General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum

January 2012

www.acara.edu.au
**Intercultural understanding**

**Introduction**

In the Australian Curriculum, students develop intercultural understanding as they learn to value their own cultures, languages and beliefs, and those of others. They come to understand how personal, group and national identities are shaped, and the variable and changing nature of culture. The capability involves students in learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect.

Intercultural understanding is an essential part of living with others in the diverse world of the twenty-first century. It assists young people to become responsible local and global citizens, equipped through their education for living and working together in an interconnected world.

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA 2008) recognises the fundamental role that education plays in building a society that is ‘cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia’s Indigenous cultures’ (MCEETYA, p. 4). Intercultural understanding addresses this role, developing students who are active and informed citizens with an appreciation of Australia’s social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and the ability to relate to and communicate across cultures at local, regional and global levels.

**Scope of Intercultural understanding**

Intercultural understanding combines personal, interpersonal and social knowledge and skills. It involves students in learning to value and view critically their own cultural perspectives and practices and those of others through their interactions with people, texts and contexts across the curriculum.

Intercultural understanding encourages students to make connections between their own worlds and the worlds of others, to build on shared interests and commonalities, and to negotiate or mediate difference. It develops students’ abilities to communicate and empathise with others and to analyse intercultural experiences critically. It offers opportunities for them to consider their own beliefs and attitudes in a new light, and so gain insight into themselves and others.

Intercultural understanding stimulates students’ interest in the lives of others. It cultivates values and dispositions such as curiosity, care, empathy, reciprocity, respect and responsibility, open-mindedness and critical awareness, and supports new and positive intercultural behaviours. Though all are significant in learning to live together, three dispositions – empathy, respect and responsibility – have been identified as critical to the development of intercultural understanding in the Australian Curriculum.

For a description of the organising elements for Intercultural understanding, go to Organising elements.
Intercultural understanding across the curriculum

Although the Intercultural understanding capability focuses primarily on the development of skills, behaviours and dispositions, it also draws on students’ growing knowledge, understanding and critical awareness of their own and others’ cultural perspectives and practices derived from learning area content.

Intercultural understanding is more apparent in some learning areas than others, being most evident in those aspects of learning concerned with people, their societies, relationships and interactions, and in conjunction with the cross-curriculum priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia, and Sustainability.

Intercultural understanding is addressed through the learning areas and is identified wherever it is developed or applied in content descriptions. It is also identified where it offers opportunities to add depth and richness to student learning in content elaborations. An icon indicates where intercultural understanding has been identified in learning area content descriptions and elaborations. A filter function on the Australian Curriculum website assists users to identify F–10 curriculum content where intercultural understanding has been identified. Teachers may find further opportunities to incorporate explicit teaching of intercultural understanding depending on their choice of activities. Students can also be encouraged to develop capability through personally relevant initiatives of their own design.

- Intercultural understanding in English
  (http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/General-capabilities)
- Intercultural understanding in Mathematics
  (http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Mathematics/General-capabilities)
- Intercultural understanding in Science
  (http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Science/General-capabilities)
- Intercultural understanding in History
  (http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/History/General-capabilities)

Background

This background summarises the evidence base from which the Intercultural understanding capability’s introduction, organising elements and learning continuum have been developed. It draws on recent international and national research, as well as initiatives and programs that focus on intercultural understanding across the curriculum.

Intercultural understanding is a relatively recent addition to Australian school curriculums. It has its origins in several fields including cultural studies (Hall 1997), language education (Kramsch 1998; Liddicoat, Lo Bianco and Crozet 1999), multicultural education (Banks and Banks 2004; Noble and Poynting 2000) and more broadly in sociology, linguistics and anthropology. Given its diverse origins, it is not surprising that the nature and place of intercultural learning are by no means settled and the definition of the term ‘culture’ is itself not agreed upon.

The Intercultural understanding capability adopts the Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages (ACARA 2011) definition of culture as involving:

… a complex system of concepts, values, norms, beliefs and practices that are shared, created and contested by people who make up a cultural group and are passed on from
generation to generation. Cultural systems include variable ways of seeing, interpreting and understanding the world. They are constructed and transmitted by members of the group through the processes of socialisation and representation. (p.16)

Drawing on this definition, Intercultural understanding focuses on sharing, creating and contesting different cultural perceptions and practices, and supports the development of a critical awareness of the processes of socialisation and representation that shape and maintain cultural differences.

