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# Chapter 4

## Exploring the intercultural in Australian community languages teaching

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### 1 Introduction

Community Languages (CL) is a term that has been used in Australia since the 1970s to refer to the languages spoken by immigrant groups, as opposed to classical or modern foreign languages taught in schools and universities. Although the term raises questions as to whether “community” refers to the region where the language is used, the group of recent immigrants using the language or the Australian-born children of immigrant parents (Mercurio & Scarino, 2005), the meaning of CL in the Australian context can be seen as closest to the term “heritage” used elsewhere and aligns with the definition Oguro and Moloney (2012) used

to describe school children who are being educated primarily through English but who also have contact with other language(s) through their family or community. This group may include children born in Australia or those who have migrated to Australia, and may include children who have one or more parents or carers who use the heritage language with them (Oguro & Moloney, 2012, p. 71).

These children can also be seen as having different needs to second language learners, as they have a family or community background in the language and/or culture, and different needs to background speakers, as they do not have sufficient exposure to their heritage language and culture to confidently identify themselves as bilingual and bicultural. As well as diversity amongst individual CL learners, there is also variety in CL communities due to their size and the educational attainment and socio-economic status of their members (Carreira, 2004).

### 1.1 Community languages in New South Wales, Australia

CL in the state of New South Wales (NSW), Australia, appears in the education system in three different forms. First is the K–6 Community Languages Program, in which over 30 languages are taught to primary school children in around 150 schools. A school is allocated a Department of Education and Communities (DEC) approved CL teacher according to the school’s demographics. These language lessons occur in school time and are part of the curriculum, but the hours provided differs from school to school. When children leave primary school, they are still able to study their heritage language with DEC teachers by attending the Saturday School of Community Languages, the second form CL takes in NSW. As the name suggests, these lessons occur on Saturday mornings (outside regular school hours) for approximately 3 hours; however, the classes still contribute to a student’s academic record. The third form CL takes is after-hours, community-run schools which fall under the DEC’s NSW Community Languages Schools Program (NSWCLSP), a program which has been administering funding for and supporting after-hours language classes since the mid-1980s. These classes are not necessarily taught by trained teachers and do not contribute to a student’s academic record. As schools are community-run, the number of teaching hours and quality of programs varies between providers. Currently approximately 28,000 students and 2,000 teachers are involved in the program. Language classes operate from more than 450 locations and over 50 languages are taught. The participants in this study teach in CL schools funded by the NSWCLSP.

The NSWCLSP provides funding for school-aged students at the rate of \$120 per student per year, of which 50% are provided by the Australian federal government and 50% by the NSW state government. Funding is also available in the form of Establishment Grants for new schools and Specific Project Grants. The DEC funds community organisations to operate and administer language classes, and also provides funding for an Education Officer to work for each of the three Community Language Schools Associations in NSW – the NSW Federation of Community Language Schools (NSWFCLS) in Sydney, the Association of Illawarra Community Language Schools (AICLS) in Wollongong and the Hunter Parents’ & Teachers’ Association of Community Language Schools

(HPTACLS) in Newcastle. During the year 2012 when the study was undertaken, the researcher was employed as the HPTACLS Education Officer. HPTACLS has approximately 15 member schools. However, the Education Officer's jurisdiction spreads from the north shore of Sydney Harbour to the Queensland border, including part of Western Sydney – an area comprising over 100 CL schools.

## 1.2 Intercultural language learning

Interculturality is a process in which people develop a critical stance towards difference (Lobo, Marotta, & Oke, 2011) through engaging in “‘intercultural’ exchange and dialogue” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 17). One of the debates surrounding intercultural approaches to education is on the kind of knowledge and experience that contribute to the development of interculturality. Whereas Coulby (2006) argues that teachers must have expert knowledge of the culture they are teaching, a more convincing suggestion for how to stimulate the development of interculturality is to do so through the accumulation of experience rather than knowledge. Whereas a focus on knowledge can cement the idea that cultures are static and boundaried, a focus on experience highlights the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of every encounter. More experiential approaches to intercultural education encourage students to look at the “how” and “why” of difference rather than trying to find a “truth” (Lavanchy, Gajardo, & Dervin, 2011). Abdallah-Preteille (2006) extends the idea of intercultural education through experience by emphasising the need for students to take action in order to engage fully with the process of interculturality.

