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Enhancing the intercultural capability of students of additional languages in New Zealand's intermediate schools

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Introduction

The purpose of this TLRI-funded study was to investigate how five Year 7/8 teachers of additional languages in four primary/intermediate schools in New Zealand supported their students to develop their intercultural capability in the context of learning a language additional to the language of instruction. The teachers taught a range of languages (Chinese, Japanese, French, te reo Māori).

We define intercultural capability as the ability to relate successfully and comfortably to people from different cultural backgrounds, appreciating and valuing one's own culture and uniqueness alongside the cultures and uniqueness of others (Liddicoat, 2005). Our study was motivated by national and international rationales.

In light of the increasing diversity of backgrounds of learners and their families in New Zealand (see, e.g., Statistics New Zealand, 2013), helping young learners to develop their intercultural capability has become both a significant learning goal and a major challenge.

Bolstad, et al. (2012) asserted that New Zealand's "21st century citizens" need to be "educated *for* diversity—in both the people sense and the knowledge/ideas sense." This is because "[t]he changing global environment *requires* people to engage—and be able to work—with people from cultural, religious and/or linguistic backgrounds or world views that are *very different* from their own" (our emphases). On this basis they concluded that education for diversity is "an essential aspect of 21st century citizenship" (p. 25).

New Zealand's *International Capabilities* report (Ministry of Education, 2014) argued that the ability to inter-relate across cultures is "how the *New Zealand Curriculum* (*NZC*) Key Competencies look when young people apply them in intercultural and international contexts" (p. 1). The report refers to such capabilities as "global competence", "international-mindedness", and "cross-cultural competence" (p. 4). These competences are considered as socially and economically important for New Zealand, and will contribute to helping young New Zealanders to achieve success (p. 6).

Central to our study was the argument that the *Learning Languages* curriculum area of the *NZC* is uniquely placed to become a key vehicle through which intercultural capability may be developed.

Learning Languages is built on a three-strand model which expects that communication, language knowledge, and cultural knowledge will be interwoven within languages programmes (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 24). In the *cultural knowledge* strand, students "learn about culture and the interrelationship between culture and language." Furthermore, "[a]s they compare and contrast different beliefs and cultural practices, including their own, they understand more about themselves and become more understanding of others" (p. 24). These aims are reflected in achievement objectives for students starting out with learning a language (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The published *NZC* end-goal of intercultural understanding has been framed in the literature as reaching a "third culture" (e.g., Kramsch, 1999, 2009) or "third place" (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat, & Crozet, 1999). The "third place" challenges the assumption that the way I (and those like me) do things is the "right", "best" or "only" way. It is:

- a place between first culture (my culture) and second culture (your culture) that "recognises and values both who I am and who you are in the interaction" (East, 2012, p. 141)
- a "comfortable unbounded and dynamic space which intercultural communicators create as they interact with each other and in their attempt to bridge the gap between cultural differences" (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2000, p. 1)
- a place that acknowledges and is comfortable with difference.

Importantly, intercultural interlocutors are not expected to "*abandon* their own thoughts, feelings and values and *assimilate* themselves to the thoughts, feelings and values of their interlocutors." Rather, they are required to "reach an *accommodation* between their own culture and personality and the new culture" (Liddicoat, 2008, p. 279, our emphases). *Learning Languages* provides unique opportunities for students to be introduced to 'second cultures', and to explore and reflect on difference.

Research design and methods

Principles informing the study

Two sets of principles, developed by New Zealand researchers under contract to the Ministry of Education, have been put in place to help teachers with implementing the expectations of *Learning Languages*.

Ellis's (2005) ten principles focus on optimal conditions for developing additional language proficiency in an instructed setting. However, their focus is purely on language teaching and learning; they do not address the intercultural dimension. Newton, Yates, Shearn, and Nowitzki (2010) present six principles for effective *intercultural* language teaching and learning. The principles seek, for example, to integrate language and culture from the beginning, and encourage and develop an exploratory and reflective approach to culture and culture-in-language.

Ellis (2005) was released well ahead of the introduction of the *NZC*, was distributed widely to schools, and has been taken up in several professional learning and development (PLD) initiatives. This means that, in practice, the "Ellis principles" have become quite embedded into teachers' thinking. By contrast, the Newton, et al. (2010) report was not available to teachers until well after the launch of the *NZC*, was not as widely disseminated, and features minimally in current PLD. In practice, the six Newton, et al. principles remain considerably less embedded. Our project therefore investigated how intercultural capability based on Newton, et al.'s key principles might be enhanced in primary/intermediate school contexts.

The study

Our project was framed as a case study situated within an interpretivist research paradigm. Our overarching research question was:

> How can programmes designed to fulfil the requirements of *Learning Languages* enhance intermediate school learners' intercultural capability?

