Developing Intercultural Understanding in Primary Schools

Patricia Driscoll and Helen Simpson

Abstract

This chapter explores cultural learning and intercultural understanding associated with foreign languages in primary schools. The chapter focuses primarily on the UK and more specifically on the English context. The issues explored, however, are relevant to foreign language provision in other early language learning settings. We argue that intercultural understanding is relegated within many language lessons not because of teachers' commitment, but rather because of the limited curriculum time allocated to languages given the expected levels of linguistic development and the lack of availability of appropriate training. We contend that without long-term systematic planning and a cross-curricular approach to cultural learning which encompasses the global dimension, intercultural development will continue to play a minor role in language lessons and in the primary curriculum as a whole.

Keywords: Intercultural Understanding, culture, early language learning, language awareness

(A)Introduction

The rise of English as an international language for popular culture, technology, the internet, research, commerce and banking (Nuffield 2000, Crystal 2003, British Academy 2011), has created the need for an unprecedented number of individuals from non-English speaking countries to learn the language. In secondary schools, English is acknowledged as a key skill and is the main language other than the national language taught in schools (European Commission 2012). Curricula may vary across Europe, but the rapid increase of early language-learning programmes has been stimulated predominantly by the need to learn

English and to raise levels of linguistic competence by the end of schooling (Enever and Moon 2008, Edelenbos, Johnstone, Kubanek-German 2006).

Encouraged by both politicians and parents (Enever 2011), primary schools across the world are providing early language education with the view to equip individuals with the necessary linguistic skills to communicate, study, work, travel, and generally access information. The expectation that linguistic standards will be improved by an early start are based on two basic assumptions: firstly that young learners possess natural attributes and an enthusiasm for learning and secondly that by extending instruction time downwards in the primary phase, learners have more time to learn a language (Singleton 1989).

Despite the benefit of speaking the language of international communication fluently, early language learning in England springs from similar instrumental aspirations of equipping citizens with the necessary skills to operate in the 21st century (DfES 2002). The Nuffield Foundation's investigation of the language capability of the UK found that 'English alone is not enough' for economic growth, and the chronic shortage of usable language skills leaves the country vulnerable in an increasingly competitive world (Nuffield Foundation 2000: 14). There are considerable differences in educational policy in the four countries of the UK and this chapter focuses centrally on policy and practice in England. The evidence and discussion however, relate to a much broader global context of language learning and developing intercultural understanding in primary schools.

Findings from a more recent study of the languages most needed in the UK concur (British Council 2014), arguing that the UK is lacking the necessary skills for the future, not because the wrong languages are being learned but that a much wider range of languages will be needed in the future to preserve economic wellbeing. The report gives a list of the most important languages associated with UK exports which include Arabic, Mandarin, and Portuguese as well as German, Spanish and French which are predominantly taught in English

Published in: Bland, J (2015) *Teaching English to Young Learners*
Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3-12 Year Olds. London: Bloomsbury Academic
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schools. Importantly, the report argues for the need to balance economic priorities with cultural, intellectual, individual and societal non-market factors (2014: 4). The report specifically draws attention to a position paper published by the British Academy (2011) which makes a powerful case for the importance of developing greater intercultural understanding for economic as well as societal reasons and improving intercultural interactions at home and overseas.

Tinsely (2013) presents a range of evidence about the benefits of intercultural as well as linguistic skills in her recent examination of the current demand and supply of language skills in the UK. She argues for the personal and societal value of developing a global mind-set and a willingness and ability to manage complex intercultural relationships when abroad as well as at home. Fostering an open mind-set, developing tolerance, cultural sensitivity and an acceptance and understanding of diversity in increasingly multilingual and multicultural societies are essential features in preparing young people for a future which is not confined by local, regional or national borders. Schools play a crucial role in preparing learners for their future lives; arguably it is an essential part of their core purpose.

