

## A living curriculum as policy for languages education: towards a plurilingual and intercultural orientation

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## Line of discussion

- Changing context of society; changing educational landscape; changing profiles of students.
- Changing theoretical landscape and goals of languages education.
- Curriculum as a fruitful unit of analysis for educational policy making and engendering change.
- Curricularization and its impact.
- Entailments of a plurilingual and intercultural curriculum: an ecological approach that includes multiple frameworks at different levels; two examples of curriculum development and change.
- A living curriculum
  - desire to open up a conversation about what constitutes a plurilingual and intercultural orientation to curriculum for languages education
  - a deliberate focus on conceptual framings to foreground the nature and scope of the curriculum endeavour and considerations for enacting change in curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment.
- Our understandings emerge from ongoing programs of research with teachers on program design and assessment within a plurilingual and intercultural orientation.

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## Changing context of our world

- Immense social change: movement of people (voluntary or forced migration); increasingly diverse communities (linguistic, cultural, gender, sexuality, etc.); poverty; inequality; injustice.
  - International conflict and attentiveness to communication across borders.
  - Environmental: climate collapse.
  - Techno culture: virtual citizenry, AI.
  - In education: national curriculum standards and the growth of testing regimes; innovation in education understood as technologization.
  - And more...
- A rapidly changing world impacts languages education in different ways, in different contexts; it impacts personal desires, affiliations, and relationships that individuals have with languages being learnt.

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## Changing theoretical landscape of languages education - 1

Need to consider understandings that persist in the learning and teaching of languages (recognising the differences across programs and contexts):

- a monolingual framing of language learning
- a strong cognitive, psychological orientation to SLA
- a limited consideration of culture, both in relation to the discipline and in relation to processes of learning
- the dominance of 'methods' or pedagogy and, for the longest time, communicative language teaching
- the educated native speaker standard
- the prevalence of fixed standards (for curriculum and assessment of achievement) with little questioning of their bases
- insufficient consideration of long-term development in languages learning and use.

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## Changing theoretical landscape in languages education - 2

Changing conceptualisations of language, culture, learning, SLA and bi/multilingualism

Language: language as object/system → language as practice/ language use in social interaction → language as interpretive (Scarino 2014) → language as assemblage i.e. "how languages come together in momentary assemblages of people, places and artefacts" (Pennycook 2024, p.41)

Culture: culture as facts, artefacts, information → culture as social practices → culture as a lens through which people mutually interpret, create and exchange meanings and reflect upon the situatedness of self and other (Scarino, 2014).

Learning: learning as mediated by a multitude of factors; learning as acquisition of new knowledge → learning as participation in use of new knowledge → learning as a process of sense making, becoming aware of how learners reciprocally interpret knowledge to others and themselves through their language and culture.. (Scarino, 2014)

SLA: acquisition of monolingual NS norm → the multilingual turn (May 2014; Ortega 2019; The Douglas Fir Group 2016) → Interdisciplinary perspectives (Byrnes & Duff 2019) → SLA/T (Atkinson et al forthcoming); recognised as a complex, dynamic system (Larsen-Freeman 2011).

→ conceptualisations, often unexamined, shape all aspects of languages education

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## Expanding goals of languages education

Communicative language learning legacy offers an insufficient conceptualisation of goals.

"Every linguistic experience is experience of the world, not (just) experience of language« (Gadamer 1989, p.546).

→ Not just language learning per se but for social and aesthetic experience and social action.

→ Expansion to include humanistic and educational goals (not just instrumental) as students navigate multilingual and intercultural spaces – to learn, continue to learn, and to develop student agency and voice in learning; in these spaces, exchanges involve the negotiation of symbolic meanings (Kramersch & Whiteside 2008), building relationship, and expressing identity.

(see: Kramersch 2014, Leung & Scarino 2016, McNamara 2019)

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## The Common European Framework of Reference

- Introduced the notion of a plurilingual orientation.
- Designed to support language learning in a diverse Europe.
- Goals expressed in generalised, generic, functional terms, geared towards preparing mobile workers and travellers.
- Common goals, common achievements, common scale used as a common reference point.
- Scales as the most influential part of the Framework; these are hypothesised norms assumed to be common to all languages, all learners, all contexts → and an inevitable reduction.
- It offers a traditional view of language use.
- Developed almost 25 years ago, and so does not reflect subsequent social, technological and political changes.

