



AFS Intercultural Programmes NZ Inc Submission on the Draft New Zealand Curriculum

November 2006

Executive summary

- AFS Intercultural Programmes New Zealand Inc (AFS) has worked extensively with the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the last two years to raise the status, study and understanding of language immersion experiences and the importance of intercultural education within New Zealand's schools, for both students and teachers.
- For 60 years AFS has promoted the value of intercultural experiences to the NZ community through school presentations, community publications and culminating in the opportunity for students to study abroad on AFS year and semester exchange programmes.
- AFS Intercultural Programmes NZ Inc promoted the need for the government approved exchange organisations to have a 'unified voice' on a number of issues, including acting as an advocate for the importance of intercultural education and in building relationships with a number of government departments, including the Ministry of Education. Hence the formation of the New Zealand Council for Intercultural Education in 2004.
- AFS is committed to intercultural learning and through its programmes to helping students acquire skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will be useful throughout their lives as they attempt to cope sensitively and intelligently with the urgent challenges of the global community in which they live.
- Results from an independent study demonstrate that students benefit throughout their lives from intercultural learning experiences undertaken, and that such experiences impact the lives of a variety of people in both the home and host countries.
- The importance of intercultural education is not reflected in the Draft New Zealand Curriculum (DNZC) per se but there are many aspects of the document that if made more explicit could better guide teachers, schools and their communities, especially the students, as to the importance and value of intercultural experiences.
- AFS recognises that the main elements of the DNZC allow for an increased focus on intercultural education in all the Learning Areas, especially Learning Languages and Social Sciences, and can make a significant contribution to the acquisition of the Key Competencies as outlined.

Background

AFS Intercultural Programmes AFS is an international, non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation that provides intercultural exchange opportunities to help young people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world. By giving young people a unique life experience, AFS seeks to affirm faith in the dignity and worth of every human being and of all nations and cultures.

Established sixty years ago, after World War 2, by the American Field Service volunteer ambulance drivers, AFS now provides intercultural experiences for young people to gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for living in a global society. It is one of the world's foremost established exchange specialists and New Zealand has been part of the international programme for over 58 years.

AFS is committed to intercultural learning. Through its programmes students are removed temporarily from their home environments and introduced to differing values, ways of life, and patterns of thought in completely new environments. This immersion in a new culture enables participants to acquire skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will be useful throughout their lives as they attempt to cope sensitively and intelligently with the urgent challenges of the world of tomorrow whether through further study, in the work place or the community at large.

AFS currently has offices in over 50 countries and operating programmes in more than 80 countries. World-wide AFS exchanges over 11,000 participants annually on a variety of programmes which

include students, young adults, educators and volunteers. More than 10,700 New Zealanders have experienced an AFS exchange programme.

The strength of AFS lies between its highly successful mix of professional management and systems with dedicated volunteerism. The key differentiator from many other programmes and from other export education schemes is that its many volunteers and all host families are unpaid. Their motivation lies in the rightness and loftiness of AFS's goals and objectives, and to their willing support of international and intercultural exchanges. It is such people, wherever they are in the world that we wish to link to New Zealand students.

The Importance of Intercultural Education

Intercultural learning and experience builds tolerance, confidence, problem-solving and communication skills far beyond the obvious. It involves growth and change in terms of intercultural knowledge and sensitivity, personal values and skills, interpersonal relationship-building and global issues-awareness. Through the DNZC we see an opportunity to prepare New Zealand students for a future that is very closely bound to the global community through intercultural experiences both within the NZ community and abroad. This need is urgent.

Intercultural Knowledge and Sensitivity

An immersion experience in an overseas host culture can expose participants to innumerable dimensions of that culture. These dimensions can range from the simple acquisition of the necessities of daily life, including language skills, to the complex and subtle distinctions made by the host among alternative values, social norms, and patterns of thought.