The teacher partners[1]

1. **Lillian** teaches **Mandarin Chinese** (hereafter Chinese) in an International Baccalaureate School in the North Island. Working alongside a Mandarin Language Assistant (MLA), Lillian facilitates three 20-minute lessons in Chinese a week for her students (Year 7 in the first year of the project; Year 8 in the second year).

2. **Kelly** considers herself an intermediate-level user of **Chinese**. In the course of this project, Kelly taught Chinese in two very different North Island full primary schools. The first was a low decile school with mostly Pasifika and Māori background students. Kelly taught Chinese once a week for 45 minutes to her Year 7/8 combined class. The second school is high decile, with students mostly from New Zealand European and Asian backgrounds. Every classroom teacher in Years 5–8 teaches Chinese for at least 30 minutes per week, supported by an MLA.

3. **Kathryn** teaches **Japanese** in an International Baccalaureate School in the North Island. Kathryn studied Japanese at high school and university, but does not consider herself a strong Japanese speaker. Kathryn teaches Japanese every 6 teaching days for 30 minutes to four separate classes of about 32 students each.

4. **Mike** learnt French for 6 months at high school and more recently completed night classes at the Alliance Française. Mike teaches **French** to a Year 7 class for 1 hour a week at an intermediate school in the South Island.

5. **Tamara** teaches at the same school as Mike. She developed **te reo Māori** skills initially through cultural activities, and then more formally at high school and through papers at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. She integrates Māori language and culture across all learning areas in her Year 8 class programme.

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1 Lillian is a first language speaker of Chinese; the other participants speak English as a first language.

The process

The study had four phases:

1. Phase I (February–June 2016): We wanted to find out what the teacher partners already knew and understood about the two sets of principles (Ellis, 2005; Newton, et al. 2010), and the opportunities (if any) that they created for intercultural exploration. We observed their current practices, asked them to complete a demographic survey, and interviewed them about their beliefs and understandings about language teaching and learning in the New Zealand context.

2. Phase II (July 2016–November 2016): We brought the teachers together for an initial 2-day hui where we began to explore with them the Newton, et al. (2010) principles. We also supported teachers as they constructed context-suitable teaching as inquiry cycles with an intercultural focus. We observed classes on at least three occasions with each teacher, undertook reflective interviews with the teachers after each observation, and completed summative interviews with the teachers and focus group interviews with students (six from each observed language class).

3. Phase III (February 2017–June 2017): We repeated the pattern from Phase II, starting with a 2-day hui that took the principles of intercultural capability deeper. We explored pedagogical applications of intercultural principles as exemplified in Liddicoat (2008) and began the process of co-constructing new inquiries with the teacher partners.

4. Phase IV (July 2017–December 2017): We produced a series of in-depth "engaging examples of practice" following the model of published case studies to support the *NZC* (TKI, 2013). These outlined the teachers' journeys and the outcomes of their inquiries.

What we found out

Baseline data (Phase I)

Promoting genuine communication

In line with the recommendations of Ellis (2005), it was clear that the teachers recognised the importance of promoting genuine communication in the target language among their learners, albeit at a basic level that acknowledged their students' beginner status. The teachers drew on key words such as "communication, interaction and excitement". Where cultural knowledge was seen as important, for the most part this was static (i.e., learning facts about the target culture).

> The kids need to be using the language … so get them talking a lot with their peers … exposing them to a lot of input is really important and getting them to use the language as authentically as possible. [Mike, French]

> I believe in teaching the basics for communication at a very, you know, "hi, how are you?" kind of level, "what is your name?" That kind of thing … I ideally include [culture] in every lesson, you know … something little, teaching numbers, unlucky numbers, lucky numbers, colour red, you know, there are so many cultural bits like that. [Kelly, Chinese]

With regard to developing intercultural capability, teachers had not heard of the Newton, et al. (2010) principles, and we therefore essentially began from a baseline of minimal (if any) knowledge.

The inquiries

Our initial 2-day hui introduced teachers to the six Newton, et al. (2010) principles. Although we did not wish the teachers to lose sight of the *holistic* nature of the principles, we placed particular focus on Principles 3 and 4:

3. encouraging and developing an **exploratory and reflective approach** to culture and culture-in-language

4. fostering **explicit comparisons and connections** between languages and cultures.

These were the two principles that had the most resonance for the teachers, and were chosen as foci in light of the published curriculum achievement objectives for beginner language students (Ministry of Education, 2009):

- Levels 1 and 2: (1) Recognise that the target culture(s) is (are) organised in particular ways, and (2) make connections with known culture(s).
- Levels 3 and 4: (1) Recognise and describe ways in which the target culture(s) is (are) organised, and (2) compare and contrast cultural practices.

