

# **The Development of Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching**

Michael BYRAM, Bella GRIBKOVA and  
Hugh STARKEY

# Introduction

Education for intercultural understanding remains central to the Council of Europe's activities to promote greater mutual understanding and acceptance of difference in our multicultural and multilingual societies.

Learners need not just knowledge and skill in the grammar of a language but also the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways.

The Council of Europe's 'Common European Framework of Reference' embodies these innovations and also emphasises the importance of 'intercultural awareness', 'intercultural skills', and 'existential competence'

# Aims in developing IC dimension

- to give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence;
- to prepare them for interaction with people of other cultures;
- to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviours;
- and to help them to see that such interaction is an enriching experience.

# Components of ICC

**knowledge, skills and attitudes,** complemented by the values one holds because of one's belonging to a number of social groups. These values are part of one's social identities.

# The Role of Language Teacher

- to develop skills, attitudes and awareness of values
- to develop a knowledge of a particular culture or country.

# The ICD is concerned with:

Helping learners to understand

- how intercultural interaction takes place,
- how social identities are part of all interaction,
- how their perceptions of other people and others people's perceptions of them influence the success of communication
- how they can find out for themselves more about the people with whom they are communicating.

# Modification of the curriculum

A set curriculum or programme of study can be modified and challenged by simple techniques which make learners aware of the implicit values and meanings in the material they are using.

# Textbooks

Textbooks can be presented in a way that suggests that the materials are authoritative and definitive or in an intercultural and critical perspective. When developing intercultural skills, teachers can start from the theme and content in the textbook, and then encourage learners to ask further questions and make comparisons.

# Grammatical exercises

Grammatical exercises can reinforce prejudice and stereotypes or challenge them.

For instance, female subjects may be linked to stereotypically female activities or actions (Mary likes cooking; John likes football);

stereotyping generalisations may be encouraged about groups (The French like...; Germans are.....; Older people.....).

Teachers can encourage learners to comment on such statements and challenge them.

# Authentic material

It is important to use authentic material but to ensure that learners understand its context and intention. Materials from different origins with different perspectives should be used together to enable learners to compare and to analyse the materials critically. It is more important that learners acquire skills of analysis than factual information.

# Visiting the foreign country

The visit or exchange is much more than an opportunity to 'practice' the language learnt in the classroom. It is a **holistic learning experience** which provides the means of using **intercultural skills** and acquiring **new attitudes and values**.

If teachers create a pedagogical structure in three phases, learners can profit from a visit or exchange in ways which are scarcely possible in the classroom. Teachers need clear objectives, methods which take into account the power of experiential learning, and then learners will 'make the strange familiar and the familiar strange'

# Critical Analysis

Learners can acquire the skills of critical analysis of stereotypes and prejudice in texts and images they read or see. Their own prejudices and stereotypes are based on feelings rather than thoughts and need to be challenged, but teachers need to ensure that the ideas are challenged not the person, if the effect is to be positive.

# The Role of assessment

The role of assessment is to encourage learners' awareness of their own abilities in intercultural competence, and to help them realise that these abilities are acquired in many different circumstances inside and outside the classroom.

# European Language Portfolio

A test which is not based in traditional examinations but, rather, on the record of learners' competences is suggested.

They make explicit reference to the European Language Portfolio as an assessment tool.

- **The Passport section** provides an overview of the individual's proficiency in different languages at a given point in time; the overview is defined in terms of skills and the common reference levels in the Common European Framework.
- **The Language Biography** facilitates the learner's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress; it encourages the learner to state what he/she can do in each language and to include information on linguistic and cultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts.
- **The Dossier** offers the learner the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the Language Biography or Passport.