Reimagining learning in contemporary times

Consultation Draft

Prepared by the Multicultural Education and Languages Committee (MELC)

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We are proud to share this statement on reimagining learning for contemporary times.

In the dynamic, international world in which we live, work and learn, we encounter people of diverse languages, cultures, world views and values. Through our interactions with them we discover differences not only in language use and cultural practices, but also in perspectives, knowledge and ways of knowing. People in all spheres of their personal, social and working lives now need to be able to negotiate the rich diversity of experience and meanings, both within and across languages and cultures. It is learning of this kind that can take our young people anywhere, from the remote environments of Australia to the multitude of diverse environments around the world.

Active participation in this context means that education and learning must also change in significant ways. This statement offers a vision for learners and the kind of learning that is needed. It describes the major shifts in our dynamic world, their impact on learning, and the imperative for educational change. It brings together three areas of education - Languages, Multicultural Education and the Internationalisation of Education - that are central to the necessary change in education. All relate to the fundamental goal of enabling all children and young people to learn how to negotiate differences and to reflect upon that experience. They all focus on languages and cultures and their role in the educational achievement and wellbeing of all children, young people, families and communities of South Australia. All are integral to ensuring that people can participate in an internationalised world with understanding, respect and ease.

Two fundamental ideas underpin this reimagining of learning for contemporary times. The first recognises that all learners are situated in the languages and cultures of their primary socialisation and develop their own knowledge, experiences and ways of being in the world as part of their early socialisation in life. The second recognises that all learning is linguistic and cultural activity. Just as languages and cultures influence learners as persons, they also influence their learning and development. These two ideas are interconnected through intercultural learning.

This statement elaborates on the South Australian Education Vision for the Independent, Catholic and Government Sectors, that:

*Our schools and early childhood settings will be places where students learn to live together with civility and respect for difference and commonalities, and demonstrating intercultural and ethical understanding.*

We trust that this statement will stimulate discussion and action to transform the learning of all children and young people in our schools across all sectors of education.

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1 In this statement ‘education’ and ‘schools’ are used to include pre-, primary and secondary schools.
The vision

That all students participate in the intercultural exchange of knowledge, ideas and meanings in a linguistically and culturally diverse world, and continue to learn to do so with respect and reciprocity in their personal, social and working lives.

Goals for learners

That all children and young people develop:

• disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge, and create and apply knowledge to act upon the world and work on complex problems in diverse contexts, with mutual understanding

• sophisticated language/s and literacies for exchanging meanings within and across languages and cultures, with sensitivity to the diversity of language use, cultural practices, knowledge systems, perspectives and values

• the capability to step back from and critically reflect on their own linguistic and cultural perspectives, experiences and responses in relation to those of others

• dispositions to engage with and understand ‘otherness’, including curiosity, openness to difference and a willingness to collaborate

• the ability to manage uncertainty in an ethical manner, with mindfulness towards others and with creativity and responsibility

• a deep understanding and appreciation of South Australia’s first peoples, their cultures and languages, including the diversity within Aboriginal communities and the ways in which knowledge, language, culture, identity and Country interconnect

• ways to act upon the world as learner-citizens contributing to ‘the society we want to be’, and reflect on their actions and learning in developing their self-understanding

• an understanding of the essential reciprocity of learning and human relations.
Reimagining learning for contemporary times: an educational imperative for South Australia

Globalisation has transformed our personal, social and working lives in fundamental ways. It has created and will continue to create both opportunities and challenges for all.

The movement of people across the globe is now on a scale and at a speed that are unprecedented. Changing technologies and the extensive use of the Internet and social media have transformed the nature and extent of communication, which has become instantaneous and networked in ways that transcend borders. These changes have accelerated the spread of knowledge and ideas across the globe and expanded the diversity of communities in which people interact. Linguistic and cultural (including faith-based) diversity characterises communities and social and work environments, both locally and internationally. This mobility has brought greater opportunities for exchange and, at the same time, greater fragilities.

In such a rich and complex environment people need to be able to navigate and connect across diverse languages, cultures and knowledge systems in order to participate successfully in a global economy and in workplaces that are increasingly diverse.

The imperative for contemporary education is to re-imagine learning in and through linguistic and cultural diversity, acknowledging that it is integral to the learning and success of all children and young people. Education needs to recognise that our diverse multilingual and multicultural learning environments may well be the most stimulating environments and resources that we have had for learning in decades. The development of intercultural capabilities is necessary for successful participation within and across local, regional and global communities in all spheres of activity. Developing these capabilities is central to the educational achievements and prosperity of individuals, communities and the state. They will enable learners to live and work successfully as linguistically and culturally aware and attentive citizens of the world.

In South Australia, participation in linguistic and cultural diversity requires recognition of the distinctive languages, cultural heritage, knowledge and ways of knowing of South Australia’s Aboriginal communities [list languages here]. For Aboriginal children and young people, it is their right to learn their own languages and cultural heritage and knowledge systems. For all non-Aboriginal children and young people, this learning is a fundamental part of learning and understanding the languages, history, culture and country of the state in which they live.

Traditionally, learning about linguistic and cultural diversity has been seen predominantly as the goal of the Languages learning area and of Multicultural Education. More recently, international education has been included as a dimension of education in linguistic and cultural diversity. However, in the contemporary world, learning to engage successfully with linguistic and cultural diversity has become a goal for all children and young people, across the curriculum as a whole. All learners are participants in the diversity that characterises every classroom and school. Although the three areas – Languages, Multicultural Education and the Internationalisation of Education – have been seen as three separate dimensions of education, each with its own distinctive history, they are all interrelated and central to meaningful education. They are all integral to enabling children and young people to experience and reflect upon being and learning across differences.
Learners and learning in linguistic and cultural diversity: two key ideas

*It is not sufficient for learners to know how to communicate meanings; they have to understand the practice of meaning making.* (Kramsch 2006)

Learning in all areas of the curriculum is mediated through languages and cultures – those that children and young people bring to their learning, those that they learn at school, and English (including English as an Additional Language/Dialect, EAL/D) as the major medium through which all students learn, be they Aboriginal, migrant, refugee, local or international. Language encompasses literacy/literacies (multilingual, multimodal), the learning of languages, mother-tongue learning and discipline-specific language for learning in all learning areas and in bilingual education.

