



ACROSS
CULTURES

RESEARCH-INFORMED METHODOLOGY

Across Cultures Methodology

Five interconnected principles for developing English
language, literacy, and curriculum access

Any language background | Any literacy level

Assessment-led • Image-based • Blended approach

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Across Cultures' programmes provide structured, image-based language, literacy, and assessment for multilingual learners, including those at an early stage of English or with limited literacy experience. Through three age-specific programmes (Learning Village, Islands, and Community Village), the methodology combines independent learning, educator-supported teaching, targeted intervention, adaptive teaching, and flexible resources. In this document, 'Learning Village' will be used as an umbrella term to refer to all three of Across Cultures' language learning programmes, which support learners aged 6-11, 11-16, and post-16/adult).

Any language background ▪ Any literacy level

Access to the programmes does not rely on English literacy, a shared language with the teacher, or a single translation language. However, this does not mean that every learner follows the same pathway or requires the same support. Instead, it means that a learner can begin through meaningful images, spoken English, and carefully scaffolded interaction without first needing to read English, share a language with the teacher, or depend on translation. Assessment is then used to select and adapt the most appropriate language and literacy pathway.

Purpose and scope

Language is both a subject of learning and the means through which learners access almost every other area of education. A learner may understand a curriculum concept, possess substantial knowledge in a home language, or communicate confidently in everyday situations, yet still be unable to demonstrate that understanding through English. Without explicit language and literacy support, limited English proficiency can mask ability, restrict participation, and affect confidence and belonging (Carrasquillo, Kucer and Abrams, 2004; Cummins, 2000; Gibbons, 2009).

Learning Village is designed to reduce this barrier. It does not treat language learning as a

collection of disconnected games, worksheets, or online activities. Its lessons, assessments, learning pathways, printable resources, and professional support are connected by a shared approach to how language is accessed, taught, practised, applied, and reviewed.

The methodology has developed through Caroline Scott's research and published programmes for teaching English as an additional language, classroom practice in multilingual institutions, and the continuing development of Learning Village (Scott, 2007; 2012; 2020; Across Cultures, 2018).

Underpinning the methodology are five interconnected core principles:

- 1 **Learning Through Images**
- 2 **Immersive English Learning**
- 3 **Structured and Scaffolded Language and Literacy Development**
- 4 **Flexible and Blended Teaching and Learning**
- 5 **Research-Informed and Professionally Supported**

Assessment and inclusive design are at the heart of all five principles. Assessment identifies starting points and next steps; inclusive design ensures that learners can access appropriate support regardless of language background, literacy experience, or additional learning need.

The methodology at a glance

1

Learning Through Images

Images create an accessible route into meaning before learners are expected to rely solely on English text.

2

Immersive English Learning

Learners hear, see, practise, and apply comprehensible English from the start, with purposeful home-language support.

3

Structured and Scaffolded Language and Literacy Development

Vocabulary, language structures, and literacy develop through connected steps, repeated practice, and gradual independence.

4

Flexible and Blended Teaching and Learning

Independent, small-group, targeted, and classroom learning work together according to assessed need.

5

Research-Informed and Professionally Supported

Technology enhances a coherent methodology while teachers retain assessment, teaching, and implementation decisions.



1 Learning Through Images

Images as the initial route to meaning

Learning Village uses images as a primary means of accessing meaning. An image can give a learner an entry point before they can decode the corresponding English word or sentence. When the image is paired with spoken and written language, the learner can begin connecting concept, sound, and form.

This is particularly important where teacher and learner do not share a language, where translation is unavailable or unreliable, or where the learner is still developing literacy. A learner can respond to an image by pointing, selecting, matching, listening, speaking, or acting before being expected to read and write. This allows language learning to begin without waiting for English literacy to be established.

Research into dual coding and multimedia learning indicates that well-coordinated words and pictures can support understanding and memory by engaging interconnected verbal and non-verbal representational systems (Clark and Paivio, 1991; Mayer, 2021). Visual and verbal information can therefore provide complementary routes for processing and remembering new material, provided that the design guides attention and avoids unnecessary detail or overload (Plass et al., 1998; Plass and Jones, 2005). Research on multimedia support in second-language learning has also found benefits for vocabulary comprehension and retention when visual information is meaningfully connected to language (Chun and Plass, 1996; Mohsen, 2011).