Furthermore, in acknowledging the founding status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia, it is alert to the place of negotiation and boundaries in engagements at the cultural interface (Nakata 2007) and mindful of practices that both celebrate and protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage (Janke 2008). In recognising the importance for Australia of maintaining positive relations and communications in its region, it promotes recognition, communication and engagement with the different countries and cultures within Asia. It also supports the development of a strong vision for a sustained and peaceful global future.

Intercultural understanding assumes an integral connection between language and culture, acknowledging language as the primary means through which people establish and exchange shared meaning and ways of seeing the world (Scarino, Dellitt and Vale 2007). It works on the assumption that, in learning to live together in a world of social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, students need to look beyond their immediate worlds and concerns (Arigatou Foundation 2008) and engage with the experience and ideas of others (Appiah 2006) in order to understand the politics of culture on the world stage (Sleeter and Grant 2003).

Intercultural understanding identifies knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that assist students in developing and acting with intercultural understanding at school and in their lives beyond school. At a personal level, intercultural understanding encourages students to engage with their own and others’ cultures, building both their sense of belonging and their capacity to move between their own worlds and the worlds of others (Kalantzis and Cope 2005), recognising the attitudes and structures that shape their personal identities and narratives.

At an interpersonal level, it considers commonalities and differences between people, focusing on processes of interaction, dialogue and negotiation. It seeks to develop students’ abilities to empathise with others, to analyse their experiences critically and to reflect on their learning as a means of better understanding themselves and people they perceive to be different from themselves (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler 2003; Wiggins and McTighe 2005). It provides opportunities for students to question the attitudes and assumptions of cultural groups in light of the consequences and outcomes for others.

At a social level, Intercultural understanding builds students’ sense of the complex nature of their own histories, traditions and values, and of the history, traditions and values that underpin Australian society (MCEETYA 2008).

Students learn to interpret and mediate cultural inequalities within their own and other societies. They learn to take responsibility for their interactions with others, to act on what they have learnt and to become intercultural citizens in the world (Byram 2008).
References


General capabilities in the Australian Curriculum - January 2012
Organising elements

The Intercultural understanding learning continuum incorporates six interrelated organising elements.

Students develop intercultural understanding through:

- Recognising
- Interacting
- Reflecting
- Empathy
- Respect
- Responsibility.

The diagram below sets out these elements:

[Organising elements for Intercultural understanding diagram]

**Recognising**

This element involves students in identifying, observing, analysing and describing 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 beyond 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. In developing and acting with intercultural understanding students:

- identify and explain their own cultural beliefs, practices, values and traditions
- recognise that culture is dynamic and complex and that there is variability within all cultural, linguistic and religious groups

General capabilities in the Australian Curriculum - January 2012
• compare the experiences of others with their own, looking for commonalities and differences between their lives and seeking to understand these
• recognise that people have many ways of knowing and being in the world

**Interacting**

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. Interacting includes developing critical insight into different viewpoints (perspective taking) and making sense of a culture for someone with limited experience of that culture (interpreting or mediating).

Through perspective taking, students think about familiar concepts in new ways, encouraging flexibility, adaptability and a willingness to try new cultural experiences. In developing and acting with intercultural understanding students:

• view aspects of their own language and culture from another cultural perspective
• view aspects of another language and culture from the perspectives of members of that cultural group
• recognise multiple views within a range of cultural contexts
• act positively in unfamiliar contexts.

Mediating and interpreting involves students learning to ‘stand between’ cultures – to explain their own cultural perspectives and practices and to understand the perspectives and practices of others. It enables students to engage critically with issues that may be controversial or require solutions. The ability to move between cultures empowers students to contribute to civic life. In developing and acting with intercultural understanding students:

• identify areas of misunderstanding and the cultural knowledge required to facilitate shared understanding
• mediate meaning with and between people who may not share the same world view, considering the importance of language in shaping how we see the world.

**Reflecting**

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. In developing and acting with intercultural understanding students:

• think critically to see their point of view as one of many
• consider how intercultural encounters have affected their thoughts, feelings and actions
• recognise how their actions, mediated by their own culture, have affected others
• recognise the influence of increased intercultural interaction on their personal identity and the nature of their communities.
Empathy
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 feeling for others, caring and imagining. Students are asked to consider what it might be like to ‘walk in another’s shoes’. In developing and acting with intercultural understanding students:

- imagine what their own feelings and responses might be in the situations of others
- seek to understand how others might feel
- consider the impact of their own behaviours on others.

