

The act of teaching and learning is intricate, not something that can be reduced to a few methodological prescriptions. Furthermore, the role of teachers is not one of simply receiving prescriptions from others that are subsequently ‘implemented’ in their context. Rather, teachers come to the act of teaching and learning with their own dynamic framework of knowledge and understanding of their own personal, social, cultural and linguistic make-up and that of their students. Their experiences, beliefs, ethical values, motivations and commitments are part of their framework of knowledge and contribute to their stance and identity as a teacher (Scarino 2007). In teaching, the teacher’s framework interacts with those of their students as they work together to develop new understandings.

This framework is continuously evolving, based on our distinctive experience and reflection on that experience. It provides the frame of reference through which, in day-to-day teaching, teachers create learning experiences for students and interpret and make meaning of their learning. It is through this framework that teachers 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.

In reading and working with the Guide, teachers will bring their own frameworks of understanding to make sense of their work. The ideas and understandings that follow are a way of contributing to the professional dialogue that teachers, as educators, have with themselves in developing a personal stance and with colleagues and others in developing a collective professional stance.

Working with complexity and change

KEY IDEAS

- The nature, contexts and purposes of using language and languages in our multilingual and multicultural world is increasingly complex and teachers need to work with this complexity
- The key concepts that are central to teaching and learning languages are constantly evolving and need to be open to deeper understanding

Our work as teachers of languages has always been complex and subject to change. In developing a contemporary stance, languages teachers must consider and respond to notions of complexity and change. Just as teaching cannot be reduced to methods or prescriptions, the key concepts of ‘language’, ‘languages’, ‘culture’ and ‘communication’ cannot, and should not, be reduced to something simple.

The nature, contexts and purposes of using language and languages for communication are increasingly complex and ever-changing in our multilingual and multicultural world where people use different languages and dialects for different purposes in a range of different contexts. The need to communicate (that is, create and exchange meanings with diverse peoples both within and across cultures, and use a variety of communication technologies) requires a sophisticated understanding and use of language and languages. Through the experience of communicating across cultures and reflecting on that process, people develop an intercultural capability and sensitivity.

Developing such a capability means interpreting and exchanging meanings in the variable contexts of human communication and interaction, both within a particular language and culture, and across languages and cultures. It involves coming to understand the nature of the interrelationship of language, culture and learning and their connection to the meanings, practices and identities of communicators as fundamental to language use in its variable contexts. From an educational perspective, this means that the starting point in developing a stance for the teaching and learning of languages must be an expansive understanding of language(s), culture(s), their interrelationship and a process of communication that takes into account this variability. Theories and practices related to language teaching, learning and assessment are subject to constant inquiry and change. This means recognising that understanding these concepts, theories and practices, and developing/ changing a personal, professional stance, is a matter of ongoing professional inquiry.