

Learning Languages in the New Zealand Curriculum

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Executive summary

This paper addresses a range of conceptual issues that pertain to the development of curriculum statements that are designed to depict the essence of learning languages and cultures at progressive levels of achievement through the primary and secondary curriculum in New Zealand. These curriculum statements, typical of educational reform internationally, seek to address two fundamental and interrelated dimensions of language teaching and learning: (1) the nature, scope and complexity of learning languages and cultures and (2) the 'outcomes' of learning, understood both as the nature and scope of learning and the level of complexity or standard. As well as being fundamental curriculum questions, they are also questions that form part of teachers' ongoing consideration of their work as languages educators.

The development of a statement for Languages in the New Zealand curriculum takes place in the context of more than a decade of curriculum being framed within an 'outcomes' orientation. Using the construct of 'outcome' alone, however, is considered to be insufficient as a catalyst for engendering a revitalisation in the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment of Languages. What is needed is a focus on the deep conceptual issues that relate to learning Languages and a curriculum framework that speaks to teachers as mediators of learning, and as people who have a major role to play in communicating learning to students, parents, educational administrators and the wider community. Thus, the purpose of the curriculum framework is best seen as providing a basis for both systemic and, most importantly, educational accountability, as well as promoting both short term and long term approaches to language learning and assessment.

This paper addresses the deep conceptual issues considered in developing a curriculum framework for Languages. These pertain to changing understandings of a set of concepts that include: language, culture, communication, learning, teaching, assessment, achievement and progress and their interrelationship. These concepts are fundamental to understanding the learning of Languages. They are interrelated through the concept of intercultural language learning. Consideration of cross-curricular competencies or capabilities affords an important opportunity to consider Languages in the context of their place in the curriculum as a whole, and in the holistic education of students.

It is highlighted that once developed, it is important to recognise any curriculum framework as an artifact or resource designed to support reflection and change. It pertains to the intended curriculum, rather than the enacted curriculum. Their strength resides in their potential to engender important, common, conceptual dialogue. Their limit resides in the fact that they are resources that address intentions, and not practice for practice can only be enacted by people. The curriculum statement: *Learning Languages in the New Zealand Curriculum* therefore, will be understood and used in different ways by different participants in the education process. In order to ensure dialogue based on the curriculum framework, it will be necessary to provide opportunities for professional development. In order to ensure understanding of the curriculum as enacted by teachers, students and their communities, based on the curriculum framework, it will be important to support an inquiry or research stance towards its use. The curriculum framework itself should also remain open to continuous refinement, based on use.

Introduction

Context of development

The preparation of the curriculum statement *Learning Languages in the New Zealand Curriculum* offers the Ministry, and the wider community of individuals and groups involved and interested in languages education, an opportunity to consider Languages as an area of learning in its own right within the New Zealand curriculum. The goal of such development is to create a ‘state-of-the-art’ educational resource that provides a guide to teaching, learning and assessment in the present, and that is also fruitful at least for the immediate future.

This development is part of a ‘revitalisation process’, based on a stocktake of the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* of 1993 (Ministry of Education, 2002). According to the Ministry, the overall process of development involves: (1) clarifying and refining outcomes, (2) a focus on quality teaching, (3) strengthening school ownership of curriculum and (4) supporting communication and strengthening partnerships with parents and communities. It is worth observing that in setting the task of curriculum ‘revitalisation’ or renewal, the Ministry is retaining its orientation towards ‘outcomes’. Generally, within this orientation, the emphasis on outcomes tends to leave to implementers (teachers and schools) at the local level, the task of developing appropriate content and processes to yield the intended outcomes. Within this orientation it is generally understood that, provided the outcomes are met (which is not an un-complicated notion in itself), they can be realised according to the requirements of the local context. In the present phase of development, the revitalisation process includes an emphasis on the processes of quality teaching, and issues of local ownership and community understanding. This can usefully be interpreted as a potentially ‘new generation’ view of outcomes-oriented curriculum, one that is as concerned with processes and substance, as it is with the results or ‘outcomes’ of learning through the curriculum.

The development of the curriculum statement for the Languages learning area as set out by the Ministry involves the preparation of an overarching statement for teaching, learning and assessment. This overarching statement includes *an essence statement* which is intended to capture the nature of language learning and the contribution it makes to the individual and to society. In addition, it is intended to present *achievement objectives described at eight levels of progression*, to capture the range, breadth and depth of student achievements. Finally, the statement is intended to address the development of overarching “key competencies, essential skills, attitudes, motivations and values” that integrate the curriculum as a whole. These requirements too, can be interpreted as signalling a desire on the part of the Ministry to provide a resource that extends beyond a traditional depiction of ‘outcomes’. Beyond outcomes, described as ‘achievement objectives’ at various levels, the emphasis on ‘essence’ invites developers to consider deeply the intrinsic nature and substance of the Languages learning area; the requirement to consider cross-curricular skills, attitudes, motivations and values can be understood as seeking to capture broad human capabilities that are considered to be of value in students’ overall learning and development, including their linguistic and cultural development.

In considering the development of a statement for Languages in the New Zealand curriculum, I necessarily bring an ‘outsider’ perspective, as one who has not lived in the culture of education in New Zealand. Nevertheless, I have engaged with the preparation of such statements in various states and nationally in Australia, and in Hong Kong. This experience has enabled me to study the development of such statements and to come to understand both their potential value and limitations. Thus, together with the influence of my own

local/national contextualisation, I bring both a generative and a critical perspective to the task of development and ongoing reflection on such developments.

In discussing the development of a curriculum statement for Languages in the New Zealand curriculum I consider: (1) the context of curriculum development within an ‘outcomes’ orientation, (2) the purposes of curriculum statements, (3) the nature of learning languages-and-cultures, (4) connecting teaching, learning and assessment of languages-and-cultures, (5) connecting within and across the curriculum, (6) connecting curriculum framework development and its use, and (7) connecting teachers in professional learning and research in languages-and-cultures education. Discussion of each of these focuses predominantly on conceptual considerations to be addressed in the development process, with a brief consideration of the use of the curriculum frameworks.

