

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
TEACHING AND LEARNING: ACTION INQUIRY IN  
A CYPRIOT TERTIARY INSTITUTION

**Mary Georgiou**  
**BSc., MSc.**

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Doctor of Education

August 2010

## **DECLARATION**

I confirm that this dissertation is my original work. It does not include material previously presented for the award of a degree in this, or any other university.

Signed .....

Mary Georgiou

August, 2010

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the potential of teaching intercultural competence in foreign language courses through the example of a pedagogical experience in a higher education institution.

Language research increasingly acknowledges the intercultural dimension of foreign language education and foreign language teachers' social and moral responsibilities. Successful intercultural interactions presuppose unprejudiced attitudes, hence learners' intercultural competence: tolerance and understanding of other cultures as well as cultural self-awareness. Intercultural communicative competence can therefore be considered as one of the central aims of foreign language education so that learners can successfully communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural worlds. However, there have been few empirical studies which illustrate intercultural competence with a view towards assisting its integration into classrooms.

The main purpose of this investigation is the increased understanding of my practice in order to reconceptualise it as one of a social justice educator, which entails the construction of an understanding of intercultural competence teaching and learning in the foreign language classroom. The study incorporates insights from critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, and intercultural competence theories and examines the ways in which the research process has influenced and reshaped my practice, paving the way forward to further improvements for the future.

During a classroom-based study over two academic semesters, I created an intercultural syllabus for my teaching of an English writing course which

aimed to facilitate new understandings and insights around cultural diversity and contribute to learners' responsible citizenship in a democratic society. Participants included all students who were enrolled in these two university classes. Using an action inquiry methodology, the project was a study of my educational practice which addressed five broad research questions. Qualitative data collection and analysis endeavoured to answer these questions by investigating student perceptions of cultural diversity and assessing their response to the syllabus; hence by focusing on the enhancement of students' intercultural competence, the study sought to identify successful strategies for teaching intercultural competence. Data collection methods included student interviews, student essays, and my reflective diary.

Findings reveal that most learners construct cultural differences as problematic, resort to negative stereotyping, and reproduce essentialised images of the self and of otherness; however, analysis also surfaced a more fluid and ambiguous understanding which portrays cultural others in more positive ways. Additionally, greater and deeper student understanding of intercultural issues is evidenced with reflection on the concept of culture and on migration, increased cultural self-awareness, expression of empathy and solidarity, acknowledgement of heterogeneity within national cultures, and awareness that insufficient knowledge of cultural groups may lead to misconceptions. The identification of ineffective strategies has assisted me in revising the intervention, while the self-reflective process brought to light my own biases towards otherness, assumptions which inform my practice, and ethical dilemmas involved in transformative teaching.

Implications include the significance of affective learning, of student agency in the knowledge production process, and the connection of the educational experience to their lives. They point to the empowering experience for teachers of shaping the curriculum and living out their values in their practice but also to the challenges involved in transformative practices, teaching values, and assessing intercultural competence.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Writing a thesis is a solitary journey which cannot come to term without the support of caring people. These acknowledgements are only a modest expression of my appreciation for those who have been there for me during this long period.

First of all, I would like to sincerely thank my supervisors, Dr Lindsey Smethem and Dr Roger Firth for their guidance, encouragement, and support.

I am especially grateful to my students who participated in this study and gave me their time and work. I would also like to thank my colleagues who assisted me with their valuable feedback and insights as well as my family and friends for their love and patience. My special thanks go to Katherine, Christine, Trish, Andri, Marios, Florent and Andreas.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents who gave me my first lessons in life of curiosity and tolerance.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C1	First culture
C2	Second culture; target culture
CC	Communicative competence
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CP	Critical Pedagogy
ECML	European Centre for Modern Languages
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EIL	English as an International Language
ELF	English as Lingua Franca
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
IC	Intercultural competence
ICC	Intercultural communicative competence
FL	Foreign language
FLE	Foreign language education
FLT	Foreign language teaching
L1	First language; mother tongue
L2	Second language
TESOL	Teaching English to speakers of other languages

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

My concern for intercultural competence and more generally intercultural education reflects changing circumstances across the globe which result from trends of increased mobility (tourism, travelling, and migration) and modern communication which multiplies interactions through the use of new technologies. Learners are therefore more than ever likely to work, live, and communicate with people who are linguistically and culturally different, which sets a priority for educators: to prepare learners for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and intercultural encounters resulting from an increased global interdependence.

Foreign language education is, by definition, intercultural (Sercu *et al.*, 2005). The foreign language classroom is where two cultures meet: the learner's and that of the target language. Learning to express oneself in words other than one's own is entering a world where much is new and different, and this necessitates acquiring 'a new standpoint in our world-view' (von Humboldt, 1836). In my teaching career, I have often faced students' comments which describe words, expressions, or structures in a foreign language as "bizarre", "weird" or even "not normal". I usually reply that this is what is fascinating about language learning: we have to abandon the familiar for the surprising and for a world of relativity where nothing is normal and everything is strange. Would we not be normal in the eyes of others? If we regard the French to be contrary because they place the noun before the adjective, do we not look exactly the same in the eyes of the French for doing the opposite? The conviction that there is no centre of the world is at the heart of language learning and curiosity the leading force. The curiosity to learn about others dominates the risk of

embarrassing ourselves in unknown territory. For, learning a new language is taking risks by placing oneself 'in a position of uncommon subordination and powerlessness' (Kramsch, 1993: 238). It entails making numerous mistakes and sounding less intelligent than in our mother tongue, and getting familiar with new socialisation patterns of another culture at the risk of acting the "wrong" way. Language learning is for me undoubtedly an intercultural enterprise. This is the way I experience language learning and my work, but do language theories confirm this position?

Language research increasingly acknowledges the intercultural dimension of foreign language education and foreign language teachers' social and moral responsibilities. Successful intercultural interactions presuppose unprejudiced attitudes, hence learners' intercultural competence (Kramsch, 1993; Steele, 2000; McKay, 2002): tolerance and respect towards other cultures as well as cultural self-awareness. Intercultural learning helps students understand the relationship between cultures and develop multiple perspectives. Intercultural communicative competence can therefore be considered one of the central aims of foreign language education (Guilherme, 2002; Byram, 2008) so that learners can successfully communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural worlds.

Despite the recognition of the significance of intercultural learning, there is still a gap between academics and practitioners: foreign language teachers and teacher educators seem hesitant to integrate these theories into pedagogical practice (Lázár *et al.*, 2007; Cushner and Mahon, 2009; Byram, 2009) while only a few empirical studies have implemented intercultural learning in classrooms (Byram *et al.*, 2001) and can substantiate the development of intercultural competence.



## **1.2 PURPOSE OF STUDY**

This empirical study aspires to connect research to practice, thereby contributing to the ongoing debate on intercultural competence in foreign language pedagogy. It set out to examine intercultural competence in a foreign language course in a higher education institution using an action inquiry methodology and qualitative methods. The main purpose of this study was to construct an understanding of foreign language teaching and learning of intercultural competence through the example of a pedagogical experience. Through a specific intervention in an English writing course and the examination of learners' responses to it, the investigation undertook to identify successful teaching strategies. It delineates how I enhanced my understanding of intercultural competence in action and reconceptualised my practice as a space which addresses moral, political, and social justice issues.

This self-study which aims to improve my practice asked the overarching research question:

How does a foreign language teacher enhance learners' intercultural competence?

From this general question emerged the following research sub-questions:

1. What were students' perceptions of cultural diversity?
2. How did students respond to the intervention? What indicates their greater and deeper understanding of intercultural issues?
3. Which strategies in my practice were effective in enhancing learners' intercultural competence?

4. How was the understanding of my practice enhanced? How do I now reconceptualise my practice as one of a social justice educator?

This investigation attempted to answer the above questions by analysing data generated from two classes of the same course during two consecutive semesters. Data included student essays, student interviews, and my reflective diary, while all the students who attended these two university courses were my research participants.

### **1.3 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

In Chapter 2, the several contexts are described in order to situate the study: my personal context, in terms of how my personal history defined my interest in interculturalism and shaped my values around social justice and my professional context and my institution where the empirical study was conducted in order to contextualise my research in its immediate environment. Finally, a particular focus on the locational context depicts the Cypriot education system and socio-political factors, significant in determining student perceptions of otherness.

In Chapter 3, relevant literature is reviewed to place the study within its theoretical framework. The first two parts of the chapter focus on some of the theoretical models which inform intercultural competence: critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism, as well as the cultural and the intercultural components of foreign language education. These theoretical models give rise to a reassessment of the goals and practices of foreign language teaching and learning, which are addressed in the third section of the chapter.

In Chapter 4, the methodology employed is discussed, detailing the research design and processes. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part articulates my beliefs about reality and knowledge, gives a theoretical overview of action inquiry and situates my study within this tradition. The second part concentrates on the way the study was conducted: the implemented syllabus, the research methods employed, data collection and treatment of the data. Ethical issues, validity, and reliability are also addressed.

In Chapter 5, the collected data are presented and analysed in order to help me construct an understanding of intercultural competence in my practice. The analysis is two-fold: it focuses on students and on myself, in an effort to reconceptualise my role as a social justice educator, which entails identifying students' perceptions and their cognitive and attitudinal responses to the syllabus.

In Chapter 6, findings are summarised and discussed in relation to the relevant theory, contexts, and methodology. Themes which emerged from data analysis are revisited in order to draw further conclusions which answer the research questions and highlight the contribution of the study. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the study, propose some implications for foreign language teaching and teacher education and suggest some avenues for future research.



## **CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTS**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I situate my research in its background contexts. I begin by describing my personal context and my personal history behind the choice of the research topic. Certain events in my life have been decisive in shaping my commitment to antiracism and social justice; they have therefore contributed to the formation of the ontological stance and pedagogical commitments that I bring to the present study. I then discuss my professional context and my university, where I conducted the empirical study. I briefly describe the institution in order to contextualise my research into its immediate environment. Finally, I move to the locational context in order to depict the Cypriot context. One of my research questions addresses my students' perceptions of cultural diversity; I thus consider it necessary to give a picture of the education system which has been, I believe, decisive in shaping these perceptions. My focus is its ethnocentric orientation which reproduces essentialised constructions of the self and others and which fails to include cultural and religious minorities. This is not irrelevant to the political context and recent social developments which I also address. Moreover, the Cypriot policy on plurilingualism, seen as a factor in enhancing intercultural competence, is compared to European Union guidelines.

### **2.2 MY PERSONAL CONTEXT**

My long-held belief in social justice has motivated the specific research topic. As do many language teachers who spend at least a year abroad as part of their undergraduate studies, I have had the experience of studying and living away from home for a long period which confronted me with the

challenges of a new place away from the safety of the familiar: my family, my country, my language but it also afforded me the rewards of new learning and new loving friends. Like other language teachers, I have been made to feel welcome but I have also been faced with a few incidents of hostile attitudes, negative stereotyping, or even overt racism.

Questions of inequalities and injustices have always been of relevance to me, precisely because I have been in the role of the other, the displaced at a young age, exiled within my country and abroad. Following a war in Cyprus in 1974, I fled with my family from my hometown to another part of the island, then to Greece. The refugee identity has therefore been part of me since my childhood. As a young adult, I chose to study and work in France and Greece, for an extended period: moving places was not a problem for me, for I already felt without roots. When nostalgia led me back to Cyprus, I felt content to reintegrate into my home culture; I would, however, never have the same sense of belonging as in my childhood for I now belonged to a 'third culture' (Kramsch, 1993): the experience of mobility with its transitions, discoveries, and losses had by then shaped a new perception of home and defined me not only as a Cypriot but also as a global citizen.

It is therefore not surprising that the injustice which upsets me the most is discrimination based on somebody's culture or ethnic origin. I do not have to make an effort to position myself as other; it is a role I know well. I naturally relate to cultural minorities, to those living away from home or not fitting into their physical environment because I find in them an echo of my own traumas. My commitment to antiracism is thus grounded in my own experience. Moreover, my studies, teaching experience, and residence in France have been decisive in shaping some of my values; for instance,

the strong secular tradition of the country has influenced the way I view the role of religion in education.

Consequently, my research naturally evolved from my personal history and values which have been shaped by this history. I believe in an intercultural approach to education where all cultures are regarded as equally valid, whilst I feel a need to make a small contribution to the betterment of society. Education is seen as contributing to preventative solutions for a number of social evils, discrimination being one of them (Hooghoff and Delnoy, 1998), and I feel that as an educator it is my moral responsibility to transform my practice into a more socially just one.

### **2.3 PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT: THE UNIVERSITY OF NICOSIA**

My institution is my immediate research context. The University of Nicosia/Intercollege is a private tertiary institution which receives young people (aged mostly 18-25) pursuing undergraduate (BA) or postgraduate studies (MA) in a variety of programmes. It was founded in 1980 with eight students but quickly evolved in size and prestige to become the largest private tertiary institution in Cyprus hosting 5,000 students at present. Originally a college, it became a university in 2008; the college and the university now function as separate entities which focus on professional or academic programmes respectively.

The institution is a living example of globalisation as it is an English speaking institution, situated in Cyprus, inspired by American academic models. More recently, the university started adapting to European standards following the Bologna Process whose ultimate aim is to create a unified European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (European Commission,

2008). It is a multicultural institution with faculty, staff, and students (18% of students are non-Greek Cypriot) from 80 different countries. With the opening of border checkpoints between the two parts of the island in 2003, a few Turkish Cypriot students have also enrolled at the university. International students are supported before and after their arrival by the Admissions Office but mostly the Department of Student Affairs. The latter assists them in finding accommodation and employment as well as in getting acquainted with the university services. It also promotes social and intercultural interactions through student clubs and societies, and the organisation of trips within and outside Cyprus. Despite these efforts, international students seem to be isolated from local students. This is quite visible in the crowded cafeteria where one can see students mostly socialising within their own ethnic groups. The existence of ethnic societies (Iranian society, Russian society, Cypriot Greek society...), despite their good intentions of giving students the opportunity to express their home cultures, is perhaps not helpful in enhancing interaction among locals and foreigners.

Moreover, the administration seems reluctant to promote plurilingualism because foreign language courses are considered more costly than theoretical courses, which can host a bigger number of students. This stance follows a general trend of 'crisis in modern languages' in higher education where utilitarian criteria such as 'viability' and 'efficiency' guide managerial decisions (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2001: 1, 2). As elsewhere education is increasingly market oriented and modern languages are devalued because they cannot promise students 'material returns' and a job in return for the investment of their time and money (*op. cit.*: 2).



## **2.4 THE LOCATIONAL CONTEXT: CYPRUS**

'Classrooms and schools are not insulated environments. What goes on outside schools greatly influences what occurs inside them' (Zeichner and Liston, 1996: x). This is why I endeavour here to examine contextual issues and specifically the Cypriot context, which can offer insights into students' perceptions of otherness. I focus on the way socio-political factors contribute to an ethnocentric orientation of the education system and which, combined with the recent arrival of immigrants, may account to a large extent for the expression of xenophobic attitudes within the Cypriot society. Although numerous studies indicate the impact of the Cyprus problem on both Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, I only refer to Greek Cypriots because these represent the majority of my participants.

### **2.4.1 THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT**

The Republic of Cyprus is a small island situated in the south-eastern Mediterranean with a population of 797,000 (Press and Information Office [PIO], 2008). The history of the country is one of much turmoil: the strategic position of the island, at the intersection of three continents, Africa, Europe, and Asia, has attracted many conquerors and colonists: Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Venetians, Ottomans, and British who succeeded in invading and ruling the country. All these conquerors have left their imprint on the island (Hadjipavlou, 2006) but the most decisive influences in forming the two main communities have been the settlement of Achaean Greeks in the second millennium B.C. and the three centuries of Ottoman rule (1571-1878).

Knowledge of the events of the last five decades is quite significant in the understanding of the process of identity construction (Spyrou, 2006) and

Greek Cypriot perceptions of otherness. An anticolonial struggle against the British rule which was claiming union with Greece ended in 1960 with independence and the declaration of the Republic of Cyprus. This was followed by a period of intercommunal conflict between Greek and Turkish Cypriots and a Turkish invasion in 1974, resulting in the occupation of one third of the territory. Since then, the country has been territorially, politically, culturally, and psychologically divided (Shepherd Johnson, 2007): Greek Cypriots live in the south, in the Republic of Cyprus and Turkish Cypriots in the north, in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) which is unrecognised by international law. This has come to be known as the "Cyprus problem", which dominates public debates and impregnates daily life, thus is not without an impact on youth lifestyle. For instance, Cyprus is a highly militarised country and there is a compulsory two-year army service for young male Greek Cypriots.

My Greek Cypriot students were born after 1974 and grew up with limited or no physical contact with Turkish Cypriots while they have been socialised to resent them. A discourse which demonises the other community is present in some of the media while daily news focuses on the continuing occupation of the northern part of the island and ongoing political efforts to solve the Cyprus problem. At the same time, physical division is visible, especially in Nicosia, through military posts, barbed wire, Greek, Turkish or U.N. flags or dead end streets which lead to the buffer zone, the uninhabited area separating the two parts of the island, also known as the Green Line. The longstanding political problem has had a considerable impact on education (Philippou, 2005), which is used for political ends (Persianis, 1996 cited by Trimikliniotis, 2004). This is further discussed in the section 2.4.3 "Nationalism in the educational system".

The Cyprus conflict is, I believe, significant in determining people's perceptions not only of the Turks and Turkish Cypriots but by extension perceptions of other Muslim populations and immigrants. The presence of immigrants is often compared to that of Turkish settlers in the north (now a larger population than Turkish Cypriots) in every-day discourses which express a sense of invasion and insecurity. Moreover, because of the proximity of the country to conflict areas (Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon), undocumented immigrants are reported to arrive in Cyprus from the northern occupied territories, after having crossed the so-called Green Line (Trimikliniotis and Fulas-Souroulla, 2007). Hence, 'feelings of mistrust, stereotyping and psychological distancing' (Hadjipavlou, 2007: 39) which are directed towards those on the "other side" are extended to the "others" on this side.

#### **2.4.2 IMMIGRATION**

While many European countries started receiving migrants many decades ago, for Cyprus this is a rather new phenomenon. Although it has been a multicultural society for centuries, culturally and linguistically heterogeneous due to the presence of various domestic minorities, recent immigration has transformed the cultural landscape of the island. In the last two decades, and especially during the last few years, Cyprus has experienced an arrival of immigrant workers — foreign nationals constituted 10% of the total population in 2002 (Country Report, Council of Europe, 2004), compared to 14 % in 2005 (Trimikliniotis and Fulas-Souroulla, 2006). In the 1990s, Cyprus changed its migration policy 'in order to meet labour shortages' and became within a very short period a host country for migrants whereas it traditionally exported migrants. Migrant workers are mainly Eastern Europeans, south-east Asians, Chinese or Middle-Eastern who are employed as domestic workers, or in the areas

of construction, agriculture, tourism, trade and the manufacturing industry (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou, 2005).

While the public debate on multiculturalism has hardly begun, civic participation of migrants (participation in elections, membership in political parties and organisations or in trade unions...) is reported as 'rather disappointing' (*op. cit.*: 4). Concurrently, most of the local media have 'little sense of political correctness' (Trimikliniotis, 2004: 56) and cultivate attitudes of fear and suspicion towards migrants. For instance, they cover incidents in a sensational way by mentioning the ethnic origin (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [ECRI], 2006) of perpetrators of crimes.

At the same time, the educational response to the migration trend is quite weak: state education, whose goals and contents have a predominantly monocultural orientation, is quite unprepared to receive migrant children, who represented '9% of the state school population' in 2008/9 (Euridice, 2009). There is no consistent policy for welcoming newly arrived pupils (European Network Against Racism [ENAR], 2008a) such as intensive language courses which would help them overcome language barriers: though Greek lessons are increasingly offered to children of migrant workers, they are available mostly in primary schools rather than in secondary schools (ENAR, 2008b). It is therefore not uncommon for older pupils to struggle to follow lessons in a language they hardly understand. In its description of the national education system, the Ministry of Education lists under the heading "Multicultural education" the provision of intensive instruction of Greek language for primary school pupils but the piloting of similar courses for only 15 secondary education institutions (Euridice, 2009). Some intercultural education courses are included in pre-

service training for school teachers but, for in-service training, these are optional or limited to the preparation of teachers to teach Greek as a second or foreign language (Euridice, 2009). There is therefore no consistent policy for experienced teachers to benefit from training which would help them deal with a multicultural classroom. Teacher training follows the logic of the education system as a whole: there is no 'systematically recognized goal' to address multiculturalism, and neither therefore to train teachers in the areas of 'tolerance, human rights, conflict resolution' or 'social justice' (Shepherd Johnson, 2007: 30).

Thus, the model promoted does not respond to new realities, and tensions are created between 'local traditions' and 'global trends' (Zembylas, 2003: 503). Despite an increasingly heterogeneous school population, the educational system continues to advance an ethnocentric model that breeds nationalism and xenophobia.

### **2.4.3 NATIONALISM IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

While Cyprus benefits from quite a high level of literacy — 98% of young Greek Cypriots were enrolled at secondary educational institutions and 81% at tertiary educational institutions in 2006 (Cyprus Human Development Report [CHDR], 2009) —, education promotes nationalism which in turn sustains negative stereotypes of the ethnic other and leaves little space for criticality (Spyrou, 2002, 2006; Bryant, 2004; Zembylas, 2007; Papadakis, 2008; Varnava, 2009). The well documented ethnocentrism of the Cyprus education system is depicted as one that reproduces discriminatory patterns (Trimikliniotis, 2004; European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia [EUMC], 2006) and that supports 'considerable levels of racist and xenophobic prejudice among students' (ECRI, 2005) and teachers (Trimikliniotis, 2004).

Education is seen as essential in constructing, even imposing national identity (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 2006): curricula, textbooks, national and religious symbols and celebrations, many teachers' discursive practices (Spyrou, 2006; Zembylas, 2007; Varnava, 2009) in general and history lessons in particular reproduce highly stereotypical images. Nationalist historiography fosters the animosity between Greeks and Turks wherein Turks emerge as the main enemy of Hellenism (Spyrou, 2006; Papadakis, 2008). History school books stress allegiance to the "motherland" Greece through the country's 'supposed thousands of years of pure Greekness' (Bryant, 2004: 171) and offer monolithic and essentialised constructions of the self and the other which fail to recognise heterogeneity or commonality: the self is glorified through a 'narrative of national achievements and struggles' (Papadakis, 2008: 2) whilst the Greek nation is portrayed in historical continuity with ancient times (Frangoudaki and Dragona, 1997); in this way, it is suggested that contemporary Greeks are direct descendants of ancient Greeks, untouched by other intermediary influences. On the other hand, the presence of others is portrayed as parasitic, while Turkish Cypriots are often assimilated into the category "Turks" who are presented as aggressive and barbaric (Spyrou, 2006; Papadakis, 2008). Thus, in the process of national identity construction, the Turks become the primary and 'most negative ethnic Other', 'against whom a sense of Self is constructed' (Spyrou, 2006: 102, 95). Essentialised constructions of otherness include the British, since both the official and the hidden curriculum reproduce accounts of the colonisers' cruelty, thus socialising the youth 'into multiple enemies' (Hadjipavlou, 2006). Further, nationalistic education suggests that Cyprus is Greek and therefore true Cypriots are only Greek Cypriots, which leaves little space for ethnic minorities within the nation (Spyrou, 2006). Cypriot

minorities (Maronites, Latin, Armenian, Roma, Jews) or immigrants are hardly represented in textbooks or curricula, a policy which fails to acknowledge multiculturalism as a historical or a contemporary phenomenon (Varnava *et al.*, 2009).

The reinforcement of Greekness in national identity construction and the exclusive representation of the dominant group are aided by a centralised system with a prescribed national curriculum, a single textbook policy (Frangoudaki and Dragona, 1997; Varnava, 2009), and the publication of many textbooks in Greece (Zembylas, 2002; CHDR, 2009). Consequently, young Cypriots are educated with the same textbooks as their Greek peers. However, some studies indicate that Greek Cypriot children also draw on a Cypriocentric discourse, which emphasises the Cypriot identity, to construct their national identities (Spyrou, 2002; Ioannidou, 2004; Philippou, 2005; Sophocleous, 2009). Not surprisingly, Sophocleous' (2009) research shows that pupils' Cypriot identity emerges with issues relevant to their daily activities with friends and family but not with issues relevant to education.

Frangoudaki and Dragona (1997) posit that the image of national others promoted by Greek textbooks is a mirror image of the national self which is in fact represented as weak, fragile, insecure and in danger of alteration by the influence of other civilisations. This insecurity is expressed by vivid reactions of state teachers' organisations and a very vocal part of the public (politicians, the Church, parent associations...) to attempts for educational reforms which are often regarded as an effort to de-hellenise citizens. Such was the case for the revision of the history textbook for the sixth-grade of primary schools in 2007, which caused uproar and led to its withdrawal. According to Shepherd Johnson (2007: 31) it is typical in

'postconflict societies' for traditionalists who feel concerned with 'preserving cultural heritage and national identity' to resist reforms aiming at bridging the divide.

The legitimisation of a 'Helleno-centric education' is supported by the aspiration of the educational system to transmit 'Helleno-Christian' or 'Helleno-Orthodox' values (Trimikliniotis, 2004: 63, 68). Numerous practices reflect this trend: daily lessons start with a morning prayer while classrooms are decorated with Christian symbols such as icons of the Christ or the Virgin Mary. In addition, pupils are escorted by their teachers to a church to follow a mass four to six times a year during school time. Religious education, as it is now practised, may be seen as reinforcing discriminatory practices against minority students.

#### **2.4.4 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

While curricula, notably of History and Modern Greek, are 'loaded with ethno-religious biases' (Trimikliniotis, 2004: 69), religious education also seems to exclude other communities. Compulsory during the twelve years of primary and secondary education, religious education has recently become optional for pupils with a migrant background of another religion and Cypriots who declare a different or no religion. Dispensation is possible but no alternative courses are offered. The lessons take the form of catechesis, an education in the faith and the teaching of the Christian Orthodox doctrine with little reference to other religions. Cyprus reproduces the Greek model of 'religious indoctrination' (Zambeta, 2003: 15) which assumes that the orthodox faith is an integral component of the national identity and which results in a 'confusion between the qualities of citizen and faithful' (*op. cit.*: 16) [*my translation; original in Greek*]. More



to the point, the head organisation of Greek education is the “Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs”.

The dogmatic nature of religious education is in conflict with pedagogies which foster criticality and creativity (*loc. cit.*) while the exclusive teaching of the dominant group’s religion disregards principles of pluralism. Again, it is suggested that Cypriots are only the Greek Orthodox, which notably excludes all other Cypriots or non-Cypriots. If confession is indeed strongly tied to the national identity, does it legitimate most Greek Cypriots’ right ‘to impose’, as the majority group, ‘their religious convictions through schooling’ (Zambeta, 2003) [*my translation; original in Greek*]? Further, the obligation for parents to declare their religious convictions to the school so that their child is exempted from the lesson is regarded by some as an infringement on their privacy. At the time of writing, there are complaints to the ombudsman’s office, whose role is also to investigate the violation of citizens’ human rights by government services.

The Cypriot model is not unique but rare compared to practices in other E.U. countries, most of which have launched a public debate on the connection between the role of religion in schools and religious diversity. European countries are all faced with the challenge of ‘religious pluralisation’ and an increasing number of their citizens who declare themselves ‘of no religion’ leading them to rethink their approach to teaching religion (Willaime, 2007: 59). The response of many E.U. countries to increasing diversity has been a ‘process of deconfessionalisation and secularisation of religious education’ in such ways that they contribute to students’ ‘responsible citizenship in pluralist societies’ with courses which are non-obligatory, include more religions or

non-religious positions, or highlight the ethical and values dimension of religions (*op. cit.*: 62, 64).

The Cypriot education system is therefore, for the time being, unable to acknowledge and respond to diversity, and to pupils' rights to being educated in their own faith or of having no faith. It is quite significant for my study that Cypriot students are not educated about other religions, which restricts their tolerance and understanding. 'Religious diversity is either disregarded or equated with the external "Other"'; especially 'Islam is presented as a culturally inferior culture which clearly represents the enemy' (Zambeta, 2003: 20). However, the 'ability to discuss all religions with all students increasingly appears to be a pedagogical and civic necessity' (Willaime, 2007: 66) in pluralist societies such as Cyprus.

#### **2.4.5 EDUCATIONAL REFORM**

Despite these inadequacies, recent developments give rise to some optimism. Since the accession of Cyprus to the European Union, in 2004, the need to enhance openness to other peoples and cultures has become more obvious: the concern to 'align with a European future' and educate teachers for new realities now gains ground (Shepherd Johnson, 2007: 30). This is traceable in official documents: in the official statement of its aims in 2004 the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture stated that one of the aims of primary education is to establish children's 'national and ethnic identity and their status as citizens of the Republic of Cyprus who make great efforts for their national demand of human rights through legal and generally accepted procedures', which refers to the Cyprus problem. In 2005, apart from 'retaining the national identity and keeping alive the memory of the occupied areas in Cyprus' the Ministry also included 'the development of free and democratic citizens', 'coexistence, cooperation

and combating intolerance and xenophobia' while the 2008 report made no mention of national identity; instead, it listed amongst its aims for secondary education 'belief in human values, respect for our cultural heritage and human rights' and the European dimension in order to assist pupils in acquiring European consciousness.

The entry of Cyprus into the E.U. has been one of the incentives for the ongoing reform of the educational system. The 2004 Report of the Committee for Educational Reform confirmed the 'narrowly ethnocentric and culturally monolithic character' of the Cypriot educational system and made recommendations for its restructuring. These included features of a European school system which is 'democratic' and 'inclusive', respects 'pluralism', and 'recognises differences' and 'multiculturalism'. The reform should result in new curricula and syllabi per subject for three levels of education: pre-primary, primary, and secondary (Euridice, 2009).

As immigration in greater numbers is a recent phenomenon, national education gradually acknowledges changing needs for a new school population and makes some efforts to adapt to it. In this way, the Ministry of Education announces some novelties such as 'an induction guide for the new coming students' in eight languages, the 'addition of intercultural elements to the new Curriculum', and new 'pedagogical material' (Euridice, 2009).

#### **2.4.6 PLURILINGUALISM AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY**

The construction of the European Union has led to a need for forging a European identity. As a supranational economic and political entity, the European Union naturally concerns itself with the integration and

identification of 500 million E.U. citizens with Europe. The construction of a European identity is not explicitly assumed by national education systems, but, at present, the E.U. chooses to promote European citizenship through plurilingualism, which grants language education 'a role in E.U. educational thinking' (Byram, 2002: 44).

Plurilingualism is defined by the Common European Framework of Reference [CEFR] (2001) as an overall communicative competence within which varying degrees of competence in a number of languages interrelate and interact. With 23 official and working languages, the European Union encourages language diversity expressed through a policy formulated in 1995 that promotes proficiency in three community languages, thus learning the mother tongue plus two E.U. languages (European Commission, 1995). The Council of Europe, which focuses on cultural cooperation, has also formulated language education policies to promote plurilingualism, linguistic diversity, mutual understanding, democratic citizenship, and social cohesion (Council of Europe, 2005). Specifically, the Language Policy Division and the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) provide E.U. members with the opportunity to analyse their language policy and practice, and to formulate and implement possible future developments.

Foreign languages have long been promoted by Cypriot education with compulsory courses. Pupils start learning English at age nine from grade 4 to grade 6 of primary education (2 teaching periods out of 35/week). A second foreign language is now piloted in a few primary schools. In secondary education, pupils continue with compulsory courses of English but also French (3 periods and 2 periods respectively out of 35/week) for the first four grades. During the last two grades, pupils may choose two

foreign languages: English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Russian, or Turkish for 2 periods or 4 periods per week, according to the orientation of their studies. In addition, official documents of the Ministry of Education and Culture state that the new foreign language curriculum draws ideas from the European Framework for Modern Language Learning and lists 'intercultural competences' amongst its objectives (Country Report, Council of Europe, 2004).

However, the policy on plurilingualism seems to be deficient, as most young people become somewhat fluent in English but are hardly interested in other languages. Further, most parents resort to private lessons in order to ensure that their children will learn English or more rarely a second language.

## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

This review outlined my personal, professional, and locational contexts in an effort to elucidate the reasons which motivated my research and to provide background information for my study. I have mainly focused on the Cypriot context in order to enhance the understanding of my students' perceptions of otherness.

The 'strong ethnic and religious ties with Greece' (Zembylas, 2003: 503) still define Cypriot educational policies and curricula. The on-going political situation and division are not helpful in moving forward towards more pluralistic practices because they justify the victimhood role promoted by schools. This is not uncommon in divided societies (Northern Ireland, former Yugoslavia, Israel...), where the education system serves to consolidate, 'if not to promote, the divisions' (Shepherd Johnson, 2007:

22). An education in nationalism forms defensive and insecure citizens who perceive others in a binary logic of exclusion, with a strong sense of opposition between *us* and *them*, where the self is idealised and the other is demonised; 'mixing with *them*' 'represents a danger of impurity' (Zembylas, 2007: 181).

There are, however, some encouraging signs which result from the influence of E.U. policies and practices. The accession of Cyprus in the E.U. marked the beginning of changes towards more democratic and inclusive schools. As a member of the European family, Cyprus is driven to revise its educational system in order to foster democratic values such as respect for otherness, tolerance, and openness to cultural pluralism which are central for the success of the E.U.: the creation of new bodies such as the office of the ombudsman or the observatory on racial discrimination, mobility programmes for students and teachers, and increased opportunities for interaction with European peers all contribute towards less insular attitudes and increased protection of citizens' human rights.

## **CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, I review relevant literature in an effort to locate my study within a wider theoretical framework. I discuss some of the theoretical models which inform intercultural competence (IC): critical pedagogy (CP), critical multiculturalism, and the cultural and the intercultural components of Foreign Language Education (FLE). Finally, I address a reassessment of FLE goals and practices in light of these theories.

In the first section, I review some of the concerns of critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism in order to illustrate how they give rise to a reassessment of the goals and practices of foreign language education. These theoretical perspectives are so vast that I selectively focus on areas which are of most relevance to my empirical study and to foreign language education: the purpose of educational institutions and the political role of education and educators. I then try to connect these schools of thought to foreign language teaching to examine their relevance to this type of education. How can foreign language teachers relate to and apply these theories in their practice? What can constitute critical classroom pedagogies? These are some of the questions I address in this section. Some concepts which are central to critical pedagogy, such as Freire's conscientization and how it relates to reflection, are also examined in chapter four.

## **3.2 CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, CRITICAL MULTICULTURALISM, AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

### **3.2.1 SOME BASIC CONCEPTS OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

A central tenet of critical pedagogy is that, whether intentional or not, all forms of education are political (Shor, 1992) and that all educational decisions have ideological implications. Contesting neutrality in education (hooks, 1993; Sleeter and McLaren, 1995; Giroux, 2005), critical pedagogy can be broadly described as education grounded in a desire for social change (Sleeter and McLaren, 1995; Guilherme, 2002; Darder *et al.*, 2003). Refusing to view educational institutions as sites where a neutral body of curricular knowledge is passed on to learners, critical pedagogy considers them to be 'cultural and political arenas where different cultural, ideological and social forms are constantly in struggle' (Pennycook, 1994: 297). It therefore aims to change both education and society, for the mutual benefit of both. It holds a transformative view of the world by refusing the status quo, the world as it is, which serves 'the dominant interests of global capitalism' and 'white hegemonic power' (Phipps and Guilherme, 2004: 2).

CP is a theoretical tradition which was inspired by critical theory and the Frankfurt School of philosophy and social theory in the late 1920s; critical theory was initially concerned with critical reappropriation and revision of Marxism but was also informed by Freud's work (Blake and Masschelein, 2003). Though it is difficult to identify the ideas of critical theory as there are many lines of thought amongst the various thinkers affiliated with the school, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm, Habermas..., all share a 'critical stance toward society', and a 'strong ethical concern for the



individual' while they reject diverse forms of oppression and social injustice and strive towards a more humane world (*op. cit.*: 38-39).

