

Chapter 2

Studies on the Intercultural Dimension Across the Globe



2.1 Introduction

In Chap. 1, we introduced the study that is the focus of this book alongside the New Zealand language teaching and learning context in which the study is situated. In this chapter, we present arguments from the international literature on the intercultural dimension, starting with an attempt to synthesise key debates around defining this crucial dimension. In the first part of this chapter, we locate the concept of interculturality in education, in particular in curricular reforms in different jurisdictions and in the teaching/learning of additional languages (L2s). In the second part, we present a range of empirical studies that have investigated the intercultural dimension as it relates to pedagogy, teachers and learners, with a particular focus on younger (school-aged) language learners.

2.2 The Intercultural Dimension

Interest in understanding the skills required to engage with cultures and learning about cultures is not new, and certainly not exclusive to language education. Several academic fields have contributed to the knowledge base regarding what today is known as “interculturality.” Contributions from anthropology, communication studies, education, linguistics and psychology, to name a few, have resulted in a rich and complex interdisciplinary field with numerous definitions, theorisations and applications. Authors like Holmes and MacDonald (2020) consider that the concept of interculturality is present in all aspects of contemporary life and characterise the development of interculturality “through the different forms of ethical practice which we carry out, moment by moment, in the unfolding of our daily lives” (p. 1).

Although scholars agree that culture shapes how individuals communicate, behave and interact with others, defining precisely what *culture* is has been less straightforward. As Byram (2021) put it, “[d]efinitions of ‘culture’ are many” (p. 50), and it is important to be mindful of the risks of presenting a given culture “as if it were unchanging over time or as if there were only one set of beliefs, meanings and behaviours in any given country” (p. 51). Broadly speaking, the conceptualisation has changed from viewing culture as a relatively static entity made up of “facts” to be learned, to seeing culture as dynamic and constantly changing through interaction and communication. According to Paige et al. (2000), a change in perspective from static to dynamic has been characterised by “conceptual shifts from culture-specific to culture-general models of intercultural competence, cultural stereotypes to cultural generalizations, cultural absolutes to cultural variations (within and across cultures), and culture as distinct from language to culture as integral to language” (p. 5).

The interest in researching the intercultural dimension of human interaction can be traced to the 1950s, with documentation of cross-cultural communication problems encountered by Westerners working overseas followed by three decades of expanded interest in contexts as varied as study abroad or immigrant acculturation (Sinicrope et al., 2007). However, just as there are many meanings to the word “culture,” determining exactly what the intercultural dimension is and entails is also complex. Indeed, we pointed out two problems in the opening chapter. First, a range of labels is used in the literature with regard to the intercultural dimension. These include: intercultural *competence*; intercultural *communication*; intercultural *awareness*; intercultural *understanding*; and intercultural *capability* (the label we have chosen for this book). Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) offered a comprehensive list of 19 terms that they noted were often used interchangeably. Intercultural competence (IC) has emerged as a predominant label. However, this label has been used and variously defined by different scholars over the last 30 years, and no single definition has been agreed upon (Deardorff, 2006), making the construct itself messy and difficult to pin down (Dervin et al., 2020).

2.3 Intercultural Competence

Sercu et al. (2005) provided a multi-faceted description of what intercultural competence might entail:

the willingness to engage with foreign culture, self-awareness and the ability to look upon oneself from the outside, the ability to see the world through the others’ eyes, the ability to cope with uncertainty, the ability to act as a cultural mediator, the ability to evaluate others’ point of view, the ability to consciously use culture learning skills and to read the cultural context, and the understanding that individuals cannot be reduced to their collective identities. (p. 2)

Taking the above description as a starting point, it can be argued that, despite differences that have emerged, all definitions and conceptualisations acknowledge that IC involves the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other

cultures. Such interaction includes both what people do and what people say, and typically encompasses four dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours (Perry & Southwell, 2011). These four dimensions can be seen in many definitions and models of intercultural competence (see reviews by Derwin, 2016; Perry & Southwell, 2011; Sinicrope et al., 2007; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). These models generally agree that intercultural competence refers to “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 7).

In what follows, we briefly describe three models considered influential to current operationalisations of the intercultural dimension in education, each including cognitive, affective and behavioural components operating within an ongoing process of individual and interactional development.

Cited as one of the earlier models of intercultural competence, Bennett’s (1986) *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* was created as a framework to explain the reactions of people to cultural difference. Drawing on concepts from cognitive psychology, the model charts stages of the individual’s evolution from “ethnocentrism” (believing that one’s culture is the best) to “ethnorelativism” (realising that all cultures contain elements that are both “good” and “bad”). According to Bennett (2004), in order to navigate intercultural situations successfully, a person’s worldview must shift from *avoiding* cultural difference to *seeking* (i.e., consciously not avoiding) cultural difference. The model has been used in both academic and business contexts to inform educational programmes to facilitate individuals’ development across stages.

In the context of efforts to develop interculturally competent students at tertiary level who can engage in international education, Deardorff (2006) developed the *Process Model of Intercultural Competence*. Using both a questionnaire completed by administrators of international offices in US universities and a Delphi process (see, e.g., Rowe & Wright, 1999), developing consensus among a panel of intercultural scholars, the resulting framework contains five essential components of intercultural competence: knowledge, attitudes, skills, desired internal outcome and desired external outcome. Deardorff argued that one of the advantages of this model is that it lends itself to the possibility of *assessing* the development of intercultural competence.