Education, however, cannot be justified purely in terms of future attainment. Cregan and Cuthbert (2014: 4) question the term 'child' in relation to the notion of the global child and argue that at the simplest level a child 'is a young human being […] in the stage of life known as childhood', which should be respected. They are not simply adults-in-waiting. Alongside preparing future citizens, primary schools also play a key role in educating children in the broadest sense, by providing a wide variety of experiences to enable them to thrive as children, in well as the adults they will become. Children's own perceptions about what is significant in their lives are also important. According to Robin Alexander (2010), there is limited evidence reported that relates to pupils' views of the purpose of primary schooling. The evidence presented in the Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander 2010: 20), suggests

that pupils predominantly view primary schools as places to prepare them for their future work. In addition to the benefits of schooling in terms of their future lives, pupils also consider that schools provide important contexts for social mixing and making friends and spaces to learn how to generally conduct themselves outside of the home and school. Understanding and accepting cultural and social diversity and gaining insights into the nuances of one's own cultural identity are key features of learning about the complexity of social and cultural interaction and the etiquette of social conduct.

We argue in this chapter that in general, intercultural understanding is marginalised in language lessons even though many teachers believe that culture is a key component of learning a foreign language. We begin the chapter by defining culture and the importance of cultural learning within foreign languages. We present recent evidence of intercultural learning in primary schools, locating the discussion within the policy framework at the time the research was conducted. Finally we consider the potential of a more holistic cross-curricular approach that extends the dynamics of intercultural understanding across the whole school and the wider curriculum with the child and not the symbolic 'stranger' or 'foreigner' (representative of foreign cultures) at the centre of learning.

(A)Defining Culture

Culture is an all-encompassing and complex concept with a wide range of different types of definitions. According to Woodgate-Jones and Grenfell, (2012: 333), 152 definitions of culture existed by the early 1950s, to include 'the arts […] human knowledge, beliefs, behaviour, shared attitudes, values, goals, practice, and traditions' but, they argue, the concept has developed since then. Culture is therefore, everywhere; it is tangible in the form of visual arts, music and literature and visible in the everyday behaviours, routines and rituals of people; it is also embedded within the pattern of invisible codes which influence our beliefs,

deeds, way of life, perceptions of our heritage and the vision of our future. Wedell and Malderez (2013: 31) describe culture as 'a socially shared, underlying, often "taken-for-granted" system of "rules" which guide and control social behaviour, and which are very strongly held and affectively charged'. To develop an awareness of the forces which have such a powerful effect on one's own identity and the identity of others, is an important step in self-discovery and understanding the communities in which we live.

Through a patchwork of emotional, physical and cognitive, active and passive experiences, we both absorb and actively learn about the attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour of a particular group. Adapting to different macro-cultures within a society is part of being human, and children from an early age begin to learn how to modify their behaviour and respond in different settings both within and outside of the home. Once at school and frequently before, they begin to learn how to interact with groups and that there exist rules of conduct in different groups, which they may or may not understand, and which at times may be contradictory, but which can command sanctions if contravened. They absorb culture as they go about their daily lives and learn how to modify and adapt their behaviour as they interact with the range of people they encounter.

By learning to look critically at the dominant discourses that surround them and by beginning to analyse the dynamics of culture from an early age, children could develop an appreciation and respect for the diversity within their own culture. They could also learn to value that their own identity is neither fixed nor monotone, and that they can belong to a number of different groups at the same time. According to Barrett (2005), by the age of about 6, children acknowledge their affiliation to the national society to which they belong. Schools, through the curriculum, play a part in offering children opportunities to feel a sense of belonging to a regional or national group. Reflecting upon and analysing culture does not undermine feelings of belonging, rather it has the potential to create curiosity about the world,

raise questions about the simple notion of 'us' and 'them' and promote a sense of global identity.