Similarly, critical pedagogy, which was mainly developed by American theorists from the beginnings of the 1980s, holds a deeply politicised view of society and education and a concern with social justice (Darder *et al.*, 2003). Critical pedagogues have also built their work on previous contributions of progressive educators, such as John Dewey or Herbert Kohl (*loc. cit.*). Their main concern is to link education to democratic principles and to transformative social action in classrooms as well as in society. As a politically aware citizen aspiring to transform my teaching practice into a more socially just one, I was drawn to this political approach to education. Social justice is understood here as 'a movement towards a fairer, less oppressive society' seeking the 'good of individuals' through the 'right distribution of benefits and responsibilities' (Griffiths, 1998: 89, 91).

### **3.2.1.1 Purpose of education: Educational institutions as sites of cultural production and transformation**

Although much of the work of critical pedagogues deals with schooling, most of their critique can equally be applied to higher education. As my study was conducted in a higher education institution, I am using the term "educational institutions" which includes primary and secondary schools as well as universities.

An essential theme for critical pedagogues is that of educational institutions seen as sites of economic and cultural reproduction and social inequality (Sleeter and McLaren, 1995). Bourdieu (1977) also referred to

cultural reproduction to describe educational institutions as a system which perpetuates social and economic inequities and legitimates the dominant classes' cultural values. Through a critique of capitalism, critical pedagogues contend that problems associated with education are related to the perpetuation of structures of 'domination and exploitation' (Darder *et al.*, 2003: 5). Particularly, Michael Apple wrote extensively of educational institutions reproducing unequal power relations and linked notions of cultural capital and reproduction of official knowledge in education; power and politics are central in understanding educational institutions which are part of society and fully participate 'in its logics and socio-cultural dynamics' (Apple, 1996: 107). Hooks (2003) focuses on higher education to deplore the silencing of working-class voices and a lack of a debate on class issues in university classrooms. Hopeful about the possibility of social transformation and a just society, critical pedagogues envision educational institutions as places of 'cultural production' and 'emancipation of individuals' who would be empowered to actively participate in democracies which embrace cultural diversity (Morrison, 2001: 280). Hence, a driver for this movement is the idea that educational institutions can act as 'a basis for the future of democratic societies' (Guilherme, 2002: 31).

Critical pedagogy does not view education in simple terms of classroom methodology but goes much wider than educational institutions and is part of the development of an emancipated citizenry. For Giroux (1983: 170) the predominance of 'culture of positivism' allowed for analysis only of questions of efficiency in teaching and learning, and not for questions concerning issues such as the extent to which educational institutions reproduce social 'inequities in wealth, power, and privilege'.

Critical pedagogues thus believe that educational institutions and educators should be connected to wider society, that is to other progressive social groups in order to create alliances and solidarity, ensuring that the pedagogical is more political and the political more pedagogical. They see the need to link pedagogical practices in educational institutions with broader society by encouraging democratic behaviour so as to prepare students for democratic conduct in society. Giroux and Myrsiades (2001), for instance, deplore the market logic and commercialisation of higher education which drive it away from its mission and main purpose, civic education, towards vocationalism. Universities should primarily be sites for the development of critical citizenship rather than job-readiness. Barnett (1997) shares the view that higher education ought to place criticality at its centre in order to enable students to become critical beings and engage with critical thinking, self-reflection, and action instead of narrowly concentrating on the transmission of knowledge. Transforming society towards more equality by preparing students to be active citizens and participate fully in a democratic society is at the heart of critical pedagogy. This is perhaps of most relevance in our days, with the preparation and development of free and democratic citizens high on the agenda of educational authorities, especially among European Union institutions, such as the Council of Europe. The same applies to teacher education since one of its major goals should be to prepare learners, at all levels of education, for informed citizenship in a democratic society (Guilherme, 2002).

Grounding the politics of education within the larger society, Apple, Giroux, and McLaren are committed to the promotion of 'critical democracy, individual freedom, and social justice' by the preparation of students to become citizens who have the capacity to engage 'in critical praxis for

sociocultural betterment' (Stanley, 1992: 208). Thus, struggling in educational institutions 'is struggling in society' (Apple, 1996: 107).

The premise of critical pedagogy, that all forms of education are political and ideological has been contested as extreme and compared to religious dogmas. Claiming that ideology in teaching is omnipresent, whether educators are cognisant or not, is basically 'a form of displaced religious faith couched in secular terms' (Santos, 2001: 180). I however have long believed that education and politics are inextricably intertwined. This fundamental stance which guides my choices as a teacher-researcher found an echo when I first read about critical pedagogy. Unable to espouse Santos' criticism, I do, however, take her words into consideration in hope of avoiding dogmatism.

### **3.2.1.2 Teachers as social agents**

Teachers can be viewed as "transformative intellectuals". The term coined by Giroux (1988), describes the active role that teachers can play in transforming educational institutions and their students' educational experiences and lives. The term describes a person who 'exercises forms of intellectual and pedagogical practice' which endeavour to insert education 'into the political sphere' believing that schooling embodies relations of power (Giroux and McLaren, 1986: 215). It refers therefore to someone who is particularly concerned with social inequalities and feels the need to engage critically with them.

Typically, educational authorities display little confidence in teachers' ability to provide intellectual and moral guidance for young people (Giroux, 1988). The concept of transformative intellectuals attempts to reformulate the dominant notion that reduces teachers to educational technicians

merely carrying out 'dictates and objectives decided by experts' not necessarily in touch with classroom realities. Viewing teachers as engaging 'in transformative intellectual labour' in the pursuit of change 'in the conditions of their own work', but also towards the realisation of a free and just society (Stanley, 1992: xiii) involves rethinking their role: they become professionals committed to the empowerment of their students who thereby empower themselves (Guilherme, 2002). When teachers are seen as technicians it is implied that the "intellectual stuff" should be left to academics (Stanley, 1992) whereas teaching 'by its very nature, involves rigorous intellectual pursuit' (Freire, 2005: 4). These two competing orientations have implications for curriculum development: teachers can actively contribute to the shaping of the curriculum or simply deliver to their classes a curriculum imposed on them. Separating curriculum from instruction ignores teachers' intellectual freedom and professional expertise (Pinar, 2004). The technician approach to teaching is increasingly dominant as education becomes more market driven (Murray and Lawrence, 2000; Giroux and Myrsiades, 2001) with consequences in 'teacher professionalism, teacher development and teacher research.' Teaching is seen here as a technical activity, assessed in terms of performance, standards, and measurable outcomes while education is considered to be serving market needs, a commodity in 'social and economical development' (Burton & Bartlett, 2005: 6-7). Centralised educational policies, curriculum control and restructuring can render teachers less active in forming their identities and institutions, ultimately devaluing their work (Smyth and Shacklock, 1998).

Positioning oneself as a transformative intellectual entails treating learners as critical agents, utilising dialogue, and questioning the sources of knowledge production and distribution in order to make 'knowledge

meaningful, critical and ultimately emancipatory' (Giroux and McLaren, 1986: 215). Teachers are defined as active community participants whose role is to make their institutions democratic places where students can debate, and learn how to function in real democracy (Giroux, 1988). Thus, teachers can be agents of reform by empowering students to become critical, active agents (*op. cit.*) and by viewing classrooms as democratic public spaces of transformative interaction. This transformation will start in the classroom and evolve outwards into the society where students dwell.

This perception empowers teachers and accords them a professional aura; it calls on teachers to resist being mere transmitters of knowledge and passive recipients of curricula imposed on them (*op. cit.*) and to see themselves and their students as active participants in the construction of knowledge. Education reformers often ignore teachers' expertise (Zeichner and Liston, 1996) while researchers seldom call on teachers as sources of guidance (Delpit, 1995). However, teachers do possess the agency to adapt assigned curricula to their needs and values (Wideen *et al.*, 2002) and challenge curricular directives which they judge to be in disagreement 'with their professional and ethical responsibilities'. They can omit or emphasise parts of the curriculum by adding materials, activities or personal comments in ways that satisfy them more (Reagan and Osborn, 2002: 87).

Teachers can also be viewed as "cultural workers" (Simon, 1992; Freire, 2005). As producers of culture with a critical capacity, they should struggle with the dominant values in society and in themselves in order to assume 'their political and cultural' role and work towards social transformation (Apple *et al.*, 2001: 130). This concept also connects educators to a community of other political and cultural workers committed to

transformative projects in a variety of domains such as 'writers, artists', 'environmental' and 'human rights activists' (Pennycook, 1994: 304).

The idea that teaching can bring about social change is also found in transformative teaching which draws on 'feminist, critical and anti-racist pedagogies' (Matthews, 2005: 95). Though these pedagogical approaches are rooted in different traditions they both aspire to work towards social transformation by exposing inequalities and instilling critical awareness in students (Ng, 1998). Encouraging learners to question rather than accept dominant ideologies, the transformative teacher endeavours to alter student 'perceptions of the world' by both curriculum content and pedagogical practices. Educators empower their students when they share pedagogic authority with them: they involve students in decision-making about 'classroom structure, procedures and course requirements', build student understanding on their own experiences and real-life situations or encourage collaboration with peers (Matthews, 2005: 99-101).

### **3.2.1.3 Students as active thinkers**

Considered a prominent figure or even the founder of critical pedagogical thought and practice (Nainby *et al.*, 2004; Guilherme, 2002) Paulo Freire has influenced educators striving to bring about change in their classrooms, institutions and ultimately in society. A valuable Freirean concept is the contrast between banking-education and problem-posing or dialogic education. The banking concept of education only allows students to receive, file, and store the deposits of knowledge (Freire, 1970). It is a model of education that has been largely questioned but is still dominant in Cypriot schooling as well as in higher education where the 'lecture format' prevails (Matthews, 2006: 98); it is difficult to perceive any attempt of transformation or innovation when students are reduced to

docile listeners without being actively involved in knowledge production or unable to connect education to their everyday lives. Teacher-centred approaches do not foster the co-construction of meaning but the acquisition of meanings constructed by teachers. Many learning theorists (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1978) have disapproved of this top-down model, considering it alienating and unconnected to the students' lives.

Freire's conception of teacher-student interaction and of teachers' ability to communicatively engage students is fundamental to social transformation (Nainby *et al.*, 2004). For Freire, emancipatory education is never a simple transmission of facts and information in a way that turns students into containers, receptacles to be filled by the teacher. On the contrary, his concept of dialogic teaching legitimates and values students' knowledge as they are no longer passive but 'critical co-investigators in dialogue' with their teacher (Freire, 1970: 62). A Freirean critical teacher is therefore

a problem-poser who asks thought-provoking questions and who encourages students to ask their own questions. Through problem-posing students learn to question answers rather than merely to answer questions. In this pedagogy, students experience education as something they do, not something that is done to them.

(Shor, 1993: 26)

Using a constructivist framework, Freire pointed to education as a tool for dialogue and consciousness-raising. The idea that learners construct their own knowledge and contribute actively to their own learning is associated with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism. Vygotsky gave 'a more socially interactive picture of the construction of knowledge'



(Solomon, 2003: 56) and distinguished between bottom-up and top-down learning experiences that intersect to produce children's Zone of Proximal Development. The adult enables children to do more than they would be able to do on their own, a process eventually internalised by children and leading them to 'higher order thinking' (*loc. cit.*). His theory of learning emphasised learners' active agency in the process of knowledge creation and the importance of peer interaction in learning which influenced learner autonomy theories (Fenner, 2006).

Claiming any contribution to social justice in education is impossible if the traditional transmission model is perpetuated and the main stakeholders, the students, are not given ownership of learning. If the focus is on student empowerment, the starting point should be the acknowledgement of 'the cultural, linguistic, imaginative, and intellectual resources' that they bring to classrooms (Cummins, 2001: 653). During my intervention, dialogic teaching was my eventual goal; I cannot claim that my teaching reproduces Freire's ideal but it is certainly an inspiring model I have been striving towards since the beginning of my study.

Even if Freire was largely interested in adults living in oppressive conditions (notably Brazilian peasants), his work is significant for teachers like me who work with privileged students. For instance, the issue of illiteracy can be extended metaphorically to those who fail to decipher the world and 'their lives in a critical and historically relational way' (Freire *et al.*, 1987: 12). For Freire, literacy is 'a form of cultural politics' which ultimately means a critical awareness of one's context leading the individual to a more active stance in society (Guilherme, 2002: 31). Based on this reading, my endeavour was also to explore ways of raising awareness about one's privilege in order to bring about conscientization on

the part of students who may have never considered 'the predicament of distant others' (Allen Morrow and Torres, 2002: 144). Conscientization is the development of a self-awareness that can 'transform individuals' experience of the world' (Diaz-Greenberg and Nevin, 2003: 216) who will eventually feel so concerned that they will take action 'to change the world' (Freire, 1996: 183). These Freirean concepts have therefore been of particular relevance for my research.

### **3.2.2 MULTICULTURALISM/INTERCULTURALISM**

#### **3.2.2.1 Issues of terminology**

One of the basic assumptions I bring into my study is that people with differing value systems and patterns of communication are often not well understood by members of the dominant culture (Cushner, 1998); further, I assume that most of my local students are 'at the stage of monoculturalism', with limited contacts with culturally different persons, which leads them to believe that there is only one correct perspective, theirs, and that 'variation is fundamentally deviant' (Ramsey and Williams, 2003: 150). In my endeavour to enhance students' intercultural competence, I inevitably turned to the rich literature on multicultural education.

My use of the terms multiculturalism and interculturalism calls for an explanation. The terms multicultural, intercultural or cross-cultural are all common in the literature. Multicultural education is preferred in North America, whereas the term intercultural is more widely used in Europe. *Multicultural* suggests that groups of many (multi) different cultures co-exist in the same space; however, it may imply that people from a variety of diverse backgrounds live side by side but without necessarily interacting with each other (Bailly and Filiot, 2000). Inter in *intercultural* expresses a

relationship and implies that different people and groups are not only present in an educational environment but also come into contact (*op. cit.*). Damanakis (2006) points out that *multiculturalism* is a fact; it is what occurs in life, while *interculturalism* is what we aim at, a 'marriage' [*my translation; original in Greek*]. Cushner (1998) concurs with this position, seeing in *intercultural* an expression of exchanges and cooperation between groups and recognition that a real understanding of cultural similarities and differences is essential in providing a basis for collaboration with others. He consequently concludes that *intercultural* education is more proactive and action-oriented than *multicultural* education. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC, 2004) sees a finer difference in their use among the E.U. member states: *intercultural* education fosters a better understanding of our own and other cultures, whereas *multicultural* is often seen as an appropriate response to prepare students for life in a multicultural society. I therefore privilege the term *intercultural* that I use more widely in this account without excluding the term *multicultural*, applied here as synonymous, since it is present in the abundant American literature.

Today, multiculturalism has a central place in education and generates discussions on social justice, democracy, and human rights (Bennett, 2001). Characterised by diverse and sometimes competing theoretical approaches, and addressing issues of 'diversity and difference, social inequality and the need for social change' (Appelbaum, 2002: 2), multiculturalism may deal with more than racism and cultural pluralism: gender equity, disability, sexual orientation, bilingualism, environmental degradation, poverty, and consumerism are also included (Ramsey and Williams, 2003). Critical pedagogy has influenced recent developments which link 'multicultural education with wider issues of socio-economic and

political inequality' (May, 1999: 3). This wide range of concerns – political, social, cultural, moral, educational, or religious – is probably what creates a tension in the principles that underpin multicultural education. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) present five major perspectives: conservative, liberal, pluralist, left-essentialist and critical multiculturalism. As a natural consequence of my interest in critical pedagogy, I will here limit my review to critical multiculturalism which is often understood 'as a radical alternative to liberal multiculturalism' (Bennett *et al.*, 2005: 227).

### **3.2.2.2 Critical multiculturalism**

As I have tried to demonstrate previously, critical pedagogy aspires to 'transformative social action in the interest of oppressed communities' (Darder *et al.*, 2003: 3), which inevitably includes a commitment against racism and which in turn makes it a 'partner with multicultural education' (McLaren, 2003b: 170). Critical pedagogy and multicultural education are 'mirror images' in that they are both 'educational innovations' (Gay, 1995: 155) which 'acknowledge and value' cultural diversity and prepare learners to become active members of a democracy by encouraging 'critical thinking, reflection, and action' (Nieto, 2004: 355, 359). They both aim at students' empowerment, 'critical knowledge, moral and ethical values', and action for educational and social change for a more democratic world (Gay, 1995: 157).

Sharing an intellectual alliance with critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism responds to a need to go beyond a superficial celebration of cultural differences and inclusion of diverse cultures and to critique power in its multiple forms. It attempts to offer an alternative to a non-threatening kind of multiculturalism which is considered weak in addressing structural inequalities (racism, white supremacy, capitalism).

Critical multiculturalists address the effect of capitalism on the poor and marginalised (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997) and associate multicultural education with wider issues of socio-economic and political inequality. They also take an interest in political issues surrounding the current organisation of modern nation-states which includes a critique of the disparity in the distribution of power and social and political access among different ethnic, cultural and social groups (May, 1999). Critical multiculturalism therefore addresses the construction of a common language and culture in modern nation-states and the public representation of minorities.

A central tenet of critical multiculturalism is the project of social transformation; it seeks social justice and equality by placing race, class, and gender within the larger framework of social struggles and by examining how inequality and injustice are produced and reproduced in relation to power and privilege (Sleeter and McLaren, 1995; Kubota, 2004). Critical multiculturalism thus places antiracism at its centre (Nieto, 2004; May, 1999). It studies the relation between dominant and subordinate groups and it confronts racism by naming it and by focusing on how membership in particular groups disadvantages certain students. This explicitly antiracist perspective is reflected in the exploration of discrimination in all areas: curriculum, materials, policies, and teacher-student interaction (Nieto, 2004).

Another characteristic of critical multiculturalism is that it views culture 'as diverse, dynamic, and socially, politically and discursively constructed' (Kubota, 2004: 38). This means that cultures are neither homogeneous nor static, and that images we hold of other cultures are neither neutral nor objective but are produced in political and ideological struggles of

power. Pennycook (1994) for example points out the legacy of colonialism, which created a dichotomy between the Self and the Other and images of the culturally “superior” and “inferior”.

### **3.2.3 LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

The question which now arises is: How can I combine these constructs in my context and in a way that they can work towards my personal, my students’, and social transformation? I begin by exploring the ways in which foreign language education can contribute to social justice and change by looking at the ideological nature of FLT.

A central tenet of critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism is the rejection of value neutrality, whether referring to researchers, education, or the concepts of language, culture, cultural beliefs and practices.

#### **3.2.3.1 The ideological nature of language teaching**

Pennycook (1994), in a book which echoes the doubts and contradictions I often experience as a FL educator, challenges the neutrality of FLT. He questions the prevailing assumption in English language education which views the spread of English as natural, neutral and beneficial as well as the notion that countries or individuals freely choose English, irrespective of economic, political, and ideological constraints. This view, he remarks, needs to be investigated as a particular discursive construct and language professionals should start exploring the interests served by their work. Language is therefore to be viewed within the wider frame of society, culture, politics, and economy. Since a language is never neutral, Pennycook argues that language teaching practices are equally non-neutral, but are also involved in cultural politics. They reflect a particularly

Western view of education based on a narrow set of teaching and learning circumstances which disregards the variety of educational contexts.

It is indeed difficult to accept a view which reduces FLT to a set of techniques, disconnected from cultural realities or ideological orders. My claim that education is never neutral inevitably includes FLT. Pedagogical choices are not innocent: they represent ideological orientations, 'in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed' (Berlin, 1988: 492). In the same line of thought, Prodromou (1988: 74) explains the ideologies behind language teaching as the reflection of teachers' attitudes to society and the educational practice which are expressed in 'power relationships', of the way authority is viewed in the classrooms and 'by extension in society'. In the same way, syllabi can be seen as standing for particular ideologies (Candlin, 1984 cited by Pennycook, 1994). What we choose to teach, how we teach it, and how we relate to students all reflect our ideological assumptions about education and society.

In an article which is of particular relevance to my study, Benesch (1993) highlights the political dimension of English as a Second Language [ESL] writing. She refutes Santos' (1992) position that ESL composition is primarily descriptive and pragmatic, and thus aloof from ideology (Benesch, 1993) by pointing to a growing body of literature that takes into account the sociopolitical context of ESL teaching and learning. Drawing on the work of first language (L1) and second language (L2) educators (Cummins, 1989; Apple, 1990; Auerbach, 1991; Shor, 1992), she concurs with the critical pedagogy tenet that L2 composition is, like all teaching and research, ideological and that the fact that some educators,

particularly in FLE, do not acknowledge their ideology does not make them politically neutral.

It is preferable that the social, political and ideological aspects in language and language teaching and learning are dealt with explicitly. Byram and Morgan (1994: 177) argue in favour of the link of political education to FLE. Though political education may connote indoctrination they suggest an interpretation of the term which can describe 'the critical understanding of native and foreign cultures'.

### **3.2.3.2 Why should foreign language educators engage with the critical?**

Luke (2004: 25) gives a number of reasons that justify the need for language teachers' engagement with critical pedagogies: traditional student bodies of language programmes have historically been objects of colonial and imperial power, which is the case of many of my students, both Cypriot and international; second language educators, especially TESOL, serve a 'transnational service industry which produces skilled human resources for economic globalisation'; the identity politics and dynamics of power within the TESOL classroom in so many countries usually involve social relations between teachers and students that reproduce larger social and economic relations. This, he concludes, turns TESOL into a pedagogical site and institution for educating the racial and linguistic other.

Luke's and Pennycook's views on the politics behind English teaching assist me in making sense of the contradictions I sometimes feel about teaching the language(s) of the powerful. At times I wonder whether I contribute to



cultural imperialism of colonialist countries and the economically powerful (Britain, France or the U.S.A.). This feeling is more present when I teach culture or come across cultural practices in textbooks which seem to solidly represent cultural imposition. My fear is that I may be unconsciously portraying the English and French languages as the passport to westernisation, sending the underlying message 'you should be aiming at imitating Westerners'. Hence, the intercultural focus in the syllabus I elaborated for my study; it is a way for me to escape this cultural imposition by viewing and representing these languages as global, not solely belonging to native speakers but as a means to communicate with the rest of the world. It is a form of subtle resistance and a process of appropriation (Canagarajah, 1999). Thus, critical pedagogy increases my understanding of how these languages are socioculturally and sociopolitically framed and provides me with the tools to struggle against power relations embedded in my subject matter (Norton, 2004).

### **3.2.3.3 In search of critical classroom practices**

It is clear that critical approaches to language education require commitment to social justice, and equality (Norton, 2004) and that critical FL pedagogies aspire to support social change. Stephen May (1999: 4) explains that, though multicultural and antiracist education have been criticised for failing to successfully link theory, policy and practice and may historically have been under-theorised, they can at least be applied in educational institutions. In this way, he adds to a repeated critique of CP for failing to implement theories in real contexts and classrooms because it presents a theory which is 'of little relevance to either policy makers or practitioners'.

Clearly critical pedagogy refuses to outline teaching techniques (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997), but two of its dimensions are of significance to FLE and to my study:

- teaching materials: curriculum development around issues of social justice, and
- pedagogical practices: dialogical relations and increased curricular control of students

Since critical pedagogy aims at bringing social change towards a more just society, it is also interested in a pedagogy which integrates 'larger sociopolitical realities' (Sleeter and McLaren, 1995: 223). The main concern of my implemented syllabus was specifically the creation of teaching materials which exposed students to social justice issues so as to develop their sensitivity to cultural diversity and their critical thinking skills. Hafernik *et al.* (2002) emphasise that this type of material represents one dimension of social justice pedagogies in FLE and that it is part of a teacher's moral responsibility to include them in the curriculum. They explain that ignoring important social issues because they are political is a political decision in itself but that it would be unethical to try to indoctrinate learners to one's own political positions; teachers' aim should be to expose learners to issues and assist them in thinking critically and reaching their own conclusions through materials and activities which can lead to meaningful discussion and writing.

Along the same lines, Nieto (2004) states that to be antiracist means making explicit the antiracism and antidiscrimination parts of the curriculum and teaching students skills to confront racism. Tatum (2003) also recommends breaking away from the familiar and safe ground of neutrality or silence for which we pay a price as a society.

It seems, though, that providing learners with information is not enough and that connecting awareness to action is necessary. Tatum (1992: 21) notes that raising awareness about racism without also raising awareness of the possibilities for change 'is a prescription for despair'. This is in line with a central critical pedagogy precept, social transformation, which can only be achieved through action.

Moreover, Adams *et al.* (2007) underline the importance of affective learning and recommend the balance between the cognitive and emotional components of the learning process. The affective component of learning is the second dimension of critical classroom practices described by Hafernik *et al.* (2002: 6) as the way 'classroom participants treat each other (a classroom atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance)'. It also points to the Freirean contribution which views learners as active thinkers and as constructors of knowledge as well as to dialogical relations between teachers and students.

### **3.2.4 CONCLUSION**

Investigating critical pedagogy has assisted me in establishing a relationship between pedagogy and politics and further defining the ideological frameworks I bring into my study. Critical pedagogy highlights the political aspects of teaching and views educators as political agents. Teachers do not live in a world devoid of ideology, racism, or social classes; their educational decisions are political and have social implications.

This position echoes deeply in me; however, I do not separate educators into two categories: those who choose to struggle against injustice and

exclusion and those who perpetuate the status quo. I rather believe that some of our decisions, unconscious or not, do reproduce cultural and social inequities and it is part of our responsibility to critically reflect on these decisions and practices and change them. Critical pedagogy represents for me the utopia I can strive towards, of creative and meaningful teaching, of respectful and honest relations with my students and of the will to guide them towards more awareness of social injustices.

### **3.3 THE CULTURAL AND INTERCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING**

#### **3.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

A basic stance that motivated my study is that intercultural learning is inherent in language learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2007). Does this entail that aiming at linguistic mastery is sufficient to develop learners' intercultural competencies? Is successful communication only about acquiring a linguistic code? Since a language also reflects cultural values how does the FL teacher deal with them? Is teaching cognitive elements of the foreign culture sufficient to meet intercultural objectives? Does knowledge about another culture encourage tolerance and can it lead to unprejudiced communication? If intercultural competence is to be included in FLT aims, how should teachers approach it?

The intercultural component of FLE inevitably leads me to briefly review its cultural component and address the debate which is troubling FLE theory: teaching language vs culture and more recently teaching culture vs cultural or critical cultural awareness.

### **3.3.2 THE CULTURAL COMPONENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

#### **3.3.2.1 Teaching language vs culture**

FLE should include the teaching of the culture of the target language (Kramsch, 1993). Elements of the target culture are expected to be included in textbooks (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999) or these are reflected in the documents studied. But what exactly is the relationship between culture and language, and how does FLE treat this connection?

Since the 1990s large sections of linguistics — anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics and research into intercultural (language) communication — have stressed the close relationship of language and culture (Risager, 2007).

According to Kramsch (1998: 3) language expresses cultural reality (it reflects its speakers' experience, attitudes, and beliefs), it symbolises cultural reality (speakers view their language as a symbol of their identity), and it embodies cultural reality 'through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects'; speakers therefore use language to create experience:

...the way in which people use the spoken, written, visual medium creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to, for example, through a speaker's tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures and facial expressions.

*(loc. cit.)*

The close bond between language and culture was expressed by Agar (1994: 28) with the term "languaculture": 'Culture is language, and language is loaded with culture'. However, this tendency to simply identify language and culture is criticised by Risager (2007), who questions their

inseparability and emphasises the complexity of their relationship which, in her view, lacks comprehensive analysis.

FLT has become increasingly aware that a language can rarely be taught without including the culture of the target community (Byram *et al.*, 1994; Hinkel, 1999; Lange and Paige, 2003; Corbett, 2003; Fenner, 2006). However, FLT tends to treat the cultural component separately from language and teacher guidelines often refer to teaching the four skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) *plus* culture (*my emphasis*; Kramsch, 1993) indicating not only a separation between language and culture as a well-established feature of FLE but also a hierarchy which views culture as secondary to language acquisition. This, Valdes (1986) asserts, is the predominant view of ESL teachers who view the integration of culture teaching as interfering with the teaching of the four basic language skills while Cortazzi and Jin (1999) affirm that culture is often ignored in ELT curriculum design and evaluation. Lázár *et al.* (2007) also emphasise that language learning and teacher education still largely focus on the acquisition of grammatical and lexical competence though it is acknowledged that fluency alone is not sufficient to communicate successfully with people from other cultures.

Even though interest in culture teaching has grown in the last thirty years (Corbett, 2003), FLE still tends to grant a marginal part to culture treating it 'like a second cousin' (Lange and Paige, 2003: xi).

However, if

language is seen as social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching [and] cultural awareness... both as enabling

language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency (Kramsch, 1993: 8).

A number of scholars (Valdes, 1986; Byram *et al.*, 1994; Doyé, 1996; Hinkel, 1999; Fenner, 2006; Risager, 2007) advocate this integrative view of language and culture and recognise that language teaching cannot be separated from the teaching of the target culture(s).

### **3.3.2.2 What aspects of culture to teach?**

The reluctance of FLE to deal more systematically with culture can be partially explained by the challenge that the concept of culture represents. The very definition of the term culture is nebulous and complex as 'culture, like language, is dynamic, changing to meet the needs of the people it serves' (Reagan and Osborn, 2002: 76).

The fact that 'cultures are fluid and mobile' (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2004: 62) gives several definitions and views of culture (Hinkel, 1999), posing the problem to teachers and curricular planners of how to approach it and which themes or topics to include.

Kramsch (1998) explains that one (social, synchronic) view of culture focuses on behaviours and values of the members of the same discourse community while a second view is diachronic and takes a more historical perspective: it sees culture as the result of shared history and traditions and studies the representations of a social group and its material productions over time (art, monuments, media...).

These seem to be the views of culture which are generally adopted by FLT since it tends to focus on topics around history, geography, literature and

the fine arts, cultural values and customs, or daily life (Paige *et al.*, 2003). Fenner (2006: 41) distinguishes between different levels of education when she states that higher levels of education are mainly interested in 'history, geography, institutions and literature' whereas lower levels of education emphasise everyday life: 'home, school, and spare time.' The distinction between small c culture (daily life) and capital C culture (arts, literature and intellectual traditions) is conventionally made in FLE (Steele, 2000); this facts-oriented approach is criticised as 'inappropriate' or even 'damaging' (Byram and Feng, 2005: 917) as it ignores that culture is 'a social construct, a product of self and other perceptions' (Kramsch, 1993: 205) and represents the risk of creating and reinforcing stereotypes among learners (Byram and Feng, 2005; Lange, 2003; Starkey, 2005). Despite the good intention of encouraging tolerance towards the bearers of the target culture, learners tend to perceive them as a homogeneous community with strange behaviours (Damen, 2003).

Kramsch (1991: 218) notes that a prevailing model in FLT simplistically addresses "the four Fs": 'foods, fairs, folklore, and statistical facts'. Holme (2003: 18-21) goes further by detailing five principles which guide the introduction of culture into the language curriculum:

- the "communicative view" consists of giving students language to quickly use in specific contexts and culture is rarely introduced if only for the purpose of enhancing language skills;
- the "classical-curriculum view" sees culture as enhancing 'the intellectual value of the language', a rationale derived from the teaching of Ancient Languages, which were viewed as instilling in learners 'principles of logical thought';
- the "culture-free-language view" arises from a sense of danger of 'cultural contamination implicit in the learning of a dominant



international language' and leads to neutering the cultural influence of the language or contextualising it to the students' own region and culture;

- the "deconstructionist view" considers that language learning necessitates an 'understanding of implicit meanings' and that deconstructing linguistic structures (e.g. prepositions) enhances insights into the target culture;
- the "competence view" treats culture as vital for fully understanding the nuances of a language, thereby reflecting that FLE should encompass 'a sustained and ethnographically structured encounter' with the target culture.

The first three views, Holme affirms, consider culture as secondary or even unrelated to 'successful language learning' whereas the last two treat language and culture as complementary and 'in dynamic interaction'.

FLT commonly views the teaching of culture as 'transmission of information' about the country and its people, in a didactic manner (Buttjes and Byram, 1991: 118). 'In the world of *transactional discourse*' (the transmission and reception of knowledge) 'the foreign language is used to transmit and receive information' about the foreign culture (Kramsch, 1993: 242).

The cultural information is often translated by 'facts and figures about the history, the society, the culture of the country' (*loc. cit.*). If a FL teacher chooses this approach, the information transmitted should at least consider variations within national boundaries in the same way that language teaching should expose learners to varieties of a language. 'The national paradigm' which prevails in FLT should equally be problematised

(Byram and Risager, 1999: 145) as it does not acknowledge that all cultures are diverse (McKay, 2002). In a more recent work, Risager (2007) explains that the nationalisation of languages and the dominance of the nation state in FLT emerged in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; this resulted in a narrowing on a single country seen as representative of a language (e.g. Spain for Spanish). This approach is particularly problematic in the case of international languages.

### **3.3.2.3 The cultural dimension of a world language**

When a language is spoken in several countries or regions, which is in fact the case for many languages, English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese..., the task becomes more complex for teachers who have to decide which country's culture to consider as the target culture. It is not uncommon that the country where the language first emerged is taken as the main reference for cultural information; for instance, in the textbooks I have used over the years, France is privileged at the expense of Switzerland, Belgium, and Canada where French is spoken by a part of the population or countries where French is the official language such as Ivory Coast or Senegal. In the case of English, the international language *par excellence*, the problem becomes more acute.

For McKay (2002: 24) a language is considered international not just when it has a large number of native speakers but when it has developed so that it is no longer connected to only one culture or country but it 'serves both global and local needs as a language of wider communication'. Kachru (2005) contests the myth that English language learners around the world learn English to interact with native speakers by asserting that they mostly use English to interact with each other. This 'shift towards English as lingua franca (ELF)' affects the essence and aims of ELT (Decke-Cornill,

2003: 60): 'the teaching and learning of an international language must be based on an entirely different set of assumptions than the teaching and learning of any other second or foreign language' (McKay, 2002: 1). McKay questions the aim of ELT to lead learners to native-like competence and suggests that a theory of English as an international language (EIL) teaching and learning recognises the variants of English within 'multilingual communities' (*op. cit.*: 125). Naturally, this has implications for the area of culture teaching as well: EFL-teaching must expand 'its geographical scope and include non-mainstream cultures' 'apart from the UK and the USA' (Wandel, 2003: 72-73) since a culture of no particular country can be considered the target culture (McKay, 2002). EIL should rather place at its centre intercultural interactions (*op. cit.*).

When designing the syllabus for my study I adopted a similar stance: an international language 'belongs to nobody, or rather to everyone who – using and sharing it – creates it' (Decke-Cornill, 2003: 70). I tried to establish a 'sphere of interculturality' (Kramersch, 1993: 205), and create what Kramersch (1993) calls a 'third place' or 'third culture': a new reality where learners are at the intersection of L1 and L2, C1 and C2 – their native culture and the target culture – and 'construct their personal meanings' (*op. cit.*: 238) which help them gain insights into their own and other cultures. Hence, learners are enabled 'to take both an insider's and an outsider's view on both their first culture (C1) and their second (C2)' (Kumaravadivelu, 2007: 132).

#### **3.3.2.4 Cultural knowledge vs Cultural awareness**

An answer to the dilemma of ownership of an international language lies in moving beyond teaching cultural information and aiming at the development of cross-cultural awareness. In fact, the terms cultural,

intercultural and cross-cultural awareness are all found in the literature, inevitably given the variety of disciplines interested in the concept (cross-cultural psychology, anthropology, socio-linguistics, intercultural communication and education, business studies, cultural studies...). Each discipline area tags the terms 'with different assumptions and meanings' (Roberts *et al.*, 2001: 31) but it would be more useful here to clarify the difference between the terms cultural awareness and intercultural competence, to which I extensively refer. Byram (2000b: 161) considers cultural awareness to be 'a more general, non-technical term' prone to various interpretations whereas intercultural competence refers to and replaces 'the concept of communicative competence, and therefore includes a SKILLS dimension'.

