

LLJ Special Issue

Intercultural communicative competence in Foreign Language Education:

Questions of theory, practice and research

Introduction to Volume Two

This second volume of a two-volume special issue continues the investigation of the cultural turn in language teaching. The rationale for the special issue, as described in Volume One, highlights the importance, and imperative, of research illustrating teachers' and learners' developing awareness of other people's 'cultures,' as well as their own, as they engage and communicate with others in different languages or in a lingua franca. Curricula and policy documents have begun to highlight the need to develop learners who have intercultural competence, and the responsibility for this teaching and learning is often placed in the domain of the language teacher (Byram & Parmenter, 2012). Yet, as the articles in the first issue demonstrate, the theory and practice of developing intercultural competence is itself undergoing a 'cultural turn' as authors critically examine and contest the meaning and value of the language of this cultural turn. For example, the articles in Volume One illustrated the complexity, and limitations, of terms such as 'intercultural (communicative) competence', 'identity', 'the intercultural speaker', and 'cultural awareness'.

In this second volume, authors continue this exploration of the cultural turn in language teaching and learning, and the concepts that underpin it. They also continue to examine the interrelationship among **models** that illustrate and guide teacher practice, **practice** itself—the relationship between what teachers do, and how, where, and what learners learn—and **empirical investigation** through teacher-led research. In particular, they address three key themes: contexts of teacher education, descriptions of specific courses and textbooks, and the potential and possibilities engendered by new technologies.

The first of these three themes—teacher education in developing learners' interculturality—is as yet under-explored, and the two articles by Bastos and Araújo e Sá and Pihno attend to the importance of developing teachers' own intercultural understanding. Bastos and Araújo e Sá highlight the importance of training programmes that enable teachers to integrate the intercultural dimension into the professional practice. Their article draws on Portuguese secondary school teachers' accounts of representations and experiences of intercultural communicative competence and how it develops. From this evidence they develop a heuristic model of professional training that includes the cognitive, praxeological, and affective domains of teacher experiences of developing intercultural communicative competence. Their colleague, Pihno, illustrates in her article the potential of intercomprehension as a portal for developing teachers' intercultural sensitivity. Drawing on student teachers' accounts, Pihno demonstrates how teachers' growing intercultural sensitivity enabled them to build knowledge about intercomprehension, knowledge which is important in expanding teachers'

critical cultural awareness and which enables them to perform as intercultural and plurilingual educators.

The second theme explores the place of courses and textbooks. Cabau shows how an intercultural model, which recognises the multifaceted aspects of identity, languages, and the learner's profile, can be used in language education in the Hong Kong context. The approach merges two guiding pedagogic frameworks – the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and Content and Language Integrated Learning – to enhance learners' motivation and interest by providing tools for reflection about one's (social) identities as well as those of the other. Yang and Fleming also draw upon existing models in their empirical investigations, with the emphasis on analysing learners' learning processes and their ability to comprehend phenomena from another language-and-culture or 'linguaculture'. In both cases, there are implications for practice and, as Yang and Fleming make clear, there is the further question of transferability of models and practice to other contexts. Tajeddin and Teimournezhad's analysis of the cultural dimensions of textbook content remind teachers of the importance of evaluating the cultural dimensions of textbook materials. They point out how the dialogues and reading passages in the local Iranian textbooks favoured a culture-neutral stance, compared to the international textbooks which favoured intercultural elements. They argue that the culture-neutral agenda of the former may work against developing intercultural understanding and awareness.

The three articles in the third theme demonstrate the interrelationship between all three components of models, practice, and empirical evidence. The authors demonstrate the growing importance and value that teachers ascribe to technology in developing learners' intercultural understanding and competence and to personal contact and first-hand experience. The first two articles, by O'Dowd and Lazar, deal with authentic intercultural communication opportunities for learners to engage with others outside of their own country. O'Dowd draws on the Delphi technique to consult 'experts' and 'practitioners' in identifying the skills, attitudes and knowledge foreign languages teachers need to establish and carry out successfully an online intercultural exchange with their learners. His emergent model points to the importance of teachers' organisational, pedagogical, digital competences and attitudes and beliefs, and challenges teachers' preferences for (socio)constructivist models of teaching and learning. Lazar's comprehensive examination of teachers' and learners' experiences of online exchange in four countries in Europe shows how learners' initial difficulties in communication improved and developed over the five-month project, resulting in friendship development and discoveries in culture learning. The third article, by Trejo and Fay, provides an important contribution to developing intercultural competence in learners studying English in the largely monolingual context of a Mexican university. Trejo and Fay report on a technology-based (wiki) extra-curricular pilot project which used an ELF/intercultural approach to develop students' general cultural awareness, that is, an openness and curiosity to otherness. Their pedagogic approach, they argue, may have applicability in similar 'Expanding Circle' EFL contexts where learners are more likely to use English internationally, rather than as a foreign language. Thus, each of the three approaches offers a building block for developing technology as a tool for developing learners' intercultural

competence, and potentially, understandings of citizenship. As such, each model also offers pedagogic opportunities for teachers to enrich learners' interculturality in the face of the intercultural turn.

In conclusion, the eight articles in this second volume complement the seven in the first by foreshadowing the need for and importance of teacher-led research on the cultural turn. In varying and insightful ways, they all demonstrate the interrelationship between models, practice, and empirical investigation. As such, they offer ways of building teacher and learner self/other awareness, understanding, and competence; they offer lifelong learning processes for developing an intercultural stance towards others; and finally, they invite teachers to draw on their own reflexive practices to expand teacher/learner understandings of interculturality through their own research and practice, by providing further examples of the interrelationship of models, practice, and empirical evidence.

Reference

Byram, M.S., & Parmenter, L. (2012). Byram, M.S. & Parmenter, L. (2012). *The Common European Framework of Reference: The Globalisation of Language Education Policy*. Clevedon; Multilingual Matters.

List of articles

Teacher education:

Mónica Bastos & M^a Helena de Araújo e Sá,

Pathways to teacher education for intercultural communicative competence: Teachers' views

Ana Sofia Pihno

Intercomprehension: A portal to teachers' intercultural sensitivity

Courses and textbooks:

Béatrice Cabau

Intercultural approach in a Hong Kong academic setting

Linda Hui Yang and Mike Fleming

An empirical investigation of how Chinese college students make sense of foreign films and TV series: Implications for the development of intercultural communicative competence in ELT

Zia Tajeddin and Shohreh Teimournezhad

Hidden cultural agenda in L2 education: Representation of L1, L2, and cross-linguistic cultures in international and localized ELT textbooks

New technologies:

Robert O'Dowd

The competences of the telecollaborative teacher

Ildikó Lázár

The intercultural dimensions of learning English in a web collaboration project among classes in four countries

Paola Trejo & Richard Fay

Using wikis to develop generic cultural awareness amongst Mexican learners of English