(A)Intercultural learning within foreign languages

The importance of the cultures and context associated with foreign or second language learning is emphasised by Kramsch (1993: 1), who argues that 'culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on' rather, it is fundamental in achieving communicative competence and an essential part of learning another language. Understanding cultural conventions of interaction and rules of social engagement therefore, are considered essential to minimise the potential for offense or miscommunication. Johnstone (2009: 38) reminds us that we are now in the third wave of implementing early language learning: with the first wave starting in the 1960s, the second in the mid-1980s and the third wave in recent times. Over this period language teaching has changed radically and with it the role and status of cultural and intercultural learning. Fluent communication, as the ultimate aim of language learning, swept across much of foreign and second language pedagogy from the 1980s, with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach (Littlewood1981). CLT focuses on setting up communicative activities for practical communication in the classroom. Learners are encouraged to interact in the target language about matters which interest them, and engage in role-play scenarios in simulated 'real-life' situations with the view that they will be able to apply their knowledge and skills when communicating outside of the classroom and in the target country. Grenfell (2000: 24) argues that the national curriculum and public examinations were designed according to the principles of CLT which placed the learner as a tourist or host by reinforcing the prominence of personal communication in 'authentic' learning situations.

Culture can be incorporated into classroom-based learning through the teacher, visits and resources. Technological advances in teaching materials from the 1980s to the present day have allowed teachers to provide learners with vicarious experiences of 'real life' cultural images and scenes of native speakers interacting. Teachers can exploit these visual images and creatively enhance teaching and learning so the language is modelled within a cultural frame. Many primary teachers, however, have limited if any personal experience of countries where the target language is spoken, and as non-specialist language teachers they may not have had a year abroad as part of their degree or training opportunities related to intercultural learning (Driscoll, Earl and Cable 2013). Curriculum time for primary languages is also relatively short in England, with the majority of language lessons taught once a week for 30 or 45 minutes (Wade and Marshall 2009). As a consequence, when cultural references are made, they tend to be brief, leaving little time for analysis or discussion about cultural identity (Driscoll et al., 2013)

The Common European Framework (CEFR) (2001), a curriculum guidance resource used extensively across Europe and beyond, strongly advocates the importance of intercultural knowledge and skills within effective communication. The concept of intercultural competence developed extensively by Michael Byram (1989, 1997), underpins how intercultural competence is conceptualised in the CEFR. His model of the five s*avoirs* encompasses the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes needed to interact with those from other cultures and the ability to de-centre and understand other cultures and one's own through the eyes of someone from another culture. The *savoirs* include:

- Savoir être - attitudes of curiosity and openness: 'the kind of learner who notices and asks questions, who expresses wonder and interest in other people's behaviours and beliefs, rather than rejection and disgust' (Byram and Doyé 1999: 142).

- Savoirs - knowledge of self, other and individual and societal interaction.

- Savoir comprendre - skills of interpreting: 'the ability to take a person's school report and not just translate it but explain the significance of what is written, how it relates to the education system' (Byram and Doyé 1999: 142).

- Savoir apprendre/faire - skills of discovery and interaction.

- Savoir s'engager – critical cultural awareness, which calls for reflection and analysis within an educational framework.

Byram's model of the skills, knowledge and understanding required for intercultural competence is evident in the national strategy, *Languages for All: Languages for Life* (DfES 2002), which set out a vision for life-long language learning starting in primary school, over a decade ago. The strategy extends the cultural dimension in languages to include global citizenship and social cohesion, highlighting the importance of understanding different perspectives and cultures with the view to breaking down '*barriers of ignorance and suspicion*' (DfES 2002: 13). Through developing a more explicit understanding of their own culture and language, and the culture and language of those around them, children can learn to appreciate and value diversity while appreciating a sense of their own uniqueness. The concept of 'otherness' therefore, becomes a normal part of the local as much as the national and international.