Prior to addressing the conceptual considerations it is important to signal a distinction. This is the important distinction between the ‘intended’ and the ‘enacted’ curriculum. The *intended* curriculum focuses on the planning, design and organisation of learning; it addresses primarily questions of the knowledge that is to be learned, that is, the subject matter or substance of the curriculum. The *enacted* curriculum relates to the lived experience of learning; it addresses not only the subject matter of the curriculum but how this is understood and acted upon by teachers and learners in their particular contexts.

In the process of developing a curriculum statement, Ministries can only address the intended curriculum and the intended outcomes of learning. Their work focuses on developing a resource that is intended to guide teaching, learning and assessment. They cannot engage directly with the enacted curriculum, the lived, sociocultural complexity of teaching, learning and assessing. However, it is important in the development to take into considerations about use. Furthermore, Ministries can also seek to monitor the use of the resource and stimulate innovation and creativity in its use.

Thus the development of a statement of the intended curriculum is best undertaken with mindfulness about the context of its use in the enactment of the curriculum, and with recognition that it should be subject to continual refinement based on use.

The context of curriculum development within an outcomes orientation

Curriculum development within an outcomes orientation has been a major characteristic of educational reform throughout the 1990’s. Within this orientation, knowledge and know-how, incarnated in people, is seen as a critical resource; hence, there is the need to continuously develop people, which, in turn, necessitates reform in education. The shift towards specifying outcomes is integral to this style of educational reform. While this orientation is evident in education at an international level, it is not uncontested. Governments have assumed and acted upon a connection between education, (specifically, high standards and standardised assessment), on the one hand, and social, political and economic productivity at an international level, on the other hand, even though this relationship has not, in fact, been established through research (see Reardon, Scott and Verre, 1994:1). In response, education systems have developed frameworks of system-wide outcomes (or ‘standards’ as they are called in some contexts) within and across areas of the curriculum, with accompanying, standardised systems for monitoring the achievement of those outcomes. Schools and teachers have become responsible and accountable for ‘delivering’ the outcomes as defined.

The movement towards developing frameworks of outcomes has been seen as a characteristic of the ‘marketisation of education’ and the production of human, intellectual ‘capital’ for the competitive benefit of the nation as a whole. The emphasis then, has been seen to be on competition and accountability, within an economic rationalist ideology (see Ball 2000; Roberts, 2003). As such, the development of frameworks of outcomes has been understood as a highly political process which speaks to policy makers and administrators (Brindley, 1993) more than to teachers. The *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993) was part of this world-wide development. It represented a shift from ‘content’, as ‘input’ to the learning process, to ‘outcomes’ (Ministry of Education, 2002). In a volume on international curriculum research, Roberts (2003) discusses in detail the debates that surrounded development and use of the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework*. As a conclusion to his analysis he calls for a return to deeper questions about the nature, purposes and aims of the curriculum, as well as the nature of curriculum processes, and he emphasises that this deep questioning should not just be in abstract, but in a way that enriches discussion about practice. He states:

The key perhaps is not to fall into a form of abstract theorising where the practical, policy, political and pedagogical issues of the day are ignored, but rather to show how concern with fundamental curriculum questions can, by providing a new set of conceptual lenses through which to view those issues, deepen and extend an already rich conversation. (Roberts 2003, 511)

This emphasis on the deep issues of the curriculum is timely in the Languages area, given that the field of languages education is responding to major changes in how the learning of languages is understood.

From an ‘outsider’ perspective, it is difficult to fully perceive the context of the current process of revitalisation of the New Zealand curriculum, and Languages within the curriculum. There are important indications that the process of development involves more than the concept of outcomes alone as a catalyst for curriculum renewal and improving learning. At the same time, there is also a potential danger that an instrumental view of learning outcomes might prevail. If too strong an emphasis is placed on outcomes the curriculum ecology is disrupted. In formulating ‘outcomes’ (or criteria, or standards, or descriptions of any kind as educational resources) in the context of curriculum renewal, it is important to note that no amount of refinement of the language will remove the fact that statements remain open to interpretation, and will be interpreted differently by different participants in the educational process. McNamara (1999) describes the way in which the work of developing curriculum statements emphasises wording and rewording and achieving consensus around these words, a process that he calls the “nominalisation fallacy” or “wording by collective agreement”. Similarly, Moss and Schutz (2001) discuss through detailed examples the way in which efforts to achieve consensus in relation to key ideas in curriculum, learning and assessment actually may mask diversity of the kind that would broaden participants’ understanding.

Given the potential contestation surrounding an ‘outcomes’ orientation, particularly if ‘outcome’ is seen as a sufficient construct to guide curriculum renewal, it is important in the current curriculum revitalisation process to:

- understand the *political* and *educational* context of development;
- recognise the risk of over-emphasising outcomes in the ecology of curriculum development;

- recognise, as suggested more generally by Roberts (2003), the need to focus on the deep questions of curriculum and their relationship to practice, which, in relation to learning languages relate to: How do we understand languages-and-cultures? How are they learned? What can be legitimately expected as learning outcomes for the increasing diversity of learners in schools and the increasing diversity of purposes of learning? How is progress in learning for each individual best nurtured and described?
- recognise the limits of the refining of words, for they will always remain open to interpretation;
- recognise the value of diverse perspectives, even dissensus, in broadening understanding;
- recognise the need for the curriculum statement to speak to teachers as the mediators of learning, and as people who have a major role in communicating learning to students, parents, educational administrators and the wider community;
- leave space for innovation on the part of users.

The purposes of curriculum statements

An understanding of the intended purposes of curriculum statements shapes both their development and subsequent use.

Three questions related to the purpose of the curriculum statement are discussed below.

1. *Is the purpose to guide teaching and learning, or assessment, or both?*

A central issue is whether the major purpose of the curriculum statement is to address predominantly the *scope* of learning or the *assessment* of learning, and the setting of 'outcomes' or 'standards', or both.

