



Reimagining learning as intercultural engagement

Prepared by the Multicultural Education and Languages Committee (MELC)





We are proud to share this statement, which contributes to reimagining learning as intercultural engagement.

We live, work and learn in a dynamic, international world. In all parts of our personal and working lives we will interact with people of other languages, cultures, world views and values. We live in a time that gives us diverse experiences and knowledge. We need to be able to interact with people in and across language and cultural groups. It is learning of this kind that can take our young people anywhere, from the remote environments of Australia to different parts of the world. Young people need to develop intercultural capabilities to act and interact as effective global citizens.

In order to prepare young people to lead meaningful lives in this context, education and learning must change in significant ways. This statement offers a vision for learners and identifies the intercultural capabilities they need. It invites students to be active in the design of their own learning in diversity. It is an opportunity to talk about major shifts in our dynamic world, their impact on learning, and the need for education to respond in new ways.

The statement brings together three areas of education – Languages, Multicultural Education and the Internationalisation of Education – that are central to reimagining learning. All can be seen as spanning the curriculum as a whole, and all relate to the fundamental goal of enabling all children and young people to engage with diversity and to reflect upon these experiences in an internationalised world.

This statement elaborates on the South Australian Education Vision for the independent, Catholic and government sectors, that:

Our schools and early childhood settings will be/ are places where students learn to live together with civility and respect for difference and commonalities, demonstrating intercultural and ethical understanding.

We trust that this statement will stimulate discussion and action to change the learning of all children and young people in our schools and preschools, across all sectors of education. We trust that it will invite them to participate in diversity. We trust that the outcome will be for students to develop the intercultural capabilities they need to be able to contribute as global citizens.



The vision

All young people learn to participate in the intercultural exchange of knowledge, ideas, meanings and values in a dynamic international world.

They reflect on their knowledge, experiences and identities as a basis for understanding themselves and others.



Goals for learners

All children and young people develop the following intercultural capabilities and dispositions:

Knowing and ways of knowing

- Develop and apply disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge to work on complex problems in diverse contexts.
- Recognise that knowledge is created and communicated through language within a cultural context and that different people bring different insights, experiences and knowledges to the process.

Languaging/making sense of learning

- Develop and use sophisticated language-and-literacy-learning repertoires for creating, interpreting, analysing and exchanging meanings.
- Use these learning repertoires to connect with people in productive ways, becoming resourceful speakers who can draw on multiple linguistic and cultural resources in order to exchange meanings.

Reflecting/comparing

- Step back from and critically reflect on their own linguistic and cultural assumptions, perspectives, experiences, reactions and responses in relation to those of others.

Engaging with difference

- Engage with and understand 'otherness' with curiosity, openness to difference, and a willingness to make sense of and reconcile multiple perspectives.

Acting ethically/mindfully

- Engage with people in an ethical and mindful way, paying attention to reactions and responses and learning to manage uncertainty.

Understanding the first peoples of Australia

- Understand and engage with the knowledges, languages and cultures of Aboriginal peoples and the physical and spiritual connectedness of language and culture to their land, environment and sustainability.

Developing self-awareness as global citizens

- Find ways to imagine and act upon the world as learner citizens and contribute to 'the society we want to be'.
- Reflect on their learning and actions, to develop their self-awareness and their place in diverse communities.

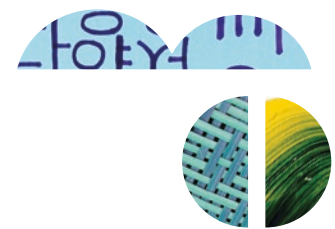
Mutual/shared responsibility

- Appreciate that the processes of communication, building relationships and learning all involve the mutual interpretation and exchange of meanings, based on shared responsibility.





Reimagining learning as intercultural engagement: an educational imperative for South Australia



We live in a dynamic and diverse world

Globalisation has changed our personal, social and working lives in fundamental ways. It has offered greater opportunities for exchange and, at the same time, greater challenges and fragilities.