The teachers framed their own inquiries based on the Teaching as Inquiry cycle as indicated in the *NZC*. In what follows, we summarise key elements from the five "engaging examples of practice". These provide illustrative snapshots of what the teachers *did* with their students, and what they *thought* about what they did.

Lillian

Lillian works in a Bring Your Own Device school. This helps her to facilitate whole class inquiries where all students can see their classmates' interactions as they take place in real time using GoogleDocs. Her first inquiry—Chinese Inquiry on Sport—was with a Year 7 Chinese class. There were two catalysts for inquiry. First were two sets of images, one gleaned from an internet search in English, and the other from a search in Chinese. When Lillian had searched in English using the search term "Chinese school sport" she came up with a set of arguably stereotypical 'unhappy' sports images, a sense of compulsion, and what she described as "competitiveness and things like that ... everything has to be in line ... I'm not seeing any games as much played in the younger generations, everything is, like, teams and it had to look glamorous ... everything is in order and you don't have your own thinking." Using the same search term in Chinese led to a different and perhaps more authentic set of pictures which Lillian saw as reflecting "what the Chinese would like", that is, a happier portrayal which Lillian thought might represent how China wanted to be seen by the wider world. Second, Lillian presented two short video clips about a sports day at a junior high school in China, where everything was presented as very regulated and military.

Over several lessons, Lillian asked her students to explore, discuss and reflect on similarities and differences. Although it seemed that the Chinese students had been forced into participating, Lillian drew attention to the different sets of images, and asked, "Is that the whole picture? How do we know the reality is broader? Do you have Chinese friends? Do you talk to them? What do you think the Chinese want people to think about sport in China?" As the lessons progressed, Lillian took the discussion further in ways that challenged the stereotype of "forced, regulated, rigid"—"What do most people that are not from China usually see about school sport? What do most people from China want others to feel about school sports? Do all schools in China do sports in this way? How do you know? What makes you think that?"

In retrospect, Lillian commented that she liked how her students were responding to the sessions. She noted, "I don't think they've ever been asked questions that are like this." She was aware that, through the prompting and reflection, her students were beginning to challenge stereotypical views.

Kelly

In her first inquiry, Kelly wanted her students to reflect on family similarities and differences between China and New Zealand. This was a class of mostly Pacific Island students, and Kelly saw this as providing rich opportunities for intercultural reflection, comparison, and contrast. One series of lessons focused on 'siblings' and 'family size'.

In an initial lesson Kelly explained China's 'one-child policy'. After this the whole class undertook a survey, in Chinese, on the number and gender of everybody's siblings. In a subsequent lesson the class discussed how family life might be different for an only child (typically a boy) in China. Students shared ideas such as "boring", "lonely", "could be spoilt", "shy" and "they have no one to look up to". Kelly also asked the class to report on how they perceived their own families in comparative terms.

Drawing on an example of an only son that Kelly had known in China, she noted that her students "were doing a good job at noticing the similarities and differences between this boy's life and their lives." In comparison, her students' families were "quite different—chaotic, noisy, and often with lots of adults." Two challenges stood out

for her. First, she recognised that the one-child policy was "actually quite a controversial subject." There were certain aspects she did not want to explore with her students, such as "the way many Chinese aborted young girls," because, in her view, such topics would "not have been discussed with them before." This meant that Kelly ended up "skirting around" some issues that she was not comfortable addressing.

Second, Kelly did not anticipate the responses she would get when she asked how her students would define 'family'. She thought they would supply typical responses—"a group of people that look after you", "people that love you", "something you cherish" and "friends". However, a few students used words like "lazy", "ugly", "harsh", "disrespectful", and "rough". These responses left Kelly feeling "uncomfortable" and "unprepared." However, this became part of Kelly's own intercultural learning. Having "assumed that they were going to give me answers that I could relate to and make connections with," she came to realise that "despite being from the same place, people can have very differing perspectives on the world and themselves."

Kathryn

Kathryn's first inquiry had looked at aspects of Japanese culture related to phone numbers and telling the time. For her second inquiry, students explored different aspects of the relationship of the Japanese people to food, drawing on a range of internet resources (websites and YouTube videos). Her students worked in groups to research potential topics, then organised the information they had found in KWL charts (What I Know; What I Wonder; What I Learned) in shared GoogleDocs. Each group's information was then shared with the class as a poster.

Kathryn's students were used to conducting inquiries and had strong ICT skills. As a consequence the expectations of the task seemed well understood by them, and they were able to navigate and research online confidently. They were also comfortable working in groups and, for the most part, managed their work independently of close monitoring by the teacher.