Culture has been incorporated into language teaching in a variety of ways. Traditional approaches emphasise a country's high culture such as art, literature or music, but often fail to create strong links between language and culture. Culture study approaches emphasise information about a country such as its history, geography and institutions. An approach which views culture as societal norms leads students to understand what people from a certain country believe and how they act in certain situations. However, it can result in stereotyping, if a variety of perspectives are not shown (Saunders, 2005).

Intercultural Language Learning (IcLL) can be viewed as an improvement on earlier approaches to integrating language and culture teaching due to its recognition that language and culture are inextricably linked. IcLL also acknowledges that there are different levels of culture (common/human, shared/group, unique/individual) and is an approach which leads students to appreciate difference and avoid stereotyping. IcLL is an approach which emphasises the importance of context for both language and culture, and also highlights that contexts, languages and cultures are dynamic and always changing. In addition to recognising that students can access culture on a deeper level than just learning about food and festivals, IcLL also values a student's home language and culture, and builds upon the prior knowledge they bring to the classroom.

Building on the work of founding scholars of IcLL such as Byram (1989) and Kramsch (1993), the Australian researchers, Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler (2003), have developed five principles to help teachers implement IcLL in their language classrooms: *Active Construction, Making Connections, Social Interaction, Reflection* and *Responsibility*. The principles, their aims and how they can be translated into classroom activities are outlined in Table 1.

In line with the principle of Active Construction, teachers are encouraged to provide students with opportunities to use the target language in authentic tasks, including typical classroom activities such as brainstorming. Making Connections is a principle which recognises the value of students' prior knowledge of languages and cultures, and their own personal experiences. Students are required to actually interact using the target language under the principle of Social Interaction and this can include in-class role playing in a range of contexts. Reflection is one of the principles that is perhaps less likely to occur in the target language in lower and intermediate levels, but which is however still an essential part of IcLL. The final principle, Responsibility, encourages students to use language ethically in regard to how they interact with others and to understand the implications of their language use.

Table 1. IcLL principles, their aims and ideas for classroom implementation

Principle	Aims	Classroom implementation
Active Construction	Students actively engage with the language and culture they are learning and apply it to real-life situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• task-based activities</li> <li>• mind-mapping</li> <li>• brainstorming</li> </ul>
Making Connections	Students make connections between their two (or more) languages and cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students making links between language learning and their own lives such as family and school experiences</li> <li>• comparing language texts and cultural contexts</li> </ul>
Social Interaction	Students identify and communicate across cultural and linguistic boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• talking</li> <li>• interacting</li> <li>• asking and answering questions in a variety of different social contexts</li> </ul>
Reflection	Students think about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• their identity</li> <li>• linguistic and cultural differences</li> <li>• their own intercultural behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discussing</li> <li>• writing</li> </ul>
Responsibility	Students take responsibility for communicating successfully and developing intercultural perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• setting personal goals</li> <li>• engaging positively with difference</li> <li>• reflecting</li> <li>• self-monitoring</li> <li>• using knowledge ethically</li> </ul>

## 2 Research design and methodology

### 2.1 Research design

Data for this study were collected in the form of responses to a short online course. In her role as Education Officer, the researcher regularly developed and administered short online courses for CL teachers. The seven participants in this study were all teachers at CL schools in NSW and volunteered to enrol in the short online course and participate in the research on the condition that they would not be identified and their re-

sponses would in no way affect their course result. Teachers were also free to complete the course without participating in the study. Participants were provided with a certificate on completion of the course. However, no formal qualification was obtained. The course content included different approaches to culture teaching, the features of IcLL, including the five principles (as outlined in section 1.1), a case study, the role of the teacher in IcLL, the importance of teacher reflection and teaching resources for IcLL.