Images can also reduce the need to move repeatedly from an English word to a translated word before reaching its meaning. Because working memory is limited, unnecessary search, split attention, or redundant processing can compete with the mental resources required for learning (Sweller, 1988; Sweller, Ayres and Kalyuga, 2011). A clear image-language connection may reduce this avoidable demand. It does not make learning effortless: the learner must still attend to, retrieve, and use the English. The purpose is to make the route to meaning more direct and the cognitive demand more relevant to the learning goal.

The rationale is not that some learners possess a fixed “visual learning style”. Nor does the presence of a picture automatically produce understanding. Images can be ambiguous, culturally unfamiliar, or interpreted differently. They therefore need to be carefully chosen, explicitly connected to the target language, and checked through learner response.

From image to language

Within Learning Village, an image is not an end in itself. It provides a bridge into spoken and written English. A typical progression is:



NOTICE AND INTERPRET

The learner studies an image and connects it with existing knowledge or experience.



HEAR AND UNDERSTAND

The image is paired with clear spoken English.



SAY AND RETRIEVE

The learner recalls and produces the word, phrase, or sentence with progressively fewer prompts.



READ AND CONNECT

Written language is added and linked to the image and sound.



WRITE AND APPLY

The learner uses the language in a new sentence, interaction, or curriculum context.

This sequence enables understanding to develop before the learner is asked to manage the full literacy demand of a task. It also connects speaking and listening with reading and writing rather than treating them as unrelated skills.

Why this supports any language background

The core learning pathway is not dependent on a single translation language. The initial connection is made through image, audio, context, and interaction, so learners from different language backgrounds can work from the same central content. Optional translation may then be used to check meaning, reduce uncertainty, connect with prior knowledge, or enable home participation.

This is the practical meaning of **any language background**: access to the core teaching does not depend on the teacher speaking the learner's language or on a particular translation being available.

Why this supports any literacy level

Learners can begin through listening, speaking, images, gesture, and selection rather than English text alone. Those learning to read and write for the first time can develop useful spoken English alongside explicit phonics and literacy teaching. More literate learners can connect the same images and language to text, spelling, sentence construction, and extended reading or writing.

This is the practical meaning of **any literacy level**: literacy is assessed and developed from the learner's starting point; it is not assumed as a prerequisite for accessing the programme.

2 Immersive English Learning

English-rich, not English-only

In Learning Village, immersive learning means sustained, purposeful engagement with English from the beginning. Learners repeatedly hear, see, retrieve, use, and apply English in meaningful contexts. Images, modelling, gesture, audio, and structured interaction provide contextual and non-linguistic support that helps make the English comprehensible. This reflects the influential principle that language development depends on access to meaningful input that learners can understand, while Learning Village also recognises that input must be accompanied by attention, interaction, production, and feedback (Krashen, 1985; Swain, 1985; Schmidt, 1990).

Immersion does not mean prohibiting home language use. Learners' existing languages carry knowledge, concepts, identity, and learning strategies. Purposeful home language use can help learners activate prior knowledge, understand a new concept, compare language structures, record new learning, communicate with family members, and demonstrate what they know (Cummins, 2000; Gibbons, 2009; The Bell Foundation, n.d.-a; NALDIC, 2024).



Translation is one possible strategy within this multilingual repertoire. It can clarify a key concept, check interpretation, support curriculum thinking, or reduce uncertainty, particularly at an early stage. It should complement rather than replace meaningful engagement with English.

If every item is routinely mediated through translation, learners may have fewer opportunities to develop direct connections between English forms and meaning or to retrieve and produce English for themselves. The aim is therefore not to replace the home language, nor to make translation the principal method of instruction. It is to build increasingly confident and independent use of English while allowing the learner's full linguistic repertoire to support understanding.