Respect
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:

- demonstrate respect for themselves and others whatever their cultural, linguistic or religious backgrounds
- understand and acknowledge the value of distinctive cultures within nations, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Australia
- understand that ways of demonstrating respect and its significance vary between cultural groups.

Responsibility
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:

- demonstrate a commitment to reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians
- take responsibility for their understanding of and behaviour towards different cultural groups in Australia, the Asia-Pacific region and the world
- understand their reciprocal roles and shared responsibilities as local and global citizens.
### Intercultural understanding across stages of schooling

#### Recognising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By the end of Year 2 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 6 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 10 students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>describe aspects of their personal identity and identify various groups to which they belong (for example describing place/role in family and their membership of different social and cultural groups)</td>
<td>explore and express aspects of their identities as they interact with others (for example explaining differences in their behaviour, such as language use and values, at home, at school and within different groups)</td>
<td>recognise how their membership in cultural groups shapes their identities (for example exploring the concept of multiple identities and what it means personally)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recognise that cultures influence how people live, work, dress, eat, speak and celebrate within their families and local communities, (for example identifying values and beliefs important to them and their families)</td>
<td>describe and compare cultural assumptions, beliefs and practices, with particular reference to traditions and customs (for example comparing traditions and customs surrounding a particular cultural practice)</td>
<td>understand the complex and dynamic nature of cultural experiences (for example comparing the biographies of people from different cultures who have relocated, considering their motivations, experiences, reflections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understand that the way they live may not be the same as the ways other people live (for example showing interest in stories from other cultures, making comparisons and accepting differences)</td>
<td>recognise and respond to cultural diversity, its contributions and effects in national and regional contexts (for example describing the contribution of particular groups to the history and development of Australia and its region)</td>
<td>recognise and respond to the challenges of cultural diversity and the politics of culture (for example analysing media reports on particular groups within Australia and internationally with reference to stereotypes, prejudice, racism, privilege, voice)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Interacting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By the end of Year 2 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 6 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 10 students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>respond positively to stories and encounters that represent a range of cultural experiences and</td>
<td>identify differences within and across cultures in relation to specific situations and events (for example explaining different perspectives on familiar and specific events)</td>
<td>analyse the visible and less visible features of their own and others’ cultures (for example analysing their own cultural assumptions and those of others in relation to particular issues or events)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contexts (for example engaging with people, texts and artefacts from different cultures)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>describe aspects of their own lives to others and make comparisons between their lives and those of other children (for example describing ways they relate to their immediate and extended families, listening to others and make comparisons)</td>
<td>value intercultural exchanges and work towards mutual understanding (for example adapting their communication to check for understanding)</td>
<td>understand the complex relations between language, culture, thought and context (for example engaging with the texts and experiences of others to gain insight into the way cultures shape peoples’ perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engage in communication with others they perceive to be different from them (for example adapting their communication to ensure everyone is included in group activities)</td>
<td>look for similarities with people they think of as being unlike themselves and differences with people they consider to be similar (for example engaging with views they know to be different from their own to challenge their own thinking)</td>
<td>interpret cultural differences for others by identifying values and beliefs they take for granted and consider how these might look to someone with different values, beliefs and behaviours (for example suggesting cultural assumptions and perspectives that might underpin unfamiliar behaviours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>identify areas of potential misunderstanding on the basis of language or culture and seek clarification or further explanation (for example analysing and reflecting on aspects of language and culture that need further explanation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Reflecting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By the end of Year 2 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 6 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 10 students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reflect on similarities and differences with children in their classes, in their local communities or whom they have met in other situations (for example describing and comparing their own experiences with those of other children)</td>
<td>reflect on how intercultural encounters have affected their thoughts, feelings and actions (for example describing their responses to the diversity of values and experiences represented in texts, films, the arts and other media)</td>
<td>reflect critically on their responses and attitudes to intercultural experiences (for example describing how exposure to a diversity of views, ideas or experiences has the potential to change the way they think about a particular issue or event)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demonstrate an initial understanding of the concept of cultural diversity and its presence and influence in Australian society (for example describing the effect of sharing different stories and experiences on their learning)</td>
<td>accept that their point of view is one of many and begin to see themselves as others may see them (for example describing an experience or event from another’s viewpoint)</td>
<td>demonstrate open-mindedness to the positions of others (for example representing both sides of an argument, giving value to a variety of perspectives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identify and reflect on the impact of stereotypes and prejudices (for example identifying positive and negative effects of attributing features to particular social or cultural groups)</td>
