

Professional standards for accomplished teaching of languages and cultures

**Australian Federation of Modern
Language Teachers Associations**

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Accomplished languages and cultures teaching

Being an accomplished teacher of languages and cultures means being a person who knows, uses and teaches language and culture in an ethical and reflective way. It involves a continuous engagement with and commitment to learning, both as a teacher and as a life-long learner. It means more than teaching knowledge of languages and cultures and includes teaching learners to value, respect and engage with languages and cultures in their own lives and to interact with others across linguistic and cultural borders. It means creating a culture of learning which approaches language, culture and learning with respect, empathy, commitment, enthusiasm and personal responsibility.

Accomplished languages and cultures teaching is reflected through the following dimensions:

- educational theory and practice
- language and culture
- language pedagogy
- ethics and responsibility
- professional relationships
- awareness of wider context
- advocacy
- personal characteristics

These standards recognise that accomplished language teaching can only occur in an appropriate and supportive teaching context and so the standards document includes not only standards for accomplished teaching, but also programs standards, which the profession believes are necessary for accomplished teaching to occur.

Guidelines for using the standards

The Standards are designed to reflect the high levels of achievement of accomplished teachers of languages. They should not be viewed as representing a minimum standard but as a standard to be aimed for during a teaching career.

The standards are designed to assist teachers to understand and develop their own practice. They are intended as a guide for thinking through one's current professional work and identifying needs for future development. Any mismatch between a teacher's current position and the standard then is to be seen as an opportunity for learning rather than as a failure to meet the standards expected of a teacher.

The standards are not designed or intended for use in evaluating teachers' performance, but as a framework for understanding teachers' professionalism. However, teachers may use them to assist in developing portfolios for use in applications for promotion or for professional evaluation.

Both the teacher standards and the programs standards apply equally to every teacher and to teaching context and should be used together to maintain and improve teaching quality.

Teacher standards

Educational theory and practice

Accomplished languages and cultures teachers have knowledge of child/learner development appropriate to the level at which they teach and apply this knowledge in all aspects of their teaching.

They engage with current theories of education, general principles of teaching and learning, and classroom management. They keep up to date with developments in the field of education through professional learning and professional reading.

They are aware of the culture of schooling in the contexts in which they teach. They actively engage with education policies, and curriculum frameworks. They are able to locate languages within a wider educational context, creating connections with other curriculum areas and with extracurricular activities.

Suggested questions for reflection

What do you know about the individual learners you teach and their capabilities?

How comprehensively do you understand the discipline, traditions and debates in language and culture teaching?

What is the culture of the school in which you teach?

What do you know about the policy and curriculum documents which are relevant to language teaching?

How do you make connection with other curriculum areas and with extra curricular interests?

Language and culture

Accomplished languages and cultures teachers are both users and teachers of linguistic and cultural knowledge.

They have knowledge of the language(s) and culture(s) they teach which enables them to participate readily in interactions in the language in and out of the classroom. In addition, they have a developed intercultural awareness and know how to communicate across languages and cultures.

They are actively involved in maintaining and developing their knowledge of the language and culture they teach and seek out opportunities to use their knowledge and to keep up to date with how the language and culture are used in target language communities.

They have explicit knowledge and a working understanding of the linguistic and cultural systems of the language and how these systems work in the social lives of people.

They understand the relationship between language and culture and have an awareness and understanding of the role of language and culture in human interaction and identity. They use this knowledge to enhance their teaching.

Suggested questions for reflection

How do you express your intercultural awareness in teaching and in daily life?

How do you use and develop your language abilities?

What sorts of language-based activities are you involved in outside the classroom?

What sorts of contacts do you have with target language communities, personally or through reading, the media or the web/internet?

What recent activities have you undertaken to develop your language and cultural knowledge of the language you teach?

How do you deal with issues of identity in your teaching (including your own identity)?

How do you encourage learners to see the world from other cultural perspectives?

What messages do your students take away from their experience of language learning about the relationship between language, culture and learning?

Language pedagogy

Accomplished teachers have a developed understanding of the language learning process. Their understanding comes from their formal and informal learning about teaching and learning and also from their own experiences of being a language learner and user, either of the language they teach or of another language.

They have knowledge of current developments in language learning and teaching research and develop their knowledge further by engaging in professional learning, professional reading and/or research.

They use their knowledge of language and culture in order to promote learning in ways which are appropriate for learners in context and which cater for the diversity of abilities among their students, using authentic language and resources.

They create a culture of learning in their classrooms which fosters interest in languages and cultures and encourages learners to accept responsibility for their own learning.

