linguistic code alone, but which must also include an understanding of language as a form of making and interpreting meaning. We examine different ways in which the idea of culture has been understood in language education and argue for an understanding of culture as a dynamic process within which meanings are created, exchanged, and interpreted. We also examine ways of understanding the intercultural and develop a view of the intercultural that emphasizes it as mediation between cultures, as personal engagement with diversity, and as played out most especially in language education through interpersonal exchanges of meaning.

In Chapter 3 we discuss the understandings of learning that underpin an intercultural perspective on language teaching and learning. The chapter considers briefly some aspects of the history of second language acquisition (SLA), leading to a discussion of the central debate that emerged in the field in the mid-1990s about the nature of SLA and second language learning. This is the debate between two families of theories, those that are traditional and cognitively based and those that are more recent and socioculturally oriented. We consider key understandings relevant to the two families of theories. We also discuss Sford's (1998) two metaphors of learning – acquisition and participation – and her argument for complementarity and therefore sufficiency. Arguing against the sufficiency of these two metaphors, we discuss the need to expand further views of learning within an intercultural perspective, to capture the process of moving between diverse linguistic and cultural systems and to acknowledge the essentially interpretive nature of learning to communicate across languages.

The issues of language culture and learning are drawn together in Chapter 4, which frames our understanding of the intercultural as it applies in language education. In this chapter we argue that the intercultural is a dynamic engagement with the relationships between language, culture, and learning. It involves recognition of the cultural constructedness of perception and



interpretation as a starting point for making, communicating, and interpreting meanings about and across languages and cultures. In particular, we argue that intercultural oriented language teaching and learning places the learners themselves at the focus of intercultural engagement. This requires a recognition of the identities that language learners have in their encounters with a new language and culture and the ways the teaching and learning context positions learners in relation to these identities. We then articulate a number of principles that we believe to be fundamental for engaging language learners in a reflexive approach to making and interpreting meanings, and some of the ways in which these principles can be enacted pedagogically.

In the remaining chapters we consider more directly some of the main aspects of practice in teaching and learning languages from an intercultural perspective. Here we break down the ecology of language teaching and learning into some of its major components. The aim is not to fragment teaching and learning but rather to show how an intercultural perspective is articulated in different parts of the broad ecology. In considering these components we have included aspects of teaching practice that may sometimes be considered as lying outside direct control of teachers (e.g. planning and evaluation) because we believe that these activities are fundamental components of the work of all teachers, and because we believe that an intercultural stance permeates all aspects of the ecology of teaching and learning.

In Chapter 5 we argue that teaching and learning languages within an intercultural perspective requires an expansion of the construct of “task” to highlight the nature of interaction as interchange, that is, as the interpretation, creation, and exchange of meaning, and to acknowledge that for learners these interactions constitute lived experience along a trajectory. These experiences contribute to the development of communication as well as to the development of an evolving understanding of what communication entails and ultimately to the learners’ development of self-awareness as communicators. We use a series of examples to illustrate ways in which teachers of diverse languages construct such learning experiences.

Chapter 6 turns to an exploration of how the interactions and experiences described in Chapter 5 can be resourced within a language program. A language-learning resource does not exist in isolation but needs to connect with other resources to form a coherent whole, and resources are not simply texts and materials, but learners themselves can become the resource. We then examine the selection, adaptation, and creation of resources and the ways in which resources are used for diverse purposes, such as discovery, scaffolding, and reflection, and the ways in which teachers use resources for multiple purposes. The chapter examines the nature and role of authentic resources for intercultural language teaching and learning, arguing that resources need to be personalized to make them meaningful in learners’ own terms and to enhance possibilities for connecting with diverse linguistic and cultural practices in constructive ways. Chapter 7 develops the discussion of resources by considering technology as integral to intercultural language teaching and learning because it provides the best source of contemporary material for languages education and allows for participation in the target language and its communities. The power of technology is to make other cultures present to learners in diverse, complex, and immediate ways, and to allow for and require intercultural engagement.

In Chapter 8 we turn to the issue of assessment. We contextualize assessment in relation to the tension between traditional and alternate assessment paradigms, its institutional

character, and the need for a reconceptualization of the assessment process. We then consider four processes of assessment – conceptualizing, eliciting, judging, and validating – and we identify features of assessment that are required to assess language learning as an intercultural endeavor. We use a series of examples to illustrate ways in which language teachers are experimenting with assessment of language within this perspective. We conclude by discussing some complexities that remain to be addressed in this area.

In Chapter 9 we consider how a program of interculturally oriented language teaching and learning can be planned as a developmental experience of learning over time. We consider ways of understanding the content of a program of learning in which language, culture, and learning are integrated and interrelated. We argue that the framing of planning needs to be conceptual, as it is through concepts that integration can be achieved and interactions and reflections can be organized. We see the progression through a program of learning as a holistic process of developing complexity as learners engage in processes of interpreting the languages and cultures that are at play in their learning context. This development requires consideration be given to planning the experiences through which learners develop this complexity, and the connections between these experiences, which in turn enable the elaboration of understanding and interpretation.

In Chapter 10 we consider evaluation as an integral aspect of the ecology of language learning within an intercultural perspective. We discuss the nature and purpose of program evaluation, research paradigms that shape the process, and the process of evaluation itself. In so doing we highlight the way in which the view of language learning as intercultural shapes both the frame of reference for evaluation and the processes involved. We then consider the relationship between evaluation and professional learning for teachers. We conclude by considering language learning as action and interpretive understanding across languages and cultures.