Cultural awareness fills a gap in FLE as it focuses on a successful interaction between people of different cultural backgrounds. Based on the assumption that mere knowledge about a culture is insufficient for gaining insight into intercultural encounters, FLT should rather foster student reflection on how this knowledge might have an effect on their interaction (McKay, 2002).

Thus, increased knowledge about the target community does not necessarily modify prejudiced attitudes. Several researchers point to the insufficiency of culture teaching as mere transmission of knowledge and to the need for an intercultural perspective (Kramsch, 1993; Steele, 2000; McKay, 2002) so that learners 'interpret and compare the cultural practices of the other society' to theirs 'without an ethnocentric perspective'. FLE needs to move beyond "knowledge about" to "empathic understanding of" (Steele, 2000: 200) and students must be encouraged to become tolerant of differences.

An alternative approach to culture teaching lies in viewing culture as a set or a system 'of principles of interpretation' and 'the products of that system' (Moerman, 1988: 4). This definition sees culture as a 'framework of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that are used to interpret other people's actions, words, and patterns of thinking' which can only be 'subjective and taken for granted' (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999: 197). At the same time, it draws attention to the affective component of learning as opposed to the cognitive component (Byram, 2000b). For Steele (2000) emotions are essential in clarifying attitudes and there is a need for critical analysis of attitudes of indifference and hostility towards the other culture(s). This is particularly relevant to the Cypriot context as explained in chapter two, as there is a prevailing anti-British sentiment largely rising from the past British rule, the presence of British Sovereign bases on the island and the Cyprus problem. The Cyprus problem has also given rise to anti-American feelings which also need to be clarified within the English language classroom.

For me, an intercultural approach to language teaching and learning does not mean excluding culture from the curriculum and de-ethnicising or deculturalising a language (Loveday, 1981 cited by Corbett, 2003). It is rather about broadening the scope of language education in order to include non-Western cultures in the curriculum content (Guilherme, 2002) but mostly the learners' own culture (Byram and Feng, 2005). Cultural self-awareness should lead learners to changing their perspective, to decentring and reflecting on their own culture, thus relativising prior views of themselves and their culture which were considered self-evident (Byram *et al.*, 1994).

Hence, more than the learning of cognitive elements about the target culture, FLE feels concerned with mutual acceptance, and therefore the relationship between speakers. Research on culture teaching and learning has become increasingly interested in learners' tolerant attitudes towards other cultures as well as in the extent to which studying other cultures enhances reflection upon one's own culture (Lantolf, 1999).

### **3.3.2.5 Critical cultural awareness**

The concept of critical cultural awareness goes one step further by integrating politics into FLE. Since education is never neutral, neither is FLE which has a 'political role to play'; consequently FL teachers assume 'social and political responsibilities' (Byram and Feng, 2005: 915). Byram (1997: 35) uses the term to stress the need for a reflective and analytical stance towards one's culture in order to appreciate the other's 'meanings, beliefs and behaviours' and the 'ways in which they have been formed'. He places politics at the centre of his intercultural communicative competence (ICC) model (Byram and Feng, 2005) and assimilates critical cultural awareness to *savoir s'engager* which 'explicitly enables learners to question, to analyse, to evaluate and, potentially, to take action, to be active citizens' (Byram, 2008: 146). Byram (1997) believes that it is crucial to include critical cultural awareness in FLT educational objectives. Similarly, Tarasheva and Davcheva (2001: 46) believe that critical cultural awareness 'with respect to one's own country' is now regarded as a main purpose of language and culture teaching. Critical reflection, which is a form of metacritique, since it allows one to be critical about one's own critical thinking (Guilherme, 2002), is suggested as a vital strategy to develop this kind of awareness (Phipps and Guilherme, 2004).

Guilherme (2002: 225), drawing on critical theory and postmodernism theories, but mostly on critical pedagogy, argues more explicitly in favour of the political dimension of language and culture teaching. She proposes three components for educating 'critical citizens and educators' in FLE:

1. the infusion of 'meaning and purpose' to 'cultural contents' by promoting critical cultural awareness with the aid of 'Human Rights Education and Education for Democratic Citizenship',
2. an interdisciplinary component that consists of 'Cultural Studies, Intercultural Communication, and Critical Pedagogy', and
3. pedagogical strategies for critically studying foreign cultures that function in relation to various geopolitical levels, 'local, national as well as global and to "existential" references': 'beliefs, values and attitudes'.

### **3.3.3 HOW IS FLT CONCERNED WITH INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE?**

The objectives of FL teaching and learning can therefore no longer be limited to the sole acquisition of linguistic competence but should also include communicative and intercultural communicative competence (Sercu *et al.*, 2005; Lázár *et al.*, 2007). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (2001) implies intercultural competence when it points to the need for development of 'general competences': declarative knowledge (*savoir*), skills and know-how (*savoir-faire*), existential competence (*savoir-être*), and ability to learn (*savoir-apprendre*) which should improve the ability to relate to otherness. ICC can therefore be considered one of the central aims of foreign language education (Guilherme, 2002; Byram, 2008) in order to enable learners to communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural worlds.

### **3.3.3.1 Definitions of intercultural competence**

Intercultural competence has been defined by numerous scholars during the last fifty years but there has been no agreement on its definition (Deardorff, 2009). The complexity of the concept is reflected in the variety of its definitions. One of them speaks of the 'individual's ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries' (Byram, 1997: 7). More elaborately, it expresses 'the willingness to engage with the foreign culture, self-awareness and the ability to look upon oneself from the outside' (Sercu *et al.*, 2005: 2). In order to interact with cultural others without conflicts or misunderstandings, one therefore needs 'to step outside' one's own framework (Bennett, 2009: 122), to take a distance and observe oneself as an outsider; a better knowledge of the self leads to a better understanding of others and vice versa (Alred, 2003). 'To enter other cultures is to re-enter one's own' (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2004: 3). Byram (1997) calls this the ability to decentre. For Meyer (1991: 137) IC identifies 'the ability to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes, and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures' stressing that adequacy and flexibility imply an awareness of cultural differences. In short, it is the ability to have a harmonious interaction with people of different cultures. This presupposes that we are able to see a relationship between different cultures, to focus on commonality and not only on differences; knowing that we share beliefs and values with social groups in other countries can play a significant role here (CEFR, 2001). Similarly, it involves a critical understanding and awareness of our 'own and of other cultures', of the way our perceptions have been determined by our culture, instead of believing that they are natural (Byram, 2000 a.: 11). Developing one's IC implies that we cease to believe that our way of being is "normal" and that we become aware that 'culture is not universal' (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997: 62), that our



values, lifestyles, or patterns of behaviour have been shaped by our culture just like everybody else's in this world.

Michael Byram (1997) introduced the term of intercultural communicative competence (Guilherme, 2002) making the distinction with intercultural competence which defines the ability to interact in one's own language with people from other cultures while ICC describes the ability to do so in a foreign language. Though Byram's work has significantly influenced my empirical study, I will be using both terms: the more generic term intercultural competence widely used by theorists of various disciplines and intercultural communicative competence which specifically refers to language teaching and learning.

The concept of ICC has resulted from successive definitions of FLT objectives which I now briefly review.

### **3.3.3.2 From linguistic competence to sociolinguistic competence**

The history of language teaching reflects the evolution of increased understanding of the nature of language with attempts to integrate new insights into methods and objectives (Byram, 1997). Until the 1950s the sociocultural context of a language was ignored by FLE which considered that the acquisition of skills in grammar and phonology were sufficient (Brøgger, 1992). Reading, writing, speaking, and listening were, and still are, listed as the four language skills which language learners need to develop in order to ensure linguistic competence. It was only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that FLE took an interest in the context and the relationship between speakers (Doyé, 1999). The realisation that oral proficiency and literacy skills were not sufficient and that there was a need

to use language in real communicative contexts led to the integration of communicative competence and of sociolinguistic competence, which has been defined as the awareness that language forms are determined by the setting, the relationship between communication partners, and the communicative intention (van Ek, 1986).

### **3.3.3.3 From communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence**

The concept of ICC as an extension or an essential part of communicative competence integrates the ability to cope with one's own cultural background in interaction with others (Beneke, 2000 cited by Lázár *et al.*, 2007) so as to become fully capable of communicating in L2 (Usó-Juan and Martinez-Flor, 2006). The significance of this construct is acknowledged at present in language teaching theory and is the outcome of a progression of discussions amongst researchers.

The concept of communicative competence (CC) was elaborated by a succession of theorists as an integral component of FLT. Hymes (1972) first introduced the concept of CC as a reaction to Chomsky's (1965) notion of linguistic competence, which focused only on knowledge of grammar rules and the ability to form sentences correctly. Hymes defined CC as the grammatical knowledge and the grasp of social rules needed to interpret messages in order to participate in a speech community. His concept of competence did not include only knowledge but also the ability to use this core knowledge. Communicative competence assumes that learning words and grammatical structures may turn us into fluent speakers but 'communication is a lot more complicated' because 'words have social as well as referential meaning' (Bratt Paulson, 1992: 113). The construct therefore involves the interlocutors' negotiation of meaning.

Canale and Swain (1980) developed their work from Hymes to define a model of CC within which they included sociocultural competence defined as cognition of social factors, cultural norms and other pragmatic information that influences choice and sequence of language forms. Van Ek's contribution to the elaboration of the concept is considered very important. He emphasised (1986) that FLT is not just concerned with training in communication skills, but also with the personal and social development of the learner as an individual and he presented six partial abilities of communicative competence. Van Ek's definitions of the six competences have been summarised by Byram (1997: 10) as follows:

*Linguistic competence*: 'the ability to produce and interpret' meaning formed in agreement 'with the rules of the language concerned'

*Sociolinguistic competence*: 'the awareness' that our 'choice of language forms' is determined 'by setting, relationship between interlocutors, communicative intention, etc.'

*Discourse competence*: 'the ability to use appropriate strategies' to construct and interpret texts

*Strategic competence*: 'communication strategies', such as rephrasing 'to get our meaning across'

*Social competence*: familiarity with differences in social customs, empathy and motivation to communicate with others

*Sociocultural competence*: the ability to function in several cultures which supposes some familiarity with the sociocultural context in which a language is situated.

The last constituent, sociocultural competence, was critiqued and further refined by Byram and Zarate (1997a) on the basis that van Ek's definition assumed that language learners should learn the language spoken by

native speakers and required that they are familiar with the native context; this implied that there is just one native context whereas this is not the case for many languages used in different societies. Byram (1997: 8) also reacted to Hymes' emphasis on sociolinguistic competence judging that it is misleading to suggest that FL learners 'should model themselves' on native speakers; this, he stresses, ignores the importance of learners' 'social identities and cultural competence' in cross-cultural interactions.

#### **3.3.3.4 The native speaker model**

Hence, Byram (1997: 3) has distinguished between communicative competence, with its focus on exchanging information and intercultural competence, which depends on the 'ability to decentre' and accept the listener's or reader's perspective. He has also added to the criticism of the long-held assumption in FLE that learners should aim to imitate native speakers; this inevitably places language learners at a disadvantaged position as they will never attain native capacity.

Others have also challenged the dominance of the native speaker model, as an ideal which is inaccessible and difficult to define (Kramsch, 1993; McKay, 2002). Canagarajah (1999) and Pennycook (1994) criticised the notion that learners are not able to resist the hegemony of the native speaker model which is considered as a politically suspect one because it is unattainable (Pennycook, *op. cit.*; Corbett, 2003; Byram, 2008). Aiming at imitating the context of native speakers with its conventional meanings deprives language learners of their autonomy and agency (Pennycook, 1994).

In the particular case of English language, the native speaker model has dominated 'for most of the history of ELT' (Corbett, 2003: 26) and up to

the present (Decke-Cornill, 2003: 60); aiming at near-nativeness implies that ELT has to prepare learners for interactions 'with native speakers of standard English' which entails a contradiction: 'the expansion of English is officially justified because of its international scope while its teaching remains locked into a nationalist, culture-specific tradition'. Even the claim that native speakers should set a model for linguistic competence to help maintain intelligibility among all speakers of English has been contested (McKay, 2002). It is argued that since its internationalisation has given rise to several standards, unifying norms will likely emerge and one goal of EIL teaching is to ensure that the speakers of English understand each other (*op. cit.*).

The CEFR (2001) states that language learners should not be regarded as individuals who abandon their social identity in favour of another, but as social agents whose whole personality and sense of identity are respected and enriched through the experience of otherness in language and culture. Moreover, in the case of some popular foreign languages such as English, French or Spanish it is difficult to decide who represents the native speaker as these languages are spoken in a number of countries with very different social identities. These 'pluricentric languages' produce different standards which makes it 'neither possible nor desirable' to impose a single model (Kachru, 2005: 163). It is thus clear that FLE cannot aim at imitating a restrictive and normative model of a native speaker (Guilherme, 2002).

The term "intercultural speaker", coined by Byram and Zarate (1997a), provides an alternative for this constructed abstraction and amends the hierarchical relationship between native speakers and foreign language

learners. Most of all, it allows FLE to place educational objectives within a broader view of society.

### **3.3.3.5 The intercultural speaker**

The concept of the intercultural speaker goes beyond the traditional role of FLE which focuses on the knowledge of the target culture. Meyer (1991) is one of the scholars who identified this deficiency, arguing that traditional language teaching concentrates on differences between mother country and foreign country (countries) on a cognitive level but does not systematically allow the students to act in cross-cultural situations.

Here, the outcomes of FLE are redefined as the ability to see how different cultures relate to each other in terms of differences and similarities and to be able to interpret and understand the perspective of others as well as to question and decentre from one's own perspective (Byram and Zarate, 1997 b). Persons with the ability to take a double perspective by relating two sets of values, beliefs and behaviours are called intercultural speakers. The competent intercultural speaker can be seen as being proficient in both languages and able to mediate successful interaction between members of the home and target cultures (Lambert and Shohamy, 2000). Language learners are thereby conceived as cultural mediators who cross frontiers, carrying their local identity with them (Byram and Zarate, 1997 b). The assumption is that acquisitions 'in the context of one language can be re-invested' when learning a new language and that intercultural competences can be transferred into new cultural systems (*op. cit.*: 242) despite the speaker's lack of familiarity with them. The knowledge of different languages and cultures and of 'shared rules of interpretation' can be applied to new contexts to make sense of the world which enables plurilingual/pluricultural people to easily move between discourse

communities (Kramsch, 1998: 27). The intercultural speaker is therefore described as a person who 'has knowledge of one or, preferably, more cultures and social identities and has a capacity to discover and relate' to people from new contexts, for which he/she has not been prepared (Byram and Flemming, 1998: 9). Guilherme (2002) draws connections between intercultural speakers and Giroux's (1992) idea of border-crossers who can fashion new identities combining the universal with the particular and feelings of belonging with feelings of detachment. Phipps and Gonzalez (2004: 90) have expanded the notion of the intercultural speaker to the one of 'intercultural listener', thus emphasising the idea of communication as exchange and that the aim of FLE is to develop 'interculturally critical beings'.

As a teacher of two foreign languages, I concur with the transferability of linguistic and cultural competences from one language to another; it is also apparent to me that the more a person is exposed to other cultures, the more he/she is likely to interact effectively across cultures. The intercultural speaker model evidently represents progress compared to the native speaker model. Nevertheless, I am not certain that it is an attainable or realistic model, which was the basic criticism of the native speaker model. Is it possible that a person treats respectfully and favourably all cultures, and that all encounters are free of any bias? Are there not always cultures which are more foreign to us than others, and cultures towards which we are more negatively predisposed? The potential of intercultural learning for changing students' beliefs and attitudes has not remained unquestioned. Kramsch (1993) has emphasised the difficulties in determining if and when the affective aims of intercultural learning have been achieved. Cryle (2002: 30 cited by O'Dowd, 2003: 119) also questions the realism of focusing on the affective aspects of

intercultural learning which may be 'an unhelpfully distant goal'. In my view, the intercultural speaker model rather represents an ideal we can aim at with sustained effort throughout our lifetime. The individual's gradual development is posited by Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), which suggests that a person moves through different stages from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism in his/her acquisition of IC: from denial, defense, minimisation (ethnocentric stages) to acceptance, adaptation, integration (ethnorelative stages). In a more recent text, Bennett *et al.* (2003: 248-252) reiterate and explain these stages:

*Denial:* Here, cultural differences in other people are not identified and if they are, cultural others are perceived as 'less human' than the self.

*Defense:* One's own culture is experienced as the only true culture. Others are perceived in stereotypical images as less real than the self.

*Minimisation:* Individuals at this third and final stage of ethnocentrism minimise cultural differences as they believe that universal values apply to all human beings and still lack cultural self-awareness.

*Acceptance:* The first stage of ethnorelativism acknowledges and respects behavioural and value differences since people become aware of their own cultural contexts but do not necessarily accept all cultural differences.

*Adaptation:* Here individuals 'are able to shift their cultural frames of reference' by integrating other cultural beliefs and behaviours to their own. They experience intercultural empathy and adapt their behaviour to the target culture.

*Integration:* Other cultural frames of reference have been integrated into one's identity; people are 'no longer at the center of any' culture which 'can be a profoundly alienating experience'. FLE can therefore contribute to



learners' intercultural sensitivity and help them move through the above stages.

### **3.3.3.6 The five *savoirs***

Byram and Zarate (1997 a.) have elaborated a significant model of ICC, formulating explicit objectives therefore facilitating assessment, which has influenced a number of scholars, such as Lázár, Fenner, Sercu or Guilherme. Here, the intercultural speaker possesses four competencies: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and intercultural and four *savoirs* consisting of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and abilities:

- 'Attitudes (*savoir être*): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.
- Knowledge (*savoirs*): of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.
- Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*): ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.
- Skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/savoir faire*): ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.
- Critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*): ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria

perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.'

The fifth component (*savoir s'engager*) was later added by Byram (1997) in order to include a political dimension to the model.

Sercu (2000), who uses the different components of this model for her study offers her interpretations for *savoirs*, *savoir-apprendre*, *savoir-faire* and *savoir-être*.

Fenner (2006) engages with three of these competences (*savoir*, *savoir-faire* and *savoir-apprendre*).

Lázár *et al.* (2007) refer to and offer their interpretations of three of these dimensions (knowledge/*savoirs*, know-how/*savoir-faire*, being/*savoir-être*) which can be assessed.

Guilherme (2002) focuses on critical cultural awareness.

<b>Skills</b> <i>savoir comprendre</i>		
<u>Byram, 1997</u> interpret and relate  ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own		
<b>Knowledge</b> <i>Savoirs</i>	<b>Education</b> <i>savoir s'engager</i>	<b>Attitudes</b> <i>savoir être</i>
<u>Byram, 1997</u> Of self; of other; of interaction: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction  <u>Sercu, 2000</u> the acquisition of a body of knowledge about a particular target culture or a group of cultures  <u>Fenner, 2006</u> declarative knowledge  <u>Lázár et al., 2007</u> intercultural awareness: the understanding of the relation between the world of origin and the world of target communities	<u>Byram, 1997</u> political education critical cultural awareness  ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries  <u>Guilherme, 2002</u> a reflective, exploratory, dialogical and active stance towards cultural knowledge and life that allows for dissonance and conflict as well as for consensus, concurrence, and transformation	<u>Byram, 1997</u> relativising self Valuing other  curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own  <u>Sercu, 2000</u> a general disposition of respect and tolerance towards cultural differences, essential for entering into and maintaining intercultural contacts  <u>Fenner, 2006</u> "existential" knowledge directly concerned with cultural competence  <u>Lázár et al., 2007</u> cultural awareness, the understanding of other cultures which should lead to their acceptance and valorisation and ultimately the integration of other values than those of one's culture

<b>Skills</b> <i>savoir apprendre/savoir faire</i>	
<u>Byram (1997)</u>  discover and interact  ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction	
<i>Savoir-apprendre</i>	<i>savoir-faire</i>
<u>Byram and Zarate, 1997b</u> capacity to develop and operate an approach to interpreting cultural phenomena which reveals unknown meanings, beliefs, and practices from a language and culture with which the learner is not familiar  <u>Sercu, 2000</u> the ability to learn cultures  <u>Fenner, 2006</u> ability to learn	<u>Byram and Zarate, 1997b</u> a combination of <i>savoirs</i> , <i>savoir- être</i> and <i>savoir-apprendre</i> in situations of bi- or multilingual contact  <u>Sercu, 2000</u> the ability to apply these skills to hitherto unknown intercultural situations or cultural phenomena  <u>Fenner, 2006</u> skills and know-how  <u>Lázár et al., 2007</u> ability to function linguistically in the target language by using different language strategies in order to communicate with those of other cultures, and the capacity to overcome stereotyped relationships

**Table 1: The five *savoirs***

It is evident that as IC is a complex concept, it consists of a number of components. The model is not necessarily exhaustive, but it has been repeatedly reproduced and is considered the most agreed-upon definition.

It reveals that ICC covers not only the cognitive but also the behavioural and affective domains.

Byram (1997) further defines each of these elements to allow for the formalisation of learning objectives and their assessment. Noting that the relationship between skills, knowledge, and attitudes leads inevitably to overlap and repetition, he analyses in detail each objective. Because not all objectives are compatible with classroom work, he places intercultural learning in different locations: the classroom, fieldwork (pedagogically structured visits abroad), and independent learning which places the responsibility on the learners for reflection on their learning experiences and personal growth. His model is therefore sufficiently general so as to fit different contexts, so teachers should select the components which fit their courses and aims. A main criterion is the possibility of assessing their students' performance, which is not the easiest task when dealing with ICC.

### **3.3.4 CHALLENGES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT**

#### **3.3.4.1 Assessment of intercultural communicative competence**

A quite traditional practice in FLE assesses knowledge and facts about other cultures. Assessing and evaluating ICC represents a larger challenge for teachers and teacher educators who implement intercultural learning in their classrooms and programmes. Whether the aim is to measure the outcome of learning at the end of a course or to determine students' performance during it, the nature of ICC complicates the task because it deals mostly with moral and affective developments, which are difficult to determine. It does not simply deal with the acquisition of new knowledge but mostly with behavioural and attitudinal changes: the development of

cultural awareness and self awareness, understanding and respect of other cultures, openness to diverse cultural experiences etc. Moreover, educators commonly assess knowledge and perhaps skills but they are not used to assessing attitudes and awareness (Fantini, 2009).

It is possible to assess IC, but its assessment depends on its definition (Klemp, 1979 cited by Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2009). Although there have been several definitions of IC which seek to identify its specific components, there has been no consensus (Deardorff, 2006). This inevitably complicates its measurement.

Assessing ICC is not only technically difficult but also raises ethical issues. It forces questions on the appropriateness of assessing attitudes (Byram and Zarate, 1997 a.) and the quantification of tolerance (Byram, 2000). It implies that teachers scrutinise learners to detect changes in their attitudes which questions their right to judge learner 'degree of social responsibility' (Byram, 1997: 10). Some intercultural experts feel that IC should not or cannot be assessed (Deardorff, 2009). Kramsch (1993: 257), for instance, considers IC 'a very personal place' which 'will be differently located, and will make different sense at different times' for each learner.

Nevertheless, assessment is helpful to institutions and individuals as educational systems demand the measurement of performances (Corbett, 2003) while it can operate as an incentive for teachers and learners to take the intercultural component seriously (*op. cit.*; Sercu *et al.*, 2005). Fantini (2009) recommends as a starting point, a clear definition of IC and a subsequent alignment of course objectives, design, and implementation. One approach to ICC assessment and an alternative to traditional tests

and examinations which suppose quantification is learners' self-assessment. Self-assessment can be an effective supplement to tests and teacher assessment (Lázár *et al.*, 2007); it does not have to be based on checklists but there can be more flexible means of self-profiling (Little and Simpson, 2003). Based on the assumption that learners should be aiming at becoming intercultural speakers, Byram and Zarate (1997 a.) recommend a meta-phase which allows learners to look back at their learning, make judgements about their performance and assess their own progress in the field of intercultural learning. Shortly after, Byram (2000a) suggested a portfolio approach, but one which focuses on experiences abroad.

The CEFR which offers a guideline for achievements of European language learners only proposes a framework for assessing linguistic competence. Though it repeatedly refers to intercultural awareness, it omits suggesting a model of assessment for this kind of learning. However, the Framework (2001) establishes three fundamental components for any form of assessment in a language programme: validity, reliability, and feasibility; these are used by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) to suggest some methods for evaluating ICC. Their publication *Developing and assessing ICC* offers a range of solutions to language teachers and teacher educators. The authors indicate that ICC assessment should include more than objective testing of knowledge of cultural facts, which is commonly practised, and take into consideration the other two dimensions: knowing how (*savoir faire*) and attitudes (*savoir être*). This very complex task, they continue, can be accomplished through a number of data sources such as anecdotal records, observation checklists, observation rating scales, documentation of task-related behaviours, attitudes inventories, surveys, journals, collection of written products,

interest inventories, logs, etc. (Lázár *et al.*, 2007). These methods define a kind of evaluation which is continuous and formative (rather than summative) as it expects teachers to gather information on their learners during the whole learning process. They also suggest assessment that can be direct (e.g. observing with a criteria-grid students performing a role play) or indirect (a test), holistic (a global judgement on performance) or analytic (observing closely all dimensions and sub-dimensions). The publication *Developing Intercultural Competence in Practice* offers some examples of classroom practices of ICC development and assessment such as Burwitz-Mezler's (2003) experience of teaching ICC through literature; the author gives a list of intercultural objectives, such as the identification of national stereotypes in the text studied, which can be observed 'as far as possible' in learners' behaviour (*op. cit.*: 31).

Hence, criteria for ICC assessment are not clear-cut mainly because values and attitudes are involved. It appears that further developments in FLE are needed (Little and Simpson, 2003) before appropriate tools for ICC assessment are offered. When designing an ICC development syllabus, if FL teachers opt for assessment, they need to elaborate their own model which should be assessment-informed and based on explicit criteria and measurable student performance. Additionally, Fantini (2009) and Deardorff (2009) recommend a prioritisation of IC aspects to be measured and an alignment of educational objectives, course implementation, and assessment.

#### **3.3.4.2 How easy is it to become an intercultural speaker?**

A question that was troubling me throughout my study was how successful my endeavour could be. To what degree can a teacher influence students' values and beliefs formed through experiences of a lifetime (in the case of



my students 18 years at least)? How easy is it to become intercultural competent, or in Byram and Zarate's (1997a) words an 'intercultural speaker'? Numerous studies point to the complexity of intercultural encounters and relationships and the need for a committed effort for successful communication with other cultural groups and persons.

IC is not a "natural" or "automatic" by-product of foreign language teaching (Meyer, 1991). If FL courses teach intercultural competence, can they produce intercultural speakers? A major challenge lies in the terminology: competence is defined as a specific range of skills, knowledge, or ability whereas interculturality represents a complex personal growth process which evolves over a lifetime.

Other researchers, especially in social psychology, point to the difficulty of the intercultural experience and of ICC development. The process requires the revision of taken-for-granted beliefs, concepts and attitudes in order to better understand others which can be experienced as an uncomfortable one (Berry *et al.*, 1992). Becoming an intercultural speaker involves revealing and revising one's worlds of ideas and values. It thus becomes evident that interrogating the specificity of one's culture and identity can be difficult and uncomfortable. Negative feelings experienced can range from fear to anger and anxiety (Sercu *et al.*, 2005: 2).

This clearly demonstrates that intercultural learning represents a challenge for educators. Learners should be assisted in the acquisition of 'a critically reflexive understanding of the belief structures and feelings' they bring into the relationship with cultural diversity (Downing and Husband, 2005: 188). Educators should enable learners to explore and reveal their taken-for-granted views and values, which entails interrogating their identities

and cultures, a 'taxing and uncomfortable' experience (*loc. cit.*). Matsumoto (2004 quoted by Galassi and Akos, 2007) states that language proficiency, levels of ethnocentrism, and knowledge of host and home cultures are leading contributors to intercultural adjustment. Individuals are seen to be playing a leading role in IC and adjustment of emotional regulation is considered a gatekeeper skill that allows such knowledge and skills to be used in the development of IC: if they cannot control their emotional reactions in productive ways that allow them to exploit their knowledge and skills, IC development is very difficult (*op. cit.*). Eidleon and Eidleon's (2003) review of the research on anger, violence, and group conflict is also relevant to IC development. They identified five belief domains that individuals and/or groups engaging in conflicts with other individuals/groups share: 1. superiority: 'we are better than them' 2. injustice: 'we have been mistreated' 3. vulnerability: 'we are in danger from the out-group' 4. distrust: 'we do not trust the out-group which has evil intentions' and 5. helplessness: 'we are powerless and dependent on the out-group'. These beliefs need to be identified amongst students, confronted and defused.

### **3.3.5 CONCLUSION**

Despite the significance of ICC, it is 'still at an embryonic stage' (Zarate *et al.*, 2004: 183). Given the increasingly global nature of contemporary society (Skopinskaja, 2003) learners need the tools for successful intercultural communication which can also be provided by FLE. We live in a cosmopolitan world, a result of intensified international mobility, which necessitates a better understanding of other cultures.

Having established the ideological nature of language and education and the political and intercultural dimensions of FLE, I now investigate how these dimensions redefine its purposes.

### **3.4 RETHINKING THE PURPOSE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

#### **3.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the light of intercultural competence and critical pedagogy theories, I now address the pedagogical priorities which arise and try to demonstrate how their integration in FLE calls for a reassessment of its goals and practices.

Following Tollefson's recommendation (1991 cited by Pennycook, 1994: 168) I examine the 'ideological assumptions' about language teachers' social roles, new responsibilities which emerge for them, and the implications for their students and for FL teacher education and training.

#### **3.4.2 FROM INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE TO GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP**

##### **3.4.2.1 Interdisciplinary language learning**

Guilherme (2002), as previously noted, advocates an interdisciplinary approach to language teaching; other researchers also suggest an intercultural and humanistic approach that would draw on human rights and citizenship education to promote personal and societal growth.

Phipps and Gonzalez (2004), who engage with language teaching and learning in higher education, advocate for 'linguaging', 'a life skill' (*op. cit.*: 2) through which learners are given voice, their experiences are valued and they are empowered into becoming 'actively critical social beings' (*op. cit.*: 73); they argue in favour of moving from IC to the concept of 'intercultural beings' with an understanding of our diverse and

multiple realities (*op. cit.*: 3); the authors view languages as a social justice issue rather than a matter of skills and competences, thus suggest moving away from purposeful and 'technicist approaches' to new concepts so as to prepare global citizens (*op. cit.*: xv). For this to happen, Phipps and Gonzalez suggest that language teachers position themselves critically in a rapidly changing context and become interdisciplinary academics.

Interdisciplinarity is supported by the Council of Europe (2002: 3), whose recommendations to member states suggest pedagogies which promote living together in democratic societies and which should permeate many curriculum areas, such as language teaching. They thus recommend 'multidisciplinary approaches and actions combining civic and political education with the teaching of history, philosophy, religions, languages, social sciences...'

Zarate *et al.* (2004) also adopt a multidisciplinary framework which draws on psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural anthropology, anthropology of communication, and sociology of difference in order to consider the role languages play in maintaining social cohesion while Byram (1997) recommends that language education uses concepts from citizenship education, education for democracy, human rights and peace education, and cultural studies to establish criteria of evaluation and mediation between cultures. The same stance is adopted by Starkey and Osler (2005) and the several contributors to their publication *Citizenship and Language Learning*, which advocates an inclusion of human rights and citizenship education in FLE so that it can respond to a changing global political context.

### **3.4.2.2 Language learning and citizenship education**

Citizenship education is understood here as the preparation of learners to become engaged and responsible citizens prepared to connect with 'the different communities to which they belong' (Alred *et al.*, 2006: 2). A growing concern with citizenship issues (Council of Europe, 2005) leads more national governments to follow the example of international organisations, such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe, which promote citizenship education as a contribution to peace and human rights (Osler, 2005).

Citizenship education is one form of political education which is also concerned with the promotion of solidarity and which, like intercultural education, deals with multiple identities: they both undertake to 'identify the sense and sources of identity and the competing forms of national, regional, ethnic, and religious identity' (Torres, 1998: 3). Starkey (2005) notes that citizenship education and the intercultural dimension of language learning both respond to the emerging realities of globalisation. Multicultural societies, he explains, are the result of global migration while ethnic, religious, and nationalist movements threaten democracy. This is why education and specifically education for citizenship are vital so as to transmit values contributing to 'just and peaceful democratic societies.' A similar role can be assumed by language education as it is increasingly understood as 'contributing to citizenship education' (*op. cit.*: 23).

Since FLE can be construed as contributing to learner 'cultural and educational development', it can be regarded as a constituent of citizenship education (Corona, 2005: 95). Linking the teaching of languages to education for citizenship places universal values and morality (Alred *et al.*, 2006) and 'the respect for the individual' at the centre of the

FLE endeavour (Byram and Feng, 2005: 916). It entails reconsidering the aims and contents of language syllabi so that they contribute to the empowerment of citizens (Corona, 2005) and that they encourage learners to become active citizens. In the same line of thought, Phipps and Guilherme (2004: 4) recommend that a 'pedagogy of responsibility', as a vital component of citizenship education, is included in the teaching of foreign languages in order to establish a link between the two from a local/global perspective.

A similar rationale connects FLE to human rights education (Guilherme, 2002; Byram, 2002b; Brown and Popovici, 2005; Popovici, 2006) and peace education (Byram, 1997). These developments emerge from an increasing interest among FL educators to help their students develop skills of effective citizenship (Osler and Starkey, 2005). Linking FLE to citizenship education therefore reinforces the political, social and moral dimension of language learning and views FLE as explicitly contributing to democracy and peace (Popovici, 2006).

Connecting FLE to citizenship and human rights education comes as a natural consequence of acknowledging the political dimension and social purpose of language learning. Since I have already concurred with a CP position that FLE ought to prepare students to be active citizens and fully participate in a democratic society, I also believe that FLE should aim at instilling a culture of democratic citizenship and human rights.

### **3.4.3 NEW EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND TEACHER EDUCATION**

#### **3.4.3.1 New roles for language teachers and learners**

The political dimension in foreign language/culture education calls for examining the implications for teachers and reconsidering their roles (Guilherme, 2002).

Foreign languages today are 'in the service of employability and the market'. Viewing language teaching as useful to meet the criteria of the labour market results in reducing language teachers to technicians (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2004: xv). Smyth *et al.* (2000) add to this discussion by stressing that market driven policies increase the state's control over teachers' work which imposes directives and curricula and involves their 'deprofessionalisation' or 'reprofessionalisation'; teaching cannot escape the logics of globalisation and marketisation (Burton & Bartlett, 2005) and it is now construed as a specialised craft which produces 'the larger workforce' (Connell, 1995 quoted by Smyth *et al.*, 2000: 6); this 'shift from educative to economic imperatives' leads to a discourse of 'efficiency, effectiveness, competencies and accountability' (Smyth *et al.*, 2000: 8), which limits teacher autonomy (Murray and Lawrence, 2000).

At university level, although the cultural dimension has always been important in FLT, culture 'is still referred to as background, civilisation or *Landeskunde*', as it is not regarded as a vital part of language learning (Fenner, 2006: 41). This is contested by Phipps and Gonzalez (2004: 11), who consider that the cultural component, as well as a critical perspective, is absent in university language courses which reinforce the view that foreign languages are 'essentially, and purely performative.'

On the contrary, to regard foreign language teaching as 'a social justice issue' (*op. cit.*: xv) entails new empowering roles for FL teachers.

By discarding their role as ambassadors of a foreign culture... by acknowledging the interactive role of culture learning... and the social, political and ethical implications of intercultural learning/teaching, the foreign language/culture teacher becomes more concerned about issues of communication and solidarity.