Students who are exposed to an intercultural experience can attain the following learning objectives:

- Increased knowledge of the host country and culture, demonstrated by an ability to explain key dimensions of that culture from the perspective of the host national.
- Increased sensitivity to subtle features of the home culture, demonstrated by an ability to see aspects of that culture not previously recognized, and to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of an outsider.
- Understanding of the nature of cultural differences, demonstrated by an ability to describe some of the fundamental concerns that must be addressed by all human beings, and by a readiness to accept that a wide variety of solutions to those concerns are possible.
- A broadening of one's skills and concepts, including language, demonstrated by the ability to think and to act in ways that are characteristic of the host culture but transferable to other environments.

Personal Values and Skills

An intercultural experience either within one's own country or abroad removes students from their familiar environment and places them in a new environment. In such unusual circumstances, students will be confronted repeatedly with crises of varying dimensions, including the probable need to converse in the language of the host community or country. They will have to make judgments and embark on actions in the absence of familiar cues. Thus students will be provided with opportunities for reassessing their values, stretching their capacities, and practicing new skills. Participants would be able to attain the following learning objectives:

- Think creatively, demonstrated by an ability to view ordinary things, events, and values from a fresh perspective and to generate innovative ideas and solutions.
- Think critically, demonstrated by an unwillingness to accept superficial appearances and by skepticism of stereotypes.
- Accept more responsibility for oneself, demonstrated by increased ability to exercise self-control within the context of social norms and expectations.
- De-emphasize the importance of material things, demonstrated by an increasing tendency to define one's worth and goals in terms of ideals instead of possessions.
- Be more fully aware of oneself, demonstrated by increased willingness and ability to view oneself objectively and to see oneself as deeply influenced by one's native culture.

Interpersonal Relationship-Building

Students participating in an intercultural experience become fully involved in daily living and working arrangements with a variety of people in their new environment. Whether a student's placement is as an individual or as a member of a group of exchange visitors, he or she is required to develop and maintain relationships, including through language, with people from the host community or country. The interpersonal skills developed in this intercultural context is transferable to many other settings during the participant's lifetime and would include the following learning objectives:

- A deepening concern for and sensitivity to others, demonstrated by increased ability and willingness to "put oneself in the other person's place," that is, to empathize.
- Increased adaptability to changing social circumstances, demonstrated by greater flexibility in the process of adjusting to new people, social situations and cultural norms.

- Valuing human diversity, demonstrated by an eagerness for communication, mutual respect, and friendship with others from a variety of backgrounds different from one's own.
- An ability to communicate with others using their ways of expression, demonstrated by the ability to carry on extended conversations with hosts in their native language, and by the ability to use and to react appropriately to non-verbal signals common in the host culture.
- Enjoying themselves in the company of others, demonstrated by a diminishing of self-consciousness and an increase in readiness to participate wholeheartedly in many varieties of social gatherings.

Global Issues-Awareness

Living in a place other than one's home community helps students to recognize that the world is one large community, a global island, in which certain problems are shared by everyone everywhere. Students have the opportunity to empathize with their hosts' perspective on some of their problems, and thus come to appreciate that workable solutions must be culturally sensitive, not merely technologically feasible. Such awareness prepares the student to take his or her place among those who are addressing the crises facing humankind. Most students given an intercultural experience would attain the following learning objectives:

- A deepened interest in and concern about world affairs, demonstrated by a sustained commitment to obtaining information from many sources with respect to the problems commonly facing all human beings.
- An awareness of worldwide linkages, demonstrated by a willingness and ability to make personal choices in certain ways because one cares about the effect of one's choices on people in other communities throughout the world.
- A commitment to the search for solutions to worldwide problems, demonstrated by the giving of one's personal resources (time, energy, and money), whether in a professional or voluntary capacity, to the search for culturally sensitive and technologically feasible solutions.