At a fundamental level, the purpose of the development of the curriculum statement: *Learning Languages in the New Zealand Curriculum*, as indeed for analogous developments in any context, can be seen as addressing two related educational questions:

- What do students need to learn and know, that is, what is the *nature, scope* and *complexity* of learning languages-and-cultures? (i.e. with a focus on the substance of teaching and learning)
- What are appropriate 'outcomes' of learning, understood both as the *nature, scope of learning* and *level of complexity* or standard? (i.e. with a focus on assessment)

Both these questions require a conceptualisation of the *nature* and *scope* of languages-and-culture knowing and learning, and the *level of complexity* of that learning. The first question is directed primarily towards the substance of teaching and learning, identifying what is to be learned and known, and to be continuously developed. It implies the inclusion of a notion of *scope*, that is, the range or multidimensionality of learning, and the general *level of complexity* at which the curriculum, teaching and learning should be pitched. This is what, in the US context, is termed 'content standards', that is, what is to be learned, though it is recognised that the 1993 curriculum initiative, that installed 'outcomes' into the New Zealand curriculum, was precisely a reaction against a perceived over-emphasis on 'content'. The notion of 'content' is itself highly problematic because users do not specify how they conceptualise it in their own minds. In traditional definitions it generally refers to the breaking down into parts of the 'body of knowledge' that defines the curriculum area. In more

recent definitions, 'content' is conceptualized as including processes, strategies and metacognitive reflection. The conceptualisation of 'content', therefore, becomes a central issue in the development of the curriculum statement.

In the curriculum statement for Languages in the New Zealand context, the essence statement provides a base for conceptualising the nature and scope of learning languages. It also provides the curriculum architecture or structure for specifying the scope of learning through three strands: communication, language, and culture. It does not provide a map of the increasing complexity of learning across the continuum of schooling. This mapping is currently captured in the frameworks for specific languages that have been developed since 1993 (see, for example, Ministry of Education 2000a; 2000b), though these have been formulated through a different curriculum architecture. From a curriculum development perspective this raises questions about the most appropriate curriculum architecture and the nature and degree of specification that is seen to be necessary to guide teaching and learning, both at generic and at language-specific levels.

The second question is directed primarily towards the assessment of learning, identifying the 'outcomes' of learning and knowing. The conceptualisation of 'outcomes' also implies and relates to an understanding of the nature and scope of learning. This is what in the US context is termed 'performance standards', that is, the intended level of performance. It necessarily includes a notion of complexity or standard at which student performance is to be assessed.

The description of 'achievement objectives specified at eight levels' in the curriculum statement for the New Zealand context addresses this question. While the term 'achievement objectives' is no doubt well understood by insiders in the New Zealand system, it may be somewhat ambiguous for outsiders. This is because 'achievement' would normally pertain to the second question above, while 'objectives' would normally pertain to the first question. This issue of naming also relates to the distinction between the intended and the enacted curriculum. At a planning level, outcomes can only be intended; as such, they perform a similar function to that traditionally served by objectives and this may well provide an explanation for the use of this term. Issues related to the conceptualisation of 'achievement objectives' are discussed further below.

2. *Is the purpose to guide episodic or long-term progress in learning?*

In the development of curriculum statements two major approaches have been used in the presentation of outcomes and progression. (Hill, Iwashita, McNamara, Scarino and Scrimgeour, 2004). These are the 'scale of scales' approach [e.g. the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe 2001)] and the benchmarking approach [e.g. Toronto Board of Education Benchmarks (see Larter, 1991)]. The *Common European Framework of Reference* is best described as a reporting framework. A series of progressive, generalised levels of proficiency are depicted, based on a range of scales in use for different languages in different countries that form the European Union. As such it is a 'scale of scales'. Within this approach the method of assessment is a local matter for each educational system; students are assessed locally and their results are then mapped onto the particular level of the *Common European Framework of Reference*.

The Toronto *Benchmarks* do not present a progressive generalised set of proficiency descriptions. Instead, they comprise a set of externally-designed benchmark tasks intended to elicit evidence of student performance. Student performance on these tasks is reported using a five-level scale, with each level defined on the basis of actual task performance. Thus, the

outcomes or descriptions of performance are task-specific snapshots of performance, at specific grades of schooling. In contrast with the *Common European Framework of Reference*, the dynamic, longitudinal dimension/progression is captured not through generalised level descriptions, but through benchmark tasks and related descriptors that are set and made available at different phases of schooling. There is no attempt to generalise performance across tasks and levels. The *Benchmarks* depict episodic, task-specific levels of proficiency.

To summarise the distinction, the outcomes or descriptions of performance in the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference* are progressive and longitudinal but hypothesised, while those in the Toronto *Benchmarks* are episodic but based on actual student performance.

The approach taken to presenting outcomes and to depicting progression will influence the development of the curriculum statement. While in the development of the statement 'Learning Languages in the New Zealand Curriculum', the decision has been taken to adopt the levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference*, most probably for the reason that it provides a scale of scales and therefore appears to be designed as a referencing tool, issues remain regarding the hypothesised relationship between the proposed generic outcomes and the levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference*, and subsequently, the relationship between the generic and language-specific outcomes.

A purpose that has been under-represented in the development of curriculum statements of outcomes for learning across progressive phases of schooling is that of seeking to take a long-term perspective on learning, with an emphasis on progress over time. (See Scarino, 2000 and 2003; Kohler, 2003). Although intended to capture the span of learning throughout schooling, it seems that once curriculum statements have been developed, they are used generally to judge episodic performance, regardless of whether their conceptual origin was to develop a scale or a resource for benchmarking task-related performance.

3. *Is the purpose to guide administrative, systemic accountability or educational accountability?*

The literature surrounding the work on developing and implementing curriculum statements draws a marked distinction between administrative and educational purposes, with the former pertaining to system-wide reporting to the Ministry for quality assurance, and the latter pertaining to classroom-based teaching, learning and assessment (see Brindley, 1998; McKay, 2000; McNamara, 2001). Though these purposes are not as dichotomous as the presentation in the literature would suggest (see Scarino, 2000), decisions regarding the relationship between various purposes will necessarily shape the curriculum statement. From the perspective of purpose, however, it is likely that systemic accountability in relation to the first question (i.e. the 'content standards') will be perceived as a softer form of accountability than if it is in relation to the second question (i.e. the 'performance standards').