(Guilherme, 2002: 159)

Cultural, intercultural and critical pedagogy theories view the FL educator rather as:

- a cultural mediator (Byram, 2008; Zarate *et al.*, 2004; Sercu *et al.*, 2005)
- a transformative intellectual (Guilherme, 2002; Byram, 2008)
- a social activist (Reagan and Osborn, 2002)

**Cultural mediator** describes a person who is able to see the relation between different cultures, in terms of both similarities and differences and negotiate between people who have been socialised into these cultures. In this way, cultural mediators use the self to bring into contact two or more, depending on the number of languages, 'sets of values, beliefs and behaviours' (Byram, 2008: 68). The intercultural component of FLE ascribes new roles for teachers who are called to clarify 'ethnocentric attitudes', encourage 'openness to otherness' and cultural self-awareness (Byram and Zarate, 1997 a.: 243). FL teachers can be thus redefined as 'social agents' who mediate intercultural interactions (Zarate *et al.*, 2004: 219).



**Transformative intellectuals:** the term developed by Giroux (1988), already explained in this chapter, calls on language teachers to encourage students to become involved in improving the outside world (Byram, 2008). More elaborately, this means that FL educators combine 'theory and practice, reflection and action', in order to help learners become more interculturally sensitive, both cognitively and emotionally (Guilherme, 2002: 159). The foreign language/culture educator therefore empowers learners to question 'their own and others' histories and commit themselves to the responsibility of building this intercultural world' (*loc. cit.*).

**Social activists:** By considering language teaching 'a political act', Reagan and Osborn (2002: 85) also call upon language teachers to engage learners in a greater intellectual and emotional 'understanding of the world' (*loc. cit.*) and to use 'critical reflection, curricular nullification, and other forms of activism' to change the foreign language classroom into a space for social transformation (*op. cit.*: 89). By curricular nullification they signify pedagogies which challenge curricular directives opposing or contrary to 'the ends of social justice' (*op. cit.*: 87). I concur with Reagan and Osborn who believe that teachers defy curricular mandates in their daily practices which they find unsuitable with their professional and moral responsibilities; this strategy can also be extended to educators who are inspired by critical multiculturalism (*op. cit.*); they conclude that FL educators should aim at developing 'multiple literacies', cross-cultural competence, and a critical sociopolitical 'language awareness' among students while they should become cognisant of their cultural and intellectual roles (*op. cit.*: 91).

These perceptions of FL teachers' role have repercussions for learners' roles. Classrooms, as previously stated, are seen as democratic public spaces of transformative interaction where both teachers and students are active constructors of knowledge. Problem-posing or dialogic education legitimises and values the knowledge of students who are actively involved in its production and in the connection of education to their everyday lives. The hierarchical and unequal relationship to learners is questioned when teachers cease to view them as 'docile bodies' or 'empty vessels' (Vygotsky, 1978) but mobilise their creativity and ability, to encourage learner autonomy and criticality (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2004).

This is of particular relevance in higher education, where the lecture format prevails through which lecturers 'impart expert and hegemonic knowledge' to their students (Matthews, 2005: 97). Further, Zukas and Malcolm (2002: 204) contest the instrumental focus of higher education on 'processes and outcomes of the classroom transaction' taking little account of student identities. They suggest instead a broader view which espouses the political roots and social purpose of adult education, point to Barnett's (1997) work on higher education and the notion of "critical being" and deplore few occurrences in the literature on higher education of the educator as critical practitioner.

The political and ideological dimensions of language educational practice seen in this way involve the empowerment of both teachers and learners.

#### **3.4.3.2 Interculturalism in foreign language teacher education and training**

I now attempt to address whether FL education and teacher education deal with interculturalism. If interculturalism is inherent to FLE, all FL teachers

are not necessarily 'sensitive to cultural diversity' even if their colleagues usually view them as 'liberal advocates for multiculturalism and diversity' (Kubota, 2004: 30).

The new relationship to cultural difference supposes attitudes and abilities which did not always preoccupy FLT. They involve the 'affective capacity to abandon ethnocentric attitudes and perceptions vis à vis otherness, as well as cognitive capacity to establish a relationship between one's own and the foreign culture' (Byram and Zarate, 1997 a.: 243). The authors also note that this role has not been initiated in many education systems, which certainly applies to the Cypriot one, as explained in chapter two.

A further review of the literature does not cede more optimistic results. Kramsch (1993: 235) for instance contends that most FL courses do not teach interculturality as a systematic learning of difference nor do they integrate it 'into a multicultural view of education'. Zarate *et al.* (2004) concur with this position when they assert that FL teaching has hesitated to incorporate IC development as a vital element of linguistic interactions.

Unavoidably, language teacher training adopts a similar stance: only few teacher training programmes include cultural or intercultural components in their curricula (Lázár *et al.*, 2007; Byram, 2009). Phillipson (1988: 348 quoted by Pennycook, 1994: 13) maintains that the intercultural and political dimensions of language teaching are marginal in ELT professional training, which rather focuses on 'linguistics, psychology, and education' in a limited sense but gives little attention to 'international relations, development studies, theories of culture or intercultural contact, or the politics or sociology of language or education'.

One study which partly explores the consequences of this omission in teacher education is reported by Sercu *et al.* (2005). Investigating teachers' perceptions of IC teaching and current culture-and-language education practices, their empirical study explored and quantitatively compared FL teachers' IC in seven countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Poland, Mexico, Greece, Spain and Sweden. Their findings indicate that even those teachers who are positive towards intercultural competence fail to meet all the criteria of FL&IC teaching. They confirm that culture teaching is mainly perceived as the transmission of information on the target cultures and that though IC teaching is viewed as a significant innovation it is also perceived as marginal to the linguistic goals of FLE. Moreover, they highlight teacher-centred approaches to teaching culture and IC competence rather than guiding learners into developing and changing concepts. Their recommendations point to the need for altering teachers' beliefs as the best means for changing teaching practices and view interculturalism in terms of teaching IC and not only cultural knowledge. For this to occur, they propose that teacher development programmes build on teachers' current beliefs and enhance reflection on their teaching materials and practices. The importance of critical reflection for teacher education in the development of intercultural awareness is also stressed by Byram (2008) and Phipps and Guilherme (2004).

Equally important is Byram's (2008: 150) recommendation to include 'values education' and 'education for democratic citizenship' which he considers 'the most innovatory and radical element needed in teacher education'; this calls language teacher education to de-emphasise languages as performance and include criticality and engagement in the world around them (*op. cit.*).

### **3.4.4 CONCLUSION**

Since I view teaching as a 'form of political and cultural action' (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2004: xvi) I have tried to establish that foreign language education, just as any education, has a dimension that involves socio-political issues.

FLE has evolved in the last few decades: some time ago language learning was considered as serving the 'study of high culture'; in the last three or four decades its purpose has been primarily to communicate (Byram, 2002: 43). In the light of the new theories of teaching and learning and the evolution of our perception of culture in relation to FLE, cultural and intercultural competence are increasingly valued and regarded not as superfluous but as integral to FLE (Fenner, 2006). Globalisation and internationalisation, with increased geographical mobility, more heterogeneity in societies (Alred *et al.*, 2006) and more regular communication among people of a different linguistic (Byram, 2008) and cultural background, pose new challenges for FLE which can be partly met through interdisciplinarity and the integration of citizenship education. Our students will soon have a quite different sense of belonging and of 'national and international identities' (Byram, 2008: 147) and language teaching must respond to these emergent identities.

Language teachers have mainly focused on the development of language skills that seem to be value free, particularly in the last decades (Byram, 2008). Critical pedagogy incites them to read the world and act on it while an intercultural approach promotes the positive development of learners' personality and identity (CEFR, 2001).

Insights from education for democratic citizenship, human rights, or peace education can make FLE more explicitly political (Byram and Risager, 1999; Guilherme, 2002; Byram, 2008) so as to support social transformation especially in terms of mutual understanding among people of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Though there is an increasing interest on the part of research on culture teaching (Corbett, 2003; Fenner, 2006) and political education, FL teacher training as well as classroom practices do not seem to follow this trend: teaching practices are slow to change (*op. cit.*); interculturality is hardly traceable in educational practices but 'present in the academic discourse' which is interested in initiating changes (Alred *et al.*, 2006: 5). If language teacher education and training better prepare teachers for the cultural and intercultural dimension of their work, they can carry out these tasks with professionalism and experience less divergence between pedagogical ideals and practices (Sercu *et al.*, 2005).

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce my research as a self-study for the improvement of my practice and a form of action inquiry. This chapter outlines the specific methodology employed in this study and the basic research design. This should aid in making clear my reasons for choosing the action inquiry paradigm and specific research methods as well as the values and principles underpinning the way I conducted the research.

My choice of methodology was influenced by my philosophical research stance which is the basis for the first set of issues I address: the study's paradigm, ontology, epistemology, and methodological approach. I articulate my beliefs about reality and knowledge, thereby naming my ontological and epistemological stances, and subsequently try to clarify the aims of the study and focus on my methodological choices. I give a theoretical overview of action inquiry and situate my study within this tradition.

In the second part, I concentrate on the way the study was conducted and provide information about the implemented syllabus, the site, participants, the research methods employed, data collection, and an overview of the treatment of the data. A discussion follows on the validity, reliability, ethical issues, and limitations of the study.

## **4.2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

### **4.2.1 MY PERSONAL PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH STANCE**

My long-held belief in social justice originally motivated my research topic. I chose to conduct my study in an effort to live according to my values of respect and acceptance of diversity, which are fundamental in my life, and central to the present work. I aspire not only to understand the world, but also to change it. Such a statement may sound pretentious and utopian, but over the years I have developed the idea that we can each generate a small-scale change in our immediate environment that can make a small difference in the world. The idea of an action inquiry study in my workplace came from this need to “make a difference” by changing my practice into a more socially just one, and it subsequently guided me towards critical pedagogy theories. I turned to these theories out of intellectual and ethical conviction, as they provided the means to critically approach my practice.

My interest in social justice, consequently in critical pedagogy, stems from feelings of anger, guilt, and sadness when I look around me or follow the news and witness poverty and starvation, discrimination and racism, and feel the need to do something about it. My commitment to interculturalism and respect towards cultural diversity are also grounded in my own experiences. My personal history of displacement and mobility informs my basic beliefs, themselves informing my professional and research choices, while my research is feeding, reinforcing or transforming my initial beliefs. It is a circle which connects education and research to life and which makes it difficult to draw lines between what is personal and what is collective, what is political and what is not. ‘Education is concerned with



both individual and collective well-being. It is highly personal and individual, and also highly social, political and public' (Griffiths, 1998: 66).

'Ontology logically precedes epistemology which logically precedes methodology' (Hay, 2002: 2). However, my starting point was the choice of a methodology; this does not mean that my 'view of the world', shaped by the experience I brought to 'the research process' (Grix, 2002: 179), followed; it rather suggests that my ontological and epistemological assumptions unconsciously guided my choice of methodology and that I later took the step of "labelling" them. Ontology, epistemology, and methodology 'are interconnected in such a way' that situating oneself in one system constrains one's positioning in the others (Guba and Lincoln, 1998: 201). By choosing an action inquiry methodology, I was originally guided towards critical theory which subsequently led me to critical pedagogy theories.

My research is committed to the project of social justice, perceived as pursuing 'the good of each and also the good of all, in an acknowledgement that one depends on the other' (Griffiths, 1998: 89). My choice of methodology and the theoretical perspective which informs it came precisely from a need to 'live in the direction of the values and commitments' that inspire my life (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006: 23). I therefore concur with McNiff and Whitehead, who in examining the ontological assumptions which underpin action inquiry see a 'value-laden' and 'morally committed' inquiry (*loc. cit.*). My driving force is the examination, surfacing, and a better understanding and transformation of social inequalities. Social justice, which inevitably includes respect for otherness, is the main ontological value within which my research is situated.

As an action inquirer, I see reality as constructed in a process which integrates 'strands of learning, action and reflection' and aspire to develop an understanding of my own assumptions through self-reflection (Ellis & Kiely, 2000: 85). The idea of constructed and historical realities is central in action inquiry which adopts the ontological position that realities have come to be accepted and taken-for-granted 'through historical time by virtue of reiteration' but that they can be altered and reconstructed 'via a process of inquiry'. In fact, the reconstruction of a specific social reality is the primary purpose of action inquiry (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 129).

This study falls in the critical paradigm which defines research as inherently political and researchers as openly ideological. In this paradigm, the researcher often situates her/himself as an agent of change with 'a mandate for social justice' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: xxiv). A basic position which guides my choices both as a teacher and a researcher and which is in agreement with a fundamental critical pedagogy stance is that education, educational research, and politics are inextricably intertwined. I cannot relate to the positivistic view that knowledge is hard, objective, and tangible and see myself as an observer comparable to a natural scientist. I rather view reality as subjective, multiple, and socially constructed by research participants. Since I embrace the view that knowledge, research, and practice are not neutral, 'apolitical' or 'value-free' (*op. cit.*), I feel a connection to the critical paradigm which openly states ideological or political biases, rejects claims to neutrality and the positivistic stance that 'facts and values are separate' (Kincheloe, 2003: 206), and believes that research is value laden, unlike other paradigms which may carry hidden ideology under the surface of objectivity. I can therefore affirm that my research is subjective since it expresses my perspective, that my values as

an investigator inevitably influence the inquiry, therefore that my findings are 'value mediated' (Guba and Lincoln, 1998: 206-207).

The epistemological base of action inquiry mainly draws on the Frankfurt school of critical theory and in particular the work of Jürgen Habermas (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Members of the Frankfurt school were committed to the notion that theory and practice are interrelated (Giroux, 2003) and must both inform inquiry which seeks social transformation (Darder *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, the name and basic conceptualisations of critical pedagogy are derived from critical theory (Miedema and Wardekker, 1999; Darder *et al.*, 2003; Ponte and Ax, 2009). Critical pedagogy also draws on other sources such as phenomenology, feminism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism (Stanley, 1992). Critical educational research emerged to fill the gap that positivistic and interpretive paradigms left, that is 'the neglect of the political and ideological contexts' in their accounts of social behaviour. I find myself in agreement with the critical pedagogy objective: not only to describe, understand, and interpret society and behaviour, but to build a more democratic and just society (*op. cit.*: 26). The pedagogical aim of critical pedagogy is the emancipation of learners from oppressive conditions and asymmetrical relations of power through methods such as the development of opportunities for dialogue (Ponte and Ax, 2009) and the creation of democratic classroom structures (Darder *et al.*, 2003); its scientific aim is to 'critique the societal conditions of education' (Miedema and Wardekker, 1999: 67) and 'to develop emancipatory knowledge and insight into knowledge interests as a base for social transformation'. Similar to other teachers who are carrying out action inquiry from a critical perspective, I seek to examine the conduct of my inquiry and its significance in terms of 'social justice and emancipation' (Ponte and Ax, 2009: 332). By this, I mean that my research aims at

empowering learners and myself to actively participate in democracies which respect and embrace cultural diversity (Morrison, 2001), thereby promoting social justice.

My perspective on knowledge is therefore critical constructivist: knowledge as well as 'the classification and organization of 'reality'' are seen here as a set of constructions (Kincheloe, 2003: 176), historically and culturally determined. Knowledge is 'uncertain', 'subjective', and meaning is 'created through negotiation' with others (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006: 29) while the notion of inseparability between the knower and the known requires paying equal attention to the investigator's perspective as to the research design and methods (Kincheloe, 2003).

Furthermore, a main difference between action inquiry and other research paradigms is that 'knowing becomes a holistic practice' and that 'theory is lived in practice and practice becomes a living theory' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002: 35). The traditional divide between 'research and application' and prominence of 'knowing through thinking' is here bypassed to emphasise 'knowing through doing' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: xxv). A dialectical view of knowledge considers that theory and practice are inseparable and both are necessary in understanding the world and our daily actions (Darder *et al.*, 2003).

My views on knowledge and reality have largely shaped my interest in a qualitative research approach. Moreover, the choice of qualitative data collection methods has been determined by my decision to conduct classroom-based research, consequently with a small number of participants. Since my sample was modest and I did not intend to test 'a specific hypothesis', quantitative methods were 'of little value' to me

(Taber, 2007: 86). In this way, my teaching context/research site also guided some of my research decisions, which is often the case in practitioner research (*op. cit.*).

#### **4.2.2 CRITICAL ACTION INQUIRY**

##### **4.2.2.1 Why was I drawn to action inquiry?**

My initial concern was to conduct a study which not only described and generated an understanding of phenomena but which would also generate positive changes in my practice and in society. Action inquiry does not simply seek to understand and interpret the world but to change it (Noffke and Stevenson, 1995; Atweh *et al.*, 1998; Cohen *et al.*, 2000; McNiff *et al.*, 2003; Reason and Bradbury, 2006). The transformative and emancipatory nature of action inquiry, the fact that it combines research and action focusing on democratic education and social change (Noffke and Stevenson, 1995), appealed to me as it provided me with the opportunity of combining research activities and social action. This was in agreement with my commitment to social justice and my wish to conduct a transformative pedagogical study. Critical action inquiry offered me the means to construct a system of meaning, to look for philosophical guidance in order to consider not only my research but also my teaching (Kincheloe, 2003). For me, this meant that my investigation would aim at reconstructing my practice, changing the focus of my professional life, and enhancing students' intercultural competence, in the pursuit of greater social justice. The methodology that I chose thus corresponded to my aspiration to live my values more fully in my practice (McNiff *et al.*, 2003). I cannot claim any social changes at present, but I hope that instigating reflection on key issues amongst my students as well as the reconceptualising of my practice have been my contribution to an improvement of this world.

This methodology was appropriate for improving my educational practice by engaging me in a study of my own teaching. Action inquiry offered me together with the potential of emancipatory knowledge, the opportunity of critically reflecting on and problematising my pedagogical practices through the surfacing and examination of my tacit assumptions (Herr and Anderson, 2005). As I have been in the teaching profession for many years, I was drawn to inquiry which combined the activities of research and practice and which I felt would be a natural progression in my professional life. This is what attracts many educators to practitioner research: its emphasis on a 'greater understanding and improvement of practice' (Bell, 1999: 10). In this way, it responded to my ongoing wish to become a better teacher and improve the quality of educational provision to my students. As it is designed to improve 'the quality of a personally experienced situation', action inquiry is 'a common approach to *practitioner research* in professions such as teaching' (Taber, 2007: 83).

On a more practical level, action inquiry offered me the possibility of researching within my own working context. Working at my university, in my classes with my students sustained my motivation as I felt that my study would be of immediate concern to me. It was a place I was familiar with and knew better than any other educational institution, factors which enhanced the investigation process. It enabled me, I felt, to better identify and evaluate problems, and limited the risk of misjudgements. This also facilitated the task of accessing data and implementing a strategic plan.

#### **4.2.2.2 The evolution of my research**

My desire to undertake action inquiry emerged from a wish to enquire and improve my educational practice, generate learning while contributing to a

more socially just world. What attracted me to action inquiry was a quest for personal and professional fulfilment and not only a need for solving a problem in my practice. This reflects a different approach to the purpose of education from the one promoted by new teacher professionalism, which is more practical, concentrating on teaching techniques and encouraged by evidence-based practice. Critical action inquiry is not compatible with a view of teaching as a technical delivery of information (Kincheloe, 2003). My view on educational research concurs with those who see a moral and social dimension in education, one in which teachers care for the welfare of their students and promote the 'values of mutual respect and tolerance in a democratic society' (Burton & Bartlett, 2005: 7, 10). The 'duty of care' is an essential element of the teaching profession but it can be interpreted in terms of gaining 'additional technical skills' (Murray and Lawrence: 2000: 10, 11) which was not my main preoccupation.

As my research progressed, I decided to change direction. This is not uncommon in doctoral work or research in general, which evolves during the process, probably more so in the case of novice researchers such as myself. A degree of flexibility and change of direction in researchers' plans is even encouraged (Blaxter *et al.*, 1996). My initial plans included collaboration with peers, the implementation of two cycles of data gathering and evaluation and a focus on change in learners' perceptions. As I started conducting the study, it became apparent to me that it would be very difficult for my colleagues to collaborate with me because they were busy with their own teaching and research activities. I consequently changed plans and decided to conduct the research alone.

Further, I chose two classes of the same course, taught in Summer and in Autumn 2007, with the intention to collect data from the first class,

analyse it, reflect on it, and plan modifications for the second class. However, in the course of my research the lapse of time between the two courses proved to be too short for data analysis; as a result, observations and reflection on class activity resulted in an informal evaluation between the first and second implementations: 'within any one cycle of activity there is likely to be an evaluation of some form, either formal or informal. Reflecting on learning and action is a form of evaluation' (Ellis & Kiely, 2000: 87). This evaluation was insufficient for major modifications in my syllabus and pedagogies. Nevertheless, as the present work is an open-ended process, a new cycle of action may result from the analysis and evaluation of these data. Finally, as my study was advancing, in the light of new readings and further reflection, my interest shifted; it evolved from measuring changes in students' perceptions after what I had originally called a 'prejudice reduction' (Banks, 1999) intervention to the learning process during an intercultural competence enhancement intervention. It became clearer to me that it is difficult for people's perceptions, especially adults', to change during a 39 hour course and that my endeavour was rather to add a stone in the edifice of my students' education. My approach thus moved from behaviour change to educational experience adopting McKernan's (2008: 4) suggestion to design a syllabus whose primary concern would be to 'enable students to think and to make critically informed choices'. This is why I chose to focus on the enhancement of their perceptions, the learning process itself, and the changes in my own practice. In this way, I realigned the area of my focus towards what I considered more interesting and relevant (Mills, 2003) to my context.

Thus, the starting point of my research was not a problem in my practice that I sought to fix, but rather the development of a broader



understanding of the teaching and learning process. My study can also be labelled 'classroom research by teachers' or 'teacher research', terms respectively preferred by Hopkins (2002) and Carter and Halsall (1998) for action inquiry (Burton & Bartlett, 2005: 38).

Action inquiry is a paradigm which includes action research (Tripp, 2003). As the literature around action inquiry is limited, I also make use of literature on action research and replace the term research by the term inquiry; I am in this way using the umbrella term action inquiry which, in the literature, refers to both action research and action inquiry.

#### **4.2.2.3 Definitions of action inquiry**

The combination of the terms action and inquiry highlights the essential features of the methodology: conducting concurrently action and inquiry as a means of increasing 'the wider effectiveness of our actions' (Torbert *et al.*, 2004: 1) through enhanced knowledge about practices and contexts of practice. What distinguishes action inquiry from other methodologies is that it bridges the divide between theory and practice, researchers and practitioners, by interweaving the two phases of inquiry and action (Somekh, 1995; Elliott, 1996; Torbert *et al.*, 2004). Situated within the teacher-researcher movement, it enables practitioners to play an active role in improving the conditions of their settings (Elliott, 1996).

Defined as a 'process through which practitioners study their own practice' (Corey, 1953), 'a self-reflective inquiry' which aims to better understand one's own practice in context (Carr and Kemmis, 1986), it is 'a way of researching [one's] own learning', taking action to improve one's practice and producing evidence to document this improvement (McNiff and

Whitehead, 2002: 15), 'theorising from the standpoint of action in order to act with "understanding" of the practical situation' (Elliott, 2003: 172).

There now exists a variety of forms of action inquiry (Reason and Bradbury, 2006) in education, but they are all concerned with improved practice whether this improvement is concerned with a single class and teacher or a national education system. Within definitions encountered in the relevant literature, there is the recurrent theme of change. A precondition of action inquiry is that practitioner researchers feel the need 'to initiate change' (Elliott, 1991: 53). Based on the belief that education is filled with injustices (Noffke and Stevenson, 1995), it seeks to lead to transformations which may be aimed at a variety of areas: teaching methods, learning strategies, evaluative procedures, continuing professional development or attitudes and values (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Within the broad goal of improving teaching and learning, action inquiry can be used to develop new pedagogic models of learning, design curricula or support learning innovations (Riding *et al.*, 1995) and may undertake to support professional development, promote school and teacher education reforms or create social change (Christenson *et al.*, 2002).

Transformation can be aimed at a group level, towards students, teachers and/or their educational institution, but also at a personal level; through a self-reflective and self-evaluative process, participants seek to broaden their understanding of their practices in context (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; McKernan, 1996). Action inquiry regards knowledge as an agent of social transformation 'to be derived from practice, and practice informed by knowledge' (O'Brien, 1998).

The potential of action inquiry for personal and social change is widely acknowledged but a significant question concerning my study arises here. Can I guarantee that personal transformation indeed occurred as a result of my action inquiry? How is change defined? As pointed out by Hollingsworth *et al.* (1997), tensions arise from conceptions of self and personal change constituted through social structures and language and from the risk of normalising and predetermining the extent to which a teacher-researcher should or could change. McNiff *et al.* (2003) offer me an answer by defining changes in terms of learning: personal change as individual learning and social change as collective learning. Torbert *et al.* (2004) also speak of transformational learning which enhances individuals' or groups' capacity for more creativity, awareness, justice, and sustainability.

#### **4.2.3 MY ACTION INQUIRY METHODOLOGY**

##### **4.2.3.1 Features of action inquiry in my study**

The intention of my study is thus to achieve an improvement in the teaching and learning of students through a particular focus on the syllabus, and ultimately an improvement of my practice. This defines my research as practitioner research or teacher research and places it more specifically within the paradigm of action inquiry. In this section, I explain my personal approach in developing a research methodology (Tripp, 1998) by detailing the features of action inquiry which apply to my research.

My attention was initially 'drawn to an issue' (*op. cit.*: 38), the growing expression of xenophobic attitudes within the Cypriot society (Trimikliniotis & Demetriou, 2005), and consequently within my professional context as well. I then took a position on this issue (Tripp, 1998) – I wished to contribute through my practice to decreasing these attitudes. I

subsequently developed an action plan for improving my practice: I created a syllabus which fostered students' sensitisation towards the issues of migration, discrimination, and cultural diversity while I sought to refine my pedagogical strategies which would engage learners with this syllabus.

I then monitored and described the effects of my actions (*op. cit.*). Through strategic action, 'a crucial defining characteristic of all action inquiry', I intentionally pursued information to achieve an understanding through 'rational analysis'. By collecting and analysing data, I moved from experiencing things to describing them: I looked into students' response to a syllabus which ultimately aimed at enhancing social justice. Strategic action contrasts 'action which is a result of habit, instinct, opinion' or 'partial knowledge' (Tripp, 2003).

Monitoring and describing my actions also involved reflecting upon how well these 'work in practice' (Tripp, 1998: 38). Action inquiry embraces the concept of action and reflection in order to surface understanding and enable change (Schön, 1995 quoted by Ellis & Kiely, 2000). Individual change can result from 'critical reflection' on assumptions and the way they define reality (Ellis & Kiely, 2000: 85-86); this personal change, in the sense of individual learning (McNiff *et al.*, 2003), is one of the intended outcomes of my research. My aim is to examine my practice in order to improve it, 'in terms of both effectiveness and social justice' (Tripp, 1998: 38). The result is an increased awareness of my perceptions and values, for instance of my own stereotypes and prejudices, and the way they inform my teaching and inquiry. A critical stance towards my practice is a disposition which is now part of me and which will be defining my 'values and future strategies' (Ellis & Kiely, 2000: 85).

Table 2, inspired by Christenson *et al.* (2002), demonstrates how my study integrates some of the characteristics of action inquiry.

<b>Aspects of action inquiry</b>	<b>Demonstrated in the study</b>
Research proposal	Proposal shared with supervisors
Research permission of participants	Students signed permission
Data collection methods	Student essays, Student interviews, Reflective diary
Data analysis	Coding and interpretation of data
Researcher journal/reflections	Reflective diary before/after classes
Influence on teaching	Pedagogical changes in light of research findings/re-evaluate values and educational practice

**Table 2: Action inquiry aspects demonstrated in the study**

#### **4.2.3.2 Curriculum development**

Noffke and Stevenson (1995: 20) define action inquiry as a set of political commitments and assume that educators can develop in students/citizens a sense of 'ethical caring'. The authors focus on the learner as a whole person and connect the classroom to the "outside" world, the school and the society, whereas they stress that political and moral issues are inherent in the teaching profession. These political and moral commitments have instigated my study, which is indeed concerned with the development of an ethics of care among my students, through the creation and the implementation of an intercultural competence enhancement syllabus. In an effort to live according to my values of respecting difference and diversity, I implemented materials and pedagogies which gave learners an incentive to reflect on their perceptions of cultural otherness, and then sought evidence, through data gathering and analysis, that I had an educative influence on them (McNiff *et al.*, 2003).

Since action inquiry places teachers at the centre of the research process in view of improving their practice, it follows that they can engage in curriculum inquiry. In fact, it has been largely used in curriculum inquiry, based upon the premises that curriculum is 'the preserve of teachers' and that curriculum development and knowledge should be grounded in practice and 'the actual study of classrooms and other educational settings' (McKernan, 1996: 11, 35). This trend has been influenced by Stenhouse's work in the 1970s who felt that curriculum development would gain in effectiveness if teachers were actively involved in it. Curriculum development with teacher research is of particular relevance as teachers increasingly lose control over it (Burton & Bartlett, 2005). The result takes into account the uniqueness of each educational environment as well as the individual teacher's pedagogical knowledge and his/her personal values and beliefs. Teachers hence become curriculum developers, not mere transmitters of assigned knowledge.

In the course of my research, I undertook a modification of the assigned curriculum in order to foster the enhancement of learners' intercultural competence. The rationale behind my choices of materials and activities was the promotion of antiracism, tolerance, and understanding across cultures. My inquiry can therefore be labelled a Curriculum Development inquiry following Tripp's (2003) categorisation of the most common strategies of action inquiry:

Curriculum and Product Development	Design  Modify/Improve	Produce/Trial	Monitor/ Test	Evaluate
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The design of the syllabus/product and its implementation are explained in section 4.3.2, while the monitoring and evaluation through analysis of data collected during the intervention are further developed in chapter five.

#### **4.2.3.3 Self-study for professional development**

Since action inquiry focuses on and aims to impact on practice, it is appropriate for continuing professional development of teachers (Murray and Lawrence, 2000) with a view to generating awareness, expanding competence (Torbert, 2006), and developing new methods of teaching and learning. Self-study is at the heart of action inquiry, regarded as a powerful tool for personal and social renewal (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002). The assumption here is that the transformation of the self contributes to social transformation and that 'the process of social change begins with the process of personal change' (*op. cit.*: 23). Through the learning process of action inquiry, people change their actions, interactions, meanings, values, and discourses (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000) which may in turn build structures for deeper social reform.

The investigation of my educational practice aimed at remodelling it through an enhanced understanding of the intercultural dimension in language teaching and learning. The fact that I wanted to concentrate on and improve an aspect of my professional practice (Lomax, 1994; Wallace, 1998; Cohen *et al.*, 2000) made action inquiry attractive to me. I therefore turned to this methodology which allowed me to reflect on, improve, and theorise my educational practice. I proceeded by planning, taking actions, observing students and myself in action and finding facts about the results of my actions; findings assist me in re-evaluating my actions and this new learning will be fed back into my practice. It is a self-study which aims to show how I have enhanced my understanding and

action in my situation and offer my personal theory of practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002).

For some, action inquiry is predominantly an individual affair and can only be done on oneself and not on others (McNiff *et al.*, 2003; Reason and Bradbury, 2006); in order to learn more (and theorise) about one's practices, 'first person research' (Torbert, 2006: 207) is conducted to achieve positive changes in one's practice through critical and self-critical action and reflection (Atweh *et al.*, 1998).

#### **4.2.3.4 Reflective practice**

Action inquiry is therefore regarded as a form of self-reflective inquiry. The concept of reflective practice has its roots in the work of John Dewey (1933). Reflection describes a mental process in which one revisits ideas or events, debriefs them and evaluates them (Tripp, 1998). This 'recapitulation and self-criticism' is expected to enhance practitioners' ability to recognise their perceptions and knowledge (Murray and Lawrence, 2000: 10) and lead to self-improvement (Schön, 1983). Critical self-reflection is central to action inquiry which fosters change through the examination of practitioners' assumptions, practices, and contexts (Christenson *et al.*, 2002). The action-reflection cycle is based on the connection of 'improved knowledge through action' (Ellis & Kiely, 2000: 83) which highlights the significance of reflection upon the outcomes of action (Middlewood *et al.*, 1999). Developing new understandings of one's actions, especially those that have become part of habits and routines should lead to changing them (Somekh, 1995) or more modestly enhancing their effectiveness (Torbert, 2006).



The study has engaged me in examining my knowledge and the way this knowledge frames and constrains my actions. It has also provided me with the opportunity to critically reflect, clarify, and challenge my values and my taken-for-granted practices (Atweh *et al.*, 1998; McNiff *et al.*, 2003), criticise my subjectivity and 'perceptual biases', one of the key principles of action inquiry (Winter, 1996: 13-14).

Researching and studying my own practice has enhanced my capacity for self-evaluation and self-improvement (McKernan, 1996) due to a more systematic reflection on my practice. During my study, I kept a reflective diary which assisted me in revisiting classroom events, my actions, and learners' responses and supported the research process by enhancing my 'awareness of actions, interpretations and 'theories in use'' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000: 266). The analysis of the diary has allowed me to develop further insights on my teaching and research, which I will integrate into my future practices. This 'dialogic retrospection process' (Phipps and Guilherme, 2004: 50), this struggle for self-awareness therefore becomes a never-ending process, the goal of which is not to reach some target 'but simply reaching for more and more growth' (McKernan, 2008: 215). Torbert *et al.* (2004: 4) call this self-reflective stance 'conscious living' so that we learn from our experiences and 'modify our actions' and thinking.

A desired outcome has been, for instance, the questioning and a modification in power relations between learners and myself, especially concerning the knowledge creation process. I have become more open to student views and incorporated their perspectives into the pedagogical process. At the same time, the reflective process has allowed me to surface some of the biases in my research and practice or the ethical

implications of conducting ideological research as explained in chapter five. The objective of my syllabus, and related tasks and activities, was to encourage reflection among learners so that they develop their critical thinking especially around issues of cultural diversity. Data analysis partly focuses on seeking evidence of their active participation in reflective thinking.

#### **4.2.3.5 Knowledge creation**

Having paid greater attention to my intentions, actions, and strategies, I aim at participating 'in the generation of knowledge' about my own profession (Tripp, 2003). Action inquiry has permitted me to integrate a research orientation into my practice unlike traditional research which separates 'scholarship from praxis' (Reason and Bradbury, 2006: xxv) and where practitioners are expected to apply external researchers' findings (Burns, 2005). By challenging the dichotomy between action and knowledge, and practitioner knowledge versus objective knowledge, the knowledge of practitioners-researchers is valued (Ellis & Kiely, 2000); as a teacher I am the most appropriate one to give answers about the teaching-learning process following a rationale that 'naturalistic settings are best studied' by those who experience them (McKernan, 1996: 5). Instead of being the recipient of 'meaning handed to' me by other researchers (McKernan, 2008: 217), a process which traditionally disenfranchises me from insights into my own practice (Bell, 1988), I am seeking to contribute to a body of knowledge on teaching. In this respect, action inquiry has been an empowering experience as it has given me the opportunity to grow as a teacher-researcher.

A unifying conception of knowledge and action privileges a correlation 'between improved knowledge through action and improved action through

reflection' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000: 267) where knowledge 'is created in and for action' (Ellis & Kiely, 2000: 84). This mutuality in 'which knowledge is in the action' is the 'basic epistemological feature' of this form of research (Van Beinum, 1999: 10). The development of the practical wisdom of the practitioner researcher (Somekh, 1995) and the generation of educational knowledge that results are thus seen as a major purpose of the methodology. As a practitioner researcher I have produced personal theories from my educational practice, with what Jack Whitehead (1993) calls living forms of theory. In living educational theories, practitioner-researchers generate their own explanations in enquiries which are focused on living their values more fully in their practice.

The action part of improving my practice is now part of my construction of new knowledge and understanding (Elliott, 2003). The learning which resulted from the process of improving my practice through research leads to the production of new knowledge. In chapter six, I recount how this process enabled me to generate my own educational theory derived from my practice.

## **4.3 THE STUDY**

### **4.3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

With an understanding of the methodological approach, I now address the core of the study, that is, the research questions which frame the investigation. This research project is designed to explore the following overarching research question:

How does a foreign language teacher enhance learners' intercultural competence?

From this general question, a number of specific research sub-questions emerged and were refined during the research process.

