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Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (iCLT). Guidelines for effective practice in language classrooms.

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Background

In 2007 the New Zealand Ministry of Education (MoE) launched the revised New Zealand Curriculum which for the first time included 'Learning Languages' as an independent learning area. The MoE have identified **Communication** as the core strand citing Liddicoat (2004) "*Intercultural language teaching places the need to communicate in the first place and seeks to teach culture in a way which develops intercultural communicative skills at the same time as developing language skills.*" The Communication strand is supported by **Language Knowledge** and **Cultural Knowledge**.

In late 2006 the MoE funded a report on Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (iCLT): Implications for Effective Teaching and Learning.

The key objectives for this report were twofold. Section A provides an evidence-based framework to guide pedagogy from an iCLT perspective. Section B provides teachers and advisers with guidelines for effective practice in order to implement the framework.

The scope of the report focused on language teaching in Years 7-13 classrooms (ages 11-18). This required visiting a range of schools to observe language teaching in action.

The report was submitted to the MoE August 2009 and is currently in press.

This paper endorses the pedagogy of iCLT as the preferred language teaching methodology and provides practical evidence-based guidelines for its effective implementation.

Research Questions

The focus of enquiry was to gauge the extent to which iCLT was in evidence in a cross-section of New Zealand schools. From this examples of best practice would be identified in order to provide case studies and exemplars as models of effective iCLT.

This focus of enquiry would investigate the place of the cultural strand in language classrooms. Discussions with teachers and students would indicate the extent to which culture is valued and how culture is incorporated into language teaching.

Section A of the report provides an extensive literature review of New Zealand and international publications to create an evidence-based framework to guide pedagogy. From this review, six principles for iCLT were created.

Methods

A qualitative multiple case study approach was chosen as the study was an exploration into current iCLT practice.

Data were gathered through:

- Classroom observations
- Focus groups of teachers using semi-structured interviews
- Focus groups of students using semi-structured interviews
- Document analysis of curriculum guidelines and national examination papers for all 13 languages taught to identify the extent to which they demonstrate an intercultural approach to language teaching and assessment

Participants were drawn from eight schools based in the metropolitan areas in Wellington and Auckland. School types ranged from decile 1c (indicating a community with the lowest average income) to decile 10 and were a mix of single sex and coeducational. Schools were selected to represent the thirteen languages taught nationally. Students were drawn form a cross-section of Years 7-13, reflecting a balance in gender and ethnicity. In total 27 classrooms were visited, 40 teachers and 72 students were interviewed.

Frame

The six principles developed from the literature review (below) formed the framework for coding and analysing focus group transcripts, classroom observations and the content analysis. This would inform the development of the guidelines for effective iCLT practice.

The theoretical frame has two essential parts. The first being Six Principles to guide iCLT. These principles have been shaped by the literature and have evolved from Dellit's (2005) five principles. The six principles are:

- 1. iCLT integrates language and culture from the beginning.
- 2. iCLT engages learners in genuine social interaction
- 3. iCLT encourages and develops an exploratory and reflective approach to culture and culture-in-language
- 4. iCLT fosters explicit comparisons and connections between languages and cultures
- 5. iCLT acknowledges and responds appropriately to diverse learners and learning contexts
- 6. iCLT emphasises intercultural communicative competence rather than native-speaker

The second part of the framework provides four approaches to culture identified by Liddicoat et al. (2003, pp. 5-7)

- 1. Culture as high culture
- 2. Culture as area studies
- 3. Culture as societal norms
- 4. Culture as practice

Together these two parts of the framework underpin the guidelines for the practical application of effective intercultural communicative language teaching and learning (Newton, Yates, Shearn & Nowitzki, 2009).

Research findings

Findings from visits to schools revealed a range of effective iCLT practices across languages that reflect the six principles in action. However visits to schools also revealed an absence of iCLT in action and ineffective approaches to teaching culture.

The review of the curriculum guidelines for each of the languages revealed a static rather than a dynamic view of culture with cultural stereotypes apparent. These curriculum guidelines do not reflect an iCLT methodology.

The review of the national examination papers across the languages identified that assessment tasks rarely integrated language and culture. Students were not required to demonstrate any intercultural competence.

As the result of this report the researchers have developed the following: (Newton et al., 2009)

- 1. Guidelines for putting the six principles into practice using evidence gathered from students and teachers, including four samples of units of work with an intercultural language learning focus.
- 2. Guidelines for assessing iCLT
- 3. Teacher self/peer assessment tools
- 4. Indicators for effective iCLT practice
- 5. A resource kit for language advisers

These guidelines and tools will be of interest and use to language teachers, professional development providers and policy makers internationally.

This report prompted the MoE to review the language curriculum guidelines.

This report and the guidelines subsequently developed and added to the literature on iCLT, in particular the addition to and development of Dellit's (2005) principles.

References:

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