Intercultural Competence in Tertiary Learners of Chinese as a Foreign Language: Analysis of an Innovative Learning Task

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Abstract This chapter presents the findings of a project designed to support development of student intercultural competence and critical thinking, innovative in the context of undergraduate Chinese language study.

An 'intercultural' approach to language learning has been widely encouraged in contemporary foreign language learning in Australian, North American and European contexts, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels (Kramsch, 2006; Scarino, 2000). As an integral part of language acquisition, students need to acquire habits of critical thinking about cultures, or 'intercultural competence'. Within student language learning, learners may develop intercultural competence through having structured opportunities to critically observe a cultural practice or particular language usage, and negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries. The chapter presents a description of a teaching intervention which took place in a second year Chinese language unit. Data comprised student reflective journals and focus group interviews. Analysis of the data showed that students found the intervention workshop and the ensuing tasks, consisting of intercultural language teaching, and journal writing, to be useful in facilitating heightened intercultural awareness. Furthermore, it raises the profile of intercultural competence as a critical language learning outcome, aligned with current initiatives in the tertiary sector, in the commitment to exchange opportunities and internationalisation.

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1 Introduction

Most universities today attach value to a global cultural competence amongst their graduate capabilities, and either explicitly or notionally integrate it in curriculum. Language study offers a particular learning opportunity for the development of critical thinking about language and culture. While an 'intercultural approach' to language pedagogy is well-established in European and North American language pedagogy, it is breaking new ground in the teaching and learning of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) (Orton 2008, 2011).

This chapter examines a collaborative teaching intervention in an undergraduate CFL class. It investigates student response to an intercultural workshop and subsequent reflective writing tasks. The chapter examines to what extent the intervention facilitated development of intercultural competence in students, as evidenced in student reflective writing, and in focus group interviews. This study builds on previous research where reflective writing narrative has been used effectively as a tool in education (see for example, Bagnall 2005; Liu and Milman 2010; Moloney and Oguro 2014).

Within the same university, Researcher 1 teaches Language Methodology to preservice language teachers in the School of Education, while Researcher 2 teaches Chinese Studies in undergraduate classes in the Department of International Studies. Although they have differences in educational background, both researchers have been involved with innovation in CFL pedagogy practice (Xu and Moloney 2011a, b).

2 Literature Review

In reviewing the research literature which informs this study, we first discuss the definition of intercultural competence; secondly we address the theoretical development of intercultural competence in the context of language learning, and in particular, in the tertiary CFL classroom; lastly the review briefly discusses the problematic nature of 'assessment' of intercultural competence, and how this shapes the choice of research methodologies.

2.1 Defining Intercultural Competence

The significance of a competence in sociocultural understanding of language use, developed in tandem with linguistic competence, has emerged from sociocultural theory. The work of Firth (1966, 1968) and his student Halliday (1975, 1978) pioneered the analysis of language in its social context and established the interdependence of language, culture and society, and language as a social phenomenon. In sociocultural theory of learning and development, language reflects, and is created by, cultural setting and everyday activities. The notion of an identifiable

intercultural competence has been applied in a number of diverse fields: it is used within research in tertiary student internationalization and study abroad (for example, see Paige et al. 2006); it has taken on economic capital within corporate training (Bennett et al. 2000) and it has shaped new directions in language pedagogy (Kramsch 1993; Byram 1997; Liddicoat and Scarino 2013). We acknowledge that the suitability of the term *competence* has been contested (Armour 2004), as it implies an individual's concrete set of skills in what must be, in fact, a complex, unstable and personal growth process constructed with others.

In considering what the term is meant to denote, Deardorff (2006) found that internationally it was understood to include component skills of analysis and interpretation, and cognitive skills that included comparative thinking skills and cognitive flexibility. In the language learning context, it includes knowledge skills and attitudes (Byram 1997), abilities to de-centre from and question one's own cultural practice, and investigate the reasons behind why the speaker of the other language acts as he/she does (Dervin and Dirba 2006).

A wider study of intercultural competence on the university campus in which this study took place was undertaken by Krajewski (2011). Her study identified a definition for intercultural competence in everyday practice between staff and students, derived from consensus. Krajewski's final definitional model involves the interaction of (a) attitude and motivation; (b) knowledge and skills; (c) behaviour and outcome. She concludes that "*Intercultural competence means to be open-minded and respectful and to accept ambiguity in all discourse with people, to consider other people's perspectives and to constantly work towards effective and appropriate communication in order to build and maintain meaningful relationships"* (Krajewski 2011, p. 85).