1. What were students' perceptions of cultural diversity?
2. How did students respond to the intervention? What indicates their greater and deeper understanding of intercultural issues?
3. Which strategies in my practice were or were not effective in enhancing learners' IC?
4. How was the understanding of my practice enhanced? How do I now reconceptualise my role as a social justice educator?

I now provide the specifics of my methodology. I first describe the implemented syllabus, and then explain the choice of the setting so as to ground my research in my professional context. More information on my institution is provided in chapter two. Next, I present the research participants and outline the data sources, the process of data analysis and interpretation. Finally I address the trustworthiness of the study as well as ethical issues and limitations of classroom-based research.

#### **4.3.2 THE IMPLEMENTED SYLLABUS**

In this section, I present the syllabus that I chose to implement in the two courses I taught as part of this study. The pedagogical decisions discussed here were made with a particular group of students in a particular institution and during a specific time period.

##### **4.3.2.1 Course objectives**

To conduct my research, I chose the course entitled Basic Writing (ENG-100), which aims to teach academic writing skills to advanced level

students who are undergraduates majoring in a variety of academic disciplines. The course is taught on the basis of three hours a week during one academic semester (13 weeks). The rationale of English courses at the University of Nicosia is that they should prepare students for academic success by supporting them in the comprehension and production of texts. The course description indicates the 'review of basic writing skills', the 'understanding [of] and ability to write fully developed paragraphs and multi-paragraph assignments' as well as the appropriate 'use of grammar and mechanics'. Learning outcomes should include recognition and production of the basic characteristics of a paragraph and different essay types. In my classes, I also included academic skills: summarising, quoting, and paraphrasing.

The duration of the course is normally 39 hours and student numbers range from 25 to 30. For the purposes of my study, I worked with two classes over two consecutive semesters (Summer 2007 and Autumn 2007).

#### **4.3.2.2 The intercultural materials**

As I was concerned with serving both the course needs and my research interests, I prepared what I will call "intercultural materials" in conjunction with the recommended course textbook. I mainly used the textbook for sentence skills and text organisation while I exploited the intercultural materials to prepare students for the production of different types of writing. These additional teaching materials stimulated class discussions (before and after handing in assignments), and were used as a basis for whole class or group work to help students prepare written assignments. Students also conducted individual research before producing written work

that would be assessed on the basis of writing skills. With the exception of one collective task on summarising, these assignments were individual.

The writing activities (see Appendices 1-6) included:

1. pre-writing and description of ethnic cultures
2. summarising a text on stereotypes (Summer 2007)/ summarising a text on migration (Autumn 2007)
3. comparison and contrast of one's life with a young immigrant's life
4. a persuasive text on cross-cultural marriages
5. a text on international students used to introduce a summarising task
6. a text describing Cypriots according to a Pan-European survey in order to stimulate reflection on students' own culture (Autumn 2007).

For these activities, I prepared handouts using texts and articles available on the internet or in a textbook (international students) and in one case an excerpt from a film.

#### **4.3.2.2.1 Rationale**

The target of learning activities was to increase learners' sensitisation to cultural diversity and to develop their critical thinking skills. When designing the activities, I sought to facilitate language and writing skills on the one hand and intercultural competence on the other. The choice of themes, tasks, and texts for teaching materials and activities was based on the course objectives, their 'relevance for ICC' and their appeal to students (Lázár *et al.*, 2003: 19). Learners' characteristics, such as their age, their socio-professional category (university students) as well as the local context (Cyprus) were taken into consideration so as to make the syllabus relevant and meaningful, include students in the learning process,

and increase their motivation for participation. My overall aim was to increase dialogue in class, to provide 'interesting readings', well-conceived assignments, and to foster 'greater joy in learning' (Benesch, 2001: xviii).

With the guiding concern of creating a syllabus which would expose students to social justice issues, and more specifically cultural diversity topics which would move students toward greater cultural sensitivity and critical thinking, I considered several parameters:

- 'What can I give them that will be of lasting value?' (CEFR, 2001: 44)
- How can the course best contribute to learners' responsible citizenship 'in a pluralist democratic society'? (*loc. cit.*)
- How can the course content best 'facilitate new understandings' and 'construct new insights' (Hernández Sheets, 2005: 129) around cultural diversity, hence prepare students for successful intercultural interactions?
- How can I address human rights and 'specific knowledge (an understanding of the current world)'? (Osler, 2005: 6)
- In what ways can the syllabus connect to learners' previous knowledge (*op. cit.*) and experiences?

This led to further defining the learning objectives, thus the teaching materials, which aimed to trigger reflection on concepts such as

- generalisations,
- stereotypes,
- ethnic cultures-identities and multiple identities,
- migration,
- prejudice.

#### **4.3.2.2.2 The cultural content**

As stated in chapter three, I view culture teaching as an integral part of language teaching (Byram, Morgan *et al.*, 1994; Hinkel, 1999; Fenner, 2006a; Risager, 2007) and believe that the transfer of information on the target language culture is not sufficient to modify prejudiced attitudes but risks creating and reinforcing stereotypical images (Lange, 2003; Byram and Feng, 2005; Starkey, 2005). My study therefore focused on learners' enhancement of intercultural competence.

Moreover, as I have already indicated, I question the native speaker model (Kramsch, 1993; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999; Guilherme, 2002; Corbett, 2003; Byram, 2008) and consider that as an international language, English belongs to all its users (Decke-Cornill, 2003). I consequently did not seek to teach cognitive elements of 'Inner Circle' cultures, or native English-speaking countries (Kachru, 2005: 155); I avoided the conventional approach to teaching culture, which typically includes information on history, geography, literature and the fine arts, cultural values and customs, or daily life (Paige *et al.*, 2003) of the target culture. Embracing the idea that English is a 'language of wider communication' (McKay, 2002: 24), I designed a syllabus which instigated reflection on what culture is. I tried to create opportunities for learners to experience other cultures (Lázár *et al.*, 2003) by exposing them to a variety of texts that contain social and cultural information and stimulate reflection on cultural diversity, cultural differences and similarities. The ultimate goal of my approach was to lead learners to successful interactions with people of different cultural backgrounds through the medium of the English language (Kramsch, 1993; Steele, 2000; McKay, 2002). I therefore sought to establish a 'sphere of interculturality' where



learners develop an appreciation and tolerance of foreign cultures, in general, in relation to their own culture (Kramsch, 1993: 205).

#### **4.3.2.2.3 The syllabus**

- **Identity**

During the first lesson I introduced an ice-breaking activity on identity (see Appendix 7). I asked the class to interview each other around themes suggested by students themselves: Name, Age, Studies, Nationality, Job. My objective was to introduce learners to the differences and similarities which define our multiple identities. The discussion which followed the activity evolved around our uniqueness and our need for belonging as well as our differences despite the fact that we may belong to the same ethnic group.

- **Description of ethnic cultures**

The course then focused on pre-writing techniques and the first type of paragraphs: description. These tasks were associated with the theme “ethnic cultures”. I first introduced the different pre-writing techniques by building on the whole class input; this collective work was copied and handed to learners to be used for their first written assignment: a descriptive type of paragraph.

The main objectives of the activity were to focus on the concepts of culture and of cultural diversity. More specifically, it aimed to:

- instigate reflection on what culture is
- raise awareness of limited knowledge of cultural others, thus stimulate curiosity for further knowledge of other cultures
- raise cultural self-awareness by focusing awareness of cultural differences and similarities

- provide opportunities to experience other cultures
- stimulate reflection on cultural diversity, cultural differences and similarities.

Discussions were initiated after I delivered a collection of student work resulting from the pre-writing session, before students drafted the descriptive paragraph, as well as after I marked their productions; these debates fostered the ability to decentre by triggering reflection on

- generalisations
- negative and positive stereotypes
- ethnic cultures-identities and multiple identities
- learners' own culture in relation to other cultures

in order to challenge preconceived ideas on other cultural groups, enhance students' awareness of their stereotypes and prejudices and clarify their attitudes: attitudes of indifference or hostility towards other culture(s).

I introduced both the theme and pre-writing techniques by asking students to generate ideas around the topic 'Americans'. I then gave students four ethnic cultures (Italians, Arabs, English, Gypsies), one for each pre-writing technique (freewriting, clustering, brainstorming, asking questions) and asked them to write down what might describe each culture. Later, having gathered input from every student, I copied their ideas on a grid and invited them to use this collective work to write a paragraph on a chosen culture. Discussions preceding and following the writing activity evolved around how appropriate the information given was (e.g. Taj Majal associated with Arabs), misconceptions (Arabs: fanatics, terrorists), outdated assumptions ('The Arabs travel with camels'), generalisations ('Italians love the opera and they all sing it'/ 'The Gypsies are poor

because they don't have jobs') and the reasons that certain ethnic groups gathered more positive or negative comments than others (see Appendix 8).

The choice of the specific ethnic groups was not random; I assumed that these groups would be associated with either positive or negative stereotypes and sought to 'develop awareness' on the reasons for this occurrence (Hernández Sheets, 2005: 64). Stereotypes are defined as 'oversimplified images or ideas held by a person or by a group toward another person or group' (*op. cit.*: 53) while negative attitudes such as stereotypes or prejudice lead to 'unsuccessful interactions' (Byram, 1997: 34). During the second implementation of the syllabus, I decided to replace Gypsies (Summer students knew very little about them and thus felt inadequate) with Cypriots in order to foster knowledge of the self.

My focus was more on self-awareness and awareness of others rather than on 'declarative knowledge', that is knowledge 'about social groups and their cultures in one's own country' and in the 'interlocutor's country' (Byram, 1997: 35). Based on the premise that learners need to reflect on their own culture in relation to other cultures (McKay, 2002) and that reflection on the target culture(s) should not only focus on differences and similarities, I mapped out my approach: I encouraged learners to analyse differences and similarities from the viewpoint of others and establish a relationship between their own system and others' (Byram, 1997; McKay, 2002; Skopinskaja, 2003). The ability to decentre (Byram, 1997) was my goal. My intention was to encourage students to adopt attitudes of openness and sensitivity to cultural difference: learners should not feel obliged to embrace everything in the other culture, but should be encouraged to 'postpone judgement of the aspects of the other culture

until these have been analysed in an intercultural perspective' (Steele, 2000: 200).

- **Comparison and contrast of one's life with a young immigrant's life**

Challenging stereotypes was also the objective of the activity based on a young immigrant's life story. I used an extract from an article which described a young Mexican (who was the age of most students in the class), an illegal immigrant in the U.S.A., and asked students to produce a comparison and contrast text. Drawing on and valuing students' lived experience, the activity invited them to analyse their own (young) culture and that of an immigrant's in order to develop an 'understanding/perception of own culture' and that of others (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997: 61). Here, I aimed at exposing students 'to existing inequalities and instill critical consciousness' in them (Matthews, 2005: 95), to 'raise awareness about one's privilege' (Allen Morrow and Torres, 2002: 144), in view of building empathy. 'Intercultural learning' can be described as 'social learning', which includes 'empathy' and 'solidarity' (Auernheimer, 1990 cited by Fennes and Hapgood, 1997: 55). Empathy is defined as 'the ability to put oneself in someone else's position, thus to be able to see this person's problems from his or her point of view' while solidarity is 'a principle contrary to rivalry and competition' and 'implies common action with others' (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997: 55). In this way, I tried to integrate an affective component to learning, one considered necessary in order to engage learners (Osler, 2005) and to clarify attitudes 'of indifference and hostility' towards other culture(s) (Steele, 2000: 200), specifically (undocumented) immigrant populations in Cyprus.

By making connections between their own lives and the young immigrant's, learners should recognise their 'common humanity' (Osler and Starkey, 2005: 19). By putting themselves in his place, they should also develop their 'openness and readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief' about their own (*savoir-être*) (Byram, 1997: 34).

Another learning objective was to build 'respect for human dignity and equality of rights' (Osler and Starkey, 2005: xiv) by laying open the issues of child labour and child migration.

- **Summarising tasks on stereotypes and migration**

The migration theme was further approached during Autumn 2007 when students were asked to summarise in small groups a variety of articles which illustrated reasons leading to migration, problems faced by migrants in Spain, and a description of migrant populations in London with a focus on the Greek Cypriot community. The rationale behind these choices was to introduce learners to the issue of migration across countries and time and draw parallels between Cyprus with what is happening around the world, thus placing the issue into a wider context. One text in particular highlighted that Cyprus was until recently a migrating country and not only a destination for immigrants.

The learning objective here was to guide students into being 'critically aware' of their context (Guilherme, 2002: 31) and putting themselves in others' positions in order to 'see a relationship between different cultures' (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997: 62). This more political topic arose from an interest in preparing students to be active citizens and participate fully in a democratic society, a central concern in critical pedagogy.

In Summer 2007, the summarising task was introduced through a variety of articles which demystified ethnic, gender, or youth stereotypes in an effort to deconstruct the concept of stereotypes. Youth stereotypes were chosen in order to stress that learners themselves may be the target of unfair generalisations, thus drawing parallels between the self and others. Given the difficulty students seemed to have in comprehending the concept of stereotypes, I removed these texts in Autumn 2007 and replaced them with ones on migration.

- **A persuasive text on cross-cultural marriages**

The activity on cross-cultural marriages similarly aimed at establishing a relationship between learners' own culture and others'. Seeking a balance between the cognitive and emotional components of the learning process (Adams *et al.*, 2007), the activity was introduced with the viewing of a film extract featuring a young Jewish woman who wishes to marry a young Russian man against her father's will and her community's practices, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Students then brainstormed the advantages and disadvantages of cross-cultural marriages, choosing a side in order to justify their opinion and write a persuasive text. Encouraging students to think critically and reach their own conclusions through an activity should naturally lead to meaningful discussion and writing (Hafernik *et al.*, 2002); learners were given the opportunity to choose a position for or against intercultural or interfaith marriages. However, I hoped that the discussion, the brainstorming session and the formulation of arguments would instigate reflection on what can bring people of different cultures together into close relationships. My intention was therefore to 'provoke cognitive dissonance' by providing opposed learning which would 'conflict with prior beliefs' (Causey *et al.*: 2000) thus enhancing self-awareness and recognition of prejudice. Another pedagogic

concept tapped by the activity was the prompting of learners 'to deal with culture at an emotional level' which, by drawing on experiential learning, interweaves 'both cognitive and affective components of the learning process' (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997: 72-73).

Both the activities described above, with reference to a Jewish community and to a Mexican boy living in the U.S.A., favoured the inclusion 'of non-European cultures in curriculum content' so as to avoid a Eurocentric approach (Guilherme, 2002: 43).

- **Description of Cypriots according to a Pan-European survey**

In Autumn 2007, I brought to class an article which compared Cypriots to their European counterparts and which, I believed, could offer closure to the intercultural syllabus.

The article, which portrayed Cypriots as having little tolerance towards foreigners amongst other attributes, also sought to deconstruct one's own perspective, give an outsider's view so that learners could 'take a distance and observe oneself as an outsider' (Alred, 2003: 24). Becoming 'conscious of [our] own perspective, of the way [our] thinking is culturally determined, rather than believing that [our] understanding and perspective is natural' (Byram, 2000 a.: 11) should foster an understanding of other cultures and lead to their 'acceptance and valorisation' (*savoir-être*) (Lázár *et al.*, 2007: 25).

#### **4.3.2.3 Teaching approaches**

In this section, I briefly refer to how I undertook engaging learners with these materials. I refer to the approaches used to engage learners with

the materials, for 'a pedagogy of difference does not mean the simple expansion of topics' (Guilherme, 2002: 45).

...teachers engaging in transformative work should be aware that the *what* (curriculum content) and the *how* (instructional practice) must work together to bring about change in a student's perception of the world.

(Matthews, 2005: 97)

Interrogating the transmission model of teaching which views a learner as passive (Morgan and Cain, 2000) and a teacher as a transmitter of knowledge (Giroux, 1988) or as 'expert knower' (Matthews, 2005: 95), I encouraged students to actively participate in the construction of the lesson and to contribute their prior knowledge and experiences. Although I decided on the themes and prepared the lesson structure and handouts in advance, I gave students increased curricular control by integrating their contribution into the syllabus and encouraging them to use other student input. By incorporating student work I hoped to give them an active voice, to help them recognise their experiential knowledge and to make teaching relevant to their lives (Norton and Toohey, 2004). To forge a small beginning, I used 'the experiences and understandings' learners brought to class (Nieto, 2004: 382).

Further, I established small group or whole-class cooperation which sought to promote learner autonomy, create opportunities for students to learn from each other and bring 'the individual student voice into contact with the voices of others through dialogue' (Matthews, 2005: 102). Learner autonomy was also fostered through the encouragement of the use of



dictionaries and the development of research skills when asking learners to undertake searches on the internet at home and bring the results to class.

Dialogical relations were also the objective of debates emerging from the readings or from students' written work which was copied and brought to class. Freire's (1970: 62) concept of dialogic teaching legitimates and values students' knowledge as they are 'no longer docile listeners' but 'critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher'. These debates aimed at providing opportunities for structured 'reflection on new information and experiences' (Causey *et al.*: 2000). Establishing a more democratic learning environment with a focus on 'listening actively to other students' (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997: 64) as well as participative teaching with course content more relevant to their interests and experiences aimed to increase learner motivation and participation.

A democratic environment is a *sine qua non* for transmitting democratic principles such as tolerance or respect for differences. The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers' Recommendation (1985: 3) underscores that

Democracy is best learned in a democratic setting where participation is encouraged, where views can be expressed openly and discussed, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, and where there is fairness and justice.

On the other hand, encouraging learners to use each other's input without sufficient prior reflection risked reinforcing negative stereotypes rather than challenging them.

#### **4.3.3 CHOICE OF SETTING**

While Cyprus is my wider environment, my workplace was my immediate research context. Intercollege, which has recently become the University of Nicosia, is an English-speaking private tertiary institution which receives young people (aged mostly 18-25) pursuing graduate or postgraduate studies in a variety of academic programmes.

My original goal was to conduct intercultural education research. After considering different options, such as conducting ethnographic research in state schools, I opted for investigating my workplace and more specifically my students and teaching. Educational institutions are such socio-culturally complex places, that conducting research in my own seemed the wisest choice. Classroom-based research offered me the possibility of combining my commitment to teaching with professional learning, assuming both teacher and researcher roles. Since the focus of practitioner-based inquiry originates from and 'informs the professional concerns of educators' (Murray and Lawrence, 2000: 9), I was hoping that my study would benefit my students, myself and my institution.

Then came the choice of a syllabus design. Unlike Cypriot state schools, primary or secondary, where the curriculum is extremely state controlled leaving little space for teachers' initiative or creativity, my higher education institution allows for lecturers' initiative in modelling syllabi. Lecturers enjoy a relative academic freedom, being assigned broad directives which leave them space to decide on or adapt the syllabus, textbooks, grading and attendance policies, assessment or teaching methodologies. It thus seemed an appropriate environment for developing and implementing teaching materials and strategies as part of the study.

My research project also originated from what I conceived to be a problematic issue in my working environment. The University of Nicosia promotes a commitment to multiculturalism which emerges from an international student body (from a total of 5,000 students 18% are international students, of 80 different nationalities); however, I had observed that many students stay within their own ethnic community which I interpreted as a lack of curiosity for other cultures. Guided by the increasingly accepted principle that intercultural education is also profitable to local populations (EUMC, 2004) who are 'generally the most miseducated about diversity' (Nieto, 2004: 353) and by the reality of my context (the large majority of my students are Greek Cypriots), my intention was to facilitate learners' insights into other cultures and place the emphasis on mutual understanding. My initial assumption was that local students are 'at the stage of monoculturalism', with limited contacts with culturally different persons, which leads them to believe that there is only one correct perspective, theirs, and that 'variation is fundamentally deviant' (Ramsey and Williams, 2003: 150). I later refined my focus to the enhancement of intercultural competence, which assisted me in adopting a less condescending attitude towards learners. I now feel that we all are more or less prejudiced and that my research and practice should be striving to produce intercultural speakers, an ideal towards which I aim myself.

#### **4.3.4 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Having decided to conduct research within my classroom, I chose one class in the Summer 2007 semester and used the revised materials with a second class (of the same level but with different students) during the following semester, in Autumn 2007. As I teach both French and English language courses, I was faced at first with the dilemma of which language

class to select. The main reason I chose English is that French classes remain at beginners' levels whereas the advanced level of ENG-100 offered the advantage of more complex communication with students: materials and class interactions could address more complex issues and their essays could be used as data. I also judged that English, as the world language *par excellence*, facilitated an intercultural syllabus even more than French and my goal of referring to otherness in terms of any other culture.

All students who attended these two ENG-100 courses are my participants. The term participant is preferred in qualitative research to replace the word subject often used in quantitative research; it implies a more active role and a more equal relationship between the two (Holloway, 1997). During the implementation of my intervention, I tried to adopt an inclusive stance which would enable students to express their opinions, voice their experiences, and contribute to the process of knowledge creation. Similarly, I have been vigilant to preserve their voices and represent them in the present account as accurately as possible. All students contributed with their input in creating data, hence new knowledge and understandings, but some students contributed more actively with their essays and interviews.

In an effort to obtain a diverse sample of students, I selected those of both genders, of diverse English language skills, academic achievement and perceptions of cultural otherness – the latter based on my first impressions from class discussions and first readings of their essays. Few students sampled are non Greek Cypriot and this reflects the composition of the two classes, as indeed most classes at the University of Nicosia. My analysis therefore refers mostly to the Cypriot context. I chose to include

international, Turkish-Cypriot, and bicultural students because I believe that a crucial feature of a syllabus should be to allow giving voice to minority views.

#### **4.3.4.1 Student essay sampling**

A purposive sample of 51 student essays was selected, produced by 22 students (11 for each course). More precisely the 51 scripts were sampled as follows:

**Summer 2007:** 24 scripts on 4 topics written by 11 students: 9 Greek Cypriot, 1 Turkish Cypriot, and 1 Russian. 5 are female and 6 are male and their age ranges from 18 to 38.

1. prewriting task for description of ethnic cultures (excerpts of 8 scripts)
2. comparison or contrast of one's life with a young immigrant's life (10 essays)
3. a persuasive text on cross-cultural marriages (2 essays)
4. final examination (4 essays in comparison or contrast of one's life with an immigrant's life)

**Autumn 2007:** 27 scripts on 3 topics written by 11 students: 10 Greek Cypriot, 1 Indian. Two of the Greek Cypriot students are children of intercultural marriages, therefore bicultural. 7 are female and 4 are male and between 18 and 24 years old.

1. prewriting task for description of ethnic cultures (excerpts of 9 scripts)
2. comparison or contrast of one's life with a young immigrant's life (8 essays)
3. a persuasive text on cross-cultural marriages (10 essays)

## STUDENT POPULATION

SUMMER 2007			
Ethnic Background	9 Greek Cypriot	1 Turkish Cypriot	1 Russian
Gender	5 female	6 male	
Age	18 to 38 years old		
Total students	11		
AUTUMN 2007			
Ethnic Background	10 Greek Cypriot (2 bicultural)	1 Indian	
Gender	7 female	4 male	
Age	18 to 24 years old		
Total students	11		
Total students (both courses)	22		

## STUDENT SCRIPTS

TYPE OF WRITING	SUMMER 2007	AUTUMN 2007	TOTAL SCRIPTS (PER TYPE)
Prewriting task for description of ethnic cultures	excerpts of 8 scripts	excerpts of 9 scripts	17
Comparison or contrast of one's life with a young immigrant's	10 essays	8 essays	18
A persuasive text on cross-cultural marriages	2 essays	10 essays	12
Final examination (comparison or contrast of one's life with an immigrant's life)	4 essays	-	4
<b>Total scripts</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>51</b>

**Table 3: Sampling of students' written production**

### 4.3.4.2 Interview respondents

Three students in each course, hence a total of six, were interviewed. Two other students selected, a male Greek Cypriot and a female Turkish Cypriot initially consented but did not respond to my request for the actual interview, after the end of the course.

The students who were interviewed are presented in the table below:

SUMMER 2007			AUTUMN 2007		
Name	Age	Studies	Name	Age	Studies
Eleni	38	Graphic Design (1 <sup>st</sup> year)	Stephanos	25	Nursing (1 <sup>st</sup> year)
Chloe	21	Graphic Communication (3 <sup>rd</sup> year)	Asha	18	Nursing (1 <sup>st</sup> year)
Pavlos	22	Communications (2 <sup>nd</sup> year)	Eva	19	Interior Design (1 <sup>st</sup> year)

**Table 4: Interview respondents**

#### **4.3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS / ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

The nature of the questions asked about the research topic led my choice of data collection methods (Stage and Manning, 2003). In action inquiry almost everything that occurs in the setting described qualifies as data in order to ascertain an understanding of specific behaviours (Sagor, 2005). Since one of my research concerns was the enhancement of students' intercultural competence, I chose to include data which would indicate their response to the syllabus: their writings and interviews. Further, I included a reflective diary as a means of recording observation on class events and supporting the research questions on my own learning and professional development. In an attempt to triangulate information and open spaces for participants' voices, I designed a study with multiple forms of data. The materials developed for the purpose of the intercultural syllabus can also be considered as raw data.

I now review each of these sources:

- student essays
- reflective diary
- student interviews

#### **4.3.5.1 Student essays**

Choosing to include student essays in the inquiry was a means of gaining insight into students' worlds: their life experiences, their perceptions of otherness, their response to the syllabus. I therefore explore students' writings as the result of their own critical thinking and not as the mimicking of my own beliefs (Blessing, 2007). I however feel concerned about the influence of an asymmetrical relationship on the authenticity of their work, further developed in the section 4.3.7.2 "Power differentials/Limitations of classroom-based research".

##### **4.3.5.1.1 Content analysis**

For the analysis of the student essays, I employed a qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic technique for grouping and compressing many words of written or oral text into a much smaller amount of text (Weber, 1990; Krippendorff, 2004), for summarising and reporting data (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). It is therefore a means for data reduction. Systematic means that content 'is selected according to explicit and consistently applied rules' (Wimmer and Dominick, 2005: 151).

The significance of this method, quite popular in mass media research, is that it enables the content analyst to gain insights and increase his/her 'understanding of particular phenomena' (Krippendorff, 2004: 18). Though content analysis is common in quantitative research, usually assumed to correspond to a precise count of words, 'it is also used in qualitative research' (Silverman, 2001: 159). Moreover, Krippendorff (2004: 16) questions 'the validity and usefulness of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative content analysis' since he suggests that all



reading of texts is eventually qualitative, 'even when certain characteristics of text are later converted into numbers'.

Qualitative content analysis is also referred to as thematic analysis and sometimes as discourse analysis (Silverman, 2001). The researcher reduces data by coding them, which involves placing units of analysis into category themes (Wimmer and Dominick, 2005) in order to recognise meanings (Krippendorff, 2004), examine trends, and identify values and attitudes of text producers (Kramarae *et al.*, 2000).

Content analysis can serve many purposes (Weber, 1990). In my case, the focus of my analysis is the identification of students' cognitive and 'attitudinal responses' to the syllabus, and the description of trends in their communication that may reveal their attention as individuals and 'reflect cultural patterns' of their group (young university students in Cyprus) (*op. cit.*: 9).

#### **4.3.5.1.2 The process**

The units of the analysis are themes defined here as 'a single assertion about one subject' (Wimmer and Dominick, 2005: 158) identified in a sentence, or a sequence of sentences. In some rare cases, phrases were also considered. I therefore used referential units, which emphasise what is being discussed (Riffe *et al.*, 2005).

Content categories were not predefined but they were coded after close scrutiny which allowed for themes to emerge from the data. I thus opted for 'emergent coding' and established 'categories after a preliminary examination of the data' (Wimmer and Dominick, 2005: 159). Naturally,

my coding and categorisation were also influenced by my areas of interest and the constructs emerging from the theory around intercultural communicative competence as discussed in section 4.3.5.3.5. Content analysis uses 'both pre-existing categories and emergent themes in order to generate or test a theory' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 476).

More specifically, I proceeded by examining the data, to identify concepts and group them into categories so as to recognise trends and make inferences about significant meanings. The level of generalisation was considered as I had to determine whether words fell into the same semantic category. My categorisation follows Weber's (1990: 37) definition: 'A category is a group of words with similar meaning or connotation.' I opted for the categorisation of the most similar concepts, even when they appeared in different forms, so as to limit subjectivity and maximise replicability. The similarity between words and phrases was based on 'the precise meaning of words (synonyms)' but also on words and phrases 'sharing similar connotations' (implying a concern for the same concept) (*loc. cit.*) (e.g. category Finances: *no money/ not enough money/ very poor/ financial problems*). The end result is a number of tables which were used to describe the main themes and to assist me in comparisons and drawing conclusions.

Since the sample consists of 51 essays written by 22 students, I chose not to 'ignore "irrelevant" information' as suggested by Weber (1990) but to examine every utterance. In this way, I applied the principle of exhaustivity according to which 'every unit of analysis' must be placed into a category (Wimmer and Dominick, 2005: 160). Nevertheless, I did not apply the principle of exclusivity which asks that a unit of analysis 'be placed in one and only one category' (*loc. cit.*). The rationale behind this

choice is that several themes emerge from the same sentence or sequence of sentences.

#### **4.3.5.2 Reflective diary**

One of the data sources was a reflective diary which I regularly kept during both teaching sequences (Summer and Autumn 2007), before and after each teaching unit. At the time of teaching and implementing the syllabus, the diary served as an observation tool and an *aide-mémoire*, since I documented my class observations, my personal thoughts and insights on classroom occurrences. Having divided the diary in two columns (before and after each lesson), I recorded in the first column factual and reflective comments which included the description of what I intended to do, lesson or unit plans and in the second column what actually took place. The diary thus includes 14 entries corresponding to 14 lessons in Summer 2007 and 26 entries/lessons in Autumn 2007. Further, I included a few additional entries under the heading "Critical conversations" where I recorded insights resulting from discussions with critical friends.

I approached the data with thematic analysis by examining the diary in search of concepts, themes and content categories. The units of analysis were identified here in sequences of sentences. I therefore allowed themes to emerge from the data, but due to the nature of the data source I mostly used pre-existing categories which reflect the main learning objectives of the courses. The process led me to the identification of different themes such as "Perception of other cultures: valuing other", "Reflection on migration" or "Establishing a democratic environment", under which I placed extracts of diary entries.

The reflective diary served three main purposes:

- monitoring my actions as a teacher/ensuring a successful implementation of the syllabus
- monitoring my actions as a researcher/ensuring a successful research study
- raising self-awareness/becoming a reflective practitioner-researcher

#### **4.3.5.2.1 Monitoring my actions as a teacher-researcher**

One definition of a diary which fits my purpose is a 'first person account' of a teaching and research experience, 'documented through regular candid entries' 'and then analysed for recurrent patterns and salient events' (Bailey, 1990: 215).

The documentation of class events in the diary and my subsequent reflections permitted me to navigate from the role of active participant to the role of participant observer (Osborn, 2000); participant observation is 'a way to collect data in naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the ... activities of the people studied' (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002: 2). Mills (2006: 58), on the other hand, suggests that teachers are active participant observers 'by virtue of teaching' because they observe their own teaching practices. What I normally do in my practice, observe my students' reactions so as to modify and adapt my teaching, was emphasised here through the regular use of the diary. Stepping back from classroom events during the keeping of the diary allowed me to take a greater distance and observe myself and my practice.

The diary, following my research foci, endeavoured to detect students' perceptions regarding cultural diversity and their responses to the course:

whether the syllabus generated (or did not generate) reflection on and deeper understanding of cultural diversity issues among students. This automatically meant assuring the quality of learning by assessing the success of the course and making necessary changes to the syllabus and teaching methods for future implementation. I thus sought evidence of my educative influence on students as defined by McNiff *et al.* (2003: 48):

...the idea that our potentials for influence are embodied in the way we act implies that influence is in the quality of our relationships. If those relationships are educative and grounded in commitments to freedom for all to learn to grow, the influence will probably also be educative.

Consequently, the diary functioned as a tool for checking and ensuring that my work had the educative influence I intended and/or whether learners' educational responses differed from the ones I had hoped for (*op. cit.*). This in turn called for the examination and explanation of my practice and the values which inform my actions.

The diary supported my reflections during the whole project: classroom events that indicate trends in students' responses, my reactions, or my colleagues' feedback. In this way, I recorded my reflections on both my students and on myself. The diary therefore offered me 'a basis to reflect on and evaluate what had happened, and to plan further action' (*op. cit.*: 100). Monitoring my actions was essential at the time, as this was my first experience of classroom-based research. Recording and looking back at my actions and students' responses (retrospective reflection) guided me to my next uncertain step (anticipatory reflection). Reflection is central to the life of an educator and it is 'in the very nature of the pedagogical relation

that the teacher reflectively deals with' young people 'rather than doing so unthinkingly, dogmatically' (Van Manen, 1995: 33). Here, my systematic reflection on progress contributed to an increased understanding of my actions and the resulting classroom dynamics.

At the same time, diaries or logs are highly recommended in qualitative research as a technique to refine research foci (Sagor, 2004) and to record the progression of events and of one's understanding of research (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002; Silverman, 2005). Narrative accounts are becoming more widespread nowadays in classroom-based qualitative research (Reagan and Osborn, 2002); they are regarded essential to action inquiry (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) and are often used as major sources of data in self-reflective action inquiry (Kember, 2000; Herr and Anderson, 2005). The diary monitored the study through reflections on data collection methods, the intercultural materials or the connections between readings around intercultural competence and my teaching, thus ensuring that practice applied relevant theories.

#### **4.3.5.2.2 Raising self-awareness**

Writing a diary, registering an ongoing reflection, is widely used in professional education and development with the objective of raising awareness and gaining insight in one's practice (Richards and Nunan, 1990; Moon, 2006). Traditionally, the distinction between reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action is made, and it is understood as a cyclical process that leads practitioners from reflection to action, then back to reflection and so on (Schön, 1983). Reflection-in-action describes reflection at the moment of teaching; reflection-on-action is reflection that takes place after teaching whereas reflection-for-action precedes the teaching event. Reagan and Osborn (2002: 23) note that

reflection-for-action, whose main purpose is to guide future action, should be seen 'as an on-going spiral', of action-reflection-new action, 'in which each of the elements of reflective practice are constantly involved in an interactive process of change and development.'

Reflection on the self is therefore an introspection that should lead to increased self-awareness. Critical pedagogues point to self-awareness and to the concept of conscientization (Freire, 2005) which refers to critical reflection as a means for educators to become aware of 'the implications of their personal and professional experiences' and develop 'cultural and political awareness' (Phipps and Guilherme, 2004: 3). Critical reflection is questioning our beliefs and values behind our actions in order to become political and cultural agents (Osborn, 2005) and transform our classrooms into sites of social change (Reagan and Osborn, 2002). Struggle for self-awareness should lead to praxis (theory-informed practice), which in my case, should guide 'students' cognitive and emotional growth in terms of intercultural sensitivity' (Guilherme, 2002: 159).

Furthermore, reflective practice is considered a meaningful and effective professional development strategy, 'a way of thinking that fosters personal learning, behavioural change and improved performance' (Osterman and Kottkamp, 2004: 1). Schön (1983) initiated the use of the term "the reflective practitioner" referring to those who learn to learn about their practice in order to become better practitioners. In fact, reflection, which can be considered 'as a conversation with oneself' (McNiff *et al.*, 2003: 26), is at the heart of action inquiry, defined as 'systematized reflection', because it forces teachers to look at their practice 'objectively and carefully, to formulate ideas for new action and to try them out' (Ur, 1998: 18). Reflection on practice in action inquiry should result in the

development of self-understanding to a great extent as 'the analysis of data and the interpretive process of developing meanings involves the self as a research instrument' (Somekh, 2006: 8). As Herr and Anderson (2005: 35) note 'unexamined, tacit knowledge of a site tends to be impressionistic, full of bias, prejudice' that needs 'to be surfaced.'

#### **4.3.5.3 Student interviews**

Recorded semi-structured interviews are one of the data collection methods I chose in order to seek student input on the intercultural syllabus, hence in order to develop new insights about my practice.