A balance of language-focused and meaning-focused learning

Exposure to English is necessary, but exposure alone is not sufficient. Learners also need explicit attention to vocabulary, grammar, and language patterns; opportunities to understand meaningful English; opportunities to produce language; and opportunities to develop fluency.

Nation's four-strands model describes the value of balancing meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development (Nation, 2007).

Learning Village contributes to this balance by:



Making input comprehensible
through images, audio, context, and
modelling



Drawing attention to vocabulary,
phonics, spelling, and reusable
language structures



Requiring learners to retrieve and
produce language rather than only
recognise it



Providing repeated practice through
varied activities



Encouraging collaborative speaking
and listening



Linking language to real situations,
curriculum content, and purposeful
communication

Research on instructed second-language acquisition supports a place for explicit, form-focused teaching, particularly when it is integrated with meaningful communication and feedback (Norris and Ortega, 2000; Spada and Tomita, 2010; Lightbown and Spada, 2013). Learning Village therefore teaches language forms as tools for communication, not as isolated grammar exercises.

Understanding a word or sentence in translation is not the same as being able to notice its English form, retrieve it, and use it in communication. Learners need opportunities to

process and produce language, notice gaps in what they can express, test their developing understanding, and respond to feedback (Swain, 1985; Schmidt, 1990). This is why Learning Village moves beyond recognition to repeated speaking, listening, reading, writing, and application.

From supported participation to confident use

New language is first made accessible and safe to attempt. Learners then encounter it repeatedly in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They are encouraged to take risks, notice patterns, correct errors, and apply language beyond the original activity.

Speaking and listening are especially important at the early stages. A learner should not be prevented from learning survival or curriculum language because reading and writing are still developing. Oral language can be taught alongside phonics and early literacy, enabling learners to communicate while they build the foundations needed for reading and writing (Genesee et al., 2013; Education Endowment Foundation, 2025).



3 Structured and Scaffolded Language and Literacy Development

A coherent progression

Learning Village sequences language so that learners can build from what they know towards more complex communication and curriculum participation. The programme connects:

- survival and everyday language
- high-utility vocabulary
- reusable language structures and grammar
- speaking and listening
- phonological awareness, phonics, and spelling
- reading and comprehension
- sentence construction and writing
- academic and subject-specific language

Vocabulary is not taught as a list of disconnected words. Learners place new vocabulary into meaningful phrases and sentence patterns. Repeated frameworks reduce the amount of new language that must be managed at one time, while still allowing learners to substitute vocabulary and generate new meanings. As confidence develops, prompts are reduced and learners use the structure more flexibly.

This reflects a form-focused approach within a communicative programme. Explicit attention to language helps learners notice and use patterns that may otherwise remain hidden within continuous classroom talk or complex curriculum text (Nation, 2007; Spada, 2011).

Scaffolding towards independence

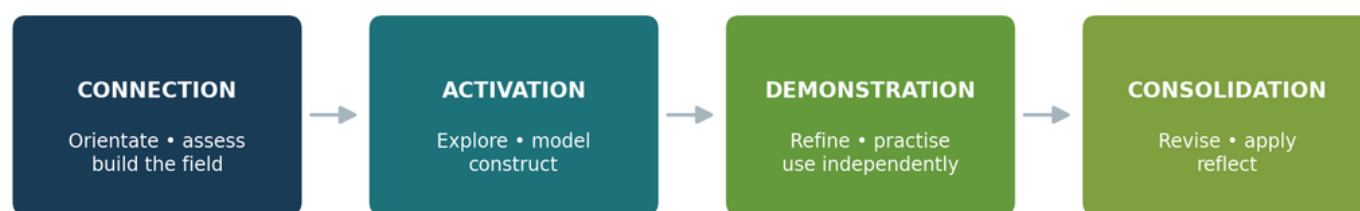
Scaffolding is temporary support that enables a learner to participate in a task that would otherwise be inaccessible. It may include images, modelling, gesture, audio, worked examples, sentence frames, substitution tables, word banks, joint construction, guided questioning, or home-language discussion.