While Krajewski (2011) and Deardorff (2006) have both suggested that a precise contextual definition is still under construction, this CFL research context defines the principal characteristics of intercultural competence for language learners, as capability to:

- critically reflect about the relationships between learner's cultures (Liddicoat et al. 2003) to de-centre, notice, and reflect on different interactions with culture (Scarino 2000, p. 9)
- Investigate deeper knowledge about practices in the target culture, China (Liddicoat 2002; Byram 1997)
- develop a sense of an individual intercultural identity and perspective (Kramsch 1993; Armour 2004)

These three capabilities informed the development of the data analysis tools of this study. Intercultural competence is observed in student performance in activities conducted *alongside* their language learning, rather than embedded within language use, which will follow in a later study. The activities in this study were considered a first step, in the case of CFL, in introducing the notion to both students and teacher. Previous research (Moloney 2013; Moloney and Xu 2012) has demonstrated the need for progressive introduction of intercultural strategies.

2.2 Intercultural Competence Within Language Learning

Tertiary language learning in Australia has undergone pedagogic change in the last 10 years, due in part to concern about the dropping participation rates for languages education (Group of Eight 2007). Pedagogy which focuses on communicative skills alone has been critiqued as failing to stimulate critical cultural understanding (Doyé 1996; Schulz 2006) and meet deeper student needs and expectations of constructivist contemporary education. Kramsch (2006) has written that tertiary language students "*need a much more sophisticated competence in the manipulation of symbolic systems… (what) word choices reveal about the minds of speakers*" (p. 249).

'Culture' has frequently been understood, and taught, as discrete items or artefacts of exotic interest, from an ethnocentric standpoint. Cultural 'information' is easily teachable (Paige et al. 2006), but may lead to a focus on superficial behaviours and stereotypes, without examining underlying values. This has been conceptualised by Moran (2001), in his description of four types of knowing involved in culture learning, in ascending complexity: 'know about'/'know how'/'know why'/'know oneself'. Information-rich traditional models of culture teaching (know about) are seen as weak in development of critical thinking.

In common with other languages, CFL teachers need to find ways to facilitate student abilities in critical cultural awareness, involving challenge to personal beliefs and assumptions. Such activities assume a common educational orientation in both student and teacher, in which knowledge is contestable, and open to interpretation. This may be challenging in the CFL classroom, where traditionally teachers have assumed the authoritative role, delivery of content, the 'know about' process is prioritised, and the nature of knowledge is not contestable (Chiang 2010; Wu et al. 2011).

Many teachers of CFL have traditionally been trained, within China, to focus on grammar explanations and linguistic accuracy only (Wang et al. 2013). In the Australian context, Scrimgeour (2010) has noted Chinese school teachers' difficulties with Australian classroom values, and tension between Australian and Chinese pedagogic cultures. Scrimgeour and Wilson (2009) critiqued the pedagogy of the International Curriculum for Chinese, (Hanban, the Office of Chinese Language Council International), in which many teachers are trained, for its representation of culture as "separated from communication and conceptualised mainly as knowledge of cultural artefacts" (2009, p. 36). Dervin (2011) has drawn attention to the stereotypes, or 'solidification' of culture, which are prevalent in many studies of Chinese students and academics. Thus, although inclusion of cultural elements has been introduced in some CFL teacher training, cross-cultural, or 'intercultural' skills are a very recent focus. These studies collectively demonstrate that an 'intercultural CFL' represents a significant new challenge in CFL teaching, and thus especially highlight the innovative nature of this project in its context.

2.3 'Observing' Intercultural Competence

The shift in pedagogy detailed above has demanded that language research similarly needs to be enhanced by the discourses of sociocultural theory (Armour 2004; Liddicoat et al. 2003) and qualitative methodologies. The "measurement" of intercultural competence is highly contested. There is aversion to the use of quantitative standardized competency instruments (Deardorff 2009), due to the risk of cultural and political bias. There is concern that such instruments and models oversimplify a complex notion, and fail to account for multiple voices, competencies, and multiple identities within any group of learners. Fantini (2009, p. 464) discusses many strategies and instruments developed to assess intercultural competence, and notes the rise of qualitative strategies such as oral and written activities, dialogues and interviews.