Hennebry (2014: 141) compares the ways in which culture is included in the national curricula of languages in five countries. The comparison demonstrates that although culture manifests itself in different ways in different curricula, the aims and objectives in the majority of cases tend towards a conceptualisation of culture as intercultural communicative competence. Hennebry argues that these include comparing and appreciating the similarities and differences between the home and target culture, developing a critical cultural awareness about one's own and other cultures and valuing the perspective of others. The comparison

focuses on secondary-school education, but nonetheless it gives an insight into the concept of culture within these national policies.

(A)Language learning in primary school

Byram and Doyé (1999: 141) suggest that there are aspects of intercultural competence that can be pursued easily in the primary school. They contend that primary schools are well placed to cultivate attitudes of openness and curiosity (*savoir être*), and develop positive attitudes towards the people who live in the countries where the target language is spoken. They also highlight the potential for reinforcing primary children's knowledge of their own culture through contrast (*savoirs),* by comparing the similarities and differences between cultural habits and traditions, as children are being socialised their own environment. In addition, children can also gain insights into their own cultural identity. Furthermore, they argue that knowing how to elicit information (*savoir apprendre*) is a basic learning strategy, and as such, it is a fundamental aspect of primary education.

The Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages (DfES 2005), a curriculum resource to help teachers plan languages, provides detailed learning objectives and a wide range of suggestions for teaching activities of children from the age of seven to eleven. The Framework is designed with three core strands – Oracy (listening and speaking), Literacy (reading and writing), and Intercultural Understanding (IU), and two strands which are designed to cut across the core strands – Knowledge about Language (KAL) and Language Learning Strategies. The IU Strand provides a loose structure for progression as broad cultural concepts are revisited at increasingly complex levels. Cultural objectives are also embedded within the KAL Strand in order to help children develop insights into the nature of language, and recognise its cultural value in that language does not always have a direct equivalent and therefore, communication is not simply a matter of translation. The KAL Strand also offers

suggestions of how to reinforce children's understanding of their own language while learning another language by comparing patterns in language structure and the roots of words. The KAL Strand thereby incorporates language awareness within the language learning experience. The Framework was a key part of government policy until it was archived in 2011.

(A)Language Awareness

Children bring a wide range of language experiences and skills to the classroom and it is from this starting point that teachers begin to develop their oracy and literacy skills. A language awareness approach to language learning offers opportunities for children to reflect on the nature of language and see the relationship that exists between languages, thereby learning more about their own language. Language awareness can develop linguistic and cultural sensitivity which allows learners to perceive language as a product of and part of culture. Rather than focusing on one foreign language with the view to developing competence, language awareness can offer children opportunities to encounter different languages and help them to identify patterns and make important connections between languages.

Eric Hawkins has written extensively about the benefits of language awareness (1981, 1984). He contends that language awareness programmes provide a positive foundation for subsequent foreign language learning, stimulate an interest in linguistic and cultural differences and help learners with poor communication skills. He also argues that language awareness fills the 'space between' (1981: 228) and provides bridges that connect the many languages in the classroom including the language of instruction, mother tongue, foreign, community and heritage languages. This approach is therefore considered a good base for multilingual programmes. *L'Eveil aux Langues dans l'école primaire* (EVLANG) project, for example, was designed as an 'awakening' to languages and implemented in five countries.

Candelier (2003) reported that through the project learners had developed a greater openness to linguistic and cultural diversity. A subsequent project, *Janua Linguarum* (Ja-Ling), the Gateway to Languages, aimed to raise learners' language, cultural and intercultural awareness through the development of Ja-Ling materials in sixteen countries (Fidler 2006).

(A) Recent Evidence

A three-year longitudinal study in forty primary schools in England (Cable, Driscoll, Mitchell, Sing, Cremin, Earl, Eyres, Holmes, Martin, Heins 2010), which investigated the influence and impact of the Key Stage 2 Framework on practice, provides robust evidence about cultural learning associated with foreign language learning. Data were collected through interviews with head teachers, teachers and pupils and yearly observations of language classes for a period of three years. Specifically designed instruments were created to assess learner attainment in listening, speaking, reading and writing in eight of the forty schools.

