

Organising elements

The Intercultural understanding learning continuum is organised into three interrelated organising elements:

- Recognising culture and developing respect
- Interacting and empathising with others
- Reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility

The diagram below sets out these elements.



Organising elements for Intercultural understanding

Recognising culture and developing respect

This element involves students in identifying, observing, describing and analysing increasingly sophisticated characteristics of their own cultural identities and those of others. These range from easily observed characteristics such as group memberships, traditions, customs and ways of doing things, to less readily observed characteristics such as values, attitudes, obligations, roles, religious beliefs and ways of thinking.

Students move from their known worlds to explore new ideas and experiences related to specific cultural groups through opportunities provided in the learning areas. They compare their own knowledge and experiences with those of others, learning to recognise commonalities, acknowledging differences between their lives and recognising the need to engage in critical reflection about such differences, seeking to understand them.

Strong intercultural relationships are built on mutual respect between people, communities and countries. Respect is based on the recognition that every person is important and must be treated with dignity. It includes recognising and appreciating differences between people and respecting another person's point of view and their human rights.

In developing and acting with intercultural understanding, students:

- investigate culture and cultural identity
- explore and compare cultural knowledge, beliefs and practices
- develop respect for cultural diversity.

Interacting and empathising with others

This element gives an experiential dimension to intercultural learning in contexts that may be face-to-face, virtual or vicarious. It involves students in developing the skills to relate to and move between cultures through engagement with different cultural groups. Through perspective taking, students think about familiar concepts in new ways, encouraging flexibility, adaptability and a willingness to try new cultural experiences. Empathy assists students to develop a sense of solidarity with others through imagining the perspectives and experiences of others as if they were their own. Empathy involves imagining what it might be like to 'walk in another's shoes' and identifying with others' feelings, situations and motivations.

In developing and acting with intercultural understanding, students:

- communicate across cultures
- consider and develop multiple perspectives
- empathise with others.

Reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility

The capacity to process or reflect on the meaning of experience is an essential element in intercultural learning. Students use reflection to better understand the actions of individuals and groups in specific situations and how these are shaped by culture. They are encouraged to reflect on their own responses to intercultural encounters and to identify cultural influences that may have contributed to these. They learn to 'stand between cultures' and mediate cultural difference.

To cultivate respect, students need to reflect on and to take responsibility for their own behaviours and their interactions with others within and across cultures. They understand that behaviour can have unintended effects on individuals and communities, and they identify situations requiring intercultural understanding. In developing responsibility, students learn to respect the human rights of others and the values of democracy, equity and justice (MCEETYA 2008).

In developing and acting with intercultural understanding, students:

- reflect on intercultural experiences
- challenge stereotypes and prejudices
- mediate cultural difference.