The analysis of student reflective journals and narratives, written while on exchange or in unfamiliar settings (for example Bagnall 2005; Moloney and Genua-Petrovic 2012) has become a popular methodology in studies of intercultural competence. This study is informed by Cowan's (2014) critique for best practice and rigour in such methodology. Following also Fantini's criteria for appropriate research tools (p. 465), we believe that the chosen strategies used are compatible with the objectives, are based on theoretical foundation, and are appropriate for the age of participants. The results are intended to inform the teaching/learning process at the university, and to enrich the broader development of innovative pedagogy in CFL. A description of the methodology of this study follows.

3 Methodology

As noted above, this study represents the analysis of a teaching intervention. It involved the following procedures: an intercultural workshop delivered to the whole class; students' reflective journal writing practice; a feedback workshop, and final assessable reflective journal. The researchers acknowledge their own intercultural collaboration, personal roles, connections with the Chinese community, and assumptions, as possible factors impacting their interviewing, and interpretation or 'seeing' (Russell and Kelly 2002), in 'co-responsible inquiry' (Glesne and Peshkin 1992; Wardekker 2000).

3.1 Data Collection

The study examined qualitative data collected over 8 months in 2013, in an undergraduate Chinese program (see Table 1 for sequence of data collection). The teaching intervention was delivered to all students in the two parallel intermediate (Year 2) classes, but students were given the option to volunteer data to the research study.

Table 1 Sequence of activities and data collection in Semester 1 and Semester 2

	Procedure	Follow-up tasks	Research participants
March 2013 Sem. 1	60 min workshop at beginning of Sem. 1	Students commence practice journal entries (non-compulsory)	N = 34
May 2013	Mid Sem. 1 'practice' journal entries submitted (non-compulsory)	Mid sem. 1, practice journal entries assessed. Feedback given	N = 19
June 2013	End Sem. 1 assessment writing submitted (compulsory)	End Sem. 1 writing data assessed	N = 34
June 2013	Focus groups interviews conducted	Audio-recorded, transcribed, analysed	N = 9
August 2013 Sem. 2	Follow-up 40-min workshop	Students continue journal entries (non-compulsory)	
October 2013	End Sem. 2 assessment writing submitted (compulsory)	End of sem. 2 Journal writing assessed	N = 28
October 2013	Post-task enquiry questions (non-compulsory)	End of sem. 2. students submit answers to questions (non-compulsory)	N = 20

3.2 Participants

All students in the classes volunteered to participate in the study. However, as displayed in Table 1, participation in the activities varied. This was due to firstly whether the activity was compulsory/non-compulsory, and secondly, due to students departing from the class at end of semester 1, and others joining the class in semester 2. Over the two semesters, the male/female ratio in the class was approximately 40/60 % respectively, however gender is not considered a relevant variable. The classes contained both heritage learners and non-heritage learners, in approximately a 50/50 % ratio. The heritage learners in the Australian Chinese diaspora are defined as having exposure to Mandarin or a Chinese dialect through family connections. The nature of the mixed class has been examined elsewhere (Xu and Moloney 2014a) as has the linguistic profile of the heritage Chinese speakers (Xu and Moloney 2014b). In regard to cultural familiarity, heritage learners may commonly move between cultures, on either a daily familial basis, or by contacting and visiting extended family overseas. The difference in response to the intercultural task between these two groups was not a focus of the current study, but will be examined in a future publication. Another uncontrolled variable is in student diverse levels of prior knowledge from travel or exchange experience.

The key element of the teaching intervention, the 60-min workshop, included consideration of how climate, geography and history have shaped life in China and Australia, and exploring the visible (artefacts) and invisible (values, beliefs) culture of China and Australia. Students were encouraged to individualise their perceptions

(Dervin and Dirba 2006) rather than to generalise, and to be critically aware of stereotypes. In the reflective journal task, students were to consider a topic arising in the course textbook, involving either a particular Chinese practice (e.g. tea house, the use of traditional medicine, use of terms of address) or attitude (e.g. not borrowing money; asking personal questions, etc.) drawn from use of language in the chapter dialogues.