Perhaps the most widely known framework used as a standard for intercultural education and development programmes in the European Union is Byram’s (1997) *Intercultural Communicative Competence* (ICC). This model, arguably one that has the most direct relevance to language teaching and learning in a range of contexts, traces its origins to work on communication, and the concept of *communicative competence*, proposed initially by Hymes (1972) and subsequently extended by others (e.g., Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980).

Acknowledging the importance of communicative competence in language education, the ICC model has shown considerable endurance, with its ongoing relevance being recently reaffirmed in a revised edition of the original 1997 work (Byram, 2021). Indeed, in the Foreword to the revision Byram argued that his model has

not been substantially changed, but that, on the contrary, “the central message ... remains” (p. xiii). Byram (1997, 2021) argued that the primary intent of L2 education must be to develop a level of competence whereby individuals of different cultures and experiences can understand and relate to one another—or ICC. He based his framework around three essential characteristics that he argued an intercultural speaker should possess: attitudes, knowledge and skills. Furthermore, Byram framed his perception of what was required for intercultural capability in terms of the development of several *savoirs* (knowledges). These represent different dimensions of knowledge, not only about the general processes involved in societal and individual interaction, but also about social groups and how they might behave both in the target language country and in the learner’s own country (we present the *savoirs* in more detail in Chap. 4 where we discuss their relevance for the project we undertook).

Diversity with representing what IC might be provides educators with a variety of approaches to understanding and researching the intercultural dimension. Additionally, a consistent element of the intercultural across different conceptualisations is the development of the kind of capability that compares, contrasts and evaluates across cultures. For example, underpinning and informing the development of the *savoirs* is the suggestion that, to attain the goal of becoming *intercultural* speakers, students of an L2 need to abandon their typical role of “tourist” (with the implication of being an outsider and temporary visitor). Instead, they will assume the more active role of “sojourner”—someone who goes beyond “visiting” a target culture to experiencing several aspects of it, exhibiting willingness to engage in new encounters and suspend judgement of others, with openness to question the values and practices of their own culture (Byram, 1997; Sercu, 2010).

2.4 Critiquing the Models of Intercultural Competence

The above three models of intercultural competence—Bennett (1986), Deardorff (2006), and Byram (1997, 2021)—have not been without comment or criticism. Piątkowska (2015), for example, provided an important caution with regard to the notion of comparison and contrast across cultures. She argued that a contrastive approach to cultural knowledge whereby learners are encouraged to “look for connections and find a bridging gap” between their own culture and the target culture can lead to the danger of creating “a very monolithic and static picture of cultures” (p. 400) which does not sufficiently take into account heterogeneous societies, minority groups and other non-mainstream members of a given society.

While the encouragement of comparison may be to develop in learners “the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, that is, between our own and another culture” (Piątkowska, 2015, p. 400), this, Piątkowska warned, may well lead to stereotypical conclusions and does not help to foster attitudes of respect towards difference and variations within cultures. As Byram (2021) put it, it is important to “be aware of the dangers of presenting ‘a culture’ as if it were unchanging over time or as if there were only one set of beliefs, meanings and behaviours in any given country.” Rather,

“it is *individuals* who meet and not *cultures*” (p. 51, our emphases). Individuals are unique and bring their own unique understandings to different interactions.

Dervin (2016) has also criticised the three models because of what he perceived as their emphasis on the individual and that individual’s positioning, disregarding the relationships in which these individuals are involved or the interactions in which they engage. He went on to warn that models of intercultural competence that are focused on the blurring of difference may run the risk of dissolving the shared values, beliefs and behaviours of specific cultural groups. In fact, he warned that concepts developed in the contexts of Europe and North America may serve the needs of their more heterogeneous and developed societies, but may be problematic for less heterogeneous, less developed societies. Further criticisms point to the fact that such a wide range of theoretical frameworks and models “complexifies the task of communicating about related ideas in a systematic and consistently interpretable way” (Sinicrope et al., 2007, p. 2).

2.5 Third Place Positioning

Despite critiques, comparison, contrast and evaluation appear to be consistent elements of the intercultural across different conceptualisations. In the process of developing a comparative and reflective intercultural stance, learners need to consider how their capability develops by drawing on their own language and culture as part of the process of coming to understand those from other cultures (Papademetre, 2000). This means that learners need to “decentre” from their own culture and see their own positioning from the perspective of another (Kramersch, 1993). Learning languages has the potential to expose learners to other ways of viewing the world and thereby develop flexibility, independence and separation from a single linguistic and conceptual system (Kramersch, 1993; Liddicoat, 2005).