In over half of the schools visited, teachers and headteachers in the study spoke with strong conviction about the importance of providing children with opportunities to develop tolerance and empathy, an interest and acceptance of diversity, and a sense of wider world. Yet despite a clear commitment to promote a global mind-set and recognition of the importance of intercultural skills, evidence of practice was found in less than a quarter of lessons. Teachers generally made brief cultural references when teaching the language. They shared factual knowledge with learners, such as information about the weather or common traditions in the target country and compared certain aspects of daily life for instance the dress codes at school. On occasion, children were exploring their own culture or the lifestyles of others within their own communities, but examples such as these were rare in lessons. In contrast, teachers frequently compared grammatical structures between English and the foreign language and many reported that learning a foreign language had enhanced children's

Published in: Bland, J (2015) *Teaching English to Young Learners*
Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3-12 Year Olds. London: Bloomsbury Academic
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general awareness of language. Some teachers, especially in multilingual schools, reported that foreign languages were a means to raise children's awareness of the social and cultural value of language through comparing structures and exploring the roots of words (Cable et al., 2010).

An increasing number of whole-school events which offered opportunities to develop children's cultural understanding took place over the three years of the study. Functions such as international book events portraying picture books, poems, fables, folk tales and other texts from around the world provided dynamic opportunities for language and cultural awareness and learning about the world (Cable et al, 2010). Cultural themes were also emphasised in whole-school assemblies and language days where each class prepared materials, food and emblems associated with another country or global weeks. These opportunities for cultural learning tended to be stimulated by foreign language learning in the school but there were no indications of direct links with learning cultural or linguistic learning objectives in lessons.

Children were able to discuss basic information about the European country where the language is spoken, for example the culture of Spain rather than Spanish-speaking countries in South America. Factual information about other countries tended to be drawn from multimedia resources which increased substantially over the three years of the study. Many children indicated that they had not learned very much about the people who live in the countries where the target language is spoken during lessons and what they did know had been shared mainly by teachers who had personal experience of the target countries.

In line with other research (Edelenbos, Johnstone, and Kubanek-German 2006, Muijs, Barnes, Hunt, Powell, Arweck, Lindsay and Martin 2005, Barton, Bragg and Serratrice 2009), children's attitudes were very positive about learning the language. Indeed, eighty per cent of children reported that they were interested in knowing more about the people and way of life and almost all children expressed a desire to visit the country. This curiosity and openness

towards the people of the target countries and enthusiasm about knowing and understanding more about the world could be conceptualised as the initial stages of *savoir être*. Overall, however, children tended towards generalisations about 'the French' or 'Spanish people' although some of the older children (ages nine to eleven) contested the sweeping statements made by their peers about a national group. Furthermore, some teachers in multicultural schools indicated that languages had made a difference to their children's developing appreciation and respect for diversity. Discussions, reflections or analysis about the influence of culture on children's own and other's lives were not observed by the research team. Further research is clearly needed about the more complex elements of *savoir* and *savoir être* outlined by Byram (1997). Evidence is very limited about how teachers develop curiosity and openness, and which types of activities and tasks are most effective for children of different ages in helping them develop skills to 'step into another's shoes' or understand the complexity of intercultural interaction. Equally, little is known about whether the skills of eliciting information (*savoir apprendre)* extends to learning more about the nuances of cultural diversity as suggested by Byram and Doyé (1999).

A few schools employed foreign language assistants who contributed to children's knowledge and understanding about cultural life abroad. Several schools also organised visits and exchanges so children experienced for themselves interaction with native speakers. In approximately half of the schools, teachers organised email exchanges so children could communicate directly with their peers in other countries. Some teachers also shared curriculum resources, designing units of work together for children in two cultural settings to share learning tasks. These activities highlight the common ground between learners from different countries as well as their differences, as children can see first-hand that to a large extent, as pupils, they have similar roles and responsibilities at school. Schools also share common features: knowledge and skills are broadly conceptualised in subject disciplines, the

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teacher undertakes the management of teaching and learning and the learners' role is to engage.