3.3 Data Analysis

The three sets of journal entry texts (mid-semester 1, end semester 1, end semester 2) were read independently by both researchers and an analysis of writing type conducted. The analysis was informed by reference to an amended three-type model for analysis of cultural reflection texts, as used by Bagnall (2005) in his study of preservice teachers' written narratives. Bagnall's work sits within multicultural education, and the desire to more radically train young teachers to have critical cultural skills. The notion of 'types' of narratives has been used also by leading writer in the narrative field, Goodson (2013). Bagnall (2005) characterised the three types of narrative writing as descriptive, dialogic, and critical. The characteristics of each type as determined in this project, are displayed in Table 2. It must be noted that the three types were not always discrete categories, but overlapping. However, each piece of writing was read, and re-read by both researchers, discussed, and a joint decision taken as to its substantial alignment with type 1, 2, or 3.

We would prefer to represent our three types of writing as arranged horizontally, as along a 'spectrum' (Goodson 2013, p. 96). We acknowledge that there has been critique of the linear nature of vertically arranged 'tiered' models which may suggest an over-simplified upward trajectory in a process which for every individual is complex, and unfixed (Dervin 2010). We believe however that an identification of

Table 2 Descriptions of three types of writing

	Characteristics of written narrative
Descriptive	Objective description of Chinese cultural practice. The description is informational only, without student reflection or input, or consideration of values. If comparisons are made with "Western" practice, they may involve stereotypes
Dialogic	Reflective consideration of Chinese cultural practice and values, and/or language use with reference to equivalent practice or context in Australian environment. May involve student in 'conversations' with their own life and home culture. They may draw comparisons, point out conflict, and explain cultural differences, similarities, or cultural assumptions
Critical	Critical Analysis of values behind Chinese cultural practice or language use, with consideration of equivalent practice or context in student's home or wider Australian environment. The student closely examines their own behaviour, beliefs, values, and their possible adaptation if in China. Their own particular cultural lens becomes visible to them ('know oneself', Moran 2001)

"types" remains useful in the analysis of written reflection, and includes recognition of the notion of students' effort to de-centre from their own culture, and move beyond stereotypes (Dervin and Dirba 2006).

In the Findings section, we provide quotations from the data which exemplify the three types. Quotes from participants are referred to by the time of data collection, plus a number: for example Mid S1P4: Middle of semester 1 Participant 4. End S2P5: End of semester 2, participant 5. In the focus groups, the nine students have been allocated a number FG1, FG2, etc.

4 Findings

There were three sets of data. The first set was the three collections of students' writing samples, from mid-semester 1, end semester 1, end semester 2. The second set of data was the transcriptions of the focus group interview recordings. The third set of data was the teacher's replies to a set of post-task evaluation questions.

4.1 Findings from Data Set 1: Analysis of Journal Writing Exercise

Student writing samples from mid-semester 1, end of semester 1, and end of semester 2 were read by both researchers, and evaluated according to the three type model detailed above.

In Type 1, students wrote descriptive passages, sometimes informed (or copied) from information sources, without any personal input or commentary, displaying the 'know about' model of cultural knowledge (Moran 2001). For example, S1P8 is writing about the practice of modesty in China, and S1P13 is writing about the role of climate:

> *Modesty is an integral component of society and is one of the paramount ways of showing respect…Chinese culture is internationally renowned for the importance of modesty. … Confucius, a dominant figure within Chinese thought and philosophy would repeatedly speak of the importance of modesty in life if one wished to become like a sage (S1P8)*
>
> *China is a large country stretching at 9,706,961 square kilometres. It holds the largest population in the world at 1.35 billion people. With a country so large, it is only natural that the temperatures and climates differs from each province.*

Goodsons' (2013) narrative research is engaged with 'types' in life history interview narratives. Goodson describes type 1 narrative tellers as 'scripted describers'. With little 'narrative intensity', reflection and internal conversation are seldom evidenced or mentioned in the narratives of such narrators. Goodson stresses that this should not be seen as any kind of inferiority, merely a difference from other types of narrators. We agree that, for these Type 1 participants, although there may be learning taking place, if they were in a "live" situation, or in China, there may be

'limited flexibility of response to changing external context' (p. 80). Of relevance to this study, Goodson notes that a closed pattern of narrativity works well in stable social locations, but is less well equipped for movement around a world of cultural flexibility and change (p. 81).