Underlying the complexity of encounters across cultures is what we introduced in Chap. 1 as the metaphors of “third space” (e.g., Bhabha, 1994) or “third place” (e.g., Lo Bianco et al., 1999). Other labels that have been used include “third culture,” “third stance,” or simply “thirdness” (Kramersch, 2009). Each label seeks to capture the dynamic nature and multi-faceted relationality of communications that are intercultural. As we acknowledged in the opening chapter, MacDonald (2019) labelled developing understandings of the concept as constituting a “discourse of thirdness,” and acknowledged tensions and contradictions in the ways in which the terms are used and interpreted in contemporary studies. He argued nonetheless that “third place” has emerged as a term to represent the space where “the ‘hybrid’ identity of the language learner/intercultural subject” can be worked out in a pedagogical context (p. 106). However labelled, the concept “draws our central focus *beyond* the entities that interlocutors are conceivably ‘locked into’ towards a *new site* opened up *between* interlocutors” (Zhou & Pilcher, 2019, p. 1, our emphases). Kramersch (1993) described these interlocutors as “brokers” who will use language in its double role of medium and shaper of culture (Paige et al., 2000).

Preparing students to be brokers and culture learners requires putting culture at the core of language education. The move to language learning as a social practice of meaning-making and interpretation is a much more expanded view than having a pure language focus, and is claimed to provide a more engaging educational experience for students (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2009). Liddicoat (2011) argued that this expanded view “implies a transformational engagement of the learner in the act of learning.” This kind of learning “involves the student in oppositional practice that seeks to decentre learners from their existing linguistic and cultural positioning and to develop intercultural identity as a result of an engagement with another culture” (p. 838). To become effective intercultural learners, students must develop a variety of learning strategies, ranging from reflective observation to active experimentation, or what Kolb (1984) referred to as an “experiential” learning style.

2.6 Interculturality in Curricula

At a conceptual level, there may be challenges in identifying exactly what the intercultural dimension entails. Nonetheless, this dimension has recently been incorporated into national curricular documents in a range of contexts, highlighting the perceived importance of helping learners to develop “complex abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different” (Fantini, 2006, p. 12). An intercultural approach has gained relevance in different contexts because of its potential to contribute to overarching educational objectives (Chan et al., 2015; Hill & Cowie, 2012), in particular to prepare learners for global citizenship, an aim also considered one of the key competencies of the twenty-first century (Byram, 2018; Noddings, 2005; OECD, 2016).

As Byram et al. (2013) argued, the appearance in curriculum documents of references to *culture*, *intercultural competence*, *intercultural understanding* and other such phrases, suggests that the “theorists” have persuaded curriculum designers that these concepts are significant and worthy of attention through educational initiatives. These efforts have been widely documented in Europe where countries belonging to the European Union have been at the forefront of reforms to educational policies that reflect the changing demographics of their populations, developing an approach to interculturalism that targets education on three fundamental levels: societal, institutional and pedagogical (Neuner, 2012). Addressing the challenges associated with building multicultural societies, the Council of Europe (2003), for example, has recognised education as an invaluable medium through which to develop intercultural capabilities and support the ideal of “learning to live together” (p. 4).

In Australia, the wider national curriculum has recently included *intercultural understanding* as a general capability articulated as: (1) recognising culture and developing respect; (2) interacting and empathising with others; and (3) reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2011).

Within a more broadly articulated intercultural interest that has permeated curriculum documents around the world, language education is arguably in a privileged position to advance the intercultural dimension. For example, in the early 1990s, policymakers in Australia put forward a progressive language and literacy policy (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1991) which motivated a number of initiatives, spearheaded by the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA). These initiatives included the publication of the *Principles for Intercultural Language Learning* (Dellit, 2005) and the *Professional Standards for Accomplished Teaching of Languages and Cultures* (AFMLTA, 2005), which were included in a countrywide professional learning and development programme for L2 teachers. In this context, the growth of an intercultural approach to language teaching and learning has been labelled “the most significant development in Australian language pedagogy in the last 20 years” (Harbon & Moloney, 2013, p. 8).

In the United States, a report demonstrating the influence of language learning on economic growth, cultural diplomacy and productivity has advocated for a twenty-first-century education that fosters *international competencies* and “nurtures deep expertise in world languages and cultures” (American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2017, p. 19). The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) published the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* in 1996 to guide language teaching and learning. These standards were later arranged into five areas that were designed to guide the teaching of a range of L2s: communication, culture, connections, comparisons and communities. A revised version (ACTFL, 2014) included *global competence*, defined as the ability to communicate with respect and cultural understanding in different languages inside and outside the classroom.

A milestone for L2 teaching in the European context was the development of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* or CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), a document adopted throughout Europe and used as a benchmark around the world (including New Zealand, as we note in the next chapter). The CEFR provides guidelines for defining common descriptors for language proficiency levels and language qualifications. Pedagogically relevant points are the recognition that competence is relative and not absolute, and the formulation of *levels of competence* alongside a general orientation of L2 teaching towards output and outcomes (e.g., interaction with others to achieve specific goals) instead of input and content (e.g., reading and processing texts in the target language [TL]), as was previously the case (Hu, 2013). The framework also highlights the importance of developing intercultural awareness and intercultural skills, to enhance intercultural communication and prevent intercultural misunderstandings.