The movement of people, ideas, goods, languages and cultures across the globe is at a scale and speed never seen before. New technologies and the extensive use of the Internet and social media have changed the nature and extent of how we communicate. We connect instantly in ways that transcend national borders and languages and cultures. These changes have accelerated the spread of knowledge and ideas across the globe and expanded the diversity of the communities we live in. Linguistic and cultural (including faith-based) diversity is a characteristic of all communities and social and work environments, both locally and internationally.

In such a rich and complex context people need to be able to develop, navigate and engage across diverse languages, cultures and knowledge systems in order to participate in shaping the globalised world successfully.





Learning is a linguistic and cultural endeavour

It is vital for contemporary education to reimagine learning as a linguistic and cultural endeavour. Learning additional languages towards developing multilingual capabilities is an essential part of such learning. Developing intercultural capabilities is central to the educational achievements, identity formation, citizenship and wellbeing of individuals, communities and the state. It is fundamental to equality and opportunities for all.

All learners are part of linguistic and cultural diversity

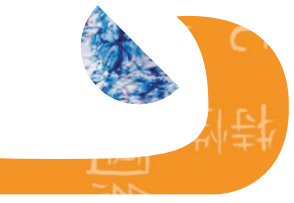
Traditionally, learning about linguistic and cultural diversity has been seen mainly as the goal of the Languages learning area and multicultural education. More recently, international education has been included as a means for extending students' horizons. With new understandings of diversity, it is timely that these three areas be reconceptualised as both interrelated and central to learning for all.

In the contemporary world, linguistic and cultural diversity is recognised as pertaining to all learners, and all learners are participants in the diversity that characterises every classroom and school.

In South Australia, a major part of participation in linguistic and cultural diversity means that we need to engage with Aboriginal languages, histories, cultural knowledges and ways of knowing. This is essential for all learners in understanding themselves, their communities, contexts and the project of reconciliation.

The realm of knowledge is international and so intercultural capabilities are needed to navigate the interpretation, creation and exchange of knowledge.





Learners and learning as intercultural engagement: two key ideas

It is not sufficient for learners to know how to communicate meanings; they have to understand the practice of meaning making.

(Kramersch 2006, p251)

Languages and cultures shape how people from all backgrounds learn about the world and understand themselves and each other. In all areas of the curriculum, learning is mediated through languages and cultures – those that children and young people bring to their learning and those that they encounter and learn at school. In South Australia, English is the primary medium through which all students learn, and all students learn an additional language.

In this sense, language includes literacy/literacies (multilingual and multimodal), the learning of additional languages, mother-tongue learning, and discipline-specific language for learning in all learning areas and in bilingual education.

As such, learning for all learners can be understood as shaped by language and culture in two key ways –through primary and ongoing socialisation, and as a linguistic and cultural activity.

All learners are situated in the languages and cultures of their primary and ongoing socialisation

Children and young people develop their own knowledge, experiences, identities and ways of being and communicating as part of their early socialisation. This occurs in the languages and cultures to which they are first exposed. Learners bring these to their learning in schools and preschools and use them as a basis for new learning and ongoing development.

All learners, through interaction with others, come to understand how their own knowledge systems, languages and cultures affect their learning and the ways in which they interpret and make sense of the world. New learning, therefore, builds on what learners bring to the learning experience and influences how they interact with the different knowledge, insights and experiences that others bring.





All learning is a linguistic and cultural activity

When children learn a language, they are not simply engaging in one kind of learning among many; rather, they are learning the foundation of learning itself. The distinctive characteristic of human learning is that it is a process of making meaning.

(Halliday, 1993, p93)

Just as languages and cultures influence the learner as a person, they also influence the person's learning and development and shape their identity.

Language and culture repertoires are integral to learning as a process of meaning-making.

When learners interact to exchange knowledge, ideas, perspectives and experiences, they do it through language. And language is integrally related to / embedded in the cultural context in which it is used.

The interpretation and meanings that learners make emerge from the linguistic, cultural and experiential context in which they are located. New learning depends upon learners' prior and developing knowledge, their life worlds, their particular language/s and culture/s, and their histories of experiences.

As they use language in different contexts, all learners draw upon their developing linguistic, cultural and knowledges repertoires in their learning. For each learner, each language may have a particular role as:

- a home language or an additional language
- a medium for learning and/or an object of learning.