Semi-structured interviews consist of a prepared but 'sufficiently open-ended' schedule to allow for re-ordering of questions, digressions, expansions, and further probing (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 182). In this type of data collection method, the interviewer 'can seek both clarification and elaboration on the answers given' and in this manner enter into a dialogue with the interviewee who is freer to answer on his/her terms than in a structured interview; at the same time they provide a greater structure for 'standardization and comparability' over that of unstructured interviews (May, 2001: 123).

##### **4.3.5.3.1 Language**

These interviews were conducted in the Greek Cypriot dialect, the students' mother tongue, so as to allow respondents to express as much information as possible. Only in one case, the medium of the interview was English as the participant was an international student. The choice of the Cypriot dialect gives it a more informal and more intimate nature as it is the language in which my Greek Cypriot students and I naturally use to communicate with each other outside class. Moreover, the informal



singular form of address is generally used from both interviewee and interviewer.

#### **4.3.5.3.2 Time and duration**

The interviews were conducted after the end of the course and the delivery of grades. This was a deliberate choice so as to limit data contamination and to gather the most potentially honest responses. Naturally, the power relation between teacher and the taught was still present and has certainly influenced the sincerity of responses but this is unavoidable in classroom-based research. It is difficult to know whether their answers would have been different if interviewers had been hired. However, in that case the relation developed between students and myself, and the emotional encounter between two subjects during the interview process would be missing (Silverman, 2006). Interviews lasted between 5 and 16 minutes, which seemed at the time the appropriate duration to obtain student impressions on the courses. Variation in interview duration reflects participants' personality and availability for the interview process but also the relation between the interviewer and the interviewee.

#### **4.3.5.3.3 Location**

The main criterion of the location was that it could offer both parties privacy and comfort, bearing in mind that the place where the interviews are carried out can influence the way students respond. Since the importance of context is stressed in interviewing children (Christensen and James, 2000), we can extrapolate that similarly students' 'behaviour and attitudinal preferences are context dependent' (*op. cit.*: 103) and that the location 'plays a significant part in power relation dynamics' (Fraser *et al.*, 2004: 85).

Before the first set of interviews, in Summer 2007, I hesitated between the choice of my office and the college cafeteria thinking that the former was a quiet space at the institution easily accessible but which stressed the power relation (my space, a space new to them and one that underlines my authority). The cafeteria is our students' favourite space and one that should have reduced the asymmetry of relations but quite noisy at times. I therefore gave students the choice between the two locations. Two of them chose my office whereas the third one, Chloe, preferred the cafeteria. My impression during analysis of Chloe's interview was that the cafeteria had not been a wise choice as not only did the student feel very relaxed but so did I. Drifting away from the interview model, I intervened numerous times while she was searching for her words or to follow up on what she had said, engaging in a dialogue. The result was therefore unintentionally close to an emotionalist model: 'while positivists regard departure from interview schedule as a possible source of bias, emotionalists actively encourage it' (Silverman, 2006: 123), believing that interviewers should try to 'provide an atmosphere conducive to open and undistorted communication' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 8). Having in mind the experience with Chloe, I decided to avoid the cafeteria in Autumn 2007, and chose to conduct all interviews in my office. Chloe's interview is therefore the only one which was conducted at the university cafeteria; the five other interviews took place in my office.

#### **4.3.5.3.4 Interview questions**

The most challenging task was to find the appropriate questions which would identify students' impressions of the syllabus and the enhancement of their intercultural competence. Trying to be as indirect as possible so as to obtain frank and open answers (Tuckman, 1972), I elaborated some

questions around the topics covered, the materials and student learning. Based on students' responses in Summer 2007, I re-evaluated the efficiency of the questions or the degree of their directiveness and I changed, reworded, dropped, or expanded the questions in Autumn 2007.

Having prepared the questions for a semi-structured interview, which provided its skeleton (Rubin and Rubin, 2005), I intervened at times with prompts and probes to allow for greater depth: prompts enable the interviewer to clarify topics or questions while probes ask interviewees to extend, elaborate, and provide detail in order to address the depth of response (Morrison, 1993 quoted by Cohen *et al.*, 2007). In fact, the use of probes is highly recommended (May, 2001). I also changed the order or the wording of questions, from one interview to another or spontaneously added questions or comments. However, judging that some of my comments in Summer 2007 were too lengthy and/or directive, I tried to limit my remarks during the second set of interviews. For Cicourel (1964: 74) errors must be conceived 'as evidence not only of poor reliability but also of "normal" interpersonal relations.'

Though a degree of flexibility is acceptable in a semi-structured interview (May, 2001), this was also connected to a difficulty to take on the researcher identity and switch to my new role, the teacher-student relation being the first that I had established with them. I felt more comfortable in my teacher role, one that I have assumed for several years, whereas I resisted the researcher identity which was just taking shape. This conflict within my dual identity influenced the process and resulted in a greater latitude and informality. The difficulty in switching to my researcher role resulted in an interview guide approach. This type of interview remains fairly conversational and situational with 'topics and issues to be covered

specified in advance, in outline form' with the interviewer deciding the sequence and wording of question in the course of the interview. The interview guide ensures 'that the same basic lines are pursued with each person interviewed' (Patton, 2002: 343). The strengths of such interviews are that they permit greater freedom to the respondent while the outline increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes the data collection somewhat systematic; weaknesses include the reduced comparability of responses as 'flexibility in sequencing and wording question can result in substantially different answers' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 353). Moreover, a strict 'interview protocol' may impede on the interviewees' ability to 'trace with the interviewer how they have made sense of events and experiences' (Heyl, 2001: 375).

The complete set of interview questions can be found in Appendix 9.

#### **4.3.5.3.5 From transcription to first interpretations**

I now outline the steps I used to analyse interviews. I transcribed the interviews in Greek and translated them into English, while keeping theoretical memos during transcription and coding as advised by Wengraf (2001) to 'build the evolving process' of my reflection, to re-examine the focus of my analysis and refine my research questions (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 203). I then summarised the interviews to get a feel of each respondent's narrative. I also followed Wengraf (2001) to code and categorise data into a different transcript matrix for each interview.

In the beginning, there was considerable confusion and 'struggling' with the interpretation of evidence. This 'chaotic and emotional' process (*op. cit.*: 229) was gradually replaced by more clarity as I read through the matrices several times, identified new categories, and refined the old ones.

Each reading of the transcripts assisted me in refining and elaborating concepts and themes: concepts are defined as words or terms that represent an idea important to the research problem while themes are summary statements and explanations of what is going on (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). In this way, I modified the transcript matrix several times, changing categories, adding notes, thoughts and commentaries on rereading student responses.

Here is an example of a matrix, an extract from Stephanos' interview:

<b>intercultural competence enhancement/ learning objectives</b>	<b>Transcript Box no.</b>	<b>Other type of notes (observations/ reflections)</b>	<b>How can I improve the syllabus</b>
	5 <i>Why did you like it?</i>		
IC skills: ability to relate one's own cultural experience Drawing on students' experiences to construct the curriculum  Important for me even if it addresses a minority of students or exactly because they are a minority, generally neglected by national curriculum	6 I liked it because it is something I lived... that I live with every day. And I believe that it is right for me. I wrote it for you that it is right. I wrote it for you (smiles). For both essays (laughs).	establishing a 'sphere of interculturality', (Kramsch, 1993: 205) a 'third place' where international and bicultural students can express their multiple identities; helps them gain insights into their own (and other) cultures, 'take both an insider's and an outsider's view on both their first culture (C1) and their second (C2)' (Kumaravadivelu, 2007: 132)	
	7 <i>For both essays?</i>		
	8 You gave us an essay <i>to marry or not (in English)</i> , something like that, <i>to be accept (in English)</i> . At the <i>final (in English)</i> it was something similar. I wrote about the same topic in both.	He may mean 'to be accepted' as a bicultural child/as a foreign spouse	

**Table 5: Example of interviews transcript matrix**

#### **4.3.5.3.6 The Chart grouping all interviews**

Again, following Wengraf's (2001) recommendations, I gathered all the interview material in a chart so as to consider simultaneously all the answers and produce a unified answer to the central research question, which is the increased understanding of IC teaching and learning in FLE. More theory questions emerged from the participants' voices, the learning objectives that I had set for the course, and the theory around intercultural competence and critical pedagogy.

The comparison of the six interviews and the effort to process them in a similar way was very helpful, allowing me to check items for consistency and make an increased effort to find new evidence. This chart assisted me in clarifying the meaning of the different concepts, in synthesising ideas, and generating new concepts and themes by elaboration (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Table 6 on the following page illustrates the way the chart helped me in making sense of all the interviews.

<b>Research question</b>	TQ2 (theory question 2)  <i>dialogical relations and increased curricular control of students (CP) / building a democratic environment: learner autonomy and listening actively to peers</i>
<b>Interview 1 Eleni</b>	3 'the way that you taught us new theory with everything that was being said in class was the best one <i>Building on learners' knowledge</i> 17 'a chance (...) for us to listen to the knowledge that the other had it was good.' 27. 'Even during the breaks, whereas I thought, well of course they won't talk about the discussion we had, what are you talking about? It's a break, they want to forget, but, if you started them off with a word there was a discussion <i>Listening actively to peers</i>
<b>Interview 2 Chloe</b>	4. ... I didn't know that there were so many synonyms'. <i>Development of awareness on lexical variety joins the strategy of encouraging use of dictionary, therefore learner autonomy</i>
<b>Interview 3 Pavlos</b>	29. 'About the discussions? With that guy, the muscled one, he did all the talk. You know, nothing. There was nothing.' <i>Student felt left out because he did not participate in discussions.</i>
<b>Interview 4 Asha</b>	-
<b>Interview 5 Stephanos</b>	-
<b>Interview 6 Eva</b>	14... And we did some <i>research</i> (in English) about each population we chose. 56 ... when you are exci... excited about a ... a topic, and it has to do with let's say a home assignment, eh... I mean you may leave the class, no, I mean, definitely you leave class and you are interested in searching to find. <i>Refers to research: self-directed learning; research skills part of enhancing independent learning</i>
<b>Research literature</b>	Kincheloe and Steinberg, (1997: 24): teaching practices: dialogical relations and increased curricular control of students/ Byram, (1997: 33): embed the learning process within a broader educational philosophy, eg promote learner autonomy and create modes of teaching and learning accordingly/ Fennes and Hapgood (1997: 75) listening to others part of building a democratic environment

**Table 6: Extract of chart grouping all interviews**

Writing the present text served as another level of analysis. As I worked to present the voices of my participants, I continued to analyse and interpret the data.

#### **4.3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

##### **4.3.6.1 Validity and reliability in my action inquiry**

Having detailed the methods of data collection and the analysis of data, it is appropriate to now address the validity and reliability of the study.

McNiff *et al.* (2000; 2003) have argued against the relevance of validity and reliability in action inquiry since these standards translate in empirical research into generalisability and replicability; however, research findings cannot be generalised or replicated in action inquiry; the aim in this type of research is a deeper understanding of a singular situation and not the application of the same process to all situations. However, this does not mean that I need not be concerned with these criteria, so in pursuit of trustworthiness, I have taken several measures.

Three different data sources were used, considered here separately, in an effort to triangulate information. Methodological triangulation involves the use of many sources of evidence or multiple methods in order to overcome partial views. Triangulation of data sources is the most common technique in action inquiry to establish validity and reliability (Sagor, 2004). Since the findings obtained with these three methods draw similar conclusions, they increase confidence in the validity and reliability of the study.

As I have agreed with the principle that research is never neutral (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000) and stated that my findings are influenced by my values, my effort has been to reflect on these values and to state them as explicitly as possible (Griffiths, 1998) throughout the study so as to 'keep track' of this influence (Hatch, 2002: 10).

Moreover, I have tried to report in detail the procedures that I used to ensure that my methods were reliable and my conclusions valid (Silverman, 2005). Transparency of the research process is one of the key criteria for judging action inquiry (Lomax, 1994).



Having conducted an action inquiry, I am not interested in making claims in 'context-free knowledge' that can be generalisable but rather in 'contextual knowledge' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 150) and the degree to which outcomes offer a satisfactory solution to the problem initially posed in my context (Mills, 2003). Even more than solving a problem, in my case answering the question about the way I can approach intercultural competence in my practice, the outcome validity of the study leads to reframing the problem initially posed 'in a more complex way'. The study has indeed surfaced the complexities of transformative pedagogies with 'a new set of questions' (Herr and Anderson, 2005: 55) which I will be henceforth striving to answer. Further, even though I studied a unique situation, some of my findings may be relatable to other similar settings.

Unlike traditional research that measures findings and outcomes, my action inquiry findings have been fed back directly into practice and their validity is tested by their impact in generating 'practical wisdom' and 'situational understanding' (Somekh, 1995: 341). The deeper understanding of intercultural competence teaching and learning and of my context has led to improvements in my practice and has given me the incentive to aim at greater development in the future. Validity is judged in action inquiry not only by the improvement of practice but also by the closer integration of theory and practice and the identification of more effective ways of acting (Ellis & Kiely, 2000). The integration of critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, and intercultural competence theories in my practice and their testing through data analysis and interpretation has shown me the way forward for a revision of the intervention and the reconceptualisation of my role as a social justice educator.

#### **4.3.6.2 Student essays**

Student essays were approached through content analysis. Though it is pointed out that validity and reliability are crucial to content analysis (Wimmer and Dominick, 2005), it is at the same time recognised that the identification and classification of concepts poses certain problems: 'Reading is fundamentally a qualitative process, even when it results in numerical accounts' which may give 'different interpretations of the same message' (Krippendorff, 2004: 21). The ambiguity of word meanings therefore poses validity problems (Weber, 1990). It is thus acknowledged that the researcher makes his/her own conceptual contributions especially as his/her reading is guided by the relevance to the research questions (Krippendorff, 2004), which limits a particular content analysis 'to the categories and the definitions used in that analysis' (Wimmer and Dominick, 2005: 154).

My endeavour has been to increase validity and reliability by following Weber's (1990) recommendation: explicitly state the rules for my coding and be consistent in the classification procedure by coding text following the same process explained previously. As the rules for my analysis are explicit and public while data are in a permanent form (texts), it is possible to verify them 'through reanalysis and replication' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 475).

#### **4.3.6.3 Reflective diary**

Thoughts, impressions, and interpretations in my reflective diary are subjective but significant in making sense of classroom events, therefore in exploring my own teaching. Though this 'particular form of research data' has its limitations, it is valuable for research that focuses on the teacher-researcher's professional development (Taber, 2007: 143-144). It

constitutes evidence of learners' IC enhancement but mostly of the process of my own learning, the examination and surfacing of my perceptual biases (Winter, 1996) and my taken-for-granted practices which, in turn, has led to 'the ongoing problematization' of my practice; moreover, it evidences that the findings resulted from a reflective process which contributes to the 'process validity' of the study, thus my 'ongoing learning' (Herr and Anderson, 2005: 55).

#### **4.3.6.4 Student interviews**

May (2001: 127) claims that interviews 'elicit knowledge free of prejudice or bias' as they provide 'a means to explore the points of view' of research participants. I cannot concur with this assertion, since interview questions guide respondents to certain answers and one disadvantage of interviews is that they are 'prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 352). In fact, bias is considered one of the major threats to validity in interviews (*op. cit.*). This is why I carefully considered the questions before conducting the interviews so as to minimise bias and then I tried to conduct interviews respectfully in a two-way flow of information between respondents and myself. Although the flexibility of semi-structured interviews is considered a threat to reliability (Silverman, 2006), I have tried to enhance reliability in the way interviews were transcribed and analysed. The mere transcription of interviews, 'the transformation from oral speech to written text' can be considered 'a translation and an interpretation' (Kvale, 1996: 205) of respondents' words; in my case, there is another layer of subjectivity, as translation from Greek to English was involved. Aware of this, I have made an effort to carefully transcribe interviews and justify my interpretations; I have tried to suggest possible alternate interpretations, to avoid focusing only on evidence that supports my own opinions, or to 'selectively interpret and

report statements justifying my conclusions, overlooking counterevidence', and thus limit my biased subjectivity (*op. cit.*: 212).

#### **4.3.7 ETHICAL ISSUES**

##### **4.3.7.1 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations have arisen throughout the study. Before conducting the classroom-based study, I sought written permission by the institution authorities in order to obtain the necessary permission and approval (Hopkins, 2002) to use the institution's name and to conduct my research (see Appendix 11).

Next, during the first lessons, I communicated to all participants an ethical statement which described the purpose and principles of the study ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and use of the data for the sole purpose of my research and which sought their informed consent (see Appendix 12). Participants ought to have the right to refuse or terminate their involvement at any phase of the study but how would that be possible in classroom-based research? This was a main ethical concern and one that I feared might create a tension, as my students had not chosen a course which was part of a research study or which had an intercultural focus. A constant source of worry was whether the research component interfered with the accommodation of learners' needs (Shi, 2006). I therefore felt that it was a major responsibility for me to create a balance between the course objectives, and the development of their academic writing skills, and my own research objectives of enhancing their intercultural competence. Even though practitioner research enhances the capacity to assume a dual role (Murray and Lawrence, 2000), that of a teacher and of a researcher, I often struggled with feelings of guilt that my

researcher role hindered my responsibility as a teacher. This theme is recurrent in my reflective diary and developed in chapter five.

#### **4.3.7.2 Power differentials/Limitations of classroom-based research**

A complex issue of classroom-based research is that the power relationship which is normally at stake between researcher and participants, underlined by feminist researchers, is reinforced by the asymmetrical relationship between teacher and students. The teacher-student relation is widely acknowledged and has been stressed, for example by Bernstein (2003: 65) as 'intrinsically asymmetrical'. Bernstein asserts that the teacher's power and authority is always there even if strategies are used to disguise and hide it. Fraser *et al.* (2004: 84) posit that no strategy can entirely bridge the students' 'innate sense of power differential across the generation gap'. This called for constant checks that interaction was as democratic and inclusive as possible during the research process (O'Hanlon, 2003).

In the case of interviews, the asymmetrical relationship, which places the interviewer as having "expert" knowledge, may be illustrated when some respondents asked me whether their answer to my concluding question was correct. Briggs (2002 quoted by Smith, 2005: 136-137) believes that 'the asymmetries of power' are a general feature of sociological interviewing. On the other hand, interviewing students is a way to empower them as their individual opinion is sought; they are literally given a voice, 'they can feel affirmed... from being genuinely listened to' (Atkinson *et al.*, 2001: 375) and being asked to contribute more actively in the research process.

The power differentials may question the sincerity of participants' answers or written production which points to the 'truth status of respondents' account' (Silverman, 2001: 233). Baruch (1982 quoted by Silverman, 2001) focuses on how participants skilfully produce demonstrably "morally adequate" accounts; in his work, mothers concerned with how they will look in the eyes of others, display their moral responsibility and the status of morally adequate parenthood. A parallelism might lead to the assumption that my students demonstrate to me how they are good students by giving me positive feedback on my syllabus and teaching, thus sending me a message: "You expected me to learn from you and I did. You have succeeded in your role as a teacher which means that I have succeeded in my role as a student."

A similar concern is related to the authenticity of the opinions students express in their essays, especially as they knew that these would be assessed. Did they make a clear distinction between the assessment of their academic skills and the expression of their attitudes, just as I did? This I will never know but I hope that through my effort to create 'relationships' which were 'educative and grounded in freedom for all to learn and to grow' (McNiff *et al.*: 2003: 48) they were authentic in their writing.

#### **4.4 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate the factors which impinged on my choice of methodologies and research methods which were consistent with both the values base of the research and the research aims. In this way, I have detailed my research philosophical stance, the methodologies, and the methods used to conduct the study. The research

questions and the selection of participants were also outlined and the intervention described. Finally, I discussed the trustworthiness of the study as well as the ethical issues and limitations of classroom-based research.

In the next chapter, I provide a detailed account of the research findings. I present and analyse the collected data in order to construct an understanding of intercultural competence in my practice.





## **CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Having established the theoretical framework and the contexts of this study, and detailed the methods by which it was investigated, this section presents the research findings. In this chapter, I look across all the data in order to identify similarities and construct an understanding of IC in my practice.

Permeating the presentation in this chapter, the primary concerns of this study are:

- the increased understanding of my practice in order to reconceptualise it as one of a social justice educator, which entails
- the identification of students' perceptions and of their cognitive and attitudinal responses to the syllabus

The analysis is therefore two-fold: it focuses on students and on myself.

### **5.2 DATA SOURCES**

The sources of empirical data are:

- My reflective diary
- Student interviews
- Student written productions:
  - A prewriting task for description of ethnic cultures
  - A text of comparison or contrast of one's life with a young immigrant's life (Galo)
  - A persuasive text on cross-cultural marriages
  - A final examination of comparison or contrast of one's life with an immigrant's life

The three data collection methods are detailed in chapter four. Data from these sources have been analysed and synthesised to answer the research questions.

Note that the excerpts from student texts are presented in their original form, with the mistakes that learners make, in order to preserve originality. Any correction on my part would entail an interpretation and the reader is thus given the opportunity to construct his/her own understanding. Suspension points (...) indicate that text has been omitted because it is not relevant to the theme identified.

Similarly, in student interviews, the actual words of the respondents are directly reported in order to preserve their voice. At times, I add comments in parentheses () on students' body language, code-switching and words or phrases used in English, or the quality of the recorded sound. Suspension points (...) indicate pauses in the flow of the conversation. The students' words are reported in *italics* so that the reader can distinguish between the interviews and students' written productions, both introduced by the students' name.

Pseudonyms were given to students so as to preserve their anonymity.

As for the reflective diary, I include information written at the time of the intervention, supported by subsequent reflections. The excerpts from the diary are introduced by the date of the diary entry and numbered lessons in the order they were taught, followed by reflective comments in *italics*. Excerpts in grey shades mark meta-reflective comments, added after re-reading the reflective diary.

For more clarity for the reader, the original text from all three data sources appears indented. The table below gives an example of the presentation of the different data sources:

<b>Student texts</b>	Stephanos: ... their kids have 2 nationalities, are also bilingual, may have 2 religions, 2 cultures.
<b>Student interviews</b>	Stephanos: <i>'...foreigners are more self-centered than us but I don't forget that me too I am... half a foreigner... I mean I see others as they are. I mean, I hang out with foreigners, whether they are white or black, for me I see a human being. There is no difference. They have the same rights as me.'</i>
<b>Reflective diary</b>	<b>Lesson 19 - 4/12/07</b> Writing task 3: Contrast immigrant's life/theirs'. I introduce the topic 'immigrants' saying that we have looked at it before and asking them what it means... 'people moving from one country to another to live', says Theodoros. Stephanos adds <b>another language</b> and <b>another religion</b> .

**Table 7: The three data sources**

### **5.3 FINDINGS**

Data analysis undertakes to identify answers to the main research question: How does a foreign language teacher enhance learners' intercultural competence?

The exploration of the main research question entailed endeavouring to answer the four research sub-questions, therefore investigate student perceptions around cultural diversity and assess their response to the syllabus; hence by focusing on the enhancement of students' intercultural competence, data analysis sought to identify successful strategies for

teaching intercultural competence and thereby assist me in reconceptualising my practice as contributing to social justice.

The analysis does not set clear boundaries between the students and myself. Because of the nature of the study, there are inevitably overlaps between the focus on students and on my practice; in assessing the students' response to the courses I have to refer to and reassess my materials and strategies and vice versa.

Having adopted a qualitative approach, I do not feel concerned with the quantification of data. Nevertheless, the fact that several participants refer to a theme is considered significant; I therefore choose to present here the most recurrent concepts, 'the relative frequency and importance of certain topics' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 476), as well as those relevant to my research question. The percentages in parentheses ( ) indicate the number of texts where the theme was identified.

I therefore expand on the most recurrent themes which indicate the ways students perceive cultural otherness and the self as well as those that point to the enhancement of their intercultural competence. Following my main research interest, I also refer to the syllabus and the teaching strategies I employed to deliver the materials in order to identify those which are successful in IC enhancement.

During the data analysis the following main categories emerged:

## **I. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS/ REFLECTION**

- ATTACHMENT TO THE FAMILY
- CULTURAL ESSENTIALISING-REFLECTION ON CULTURE

- STEREOTYPING
- DIFFERENCE AS PROBLEMATIC
- CONTRADICTIONS IN PERCEIVING OTHERNESS
- *SAVOIR*-SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE
- EMPATHY BUILDING
- REFLECTION ON MIGRATION
- REINFORCING STEREOTYPES

## **II. DEVELOPMENT OF SELF AS A PROFESSIONAL**

- FOSTERING DIALOGICAL RELATIONS
- CREATING A SPHERE OF INTERCULTURALITY
- DETECTING MY PERCEPTIONS AND VALUES
- ETHICAL DILEMMAS
  - INDOCTRINATING STUDENTS?
  - OFFENDING LEARNERS' VALUES
  - LIMITATIONS OF CLASSROOM-BASED RESEARCH

The table on the following page presents the most recurrent themes and the specific data sources they emerge from.

THEMES	DATA SOURCES					
	Student interviews	Prewriting/ Description of ethnic cultures	Persuasive text on cross-cultural marriages	Comparison or contrast of one's life with a young immigrant's life	Comparison or contrast of one's life with an immigrant's life- Final examination	Reflective Diary
<b>1. Students' perceptions-reflection</b>						
ATTACHMENT TO THE FAMILY			X	X	X	
CULTURAL ESSENTIAL-ISING-REFLECTION ON CULTURE	X					X
STEREOTYPING		X	X		X	X
DIFFERENCE AS PROBLEMATIC		X	X			
CONTRADICTIONS IN PERCEIVING OTHERNESS	X	X				X
SAVOIR-SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE		X				X
EMPATHY BUILDING	X			X	X	
REFLECTION ON MIGRATION	X			X	X	
REINFORCING STEREOTYPES	X			X	X	X
<b>2. Development of self as a professional</b>						
FOSTERING DIALOGICAL RELATIONS	X					X
CREATING A SPHERE OF INTER-CULTURALITY	X		X			
DETECTING MY PERCEPTIONS AND VALUES						X
<b>ETHICAL DILEMMAS</b>						
INDOCTRINATING STUDENTS?	X					X
OFFENDING LEARNERS' VALUES	X		X			X
LIMITATIONS OF CLASSROOM-BASED RESEARCH						X

**Table 8: Themes emerging from data sources**

### **5.3.1 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS/REFLECTION**

#### **5.3.1.1 Attachment to the family**

Students' attachment to their families is apparent in their written productions, mainly the comparison/contrast, persuasive paragraphs and their final examinations. This theme is included because it strongly emerges from students' texts, therefore reflecting a significant aspect of my context. I posit here that students' strong connection to their families, the clan, "us" affects their perceptions of "others" as outsiders or intruders.

Family is the most recurrent theme traced in all the comparison and contrast texts produced by all students who refer to it in several forms. Several scripts (48%) mention that Galo, the young Mexican immigrant portrayed in the article, left his family or that he does not live with them. This is often contrasted to their own experiences of living in their parents' home. In many cases, this is simply stated without any judgement but the absence of the family attracts more attention than leaving one's country, an experience to which the particular students evidently cannot relate.

Marina: He left his family ... to go for studies at USA...

In some rare cases (15%), students state that they too live without their parents.

Myria: Also he is an immigrant and he lives without his parents... I live my country, but not my town. I live with my boyfriend.

Only two students seem to regard living alone as an accomplishment:

Eva: He live in his own he learn to live with his self... I live with my parents, in a family with four kids everyone with his/hers problems. .. He learn to live on his own and to do thinks by his own responsibility.

Some scripts (26%) explicitly express students' attachment to their families in various ways. The family and parental support are presented as beneficial, offering security and protection. In the Cypriot context, the nuclear family is a very important institution; most young people live with their parents (89% according to Cyprus HDR, 2009) and leave the family home when they are about to get married. Even the University of Nicosia students who come from other parts of Cyprus may be commuting daily or spending week-ends in their family homes. In one case, the student stresses her affection for her family through the use of terms like: mum, dad.

Sevgul: I feel safe with my mum and dad...

Panos: ... my parents give to me advise and help me to understand what is good for me and what is bad.

Dimitris: I do not have dangerous live with that kind of risk's. I live with my parents...

Parental control is in one case portrayed as a guarantee of educational success while the lack of parental protection is blamed for problems with school and the use of substances:



Marina: I go to school everyday because they check me all the time and I have never had bad friendships.

Some (17%) give an explanation for the character's addictive behaviour. Misreading the article which refers to Galo's life as a preteen when he was still in his home country, therefore with his family, the absence of the family is blamed for drug and alcohol use.

Panos: Galo as a preteen without his parents had many bad habits. He used to drink alcohol and to smoke marijuana... On the other hand, I don't have this bad habits because my parents give to me advise and help me to understand what is good for me and what is bad.

Marina: Galo's was alone in the "zoo" and he got involve with drugs and alcohol and the problems was starting.

Family ties are therefore a shelter from addictive and deviating behaviour.

The attachment to the family is also traceable in persuasive texts on cross-cultural marriages. The majority of students (67%) take a stance against cross-cultural marriages, therefore marriages outside the clan. Their stance is clearly stated in their topic sentences (the introductory sentence which expresses the controlling idea of a paragraph), most of which were suggested by students in a whole class session before the production of their texts.

Ioanna: Cross-cultural marriages have many advantages.

Elina: People of different cultures should not get married.

In this type of written production, the family of origin is also a frequent theme; some students believe that parents would disapprove of their child's choice:

Alexia: Especially the parent's find it hard to deal with their child's beloved one's traditions and customs.

Alexia probably speaks of her own experience since she is a child of a cross-cultural marriage. Though she takes a stand in favour of this type of marriage, her text revolves around social and parental pressure on the couple and its children. Other students predict that the couple will have to choose one of the two countries as their residence. In this choice they perceive a loss of one's country and family:

Constantinos: ...she probably won't feel well psychologically because she will be away from her country and family.

Theodoros: That means that one of them will be living outside of his nation permanently and will not be able to see his/her family very often.

The priority given to the family is also reflected in the consequences students predict for the children raised in a cross-cultural environment. For some students bilingualism and biculturalism is beneficial. Ioanna, who is in favour of cross-cultural marriages, values children's bilingualism.

Similarly, Stephanos, who also speaks of his own biculturalism, focuses on the advantage of children's dual experiences:

Ioanna: "...I'm sure that my children will have the advantage of language later in life".

Stephanos: ... their kids have 2 nationalities, are also bilingual, may have 2 religions, 2 cultures.

For 17% of learners, being away from one's family of origin logically leads to limited contact with the grandparents or the extended family:

Elina: Next, their relatives will not communicate with their children, because grandparents for example do not know the other language. Also, the children not to really know their relatives.

Failing to imagine bilingual or bicultural children, Elina perceives the interaction between two cultures in terms of subtraction rather than of addition:

Elina: One of the parents must be willing to not give to his/her children the culture traditions and national heritage that his/her has.

Lucas and Alexia go one step further by visualising bicultural children who are bullied at school. While Lucas implies that they will end up criticising their parents' choice which therefore represents a "wrong" choice, Alexia,

a bicultural child herself, describes children who are born into interfaith marriages as unhappy, depressed, and with an identity crisis.

Lucas: Also think about the children what will you say to them when they are big enough to andurstant. think of who the other children will critise at school.

Alexia: According to some research that took place in the institute of North carolina, the children of cross religious parent's are often unhappy because they are often bullied by other children at school, and being called traitors. They also don't fit in easily in groups and often end-up being as an individual and suffer from depression. The reason they suffer of depression is because they are not able to find an identity for themselves.

Strong bonds to the family are consequently a haven of safety for most learners and venturing outside to meet the unknown, represented by foreigners, may hide many threats.

#### **5.3.1.2 Cultural essentialising/Reflection on culture**

Learners' views of other cultures are quite visible in their work on pre-writing techniques. This activity was introduced during the early stages of the course and five ethnic groups were given to learners: Italians, Arabs, English, Gypsies, and Cypriots.

The analysis of students' work demonstrates that some groups are viewed as normal and superior whereas others are categorised as deviant or inferior. As I expected when I chose these groups, Italians and Cypriots

are mostly positively stereotyped whereas Gypsies, Arabs and to a lesser degree the English are negatively stereotyped. The latter are mostly attributed negative characteristics (violent, drinking, cold) but there is also reference to English as an international language. Thus, the only two groups which are valued are Italians and the self, Cypriots, a perception which I tried to question during a follow-up activity. This ethnocentric view extends to Italians, who are valued most likely because they are considered to be of a similar culture to one's own. This could have applied to the neighbouring Arabs, but they are mainly devalued most probably because they are situated in the East and associated with Islam. The following extracts illustrate student knowledge and views on the five ethnic groups they were asked to work on:

**Arabs:** *Elina:* They have many religions: Muslims–Islam– Work hard- No politics - No bath – dirty - Bad clothing-Black people *Lucas:* Muslims–different culture - Wars - Women have no rights– Men get married to a lot of women. *Philippos:* Nargileh–belly dance–Married to many women– money, rich –oil –diamonds –Hot country – sun –high temperature–desert-Sahara

**Italians:** *Nikitas:* They make the best pastas. Italian women are very sexy and tall. The strongest Mafia in the world is Italian. *Chloe:* They are very friendly and open-minded. *Theodoros:* Pizza–Mafia-crime-Rome-Colosseum-beautiful girls-sightseeing

**English:** *Stephanos:* Do they like beer? Do they like fights? Do they love having fun? Why do they support the USA in

wars? Do they like football? Do they love animals? *Manos*: Why are they cold people? How many times do they come to Cyprus? *Alexia*: Why do most people around the world speak English? How do they survive the cold and rain? Where in England can you enjoy musical theatres?

**Cypriots:** *Eva*: Cypriot people like to eat a lot, especially souvla. They are very hospitable. They are Christian Orthodox. They love to go hunting (hares, birds). *Constantinos*: Cypriot people like eating good food. They go to football matches. Women go to the hairdresser's a lot. They smoke a lot. They watch TV. They go shopping. Many divorces

**Gypsies:** *Dimitris*: Dance–Homeless–living in groups–cheating–unacceptable people–no money–different culture  
*Pavlos*: Clothes –music–poor–big families *Myria*: Mediums

By bringing extracts of their written work into class and initiating a debate on it, I aimed at pointing to the diversity of perceptions, the relativity of interpretations, and the heterogeneity within the national culture, thus within any culture. This I hoped would help learners deconstruct essentialised views of culture which present ethnic groups as monolithic entities and ethnic identities as uniform.

### **Lesson 9- 30/10/07: My intentions/my plans**

Work on a list of pairs with contradictory statements to give them an incentive to reflect on differences of opinions/perception. Then, I must find a way to lead the discussion

into who we compare ourselves to, who we compare 'others' to.

### **What I actually did (didn't do)**

'The focus should be on relationships between cultures... a comparative method' (Byram, 1997: 66). I have tried to point this out. I have gone through the pairs of statements asking for their comments with minimum comments myself.

*Valuable activity to point out diversity of opinions among them /perceptions of self and relativity of interpretations of other cultures.*

I begin by asking them:

- Me: Why did you write this information on Cypriots?
- Student: We judge from what we see.
- Me: Why did the specific student write 'Cypriots go to church every Sunday' since you disagree?
- Student: Because he goes/his family goes.
- Me: One student wrote 'they are independent' but most of you think that they are overprotected.

*I was surprised they felt that way. I thought they were not aware of it.*

- Stephanos: I am like this.
- Christina: You are the exception.
- Me: We judge from ourselves. How would other people see us? Are we tall or short? Short compared to Serbs, tall compared to Philipinos. Are we conservative or open-minded? Compared to the Swedish? To the Japanese?

– Antonis: The Japanese would feel they were travelling 50 years back.

– Me: Because of technology.

I conclude that my point is that there is no right or wrong but different opinions.

Another intention of the syllabus was to instigate reflection on the concept of culture and to foster cultural self-awareness. This emerges in some of the student interviews.