To start off, students learned the vocabulary of food names in Japanese, the expressions for 'like', 'dislike' or 'love', and some of the cultural protocols around food. In a series of lessons the students watched video clips of Japanese food in different contexts. Kathryn wanted her students to go "beyond observing eating sushi with chopsticks" to other contexts such as the food eaten in school, the changes in Japanese diet over time, the aesthetic presentation of food, table manners, and so on.

Kathryn's role during group sessions was to keep the students on track. She allowed time for groups to explore different topics. It was important to Kathryn that her students did not just identify isolated facts about their chosen topics, but that they investigated the reasoning behind particular ways for doing things.

Kathryn hoped that the inquiry would make the students "richer in their understanding of Japanese, not just the language." On reflection, she deemed the inquiry learning to be a success because, in her perception, her students were "thoroughly enjoying what they are finding out and they are enjoying sharing it with other people too and discussing it." She was delighted to see how the students were able to draw similarities and differences across cultures, not only between Japan and New Zealand, but also among themselves. She felt her students "connected with Japan. They were passionate about what they had found. The inquiries gave them ownership of all they had learned."

Mike

Mike's first inquiry had focused on similarities and differences in eating and drinking conventions in France and New Zealand, drawing on several video clips. In his second inquiry he chose to explore the French school system, aligning this to his intended language foci for the term—time, dates, likes, dislikes. He sourced a range of authentic cultural resources from the internet. In a significant shift from his first inquiry, and using a process that he termed "intelligent questioning," Mike drew on "planned and thorough" questions that would come all the way through lessons rather than as a discrete block at the end.

Mike started off with a French poem to get his students to compare a young French student's thoughts about returning to school after the holidays with their own ideas. Over the next few lessons, the class watched some short videos of French students describing their school day. His use of an authentic French timetable illustrates Mike's "planned and integrated questioning" approach. The students compared the French school week with their own, focusing particularly on the length of the school day and having "free periods". Mike guided the students to also look for similarities, and probed to elicit their thoughts and feelings about what they were noticing. Mike asked his class to identify the two biggest differences between France and New Zealand, as well as two similarities. Regarding timing and range of subjects, he probed further by asking the students to articulate, given a choice, what they would prefer, and why. Regarding days for attendance, he asked, "Who'd be happy to go on Saturday, if you have Wednesday off?" Mike's probing led to lively discussion about which system the students would prefer if they had a choice, and which they thought French students might prefer. In a later lesson, Mike reused the French school timetable to get the students talking about what they liked and disliked.

As Mike reflected on the inquiry, he noted increases in his students' motivation for language learning. Mike attributed this at least in part to the "relevant, authentic and engaging context" that the intercultural focus provided whereby "students enjoyed the challenge of 'decoding' the resources." Mike confessed that he also found the intercultural focus had increased his own curiosity and interest. He also noticed that his students seemed to remember a lot of language. He put this down to the learning "having been put into a more solid cultural context."

Mike's students were very interested in the differences between their lives and those of similar aged students in France. But Mike also wanted them to realise that "culture is more complex than just a couple of generalisations." Thoughtful questioning helped him guide his students to "discuss these new things."

Tamara

As a teacher of te reo Māori, Tamara's focus was on integrating language and culture in the context of playing games. Tamara identified two traditional Māori games (kī-o-rahi and tapu ae) to extend her students' understanding of Māori culture and practise new words. Her goal was to have her learners "being able to use Māori without realising that 'I've used Māori'—so making it a normal everyday thing." Kī-o-rahi and tapu ae also had rich potential for discussions about activities that have origins in other cultures.

In the first lesson, an expert Māori games facilitator taught the class how to play kī-o-rahi. Tamara explained that "the story behind kī-o-rahi is all about taniwha (powerful creatures) and hunting and things like that. It's based on a Māori perception of how creatures move." The facilitator's explanation of the taniwha myth provided a cultural context for how the game evolved. As students played, they had opportunities to use the kīwaha (Māori sayings) they had been learning.

In the next lesson the facilitator made cultural links as she explained how tapu ae was related to Māori warfare. Interspersing Māori words with English, she described how, just as with Māori at war, there are defenders and attackers and runners (each with a particular area on the field), and how, during pā (fortified village) wars, the warriors would protect their women and babies (represented by tennis balls on small upturned cones within a circle at each end of the playing area). The facilitator seamlessly interspersed her English explanation with Māori words as she went through the rules for tapu ae. The students played the game enthusiastically.