It is important in the current curriculum revitalisation process to:

- describe the purposes of the curriculum statement, in particular, the purposes of the essence statement and of the achievement objectives at eight levels of progression;
- recognise the distinction between an emphasis on purposes related to guiding teaching and learning and/or guiding assessment, and the higher stakes generally accorded to assessment;

- recognise that the specification of *both* learning and the outcomes of learning involve important questions of *nature*, *scope*, and *level of complexity*;
- recognise the diverse ways of depicting episodic and long-term learning and the strengths and limitations of each;
- address the under-representation of and need for long-term learning purposes in learning languages.
- distinguish between the various kinds of accountabilities, and highlight to teachers, their role and responsibility particularly in relation to educational accountability;
- describe explicitly the role of outcomes in relation to the different accountabilities.

The nature of learning languages-and-cultures

The fundamental challenge in developing a curriculum statement for learning languages is a conceptual one. This challenge pertains to questions such as: How is language understood? How is culture perceived in relation to language? How is language use seen in relation to language code? How is language seen in relation to content or subject matter knowledge? Given that the curriculum statement is being developed for schools, how is language *learning* understood? What, then, is the relationship between the concepts: language, culture, communication, learning and knowing? there is much contestation about the nature of language use for communication (see, for example, Spolsky, 1993; McNamara, 1996), and the task is rendered more complex when what is needed is an integration of conceptualisations of language use with conceptualisations of second language learning and development in the context of learning in general. (Scarino, 2000); A conceptualisation of these and their inter-relationships is what is to be captured in the *essence statement*.

In addressing these questions it is important to highlight the shift in views of language from being seen primarily as linguistic forms to being seen as meaningful language use. Similarly, the shift in language learning is from being seen as a process involving the static knowledge of linguistic forms, to being seen as the process of developing a dynamic resource for interpreting and making meaning.

In this shift towards meaningful language use, language and culture are conceptualised as integrated. Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler (2003:44) describe the change and the relationship as follows:

It is conventional to consider language as a symbol system made up of words, which are encoded by sounds or graphic conventions and arranged by rules of syntax. Linguists have traditionally focused on the abstract and de-contextualised system as defining the nature of human language. Although it is possible to describe a language in terms of such structural features, such a definition of language is inadequate for understanding language as a human communication system.

As a communication system language is never de-contextualised and abstract, but rather, it is a set of practices which are deployed in context to achieve meaning. As such, an utterance gains its meaning not simply from the formal properties of the grammar and lexicon that are used to construct it, but from their utterance by a speaker to a listener at a particular time, and in a particular context, to achieve a particular communicative function. Meaning, therefore, comes from the interrelationship and the interactivity of the utterance with its context. As such,

language cannot be legitimately separated from its social and cultural contexts. Language is social and communicative, not simply structural.

Within this conceptualisation, *language use* is seen as a cognitive, social and cultural act, embedded in a web of social and cultural practices. Linguistic form does not disappear but assumes importance as a socially shared communicative resource. A knowledge of and engagement with the system of culture are fundamental to being able to communicate successfully and provide a basis through which the users of a language establish shared meanings and communicate ways of seeing the world.

Similarly, *language learning* (as indeed learning in general), is seen as a cognitive, social and cultural act, embedded in social and cultural practices. Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler (2003:45) describe the process of learning a new language as follows:

Learning a new language involves the learners in a complex process. Learners have to learn new forms and rules of the language and the conventions that assign these to meanings. They have to learn the conceptual systems that the language encodes. They have to learn the rules of variability and acceptability involved in using this sign system for communication with other users of the system. They have to negotiate the identities that are involved in using the new linguistic system and position and adopt a perspective in relationship to the identities they wish to present as they communicate. Language conceived simply in terms of grammar and vocabulary is an inadequate conceptualisation on which to base an understanding of what is involved in language learning.

In learning an additional language, students are constantly engaged with interacting and moving across at least two languages and cultures. This learning to 'move across' languages and cultures through communication is an *intercultural* process that requires interaction focused on:

- learners as *interactants* whose participation in any interaction shapes and is shaped by the cultural context in which the interaction takes place;
- learners recognising increasingly that they make deliberate choices in communication to achieve particular effects and meanings;
- learners recognising that how they act and their success in interaction is determined not only by what they do, but by what they are understood to do by members of the 'other' culture, whose perceptions will naturally be distinct from their own, and learning to manage their interactions in response to the expectations of members of the 'other' culture;
- learners decentering from their own cultural perspective to engage with others.

Learning languages in the school setting also entails learning-how-to-learn languages-and-cultures. Thus students interact both as language users and as language learners. These interactions, accompanied by reflection and a developing self-awareness as a language user, are central to *intercultural language learning*, that is, understanding the meaning – making capacity of languages in relation to particular cultures.

Since language and culture are central mediating forces in learning in general, the additional language is used also as a medium for developing general knowledge. In the Languages curriculum area, therefore, the notion of 'content' entails concepts and processes related both to the target language-and-culture itself, and to concepts and processes derived from the use

of language as a medium for learning, as students engage with important ideas to 'language about'. This is described in languages education as the relationship between 'language and content'.

The implication of the direction towards intercultural language learning, including the notion of significant 'content', is that students are continuously learning to become better and better intercultural communicators; that in each social encounter, students come to realise that what each person brings to the interaction is their knowledge (concepts, ideas), understanding and values, developed through their experiences over time, captured through their language; that they cannot fully anticipate what others will bring, and that coming to know and understand means hearing what others bring, responding, elaborating, and, through these processes, developing, over time, an ever-evolving communicative repertoire and linguistic and cultural understanding. Jay Lemke (2002:85) expresses it as follows:

The phenomenon that occurs is that people add elements of a new linguistic resource system to their communicative and semantic repertoires. Language use is integral to personal and social development, part of the short- and long-term developmental processes of both person and communities. Personal and community development continues through the medium of additional languages, as well as the first language.