To support the implementation of the CEFR framework in curricula across the European Union, a group of scholars developed a guide (Beacco et al., 2010) using the concept of plurilingualism as a special feature of multicultural and multilingual member states. It was argued that since plurilingualism is linked to the maintenance of democratic values across Europe, it should be paired with interculturalism. From those initial guidelines, Beacco and colleagues developed an intercultural L2 curriculum addressing both macro issues (e.g., syllabus, professional development

standards) and micro issues (e.g., course content, textbooks, resources) to be adapted by the various school systems in Europe. The aim was to provide stakeholders with the necessary resources to implement an approach to the development of intercultural competencies in an effective way, drawing on the theoretical work developed in the Anglophone context by Byram and others (e.g., Byram, 1997). More widely, UNESCO (2013) outlined a vision for the development of intercultural competence within L2 education that insisted that ministries of education, policy makers, teacher education programmes, materials developers and teacher educators, as well as administrators and schools, must all provide classroom practitioners with the knowledge, skills, experiences, resources and support they require. The pivotal role of teachers in the intercultural endeavour was therefore clearly recognised.

In summary, the goal of developing intercultural competence has become significant at both curricular and policy levels, both within and beyond the L2 context. It must be noted, however, that these efforts at the level of vision and even policy have not resulted in the effective implementation initially envisioned (Byram, 2014). This, it seems, is a consequence of the complexity of defining and then operationalising the construct of intercultural competence in the L2 classroom. This complexity in practice is an issue we take up in what follows.

2.6.1 Interculturality in Language Classrooms

Both scholars and policymakers have agreed that developing intercultural competence needs to be addressed explicitly in learning and teaching; more specifically, from this perspective language teaching needs to enable L2 students to develop into multilingually and multiculturally aware world citizens, something that might be labelled a “cultural turn” (Byram et al., 2013). As we discussed in the previous chapter, this growing emphasis can be traced in L2 pedagogy back to the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching in the 1970s, to perceived gaps in what CLT was aiming to achieve, and to the theorisation of intercultural communicative competence or ICC.

Byram’s ICC model (1997, 2021), which we referred to earlier, provides one means of articulating for teachers the skills that might be developed in the L2 teaching and learning context. Taking into account sets of principles for language learning and teaching that have been developed in different contexts, Liddicoat (2011) proposed a complementary means of articulating the intercultural dimension for teachers. He clarified that intercultural language teaching does not constitute a language teaching “method.” Nor is it a set of prescribed pedagogical practices. Rather, it should be viewed as a “stance” which Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) described as “positions teachers and others ... take toward knowledge and its relationship to practice” (p. 289). This means that intercultural language teaching and learning “is best considered as a set of shared assumptions about the nature of language, culture and learning that shapes an overall understanding of what it means to teach language and to do

this in an intercultural way” (Liddicoat, 2011, p. 840). Liddicoat’s review identified a number of themes:

- an active engagement with the culture of the target language community as a form of lived experience;
- positioning the learners as mediators across a multiplicity of cultures;
- an engagement in processes of reflection about language and culture and their relationship as a component of language learning.

In essence, language learning from an intercultural perspective requires “an understanding of culture as facts, artifacts, information and social practices, as well as an understanding of culture as the lens through which people mutually interpret and communicate meaning” (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 46). Byram and Wagner (2018) concluded that if language educators move from teaching “knowledge about” cultures to developing in their students the skills and attitudes to “know how to” develop intercultural competence, students will “value language education as an education for developing their identity rather than as the learning of a code that can only be used in some restricted environments” (p. 147).

In the last decade, Byram has further broadened the treatment of intercultural competence to include, in addition to the competencies of intercultural communication, the competencies of intercultural citizenship (e.g., Byram, 2012). The concept of education for intercultural citizenship brings together L2 education and citizenship education (Byram & Wagner, 2018). This is an attempt to integrate the notion of ICC from L2 education with an emphasis on civic action in the community as addressed in citizenship education (e.g., Porto, 2016). This further illustrates the interest in the intercultural that moves *beyond* language education and the L2 classroom.

2.6.2 Challenges for L2 Teachers

The development of the intercultural dimension in the context of language learning has posed several challenges for many L2 teachers, who must often assume this responsibility without adequate supporting mechanisms. As Peiser (2015) asserted, the re-conceptualisation of language teaching as encompassing *both* linguistic *and* intercultural elements has not been easy to realise in practice. When it comes to the implementation of an intercultural dimension into language pedagogy, Rauschert and Byram (2018) acknowledged the multiple challenges experienced by teachers in the form of expertise, logistics, curriculum design and methodology.

First, a significant problem for the implementation of an intercultural dimension in L2 teaching and learning, which we have noted both in Chap. 1 and earlier in this chapter, is that there is, as yet, no agreement on a definition of what the intercultural dimension is and what it entails. Teachers are therefore being asked to implement a dimension of learning for which there currently exists no definitive or universally accepted characterisation.

Second, Byram's use of the term "interculturally competent" highlights a significant shift in thinking with regard to the goals of L2 learning. Byram differentiates between the cultural competence of the "native" (L1) speaker, who identifies with one language, and the "intercultural" (L2) speaker, who is able to "see the relationships between the learner's and the native-speaker's languages and cultures, to perceive and cope with difference" (Byram & Risager, 1999, p. 2).