In the next lesson, links were made to a range of activities in different cultural contexts, including Irish dancing, *Siva Tau* (Samoan war dance), and striking a *piñata* (Mexico). Tamara taught the students some yoga poses with "a Māori spin". A short karate session with visiting teachers enabled further intercultural exploration and reflection. The students were prompted beforehand to recall Māori words they could use during karate. When they returned to class, the students discussed links between karate moves and the movements in yoga and the Māori games they had played.

Tamara concluded that "looking at things differently" was a key thing she had achieved with her class during the inquiry. Her students' explorations had extended across a range of different cultures, including people from other cultures within the class, and connecting to students' own heritage and extended families.

Enhancing intercultural capability

Below we present findings from both the teacher reflections and the student focus groups, grouped around key themes emerging from the data.

Teachers' perspectives (benefits)

Increased intercultural focus

It was clear that the teachers saw the increased intercultural focus through inquiry learning as a new dimension they had not seriously considered before. The teachers had taken important steps beyond a simple focus on basic formulaic language and basic facts about the target culture.

> I do fully support that [this] is what language is all about. It's not just about teaching how to say it, the structure, but it is actually seeing the bigger picture. [Lillian, Chinese]

> Basing lessons in an authentic context, having a bigger picture, making lessons relevant to learners, allowing students room to explore, challenging their pre-existing ideas and asking for their point of view are all tenets of good constructivist teaching. [Mike, French]

> I simply hadn't thought of student inquiries as a part of my language programme. This [the intercultural inquiry] made it clearer for me to see a way forward in my teaching, including culture. [Kathryn, Japanese]

> My lessons during the last two years have featured more whole class discussions where we reflect on the similarities and differences between two cultures in an effort to increase our knowledge and understanding of others. [Kelly, Chinese]

Critical reflection through inquiry cycles

Inquiry learning cycles prompted a level of critical reflection on the part of the students, creating safe and valuable spaces for students to explore cultural similarities and differences. The teachers were very aware of the need to challenge stereotypes. Inquiry questions moved learners towards an appreciation that culture cannot be reduced to a single set of beliefs and behaviours (i.e., the Chinese do it like this).

> They have been exploring stereotypes and discussing them openly ... they don't seem to buy much into stereotypes, if that makes sense, because they've got such experience with the Chinese girls right here in the class and within the whole school. [Kelly, Chinese]

> [My lesson aims were] to appreciate that there were differences, but also observe that actually there were just as many similarities, but also it was to appreciate the idea that culture is quite a complex idea and you can't just say "people in France do this", to appreciate stereotypes. [Mike, French]

Making connections across cultures

An important dimension of the comparison and contrast was the ability for the students not only to *make connections* between the target culture and their own cultures, but also to make connections with students from diverse backgrounds in their own classes.

> I wanted them to understand that there is a reason why not all people [Chinese] are the way that people think they are ... they can actually say to me "well, you know, my friend so and so is from China, they don't celebrate this and also they don't do things in certain ways like that". [Lillian, Chinese]

> The cultural focus was comparing, trying to make explicit comparisons between their own culture [and that of France], but also getting that idea that it's not just one thing ... I think they were beginning to notice that it was different ... [and] they were beginning to pick up some of their own culture as well. ... actually just looking and reflecting on your own culture ... is an important part of it. [Mike, French]

> When we did yoga and changed them to Māori words, they were kind of "this is really weird", like, they had this stereotype that yoga was for Indian people or mums in tights kind of thing ... we've got a Fijian Indian boy in here who is really quite "oh, this is what *we* do" ... so he was pretty vocal at some points, especially with the yoga. [Tamara, Māori]

Perceived learning gains

Teachers perceived important *learning gains* for their students, in particular in coming to appreciate similarities and differences across cultures, and thereby developing a greater openness to 'otherness'.

> I think they have taken away with them that there are different perspectives at looking at things. [Lillian, Chinese]

> I probably wouldn't have talked about how important time is to *Japanese*, probably wouldn't have thought about how important time is to *us*, I would have launched just straight into the *language* part of it. … I think they'll take away the differences more than the similarities … and the fact that for most of us time is pretty important … to learn that people are different from [them] is more memorable. [Kathryn, Japanese, our emphases]

> The boys were absolutely astounded to find out that *poi* (swinging tethered balls/weights) did originate as a boy's thing. … We did this whole big comparing what was perceived as masculine and feminine. [Tamara, Māori]

Perceived increased motivation

There was also a perceived *motivational* angle to the intercultural foci that appeared to be absent when the focus had been purely on language. For Kathryn (Japanese) the increase in motivation was contingent on a sense of increased *connection* which she believed had occurred.