## 2.2 Data collection and analysis

Data for the study took the form of teachers' responses to tasks (given to assist with their reflection and learning) as part of the short online course. Each task, how it reflected course content and which research question(s) it addressed is outlined in Table 2. Teachers' responses were analysed using open coding to address three research questions:

RQ1: How do CL teachers perceive IcLL in their own language learning experiences?

RQ2: How do CL teachers perceive IcLL in their teaching?

RQ3: How do CL teachers perceive the value of IcLL?

Table 2. Online short course tasks, course content and research questions addressed

Task	Course content	Research question
<p><b>Task 1</b> is a reflective task for you to complete before you view the lecture slides.</p> <p>Write down a selection of lessons/activities/tasks/teaching strategies with a cultural component that you have used as a language teacher.</p>	Pre-course task	RQ2: How do CL teachers perceive IcLL in their teaching?
<p><b>Task 2</b></p> <p>Which of these four approaches to culture teaching (traditional/culture study/societal norms/IcLL) have you mainly used?</p> <p>Which approaches do you think are the best for your students and why?</p>	How is intercultural language learning different to other ways of teaching culture?	<p>RQ2: How do CL teachers perceive IcLL in their teaching?</p> <p>RQ3: How do CL teachers perceive the value of IcLL?</p>

<p><b>Task 3</b></p> <p>Think about your own experiences of learning a second or foreign language (perhaps English).</p> <p>How did you experience each of the five principles?</p> <p>In the classroom? In the real world?</p> <p>Which principles were most important for you in learning a new language and culture?</p> <p>Can you give any examples?</p>	<p>Five principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Active Construction</li> <li>2. Making Connections</li> <li>3. Social Interaction</li> <li>4. Reflection</li> <li>5. Responsibility</li> </ol>	<p>RQ1: How do CL teachers perceive IcLL in their own language learning experiences?</p>
<p><b>Task 4</b></p> <p>Read Andrew's story and think about whether students you teach may have similar experiences of growing up in Australia.</p> <p>Do you think IcLL is a suitable approach to use when teaching a Community Language? Explain your answer.</p>	<p>Andrew's story</p>	<p>RQ3: How do CL teachers perceive the value of IcLL?</p>
<p><b>Task 5</b></p> <p>Revisit your original list of lessons/activities/tasks/teaching strategies with a cultural component.</p> <p>Write how you would modify these lessons/activities/tasks/teaching strategies to make them more intercultural using the knowledge you have gained in this online course. If you would not modify strategies, explain why.</p>	<p>Role of teacher in IcLL, teacher reflection, IcLL and teaching resources</p>	<p>RQ2: How do CL teachers perceive IcLL in their teaching?</p>

### 2.3 Participants

All participants were CL teachers in schools administered by the NSWCLSP, the form of CL taught by community organisations outside the mainstream education system. Each teacher volunteered to enrol in the short online course and participate in the research project. This action suggests that they already possessed an interest in IcLL. Thus, their views on IcLL cannot be seen to represent all CL teachers. Teachers were informed of the course through an email sent to all schools in the NSWCLSP and they were also invited to watch a short introductory video

explaining the aims of the course and research study. The seven participants were: 1) a Serbian teacher; 2) a Chinese teacher; 3) a Maltese teacher; 4) a Swedish teacher; 5) an Arabic teacher; 6) a Korean teacher; and 7) a Filipino teacher.