Effective scaffolding maintains intellectual challenge while reducing avoidable language barriers. The teacher first models and supports successful participation, then gradually steps back as the learner becomes more capable of completing the task independently (Gibbons, 2009; 2015).

The process often moves through:

- Teacher modelling
- Shared or jointly constructed language
- Guided practice with prompts
- Independent use
- Application in a new context

The Learning Village teaching and learning cycle



Evidence gathered at every stage informs the next teaching decision

Connection → Activation → Demonstration → Consolidation

Educator-supported Learning Village sessions follow a four-stage cycle developed through Scott's published programmes and informed by accelerated learning, inquiry, and scaffolding frameworks (Smith, Lovatt and Wise, 2003; Gibbons, 2009; Pedaste et al., 2015; Scott, 2020).

CONNECTION:

orientate, assess, and build the field

The learner connects the new topic with prior knowledge, experience, and home language. Images establish context and allow the teacher and learner to explore what is already understood. The teacher identifies gaps, clarifies the learning purpose, and selects an appropriate starting point.

ACTIVATION:

explore, model, and construct

The learner explores the target vocabulary or language structure. The teacher models pronunciation and use, makes the language pattern explicit, and supports learners to match image, meaning, sound, and text. Learners begin reconstructing and using the language with support.

DEMONSTRATION:

refine, practise, and move towards independence

Learners retrieve and use the target language with progressively fewer prompts. Collaborative games, paired interaction, role-play, and independent recall provide repeated opportunities to speak, listen, and receive feedback. The emphasis is on showing understanding through active use.

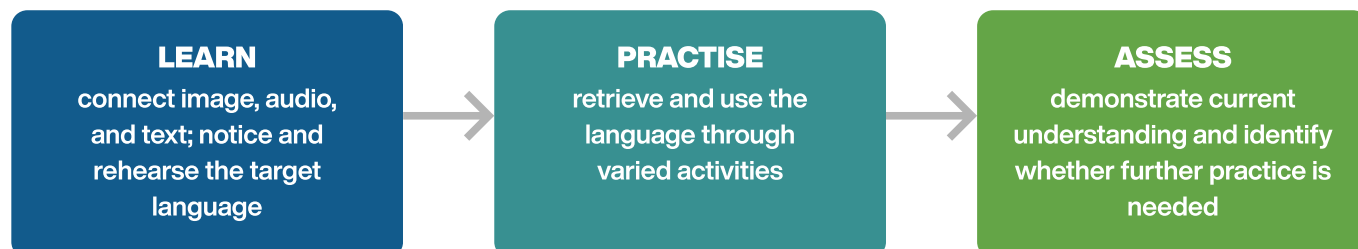
CONSOLIDATION:

revise, apply, and reflect

Learners revisit the language, apply it to their lives or curriculum learning, and consider what they can now do. The teacher uses the evidence to decide whether the learner should revisit, extend, or move on. New learning is recorded for future retrieval and practice.

The Learning Village teaching and learning cycle

Independent sessions provide a shorter, repeated cycle:



This supports strategic, self-regulated learning. Learners are taught how to practise, check recall, notice difficulty, and seek help, rather than being expected to develop these habits unaided (Oxford, 2011; López-Vargas, Ibáñez-Ibáñez and Racines-Prada, 2017).

Retrieval and spaced review are deliberate features. Recalling a word or structure strengthens longer-term retention more effectively than repeated exposure alone, particularly when retrieval is followed by feedback and revisited over time (Roediger and Karpicke, 2006; Karpicke and Roediger, 2008; Cepeda et al., 2006).

Developing literacy from the learner's starting point

Literacy needs cannot be inferred from spoken English, age, or time in an English-medium setting. Initial information should include the learner's literacy in each known language, prior education, familiarity with the Roman alphabet, phonological awareness, reading and writing experience, and any factors affecting access.

Phonics and word recognition are taught where assessment indicates they are needed. Learners whose home language uses a different writing system may need explicit support to connect

unfamiliar English phonemes and graphemes. Learners who are new to literacy may also need support with the conventions and routines of reading and writing. This teaching should use age-respectful content for children, young people, or adults and should sit alongside - not replace - meaningful spoken-language development (Genesee et al., 2013; The Bell Foundation, n.d.-c).