> The culture, giving them the taste for it, has really fulfilled the kids, and I'm sure it is going to increase their desire to take a language … when they move into high school, because they are so interested and they feel related, I think, to Japan now. [Kathryn, Japanese]

> They are definitely a lot more engaged than just teaching them, like, the actual characters and just the language of Chinese. [Lillian, Chinese]

Teachers' perspectives (challenges)

Lack of sufficient cultural knowledge

Three main challenges stood out from the teachers' stories. First, there was perceived *lack of sufficient knowledge* about the target culture, and an attendant anxiety that teachers might pass on inaccurate information or that they might embed uninformed stereotypical thinking into their students.

> I still feel insecure about my lack of knowledge about the culture. [Kathryn, Japanese]

> Students don't have much cultural knowledge outside stereotypes … [and I am] nervous of me not having the culture knowledge myself. [Mike, French]

> I believe that the depth of my knowledge of Chinese culture is limited due to being a foreigner and a non-native speaker of the language. I do not wish to inaccurately portray the Chinese culture due to my inexperience. [Kelly, Chinese]

Lack of sufficient time

A second challenge was a perceived *lack of time* to undertake meaningful intercultural exploration. Since these teachers were working in contexts where the time devoted to language learning was minimal, there was genuine concern that it would simply not be practical to sustain the level of intercultural inquiry that they had been able to create by virtue of the project. In this connection, it was recognised that developing students' ability to reflect, compare and contrast was a long-term goal, a pathway that required an on-going commitment.

> I don't think it is something that can be done in a lesson or one term or two term inquiry … you just have to slowly actually start observing and understanding. I think that is the key, working on trying to understand why we think that, why things are different. [Mike, French]

> There are a few times with tasks when I purposely tried to have the intercultural dimension to it and sometimes that took a lot of planning and work, and as always the research took a lot of work to check that I'm accurate in what I'm saying … time pressure is just so massive. [Kelly, Chinese]

Separation of language and culture

Tamara (Māori) achieved what she regarded as a successful *integration* between language and culture.

> I think the language can be actually interesting if we can play a game [with] all the instructions given in a language that's associated with whatever game it is … so it's not being specific and saying "here is our allocated time slot". It is part of our kaupapa (operating principles), it is part of what we do, and that's the biggest thing. [Tamara, Māori]

However, the other teachers expressed concern that an intercultural focus *detracted from learning the language*. Despite genuine attempts to embed the culture within the language by, for example, allowing intercultural exploration to emerge from the chosen language focus, teachers struggled with an apparent *incompatibility* between language learning and intercultural reflection.

> I think I achieved the cultural side, but the language side wasn't there just because the half hour wasn't long enough to be including the language and the culture … It's hard because it's a balance between the Japanese language and the Japanese culture. … so for me in the long term … how do I marry the language part and the cultural part? [Kathryn, Japanese]

> It was good overall to actually look at culture, it's never really been a big focus of my language teaching before … [but] I was discussing a lot of cultural stuff in English. I felt personally that my language targets went down a little bit, but cultural targets went up [Kelly, Chinese]

> How to weave it [intercultural learning] into the language learning itself, you know, a balance between the language structure learning as well as this … at the moment, I have to be honest with you, it is a bit hard. [Lillian, Chinese]

Students' perspectives

Student focus groups provided opportunities to look for evidence of the extent to which *students* reported intercultural gains as seen from comparative perspectives and the extent to which the process had begun to bring these students to a 'third place' (a place of comfort between their own culture and the target culture). In what follows, we present data from the focus groups as a progression, from assimilating facts, through noticing difference, developing openness to difference, being comfortable with difference, and finally arriving at a third place. This provides a useful means of viewing how students may be taken from one level to another. In practice, however, it was evident that each element co-existed and that students transitioned between different points on the continuum towards intercultural capability, and at different points in time, as they discussed their learning experiences with each other.

Facts about the target culture

When the students were asked to describe what they had learnt about the target language culture in their language lessons during the inquiry process, students reported an apparent focus on *facts*.

> We learnt [about] the breakfasts and dinner and lunch and stuff over in France. [French]

> We searched up some images of New Zealand sports and Chinese sports. [Chinese]

> I've learnt how to tell the time. [Japanese]

> Well, we learnt some history about some Māori. [Māori]

Only the students of Māori made reference to an *integration* of culture with language in ways that appeared to enhance their learning of both.

> We go out and play games, and it [the language] actually stays in our minds a lot, because we play the games a lot, and we learn, like, the phrases and stuff.

> We don't even really know we are doing it because we are using it [Māori] so much.

Noticing differences

Further questioning elicited some evidence that, embedded within a range of thematic contexts, students could be moved beyond factual knowledge to one that demonstrated clear *noticing of differences*. There were times when it seemed the noticed differences were not appreciated, illustrating a 'first culture' positioning.