## 2.4 Credibility and reflexivity

Although only seven teachers completed the short online course, they each represent a different CL and bring different perspectives to the data. The group of teachers included native and non-native English speakers, some of whom had been educated in Australia, while others immigrated as adults. Their responses to the tasks varied in length and depth. It was stressed during the course and in the introduction that teachers did not have to express approval of the concepts of IcLL in their responses and that their course results would not be affected by their responses. Despite this, some teachers may have felt obliged to overstate their enthusiasm for IcLL, as they were simultaneously learning about it. The researcher's role as Education Officer may have also influenced participants to respond positively. This may have been counteracted, however, by the fact that their responses were submitted online in a fairly anonymous and private forum. Only the researcher could view and comment on the teachers' responses and the researcher had only met one of the teachers before. Task 1 was designed as a pre-course task to ascertain teachers' perceptions of culture teaching before they read about IcLL and thus provides some insight into the teachers' views on teaching language and culture before beginning the course. Results from this qualitative study cannot be generalised due to the small number of participants and vastly different teaching contexts they work in. However, a number of course tasks encouraged teachers to reflect on their personal teaching and learning context when responding, providing rich, contextual data which enhances the credibility of the study.

### **3 Findings and discussion**

#### **3.1 IcLL and CL teaching**

Task 1 asked CL teachers to reflect on the cultural content of their teaching before reading any of the course material. Responses reflected a variety of approaches to culture teaching including traditional approaches, culture study approaches, culture as societal norms and IcLL.

Responses reflecting traditional approaches included that of the Chinese teacher who described teaching students about two poems by asking them to draw a picture for each poem and explaining that Chinese artists have based their work on poetry since ancient times. Similar to this teacher's focus on the high culture of art and literature, the Serbian teacher in charge of her CL school's choir made connections to the cultural aspects of music.

The teacher of Korean described her culture teaching in terms of the culture as societal norms approach. As her students were going to visit Korea on a trip organised by the CL school principal, she taught them about Korean food and manners to prepare them for their trip. This teacher's approach to culture teaching also reflected culture study approaches, as she described teaching the students about significant days in the Korean calendar such as Children's Day, Parent's Day and Hangeul Proclamation Day. The Swedish teacher also referred to the culture study approach when describing the topics her senior students (approximately 16–17 years old) chose to research and write essays on such as political parties and nuclear power in Sweden.

Responses also reflected the five principles of IcLL – in particular, the tasks set by the Maltese teacher for students to write the recipe for their favourite Maltese dish, cook it and take photographs to submit along with the recipe for inclusion in an electronic recipe book on the school's website. Students were also asked to include information about why they like the dish, how it is served in their homes and any links to history or special occasions throughout the year. Another task the Maltese teacher developed asked students to interview a parent, grandparent, family friend or community member about their migration to Australia. Completed tasks would then be submitted to the NSW Migration Heritage Centre. Both these tasks incorporate many of the principles of IcLL such as Active

Construction (writing and cooking a recipe, interviewing someone), Making Connections (linking their favourite Maltese dish to its historical and cultural context) and Social Interaction (asking their family about the dish, interviewing someone about their migration) as well as an understanding of the experiential (Lavanchy et al., 2011) and active (Abdallah-Preteuille, 2006) nature of “doing” culture.

The IcLL principles of Reflection were touched upon by the Serbian choir teacher, who described how the students could reflect on how they present themselves and their culture to others through performance. She also described the principle of Responsibility as “only interested and responsible students are motivated students” and also saw this principle in terms of engaging positively with difference in the wider community:

Participating in these schools is life-lasting experience. The Community School teacher should be able to fill all children’s hearts and minds with all aspects of cultural learning. In a tactful and skilful way students need to be educated so they can tolerate, understand, accept and respect people from all different cultures. (Serbian teacher)

Before completing Task 2, CL teachers were given a brief outline of the traditional, culture study, culture as societal norms and IcLL approaches to teaching culture. They were then asked which of these approaches they used mostly and which they believed was most suitable for their students. Teachers responded that they used all four approaches, with IcLL being the least specified. In response to the question which approach they thought were best for their students, however, IcLL was rated highest. Despite this, many teachers emphasised the importance of more traditional culture teaching methods to equip students with the knowledge (as espoused by Couby, 2006) necessary to compare, evaluate and analyse cultures:

I think using all of these approaches is necessary, as the student needs to both learn concrete information regarding the culture and then be able to contextualise it and think critically about it. (Swedish teacher)

This teacher’s response highlights the tension that exists between viewing culture as knowledge and culture as skills in IcLL. Although she recognises the importance of context and critical analysis in intercultural approaches, her understanding of culture as “concrete information” or facts suggests that this critical stance does not extend to critiquing as-

sumptions of the homogenous nature of culture (Lobo et al., 2011), as promoted by IcLL.

At the conclusion of the short online course, the teachers were asked to revisit the examples of cultural content in their teaching that they submitted for Task 1. They were then asked to explain whether they would modify these examples of lessons/activities/tasks/teaching strategies to incorporate the principles of IcLL they learned about in the course, and if so, what changes they would make.

The Serbian teacher stated that she would implement the principle of Responsibility by encouraging students to set goals for learning and evaluate their own work. The Maltese teacher also mentioned incorporating Responsibility and Active Construction into her Maltese Migration Project by asking the students to develop their own interview questions and demonstrate sensitivity by taking into account the interviewee's age and reasons for migration. The Chinese teacher responded with ideas for incorporating students' prior knowledge and higher-order thinking skills when teaching poetry and art in future:

I might ask my students to share their experience of learning English poems at school and ask them to think about how poems are valued by Australians and to discuss why Chinese would like to draw pictures for poems. (Chinese teacher)

The Swedish teacher also mentioned asking her students to reflect, and emphasised the importance of Reflection for a teacher implementing IcLL:

Having grown up myself, at their age, as a bilingual and bicultural girl in Australia, I will try to reflect over and keep in mind my own experience and use this to construct my lesson plans. (Swedish teacher)

The Swedish teacher shows awareness of her position as a role model to her students, something the Filipino teacher also wrote of in her response. She stated that she intends to "help students in creating and investigating cultural questions" by providing authentic materials and encouraging students to analyse them for bias or stereotypes. The Serbian teacher also wrote about her vision for the role of CL teachers and CL schools:

Finally, being a role model as a teacher I see the importance of shaping students' identities so they can treasure their own language and culture but also adopt everyone else's culture, language and differences. Living in this beau-

tiful country that multicultural Australia is, we can experience the richness and depth of everybody's language and culture. (Serbian teacher)

### 3.2 IcLL and CL teachers' own language learning experiences

In Task 3, teachers were asked to reflect on their own experiences of the five IcLL principles when learning another language both inside and outside the classroom. For in-class learning, teachers identified the principle of Active Construction in activities such as brainstorming and creative writing, and they identified strongly with Making Connections in the form of applying the new language to one's own life:

Early on in my education we learned the language by applying it to our own lives: making a collage describing our families in French, giving a presentation about our favourite band, etc. (Swedish teacher)

Using prior knowledge was an important aspect of Making Connections for many teachers. This included the Maltese teacher (who also works as a primary school English as a Second Language teacher) using her knowledge of text types and language features in English to write texts (such as a letter) in Maltese. This teacher learned Maltese as an adult and, in the spirit of IcLL, appreciated the point of reference provided by her first language (English):

To make sense of a new language and culture, it is incumbent on the individual to compare the familiar and known to the unfamiliar and unknown. In other words, I have always used my dominant language and culture as both a resource and reference point. (Maltese teacher)

The teacher of Arabic described how Making Connections was an important principle for her, as it encouraged her to reflect on the fact that differences between people depend on "what they have been through, their culture and the life they have lived."

The value this teacher places on the principle of Making Connections reflects intercultural education's emphasis on interaction and dialogue (UNESCO, 2006) and aims to foster appreciation of diversity and avoid stereotyping.