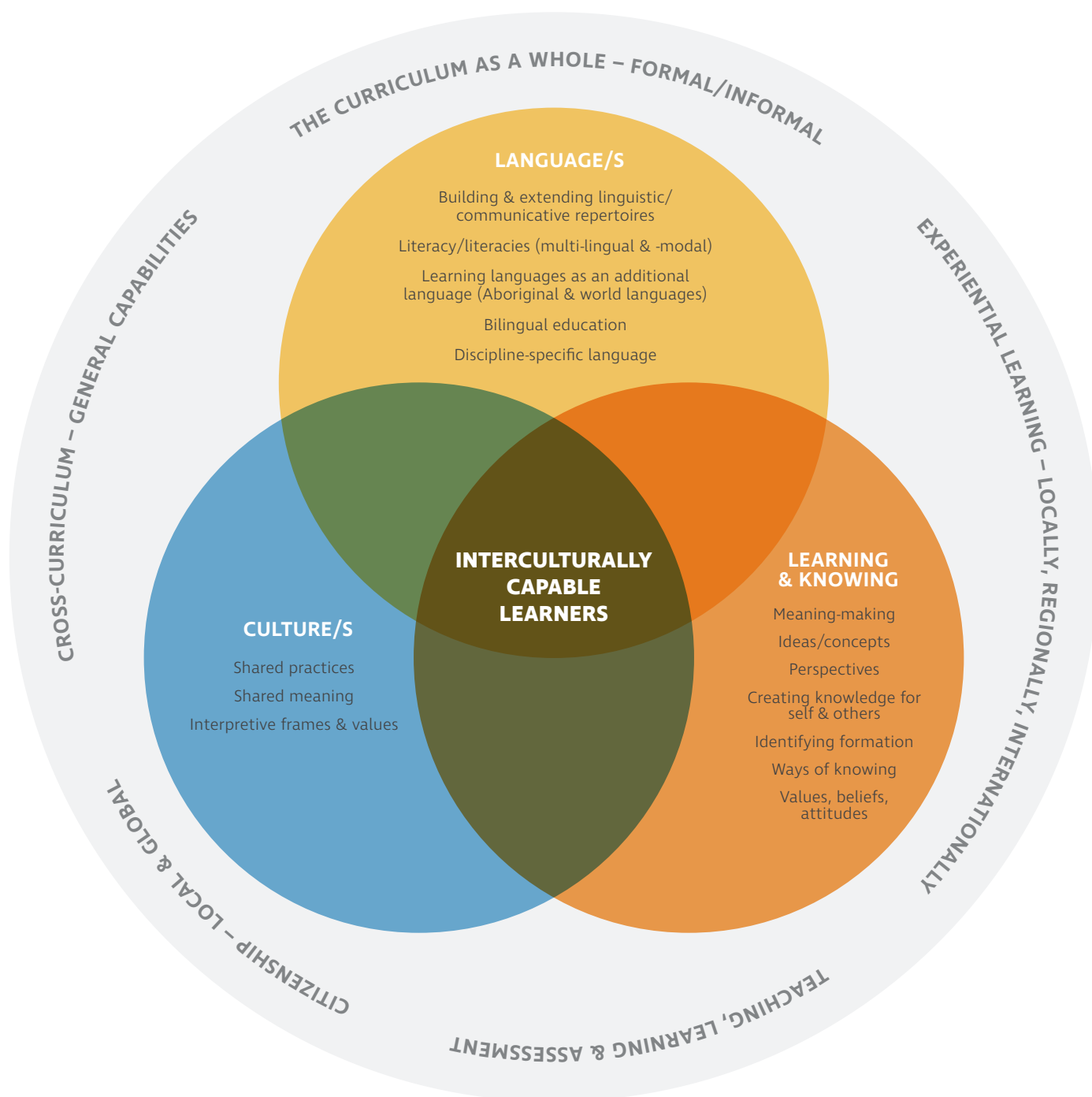
Connecting the two key ideas

These ideas are connected through an understanding of learning itself as an intercultural meaning-making process. Intercultural learning is characterised as:

- **recognising that all people and their meaning-making are located in a dynamic linguistic, cultural, experiential and historical context, and that this provides the basis for interaction, communication and new learning**
- **engaging with diverse perspectives by exchanging and creating knowledge through intercultural interaction, and reflecting on the exchange, while probing each other's understandings, positions, assumptions and values.**



This diagram shows the crucial role of languages, cultures, knowledge systems and contexts for learners and learning across the curriculum as a whole. It highlights how, for all learners and their learning, language and culture are in a constant relationship.







