

Chapter 28

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the Intercultural Development Index, and Intercultural Communication Competence

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ABSTRACT

Given the inherent pluralism of Canadian society, the emphasis on intercultural communication competence (ICC) is a logical extension of second language education in the 21st century. This chapter explores the import of implementing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Teacher Education. To support the development of ICC, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a validated tool, was used to assess the intercultural communication competence of second language preservice teachers in Canada. The purpose of this discussion is to examine if teaching and learning about the CEFR in a Curriculum and Instruction course in the area of French as a second language can provide the necessary parameters to promote intercultural communication competence (ICC) of preservice language teachers. In order to assess ICC of preservice teachers, the Intercultural Development Index was administered during the Fall semester of a one year, Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Education Certification Program.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the import of implementing the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) in a Curriculum and Instruction course to develop the intercultural communication competence (ICC) of second language preservice teachers in Canada. Grounded in the theory

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9279-2.ch028

of language competence and empirically validated, the CEFR provides a common basis for teaching, learning and assessing a second language by providing comprehensive parameters relating to language usage, knowledge and skills within a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts (Vandergrift, 2006). In a departure from other language frameworks (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Language Proficiency Guidelines, New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Scale, and Canadian Language Benchmarks), the CEFR recognizes the language learner's progression from a monocultural, unilingual speaker to a plurilingual, intercultural interlocutor.

In an increasingly globalised and diversified world, pluriculturalism, plurilingualism and intercultural communication competence are central to a successful educational experience. Massive global shifts in modern society have contributed to challenges in dealing with the increasing diversity of students in higher education. Awareness of cultural differences and the ability to respond to them appropriately is crucial for the effective practice of education (Ball, 2009; Ball & Tyson, 2011; Hammer & Bennett, 1998; Parhar & Sensoy, 2011; Sleeter & Milner, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

This recognition of harmonizing linguistic and intercultural knowledge in second language teaching is important when one takes into consideration Grant and Gibson's (2011) demographic imperative in the North American context: the growing cultural diversity in K-12 classrooms and the overwhelming majority of student teacher candidates who are white, middle class females.

As Sleeter and Owuor (2011) state:

[a] majority of teacher education candidates in the United States come from White, female, heterosexual, middle-class backgrounds, which are increasingly at odds with the backgrounds of students. Although all prospective teachers need preparation to teach diverse students well, the discrepancy between the backgrounds of the majority of pre-service teachers and realities of public schools creates challenges to teacher education programs. (p. 534)

Canada is facing a similar demographic imperative propelled by an immigrant surge from a large group of non-European citizens (Egbo, 2005, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2007, 2011). In 2006, 16.2% of Canadians were visible minorities with only 6.9% of visible minorities in the realm of teaching (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009). This transformative racial and ethnic demographic process has fuelled debates pertaining to race, culture and education culminating in important implications for defining identity and culture in second language education. For example, in British Columbia (BC), a Western Canadian province, a lack of qualified French immersion teachers is impeding program development and the delivery of French language content (Canadian Parents for French, 2013). An increasing number of French immersion teachers are second language learners who have mastered the linguistic code of the target language. However, despite their linguistic proficiency, language teachers are often inadequately prepared to disseminate critical knowledge relating to the cultural reference points of the target language. Bennett (1997) identifies these types of second language learners as fluent fools. Admittedly, this is a harsh assignation, but it does address the issue of how the traditional grammar-translation teaching of codified language discards seminal contextual and cultural references which reinforce language acquisition (Vandergrift, 2006; Williams & Burden, 2002).

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