The notion of "*the*" native speaker, where the definite article suggests uniformity among users of a language, is now much challenged and discussed (May, 2014), and has given way to the notion of the *interculturally competent* speaker as someone who is able to mediate between several languages and cultures (Byram, 2012). That is, Byram's model of intercultural competence recognises the illusory nature of the Chomskyan concept of the "ideal speaker-listener" (Chomsky, 1965) and challenges the consequent notion that the goal of L2 learning should be to help learners to reach native-speaker-like (or perfect) competence in the L2. It also recognises that perfect or error-free command of the TL is no longer the goal of the communicatively oriented classroom (a positioning that is tangibly realised, for example, in the different levels of competence articulated in the CEFR). In terms of language acquisition, Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) argued that the shift from a monolingual speaker possessing (perfect) communicative competence and a single worldview in their own language to a second language speaker possessing a multicultural worldview with communicative competence in an L2 requires an intercultural pedagogy that develops *both* communicative competence *and* intercultural competence, and that recognises that neither of these competences is absolute, but, rather, relative. This, in turn, requires a significant pedagogical shift in thinking with regard to linguistic accuracy.

Third, if teachers are to be the key brokers between theoretical understandings of interculturality and their application to the L2 within language classrooms (Young & Sachdev, 2011), they have to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes required to accomplish this wider task appropriately (Sercu, 2006). Developing intercultural stances is a process that is both cognitive and affective and it impacts teachers' personal theories of teaching as well as their professional identities (Byram, 2015). A key conceptual barrier is that interculturality, in addition to being theoretically abstract, is usually "presented in universalist terms, i.e. independent of context and age of the learners" (Hu & Byram, 2009, p. xii). What is more, teachers themselves may not have confronted their own conceptualisations and understandings of interculturality and often do not fully understand their role in the development of intercultural stances in their students (Moloney, 2008).

Fourth, the focus on the intercultural in L2 classrooms requires teachers to move from the role of "instructor" to that of "facilitator" who supports learners in developing their own interpretations of language and culture (see, e.g., Moeller & Nugent, 2014; Moloney et al., 2015; Peiser, 2015). This constructivist-informed pedagogical approach places the learner into a central position, and emphasises learners' *active construction* of their own knowledge, in contrast to taking a passive role and developing their knowledge via input from teachers or textbooks. From this standpoint, learners require opportunities to construct their own meanings as they

collaborate with others and “raise their own questions, generate their own hypotheses and models as possibilities and test them for validity” (Fosnet, 1996, p. 29). This approach acknowledges the support and facilitation that teachers need to offer, but emphasises what the learners themselves are required to bring to their own learning.

The shift away from a central (and often teacher-led) focus on *the language* and towards a wider, more learner-centred and reflective stance also demands the development of “interculturally sensitive language teachers” (Siqueira, 2017, p. 398) who are willing to take a step back from their current practices and reflect on what might need to change. In Siqueira’s view, teachers need to be supported to deal with “issues like identity, power, racial conflicts, social change, global mobility, just to cite a few” (p. 400). Siqueira encouraged the development of *critical* intercultural teachers who develop a critical consciousness and “put reflection into action” (p. 402).

The importance of reflection is also highlighted by Jokikokko (2016) who saw reflective teachers as those who evaluate and develop themselves. With regard to intercultural learning, this implies an ability to reflect critically on situations, to consider the context and to accept that IC is continuously developing. Jokikokko identified a need for teachers to learn to “examine their assumptions, values and beliefs towards different learners” (p. 220), and to realise how those influence their practices. Teachers need to question their own beliefs and confront potentially discomforting emotions attached to those beliefs.

Critical reflection and awareness are also emphasised by Díaz (2016) as essential skills needed by teachers so that they become aware of their own assumptions but can also reflect critically and interpret information with which they are presented. According to Díaz, critical awareness can be triggered by moments of “cognitive dissonance” (p. 123), that is, the mental conflict people experience when they are presented with evidence that their beliefs are limited. This can be achieved by being confronted with beliefs that contradict existing beliefs. The mind is then compelled to modify beliefs or develop new understandings. In doing so, we become more consciously aware of our own and others’ beliefs and have the opportunity to transform our perspective, a crucial part in developing intercultural understanding. Thus, Díaz argued that uncritically acquired assumptions are called into critical consciousness and have the potential to transform a person’s perspective.

2.7 Studies into the Intercultural in L2 Teaching

Having highlighted a gap between policies, academic literature and perceived values of intercultural capabilities and their implementation in practice, as well as the range of additional (and often new) responsibilities and expectations of teachers relating to intercultural education, there remains the question of whether and how educators have used approaches to help their L2 learners enhance their intercultural capability. It must be acknowledged that, as interculturality grows in attention from academics and practitioners, empirical studies have investigated—with relative degrees of success—the development of intercultural capabilities in learners of widely different ages and

in vastly different contexts. Our particular focus here is on those studies that relate to learners of an L2 in school contexts. These studies highlight different dimensions of practice and the different complexities of the inclusion of an intercultural dimension in classrooms. We start by reporting promising findings of several studies related to younger L2 learners. We go on to present studies that can be organised into those that (1) illustrate the challenges that teachers of languages face when implementing an intercultural dimension; (2) advocate a collaboration between teachers and teacher educators or researchers; and (3) promote the explicit teaching and scaffolding of intercultural learning to aid critical reflection.