The Serbian teacher gave an example of how Making Connections through dialogue led to her appreciation of the contextual factors which influence local cultures:

Discussing with other learners similarities of beach culture and then realising that beach culture is very different. How? Australia has an ocean with life saving guards and water safety while in country where I am from there was a river or sea safe to swim [without the need for life saving guards]. (Serbian teacher)

Social Interaction was another principle IcLL teachers identified in their language learning experiences. Examples of its significance include speaking with other English learners or English-speaking tourists, being interviewed on the radio in your second language and attending meetings and professional development in your chosen field. This last example was particularly important to the Filipino teacher who valued the principle of Social Interaction highly because “it develops self-esteem, better communication skills, awareness of cultural sensitivity and flexibility in any situations,” indicating the personal satisfaction this teacher derives from participating in activities related to her chosen career in her second language.

Examples of the principle of Reflection ranged from academic and linguistic to social and emotional experiences. The Swedish teacher described how, in her French class:

Reflecting over our own cultural differences often came up in discussions with each other as [...] we all came from different cultural backgrounds. We would also watch French TV shows and news casts, then discuss cultural differences or similarities that these depicted when compared with our own culture. (Swedish teacher)

In this way, Reflection took place, not just on French culture, but on the diversity of cultures in the classroom. The teachers also responded with experiences of Reflection about diversity and cultural differences outside the classroom. The Chinese teacher said she often reflected on different attitudes towards family and child-rearing between Chinese and Australians. The Maltese teacher made connections between culture and linguistics when reflecting on her heritage language, highlighting her awareness of the inextricable link between language and culture:

The comparison and analysis of idioms, proverbs, phrases, similes and metaphors allows one to appreciate the raw thinking, perspective and histories of cultures. (Maltese teacher)

As well as reflecting on the links between language and culture, this teacher exercised Responsibility when using language and described her

experience of “being conscious (self-awareness & monitoring) of my own Maltese character traits/pragmatics when functioning in an Australian English speaking context.”

In addition to taking responsibility for pragmatics when speaking a different language, being aware of a variety of perspectives can be an example of Responsibility. The Swedish teacher explained that when speaking about the carbon tax in France during an oral exam: “[I] had to be ready to engage in different perspectives regarding the issue, and thereby use my knowledge ethically, in a discussion with the examiner.” Thus, besides acting ethically in relation to linguistic conventions, language learners can also take responsibility for developing intercultural perspectives which help them to respect diversity and reach a deeper understanding.

Responsibility also takes the form of learners taking responsibility for their own learning and this was described by the Serbian teacher when she talked about herself setting learning goals, borrowing English books and using strategies to maximise her learning.

### 3.3 CL teachers’ perceived value of IcLL

Task 2 asked teachers to explain which approach to culture teaching they thought was most suitable for their students. The majority responded that IcLL was most suitable, However, some also stressed the value of other approaches. Some of the reasons given for the suitability of IcLL highlight the teachers’ perceptions of its value; for example, the Chinese teacher saw value in IcLL’s acknowledgement of students’ other cultures (such as mainstream Australian culture) in the languages classroom:

I think intercultural approach might be the best since it gives students the opportunity to describe the culture that they are familiar with but also encourages them to look at the culture of the second language. (Chinese teacher)

This statement describes the potential of the comparison of cultures to engage students and increase their confidence and motivation to learn more about the language and culture of their heritage. However, the teacher goes on to say that “the traditional and culture study approaches are essential before students are able to reflect on both cultures.” This statement indicates that the teacher feels cultural knowledge amounts to

facts and “truths” which need to be taught rather than engaged with via experiential learning (Lavanchy et al., 2011), as is advocated in IcLL. Rather than knowledge, the Maltese teacher emphasises cultural skills when explaining that IcLL’s value lies in its capacity to facilitate the development of higher-order thinking. She believes that IcLL would lead to “a greater depth and breadth of understanding” than other approaches. Similar to the Chinese teacher, the Swedish teacher perceived the value of IcLL in its capacity to contextualise information learned. She described the importance of a discussion comparing Swedish and Australian schooling systems in helping her students to reach a deeper understanding of the contexts of each country.