A set of dimensions of learning to communicate can be derived from this view of language-and-culture learning as intercultural and as contributory to developing knowledge and learning in general. Developing a capability to communicate in an additional language:

- expands learners' overall communicative potential and repertoire;
- expands learners' understanding of how language works in the context of culture;
- expands learners' understanding of how to learn languages for communication;
- expands learners' access to knowledge constructed and mediated in diverse languages;
- expands learners' understanding of how to interact with members of diverse cultures;
- expands learners' linguistic awareness and thereby perceiving the power of language in communication;
- expands learners' capability to reflect on their own language, culture and meaning-making in communication.

The decision to focus on three key concepts: communication, language, culture, as 'strands' in the essence statement for the statement for the Languages area in the New Zealand curriculum, provides a signal of a direction towards intercultural language learning, with an emphasis on using language communicatively, and making and sharing meaning across languages and cultures. This signal, however, does not constitute a rationale or an explanation for taking such an orientation. Furthermore, while the selection of the three key concepts gives salience to important dimensions of learning languages, it does not capture their integral relationship. Separated, they become analytic rather than integrative categories. This is a difficulty that needs to be addressed both in relation to teaching and learning and in relation to assessment. In both areas questions arise about how to integrate these concepts. Particularly in assessment, further questions arise about the relative contribution or weighting of each in the integration, and whether or not these same strands are to be used for reporting student achievements. If students are assessed on the integrated use of language, which would seem to

be desirable, it will be difficult to separate the three strands for purposes of reporting. In addition, the use of these three concepts as ‘strands’ under-emphasises two further dimensions which are important in learning languages. These are: (1) learning-how-to learn languages and reflecting on their use in communication, and (2) the integral relationship of language use with learning and knowing in general. These dimensions need to be captured in order to do justice to learners as both language users and language learners, who are learning an additional communicative system, as well as developing new knowledge through additional languages.

It is important in the current curriculum revitalisation process to:

- recognise that conceptualising the essence of what it means to know, use and learn an additional language, and to develop new knowledge and learning in general, through the additional language, is challenging yet central;
- make decisions about constructing a formulation that is based on theoretical insights (notwithstanding the partial nature of any formulation), and to include sufficient signals to stimulate teachers’ thinking and a reappraisal of their own conceptions;
- recognise that the ‘strands’ that form the curriculum architecture need to be derived from this conceptual work, and capture learning-and-using-language-and-culture in an active way;
- recognise that learning-how-to-learn and developing knowledge in general, are integral to learning additional languages;
- recognise that the strands need to address integration of these concepts in use, in teaching, learning and assessment.

Connecting teaching and learning and assessment of languages-and-cultures

Connecting teaching and learning

The conceptualisation of learning languages-and-cultures as a cognitive, social and cultural process has implications for the way the connection between teaching and learning and teachers and learners is understood. Sfarid (1998) describes the cognitive process through ‘the acquisition metaphor’ and the social and cultural process through ‘the participation metaphor’ of learning, and arguing that both are necessary.

The emphasis with the acquisition metaphor, based on cognitive theories of learning, is on the individual nature of the process of gaining or developing knowledge, whether this occurs as passive reception or as active construction. It results in students developing personalised versions of concepts and processes. Within this metaphor the relationship between teaching and learning and therefore teacher and learner is back-grounded. The emphasis with the participation metaphor, based on sociocultural theory, is on learners becoming participants in certain distinct activities rather than becoming the possessors of a ‘body of knowledge’ that is generalised and decontextualised. Vygotsky (1978), as one of the founders of sociocultural theories in psychology, describes learning as mediated *interpersonal*, communicative activity that leads subsequently to the *intrapersonal* capability of students to construct images in their mind, through language, to represent the world to themselves. As Kramsch explains (2000:13):

In sociocultural theory, linguistic signs and psychological processes do not precede their use in social contexts; on the contrary, it is social activity and its material forms of social and cultural mediation, that precedes the emergence of individual forms of consciousness. For Vygotsky, psycholinguistic processes are the reconstruction in the mind of the individual of the mediated social interactions that this individual has experienced on the social plane.

The implications of the participation metaphor are firstly, that it is socially supported *interaction* and *communication* that produce learning, and secondly, that the focus of learning is on people, that is, students with their teachers and other contributors to the educative process, together and over time, developing broader and deeper understanding within the learning community. Participation is both within the community of the classroom and the community of users of the particular languages. Since learning is a dialogical process, the relationship between teachers and learners and the activity they engage in together is foregrounded.

Connecting assessment and teaching and learning

The aspect of the curriculum statement that pertains to assessment is the statement of outcomes. The challenge in describing outcomes of learning languages is fundamentally a conceptual challenge. It involves capturing what it means to know, use, and learn a language, as described in the section ‘The nature of learning languages-and-cultures’ above. To this conceptual challenge is added the challenge of conceptualising progress in learning over time and the need to determine exactly what *is* progressing: the student, the subject matter, the content of learning or the performance of learning. Progress also entails conceptualising levels of achievement. In addition to these major conceptual issues, a further challenge arises from the recognition that a curriculum statement can only provide a highly generalised formulation of knowing, learning and using, and yet, developmental trajectories are particular to individual learners. As Mislevy (1993:28) states:

A learner’s state of competence at a given point in time is a complex constellation of facts and concepts, and the networks that interconnect them; of automatised procedures and conscious heuristics, and their relationships to knowledge patterns that signal their relevance; of perspectives and strategies, and the management capabilities by which the learner focuses his (sic) efforts. There is no hope of providing a complete description of such a state.