<td></td>
<td>reflect on cultural diversity and its effects and influences in Australia and internationally (for example articulating an informed position on issues such as immigration, refugees, dispossession, globalisation, and analysing their impact on Australia)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Empathy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By the end of Year 2 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 6 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 10 students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>demonstrate care and consideration for others, recognising situations where others are in need or feeling excluded (for example acting to include children who are new or visiting the class)</td>
<td>demonstrate sensitivity to the feelings and needs of others (for example through a variety of role plays imagining how people can feel when included or excluded)</td>
<td>demonstrate empathy for others, understanding the role stereotyping, prejudice and racism may have played and may continue to play in their experiences (for example through imagined or authentic scenarios demonstrating an understanding of what it is like to be systematically excluded as a member of a cultural minority)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imagine and ask: ‘How would I feel if this were me?’ (for example in scenarios concerning difference imagining how it would feel to be excluded)</td>
<td>justify their decisions, choices and behaviours in relating to others (for example giving reasons for their own ideas and actions and relating these to the ideas and actions of others)</td>
<td>look for cultural explanations in analysing their societies or groups’ decisions and actions and those of other societies and groups (for example describing the role of intercultural suspicion and misunderstanding in world conflicts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imagine and ask: ‘How do I imagine others might feel?’ (for example in scenarios concerning difference imagining how others might feel, putting themselves in the other person’s shoes)</td>
<td></td>
<td>look beyond their immediate situations by considering questions such as: ‘How might my actions affect another person?’, ‘Are there other people who might also be affected by what I say or do?’ (for example recognising that their own actions and perspectives are subject to interpretation by others who might want them to think and act differently)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Respect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By the end of Year 2 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 6 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 10 students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>demonstrate respect for themselves and everyone they encounter at home, at school and in the local community (for example practising different ways of greeting others, considering language, culture and social context)</td>
<td>respect the right of others to be different and be accepting of others (for example listening, sharing and responding thoughtfully to the views and ideas of others)</td>
<td>respect the right of all to be heard (for example understanding the need to defend the right of all to be heard as a basic human right)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identify the Aboriginal Country or Torres Strait Islander place in which their school is located (for example learning and using the names for local peoples and places)</td>
<td>acknowledge the continuous and enduring contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia (for example showing respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples’ knowledge and values relating to connection to family and the land)</td>
<td>challenge stereotypical representations of various social and cultural groups (for example comparing and analysing texts prepared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about their lives with those developed historically by others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>express an awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity in familiar contexts (for example learning familiar expressions in another language)</td>
<td>acknowledge the importance of mutual respect for promoting harmony and peace in an interconnected world (for example cooperating and negotiating in culturally diverse networks of learning)</td>
<td>demonstrate respect for cultural and linguistic diversity in a range of local, regional and global settings (for example demonstrating skills of intercultural communication, including negotiation and conflict resolution in networks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understand and act in ways that observe local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols (for example working with local groups to inform school-based learning)</td>
<td></td>
<td>understand the importance of maintaining cultural traditions to the development of personal, group and national identities (for example recognising and valuing the significant relationship between language, culture and identity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By the end of Year 2 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 6 students:</th>
<th>By the end of Year 10 students:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>join in events that recognise and celebrate cultural diversity (for example joining with Chinese students and families in celebrating Chinese New Year)</td>
<td>contribute to the development of positive relationships between people from different cultural groups to achieve common goals (for example exploring possibilities for cooperation between diverse groups in working on a shared project)</td>
<td>take responsibility for listening and seeking to understand others’ perspectives (for example developing strategies to achieve mutual understanding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>act to include children from diverse cultural groups in their games and activities (for example showing willingness to explain and demonstrate the rules of games to others)</td>
<td>identify ways people can work together and resist prejudice (for example developing and applying strategies for overcoming differences and for countering prejudice)</td>
<td>recognise the challenges of living harmoniously in a culturally diverse society and of negotiating, interpreting and mediating difference (for example representing the ideas and perspectives of others in a range of contexts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cooperate in diverse groups to share information, narratives and interests (for example contributing to group tasks, valuing the contributions of others)</td>
<td>share responsibility for negotiating difference and resolving issues or tensions created by different cultural assumptions and practices (for example examining cultural perspectives and assumptions underlying issues of local or national concern)</td>
<td>act to secure positive outcomes for members of cultural groups faced with prejudice and misunderstanding (for example challenging and countering instances of prejudice and negotiating positive outcomes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>