Type 2 writing involved the addition of some personal dialogic perspective, inclusion of comparison with family or local practice, and exploration of values ('know why', Moran 2001):

> *The Chinese elderly have lots of activities they do in order to keep their mind and body active in old age. I find this interesting as in Australia most of the retired and old people don't do much. In my family my grandparents only attend Mass, and garden.* (S2P7)
>
> *Whenever I give my grandma a call, the first thing she will ask is not "How are you?" but rather "Have you eaten yet"? Such a common greeting highlights the central role of food in Chinese culture, as illustrated in table manners, eating customs, and the significance of certain foods at New Year.* (S1P14)

Type 3 probes into the reasons or values/beliefs behind a practice, and includes some investigation of a personal values framework, and recognition of how this has shaped his/her perceptions and outlook. In only a small number of students, this may move towards Moran's 'know oneself' mode of cultural knowledge. Goodson (2013) describes such Type 3 narrators as 'elaborators' (p. 83). Goodson differentiates between 'armchair elaborators' and 'focussed elaborators' (p. 96). While armchair elaborator narratives can be reflexive and sophisticated, the narratives remain closed off from possible new courses of action or the development of new identity, inhibiting attempts to explore new modes of learning and self. (p. 88). Our students, particularly as their task is being conducted, not with the immediacy of being exchange in China, but at their desk in Australia, appear to largely remain armchair elaborators. There are however exceptions. This is exemplified in this mid-semester 1 passage:

> *When Chinese people exchange gifts they prefer not to open their gift in front of the gift giver…. In contrast, in Western culture it is considered normal to open a gift immediately after receiving it…. I know myself from personal experience the Western method of giving and receiving gifts is our way to express gratitude and respect to the gift giver. …On the other hand Chinese people have an old saying "礼轻情意重", meaning, "a small gift means a great deal". … Possibly in the past when resources in China were scarce and there was a higher level of poverty, many people may have not been able to find or afford such extravagant gifts. …This may have been about 'face'… I can see the benefits in both culture's methods of gift giving and receiving; …I think it would be nice to try it from a different perspective, and I like this Chinese way of going about it.* (Mid S1, S 9)

A portion of the above passage, with critical feedback, was given to all students as a sample, in mid S1, showing how it demonstrates the outcomes of the task. However, this student was the only student in the class, in mid-semester 1, to demonstrate Type 3 writing. As a qualitative study, we do not wish to move into a quantitative approach, but some descriptive representation of student progress is useful. Results of data analysis of mid-semester 1 (non-compulsory task) were as displayed in Table 3. The majority of the class are still at Type 1 descriptive writing.

Table 3 Analysis of student writing mid-semester 1

Mid semester 1	N = 19	
Type 1	13	68.4 %
Type 2	5	26.3 %
Type 3	1	5.3 %

By the end of Semester 1, however, we can see there has been some development towards intercultural skills in students at Types 2 and 3. Table 4 displays the results of data analysis at the end of semester 1 (compulsory task).

As noted, a "refresher" session was delivered at the beginning of semester 2, to give commentary on samples of writing. The teacher (Researcher 2) continued to direct student attention to cultural issues arising in the text, in conjunction with language acquisition. Although students were again encouraged to submit non-assessable journal entries during the semester, none took this opportunity. At the end of semester 2, students submitted their final compulsory writing for assessment. The analysis of these writing samples is displayed in Table 5.

Table 5 shows there has been movement out of Type 1 writing. After the growth exhibited in semester 1, however, the researchers hoped for a continued upward growth in students reaching Type 3. Table 5 however indicates that the growth is not that significant. Possible explanations for the clustering in Type 2 writing may lie in insufficient scaffolding of the task in semester 2, the re-iteration of the project having lost its "novelty value", intake of new students unfamiliar with the task, and variables of prior knowledge. In addition, in students' perception (expressed below in Focus group data) the textbook's "culture topics" in semester 2 did not lend themselves so well to intercultural work, and students reverted to descriptive and dialogic writing. Finally, we identified that 25 students continued from semester 1 to semester 2 study. Each of these students' result on analysis of their writing samples (type 1, 2 or 3), for both Semester 1 and Semester 2, was listed and compared. The number of students who improved one or more levels in their writing, stayed on the same level, or dropped back a level from semester 1, is as displayed in Table 6.

Thus we may observe that a total of 16/25 (64 %) students achieved positive growth in intercultural analytical skills, as evidenced in their writing. While there is no benchmark against which we can judge this outcome, it can be seen to demonstrate a positive learning response to the exercise. This is supported by students' comments in the Focus Groups, an analysis of which follows.