> They lock people out of school if they are too late, but here we don't [Student 1]. But if it was not their fault and the bus was late or something they would still get locked out, it's just too bad … it's kind of stupid [Student 2]. [French]

> We also learned that in France when you go to the market to buy, like, the iconic French stick or something … that they wouldn't wrap it up, they would just wrap up the middle for you to hold it and … so it would just leave the rest of the world to touch it if they wanted to. … I thought it was really gross and unhygienic. [French]

Openness to difference

However, some examples of noticing seemed to lead to a position of openness to difference, rather than a reinforcement of the rightness of one view over another. That is, it seemed that some students who noticed differences were able to move beyond a 'first' and 'second culture' view to a place that was willing to accept that neither perspective was right or wrong, better or worse, it was just different. The students were comfortable in their own positions here; they saw no need to abandon their own perspectives in an assimilationist way.

> I learned that everyone has a different perspective on how other people do things and that we normally stereotype other countries … or we have a different opinion on how they do things. [Chinese]

> … they do stuff differently. I wish I could do some of the stuff they did sometimes, like trying new food … [it] would be really weird, like, eating frog legs and snails … before … I would say absolutely no, but [now] I really want to go there and try every food they've got. [French]

> Their school starts earlier than ours and finishes later, and I think they've got quite a bit of homework they have to do each day … If they want to do this, then it's not abnormal, it is unique to them. [Japanese]

> I understand them better. … I won't be, like, saying "oh, these foods taste yuk" or "these foods are horrible" or something like that … I would just keep that to myself and say [to myself], "well, next time I am not going to order this". [Chinese]

Comfortableness with difference

Several students articulated significant developments in their own positioning by virtue of the inquiry process. That is, as students moved from an "at first I thought …" to a "now I think …" position, there was evidence that they were *comfortable* with perceived differences.

> It has changed me, how I see things differently … I normally would see it from that [one perspective] and [now] I look at another perspective. [Japanese]

> At the start I thought French people were weirdos, but now I think they are just normal people following their culture. [French]

> I used to think French people were amazing, magnificent, almost like dolls in a doll house, they needed to be put on display, but now that I have learned more about them I think they are just normal people. They are just doing what their culture says. They should not be like dolls that should be put up on display, they are just human. [French]

Reaching a 'third place'

It was not, however, merely a question of seeing (and being willing to accept and appreciate) difference. Some students were beginning to understand what it meant to position *themselves* in a 'third place'. Although they struggled with the words to articulate it, there was a suggestion of reaching a "comfortable and unbounded" space (Liddicoat & Crozet, 2000, p. 1), a space of *accommodation* in which the interlocutor accepted difference as normative and non-threatening and was willing to suspend having to operate out of an isolationist 'first culture' perspective.

> I think our culture, I think there is … almost a blend together … because sometimes we do the same things, sometimes we don't. … I think it is because more people are travelling around the world learning new cultures, and then I think they are just putting them together, and starting to use their culture, and it is starting to blend. [French]

> So it is we are all treated equally … we should respect their culture and they should respect ours … like sharing everybody's cultures around, like knowing about different cultures. [Chinese]

> Well, first of all, I understand them better and so I know why they do specific things unlike me or others … so I kind of respect the other cultures, and I kind of, well, replace my culture with the other culture so I can make my culture, like, better, I guess. [Chinese]

This student of Chinese went on to provide an illustration that meaningfully encapsulates a 'third place' positioning, and what this student meant by "replace my culture with the other culture".

> Everybody has a different culture … so it is sharing … [until] there is no such thing called "country", like everybody will be just mixed up in a bunch, jumbled up in a salad. Instead of "this is a tomato corner", "this is a cucumber corner", "this is a salad corner".

That is, a tomato and a cucumber do not cease to be by virtue of being in a salad, but they are no longer individual and standing alone; each contributes its own uniqueness to the whole, arguably making the whole a more complete expression by virtue of its contributing parts.

Increased motivation

Finally, there was some evidence that students were *motivated* by the opportunities to encounter and consider cultural differences through focused inquiries.

> I like inquiry because I learned lots about Chinese culture. [Chinese]

> I've enjoyed the fact that I've learned something not just from my culture, that I understand other people, like I can understand what people are saying. [Chinese]

> I really enjoy, like, the videos, and the new things we get to learn … they actually tell you more about them. [Japanese]

> If you have a friend from a different culture, you might have a better understanding of their country. So it might make you want to go there [to] visit. [Japanese]

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge several limitations to the study.

First, the situated nature of our study limits the generalisability of our findings and the extent to which the intercultural foci chosen by the teachers can be implemented without significant modification in other contexts. However, the project was predicated on the belief that intercultural inquiries would be most effective when designed and tailored to the local context and we believe that the range of contexts and languages we drew on provides useful ideas for other teachers to try out as they consider the "engaging examples of practice" we have produced.