Two key ideas underpin the reimagining of learning for contemporary times. These are:

* **All learners are situated in the language/s and culture/s of their primary socialisation** *

Children and young people develop their own knowledge experiences and ways of being in the world as part of their early socialisation in life. This occurs in the languages and cultures to which they are first exposed. Learners bring these understandings to their learning in schools and use them as a basis for new learning and ongoing development. All learners, through interaction with the diversity that is present in their classrooms, schools and communities, gradually come to understand how their knowledge systems, languages and cultures affect their learning and the way in which they interpret their world. This means that in education it is crucial to find out and connect with what learners bring to their learning.

* **All learning is a linguistic and cultural activity** *

Just as languages and cultures influence the learner as a person, they also influence the person’s learning and development.

The linguist and educator Michael Halliday (1993) highlighted how language and culture are integral to learning as a process of meaning-making when he wrote:

> When children learn a language, they are not simply engaging in one kind of learning among many; rather, they are learning the foundation of learning itself. The distinctive characteristic of human learning is that it is a meaning-making process.

It is through language in the context of culture that learners interact to exchange knowledge, ideas, perspectives and experiences, and to exchange meanings in learning.

The meanings that learners make and represent in learning originate in the linguistic, cultural and experiential context to which they belong. This means that it is crucial that educators understand learners’ prior and developing knowledge, their life worlds, their situatedness in their particular language/s and culture/s, and their histories of experiences, as these are the framework that informs their interpretation and creation of meanings in learning.
Multiple languages come into play in learning for all learners:

- Those learning languages in addition to English will constantly reference the new language being learnt to their primary language.
- Those learning EAL/D (as migrants, refugees or international students) will also use their home language (be it Chinese, Dinka or Vietnamese) to process their learning of English and through English.
- Those learning the language of their home at school will learn to expand their home language use to include more formal registers and to develop more complex literacies while moving between and further developing both their home language and English.
- International students bring their home language/s and have a strong desire and need to develop sophisticated English, as it is the medium of instruction in South Australian schools.

**Connecting the two key ideas: learning as intercultural meaning-making**

These two key ideas are connected through an understanding of learning itself as an intercultural meaning-making process. Intercultural learning may be characterised as:

- recognising that all people are situated in their own linguistic, cultural and experiential/historical context, that their meanings originate in the culture to which they belong and that this provides the basis for new learning
- exchanging prior knowledge and understandings and creating new knowledge through interaction, a process through which people exchange meanings and probe each other’s understandings, positions, assumptions and values; this exchange is mediated through language and culture.

... positionality and the impossibility of putting ourselves [in the shoes of others] while we still have our shoes on. This metaphor suggests that we cannot really take our shoes off, as we cannot simply forget all of our experience, language [and culture] and concepts, and we lack other people’s experience, language [and culture] and concepts to see ‘exactly’ what they see. ... By engaging with different shoes, despite the difficulties of putting them on, we might understand better where our own shoes might be coming from and where they might be leading in order to check if we are happy with the ways and the paths we walk.

*(Andreotti and de Souza, 2008:27)*
The diagram below depicts the centrality of languages, cultures and knowledge to learners and their learning across the curriculum as a whole.
Realising the vision for learning for contemporary times

To achieve this vision action is needed in a number of areas, in ways that recognise the life worlds of learners and the distinctiveness of each school. These areas include leadership; policy and strategy; curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment, and evaluation for improvement; relationships and partnerships; projects and initiatives; and teacher development.

That teachers, leaders and educational sectors ...

• recognise that living, working and learning in and with linguistic and cultural diversity are for all learners, all learning, all teachers and all schools

• recognise and draw upon the linguistic and cultural life worlds of learners to activate learning in diversity

• create opportunities for all learners to consider, inquire and act upon ‘big’ questions: What is worthwhile knowledge? What is the society we wish to be? How do I communicate successfully with others? How do I best contribute as a learner-citizen? How do I act knowingly, imaginatively and ethically upon the world?

• mediate the development of communication, intercultural capabilities, languages, literacies, and dispositions across all learning areas and the curriculum as a whole by:
  – re-committing to the value and challenges of engaging actively in linguistic and cultural diversity for all, and recognising that this will require change on the part of educational communities
  – creating experiences that invite students to participate in and learn through diversity, in both disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning, and by inviting exploration of knowing, understanding and making sense
  – focusing on how experiences and opportunities are perceived by students themselves, recognising and drawing upon the different perspectives and perceptions that students bring as natural resources for learning
  – supporting pedagogies and assessments of achievements that are linguistically and culturally conscious and responsive
  – encouraging attentiveness to issues of discrimination, equity and opportunity to learn and nurturing respect and reciprocity
  – enacting dialogue, helping students to recognise the value of collaborative activity to build understanding and to explore and recreate knowledge
  – encouraging local, national and global citizenship and developing a sense of human interdependence, especially through regional and international partnerships
  – establishing the school as an intercultural site, a meeting place for dialogue, community life and thought
  – exciting the imagination and creativity that come from diversity.

• provide the leadership within schools and related communities, organisations and agencies that enables intercultural learning to be reflected in the policy settings and strategies of the school to bring about change.