4 Flexible and Blended Teaching and Learning

Learning Village is designed to connect technology, teacher expertise, and classroom application. Its components are most effective when they are used as complementary parts of one provision rather than isolated activities.

The following four delivery modes demonstrate practical expressions of the Across Cultures methodology:

Independent learning

Independent learning gives learners regular, focused opportunities to build and revisit language at an appropriate pace. Image, audio, text, games, and assessment allow practice without requiring continuous adult direction.

'Independent' does not mean unsupported. The teacher:

- identifies the learner's starting point
- assigns or agrees an appropriate pathway
- teaches the routines and strategies needed to work independently
- monitors activity and results
- responds when progress, errors, or inactivity indicate a need for support
- connects independent learning with teaching and curriculum priorities

The purpose is to extend learning time and develop learner agency while allowing limited specialist time to be used strategically.

Educator-supported small-group or one-to-one learning

Small-group teaching provides a lower-risk environment for modelling, interaction, feedback, and repeated spoken practice. It can help learners build confidence, friendships, and a sense of belonging while receiving more precise support than is possible during whole-class teaching (Gibbons, 2009; Education Endowment Foundation, 2025).

Sessions should be purposeful and connected to assessment. They may focus on:

- induction and survival language
- phonics, spelling, or early literacy
- gaps in vocabulary or language structures
- oral rehearsal and collaborative practice
- reading or writing development
- preparation for a curriculum topic
- review of learning that has not yet been secured

Small-group provision should not become a disconnected or permanent alternative curriculum. Communication between specialist, class and subject staff is important so that the language taught supports participation in wider learning (Creese, 2005; Scott, 2020).

Targeted teaching, intervention, and pre-teaching

Targeted teaching begins with a defined learner need rather than a generic activity.

Assessment evidence is used to select the precise vocabulary, language structure, literacy skill, or curriculum demand requiring attention.

This may include:

- filling an identified language or literacy gap
- pre-teaching key vocabulary and sentence patterns before a lesson
- rehearsing how to explain, compare, justify, or describe
- teaching the language of a particular text type
- revisiting a pattern that assessment identifies as requiring more work
- preparing a learner to participate more independently in an upcoming classroom task

Pre-teaching is not intended to lower the curriculum challenge. It provides the language and context needed to engage with that challenge. Short, focused intervention should therefore connect back to classroom participation and be reviewed against clear intended outcomes (Lombardi, 2008; Gibbons, 2009).



Adaptive teaching and real-world application

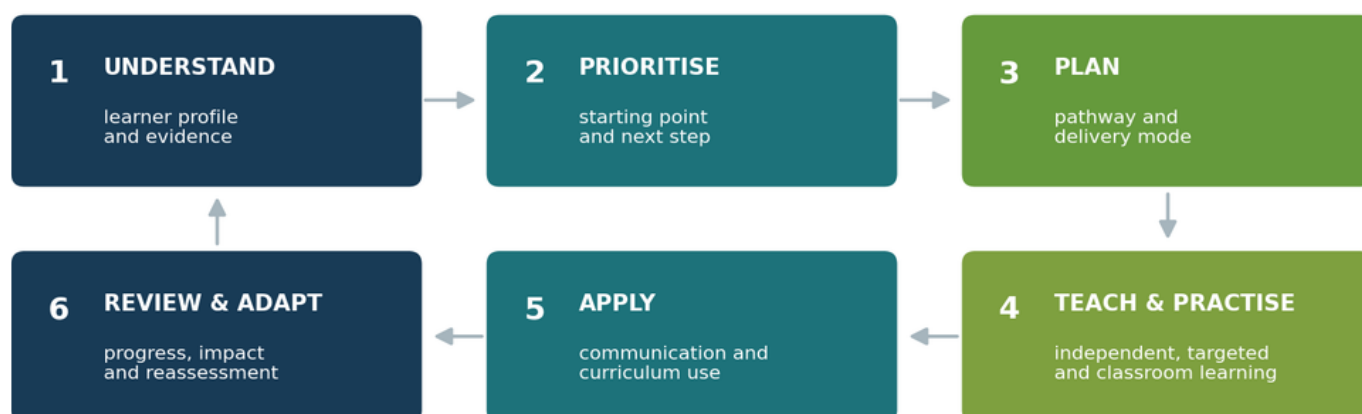
Educators use assessment and their knowledge of the learner to anticipate barriers and adapt modelling, scaffolds, pace, resources, and opportunities for practice, without reducing the intended intellectual or communicative challenge. Learners are then supported to apply their language in relevant contexts, including education, further study, employment, family, and community life.