Task 4, another task designed to elicit the teachers’ thoughts on the value of IcLL, asked teachers to read a short passage about “Andrew” – a young man born in Australia of Lebanese background – and reflect on whether their students’ experiences were similar to his. Andrew describes how he felt fairly comfortable with his bilingual and bicultural identity, until he reached secondary school. He then stopped attending Arabic school and began to feel ashamed of his background, trying to become “more Aussie than the Aussies.” When he started university, he came to identify with his parents’ hardships and travelled to Lebanon to reconnect with his heritage language and culture. In conclusion, he describes becoming comfortable with his bilingual and bicultural identity, stating “you don’t have to be stuck in just one thing.”

After reading Andrew’s story, the CL teachers were asked to explain whether they thought IcLL was a suitable approach to CL teaching in Australia and why. All teachers expressed enthusiasm for IcLL in their responses. One reason they felt it was a suitable approach was IcLL’s recognition of students as individuals. Although it can be assumed that students studying in CL schools have some connection to their heritage language and culture, their levels of exposure can vary greatly. The Swedish teacher acknowledges the individual nature of not only their *exposure to*, but also students’ *motivations for* learning their heritage language, when she states:

Because every student is so individualised, I think that IcLL is a suitable approach as it teaches each student to relate their language learning to their own context, which will always be different [...] it allows the students to not

only think more critically about what they are learning but also why they are learning it. Why do they want to learn Swedish? How do they engage with Swedish culture? If they would ask these questions of themselves I feel that it would ensure a greater engagement with the language course. (Swedish teacher)

The Filipino teacher also values the emphasis IcLL places on learners' individual differences and taps into understandings of the subjective nature of culture (Lavanchy et al., 2011), when she describes IcLL as an approach that "makes the students feel valued regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Students have their own 'individual' culture and they are unique."

IcLL was also seen as an effective way to counteract any negative feelings the students might have towards their CL learning or heritage. The Chinese teacher responded:

I think many students I teach have the similar experiences with Andrew. Sometimes they express their distance or even negative emotions towards their background. I think IcLL should be encouraged since it inspires students to reflect on the culture that they are more familiar with and then, helps the students to make connections with the other culture.

Students are not placed in an unfamiliar or totally strange cultural environment. They feel more safe to compare and contrast two cultures. (Chinese teacher)

The Arabic teacher also wrote of her students' negative feelings:

What happened to Andrew is happening to my students at this present time. Students feel ashamed or embarrassed of their cultural background all because they want to fit in and feel like they are normal. (Arabic teacher)

This teacher may have felt the parallels between her students' experiences and Andrew's story more acutely, because her students are learning Arabic (like Andrew) and the Arabic-speaking (particularly Muslim) community in Australia has experienced discrimination in recent years. This is also perhaps why, in her responses to IcLL, this teacher consistently commended its potential to encourage acceptance of diversity both in others and in oneself:

The most important approach [...] is Intercultural Language Learning as it teaches students about cultures and difference in people and not to stereotype or judge someone because of their culture. For example, calling all

Lebanese people hoons or uneducated. This approach teaches us to be tolerant of all cultures. (Arabic teacher)

In a similar vein to appreciating diversity, several teachers expressed the suitability of IcLL due to its accurate reflection of modern, urban Australian society. The Maltese teacher, who works at a primary school with approximately 97% of students from language backgrounds other than English, describes the daily reality she witnesses:

At times, I view the school community as being insular, yet on the other hand, our students have a strong sense of their identity and respect for others. They can confidently move between cultures and I witness this when a student interprets a teacher's message to their parent or grandparent or when they are performing in the Khmer Dance Group and then seamlessly appear in the school dance group, performing in a western style. (Maltese teacher)

This teacher recognises that, for students already accustomed to moving between cultures in their daily life, it makes sense for them to approach their CL learning the same way.