They have at their disposal a range of methodologies for languages and cultures teaching and in their practice select from these in a principled way, taking into consideration the learners, the learning context, curriculum goals, and the aspect of language being taught. These choices are made at both the overall level of planning and in teaching in the classroom.

They have a view of curriculum in which planning, teaching, resourcing, assessing, evaluating and renewing are done coherently according to a principled approach to languages and cultures teaching. Accomplished teaching is reflected by an ability to explain the choices being made in planning and teaching.

Their approach to assessment examines understanding, learning, and performance, and uses assessment to foster learning as well as to evaluate learning. They know and use a range of assessment approaches and select assessment tasks which are appropriate to the purposes of the assessment and use the assessment for effective feedback and reporting.

They are informed and critical users of technology in language teaching and use technology both to support learning and as a basis for learning to communicate using technologies.

Suggested questions for reflection

What knowledge about patterns of development in language and second language literacy inform your curriculum and teaching decisions?

What recent activities have you undertaken to develop your knowledge of language teaching?

What sorts of language-based activities are you involved in your professional learning?

How have you applied your recent learning to enhance your language teaching?

How do you promote interest in languages and cultures in the classroom?

How do you decide on which methodology to use in your daily teaching? What factors influence your decisions?

How do you adapt your teaching to your learners and to the material you are teaching?

How do you explain your reasons for using a particular pedagogical approach in your teaching?

What range of learning opportunities do you provide so that all students are able to achieve optimum success and recognition for their performance in language and literacy?

How do you assess learner's language development? How does this allow them to demonstrate their proficiency in the language and their intercultural understanding?

How do you decide which assessment approach to use? What factors influence your decisions?

How do you use technology in your teaching? What factors influence your decisions?

Ethics and responsibility

Accomplished languages and cultures teachers take responsibility for the teaching and learning relationship and for social and cultural relationships in their teaching.

They have a developed knowledge of their current groups of students, and strategies at their disposal to get to know new groups each term.

They establish trust between teacher and learners which fosters an empathetic view of self and others.

They know and reflect on their own values and ideological positions and demonstrate respect for the different values of learners, communities and cultures.

They seek to enable students to understand issues from multiple perspectives so that they can make their own choices and judgments.

Suggested questions for reflection

How do you demonstrate care and concern for students in the context of fostering their linguistic competence?

What do you know and understand about the communities to which your students belong and their aspirations?

What ideas and values inform your language teaching? Where do these come from?

How do you plan for all students to have the confidence to take risks in language learning?

In what ways is the language classroom characterised by dignity and mutual regard?

Professional relationships

Accomplished languages and cultures teachers are part of a professional educational community and they establish professional relationships with other languages and cultures teachers, with teachers in other disciplines, with students, with parents and with school communities.

They contribute to the profession in a range of ways which work to develop a culture of professionalism.

Professional relationships are manifested by links to and collaboration with other teachers in their schools and in the wider educational community and accomplished teachers actively network with other languages and cultures teachers informally and through professional associations.

They actively participate in mentoring more junior teachers.

They undertake leadership in language-related areas locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

Suggested questions for reflection

How do you contribute to your profession?

How are you actively involved in school, community and wider professional contexts?

How do you work with colleagues, parents and community members to develop the quality of teaching and learning in the school?

How do you use your own expertise to support other teachers, especially less experienced teachers?

Active engagement with wider context

Languages and cultures teaching is fundamentally about relationships to wider contexts and the ability to connect the local to the global.

Accomplished languages and cultures teachers actively engage with the social, political, economic, and technological climate of the times.

They are able to connect with a wider sphere of understanding of how languages and language learning relate to wider global realities.

They are aware of the impact of languages and cultures on the local and global context and on how people understand their place in the world.

They foster learners' active engagement with such broader issues and prepare their students to become knowledgeable and responsible adult participants in the global community.

Suggested questions for reflection

How do you explain the knowledge, skills and understandings you most value in the teaching and learning of language and literacy?

How do you connect language learning to what is happening in the contemporary world?

How do you use language learning as an opportunity for learners to explore what is happening in other parts of the world?

Advocacy

Accomplished languages and cultures teachers are advocates for language learning, intercultural communication and intercultural sensitivity, linguistic and cultural diversity.

They are advocates for languages both with and for students, schools and communities and engage with wider community to promote languages.

Suggested questions for reflection

How do you increase understanding of the importance of language and culture learning in your community?

How do you increase understanding of the importance of diversity in your community?

Personal characteristics

Accomplished languages and cultures teachers are passionate about languages and cultures and about teaching.