Learning Village supports adaptive teaching through resources and approaches such as:

- meaningful visuals and graphic organisers
- clear content and language objectives
- pre-taught vocabulary and language structures
- modelled speaking and writing
- sentence frames and substitution tables
- word banks, image-supported texts, and structured prompts
- joint construction before independent work
- collaborative talk and paired rehearsal
- opportunities to use home language for thinking and research
- adapted printable resources matched to the learner's pathway

Adaptive teaching is not simply making work easier. It identifies the language needed to access an age-appropriate concept and provides the support needed for the learner to think, participate, and demonstrate understanding.

Assessment and evidence: the thread through the methodology



Assessment is the thread that connects learner evidence with teaching action.

Assessment is not an activity placed at the end of Learning Village. It is the process that connects all parts of the methodology:

Understand the learner → identify a starting point → select priorities and pathways → teach and practise → review evidence → adapt or extend → reassess

Building a meaningful starting-point profile

No single score gives a complete picture of a multilingual learner. Initial assessment should bring together:

- listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English
- literacy and, where possible, language proficiency in the learner's home language or languages
- prior schooling and any interruption to education
- curriculum knowledge and age-related experience
- phonological awareness, phonics, and familiarity with the writing system
- learner and family perspectives
- relevant additional learning, sensory, or access needs

AssessEP is Across Cultures' English proficiency assessment tool and it can provide structured evidence of a learners' strengths and areas for development across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This can be considered alongside teacher observation, classroom work, unaided writing, reading information, phonics assessment, and home-language information. Assessment should distinguish between limited English, limited literacy, unfamiliarity with a task, and an underlying learning need wherever possible (The Bell Foundation, n.d.-b; n.d.-d).

Formative assessment within learning

Teachers and learners gather evidence continuously through observation, questioning, learner response, activity results, speaking, writing and self-assessment.

Within the Learning Village cycle, assessment helps answer the following questions:

- Does the learner understand the image or concept?
- Can they express it in a home language?
- Can they understand and use the English word or structure?
- Can they retrieve it without the original prompt?
- Can they apply it in a different context?
- What additional language or literacy support is needed?

Learner self-assessment is part of this process. Learners can identify what feels secure, what remains difficult, and which strategies help them learn. Self-assessment is most valuable when it is taught, connected to clear criteria, and combined with teacher feedback (Yan et al., 2022).

From evidence to action

Assessment has value only when it changes teaching or provision. Evidence should be used to:

- choose an appropriate starting point and pathway
- group learners for a clear purpose
- decide what should be learned independently and what requires teaching
- identify language to pre-teach for curriculum access
- plan revision and reassessment
- adapt resources and scaffolds
- recognise progress that may not yet be visible in general curriculum attainment
- evaluate whether the provision is working

AI-enhanced writing feedback may contribute information about proficiency, strengths, and

next steps. It should support - not replace - teachers' professional judgement. Teachers retain responsibility for interpreting the evidence in the learner's context, checking its appropriateness, and deciding how it should influence teaching.

Inclusive by design

Inclusive design is embedded across the methodology rather than added after content has been created. The programme seeks to reduce unnecessary dependence on English literacy, a shared translation language, or a single mode of response. Key features include:

- access through images, audio, gesture, and interaction
- optional home-language support
- multiple opportunities to listen, speak, read, write, select, and act
- structured pathways that can begin with survival language or foundational literacy
- repetition and reduced prompts as understanding develops
- age-respectful content for learners working at an early language or literacy level
- adaptable independent, group, and classroom use
- teacher control over pace, pathway, resources, and support

These features may also support many learners with additional learning needs. However, EAL (English as an Additional Language), limited literacy, and additional needs are not interchangeable. A learner may have needs in more than one area, and accessibility features do not remove the need for individual assessment, reasonable adjustments, or specialist advice.