The complexity here is described from a cognitive perspective; it is all the more intricate when sociocultural perspectives are also included. A further difficulty relates to the fact that performance is context specific (i.e. task-related). Developing statements of outcomes involves a process of generalising that runs counter to this characteristic of the assessment of student performance. An additional kind of generalising comes into play when the outcomes in languages learning are conceived as generic outcomes across all languages. Performance is necessarily specific to particular languages. For example, in the context of school language learning, given equal time on task, an exit performance in French will necessarily be different in nature and level from an exit performance in Chinese. Similarly, the expectations in terms of performance for students learning ‘heritage’ languages, who have some home background in that particular language are likely to be different from those for students without such background. Performance expectations will also be different for different program types e.g. bilingual, language preservation, content-based, or limited exposure programs.

In the proposed curriculum statement: *Learning Languages in the New Zealand Curriculum*, outcomes are described as ‘achievement objectives’, that is, statements of intended outcomes. They are seen as describing expectations. These ‘achievement objectives’ are pegged to the level descriptions of the Council of Europe’s *Common European Framework of Reference* (Johnson, 2004) which describe the expected level of performance.

In developing a set of ‘achievement objectives’, firstly it is necessary, to describe what ‘achievement objectives’ are intended to be and the purpose they are intended to serve in assessment.

Secondly, it is important to note that conceptions of achievement will necessarily influence the shaping of the ‘achievement objectives’. Cole (1990), for example, describes two major conceptions of achievement and their impact; these are achievement as basic skills and facts versus achievements as higher order skills and advanced knowledge. The first conception comes from behaviourist views of learning while the second comes from cognitive views of learning. Sociocultural/cognitive approaches would conceive of achievement as an evolving, integrated knowing and understanding through participation in the kind of activity which is characteristic of the field, and the socialisation of students into the community of users of that knowledge. The conception of achievement will influence the way the ‘achievement objectives’ are described as well as the architecture for organising their formulation. Specifically, this raises questions about the nature of the ‘achievement objectives’ and the strands, and specifically whether they are analytic or integrative categories. If the ‘achievement objectives’ are described in relation to the proposed three strands: communication, language, culture, developers will need to specify how language and culture are to be assessed and reported in relation to communication, and how they relate to developing awareness of learning languages and extending general knowledge through the additional languages.

Thirdly, the hypothesised relationship between the progressive set of ‘achievement objectives’ and the expected levels of achievement as pegged to the *Common European Framework of Reference*, needs to be explained. This is a complex aspect of the development of any progressive description of achievement. Very rarely are the parameters of growth, development or change stated explicitly. This is at least partly because the constellation of dimensions of growth and the trajectory will be different for different students. It is at this point that framework developers often fall into the developmental trap of relativistic language (‘some’, ‘more’, ‘even more’) and the consistency trap, whereby, having identified a particular dimension, the cell is created in the matrix of dimensions referenced to levels, and then it needs to be systematically filled in the interests of consistency. If the level of proficiency (the ‘how well’ of achievement) is captured by the *Common European Framework of Reference*, then the ‘achievement objectives’ could be understood as referring to the substance of performance (the ‘what’ of performance). In addition to maintaining this distinction, however, developers would still need to explain the relationship. Issues that remain to be considered in the formulation of ‘achievement objectives’ include the level of generality or specificity of the specification, their analytic or integrative orientation, the parameters through which generalised progression is depicted, knowing that increasing complexity in the use of the target language along a learning continuum is the product of a constellation of considerations.

In connecting assessment and learning languages-and-cultures further issues pertain to the way in which the ‘achievement objectives’ are intended to be used. The first issue relates to the purposes of assessment. Is the purpose systemic accountability or classroom learning and

educational accountability, or both? Depending on purposes, there is then the issue of eliciting student performance, that is, the procedures devised to capture student performance as well as the nature, range, amount, and quality of evidence, that is gathered and its status. For example, what types and range of procedures are to be used. Are they to be devised locally by teachers or standardised? If it is accepted that the curriculum statement presents progressive levels of achievement, that is, increasing complexity in student achievement, how is the dynamic aspect of learning captured through assessment? Once the evidence is elicited, the next issue is its judgment. How are the ‘achievement objectives’ and the related levels as depicted in the *Common European Framework of Reference* used to make judgments of student performance? How does the matching of student performance to the ‘achievement objectives’ and levels actually occur? This process is not unproblematic because both elicitation and judgment of performance are acts of interpretation. (See Scarino, 2005a; Davison, 2004; Arcoudis and O’Loughlin, 2004). How do teachers’ personal constructs, which they bring to the assessment process, connect with the constructs as embedded in the curriculum statement? How do they see evidence? How do they connect it with other knowledge they have? Why do they interpret it the way they do? How do they justify or warrant their judgments? Is this warranting or validation process undertaken at a local or at a system level? Nicholas (2000:85) describes the way in which students’ performance and achievement is mediated by the instruments used to describe it. At issue, he suggests, is the notion that “the instruments used create the ‘reality’ rather than describe the reality”. The statement of outcomes or ‘achievement objectives’ in the curriculum statement are one such instrument. Others include the elicitation procedures themselves and criteria for judging performance. As such, the curriculum statement itself is never neutral; in some ways as a resource and depending on its status, it creates or constructs the performance and the achievements of students.

It is important in the curriculum revitalisation process to:

- recognise that while the essence statement cannot describe in detail the complex connection between teaching and learning, it will inevitably reflect a conceptualisation of this connection, and that this conceptualisation should be made explicit;
- recognise that the conceptual issues pertaining to describing the essence of language learning also pertain to describing progressive ‘achievement objectives’
- recognise the need to articulate the basis for conceptualising the nature of achievement, levels of achievement and progress;
- recognise that descriptions of sets of achievement objectives at progressive levels can be no more than broad generalisations (1) of the uniqueness of the performance of individuals, (2) of the contextualised (task-related) nature of performance and (3) of the specificity of languages;
- determine the architecture for describing the ‘achievement objectives’ in a way that reflects the integrative nature of performance;
- make explicit the parameters of change over time;
- recognise that the intended use and status of the achievement objectives will influence their development;
- recognise that actual achievement may be constructed or mediated by the instruments used to describe it and that the curriculum statement itself is one such instrument.