4.2 Findings Data Set 2: Analysis of Focus Group Data

Nine students volunteered to participate in the focus group interviews. The interviewer was Researcher 1 who had no connection with student grades in their Chinese study. The questions in the focus group interviews explored what students learned, if anything, at the semester 1 workshop, their perceptions of the writing

Table 4 Analysis of student writing end Semester 1

	N = 34	
Type 1	14	41 %
Type 2	14	41 %
Type 3	6	18 %

Table 5 Analysis of student writing at end of semester 2

	N = 28	
Type 1	7	25 %
Type 2	13	46.4 %
Type 3	8	28.6 %

Table 6 Number of students whose writing changed 'type' categorisation

Change in type categorisation	N = 25
Shift to writing type displaying greater intercultural ability	16
Stayed on same type	4
Moved back to writing type displaying lesser intercultural ability	5

task, and of the benefit of the activity overall. Of the 9 participants, 5 were heritage speakers, 4 non-heritage speakers. Students expressed a positive perception of the semester 1 workshop. Six of the nine students used the phrase *"never thought about it before*" and commented that, while they had been aware of making an interested response to Chinese culture, the workshop had highlighted the nature of that response:

> *I think that was a really great hour, even though I think about this stuff a lot, just to have it re-iterated felt like it was a really good thing… It gets you thinking about in a very specific way, say the difference between Western culture and Chinese culture, and perhaps even some of the similarities.* (FGS1)
>
> *With the workshop, I don't think I'd ever really thought as in-depth about my Australian perspective on it. And I actually found it quite a challenge to put in a reflection of the Australian side of it.* (FG 4)

Most students noted that, while it gave them extra work to do, they enjoyed the process involved in the writing task. Students were motivated to look for background knowledge about Chinese practices, and to dig into their own personal experience and knowledge. Students emphasised the new knowledge and cognitive effort generated by the writing:

> *It expanded on, to look deeper into the topics …so we have to research it up, understand it a bit more, so we can see why there are these underlying differences.* (FG7)
>
> *I thought it would be easy and I could just write it up but it wasn't. You had to think about it. Just thinking about the 'why' is the hard part. But it is good to think, it was good, and I had to research a bit on the internet.* (FG9)

A number of students identified that what was new about the task, was not the cultural comparison in itself, but *"the method and thinking about it this way"… I'd*

never really thought about understanding culture as a way of understanding language." This student has identified the core purpose of the task, that the intercultural writing process was intended as a way to access greater depth in understanding language.

Two students confirmed that the most difficult aspect of the task was recognising 'invisible' Australian culture and their own beliefs (the fourth Moran level, 'know oneself'). This first student, FG4, is a heritage learner: *I actually found it quite a challenge to put in a reflection of the Australian side of it. It was actually much easier to analyse China in itself, but not so much Australia, because this is where I've been raised, and everything was so natural I've never thought about it before".*

I thought it was definitely a lot easier to talk about the Chinese side of things. (FG3).

FG5, of Sri Lankan parentage, (moving between the third person "Australian" and then including himself as "we"), observed that *"Australians have a very tough time having an Australian national identity. We struggle to have a national identity, and it's such a strong contrast to China where it's really in your face."*

Student FG9 compared the demands of the task to her experience while on exchange in Taiwan for 1 year, of becoming critical of Australia:

I would think, why do we do it that way? And I had a lot of friends from other countries as well, so I was questioning Australia all the time. You start to see a lot of faults.

Student FG9 was reminded of trying to understand people's behaviour in Taiwan, where she had to de-centre from her Australian perspective, and imagine another's perspective*: "at times you just can't understand; … You have to put yourself in their shoes, and I think that's what this task does, you have to try to put yourself in someone else's shoes, try to block out what you already know".* This is an encouraging outcome, that the task for some may micro-simulate the critical learning process of being on exchange.