Second, we started the project at a point where the teachers held a range of understandings/beliefs/practices regarding the place of culture in their teaching of languages. The shifts in learning/practice that we observed were less dramatic and not as extensive as we had anticipated. This may have been exacerbated by the "non-interventionist" stance we deliberately took whereby we did not direct and instruct teachers in what the foci of their inquiries should be, but rather guided and questioned the teachers as they worked through the process themselves. Further work with these or other teachers may benefit from more scaffolding and direction.

Third, there are limitations inherent in self-report data. We sought to mitigate these by triangulating data using several sources of evidence. Additionally, maturational constraints (the young age of the students) limited the

students' ability to articulate clearly the positions they had reached themselves vis-à-vis a "third place". Often the evidence of students' third place positioning was embedded within more superficial comments related to student learning and required careful extrapolation. Further studies would benefit from eliciting a broader range of data on the students' learning, for example, reflective journals that might evidence intercultural exploration.

Implications and Recommendations

This study has confirmed to us that developing students' intercultural capability in the context of learning an additional language is a worthwhile and achievable goal. All the teachers noted shifts in their own practices as a consequence of participation in the project. Shifts were evident in teachers' willingness to try out explorations of intercultural incidents; engaging their students in meaningful reflections on comparisons and contrasts across cultures through learning inquiries; and recognising (and thereby working to avoid) stereotypical thinking. The student data provide instances of reaching meaningful "third place" positions.

The findings of our study suggest the following:

- Inquiry processes carried out by both teachers and learners are important ways of helping students to engage with cultural differences.
- Key questions (such as those that several of the teachers had begun to employ) scaffold students when interrogating authentic resources (e.g., video clips, photos):
  - What do I *learn* about the target culture through the input?
  - What *differences* do I notice? What *similarities*?
  - What do I *think* about the target culture through this input in relation to my own culture?
  - How will what I have learned and think *change the way I act* towards those from a different language and cultural background?

The data also indicate that, apart from in the case of Māori, teachers struggled with the fundamental question of how to reconcile teaching and practising the *language* with exploring the *culture*. For beginning students, the *reflection, comparison and contrast elements* that are expectations both of Newton, et al.'s (2010) Principles 3 and 4 and of the *NZC* achievement objectives (Ministry of Education, 2009) are arguably *inaccessible* in the target language. Although the teachers and students reported worthwhile intercultural learning gains, this was mainly achieved via a procedural divide whereby culture became quite separated from language used for communicative purposes (the teachers resorted to English for reflection), and teachers expressed a level of discomfort with this.

In turn, the tension between language learning and culture learning became an increasing component of our own reflections on the emerging findings. We come to the conclusion that, in large part, the procedural divide is informed by a view on instructed second/additional language acquisition (contingent on interpretations of Ellis, 2005) that much, if not most, of what happens in the additional language classroom should be in the target language. This is a laudable and theoretically defensible view that has dominated thinking in the learning area, at least since the Ellis report. It is, however, a view that we must challenge if we are to see meaningful intercultural explorations become integral components of the language learning experience, especially for beginner language learners. In this respect, Tamara's (te reo Māori) approach stands out as a contrasting example whereby Tamara sought to *integrate* language and culture in ways that also assumed a seamlessness between Māori and English as "part of our kaupapa." However, Tamara recognised that she could develop a stronger focus on the *communication* strand of the *NZC* in her approach. The *interactional* skills of her students were arguably under-developed.

We conclude that, when teaching beginner students of languages in the New Zealand context, a more realistic expectation is that language learning should include a focus on target language use that can be combined with judicious use of English for scaffolding, exploratory, and reflective purposes. This would enable greater integration of language and culture, particularly at the beginner target language levels encountered in most New Zealand primary/intermediate classes. This is certainly an approach that has been taken up successfully in

the Australian context (see, e.g., Morgan, 2010). The approaches to intercultural reflection taken by the teachers in our study could be more seamlessly integrated with communicative (target language) interactions. For example, these might include class surveys to elicit students' preferred sports or school subjects, or to enable students to articulate, in simple ways, what they think about differences they have encountered during episodes of intercultural exploration.

Moving forward, we highly recommend that work needs to done to reconcile the perceived incompatibility of two influential reports (Ellis, 2005; Newton, et al., 2010) designed to inform curricular implementation. This work may include the articulation of a revised set of overarching principles. Our data provide a good basis to begin that work.[2]

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2 See East, Howard, Tolosa, Biebricher, & Scott (in press) for further exploration of the isolated/integrated tension as emerging from this project.