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## Understanding curriculum

- Curriculum development as policy-making.
- Curriculum design is focused on what it is that is valued learning and knowing: nature, scope and development – and why.
- It has been understood as product and process; perhaps best understood as praxis, with a critical perspective (Riddle 2024, Pinar & Irwin 2005, Cherryholmes 1988).
- Also understood as "a proposal", open to change (Stenhouse 1975).
- It is a complex system – multidimensional; multilayered.
- It provides a fruitful unit of analysis for educational policy making and enactment; pedagogy or 'task' is too fine-grained to be sufficient.

→ curriculum as a crucial site for (1) conceptualising the nature, scope and development of language learning, and (2) enacting change in practice in relation to curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment.

→ but, attention to fixity and prescriptiveness.

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## The process of curricularisation

- Curricularization refers to the process of rendering a language (as a lived phenomenon) amenable to teaching and learning; this process is ideologically framed.
- Valdés (2020) provides a critical perspective on curriculum formulations that result from misunderstandings of the capabilities of students who use two communicative systems in the everyday lives → when language is curricularized it is treated not as a naturally acquired language, as part of primary socialisation, but as a 'subject', with sets of knowledge and skills.
- Major paradigm shifts in understandings of language, culture, learning, multilingualism, but researchers and policy makers are a part of a complex system that frames understandings and curriculum.

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## The process of curricularization

- Understood by Valdés (2020) as a series of levels of interacting mechanism and elements

Framing Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideologies of Language, Class and Identity</li> <li>• Conceptualizations of Language</li> <li>• Theories of Second Language Acquisition</li> <li>• Theories of Bilingualism/Multilingualism</li> </ul>
Mediating Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational Policies</li> <li>• Educational Climate</li> <li>• Academic/intellectual Areas that Inform Program Design</li> </ul>
Core Program Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals and Outcomes</li> <li>• Learner Characteristics and Learner Categorizations</li> <li>• Approaches, Materials, Activities</li> <li>• Choice of Instructional Language</li> <li>• Instructor Competencies &amp; Characteristics</li> <li>• Assessments</li> </ul>

→ Need to recognise the complex forces that shape curriculum and practice

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## Entailments of languages curricula within a plurilingual and intercultural orientation – examples from Australia

### Principles of a multilingual and intercultural orientation

<i>Language learning as...</i>	
Multilingual/Intercultural:	Engaging with/participating in multiple languages, cultures, knowledges, codes, modes, perspectives, and representations
Embodied:	Personalisation and experiencing, including emotional resonances
Conceptual:	Connecting and abstracting knowledge and processes
Interactive:	Mediation/mediating
Reflective and reflexive:	Decentring, reflecting and reflexivity
Developmental:	On-going cycles of exchange and reflection that learning is emergent and dynamic
A continual process of exchange and reflection that is both inter- and intra-cultural.	

(see: Kohler and Scarino, 2024)

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## Expanded goals of languages education

- Communication : exchange of personal meanings in diversity, in relation to 'significant' content/concepts/knowledge  
 : understanding the practice of meaning making (Kramersch 2006, p.251)  
 : to build distinctive, cumulative repertoires of experiences and identities (see Byrnes 2018)
- Understanding : system and variability  
 : the relationship between language and culture
- Reflection : on particular concepts/ideas; experiences; social action; cultural positionings; representations; reactions/responses; perspectives; social relations; modalities; variability and diversity/ differences; dispositions, values, ethics; social justice/injustice; ideologies; identities

→ Exchange of meaning across diverse language and cultural frameworks

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## Example 1: Developing the Australian Curriculum – Languages (original iteration)-2011-2014

Contextual/conceptual issues and considerations:

- Absence of formal policy on languages; recognised in the Australian Curriculum as 'key learning area', a de facto policy
- Languages education in Australia has a distinctive Indigenous history (with many Aboriginal languages lost and endangered); a rich migration history (linked to UK, Europe and Asia), and its geography and history in the Asian region
- Each individual language is situated in the context of particular local, social, cultural, historical, geographical, political landscape that shapes the status and positioning of particular languages and language learning
- Contestation in relation to (1) practical policy matters (e.g. allocation of hours; the place of bilingual education – and more), (2) generic or language-specific curricula, (3) recognition of the diversity of learners, (4) the curriculum construct .