2.7.1 Studies into the Intercultural with Young Learners

In a report on primary-level learners in England, Barton et al. (2009) discussed a six-term language awareness initiative, designed to address a government-initiated new emphasis on L2 teaching in the primary school sector, in which generalist teachers in seven primary schools learned the basics of five languages alongside their Year 5 and 6 (9–11-year-old) students. Several objectives for the “Discovering Language” programme were set, including increasing learners’ motivation to learn languages; highlighting similarities and differences between learners’ L1 and a range of European and non-European languages; and enhancing students’ intercultural awareness and understanding. The researchers used a summative student questionnaire to investigate students’ perspectives on the programme. Additionally, the perceptions of teachers and head teachers, and a subset of students, were collected by interviews.

One of the intercultural aims of the programme was “to make pupils aware of the cultural context of each of the languages they studied.” This included “exploring the various differences and similarities between, for instance, traditions and schooling in their home country and overseas” (Barton et al., 2009, p. 154). The researchers reported “generally positive intercultural awareness” (p. 159) among the students, but also mixed findings in relation to the programmes’ motivational objectives. Barton et al. were also uncertain of the extent to which the students’ more positive attitudes could be attributed to the programme itself or to the students’ overseas travel experiences outside of the teaching and learning context.

In the Australian setting, Morgan (2010) described a lesson with a group of eight primary 6–7-year-old students learning Indonesian. Her focus was on linguistic interactions designed to enhance these young L2 learners’ intercultural understandings regarding ways of talking about self, and about and to others, in both Indonesian and Australian contexts. Interactions were planned so that there could be scaffolded comparative exploration of the language of self and others in Indonesian and English, including how language is situated within social and cultural contexts that influence its use. Differences and similarities across the languages and contexts were highlighted.

Morgan’s study presented “an intercultural orientation to learning Indonesian names and pronouns, where a deliberate emphasis on understanding what pronouns

say about identity and sense of self, for young learners, is foregrounded” (Morgan, 2010, p. 27). Bearing in mind the young age of the learners, the scaffolded explorations took place in English. Morgan reported that, although young, the students “were able to compare languages and cultures and reflect on their language use and enculturation, in rudimentary but significant ways” (p. 33).

Wagner et al. (2017) presented a series of “participatory action research” studies across a broad age range in several different contexts, with a view to presenting “the perspectives of experienced language teachers who have successfully integrated intercultural projects ... incorporating a contemporary intercultural stance within the language curriculum” (p. x).

The Wagner et al. collection included accounts from four American primary/middle school classrooms for L2 learners where Byram’s (1997) intercultural model was a criterion for teachers and their research partners as they integrated intercultural activities into their Spanish lessons. Positive intercultural outcomes perceived by the teacher-researcher partners included 6th grade (11–12-year-old) students’ “growing ability to critically consider their preconceived notions” (Roher & Kagan, 2017, p. 74), and 8th grade (13–14-year-old) students moving from a focus on their own perspectives to “a point of view which also included questions and different perspectives” (Despoteris & Ananda, 2017, p. 89).

Each of the above studies reported some success with regard to the inclusion of an intercultural dimension. Wagner et al. (2017) cautioned, however, that, although most teachers believe that culture should be “an integral component” of the L2 classroom, teachers generally “lack the skills to accomplish this task [of integration] effectively.” This, they suggested, indicated that “additional guidance in the area of intercultural communicative competence may empower teachers to confidently design lessons in intercultural competence (IC)” (p. x). In what follows, we consider studies that have highlighted specific challenges and issues.

2.7.2 Embedding Intercultural Explorations in School Contexts

In this section, we present several studies that illustrate challenges faced by teachers who have attempted to embed intercultural exploration into L2 classrooms. Acknowledging that *intercultural understanding* had been incorporated as one of seven General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum (see earlier in this chapter), Díaz (2013) reported findings from a teacher professional development programme “based on focusing on a topic/linguistic aspect to be explored, [and] integrating activities aimed at fostering intercultural understanding” (p. 14). Data from interviews and observations prior to the intervention had revealed several constraints. Teachers perceived that they lacked both time and resources to integrate an intercultural dimension into their L2 teaching, struggled with how to assess their students’ gains in intercultural understanding, and could not see how an intercultural emphasis could

be sustained. Attempts were made to address these challenges in the programme, which included workshops and classroom-based action research projects. Díaz' findings suggested nonetheless that, despite proactive intervention, teachers continued to struggle as they attempted to translate theoretical conceptualisations into classroom practice. Díaz concluded that teachers needed to rethink the underpinning assumptions about what L2 teaching is and entails, noting that this level of critical reflection on current assumptions, beliefs and practices "lies at the core of developing, and modelling, the underpinnings of intercultural understanding" (p. 19).

Sercu (2005) investigated the extent to which Flemish secondary school-level teachers were aware of the intercultural dimension in language teaching and whether they incorporated an intercultural stance in their teaching. Her participants were teachers of English, French and German. It was found that most teachers were aware of and wanted to promote intercultural learning, but that they were unsure how to include intercultural competencies due to practical circumstances, teaching materials or their own lack of preparation.

Similarly, Castro et al. (2004) investigated language and intercultural practices and beliefs among 35 secondary teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Spain. They found that most teachers perceived the learning of the language as more important than reaching cultural objectives. As a consequence, the teachers devoted around 80% of their time to language instruction. Despite a desire to include more culture in their teaching, teachers felt that curriculum requirements and time constraints made this endeavour almost impossible.