Realising the vision: learning, knowing and reflecting

To achieve this vision action is needed in a number of areas, in ways that recognise the life worlds of learners and the distinctiveness of each school. These areas include: leadership; policy and strategy; curriculum; teaching, learning and assessment; evaluation for improvement; relationships and partnerships; projects and initiatives; teacher development.

What teachers, leaders and education sectors can do

Recognise and understand that:

- learning is fundamentally a linguistic and cultural activity
- diversity is individually located and contributes to all learners, all learning and all schools
- developing students' intercultural capabilities is the responsibility of all teachers across all year levels
- learning languages gives learners direct access to the knowledge, understandings and values of diverse people
- pedagogies and assessments of achievements need to be linguistically and culturally conscious, responsive and developmental
- social, cultural and strategic change on the part of educational communities is needed to maximise engagement in linguistic and cultural diversity for all.

Act to develop young people's intercultural capabilities across the curriculum

Respect and responsibility

- Nurture and value respect, trust and shared responsibility.

Diversity

- Facilitate and nurture dialogue and collaborative activity that requires students to engage with diverse others to explore, create, expand, and extend and to apply new knowledge.
- Foster critical and creative thinking through the lens of diversity.

Critical reflection

- Guide students to step back and critically reflect upon their own linguistic and cultural perspectives, experiences and responses in relation to others and consider how they might be perceived themselves.

Linguistic and cultural repertoires

- Engage and build upon the diverse linguistic and cultural life worlds of learners to develop new learning, extending and utilising student's linguistic and cultural repertoires.



Big questions

- Create opportunities for all learners to consider, inquire into/investigate and act upon 'big' questions and their roles in exploring and contributing to them, eg:
 - What is worthwhile knowledge?
 - What is the society we wish to be?
 - How can I communicate successfully with others?
 - How can I best contribute as a learner-citizen?
 - How can I act knowingly, imaginatively and ethically in the world?
 - What is my place in the world and its diversity?
- Encourage attentiveness to issues of discrimination, equity and opportunity to learn.

Use diversity as a resource

- Utilise the diversity of students' knowledge of the world as a resource for teaching and learning.

Foster citizenship

- Develop citizenship in local, national and international contexts and develop a sense of human interdependence, especially through regional and international partnerships.

Value multiple perspectives

- Acknowledge the validity of own and others' differing interpretations.
- Value knowledge drawn from other cultures and capitalise on the different perspectives students bring to the classroom to create new knowledge and understanding.

Develop the school as an intercultural site

- Provide leadership in schools, communities, organisations and agencies so that intercultural learning can be reflected in the policy settings and strategies of schools to bring about change that is valued and respected by all contributors.
- Establish and develop the school as an intercultural site, a meeting place for dialogue, exchange of ideas and community life.





Conclusion

Preparing young people to act and interact as effective citizens of the world means that education and learning need to change in significant ways.

Learning as intercultural engagement brings diverse perspectives into the lives of all learners. Learning across the curriculum in this way draws on the diverse perspectives of our students. This very diversity is an important resource for learning to solve complex problems in diverse contexts. In this diversity students can engage with and learn from diversity first hand, developing an awareness, respect for and appreciation of the knowledge, understanding and values of others, and an awareness of how their own perspectives shape how they think, act, interact and respond. This learning is grounded in the immediacy of personal experiences across languages and cultures.

Ensuring that education develops the linguistic and cultural repertoires and the intercultural capabilities of all children and young people means that they learn to navigate diversity with sophistication and ease and move successfully between places and cultures.

Developing these qualities and capabilities through education in South Australia can provide for all students in all schools and in all curriculum areas. It is a shared responsibility and one that will enable young South Australians to thrive now and in the future.





Some sources

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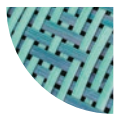
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