When Chloe refers to her trip to Italy, she is ready to 'suspend disbelief' (Byram and Zarate, 1997 a.) when she justifies, what are to her, bizarre behaviours by engaging in reflection about Italian culture:

Chloe: *'We went to Italy ... and you couldn't smoke, or speak in a museum, but a dog could go into shops, into museums, and for me these things were unthinkable, but that's what they are used to, that's how their culture is.'*

Some interesting input comes from Pavlos who explicitly states that the description of ethnic cultures unit has stimulated reflection on culture. He reports that the unit incited him to consider cultural differences and the reasons for those differences:

Pavlos: *'The differences between different populations, it is something important, you know, but, OK, you don't ever sit down and think about it.'... 'I have never sat and thought about differences between people, you know, and the reason that they think in this way, and us in that way.'*



Pavlos has developed awareness on the way 'his thinking is culturally determined' (Byram, 2000a), that 'culture is not universal' (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997: 62), and perhaps that his way of being is not natural or normal (*loc. cit.*). Nevertheless, if this awareness is limited to differences without including similarities, there is a danger of cultivating racism instead of combating it.

#### **5.3.1.3 Stereotyping**

In the same pre-writing activity, participants tend to stereotype the five ethnic groups. Cultures are mostly associated to material productions, physical appearance, behaviour, or beliefs and values.

88% of the students list habits of each ethnic group such as eating, drinking or smoking while all of them refer to material productions. In this way, students associate Italians with football, opera, painting, fashion, the Colosseum, or pizzas; the English with beer, barbecues, football; the Arabs with belly dancing, nargileh (water pipe), or the desert. As for the Cypriots they are mostly correlated to *souvla* (spit-roasted meat), the national food, but never to arts, monuments, or intellectual traditions. Self-stereotyping thereby is narrowed down to food, and even a specific dish.

Further, learners remain at a superficial level by describing ethnic groups' physical appearance (94%). Negative stereotyping and a lack of political correctness are here quite evident when they refer to people's skin or hair: the English are described as 'fair-skinned', 'blond', or 'very light' while the Arabs and the Gypsies as 'black' or 'brown'. The latter groups are also referred to as 'dirty' or as having a 'bad smell'. On the other hand, the Italians are 'beautiful' and associated with 'fashion'.

What is significant is that beliefs and values have been mainly related to the Arabs, as a consequence of being mostly associated with religion (47%). This is the only ethnic group which mainly evokes religion. In an association of ideas students produced a series of concepts: Islam, fanaticism, polygamy, women's inferior status. The reproduction of stereotypes regarding Arabs and even more Muslims is not unrelated to the current disposition in Western societies which 'places Islam under a cloud of suspicion' (van Driel, 2004: x). In two cases (Marianna and Myria) they are also associated to Catholicism. During a discussion, Marianna told the class that her mother is Maronite — a Catholic minority who began migrating to Cyprus from Syria and Asia Minor in the seventh and eighth centuries A. D. (Varnava, 2009); she therefore draws the knowledge that all Arabs are not Muslim from her family background. However, Arabs are also the targets of positive stereotypes, portrayed as hard workers, possibly because of students' exposure to immigrant populations from Syria or Egypt, some of whom are employed in manual jobs such as construction labourers.

In their production around cross-cultural marriages, learners also express negative feelings for the Arabs. 38% of their texts use examples of a Cypriot/Christian woman married to an Arab/Muslim man in order to illustrate a failed interfaith marriage. Their descriptions reproduce negative stereotypes of female oppression in the Arabic or Muslim world.

Myria: Also my best friend marriage a man from Egypt. He was forst she wear his traditional closed. He deprive her of her freedom. He belive that the wife must be stay, cleaning the house and take care of children.

Lucas: ... her husband wanted her to cover her face, when she was in public.

It appears that interfaith marriages were mostly associated with Christianity/Islam opposition and obviously Islam is related to negative constructs. This, I believe, is not unrelated to the constructs that learners hold of the Turks, given the dominant discourse and national identities developed by the official educational policy. I further argue the connection between students' negative stereotypes of cultural others to the identities constructed by the Cyprus educational system in chapters two and six. On the other hand, students are certainly influenced by the "Islamophobia" which currently prevails in the West (van Driel, 2004).

#### **5.3.1.4 Difference as problematic**

Difference is generally perceived as problematic while some differences are more problematic than others. In their pre-writing task, learners view the Arabs as the most dissimilar from the self and depict them as 'different', 'strange' or even 'bad'; difference is associated to deviance from the norm, and therefore with leading to problems.

Lucas: Muslims – different culture

In a clustering of ideas, Stephanos places 'different way of thinking' at a nuclear position around which he adds more, mostly negative, elements:

Stephanos: Different way of thinking – bad behaviour

Different way of thinking – very religious; devotion to Allah;

Muslims

Similarly in their texts on cross-cultural marriages, most learners see an impossibility of co-existence. In a few cases only, students foster the similarity in emotions and the excitement in discovering a new language and culture:

Ioanna: ...these marriages of similar love relationship can be extremely exciting because the people have the opportunity to visit new places, and learn and know new things like to speak a new language.

However, 92% of the participants invent statistics which evolve around the rate of unsuccessful intercultural or interfaith marriages due to the difference in cultural or religious backgrounds:

Lucas: Psychology Dr. Burton Furillo who was being doing research on people who get divorced reports that 75% of them are people who have different religions and believes that this is one of the biggest reasons.

Myria: In addition according to the University of Nicosia 40% of wedding divorce because have different cultures.

Eva: People who are different they don't live enough together.

What is worth noticing in the last extract is that Eva replaces 'different cultures/faiths' by simply 'different'; obviously mere difference equals for her incompatibility, therefore impossibility to live together. However, the

same student, when interviewed and referring to her academic environment normalises difference through the presence of non Greek Cypriot peers.

Eva: *'Because we are in a college and a university ... I mean the cafeteria eh... eh... within the class, we meet from differe... different students from different populations.'*

'Different' is a recurrent word in cross-cultural marriage scripts, which is predictable given the nature of the topic. What is of interest, though, is the disparities students focus on and the way 'different' is interpreted. They can be coined in Pavlos' sequence of differences and conclusion: 'a very big problem'.

Pavlos: Firstly, traditional marriage is the combination of two different world with different religions and nationality.... To believe in other God, to speak other language and costumes is very big problem.

Students concentrate necessarily on different cultures and religions, which were part of the topic given to them, and expand on differences in language, nationality, countries, customs and traditions, values, beliefs, or sense of humour. Hence, diversity is not experienced as richness but as a source of conflict:

Marianna: One of our main problems was the fact that we were two different people from two different cultures.

Marianna, drawing on her own experience from a relationship with a Greek man, equates 'different people' with 'different cultures' which are to her problematic. Eva, who organises her text around interfaith marriages, concentrates on Orthodox and Catholics, whose differences she perceives as irreconcilable:

Eva: All this for two different opinions, two different worlds wich they don't stand together.

The amplification in 'two different worlds', as in Pavlos' case, is significant in expressing that difference is divisive, preventing coexistence.

'Different' is very rarely associated to positive characteristics:

Eva: ...may be they believe that they find something special or different in them.

In fact, most participants visualise intercultural relationships as problematic; problems, difficulties, trouble, risk, and frustration are some of the terms for describing the result of cultural differences:

Pavlos: Getting married with a person in different nationality inevitably causes troubles and is a very big risk.

Constantinos: ...communication and conflict in values are the biggest problems.

Cross-cultural marriages are mostly perceived as deviant and inevitably leading to miscommunication and/or separation; 42% of the students

believe that communication is hindered by different languages and cultures and see a lack of duration in these marriages, failing to acknowledge a similar phenomenon amongst same culture marriages:

Myria: ...you will have a hard-time understanding each other... The communication between the couples from different cultures isn't good, because some things understand difference.

Theodoros: In my village a woman married a man from Lebanon. They had three children but now they are divorced.

Although intercultural marriages are increasingly common in Cyprus, they are perceived as a digression from the norm. Relationships to cultural others are perceived as difficult, challenging, of short duration, with negative consequences for the children. Most participants cannot imagine people of different cultures, and even less of different religions, in a harmonious relationship; they rather see a loss of one's family of origin, of one's culture. They visualise relationships where one spouse imposes his/her worldview on the other or one has to give up on his/her identity. Learners thus regard cultural adaptation as a violation of their personalities: 'Frequently, the prospect of adapting to other cultures brings up the question of whether to adapt, how much to adapt or, perhaps of most importance, whether we have to give up ourselves if we adapt to this other person' (Bennett, 2009: 127).

#### **5.3.1.5 Contradictions in perceiving otherness**

During class discussions, some students showed understanding about cultural differences but also expressed fear of identity loss; curiosity to

discover more about other cultures while taking a stance against cross-cultural marriages. My reflective diary is a witness to these contradictions:

**Lesson 2- 6/6/07** Activity on Identity: similarities/  
uniqueness:

Eleni: I am interested in psychology and I want to know people from other cultures. I want to know more.

Chloe: It is normal that different nationalities are different, our history is different. I don't want to lose my identity (did she mean by meeting other cultures?).

*Is it a contradiction to comprehend differences and to express a fear of loss of identity? Or does she mean that I am unique as a Cypriot and I want to stay this way?*

Contradiction is a common human feeling. Ethnographers (Whyte, 1980 quoted in Silverman 2006) believe that interviewers should not try to discover the interviewee's true sentiment or attitude but recognise that 'ambivalence is a fairly common condition of man – that men can and do hold conflicting sentiments at any given time'. During student interviews, contradiction in students' voices is traceable especially in the way they perceive others and the self. They express appreciation and solidarity as well as distance from cultural others; ethnocentrism but also self-awareness and self-criticism:

Eva: *'the topic with marriage, mm... the issue with marriage is that let's say, whether families come into conflict... because they come from different cultures, eh, and I think that I wrote that I don't agree, because at some point of their lives they will be in conflict... For example in*



*photography, I have a lesson where... where there are Turkish Cypriots, you know... the fact is that those that I met and ... (inaudible) my friends are very good you know. And generally from other countries. It's just that they move, they learn new ways of life of other races, other countries and they compromise. They are not like us Cypriots who when they see someone who is black, eh, foreigner, eh, what is he like? They comment on everything. They learn to respect others.'*

Chloe states the willingness for and at the same time the limitations of cross-cultural understanding:

*Chloe: [the syllabus intended] 'To bring us closer to each other? To understand each other's culture? His sense of humour, our sense of humour. It is vital, it may happen that we say something in class and we laugh and some will not laugh because they don't understand our sense of humour... they can't understand our sense of humour...'*

Stephanos, a bicultural student, judges that foreigners are self-centered, thus defining a homogeneous and essentialised category for otherness; he then blurs the boundaries between the self and the other by including himself in the same category and finally takes a humanistic stance.

*Stephanos: '...foreigners are more self-centered than us but I don't forget that me too I am... half a foreigner... I mean I see others as they are. I mean, I hang out with foreigners, whether they are white or black, for me I see a human*

*being. There is no difference. They have the same rights as me.'*

Respondents' ambivalence can be understood as a mosaic of different discourses on which they draw to create and recreate the self and the other. Students' complex positioning is similar to Spyrou's participants (2002: 267-268); in his study of Greek Cypriot children's imagining of the Turk, he finds that they draw 'on different voices at different times and in different social contexts.' These voices express contradiction and ambiguity and reproduce different positions to elucidate their identity and to serve 'the demands of the conversation'. My Greek Cypriot respondents have been socialised 'into multiple enemies' (the Turks, the British, the Americans...) with 'both formal and informal education' reproducing essentialised constructions of otherness (Hadjipavlou, 2006). Despite these constructions, which began to form at a young age, and which I believe to determine to a large extent their perceptions of all cultural others, learners have also been exposed to other, more tolerant influence which surfaces in their interviews.

#### **5.3.1.6 *Savoir* / Sources of knowledge**

One definition of *savoir* is the 'acquisition of a body of knowledge about a particular target culture or a group of cultures' (Sercu, 2000). As I have already indicated, the syllabus did not aim at transmitting information on one or a set of specific cultures but as the course evolved, it inevitably embraced factual knowledge (Fenner, 2006) about some cultures, because all the main units evolved around the concept of culture.

Learners generally exhibit limited knowledge of other ethnic groups; this is apparent in their prewriting tasks. For instance, 77% of them choose to

mention facts on the countries, e.g. the weather, even though the topics given were the people, most probably because they felt they had to demonstrate any knowledge they had and increase their production.

It is quite evident, and this emerges from the overall written production, that students have a deeper knowledge of the Italians and Italy than of any other foreign ethnic group. On the contrary, students seem to know little about the Arabs and the Gypsies, despite the proximity of Arabic countries and the presence in Cyprus of Arab/Middle-Eastern residents and of a Cypriot-Roma minority. The least information is given on the Gypsies who are associated with music, dance, or spicy food. Learners also seem to have limited knowledge of the English despite their presence on the island for more than a century, nowadays mostly as tourists, residents, or military serving at the British bases. On the other hand, many Cypriots reside in England as students or migrants, so one would expect that information about the English population would circulate. These occurrences may be explained by a lack of curiosity for these three ethnic groups generally held in low esteem by the locals whereas Italians — Mediterranean like Cypriots but “more” European — attract more attention. I also assume a lack of social interactions with non-indigenous populations, which may be illustrated in learners’ descriptions of the English as holiday makers. UK residents represent the biggest group of Cyprus visitors — 57% in 2006 — (Clerides and Pashourtidou, 2007) and obviously they represent the main population through whom students get acquainted with the English culture.

Pavlos: How often do they come to Cyprus?

Eva: Why do they travel a lot?

Elina: Why do they prefer to travel to warm places?

One of the syllabus main objectives was to raise awareness of limited knowledge of cultural others, and thereby stimulate curiosity to discover more. The superficiality of our knowledge of other ethnic groups was stressed accordingly during several class sessions. After each written production, I initiated discussions on the accuracy of the information given by learners, hoping to enhance self-awareness and recognition of prejudice. Based on the widespread assumption that racism is a form of ignorance (D'Souza, 1995), I endeavoured to point out that students' judgement of other ethnicities was often grounded in insufficient knowledge. Since 'stereotypes, omissions, and distortions all contribute to the development of prejudice' (Tatum, 2003: 5) my objective was to 'provide stereotype-disconfirming information' (Hill and Augoustinos, 2001: 243) and shatter students' convictions. Aiming to 'provoke cognitive dissonance' by opposing new learning which would 'conflict with prior beliefs' (Causey *et al.*, 2000), I emphasised that our misconceptions are often due to a lack of knowledge of other cultures. These sessions were recorded in my diary:

**Lesson 2 - 11/6/07** We just corrected Taj Mahal (not being in an Arab country) and brainstormed which countries speak Arabic...

I guided them into acknowledging that our lack of knowledge of populations may lead us to wrong assumptions. I will need to insist further on it. Why did most of you choose Italians? Where does your knowledge come from?

**Lesson 5 -18/6/07** Catholics are similar to Christians.

They couldn't figure out the mistake. In which countries are there Christians? In Greece, Serbia, Russia. I drew on board: Christians: Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants (Surprise: Are they Christian?)

*This has marked me and I mainly blame the national education system for ethnocentrism and self-centered religious education. This is a major deficiency of our national education since there are Catholic Cypriots (Maronites, Latins).*

The superficiality of *savoir* is explicitly stated by two respondents when they refer to the description of ethnic cultures unit:

Chloe: *'we were completely clueless and we wrote inconsistencies... we didn't know exactly what the culture of the Gypsies or the English is, exactly, and we wrote inaccuracies. OK, we learnt something from that, compared to the fact that we didn't know anything ...they simply made me understand a few more things about what I didn't know.'*

Eleni: *'it was an opportunity for us to learn a few things about some cultures of other countries, for which I was clueless... it was about curiosity to find out about the world.'*

Moreover, it was important to question the sources of this knowledge, often 'dominated by the notion of a national culture' and stereotyped, gained through history lessons, the family or the media (Byram, 1997: 35-36). This ought to lead to the acknowledgment that our perspective is

culturally determined rather than natural (Byram, 2000). During a class session which followed the prewriting task, I incited students to critically reflect on their work. I first gathered the prewriting ideas of the whole class into one document which I brought to class so that students can use each other's ideas for their descriptive paragraph. I then raised some questions (see Appendix 8) which pointed to negative stereotyping and unfair generalisations.

**Lesson 5 -16/10/07** I also prepared a list of questions, so as to question and make them doubt some certainties.

*This was based on Byram (1997: 35): In an educational framework aiming to develop critical cultural awareness there is a need for a reflective and analytical challenge to the ways our meanings, beliefs, behaviours have been formed. How do I do this? I must acknowledge the tendency to evaluate cultures with comparison to one's own, using our own cultural framework.*

I don't expand because of lack of time and because I want to avoid brain-washing them...

- Me: Who did you describe in most negative terms?

- The Arabs.

- Me: Why?

Puzzled they don't answer. Marcos says something negative about them (I don't remember) with certainty.

- Me: All of them?

- Yes.

- Me: Have you met any?

- No.

I read the list of the countries speaking Arabic.

- Not Iran? asks Stephanos. I also point out that there are Christian Arabs (Catholics, says Theodoros).
- And Orthodox, I say.
- In Lebanon, says Marianna
- Me: And Syria, Egypt.

My effort was here to raise awareness of the mere fact that the Arabs were represented as the most negative others despite limited knowledge of a very large linguistic group. I then turned to students' sources of knowledge which typically focus on some dominant cultures while they disregard others.

-Me: Where does your knowledge about other populations come from?

- History lessons and TV, they answer.

*An ethnocentric and diachronic view of culture. Contemporary source of knowledge is limited. They did not mention the Internet.*

- Me: Who do you learn most about in History lessons?

- Greece.

- Me: Which cultures do you learn most about on TV? Where are the TV series from?

- American.

- And Brazilian, laughs Constantinos.

I stress that it is normal, that they don't have much to write on some populations because they don't know them as they are exposed to limited information. They can write about what they know best, I conclude.

*I am now not sure it was a wise decision; most of their texts were on Cypriot food habits.*

Inspired by critical pedagogues who speak of cultural reproduction and the promotion of certain dominant cultures through education but also the media, I encouraged students to explore sources of their knowledge. Since the Cypriot education system fosters knowledge of Greek culture and the most popular medium, television, mainly transmits information on Cypriot, Greek and American cultures, it is not surprising that students know very little of less influential cultures.

#### **5.3.1.7 Empathy building**

Empathy and solidarity are among the educational objectives identified by Auernheimer (1990 cited by Fennes and Hapgood, 1997) when he defines intercultural learning as social learning. Empathy is defined as 'the ability to put oneself in someone else's position and thus be able to see this person's problems from his or her position' while solidarity is 'a principle contrary to rivalry and competition' and suggests 'common action with others'. These competencies should result in an enhanced understanding of migrants' and generally foreigners' conditions (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997: 55-56). For Byram (1989: 89), who contrasts tolerance to empathy, tolerance expresses the disposition to 'work and live with people who are different' without casting them out or violently reacting to them whilst empathy requires more on the part of the individual: 'understanding, an activity rather than a passive acceptance'.

Empathy building was the main learning objective I had in mind when I elaborated the "comparison or contrast of one's life to a young immigrant's life" unit which ought to raise 'awareness about one's privilege' (Allen Morrow and Torres, 2002: 144) by taking students out of their comfort zones, immersing them in new perspectives. The data suggest that the



“empathy” objective has been met to a large extent. Most learners contrast their privileged life to Galo’s hardships.

As one of the main foci of the article was that the young man worked to support himself and help his family, 96% of the texts naturally point this out and contrast it to their own advantaged position of not having to work or working only for their pocket money. Galo’s financial problems have attracted students’ attention; many of their texts (57%) contrast these problems to their own reality and their families providing for them.

Feride: Because his family are very poor, he has worked hard in many different jobs to support and to help his brothers and sisters.

Lucas: ...as a high school student he had to work to live... And he has to work to pay his college fees... On the other hand I didn’t have to work in high school... And my parents will pay for my tuition.

Furthermore, 61% of student texts refer to the fact that Galo has to support his family financially, which is opposed to them not having to provide for their own families. Obviously impressed by the fact that Galo sends money to his family (and apparently influenced by the introduction of the article which speaks of young immigrants who support their families), 57% of the scripts mention this fact. This is often emphasised by terms such as ‘worked hard’:

Chloe: Galo’s worked hard to conserve his parents...

Marina: He went there not only for studies but also to find job for college's fees. And for support as he can his family.

Learners stress Galo's difficult experiences which have forced him to assume responsibilities at a young age; the loss of a carefree childhood and early maturity are often pointed out.

Lucas: While Galo had to grow up faster, from the age of 13 as a high school student he had to work to live, to give up his youth milestones for other bigger responsibilities like not getting deported...

Philippos: Second, we had matured at different ages. He immigrated at the age of thirteen because he had many intentions. I decided what I would do in my life at the age of seventeen.

A few scripts (13%), though, establish a relation with Galo by drawing parallels between financial hardships:

Nikitas: I started to work since I was 13 in a car wash to pay everything that a child needs. Galo started to work from the same age but for different reasons. He worked to support his family... Galo had to work hard to pay his college tuition. The same as me. I have to work and at the same time to be a full time student.

Eleni: Although they [*her parents*] had financial problems I did not think of migration...

During the first implementation I had not considered that empathy can also be fostered by establishing a relationship between their life and his. Nikitas, the only student choosing a comparison text, focusing on the similarities between life experiences, forced me to reconsider my assumptions and strategies. Despite my recommendations and the choice of the majority of the class, consequently the pressure of conforming to the group, he chose to relate to the character studied. Nikitas represents for me the agency that a single student may have on a teacher.

The unit's success in building empathy is confirmed by student interviews since four respondents express empathy for or solidarity with Galo:

Eleni, a mature student, refers extensively to this unit, which she considers

*'the best for younger students'... 'we are talking about a student, at the same age of most students, so they could compare, what did we have? What does he have?'*

Eleni expresses her solidarity with Galo when she describes her own childhood:

*'If I speak about my childhood, it was worse than Galo's, let's say, it was very difficult, very poor...'*

Similarly, Asha, a rather laconic interviewee, reports having thought of Galo even after class because she could relate to him:

*Asha: 'Most about that Mexican boy. Because I compare, we have to compare right, so I am thinking about me and that boy. And between the similarities as well as, the similarities of me and that boy.'*

### **5.3.1.8 Reflection on migration**

Knowledge of social groups and their practices (Byram and Zarate, 1997) was another objective of the comparison/contrast activity supported by the summarising task of texts on migration in Autumn 2007. My aim was to increase knowledge about cultural others, in the specific case of migrants, especially undocumented ones who are as a rule “demonised” in the mainstream discourse. The article on Galo exposed students to information they do not often access: the experience of underage migrants, related from their own point of view. It also explores some of the reasons leading to migration and some of the negative consequences for undocumented migrants. This I hoped would instigate reflection on migration.

An introductory brainstorming activity I initiated on migration and reasons leading to it during the Autumn course seems to have encouraged students to name it. Given the negative connotations the word “migrant” has and the pejorative way it is often used, especially by the local media, it is I believe important that Galo is identified as such and is connected to positive attributes. However, only 30% scripts talk about migration more openly. 17% of them describe Galo as a migrant:

*Elina: First of all, Galo is an immigrant... I never staid in the other country more than 1 month.*

Theodoros: He cross the Arizona desert just to had the chance to study and be more responsible.

Students also point to migration when they speak of 'leaving his country' (30%) or crossing the Arizona desert to the U.S. in order to work and study. This is at times contrasted to their experience of residing with their families and to the privilege of not having to leave their home country.

Stephanos: First of all, I never fussed to live my country-family.

9% of student scripts seize the opportunity to express their attachment to their country:

Chloe: Second, I live in my country, I don't have to learn a new culture and language... However, I can't imagine my self to abandon my country because I love it.

Yelena: ...and I feel proud to be in my country...

Only 13% of student texts seem to be giving a positive interpretation of (youth) migration as they see the desire for a better life in such a decision.

Panos: He went to America because he want to support his parents, to get a good education and change his life.

Philippos: ...he immigrated at the age of 13 because he had many intentions.

On the other hand, the four students who chose to contrast their lives to an immigrant's for their Summer final examinations tend to give mostly negative attributes to the immigration experience. They see problems, difficulties, and great dangers:

Feride: An immigrant's life are very difficulty... My way of life are very different to immigrant's life because I haven't got too much problems.

Marina: This cost many problems because they left their family and if they have problem they don't have somebody to help them.

Increased knowledge about migrants' living conditions is reported by some respondents; it is significant, however, that two of them discover during the interview that Galo's story is a true one.

Chloe: *'... about the immigrant I felt sad a little, the poor guy (smiles)... I was sad... Even if it is not a true story. I don't know whether it's a true story or not.'*

Stephanos: *'The one with the kid, the Mexican, who has been through so much, who did so many kilometres because (inaudible) made a big impression on me, and if it's a true story, well done for the kid, he is great, I mean he made a sacrifice. But is it a true story?'*

Me: *'Yes, it is a true story.'*

Stephanos: *'That one?!'*

Stephanos and Chloe are uncertain about the veracity of the story. Apparently these students had not been exposed to many migrant experiences and find it difficult to imagine people their age in such a predicament. Another explanation is that the activity was challenging and was met with resistance given the discomfort it produced. The fact that some participants consider Galo's story an isolated or even fictitious experience limits the impact of the activity, which might have been more successful if my stance was more explicit and less neutral.

#### **5.3.1.9 Reinforcing stereotypes**

One of the undesirable consequences of the syllabus is unfair generalisations that some students make when they consider that a specific case represents a whole social group. Such is the case for Asha who combines the knowledge gained in two learning units, international students and the article on Galo, to conclude that all immigrants are economic and undocumented:

*Asha: This course we can know the difference between international students and an immigrant... But now I understand that international students are the students who, the students who come, who study and immigrants are, they don't have a passport and actually they come for work without passport with them.*

The analysis of Galo scripts also indicates an unwanted outcome: the reinforcement of prejudice in stereotyping young migrants as unhappy, extremely poor, having problems at school, or consuming drugs and

alcohol. This is particularly evident in the final examination paragraphs which reproduce part of the information found in the article and generalise the young man's case for all immigrants. The four students who chose to contrast their lives to an immigrant's for their Summer final examinations tend to give mostly negative attributes to the immigration experience. They see problems, difficulties, and great dangers:

Chloe: Immigrant's life is very hard and difficult than my life.

Dimitris: In their try to find a better place, may be they loose their life, because of the dangerous travel that they have. Another dangerous reason is that police usually found them before they get into the country and many immigrant's went to the cell.

Galo's story is present in their final examinations, especially when they describe what being away from one's family represents, as they obviously bear in mind young and probably underage immigrants. This indicates once again students' attachment to the family institution on the one hand and a reflection on some of the issues confronted by immigrants on the other. However, these statements also involve generalisations in opposition to the syllabus objectives. In some cases, these generalisations are quite unfair:

Marina: Most of them start smoke marijuana ... because they don't have somebody to check them.



In my diary, I recurrently express my concern for the correct implementation of the syllabus, hindered, I felt, by time constraints. Brief introductions to the topics or short comments on students' input without sufficient time dedicated for longer discussions represented the danger of having the opposite effect of the one aimed at: reinforcement of stereotypes and prejudice instead of challenging them. This revealed a 'conflict between dialogue and coverage in academic classes' (Benesch, 2001: xx).

**Lesson 9 - 2/7/07** Marking the exams ...many of them understood the opposite of what was said: that ethnic differences are based on genetic differences or that national stereotypes are based on true facts;

**Lesson 4 - 13/6/07** I have doubts on whether I am implementing a prejudice reduction curriculum... Judging by what most were writing I may even reinforce them. Need to prepare very thoughtfully next lesson.

*Danger of an inappropriate implementation which may have the opposite result.*

During the units on prewriting and description of ethnic cultures, discussions preceded and followed their writing around 'oversimplified images or ideas' (Hernández Sheets, 2005: 53). One of the objectives was to enhance learners' critical cultural awareness by encouraging them to clarify the basis of their judgements (Byram, 1997) and acknowledge our ethnocentrism in appraising other groups relative to our own; this should lead to making consistent assessments of our 'society as well as of others' (*op. cit.*: 54).

This task, I felt, needed more elaborate debates or revisiting these concepts at a later stage. On the other hand, time limitations are typical complaints and constraints of teachers (Hargreaves, 1994) who constantly have to make such decisions: altering, selecting and leaving behind parts of a syllabus, judging importance, relevance, accessibility or usefulness of topics to students. In this way, I might have a similar impression of time pressure even with a longer course.

#### **5.3.1.10 Summary**

This discussion has analysed data relating to five areas of evidence to identify students' perceptions of cultural diversity as well as their cognitive and attitudinal responses to the syllabus. This assists me in assessing the success of the syllabus and the pedagogies used and in revising them.

The study of student perceptions reveals strong bonds to their families which, I posit, represent security; this trait may reinforce suspicion towards otherness which seems to represent the unknown, and therefore risks and dangers. When referring to cultural others, most participants reproduce a dominant discourse of sameness where difference is associated with problems and incompatibility between them and the self. In their portrayal of specific ethnic groups, learners resort to mostly negative stereotyping and cultural essentialising, presenting people who 'share uniform perceptions and attitudes' (Harklau, 1999: 124).

This tendency has unintentionally been reinforced by the pre-writing activity. By choosing the topic of ethnic cultures' description, I may have enforced the idea that cultures are homogeneous and static and trivialised

the concept of culture. 'The teacher's perspective of 'culture' determines the learners' first impressions' of the cultures studied (Diaz-Greenberg and Nevin, 2003: 215). It seems that at the time of elaborating the syllabus, I had a simpler notion of "culture" and I did not sufficiently address its complex nature. By avoiding the transfer of information on one target language culture and choosing to include several target cultures, I did not avoid the risk of creating and reinforcing stereotypical images (Byram and Feng, 2005; Lange, 2003; Starkey, 2005). In addition, the strategy of establishing whole-class cooperation so that students could learn from each other has further incited them to resort to negative stereotyping by using each other's input. Despite its weaknesses, the specific activity has given the opportunity to some students to reflect on the concepts of culture and identity. Some participants display some understanding of culture and awareness of their limited knowledge of cultural others. Still, data suggest that the activity can be more harmful than helpful in enhancing IC.

Similarly, the activity on cross-cultural marriages seems to have emphasised cultural differences rather than similarities. Students' writing mainly evolves around the problems of such marriages, and their beliefs that difference in cultures and even more in religions is a source of conflict. Even if I consider important that the activity used students' experiences, understandings and emotions and that it has given a voice to two bicultural students, it did not meet its learning objectives: establishing a relationship between learners' own culture and others', enhancing self-awareness, valuing other and diverse points of view. A modification is thus needed so that this resource can assist learners in constructing new insights (Hernández Sheets, 2005) around cultural diversity and endorse respect for difference and multiple points of view. Restrained by the course

objectives which dictate paragraph writing, I asked learners to choose a “side” which incited them to focus only on one stance. The activity would most probably be more efficient if it was introduced for essay writing rather than paragraph writing. In this way, students would have to develop arguments around the advantages of intercultural marriages and consider people’s multiple identities that can bring them together in genuine relationships.

The comparison/contrast unit seems to have been more efficient in IC enhancement. The data suggest that the activity succeeded in building empathy amongst most learners and in creating ‘relations of sympathy... between privileged and oppressed’ (Allen Morrow and Torres, 2002: 144). Many participants demonstrate awareness of their privileged positions as well as increased knowledge about migrants’ living conditions. A few learners establish a relationship with the young migrant, thus displaying solidarity. Moreover, some students are able to a limited degree to reflect on migration as a social phenomenon. Nevertheless, the activity has also had negative outcomes such as generalising the case of the specific young man for all migrants or on the contrary, isolating his case as a unique or invented experience. These occurrences might have been limited if the migration issue had been further approached and/or explicitly connected to the local context to address undocumented immigrant populations in Cyprus.

The discussion of data now turns to answer Research question 2, to identify the increased understanding of my practice and more specifically strategies which were or were not effective in enhancing learners’ IC.

## **5.3.2 DEVELOPMENT OF SELF AS A PROFESSIONAL**

### **5.3.2.1 Fostering dialogical relations**

Increasing learners' curricular control, involving them in real-life situations, and fostering autonomous learning were all part of an effort to build dialogical relations and a more democratic learning environment. Building on students' knowledge and sharing pedagogic authority with them was already part of my teaching philosophy before this project; it was, however, reinforced through the learning which resulted from new readings on critical pedagogy and transformative teaching and the empirical study itself.

The reflective diary in particular supported this effort to establish a more democratic learning environment and in this way, more student-centred teaching and learning strategies. By being less judgemental and more accepting of students' contributions, I built on students' input to create the course, following the Freirean dialogic concept of education (Freire, 1970). Syllabus and pedagogy focused on student empowerment since they co-constructed knowledge and contributed actively to their own learning. For instance, during the second implementation of the migration unit, I decided to introduce the topic more forcefully by calling on learners' previous knowledge:

**Lesson 19 - 4/12/07** Writing task 3: Contrast immigrant's life/theirs'.

I introduce the topic 'immigrants' saying that we have looked at it before and asking them what it means:

*Very constructive way to introduce topic; students were very active and their input valuable.*

'people moving from one country to another to live', says Theodoros.

Stephanos adds **another language** and **another religion**.

**Searching for work**, says Marianna who gives a lot of input. I ask them the reasons which lead people to leave home:

**economic reasons:** low income, better salaries, I lead them but they cannot guess unemployment

**personal reasons:** relationships, Marianna mentions a friend who left Cyprus to join his girlfriend who was pregnant

**political reasons:** Lucas says Cuba and people who are not happy with Castro, I add **disliking the regime**;

Marianna says **wars**, I try but fail to lead them to mention **dictatorships**; to **escape murder** they say, and I add **escape prison**; they seem to be unaware of what happens to journalists who criticise some regimes;

**legal reasons:** Stephanos refers to a friend who committed tax evasion

**environmental refugees:** heat they say, I direct them towards floods and drought, then I add sea level and land sinking

I ask them about Cypriot migrants, why and when they left:

*Revisiting the concept of drawing parallels between migration from and to home.*

- After the war, says Eva.

- Which war, I ask?

- 1974 of course she replies.

- There was another war, I say, in Cyprus in the 60s and notice that Leila sticks her head up interested, normally head down hiding. But regret not having added a civil war between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. Phivos thinks I am referring to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World war.

I ask Eva if she remembers the text on Cypriots in London, but she doesn't remember that they started migrating in the 30s. Where to? I ask.

- England and Australia.

- And the States, I add.

- How many are there?

- Aris says, more than here.

- No, I reply, 300,000, I think. But some of their children and grandchildren come back to live in Cyprus.

By building on students' contributions to introduce the article on Galo, I legitimated and valued their knowledge, considering them as 'critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher' (Freire, 1970: 62). Learners' active agency in the process of knowledge creation builds their confidence as they feel that their ideas and suggestions are valued while understanding is built on previous knowledge, their own 'experiences' and 'real-life situations' (Matthews, 2005: 100)

An overall goal of pedagogic strategies was to make the content of the course personally relevant to students. I believe that once the material is personally relevant, it has the potential to affect learners in meaningful ways—challenge existing stereotypes and/or modify certain attitudes. One of the pedagogic concepts behind the choice of the "Galo" unit was to 'deal with culture at an emotional level' and draw on experiential learning which

refers 'to both cognitive and affective components of the learning process' (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997: 72-73). By asking learners to reflect on their own lives, I was actively engaging them in the knowledge production process. Similarly the unit on cross-cultural marriages was conceived in an effort to include a topic that would be relevant to young people's concerns. This may be the reason behind the appreciation expressed by several respondents who single out the unit:

Chloe: '*... the cross-culture (in English) was one of the best writing (in English) we did in class.*'

Pavlos: '*A good topic, a good topic (emphasis), for writing an essay, not only a paragraph was the one on marrying between races, that one is a very good topic.*'

Establishing a more democratic learning environment has been a rewarding experience for me. Fostering dialogue among learners and between learners and me so as to ensure that they make sense of subject matter and that their stereotypes are challenged seemed to increase learners' motivation and participation. Students made contributions to the course eagerly, addressed and listened actively to other students, which was one of the course intercultural learning objectives (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997).