Schools are under pressure to include a broad range of activities and messages from many sectors, communities and interest groups. AFS recognises the important contribution that an intercultural experience among NZ's diverse cultural groups or abroad could give to enrich the school programme at various levels. We also recognise that there are socio-economic differences that will impact various individuals and groups ability to avail themselves of an intercultural experience. Nevertheless it is essential that students not only have access to up-to-date, factual information but that they are able to interact with members of the global community in order to build knowledge and understanding on which a more 'just and peaceful world' can be built.

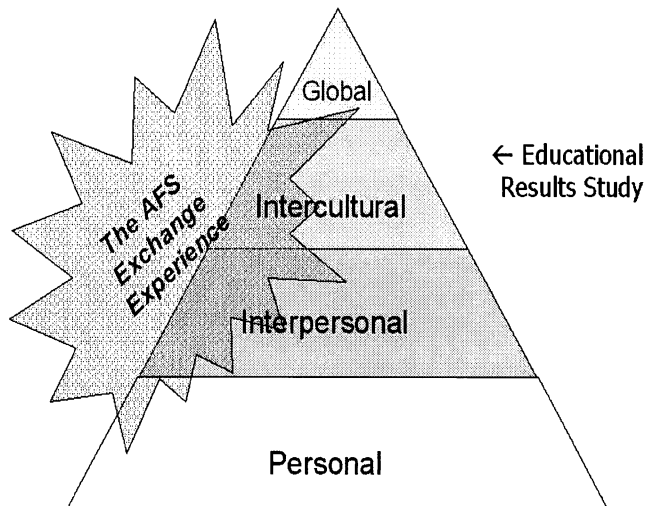
The research

Results are from an independent study of the AFS programme conducted by Mitchell R. Hammer, Ph.D. demonstrates that AFS participants are able to benefit from their intercultural learning throughout their lives; many former AFSers report that the impact of their experience increases over the years. Furthermore, intercultural learning is not limited to those who are moved temporarily from one environment to another. AFS volunteers, school personnel, work colleagues, family members, and friends in both the home and host countries all contribute to, share in and benefit from the participants' intercultural learning experiences.

Educational Results Study Information

Results are from an independent study of the AFS program conducted by Mitchell R. Hammer, Ph.D.

AFS Learning Objectives



The Intercultural Learning Experience ...is more than just being in the vicinity of another culture

AFS describes its learning goals in terms of four levels of development: personal, interpersonal, intercultural, and global. The AFS exchange experience is expected to contribute to growth in all these areas. The research focused on the "intercultural" level.

For further information on the study, contact Dr. Hammer at: www.hammerconsulting.org

Study Design

- Pre-test / post test / post-post test surveys
- 1500 AFS students and 630 of their friends who did not go abroad as control group
- 9 countries and 6 languages
- Data also collected from AFS students' parents and host parents
- Qualitative portion with "journals" provided by some students

Main Findings

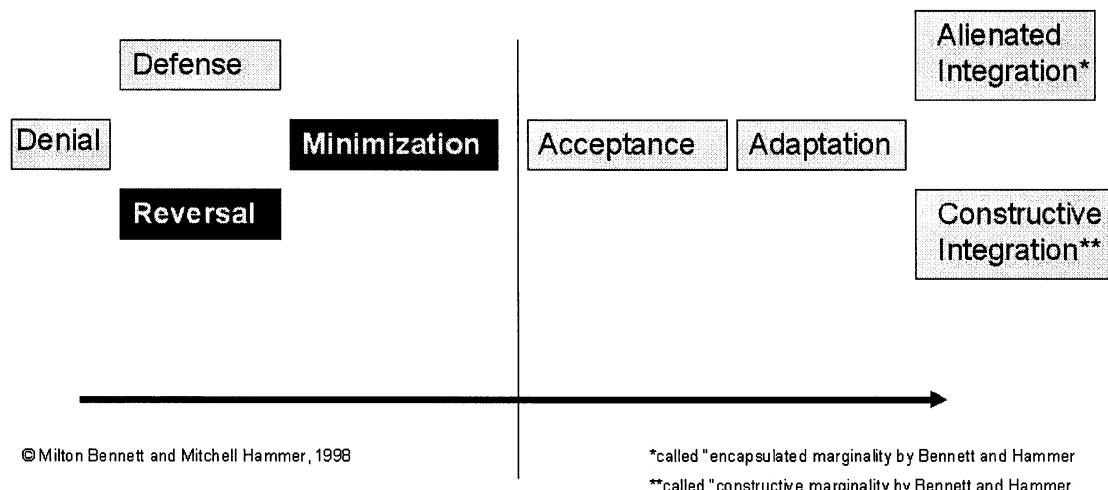
The AFS students showed significant growth compared to the control group:

- AFS students showed greater increases in their knowledge of host culture
- 47% of AFS students became fully fluent in the host language (average language increase was 2 levels)
- AFS students showed a reduction in anxiety around cultural differences; control group showed no change
- AFS students after they are home for 6-8 months report that almost ¼ of their friends are from other cultures; control group showed no change
- AFS students significantly improved their intercultural competence compared to the control group
- These improvements remained stable over time

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Ethnocentric Stages

Ethno-relative Stages



- AFS students' growth in intercultural competence was largely from a "Reversal" worldview to the beginning of a "Minimization" worldview.
- Almost twice as many AFS students as control group students who started with "Reversal" or "Defense" worldviews moved to a more advanced level.
- Only a few AFS students (and no controls) moved beyond "Minimization."

Reversal: <i>It is with these students that AFS has the biggest impact!</i>	38% of AFSers begin the program experiencing other cultures as "them" and "us" but with a "reversal" polarization: They see other cultures as better than their own!
Minimization:	55% of AFSers start out with an outlook that focuses on the commonalities among cultures and minimizes the differences.

Conclusion:

An intercultural experience (possibly through AFS) can do more to help students reflect on their own and other cultures through:

- Reflection throughout the experience and afterward
- Dealing with reversal and minimization issues
- Having students attend re-entry orientations
- Host family orientation
- Training for staff and volunteers in intercultural learning & the DMIS

By offering teachers opportunities for pre-service and in-service training, access to good quality current resources and more flexible curriculum and learning options, the profile and value of an intercultural experience for NZ students could be raised and a significantly greater number of students would avail themselves of such an experience.

The draft New Zealand curriculum

The DNZC presents a clear statement of learning outcomes, principles, values and competencies on which various curricula will be based. Useful guidance is given on designing a local school curriculum that reflects student and community needs.

Vision

The vision recognises that “education has a vital role to play in helping young people to reach their potential and develop competencies that will equip them to participate fully in NZ society and contribute to the growth of its economy”. Intercultural learning can make a significant contribution to assist in the development of confident, connected, actively involved, life long learners (DNZC pg 8) through experiences that can contribute to growth and change in terms of intercultural knowledge and sensitivity, personal values and skills, interpersonal relationship-building and global issues-awareness.

Principles

One of the underpinning principles of the DNZC is that “principles are beliefs that guide practice” and each school’s curriculum will be designed and implemented on this basis (DNZC pg 9). Intercultural education can make a significant contribution to the implementation of these principles within the curriculum.

Values and Key Competencies

More importantly intercultural education can make a significant contribution to the values that are advanced for NZ students to ‘enable them to live together and thrive in a diverse, democratic society’ (DNZC pg 10), specifically innovation, enquiry and curiosity; diversity; respect; equity; and community and participation. As a consequence, the significant contribution that can be made through intercultural education to the development of “key competencies” can be seen in the results of the educational study outlined above, e.g.

- students showed greater increases in their knowledge of their host culture (‘relating to others’ and ‘participating and contributing’),
- students became fully fluent in the host language (‘using language’),
- students showed a reduction in anxiety around cultural differences (‘managing self’ and ‘relating to others’),
- students report that almost ¼ of their friends are from other cultures (‘relating to others’) and
- the students significantly improved their intercultural competence (‘relating to others’ and ‘participating and contributing’).

