

## Review of *Intercultural Competence* by Dr. Nina Lazarevic

Historically, and especially in the early parts of the last century in Europe and the Americas, language learning was primarily an activity that was restricted to the elite and more mobile middle class. When foreign languages were studied, the emphasis was typically on what became known as high culture, later referred to as the visible and tangible expressions of objective culture, primarily consisting of the arts, great works of literature, and the major institutions of a particular culture or nation.

It is widely assumed among educators that culture and language, as well as culture and thought, are inseparable and inextricably linked. Language, thus, serves, not only as an expression of culture that is created by humans, but also as the means through which people negotiate intercultural interaction. Today, people connect more readily and frequently through face-to-face interaction or via mediated social technologies regardless of their social class, level of education or occupation. And, as nations become more inextricably intertwined, the ability to communicate effectively with people different from oneself becomes ever more essential.

English is fast becoming the lingua franca, and although approximately half a billion people speak it as a first language, an estimated two billion people study it as a second, third or fourth language. But language learning and effective communication in any language relies on more than simply the acquisition of an increased vocabulary and the ability to appropriately pronounce words – aspects that have traditionally been the focus of second language education. Attention to the cultural content or intercultural dimension of language instruction became an increasing part of the dialogue among language educators in the United States, Europe and elsewhere began in the 1960s and 1970s. This emphasis continues today, and Nina Lazarevic's book, *Intercultural Competence*, based on her extensive research, provides a blueprint for understanding the impact and role of language teaching and acquisition on the development of cross-cultural or intercultural understanding.

Nina Lazarevic understands full well that language is intimately intertwined with culture. Her book presents a most impressive and exhaustive analysis of the intersection of second language instruction and the development of intercultural understanding and competence. One of the major contributions this book offers is its in-depth, comprehensive and critical analysis of

major concepts that underlie the attainment of intercultural communicative competence. This, alone, would be a sufficient and welcomed contribution to those studying the field. But this book goes beyond that by presenting a study that is well grounded in the historical as well as relevant current research literature. It employs a comprehensive, well-grounded mixed-methods research methodology that looks closely at the development of intercultural competence, and supports the notion that teaching for intercultural competence must be well thought out, reflective, and a strategic part of any curriculum – it does not simply happen on its own.

This is an important volume that has much to offer a multitude of readers. In recent decades, understanding the cultural challenges that underlie intercultural interaction have been recognized and are taking on greater importance in education in general and language education more specifically. Scholars, thus, across many disciplines (e.g., communication, psychology, anthropology, education) will benefit from this comprehensive volume as people from a wide range of backgrounds come together to inquire about, attempt to solve, or at least better understand a variety of the world's global concerns.

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