These responses provide rich insight into how IcLL is perceived by a small group of CL teachers. Although the teachers generally believe that IcLL is the approach best suited to their students' needs, contradictions arise when teachers view culture as knowledge rather than skills and practices. By contemplating the incorporation of IcLL into their practice, CL teachers imagine their teaching would increasingly foster students' respect for difference and critical thinking skills. Through reflecting on their own language learning experiences, CL teachers were able to appreciate the significance of the IcLL principles and how they had been personally affected by them. IcLL was seen by the CL teachers as a suitable approach for teaching their students due to its appreciation of each student's unique needs, abilities and experiences, and its reflection of Australia's multicultural society.

#### **4 Implications for teaching**

Although CL teachers have often been left out of mainstream languages teaching initiatives such as IcLL, this study has shown their receptiveness to its benefits. Their appreciation for the approach seems to be aided by their own language learning experiences, and experiences of living bilin-

gual and bicultural lives in Australia. Having the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences in the short course proved to be an effective way for CL teachers to recognise their own experiential knowledge of the intercultural approach. The inclusion of Tasks 1 and 5 highlighted that teachers do not need to abandon their current methods in order to incorporate IcLL. Despite some evidence of tensions between viewing culture as fixed knowledge and seeing culture as dynamic practices, teachers' responses generally acknowledged the main tenets of IcLL, including the individual nature of culture and the importance of dialogue and interaction along with the five principles of Active Construction, Making Connections, Social Interaction, Reflection and Responsibility.

The rich data provided by these teachers indicate the potential benefits of more intercultural approaches to CL teaching. Viewing culture as subjective and dynamic increases students' ability to engage with it and opens up a space for critical reflection on their experiences as bilingual and bicultural members of Australian society. The teachers' responses have shed light on some of the challenges facing CL teachers and their students which can arise due to generational, cultural and linguistic gaps between individuals. Further, the data show that by engaging with the principles of IcLL, CL teachers are able to bridge these gaps by better understanding their students and thus developing more relevant and engaging teaching tasks for them.

As well as generating data for this research, the online course on IcLL served as a professional development exercise for the CL teachers in two respects. Firstly, the teachers learned about language teaching tasks which foster IcLL that they could implement in their CL classes. Secondly, the teachers undertook five tasks utilising the principles of IcLL themselves. The tasks required the teachers to consider their own values and experiences (Reflection), apply their knowledge to their current teaching context (Active Construction), think about the implications of themselves and their students living bilingual and bicultural lives (Making Connections), and the impact their teaching can have on these lives (Responsibility). Even the principle of Social Interaction could be explored to some extent during the online course due to the detailed feedback provided by the researcher to each teacher's response. By *learning about* the five principles and ways to implement them, and simultaneously *learning to practice* the

skills themselves as they undertook the course tasks, the CL teachers were able to experience some of the benefits of an intercultural approach, as they discovered what it was about. The participants' insightful and informed responses suggest that using an intercultural approach to teach about IcLL is an effective way to train teachers to implement it in their classrooms.

## 5 Conclusion

This study of the perceptions of seven CL teachers of IcLL has shown that they recognise IcLL in their own language learning experiences both in and outside the classroom and that they perceive IcLL in their teaching as well as acknowledging opportunities to incorporate it further. Moreover, they see the value of IcLL as an approach that complements more traditional culture teaching approaches, develops higher-order thinking skills, creates awareness of context, and fosters appreciation of diversity. In particular, they perceive the value of IcLL in its capacity to acknowledge students' individuality, create a safe environment to explore, compare and appreciate difference, and help students engage more deeply in learning, as well as in its relevance to the daily lives of bilingual and bicultural students in multicultural Australia.

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