Regardless of changes in policy and the publication of detailed curriculum guidance with intercultural understanding as a core strand, evidence suggests limited cultural learning within language lessons. Conversely, primary schools tend to celebrate cultures entwined with languages outside of lessons in the wider curriculum interlinked with the international profile of the school. Teachers' vision of preparing children for a global world and their aims to develop a greater acceptance of diverse ways of thinking and behaving could be witnessed across these whole-school activities and events, as language connects naturally and seamlessly to themes underpinning global citizenship.

(A)Statutory Status for languages in primary schools

The national curriculum, implemented from September 2014 (DfE 2013), raised the status of foreign languages to a statutory subject for all pupils in Key Stage 2 (seven to eleven) for the first time in England. It is too early to predict the impact of this new policy on practice, but the new curriculum hails some significant changes to the foreign language curriculum. The new programme of study begins with a position statement regarding culture, but culture is not mentioned again in the aims, objectives or content for primary schools and it is only mentioned briefly, with reference to reading literary texts for learners aged eleven to thirteen in Key Stage 3.

Unlike curricula in other European countries referenced by Hennebry and discussed earlier in the chapter, the new curriculum does not draw directly upon the concept of intercultural competence. The lack of emphasis on culture marks a radical shift from the notion of intercultural understanding in the languages strategy (DfES 2002), and from the importance of intercultural insights in a multicultural and international world outlined in

previous national curricula (DfE 1999). The solitary mention of culture in the new curriculum is as follows: 'Learning a foreign language is liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world' (DfE 2013: 193).

The diminished scope of culture within the new curriculum is disappointing and represents a lost opportunity, particularly now, as languages are finally a legal requirement in English primary schools. Rather than statutory status increasing the potential for cultural exposure in language lessons, practice may well decrease, with the weakened steer from policy makers and as curriculum time remains limited. Creative solutions are needed if children are to develop the intercultural knowledge, skills, attributes and mind-set for the global world of the 21st century.

One potential solution is to draw upon teachers' commitment to promote cultural learning (Cable et al. 2010) and build upon the growing portfolio of whole-school events, visits and exchanges that teachers are organising in schools. Key cultural themes or concepts could be identified; such as such as empathy or an appreciation of heritage, as a basis for whole-school planning. Starting from the child's own cultural experiences, teachers could plan systematically to explore these concepts within subject areas and across all cultural activities in the school including global learning. Long term cross-curricular planning would ensure that specific cultural themes are revisited in increasingly sophisticated ways from the beginning of primary school until the end with clear overarching learning intentions which make strong connections between English, foreign, community and heritage languages. Rather than ad hoc activities, creating a space for cultural development where children could flourish and work together and benefit from a joined-up and coherent educational offer which was tailor-made for their age group and interests.

(A)Languages as part of the whole curriculum

Culture is explicitly referenced in a number of curriculum subjects. To construct a cross curricular cultural programme which cuts across subjects connecting different aspects of culture into a coherent whole is relatively straightforward. A traditional view of high culture is proposed in the Art and Design Technology curriculum that promotes knowledge about great artists and designers and how they have shaped the heritage of the country as well as their contribution to the creativity of the nation. Making direct links to art in countries where the target language is spoken is relatively easy. The legacy of Greek or Roman culture in relation to Art, architecture and literature throughout history to the present day are referenced in the programme of study for History. Linking art to language awareness and the legacy of Latin within many languages could be a recurrent theme planned for children within several subjects over a period of time. Culture is also conceptualised as an understanding about the changing ways of life and the changing beliefs of people over time, from the Stone Age onwards. Learning and understanding about the ways of the people at some prior time and developing empathy towards them is not dissimilar to the understanding required to analyse, interpret and reflect upon different cultures at home and abroad in the present day. Equally, learning about artists, designers and architects from around the world is an important part of learning about any country, including the target country. Designing and planning a cultural theme on empathy which could be explored in many ways across different subject areas, would help reinforce children's learning. Within the English curriculum, culture is referenced through reading a range of fiction from the national literary heritage and traditional stories, as well as books, poems and songs from other cultures and traditions. A cross curricular approach to culture is not possible without effective professional development both for practitioners and for student teachers. We have insufficient evidence of effective practice in

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teacher education in how to develop teachers' intercultural understanding and help them to challenge issues which lead to stereotypes, prejudice and racism.