To develop these intercultural competencies students need to be “challenged to develop their competencies in contexts that are increasingly wide-ranging and complex” (DNZC pg 11), i.e. through an overseas intercultural experience or in another ethnic community within NZ. If applied as the DNZC intends, the Key Competencies emphasised above will encourage students to think more globally, with less prejudice, and will empower them with confidence to travel, study and work within the global community.

Curriculum Areas

The two key curriculum areas in which intercultural education can make a significant contribution are those of ‘learning languages’ and the ‘social sciences’. This does not preclude an intercultural

experience making contributions within the other curriculum areas such as 'art', 'technology' and 'health and physical education'.

Intercultural education can develop concrete themes, integrating them into a more global vision. With this in mind we suggest a possible interdisciplinary approach towards educating pupils as global citizens, enabling them to analyse and evaluate new situations which they find themselves involved in. One central theme which should be present in all areas of education since it develops universal values such as justice, tolerance and solidarity, is recognition of one's own culture and the study and understanding of other cultures. It also means respecting cultural diversity which is growing at an ever faster rate, and is opening the way to different ways of living, of thinking and understanding the world.

One of the significant outcomes of an intercultural experience is that a student not only learns another language but becomes fluent in it. This is an area in which AFS has a contract with the MOE to provide such experiences for a minimum of 20 students per year. In addition to this, AFS as an organisation sends over 200 students per year on exchanges which enable those students to also develop facility in another language.

An intercultural experience can provide another and very powerful context in which "learning an additional language and its related culture, students come to appreciate that languages and cultures are systems" (DNZC pg 18) that:

- challenges them to consider their own identities and preconceptions
- gives new ways of thinking about, questioning, and interpreting the world and their place in it, and
- enables them to acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes that equip them for living in a world of diverse peoples, languages and cultures.

In addition, an intercultural experience provides a context for students to learn substantially more about two of the 'conceptual social science strands' (DNZC pg 22), i.e. 'Identity, Culture and Organisation' and the 'Economic World'. Whilst the stated focus is on NZ contexts this should not preclude the opportunity for students to use other contexts to develop their knowledge, skills and experience that will help them to understand, participate in and contribute to the communities in which they will live and work.

Summary

We see the new curriculum as being positive but the implementation will rely heavily on local communities and the knowledge, values, determination and confidence of school boards, school leaders and teachers.

There is a risk that many schools and their students, for whatever reason will consider the value of an intercultural experience, whether at home or abroad, as a low priority. The DNZC should, therefore, explicitly mention 'intercultural education' and offer guidelines for programme planning in terms of content, contexts and outcomes. This would ensure that all students are exposed to the study of the themes surrounding intercultural education which can contribute significantly to the development of NZ students as truly 'global citizens'.

Another key element for successful inclusion of 'intercultural education' into the new curriculum is the provision of educational resources for classroom use. By providing educators with access to high quality, current information that they can use and promote with their classes, teachers will be enlightened and feel confident to include the principles and objectives of intercultural education into their teaching programmes. Opportunities for initiating and extending opportunities for both teacher and student exchanges should be investigated and encouraged.

Currently much of the effective work that is done in respect of 'intercultural education' happens beyond schools, with some support internally, by the various government approved exchange organisations. This statement is not meant to negate the work done by schools either internally through such activities as cultural days/weeks and visiting speakers or externally through cultural and sports exchanges. We urge that the new curriculum acknowledge the value and significant outcomes of intercultural learning experiences either within a NZ context or by study abroad opportunities.

It is important for the future of New Zealand's economy and society to encourage 'intercultural education' within NZ schools because it can introduce students to differing values, ways of life, and patterns of thought in completely new environments and contexts enabling them to acquire new skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will be useful throughout their lives.

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