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## The Australian Curriculum – Languages the curriculum construct - 1

Realising languages learning through the curriculum construct, designed to capture a multilingual and intercultural orientation:

Goals:      communication  
                 understanding  
                 reciprocating (contested and subsequently deleted)

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## The Australian Curriculum – Languages the curriculum construct - 2

Strands and sub-strands:(for the organisation of content description)

Communication:      socialising  
                                 informing  
                                 creating  
                                 translating/mediating  
                                 reflecting on intercultural language use

Understanding:      systems of language  
                                 variation and change  
                                 relation between language and culture

- Curricula developed with teams of teachers for 16 languages and a Framework for Aboriginal languages, a framework for Classical languages and Auslan.
- Seeking to integrate conceptual, linguistic, cultural, intercultural development.
- Realised through learning intentions, learning experiences, assessing/evidencing.

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## The Australian Curriculum – Languages: curriculum enactment

Complexity of enactment in practice:

- The nature of the Australian federation and responsibilities for education → breaking the ecology, with consequences for successful implementation.
- A curriculum by consensus?
- States responsible for (1) tailoring the national curriculum to state requirements (if desired), (2) assessment, and (3) teacher development

- Limited teacher professional development; no implementation studies; no sharing of practice across states;
- Original design seen as too 'complex' and has been 'simplified'

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## Example 2: School of Languages, South Australia - 1

Aims of the whole school project:

- To use an assessment lens to focus on student learning within a multilingual and intercultural orientation.
  - To systematise assessment policy and practices within this orientation.
  - To expand leadership capability and the professional learning of teachers with respect to assessment within a multilingual and intercultural orientation.
    - to strengthen student learning and achievement
    - to strengthen teacher practice.
- Focus on the complexity of a multilingual/plurilingual and intercultural curriculum
- Focus on change over time; a developmental view of teacher practice and teacher learning .

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## School of Languages, South Australia - 2

- 3-year program; based on **cycle of assessment** that includes: **conceptualising** → **eliciting** → **judging** → **validating**.
- Whole school reform that unites curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment
- Focused on developing units as a fundamental unit of analysis for integrating (1) learning intentions (goals); (2) **the conceptual linguistic, cultural and intercultural learning**; (3) experiences vs tasks, (4) expanded assessment processes through the cycle of **conceptualising, eliciting, judging and validating**, and in particular (5) evidencing language learning in ways that include an expanded sense of evidence of multilingual and intercultural capability.

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## School of Languages, South Australia - 3

Lessons learnt:

- Maximum time needed on **conceptualising**: teachers developing units, tailored to their particular learners and their specific language.
- A range of 'framing resources' developed for teachers to support their understanding of the expanded goals and curriculum construct.
- Curriculum is best understood not as an assembly but rather an ecological, conceptual phenomenon; surface engagement is not sufficient.
- The challenge of 'expanding' assessments and the notion of evidence and evidencing remains.
- Assessing multilingual and intercultural capabilities as complex but possible.
- Over-emphasis in teachers' assessment on the 'machinery of assessment'; leads to compliance rather than an expansive conceptualisation of language learning, teaching and assessment practices.
- Focus on 'data' (recall datafication of education) elides 'evidence' and growth/development in language learning.

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## Reflections

- Need to consider the conceptualisation of language, culture, learning, SLA and development, multilingualism, and the process of curricularisation; the ecology of curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment.
- Need to consider interacting complex systems of curriculum creation, enactment, critique...and not seeking to reduce the complexity.
- Not just 'practice', for superficial approaches to reform can be "undone by superficial understandings or by hollow enactment of idealised schemes« (Shephard 2015, p.47).
- Not a prescription (as much as a plurilingual and intercultural orientation is desired), but curriculum as a living practice, open to interpretation, with tailoring to distinctive learners and their voices, recognising their distinctive lifeworlds and their relationship with the language; it also needs to remain open to ongoing enactment, reconceptualisation and change.

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