5 Research-Informed and Professionally Supported

What research-informed means

Learning Village is research-informed rather than built around a single theory or study. Its methodology brings together:

- research in second-language acquisition, vocabulary, literacy, multimedia learning, formative assessment, self-regulation, and scaffolding
- Caroline Scott's published practitioner methodology and classroom experience
- the practical application of the methodology through Learning Village
- feedback from educators and learners
- assessment information, implementation review, and developing impact evidence

The cited research supports individual design principles; it should not be interpreted as proof that any one study validates the entire programme. Across Cultures continues to test assumptions, review emerging evidence, and evaluate implementation and outcomes.

Technology enhances teacher expertise

Technology can provide consistent modelling, repeated practice, immediate response, adaptable resources, and usable information about learner activity. It can extend access and reduce routine preparation or marking time. However, it cannot fully understand a learner's history, identity, classroom relationships, prior education, confidence, or curriculum context.

Teachers remain responsible for:

- interpreting assessment
- selecting priorities and pathways
- making learning culturally and developmentally appropriate
- modelling and facilitating interaction
- connecting programme learning to classroom participation
- noticing misconceptions or barriers
- evaluating progress and adapting provision

AI tools follow the same principle: they should enhance assessment, feedback, or resource creation while preserving teacher oversight and professional judgement.

Professional support as part of implementation

A strong methodology produces impact only when it is implemented consistently. Schools or institutions therefore need more than platform access. Effective implementation includes:

- agreed responsibility for leading provision
- appropriate initial assessment and pathway selection
- timetabled independent and supported learning
- communication between EAL, class, subject, SEND, and leadership staff
- regular review of results and learner work
- adaptation of teaching in response to evidence
- professional learning for new and existing staff

- review of learner, educator, and organisational outcomes

Across Cultures' specialist-led launch, implementation review, refresher training, and

wider professional development are intended to help schools or institutions apply the methodology to their context and sustain it over time.

Across Cultures programmes in action: a coherent implementation cycle

The methodology can be translated into a practical six-stage learning cycle:

1 Understand the learner

Gather English proficiency, literacy, home-language, educational, work and/or curriculum information.

2 Identify priorities and starting points

Decide whether the immediate need is survival language, phonics, literacy, a language-structure gap, work or curriculum preparation, or broader academic language.

3 Select the pathway and delivery approach

Combine independent learning, educator-supported sessions, targeted teaching and pre-teaching, adaptive teaching, and adaptable resources.

4 Teach through the Learning Village cycle

Connect, activate, demonstrate, and consolidate; model the learner-directed cycle of Learn, Practise, and Assess.

5 Apply learning beyond the programme

Use the target language in conversation, classroom learning, reading, writing, and real-life situations.

6 Review, adapt, and evaluate impact

Examine assessment, activity, work samples, observation and learner voice. Revisit, extend, regroup, or reassess as needed. Consider progress in language and literacy alongside confidence, independence, participation, and learners' ability to apply English in education, employment, and everyday life.

The Learning Village teaching and learning cycle

When implemented well, the Across Cultures methodology is intended to help learners:



understand and use English with increasing independence



develop connected speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills



build literacy from an accurately identified starting point



use language structures and vocabulary to communicate meaning



access and participate in curriculum learning or learning for the workplace



develop confidence, agency, and a sense of belonging



demonstrate knowledge and progress more accurately

It is intended to help educators, schools, and other institutions:



understand learner starting points and next steps



connect assessment evidence with teaching action



provide coherent independent, targeted, and classroom support



adapt provision without unnecessarily lowering curriculum or work expectations



use technology while retaining professional oversight



monitor progress and evaluate impact



build consistent and sustainable language and literacy provision

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