A longitudinal study involving 40 primary schools in England indicated a mismatch between the clearly articulated importance of the intercultural dimension in policy documents and statements by teachers, and teachers' actual practices (Driscoll et al., 2013). Although many schools included experiential opportunities for students to connect with other cultures by, for example, organising whole-school intercultural events or establishing international partnerships, the study found that children did not as a consequence demonstrate a greater understanding of their own lives or cultural identity and did not show heightened global awareness. The authors' explanation was that, although the activities were potentially enriching in themselves, they were not connected to each other. They concluded that cultural development needed to be included systematically and required collaborative planning and an overarching cultural framework, with links between all curricular subjects.

The study by Driscoll et al. (2013) also concluded that *incidental* teaching of intercultural aspects was insufficient to create intercultural understanding and that *explicit* teaching and reflection were necessary. Naidu (2020) came to a similar conclusion. She interviewed Indonesian language teachers at both primary and secondary levels in Australia, with the aim of establishing the teachers' understanding of "culture" and concepts of interculturality. Teachers in her study found the idea of intercultural teaching appealing, but were aware of their own limitations with regard to knowledge and understanding of Indonesian culture and queried whether they had the tools to foster intercultural learning. Naidu also encountered confusion about what culture actually was and acknowledged that teachers' uncertainties surrounding the cultural dimension in L2 teaching and how to address it could leave teachers reluctant to

address the complexity of culture, avoiding it altogether and instead focusing on more straightforward linguistic aspects.

Walton et al. (2013) systematically reviewed the literature focusing on school-based approaches to developing students' intercultural understanding. Some of their key findings were that only building cultural knowledge and awareness was not enough to promote long-term changes in attitudes and that a critical approach towards cultural diversity was needed by teachers and students to develop appropriate understanding. Furthermore, the reviewed studies suggested the importance of ongoing intercultural contact. The studies also called consistently for investment in supporting the development of teachers' professional and personal intercultural capabilities, as the onus was often on the teachers to implement strategies to support intercultural understanding, with minimal support.

The research studies reviewed by Walton et al. (2013) suggested that teachers needed support to feel more confident before having complex cultural discussions and having to respond to questions or controversial cultural aspects. This notion was supported by Brunsmeier's (2017) study of 19 primary school teachers' intercultural practices in Germany. The teachers stated a need for a framework to deal with learners' cultural and intercultural questions and to help them to "trigger" age-appropriate reflection on students' own culture(s). Similarly, Toner (2010) found that primary school teachers in Australia were reluctant to discuss issues they considered too complex or controversial, even when students initiated such discussions. This is echoed in Naidu's (2020) study, where it was found that teachers avoided teaching cultural aspects when they were uncertain how to approach a topic.

Walton et al.'s (2013) review of studies highlighted that there was no or only minimal long-term effect in programmes designed to foster intercultural understanding unless a systematic and school-wide approach was implemented. This is supported by Driscoll et al. (2013) who called for a systematic implementation of intercultural learning and an overarching framework for it. Along the same lines, Ohi et al. (2019) supported the call to embed intercultural learning into broader school contexts and practices, reflected in actions and interactions across school leaders and students.

The above studies highlight how implementing an intercultural dimension in school classrooms faces a number of challenges, mostly relating to the expectations placed on the teachers of languages. A possible way forward seems to be embedding intercultural education at school- and system-levels with a concerted and coherent approach to supporting the schools in doing this.

2.7.3 Collaborations Between Teachers and Teacher Educators/Researchers

Several studies in addition to Díaz (2013) highlight collaborations to support intercultural learning, and note particular benefits. Kohler's (2015) study with three teachers of Indonesian in Australian secondary schools was framed as a collective case study involving participant action research. In the longitudinal study which took place across one school year, Kohler supported the teachers' intercultural learning through processes of collaborative planning, providing input and resources, feedback on classroom observations, and probing and questioning of what was observed. Her input was often in the form of suggestions or clarifications rather than as directives. One key component for Kohler was the exploration of how authentic L2 texts could be used as means to explore the inter-relationship between language and culture. The teachers used this emphasis in their practice. However, each mediated an intercultural perspective in their own way, depending on their individual understanding and beliefs.

Müller-Hartmann and Schocker (2018) integrated task-based language teaching (TBLT) and intercultural language teaching in a three-year action research project with secondary school-level EFL teachers in Germany. Specifically, and as we noted in Chap. 1, TBLT is a constructivist-informed learner-centred and experiential approach to L2 pedagogy. In TBLT, the role of the teacher shifts from instructor to facilitator, and language learners have a crucial level of responsibility to process language in use and work out how it functions through engagement in communicative tasks. As such, there is arguably a synergy between the theoretical impetus for task use and intercultural exploration (an issue we take up again in Chap. 8).

The project instigated by Müller-Hartmann and Schocker (2018) was designed as professional learning and development for 20 in-service secondary teachers and was based on a collaboration between teachers, researchers and teacher educators. The project had several components. Initially, the researchers presented Byram's ICC model alongside proposals for TBLT and teachers shared the kinds of language use tasks they typically used in their classrooms. In a collaborative workshop, teachers and researchers jointly reflected on these tasks and discussed how ICC might be incorporated, brainstorming different options, designing tasks, and considering how they might be trialled. Teachers then went on to trial the designed tasks in their own classrooms before the next collaborative workshop session in which all participants reflected again on the effectiveness of the tasks. Over time, the teachers set up cycles of regular collaboration, including a cyclical approach to planning and teaching, and pooling of ideas. The authors report that, as a result of the longitudinal teacher-educator-researcher collaboration, the teachers designed tasks from their learners' perspectives, involved learners in task creation, tapped into the students' own experiences, and thus turned theoretical concepts into do-able experiences for their learners. However, the authors highlighted the need for ongoing support from peers, teacher educators and researchers.