As part of their Chinese major, students have to complete a small number of units taught in English which introduce generic cultural concepts. Four of the nine students suggested that the workshop and writing task had acted as a catalyst for synthesis of understanding from these units, which contributed to their growth in an applied intercultural understanding of their Chinese language. FG9 noted that "*We did a unit on cross-cultural communication in first year… but I'd never really applied it to a language that I'm studying".* FGS2 did a unit of study on Chinese traditional thought, where he studied *"Confucianism, Daoism, and it has all come together for a better understanding.*"

Commenting on other benefits of the project, students suggested that it had boosted intrinsic motivation. One student suggested that inclusion of intercultural learning would support greater retention in Chinese learning: *"the unit would see a lot more retention of students who are taking it into further years. If you're just learning the language in isolation, then you're not really connecting with it at all, so it doesn't have any significance to you*" (FG4).

FG6 felt that *"it gives you a stronger anchor point. Because if you're just learning words, then when it comes to you being put in that culture, it'll be so much more difficult to know. You wouldn't have this innate sense of the grounding of what you're*

saying. Because, language isn't just purely words and grammar, it is so much more". (FG6)

Amongst the heritage learners in the focus group participants, opinion was divided as to the benefit of the task. Some perceived it as not necessary, as "*I live between cultures all the time, don't need to think about it"* (FG8). But for student FG4 the activity has played a role in her ongoing negotiation of her own identity:

> *These cultural reflections have made me think about it more…in a good way… because I'm Chinese as well, but I've been raised in Australia, …these cultural reflections are really good because it helps me to reconcile the two halves of what I think I should be, and what I actually am, how I actually behave.* (FG4).

While most students stressed intrinsic value, two students noted the extrinsic value of intercultural competence. FG2 said that *"also in the career world, if you don't know this stuff it could make the difference between a job or not. Like say if your behaviours appear rude to the interviewer, that might mean the difference between getting the job or not."*

Student FG1 perceived the project had value in travel and on exchange: "*When you get there you won't be as well prepared I think … so it is important that you know how to act and so on. … it is useful because I'm going on exchange next year.* (FG1)

The focus group interview finally asked students for critique of the project, in order to refine future iterations. Four students criticised the limitation of writing only about cultural topics featured in the textbook. Reflecting the frustrations expressed in current literature (Dervin 2011), they identified the limitations of the textbook exclusive focus on 'visible' culture: *I actually find that a bit annoying, how textbooks always really ram the visible Chinese culture. Yes I already know there is a Great Wall. … I think it is much more important to learn these invisible things, they're going to be more important in your daily life as well. OK, there might be a Great Wall, but how's that going to affect me every day?* (FG2)

Students suggested some strategies that could be added to the task, such as additional scaffolding, in the greater provision of reflective writing samples. Five students suggested that the activity needed more collaborative discussion, beyond the workshop discussion tasks. They would like also to see each other's writing, for example, on a shared online space, in order to access others' perspectives: *"we were just writing down what we thought and giving it to someone and we never really saw what anyone else thought… I tend to think up more ideas when I'm talking with other people and learning about other people's thoughts and not just my own*" (FG 9). We recognise that social interaction is recognised as an essential generative activity in the student intercultural process (Liddicoat et al. 2003).

4.3 Findings Data Set 3: Post-project Teacher Evaluation

The teacher was asked to comment on what she gained from the project, what application she sees for the teaching of CFL, and her perception of learning benefits. She first commented on her own enjoyment of the intercultural nature of the project, of

collaborative planning and presentation, including materials from both researchers' perspectives, and how this effectively modelled the process to students. The teacher has written that the project enabled her to *"approach my teaching in a different way: a more deliberate and conscious effort to include the intercultural discussion for every unit I teach. Before, I might include a bit of cultural knowledge only when it's very obvious. But now, I always plan my lessons with some sort of intercultural discussion topics and try to explain the link between linguistic and cultural values whenever possible"*.

In her perception of the students' writing, she believed, as a first experience, it was difficult for them *"to think of things to write"*. In her impression, however, in semester 2 tutorials, students "*pay more attention to the cultural aspect of the language and become more aware of differences and similarities between the Chinese culture and their own… I believe the exercise has helped students think about culture in a more diverse way and also develop a better understanding of their own culture through comparison"*. The teacher believes the project is motivating and *"stimulates students" curiosity and enhances their interest in the language"*. She also is pleased that it brings Chinese teaching into alignment with *"current educational trends and philosophy which lay greater emphasis on how to cultivate graduates' cross-cultural competence"*.