Connecting within and across the curriculum

As indicated above, a knowledge of and engagement with the systems of language and culture are essential to being able to communicate successfully, and provide the basis for the ways in which users of a language establish shared meanings and communicate their knowledge, experience and ways of seeing and understanding the world.

Since language is a medium for learning, in learning additional language students also develop further knowledge, related to the range of learning areas that comprise the school curriculum. The relationship between 'language and content' means that developing knowledge and understanding occurs both through one's first language as well as additional languages. Not to recognise that concepts can be learned and further elaborated through additional languages would mean that students would come to see the additional language that they are learning as simply a new code, through which everything is simply re-labelled!

The possible connections with learning areas across the curriculum are limitless and can be achieved in many ways. One example is through discussion of concepts such as 'aesthetics' in art as well as in and through Japanese or 'form' in mathematics, as well as in French, or 'ecology' in biology as well as in the process of language learning in general. Connecting learning across the curriculum can be seen as generally entailing a shift from the descriptive (i.e. a description of phenomena) to the conceptual (i.e. a broader understanding of the concepts to which the phenomenon belongs) e.g. from a description of foods for special occasions to a discussion of the concept of the annual cycle of celebration through the seasons.

Important connections can be made across the curriculum and its learning areas through the current, pervasive curriculum construct of learner 'capabilities'¹ (or 'key competencies' as they are called in the New Zealand Curriculum/Marautanga Project). These are understood as generic learning in the sense of being developed through the curriculum as a whole. In much of the curriculum development throughout the 1990's, consideration has been given to developing capabilities, which have variously been named (depending on differences in orientation, purpose and focus) as 'essential learnings', 'graduate qualities', 'employability skills', among others. The power of the construct of whole-of-curriculum capabilities resides in the fact, that while different learning areas contribute to learners' knowing and understanding in distinctive ways, the learner is a whole person who, through the learning process, seeks to develop an increasingly deep understanding of himself/herself and the world. The capabilities can be seen to contribute to this holistic view of ever-evolving understanding.

Key issues in relation to their formulation include their conceptualisation and their representation through the curriculum. While these capabilities are conceptualised as holistic, when they are elaborated in curriculum development they are often presented as inventories of separate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. As such, they are then seen as separate integrated set, all of which are drawn together in the accomplishment of actions or tasks. In manifesting the relationship between the capabilities and learning in particular learning areas, the capabilities are often presented in brackets alongside particular aspects of the scope or outcomes of learning, in a 'salt and pepper' effect, a process that runs counter to connections

¹ In Australia the term 'key competences' carries particular connotations; I prefer the term 'capabilities' since it is a term that implies potentiality.

both in the constellation of the capabilities themselves, and in their relationship with knowing within and across learning areas.

The Brewerton (2004a; 2004b) conceptualisation of ‘key competencies’ for the New Zealand Curriculum appears fruitful in seeking to render the holistic nature of the learner and learning. In this conceptualisation, key competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum Framework include: identity (ies)/well-being/belonging; relating to others; thinking; making meaning (multiliteracies); managing self. These connect well with learning languages. It is potentially of value to elaborate the way in which they might be incorporated in learning languages through statements such as the following:

Learning languages can be seen as an intra-and-inter-personal process that leads to an understanding of the variable ways language and culture affect how people see the world, how people communicate about the world and how they reflect upon the ways of seeing and communicating (identity/well-being/belonging; relating to others; making meaning). Learning is understood as a social and cognitive (thinking) process that involves ongoing reflection, and through these processes students come to understand their own identity and sense of belonging (identity/belonging; managing self). The intra-personal dimension of learning a language relates to ‘managing self’, the inter-personal dimension relates to ‘relating to others’ in our local, global and virtual worlds. The central purpose of communicating is to make meaning, and the connection between languages and literacy development is well documented (see McKay 2000a; 2000b), particularly when the concept of multiliteracies includes literacies developed across the range of languages that form students’ communicative and literacy repertoires.

The dimension of values is one which is least represented in curriculum statements for the languages area. This dimension could be seen to include values (understood as those ideas, beliefs, feelings cherished by the community of the particular learning area), ethical concerns (understood as the potential for both positive and negative use of knowing in the particular learning area), and dispositions (understood as those attitudes and tendencies to think and act in positive ways). In relation to learning in the Languages area, these could be expressed as follows: Learning and using language involves:

- valuing meaning, clarity, choice, articulateness, creativity, appropriateness, accuracy, freedom of expression;
- the ethical concerns of gaining respect for the power of language, its responsible use, and its role in the resolution of tension;
- becoming disposed to seek the best expression or articulation of thought and feeling, to engage in the genuine exchange of meaning, and to continue to expand one’s own personal capability for using languages.

It is important in the curriculum revitalisation process to:

- consider ‘key competencies’ or capabilities as holistic complexes of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that have the potential to alter the processes of teaching, learning and assessment and particularly how the essence of learning areas and outcomes are formulated;
- consider specifically the way the ‘key competencies’ of the proposed *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* are manifested and developed in learning languages;

- consider specifically the way the ‘key competencies’ are represented in the essence statement and the ‘achievement objectives’ for the languages area.

Connecting curriculum framework development and use

The discussion so far has focused predominantly on conceptualising and developing a curriculum statement for learning languages. A persistent theme has been the complexity of the conceptual issues that need to be considered. Some of the issues are such that it may seem that less than feasible to develop such curriculum statements. Notwithstanding the complexities, there are several reasons why development remains worthwhile, but this is with some important caveats. Firstly, it is important for both developers and users of the curriculum statements to remain mindful of the complex thinking that underlies any formulation, and not seek to eliminate this complexity, for there is much value in seeking to ‘think through’ the issues raised in developing such statements. They are issues that are central to curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment as key educational processes. It is important to recognise that the development of any curriculum statement will be necessarily reductionist in the sense that no modelling of language-and-culture-knowing-using-and-learning can capture the complexity of the act of communicating, continuing to learn to communicate and becoming a better and better intercultural communicator, using at least two languages. Any modelling will be no more than a representation that seeks to depict ‘reality’ in order to represent crucial features of a complex situation, and should not be expected to be a true reflection of that ‘reality’. Both developers and teachers need to recognise critically the power and limitations of any formulation, and both need to continue to reflect critically on the major conceptual issues of their field.