They have a commitment to their own continuing professional and personal learning.

They connect and engage with their learners and inspire students and others.

They have a belief in their students as emerging bilinguals/multilinguals developing the knowledge and awareness they need to become effective intercultural communicators.

They adopt a critical stance on their own work and to themselves as mediators of languages and cultures, which they demonstrate through reflection, questioning, inquiry and/or research into their practices, values and beliefs.

Suggested questions for reflection

How do you model and promote language as a source of interest, curiosity and pleasure?

How do you demonstrate your commitment to professional learning?

How do you demonstrate, and inspire in students, a passion for texts that have personal and cultural significance for them?

How do you demonstrate to students how much they can successfully achieve in the target language?

How do you evaluate the success of your own teaching? What steps do you take to ensure your teaching continues to improve?

Program standards

Effective languages and cultures programs are actively valued within the school culture. Languages and cultures teaching and learning are valued explicitly in schools' statements and implicitly in the schools' planning, timetabling and resourcing for languages. Schools actively acknowledge and foster connections between languages and other curriculum areas.

Effective languages and cultures programs focus on progression in language learning both during the year and across years. They acknowledge learners' movement through the program and ensure that prior knowledge is maintained and developed. They recognise that language learning is a life-long process and needs sustained learning during schooling.

Effective languages and cultures programs have timetabling for languages and cultures which allocates adequate time to languages to enable effective and sustained language learning, recognising that achievement in language learning is dependent on time on task. Effective timetabling also gives attention to the frequency and regularity of language lessons.

Effective languages and cultures programs are adequately staffed to ensure that language learning can be allocated adequate curriculum time and language class sizes can be limited. Ideally there should more than one teacher of a language in a school. Staffing models using itinerant teachers have a direct impact on program quality as they prevent teachers from forming effective professional relations with students, other teachers and the wider school community, and prevent teachers from teaching effectively.

Effective languages and cultures programs are characterised by the allocation of dedicated space which is suitable for languages and cultures teaching and learning.

Effective languages and cultures programs have budgets which ensure appropriate access to resources for languages and cultures teaching and learning, including print-based and multimedia materials, reference books such as dictionaries, information technology and library resources.

Effective languages and cultures programs recognise the practical and performance-based nature of language learning and the need for class sizes which are appropriate for facilitating language learning as a practical and intensive form of learning. The creation of language class groups should also take into consideration the learning histories of students, their previous experiences of language learning and their background.

Effective languages and cultures programs recognise that students transferring between schools and schooling systems arrive with differing levels of knowledge of and exposure to the languages and cultures taught in the school and have strategies to facilitate transitions and enhance learning.

Suggested questions for reflection

How does the school demonstrate that it values the learning of languages and cultures?

How does the school demonstrate and foster connections between languages and cultures and other curriculum areas?

How is the programme planned to build on learners' knowledge across the years of schooling?

How does the school support sustained language learning over a number of years?

How does the teacher support sustained language learning over a number of years?

How does the school decide what is adequate time for language learning?

How does the school make adequate time available for language teaching and ensure frequent and regular language lessons?

How do staffing levels for languages in the school affect the language program?

How do staffing decisions in the school have an impact on the language teachers' work and the presence and visibility of languages in the school?

What space is made available to the languages program? How does this affect the nature of the program?

How does the school decide what is an adequate budget for language learning? What resources does the school make available for language learning? How do these decisions affect language learning in the school?

How does the school decide on class sizes and class groupings for language learning? How do these decisions affect language learning in the school?

How does the school promote language and culture learning to the community?

About professional standards

Standards of teaching are statements of values about teaching, learning and knowing and the practices of those who teach languages and cultures. These standards have been developed by the Australian Federation of Modern Languages Teaching Associations (AFMLTA) to reflect the profession's understanding of what it values in the accomplished teaching of languages and cultures.

These standards reflect an ideal for languages and cultures teaching to which teachers should aspire. Teachers can, therefore, use them to understand and to develop their own professional practice. These standards are intended to benefit teachers at all levels of schooling as signposts for on-going professional learning and as a resource for evaluating their own knowledge and practice.

The AFMLTA acknowledges that quality teaching is not merely the result of an application of pre-specified skills. Effective languages and cultures teaching is influenced by the context in which the teaching happens, including the conditions in which the program operates. The AFMLTA believes that quality teaching is the collective responsibility of teachers, school leaders, and the school community. In developing these standards, we have included standards for programs as well as for teachers as we believe that as a profession we need to indicate what we believe to be the most appropriate contexts for quality teaching to be realised.

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