The teacher enjoys her role in communicating how cultural connotations are built into the construction of characters, in helping "*students to link the words with some cultural meanings there…this greatly enhanced students' interest in what seemed to be a very boring and daunting task of learning strokes with no meaning at all. I always bring it back to the English language and culture and ask students how these values can be expressed in their language. …for example I would ask them to discuss the differences between the words 'house' and 'home', 'friends' and 'mates'."* The language teacher's role is critical in student intercultural development (Moloney 2008). It is evidenced in the teacher's understanding of intercultural development in both themselves and their students, in their displayed knowledge of metalinguistic connections, and in their design of tasks that stimulate and allow reflection. The teacher here is clearly engaged in all of these endeavours.

5 Conclusion

This study examined a teaching intervention in undergraduate intermediate level Chinese classes. In the writing task students were to investigate values inherent in aspects of cultural practice, particularly as conveyed in language use. We highlight a number of conclusions, limitations, and implications from the study.

From identified change in intercultural competence displayed in participant writing entries, and from focus group data, the teaching intervention appears to have been successful in its affordance of a first innovative step in CFL intercultural learning. Analysis of data suggests that for some students it has involved active construction of knowledge, making connections, some limited social interaction, reflection,

and indication of shared responsibility, the five principles of intercultural language learning (Liddicoat et al. 2003). However it is not known to what extent students could actualise this learning in active use of their Chinese language. For some students, it remained largely a "know about" exercise, some students investigated "know why", while a few demonstrated "know oneself". This study identified three definitional component characteristics of intercultural competence (see Literature Review) as: ability to critically reflect on relationships between cultures, acquiring deeper knowledge about practices in the target culture, and the development of an individual intercultural identity and perspective. The writing and focus data suggest that while the task appears to be useful in facilitating the first two components, it may require the more immediate experiential challenge of being in China, to fully engage with the third.

In future iterations, the researchers would like to focus more closely on more nuanced aspects of Chinese behaviour as expressed in language use, and to involve students in oral presentation performance, demonstrating their active use and understanding of these cultural aspects. Nevertheless, benefits of the project as reported by students, indicated in the data included increased cognitive activity, heightened awareness of the role of culture within language, increased intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and opportunity for identity negotiation in heritage students.

The study was limited in that it was a relatively small sample. The study does not make generalised claims as to the benefits of the activity, but merely suggests it is an initial step in incorporating an intercultural component in language teaching and its positive outcomes in this particular cohort. The research assessment of writing passages was conducted in accordance with a previously established research model, and informed by theory. However, it is possible that the interpretation of the types in the students' writings, and the interpretation of interview data were effected by researcher bias. As noted, the researchers have acknowledged limitations aligned with their own intercultural collaboration, personal roles, connections with the Chinese community, and assumptions, as possible factors impacting the project. We limit our claims of generalizability, but encourage readers to consider connections with other similar classroom contexts.

The participants' critique of the intervention delivered several useful insights which will be implemented in future iterations of teaching activities. Firstly, in future, the workshop and the writing task will be more closely aligned, to focus on language use rather than 'visible' cultural practice. In the classroom role plays that students periodically write and perform, the application of specific intercultural understandings and behaviours can be demonstrated within language use, and can be valued and assessed.

Secondly while the writing activity is useful in drawing individual reflective effort from students, in-class incidental enquiry through classroom discourse is also an important skill area for CFL teachers to further develop, to grow a classroom verbal context of intercultural curiosity and enquiry. This is recognised as a language teacher skill area still to be developed (Díaz 2013; Harbon and Moloney 2013; Morgan 2008). These Chinese learners, on graduating, will be part of a complex transnational world where personal intercultural critical abilities 'will be an

urgent and continuous requirement' (Goodson 2013, p. 111). In both learners and teachers, their intercultural ability will be employed as part of their ongoing CFL learning and teaching capital. CFL teachers with enhanced critical cultural awareness can employ their narrative capital to envisage new ways to teach and stimulate critical enquiry about language and culture in their classrooms.

Given the limited attention to intercultural learning within Chinese studies to date, this innovative project breaks new ground in Chinese pedagogy. It goes beyond teaching 'culture', to the notions of 'intercultural', challenging beliefs in both teachers and learners. This report has offered suggestions for the refinement and wider application of this study in other tertiary Chinese teaching contexts. The project highlights that teachers of Chinese may play an active and important role in facilitating intercultural competence in their students, enabling students to bring prior knowledge and cognitive enquiry to the enrichment of their Chinese study.

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