Secondly, a curriculum resource is only of value if it is used by people. This is both critical and complicated. As indicated above in relation to assessing learning and equally for all aspects of the education process, teachers and other users bring to their reading and understanding of the curriculum statement, their own conceptualisations of language, culture, communication, learning, teaching, and assessment, as well as the intended ‘outcomes’ and ‘levels’ of learning; they bring their own personal theories, expectations and experiences be they expert or novice, comprehensive or partial, complex or simplistic. Their readings offer both possibilities and potential limits (Scarino, 2005a; 2005b). As Bourdieu (1984) has stated in relation to the judgment of taste:

One can say that the capacity to see (voir) is a function of the knowledge (savoir), or concepts, that is, the words, that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception. A work... has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded (p.2)

Thus, users of the curriculum statement will bring their own interpretation and meanings and this needs to be taken into account when the curriculum statement is put forward for use. The notion of multiple interpretations and meanings raises the question of whose conceptualisations of the essence of language-and-culture-knowing-using-and-learning prevail. Similarly, whose conceptualisations of teaching-learning-and-assessing and whose conceptualisations of outcomes and levels prevail in actual use in classrooms?

Nicholas (2000:80) elaborates on this issue of multiple interpretations in his discussion of what marks progress for learners. He highlights the assumptions often made in the development and use of statements of outcomes. For example, it is assumed:

.... that teachers are independent observers of their learners, able to free themselves from the influence of their own training and their own educational purposes. It also assumes that learners are somehow acting independently of the education that they have received such that their performance reflects the best of what a person of their experience could do, rather than an approximation of what has been offered to them. The problematic nature of this is that learners usually attempt to achieve the goals that have been set for them rather than go beyond or around those goals. A further problematic feature is that what teachers perceive is shaped by their own experiences and assumptions. Consequently, the way in which the learner can progress is also shaped by the teacher's approaches to them; that is, how they are taught. In other words, teachers are not 'neutral' observers and, particularly in contexts of curriculum change, may not be uniformly well-placed to articulate insights into the learning process that will incorporate new dimensions. Equally, learners are not 'neutral' producers; they draw on and, in many ways, give back that which they have received from their teachers.

The issues raised here relate to the constructed nature of performance and how that might impact on readings. Connecting framework development and use, then, involves recognising the complex nature of interpretation in both reading and enacting any curriculum statement. In this context it is worth noting that few systematic studies have been undertaken in relation to the important area of how teachers use these kind of curriculum frameworks (see Bree et al 1997, for one such study; see also Brindley 2001)

Despite the conceptual complexity, curriculum statements offer a basis, a resource, a catalyst, and a common language for curriculum discussion among contributors to the educative process: students, parents, teachers, administrators, professional associations, tertiary institutions.

It is important in the curriculum revitalisation process to:

- recognise the complexity involved in the interplay of representation and practice;
- recognise that any published statement must remain open to modification in the light of evolving theoretical developments, experience in the use of such resources, and changing contextual requirements;
- recognise that change based on such curriculum statements, will require sustained effort over time;
- recognise that the implementation process should be systematically documented and analysed through research.

Connecting teachers in professional learning and research in languages-and-cultures education

The status of the curriculum statement: *Learning Languages in the New Zealand Curriculum* will shape in some ways the kinds of opportunities users of the statement will have to connect in professional learning. Regardless of the status, accorded to the curriculum statement, however, a program of professional learning opportunities will need to be provided for the range of users. The professional learning opportunities should model the kind of teaching and

learning advocated in the curriculum statement itself. The focus of these opportunities should extend beyond information-giving about the statement (i.e. descriptions) to discussions of the deep conceptual issues at play (i.e. conceptions) and how different users, and particularly teachers, act upon the statement in their diverse work contexts (see Woods, 1996) The professional learning discussions should be recorded as a basis for connecting discussion among contributors, so that teachers look critically at their own culture of teaching and learning, as well as the cultures created by others working in diverse contexts.

The most sustained form of professional learning is that which occurs through inquiry or research-based approaches, whereby teachers and other users engage in on-going classroom-based investigation of, and reflection on, aspects of their teaching, learning and assessment, using the curriculum statement. These approaches are particularly effective when teachers and researchers connect through approaches such as participatory action research, focused on specific improvements (see Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000).

It is important in the curriculum revitalisation process to:

- clarify the status of the curriculum framework
- provide sustained professional development for users of the curriculum framework
- recognise participatory action research as a most valuable form of professional learning.

Conclusion

The development of the curriculum statement: *Learning Languages in the New Zealand Curriculum* offers the possibility to developers and teachers to consider fundamental concepts in languages education including: language, culture, communication, learning, teaching, assessment, development and progress, and their interrelationship. Deep consideration of these concepts, while demanding, is valuable for both developers and teachers, and other users of the curriculum framework. The concepts require continuous consideration in the light of evolving theoretical and experiential work. It is for this reason that the curriculum framework should remain open to the range of readings brought to bear by diverse users. The diversity of readings will yield conversations that lead to deeper questioning and discussion and reconceptualisations that can provide richer bases for teaching, learning and assessment. What is important perhaps, is less the curriculum framework itself than an invitation to the process of ‘frameworking’, that is, inviting teachers in particular to take a ‘balcony view’ of their work. This means taking an holistic view of the languages curriculum and the curriculum as a whole as enacted in their context. In this view connections are made across different dimensions of the curriculum, through the fundamental concepts of the learning area. It also meant taking a longitudinal view of teaching, learning and assessment where connections in learning over term are made and development trajectories are emphasized. In such a context, beyond being regulatory tools, resources such as curriculum frameworks beyond being a regulatory tool, are themselves seen as generative of deep educational development, exchange, and reflection within a culture of ongoing learning for all involved.

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