2.7.4 Promoting Explicit Teaching and Scaffolding for Intercultural Learning

In this section, we review studies where teachers embarked on carefully scaffolded intercultural learning experiences in online and face-to-face settings.

An online school exchange between school classes in England and Germany was the focus of Peiser's (2015) study. The project aimed to develop intercultural understanding through online communication over a period of four months. The activities involved asynchronous communication, text and videos, which were uploaded to websites, and posts on discussion boards. Topics involved interests, hobbies, holiday activities and school, and students asked and answered each other's questions in small-group settings to encourage discussion around observed similarities and differences.

Peiser's (2015) study raises important questions around the role of the teacher in the constructivist-informed classroom. Although it might be assumed that the teacher's role is less directive and more facilitative in telecollaborative projects between students, an increasing body of research has revealed that pedagogical involvement (i.e., teacher direction) becomes important for intercultural learning. Teachers, according to Peiser's study, needed to guide students on how to become aware of and describe their own cultures, and on how to locate and interpret information provided by the project partners in a wider cultural context. Peiser concluded that without this explicit scaffolding provided by the teacher, students' lack of intercultural understanding could easily lead to cultural misunderstandings.

Using a similar approach to Peiser (2015), Yates and Fellinger (2016) designed an 11-week telecollaboration between two groups of school learners of German, one group in New Zealand and one in the United States. The activities set up for the German language learners in both settings explicitly focused on intercultural learning, including aspects of German, US and New Zealand cultures, and included online collaboration between students communicating in German. The activities were carefully scaffolded and focused on explicit reflections on students' own and other cultures. It was found that the project was a positive experience for the students, allowing them to be creative, communicating with students from other countries, and becoming more aware of similarities and differences between cultures.

In her classroom-based research, Jäger (2011) used literary texts and drama-oriented activities in a German secondary school setting to explicitly support the development of the intercultural understanding of her EFL students. Her study showed that neither a seemingly appropriate text, for example a story of migration, nor a drama activity focusing on improvisation or role-play, automatically guaranteed or even fostered intercultural learning. While literary texts and accompanying drama activities were promising starting points, the teacher's skill was a crucial factor in challenging stereotypes, supporting in-depth reflection and creating an awareness in students that communication was culture-bound and had a performative dimension. The study concluded that students were able to portray people from different cultural backgrounds in drama activities, transferring their intercultural learning to

adequate body language, gestures or facial expressions, but only once they were provided with scaffolded and explicit support relating to socio-cultural background knowledge, body language and enhancing communicative effectiveness.

In a study looking at school-wide implementation of intercultural understanding in Australian schools, Ohi et al. (2019) combined explicit teaching alongside collaboration. Their two-year project included professional learning modules and workshops on intercultural learning and pedagogies for teachers, and schools collaborated in clusters to design specific learning programmes for their schools. The study established that the explicit teaching of intercultural aspects in a language classroom was not sufficient on its own to have a long-term effect and that intercultural learning showed better results through school-wide implementation. Findings, presented as case studies, revealed the effectiveness of school-wide approaches for intercultural capabilities: school leaders developed multi-faceted approaches aimed to impact the whole school, starting with a shared understanding of intercultural learning for the entire school staff. Once core beliefs were established, they were then shared with students, parents and the wider school community. Curriculum leaders worked with the leadership team and teachers to ensure that intercultural capabilities were embedded in the school curriculum across disciplines, and teachers from all year levels collaborated to develop a strategic approach to develop students' and teachers' intercultural capabilities.

2.8 Conclusion

A recurring theme of the international literature, and in particular of prior school-level studies, is just how difficult it appears to be to integrate an intercultural dimension into L2 programmes. Despite some promising results in a handful of studies, a recent volume that has surveyed the field (López-Jiménez & Sánchez-Torres, 2021) confirms this persistent problem. In the European context, Brunsmeier (2017) spoke of the development of L2 learners' intercultural competence as “a big challenge,” due to “vague theoretical conceptions” of a construct that “has not yet been clearly defined for young learners” (p. 152). In the Australian context, Kohler (2015) recognised the immense struggle that teachers encountered as they sought to integrate culture into L2 classrooms and Díaz (2013) highlighted the huge gap that exists between theory and practice. As a result, putting an intercultural orientation into practice in many L2 classrooms was, in Díaz (2013) perception, “still at a rudimentary stage,” and happening at a pace that she described as “almost glacial” (p. 19).

Díaz (2013) reached the conclusion that putting the intercultural dimension into active practice required L2 teachers to deliberately change their own classroom practices, but that this possibility “remains to be explored beyond the level of passive recognition” (p. 13). This exploration is something that the study that is the focus of this book attempted to address. Before going on to present our study, we turn in the next chapter to research in the immediate context of the study—New Zealand.

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