'Liberation from Insularity' (DFE 2013: 193), quoted in the previous section, is not just an aim for languages. It reflects the broader purpose of the schooling in offering 'moral, cultural, mental […] development' and to prepare students for their future lives (DfE 2013: 5). Ofsted, the national monitoring body for schools in England, in a positive move echoes this broader purpose of education which cannot be simply defined subject by subject. Their remit of inspection includes the quality and overall effectiveness of cultural development in schools (Ofsted 2014: 36). Although the measurement of cultural learning implies a commodification of culture, it also raises the importance of cultural development in schools and highlights the need for schools to focus on the quality of their provision across subjects, in their approach to global learning and in light of their international profile. Aims of cultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity are closely interconnected to those of global learning through discussions about identity and stereotypes. Themes of equality and diversity relate closely to intercultural understanding and language learning. The Maastricht Declaration of Global Education, for example, contends that education 'opens people's eyes and minds to the realities of the world' (O'Loughlin, Eddie and Wegimont, Liam 2003), Hunt (2012) found in her study of global learning in 217 primary schools across England, that schools expressed their aims in relation to developing rights, responsibilities and values followed by developing an interest in other countries and cultures and broadening pupils' horizons (Hunt 2012: 29).

Martin (2007: 164) suggests that it is not necessary for young children to understand where people and places are in order to think and care about them. While this is an interesting proposition, children most certainly need concrete examples and activities to learn. Over recent years the strong influence from policy for intercultural understanding within language learning (Dfes 2002, Dfes 2005) has prompted a greater focus on good quality resources

particularly with multimedia commercial materials. With ongoing technological advances, teaching resources will undoubtedly improve enabling easy contact across the world from classroom to classroom offering all manner of exciting cultural and linguistic experiences for children (see Cutrim Schmid and Whyte 2015, this volume). Language teachers with cultural and intercultural skills themselves have an important role to play in leading a cultural learning programme across the curriculum and in supporting their colleagues in cultural innovation. There is no quick fix to developing intercultural understanding at any age but it makes sense to start early as children begin to explore their own identity within the social context of schooling.

(A)Conclusion

This chapter has explored teaching intercultural understanding within foreign languages. We have considered findings from a three-year study which documented cultural and intercultural understanding associated with languages against the backdrop of policy guidance. Through languages, primary schools are increasingly providing whole-school cultural activities and international opportunities. These rich opportunities offer a platform to develop intercultural understanding but there is limited evidence to suggest that schools plan a cohesive cultural programme with clear conceptual goals and strategies even though many primary teachers believe that intercultural learning is at the heart of the languages curriculum.

We argue that an intercultural programme of learning needs to be started early, when children are young and encountering the rules, behaviours and codes of conduct in the world away from their parents and carers. Children begin to appreciate in the early stage of schooling that they are members of a group outside of their immediate experience. As young learners progress through primary schools, they acquire a greater understanding of the subtle rules which govern the parameters of acceptability within the society to which they belong.

As language awareness can improve a learner's understanding of their own language, intercultural learning has the potential to deepen an appreciation of and respect for diversity within one's own culture and that of others. A positive way forward is to develop long-term planning with clearly connecting learning objectives associated with cultural concepts and themes that can be interwoven into the subject curriculum, the wider curriculum and events in the school, so opportunities for cultural development and experiences for primary children are maximised.

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