A subsequent question which kept arising was how far I was willing to go in ceding power for a more equitable relation with students. Some of my attempts to establish a more democratic learning environment were met with resistance: for instance, when I called on students to establish together course rules, they looked surprised and remained silent or asked



for a course outline. I first considered the determining role of institutional culture, believing that an effort for change has to be accompanied by a collective effort. As noted by Shepherd Johnson (2007: 22) isolated attempts for change need to be 'supported by system-wide' efforts to ensure their success; learners have been socialised into traditional schooling and most probably attend in our university many courses where the 'lecture format' prevails, as it is often the case in higher education. Consequently, they are not used to sharing 'pedagogic authority' with teachers (Matthews, 2005: 99). However, meta-reflective comments (marked in gray shade here) indicate that I may have also been responsible for perpetrating the status quo because I have not insisted enough in sharing power so as to maintain my dominant position.

**Lesson 7 - 23/10/07** I also give them a breakdown of how I grade paragraphs (1<sup>st</sup> time I ever do this).

*Influence of research urging more transparency.*

Marianna protests about some of my grading decisions but I do not respond. Why? Shouldn't I ask them what they think?

**Lesson 1 - 4/6/07** Then, I tried to set the rules for the lesson with them but apparently they are not used to it so I got silence or 'aren't you going to give us a course outline'?

*Trying to establish a democratic environment but students can react to 'innovative' efforts even if they foster more inclusiveness (recent example of attempt to ban school uniforms and some pupils' negative reactions).*

*Determining role of school culture (previous- primary and secondary education- and present -of our institution). Or did I not insist enough so as to maintain the status quo?*

However, they disagreed with my intention to give them unannounced assignments (40% of their grades). So, I agreed to give them a week's notice.

*Contradictions in self: how democratic would this be? It only stresses the difficulty in getting rid of my role as expert and as the one who decides; it is not easy to give up my power, too sweet?!*

This experience set future teaching goals so that courses are further co-constructed with learners: to increase negotiation with learners of both learning and assessment activities, introduce learner self-assessment and peer-assessment (Wells and Claxton, 2002), reinforce collaborative and autonomous learning. Shared control also entails further involving learners in 'decisions about classroom structure, procedures and course requirements' (Matthews, 2005: 99).

#### **5.3.2.2 Creating a sphere of interculturality**

Allowing for minority voices to be heard, thereby addressing the needs of a more diverse student body, is also important to me; by providing a space for international and bicultural students, the syllabus created a 'sphere of interculturality' (Kramsch, 1993) where they could express their multiple identities. This concept promotes the idea that national identities are not monolithic (*op. cit.*: 234) and that variations exist within each culture related to age, gender, social class... Both Stephanos and Asha communicate their satisfaction about having been able to express one of their identities:

*Asha: 'And in that topic I write about Indian culture... the Hindus. And it was really interesting to me. I like that ...*

*Because it is... to our country... related to our country, no?  
Hindus and Hinduism.'*

Stephanos: *'The one about marriage we had to... do  
(inaudible) Jewish to Orthodox. This one, because I also live  
with two religions...I liked it because it is something I lived...  
that I live with every day...'*

Clearly, Stephanos' need to express his multiple cultural affiliations and locate himself culturally 'was a powerful motivating force' for writing (Harklau, 1999: 121).

Establishing a sphere of interculturality or a third place was meant to problematise the meanings of national and target cultures so that learners develop an appreciation and tolerance of foreign cultures, in general, 'in relation to one's own' (Kramsch, 1993: 205). This is expressed by some participants who see beyond national boundaries and describe successful intercultural marriages which embody the elements of a good relationship: love, respect, trust...

Chloe: Love mixed different people and different culture to getting marriages... love, trust, and comprehension are the most important materials in her married.

Elina: ...on the contrary they [*parents*] should ... respect the fact that their child is fortunate to find her or he's true love.

Ioanna ...70 % of cross-cultural marriages in Europe, have all strong and successful relationships because they are based on trust, understanding and mutual respect.

Hence, learners 'construct their personal meanings' at the intersection of their native culture and the target culture (*op. cit.*: 238) and 'take both an insider's and an outsider's view' on both cultures (Kumaravadivelu, 2007: 132).

### **5.3.2.3 Detecting my perceptions and values**

One of the main objectives of this investigation is to problematise my practice by questioning my taken-for-granted assumptions and the extent to which I am living my values in my practice (McNiff *et al.*, 2003). An increased awareness of my beliefs, values, taken-for-granted practices (Atweh *et al.*, 1998; McNiff *et al.*, 2003) and 'perceptual biases' (Winter, 1996: 13-14) should lead to the improvement of my teaching.

The reflective diary greatly assisted me in implementing a new syllabus by closely checking on whether it met both the academic and intercultural objectives. This close monitoring of my actions reinforced my positioning as a "facilitator of learning" rather than a "provider of knowledge" and supported a critical stance towards my practice, more widely known as reflective practice (Moon, 2006). The reflective process has forced me to look at myself: to scrutinise my assumptions and my knowledge — subject knowledge and knowledge of the context — to critically examine them, to review my habitual ways of thinking and learning, to analyse and interpret my actions and interactions with my students, admit my weaknesses, detect my contradictions.

A positive outcome is therefore an increased awareness of my perceptions and values and the way they influence my teaching and my inquiry. By enhancing a dialogical interaction with the self, this narrative account has permitted me to develop insights into myself: the strengths and weaknesses of my practice, and the assumptions and beliefs which underlie it, my own stereotypes and prejudices. A better understanding of oneself should result in greater acceptance of the self and a better understanding of others (learners) (Osterman and Kottkamp, 2004). This form of 'critical self-assessment', widely recognised in education and teacher education (Kramsch, 1993: 245) has supported an on-going process of deconstruction 'of preconceived notions' towards a 'transformation of the self' (Diaz-Greenberg and Nevin, 2003: 215). If emotions and attitudes are recognised, there is a 'good possibility of examination and possible modification' (Moon, 2006: 72).

A major undertaking has been to surface my own prejudice and confront my own racism and bias which is considered a requirement for becoming a multicultural person and teacher (Nieto, 2004). Even though I believe that I exhibit a great deal of curiosity and openness to other cultures (Byram, 2000), I am certainly not as open to all cultures while I am more favourably predisposed to some ethnic groups. My reflections guided me into admitting that I sometimes let my own prejudices take over in class by privileging, for example, some of the students' input. For instance, in the pre-writing unit while we were brainstorming around the word "Americans", students suggested amongst others "George Bush" which I validated by asking them to generate phrases, which were all negative, around it. My reflective comments illustrate that this was certainly not a random choice and that I cannot be completely unbiased or uninfluenced by the Cypriot political context. Diaz-Greenberg and Nevin (2003: 221)

stress the importance of teachers' self-awareness and positioning towards otherness: 'the culture base of the teacher can often influence (unconsciously) the perceptions and subsequent presentation of the cultural norms of the other's culture.' Aware of this, during the second implementation cycle I tried to be more neutral:

**Lesson 4 -11/10/07** Then, I announce practising pre-writing and we work on the example of Americans. They give mainly words, mostly negative ones:

*Prevailing anti-Americanism in Cyprus. I should have pointed it out to the class.*

crime, selfish, war... we group ideas together. Difficult to reject some ideas, without offending them, to stay within the range of a paragraph.

*Contradiction: integrating their input vs disconfirming negative stereotypes*

Stephanos who was over enthusiastic during the 1<sup>st</sup> lesson, doesn't take it so well. I choose to work on two ideas: crime and Hollywood to bring some balance.

The diary has therefore helped me acknowledge that when first going into this research, I may have had a condescending attitude assuming that my students were prejudiced whereas I was not. My present assumption is that we are all more or less prejudiced, at different levels of intercultural competence and performance (Byram, 1997); 'there is no perfect intercultural person' but becoming one is a never-ending process (Fennes, 1997: 73) that requires constant efforts to 'decentre and take up the perspective' of the other (Byram, 1997: 3).

#### **5.3.2.4 Ethical dilemmas**

##### **5.3.2.4.1 Indoctrinating students?**

My choice to conduct ideological research has not been one without complications. It was often the cause of an inner conflict which emerged from my intention to influence learners' views and beliefs. Developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes involved in IC is inevitably linked to the personal growth of the learner and the idea of influencing someone's personality naturally raises ethical questions. Hence, this basic contradiction: I had chosen a research focus in hope of influencing my students' perceptions with the conviction that this would improve their lives, but this gave rise to feelings of guilt that it was ethically questionable. My reflective diary witnesses the recurrent concern of indoctrinating students and imposing my ideology on them.

I was often unsure of where the boundaries lay between the effort of not interfering 'in the views of the learners, for ethical reasons' (Byram, 1997: 52) and of building their intercultural competence. This hesitation was evident when I first worked on the concept of migration, in Summer 2007, by simply distributing the text on Galo without any prior introduction or extensive discussion on the text.

#### **Lesson 12 - 11/7/07**

... I said very few things; that's because I don't want it to sound like propaganda (though it is an indirect one). I should have asked, why? Why do they support their parents? Why do they risk their lives by crossing a desert?

*This fear has kept me from promoting reflection on migration.*

*Introduction too brief.*

Hence, the fear of indoctrinating learners often led me to adopt a more neutral stance than required by transformative pedagogy. At times, I refrained from developing themes or introducing concepts more extensively because I felt that I might be inculcating my ideas or that the course risked becoming too political.

### **Lesson 5 - 16/10/07**

*...I must acknowledge the tendency to evaluate cultures with comparison with one's own, using our own cultural framework.*

I don't expand because of lack of time and because I want to avoid 'brain-washing' them...

The reflective process of the diary has helped me acknowledge that this apprehension risked sabotaging my research and my effort for transformative practice. I therefore modified my approach in Autumn 2007, by being more explicit about concepts such as migration or ethnocentrism.

Still, my research choice troubled me. Hence, a tendency I had to describe my research to learners in more neutral terms, e.g. "raising awareness on cultural diversity" instead of the stronger "antiracist". This is apparent in an intervention during the interview with Stephanos. After asking him to imagine why I had given the class the specific topics, he replies:

Stephanos: [Comparison] *To other cultures, the, the similarities, differences. If there is hostility, let's say, Cy... as Cypriots towards others or how foreigners see us. These ones, comparison I think. Is it something else?*



Me: *More or less.*

Why didn't I confirm his belief by choosing to be laconic? Once again I opted for a neutral stance whereas the whole course was about taking a stance. Is the objective of influencing learners' views ethically questionable? Was I telling my students what to think or was I guiding them into thinking critically and for themselves? What is the definition of indoctrination and if I was indeed advancing a political agenda, why has it been so hard to take responsibility for it? What is the difference between indoctrination and education and does education partly involve the indoctrination of learners?

My apprehension was not completely unfounded as anti-racist pedagogy has often been accused of having 'all the earmarks of propaganda' (Thomson, 1995) whilst critical pedagogy has been compared to religious dogmas (Santos, 2001). Critical pedagogues defend themselves by opposing that critical pedagogy 'is neither indoctrination nor orthodoxy but a self-reflective undertaking that must question its assumptions and practices' (Benesch, 2001: xix).

If we examine more closely the meaning of these words, 'to indoctrinate' is 'to cause somebody to have a particular set of beliefs especially by teaching which excludes any other points of view' while propaganda describes 'publicity that is intended to spread ideas or information which will persuade or convince people' (Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, 1994). Both words have taken on a negative connotation in such a way that most teachers associate them with totalitarian regimes and would deny practising them.

Theorists give diverse contributions to the debate education vs indoctrination. 'For Western philosophers of education indoctrination is largely seen as a negative and coercive process in which pupils are taught what to think rather than how to think' (Feng, 2006: 95). Jarvis (1983: 91) contends that education and indoctrination are totally opposed because 'education seeks to free the learner's mind whilst indoctrination seeks to bind it'; indoctrination describes a teacher seeking to produce students who hold 'similar beliefs to his own' while education guides students into examining ideologies 'so that they can construct their own'. Even though I do not feel that I strived to impose a political agenda on students but to interrogate 'the status quo' 'through a dialogic process' (Benesch, 2001: 51), my study sought to influence learners' beliefs and values; even if my purpose was not to 'change learners' values, but to make them explicit' (Byram *et al.*, 2001: 7), it would be honest to assert that I did hope to persuade learners about my beliefs. This, though, is not exceptional in any form of education. My view of the world is based on my values and like other teachers, I naturally want those I teach to make my values their own (Tripp, 1998). I raised questions and introduced ideas for students to answer and assess, but the selection of specific ideas and questions was guided by my ideology. On the other hand, I certainly did not intend to bind learners' minds or to exclude their points of view. I created opportunities for students to exchange ideas in the form of open classroom discussions even when they were diametrically contrary to mine. My aim was to have students pose questions and pursue answers with a critical eye.

If education 'forms character, mental and moral' (Dewey, 1916: 84) and struggles to improve human existence (Freire, 1996), it is also about learning what is good and bad. Further, Klegg (1993: 20) argues that 'the

primary role of education is the socialization of children' which is in fact a form of indoctrination. Hartley and Whitehead (2000: 40) raise the question for student teachers to consider: what may be the differences 'between teaching and indoctrination and setting a good example'? Is there 'good indoctrination and bad indoctrination'? Since education includes the transmission of moral principles, I could argue that it involves elements of good indoctrination. In my case, infusing human rights values such as respect for others, tolerance, understanding amongst ethnic, national, and religious groups is commendable, stated for instance in the Article 29 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child which deals with the aims of education.

Hence, my inner conflict was understandable and even desirable, for it has guarded me against coercive procedures which might have incited learners to uncritically accept my views. The reflective process on ethical and unethical practices laid the principles on which I based my professional action. I, for instance, gave up on what I considered to be valuable intercultural themes because I did not want to offend learners' identity. An example lies in the unit on comparison/contrast. When planning the unit, I had initially elaborated an activity on different religions. My aim was to foster similarities of some basic religious concepts with the aid of a website put together by Chris Gaine, a British educator ([britkid.org](http://britkid.org)). However, given some of my students' negative reactions at my announcing the theme, I reconsidered and decided to focus on immigrants. My apprehension of offending students' religious beliefs guided me into choosing a less threatening theme.

**Lesson 5 - 18/6/07** Manos' reaction, ironical (I think)  
comment: So, we are learning about religions, too, here!?

*More students reacted negatively later in semester and I changed my plans. Their curiosity is probably limited, especially when it comes to religion.*

By making this choice I was taking into consideration my context: Cypriots have a strong religious identity and are generally deeply attached to their religious rituals; during the 12 years of primary and secondary education, young people follow courses of religious education which focus on the Orthodox dogma (Tsoutsouki, 2009). By drawing parallels between different religions I risked offending learners' religious convictions. Yet, this has been the case for at least one learner, as indicated by data analysis.

#### **5.3.2.4.2 Offending learners' values**

An unwanted outcome has been offending learners' beliefs and values. Eva's religion is apparently an important part of her identity and despite my effort to deal carefully with the explosive issue of religion, she expresses her frustration during the interview by referring extensively to the risks of interfaith marriages and the Catholic and the Orthodox dogmas. Eva spends a large part of her interview explaining to me why Catholicism bears significant differences to the Orthodox dogma. The student was obviously offended when I deemed it necessary to clarify in class that Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox are all Christian. She apparently takes advantage of the face-to-face interaction to develop her arguments around the impossibility of co-existence of the two dogmas within a marriage, following the writing task and the class debate. However, she states that the Orthodox are not the only representatives of the Christian faith, which I assume to be a *savoir* from the course.

Eva: ... *let's say their father is Catholic and their mother is Christian... Orthodox, in some way they will be in conflict.*

This may be the reason behind so many students' negative stance towards cross-cultural marriages. Apparently the fact that I introduced the idea of interfaith marriages has brought out more negative reactions amongst learners. Similarly, having to choose a side, for or against, has not been a helpful strategy either. I may thereby have incited learners to reinforce their positions without sufficiently questioning them; by introducing information that disturbed learners, I may have discouraged them from broadening their perspective by recognising stereotypical and xenophobic representations.

These reflections draw my attention to a careful consideration of students' cultural identities so as to avoid intensifying student resistance. Even though I knew that religion is an important part of most Greek Cypriots' identity, I chose to include interfaith marriages in the syllabus in an attempt to ask 'thought-provoking questions' (Shor, 1993: 26). Apparently, I crossed students' boundaries and they reacted by dismissing my implicit proposition. Transformative pedagogues, therefore, need to find the fine balance between challenging learners with the revision of taken-for-granted worlds and respecting their beliefs and values. Guiding students into the uncomfortable experience involved in interrogating their identities and cultures (Berry *et al.*, 1992; Downing and Husband, 2005; Sercu *et al.*, 2005) clearly represents a challenge for educators interested in intercultural teaching and learning.

### 5.3.2.4.3 Limitations of classroom-based research

Another ethical dilemma emerged from classroom-based research. During the first implementation of the curriculum, I recurrently felt that I was imposing my study on students: the balance between academic and intercultural skills was a constant source of worry even though I had made significant effort to prepare activities which were adapted to the course needs. I often had the impression that I was using my students to serve my own interests, stealing time from what they “should” be learning for the sake of my research. The main reason I had this feeling was that my students had not deliberately chosen to be my participants but were faced with a *de facto* situation (Shi, 2006). Having them sign consent forms did not soothe my guilt as I knew that teacher power left them little choice to refuse; in this I recognise ethical limitations of classroom-based research.

**Lesson 5 - 18/6/07** Overall, I had a good feeling about the lesson but I think that I talked too much – old habits?

*What is too much? This is about letting students participate, controlling those dominating the discussion in order to give others (everybody is impossible) the chance to talk and limiting the power we have.*

Also time pressure to move to next course topic, I always have the impression that I am stealing time away from normal course content to do my ‘own thing’, as I am not doing it also for them; but they didn’t sign in for that, didn’t choose it, it was imposed.

*Ethical limitations of action inquiry.*

We talk about what is not part of the normal syllabus, so they may be unhappy about it.

## **5.4 SUMMARY**

Analysing data has assisted me in developing an understanding of different concepts within my own teaching context. I developed an improved understanding of learners' perceptions and response to the syllabus which in turn allowed me to better identify materials and strategies that were successful or unsuccessful in enhancing their intercultural competence.

My effort to build dialogical relations with learners and increase their agency in the knowledge production process fostered more equitable teacher-student relations as well as their increased understanding and confidence while a more personally relevant syllabus aimed at challenging their attitudes towards cultural others. Further, the attempt to create a sphere of interculturality promoted the provision of a space for minority students and the challenge of the concept of a homogeneous and static national culture for all students. The critical examination of my teaching, mainly through the reflective diary, resulted in an increased awareness of the perceptions and values which feed into it and set future goals for self-improvement and more effective practice.

Further, conducting my study has given rise to some ethical dilemmas. First, the political direction and the aim of influencing learners' beliefs and values of the research has caused in me a conflict which has often resulted in a more neutral stance than dictated by this kind of research. These tensions are not uncommon amongst researchers who engage with political research and an ongoing debate contrasts education to indoctrination. Data analysis has helped me recognise and accept these ethical questions as an inevitable consequence of ideological research but has also guarded me in seeking a balance between enhancing participants' IC and respecting their personalities. Data indicate at least one case of a

student whose religious beliefs may have been offended by part of the course, which underlines the need for such considerations. However, this is a risk that transformative pedagogies carry with them and that I have to accept as part of the enterprise. Decisions on how to deal with students' beliefs and identities, how far to go in challenging them, are also context-dependent and rely on student agency. What this single student reaction teaches me is that it is important to give learners enough space to express their disagreement, frustration, or offence. Finally, the process has highlighted the ethical limitations of classroom-based research which compels students into becoming participants. By increasing my understanding of this classroom-based research and my construction of reality, the analysis has been essential for my development as both a language teacher and a researcher. My learning is an open process, and I still seek to move towards a more critical and transformative practice.



## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this final chapter, I summarise and further explore the themes brought forward by the analysed data in order to answer the research questions of this investigation. I therefore return to the four research questions and discuss the research findings as I draw together different strands and insights that emerged during the research process. The research literature through which this investigation was informed, the methodology, and the contexts of the study are all used to provide answers to the research questions.

The main purpose of this investigation is the construction of an understanding of intercultural competence teaching and learning in the foreign language classroom. I therefore endeavour to look at students' perceptions by taking into account their contexts and assess the intervention by exploring their response to it. I also examine the ways in which my empirical study has influenced and reshaped my practice and has shown me the way forward to further improvements for future practices. I show how the increased understanding of my practice has assisted me in reconceptualising it as contributing to social justice. In doing so, I demonstrate how my study incorporates insights from critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, and intercultural competence theories which I use to explore implications for foreign language teaching and learning. I finally discuss the strengths and limitations of the study and make some suggestions for further research.

## 6.2 OVERVIEW OF PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research examined intercultural competence in foreign language education through the specific example of a classroom-based intervention. Through action inquiry methodology, it aimed to enhance my understanding of teaching and learning intercultural competence so that my professional practice enacts my commitment to social justice. The participants of this study represent young adults studying at a specific educational institution, in a particular country and at a specific time.

The study addressed the following research questions:

The **main research question** is

- How does a foreign language teacher enhance learners' intercultural competence?

The research sub-questions are:

- **Research question 1:** What were students' perceptions of cultural diversity?
- **Research question 2:** Has students' understanding of intercultural issues become greater and deeper following the intervention and how?
- **Research question 3:** Which strategies in my practice were or were not effective in enhancing learners' intercultural competence?
- **Research question 4:** How was the understanding of my practice enhanced? How do I now reconceptualise my role as a social justice educator?

## **6.3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **6.3.1 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

#### **6.3.1.1 The family as a shelter from outsiders**

Data analysis has demonstrated that students express a strong attachment to their families which, as I have argued, influences their perceptions of others as outsiders or intruders. If 'in hating others, one also loves those who are threatened by those others' (Zembylas, 2007: 181), the opposite can be true: in loving those who are similar and intimately tied to us, feelings of distancing with those who are unlike us are reinforced. Family ties are portrayed as providing a safe environment and protection against dangers such as addictions or educational failure. This stance is not surprising in the Cypriot context, where family ties are still strong. Despite great changes in the country which is quickly evolving 'from a traditional society into a modern one', the family is still 'the central social institution' (Cyprus HDR, 2009: 15). With only 3% of Greek Cypriots aged 15-24 living alone, parental financial or other support is considered normal by most young Cypriots even after they have completed their education (*op. cit.*).

In their written productions, a main argument that students advance against intercultural marriages is the fear of offending their parents and the painful consequence of losing their loved ones by having to move abroad to join their spouse. A different culture therefore represents a different country for the students: they cannot imagine a partner from a different culture living in Cyprus, thereby failing to acknowledge the multicultural fabric of the country; this may reflect the very recent transformation of the country's cultural landscape following the arrival of

immigrant populations during the last two decades but also the lack of a recognition of cultural diversity at a societal level. Reproducing a prevailing monoculturalist discourse which opposes “us” to “them”, most learners see in intercultural relationships a loss (of their family, country, identity) rather than a gain. Moreover, intercultural marriages are viewed as exigent and deviant from the norm.

#### **6.3.1.2 Difference as deviance from the norm/**

##### **Cultural essentialising and stereotyping**

Although some learners express more tolerant views, linguistic and cultural differences are perceived by most of them as an obstacle to an authentic relationship whereas the coexistence of two cultural identities is viewed in terms of subtraction where one person enforces his/her beliefs and values on the other. Thus, living with a person of different cultural identity requires giving up on theirs and/or not being able to transmit it to their children. Analysis has also indicated that most learners construe dissimilarities as incompatible and divisive, as a source of problems in communication and relations. This trend is more present when students refer to religious differences, which are often portrayed through a Muslim and a Christian partner, evidently representing the most irreconcilable combination. Some students portray failed interfaith marriages by describing women’s oppression by Muslim husbands or associate Islam with fanaticism and extreme religious opinions. Muslims and the Arabs are constructed as the most different from the self and the most negative others. This, as explained in chapter two, is not irrelevant to the local socio-political context where the Cyprus problem is decisive in shaping negative images of the Turkish Cypriots, the Turks and by extension Muslim populations in general. Negative stereotyping of those who have

invaded and occupy the country, and who represent the archenemy (Spyrou, 2006; Papadakis, 2008) is reproduced for the general construct "Muslim". A nationalist educational system which fosters enmity and disregards ethnic and religious diversity (Trimikliniotis, 2004; Spyrou, 2006; Zembylas, 2007; Papadakis, 2008; Varnava, 2009) only reinforces such constructs. This local trend intersects with negative attitudes towards Islam in Western societies which have recently become more apparent and which represent it as an 'archaic, barbaric, irrational', violent religion (Haque, 2004: 3) and generally culturally inferior to the West (*op. cit.*; Zambeta, 2003). This is why I contend that the "uncivilised" category of Muslims joins the category of "bloodthirsty" Turks to represent the enemies.

Students' work also reveals a limited knowledge of other ethnic cultures and religions despite their presence on the island (Roma, Arabs, English, Muslim or Catholic). Furthermore, essentialised images of the self and of otherness promoted by the Cyprus educational system are reproduced by learners when they resort to stereotyping. By reducing both the self and the other to what are perceived to be their essential characteristics, learners propose fixed representations which disregard heterogeneity. In their pre-writing tasks for the description of ethnic cultures, the Arabs and the Gypsies are described in negative terms whereas the English are mainly depreciated but their language is valued. Again, this is not unrelated to the education system and the local socio-political context since Cyprus is a former British colony with a continuing presence of the British army. The British are one of the enemies, even though to a lesser extent than the Turks, 'against whom a sense of Self is constructed' (Spyrou, 2006: 95) in the nationalist educational discourse. As for the Roma, who face discrimination and marginalisation in the whole of Europe,

they have never been officially recognised as 'a separate ethnic minority group' in Cyprus. The fact that most of them are Turkish-speaking and Muslim (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou, 2009: 242) reinforces distancing and suspicion among Greek Cypriots. On the contrary, Cypriots and Italians are mainly attributed with positive characteristics. This comes as no surprise since the ethnocentrism of the Cyprus education system mainly fosters and glorifies the self (Papadakis, 2008). Additionally, the Italians are valued most probably because considered similar to the self. They may even constitute a model of a more Western version of the self for a youth who feels more 'Mediterranean' than 'Middle-Eastern' or 'European' (Cyprus HDR, 2009: xiv). Student perceptions have also been determined by global attitudes which distinguish between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority and which are a legacy of colonialism (Said, 1978; Pennycook, 1994). This explains why students look towards the West, turning their backs to the neighbouring East. In daily discursive practices, I often hear Greek Cypriots describe certain of their negative characteristics as Oriental while they express their frustration for not being European enough. Despite the proximity of Arabic populations, who may share many common features with Cypriots, students prefer to relate to Italians, the "superior" Mediterraneans since they are European.

My main argument is therefore that students' stereotyping of cultural others and of the self is related to global trends but also to the local socio-political context and a nationalistic educational system. Naturally, educational systems around the world play a decisive role in constructing national identities (Bourdieu, 1994; Byram, 2009) and nationalism so that nation-states are legitimised as independent political unities (Gellner, 2006). Criteria such as common history, ethnicity, language, cultural traditions, or religion are advanced in order to define a common belonging

to a nation and thus create an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991). For Frangoudaki and Dragona (1997) the others play a significant role in the process of national identity construction by serving to differentiate between those who share commonality and those who do not. The inclusion of familiar characteristics needs a concurrent exclusion of unfamiliar ones, which leads to their assessment as negative and their subsequent rejection. Ethnic stereotypes reproduce this mechanism of denigration of unfamiliar characteristics.

#### **6.3.1.3 Complex perceptions of otherness**

Despite the negative dominant trend in students' perceptions of cultural otherness, when looking more closely at my data a more complex and fluid understanding of the self and the other emerges. As Spyrou (2006) has also noted, students' constructions are not homogeneous since they express different positions which reveal a complexity and ambiguity. Although they have been socialised into ethnocentrism (Spyrou, 2002, 2006; Bryant, 2004; Trimikliniotis, 2004; EUMC, 2006; Papadakis, 2008; Varnava, 2009) during the twelve years of their primary and secondary education, and they have grown up in a divided and post-conflict country with the resulting insecurities and biases (Hadjipavlou, 2006; Zembylas, 2007; Shepherd Johnson, 2007), they also draw on different discourses and on their multiple identities. They have been exposed to the discourses of the education system but also of their families, their friends, and the media as well as to various stimuli in their daily lives which has created a mosaic of voices. Their multidimensional identity therefore draws on these voices to portray, for instance, the Arabs as hard workers or as Catholic and not only as Muslim.

This complexity indicates that identities are not stable and that feelings of love and hate are not 'simply polar opposites' but marked by hybridity. Ambivalence as the expression of 'simultaneous contradictory feelings' (Zembylas, 2007: 182) can be useful to educators interested in transformative pedagogies who can work towards affective solidarity by problematising 'the imaginary emotional boundaries' between the self and the other; their task would be to identify practices and strategies to enact affective solidarity, for instance by engaging in dialogue with their students so as to clarify and surface their ambivalent feelings towards others (*op. cit.*).

### **6.3.2 STUDENT UNDERSTANDING OF INTERCULTURAL ISSUES**

I now focus on the enhancement of student intercultural competence by providing evidence of their greater and deeper understanding of intercultural issues. This endeavour requires that data are revisited to seek evidence of my 'educative influence' on students (McNiff *et al.*, 2003).

The complexity in the way participants view otherness is more evident in student interviews during which they express composite views: Stephanos simultaneously includes and excludes foreigners, Eva seems to appreciate international and Turkish Cypriot students in her academic environment but cannot imagine being married to one of them, while Chloe demonstrates curiosity to learn more about other cultures but believes that some cultural differences, such as sense of humour, are insurmountable. In doing so, students adopt more fluid positions and blur the distance between the self and the other. The fact that interviews were conducted after the end of the courses may suggest that this complexity is also due to the impact of the intervention.



Student interviews and input during class discussions recorded in my reflective diary offer some evidence of reflection on the concept of culture and the acknowledgment that perspectives are culturally determined rather than natural, which were part of the learning objectives as recommended by Byram (2000a) and Fennes and Hapgood (1997). Pavlos, for example, states that he has never thought of cultural differences before, while Chloe expresses an understanding of cultural diversity when she describes the strange ways of Italians but explains them as a different expression of their culture.

The deconstruction of essentialised images of otherness and of the self was also fostered by an effort to raise cultural self-awareness by challenging the national paradigm. After surfacing the contradictions among student representations of the self, in their descriptions of the Cypriot culture, students seemed to acknowledge the diversity and relativity of their perceptions and interpretations, hence the heterogeneity within any national culture.

During another discussion which sought to stress unfair generalisations despite minimal knowledge of certain ethnic groups, students list their sources of information (history lessons and television) which focus on certain dominant cultures. This activity was part of an effort to critically engage learners with the ways their meanings and behaviours 'have been formed' (Byram, 1997: 35) and with sources of their knowledge, to question both education and mainstream media as sites of cultural reproduction (Apple, 1996), as channels of circulation of information and of transmission of dominant cultural forms (McLaren, 2003a). The unequal distribution of power among different ethnic, cultural and social groups (May, 1999) is reflected in the disparity of their inclusion in the knowledge

transmitted by education and the media, consequently in the images that we hold of other cultures (Kubota, 2004).

Inadequate knowledge of other cultures as a source of misconceptions and negative stereotyping was also emphasised during several sessions through debates often initiated by the students' own work. During these discussions, some students acknowledged that superficial knowledge may lead to wrong assumptions. In addition, an awareness of limited knowledge is explicitly stated by two of the students interviewed, Chloe and Eleni.

Moreover, learners express empathy and solidarity in their essays of comparison or contrast of one's life to a young immigrant's life. Student writing and interviews indicate that the empathy-building objective of the unit was met as most learners demonstrate awareness of their privileges, express solidarity and admiration for a hard-working young man (Galo) who supports his family and assumes adult responsibilities. In addition, as I further explain in section 6.3.3 of this chapter, there is evidence of learners' reflection on migration when they contrast their own privileged lives to Galo's experiences of leaving his country and family, crossing a desert on foot, seeking an education and better living conditions, facing difficulties such as adapting to a new country, or trying to avoid deportation.

Learners' IC enhancement is therefore evidenced by the data. Moreover, I often presented to them information in disagreement 'with prior beliefs' (Causey *et al.*: 2000) which aimed to disconfirm stereotypes (Hill and Augoustinos, 2001) and stimulate curiosity and reflection on cultural diversity; this learning may have been of major effect but it is not

observable at the present point. A degree of difficulty in detecting learners' responses to the intercultural syllabus reflects the challenge in assessing IC as it mainly involves learners' moral and affective development and the observation of behavioural and attitudinal changes.

### **6.3.3 EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN MY PRACTICE IN ENHANCING LEARNERS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE**

#### **6.3.3.1 Opening spaces**

The implementation of the intercultural syllabus, detailed in chapter four, undertook to 'create openings in the classroom space in which otherness and difference' could be felt and expressed (Zembylas, 2007: 178). My intervention sought to introduce learners to cultural diversity issues with activities planned with the purpose of problematising uniform and monolithic constructions of cultural others and moving them toward greater cultural sensitivity.

Apart from the creation of intercultural materials and activities, the intervention encouraged class debates which built on student knowledge and writing and fostered critical thinking. Class discussions were helpful in enhancing student understanding of the multiple facets of cultural diversity: a discussion on the description of Cypriot culture encouraged the acknowledgement of diversity in self-perception, hence cultural self-awareness. Other discussions fostered stereotypical or prejudiced attitudes which are based on ethnocentric tendencies or insufficient knowledge of the group we judge, or surfaced the reasons behind migration.

### **6.3.3.2 Revision of the intervention**

During the implementation of the syllabus, I tried to utilise more learner-centred teaching approaches by fostering student increased curricular control, learner autonomy, and dialogical relations. I cannot claim, though, that my approach to teaching radically transformed during my study; it would be more honest to affirm that insights gained from the implementation of this syllabus and readings — at the time — enriched my pedagogy by inciting me to pay closer attention to the knowledge and experiences that learners brought with them into the classroom. Since then, further readings and insights have motivated me to teach in ways which are more in agreement with transformative pedagogies and enhance student agency. Sharing control is at the heart of critical pedagogy and transformative practices since they are concerned with social justice and the promotion of democratic behaviours within classrooms and schools (Giroux, 2005), consequently with student 'empowerment and emancipation' (Morrison, 2001: 280).

When reviewing each activity, I conclude that the unit on description of ethnic cultures was the least successful and the comparison-contrast unit the most successful for the reasons which follow.

Making the decision to include ethnic cultures entailed the risk of reinforcing the idea that cultures are homogeneous and static. Though my intention was to raise awareness on why representatives of other cultures act the way they do, data analysis demonstrates that, on the contrary, the activity resulted in superficial and negative descriptions which essentialise other cultures; while I sought to challenge stereotypes in class debates, most students present cultures in such a way that it does stereotype them, which questions the success of the activity. Findings stress the difficulty of

leading students into recognising their stereotypes, putting them aside, and acknowledging other cultures as not inferior to theirs, but different. In the future, I would therefore abandon the specific activity which supports uniform constructions of cultures, but I would not give up on the effort to challenge stereotypical readings of otherness. I would rather foster the identification and acknowledgement of ethnocentrism in our judgements of other cultural groups, thus *savoir être* and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997), by bringing to the class documents which illustrate the relativity in interpreting otherness and open learners to multiple perspectives: I could then contrast a document where Cypriots judge other cultural groups and another where Cypriots are judged by others, for instance, the article which I used in Autumn 2007 and which described Cypriots according to a Pan-European survey. Exposing learners to the way their culture may be perceived by others would enhance their 'cultural humility' and stress that 'our way is not the only way' (Bennett, 2009: 128). Given learners' previous education, identifying ethnocentric perspectives and their effects in intercultural misunderstandings (Byram, 1997) and relinquishing them is extremely relevant in the local context.

Perhaps the most successful activity was the comparison-contrast writing task which exposed students to the experiences of a young Mexican migrant related in the first person. Following critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism which associate multicultural education with wider issues of socio-economic and political inequality (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997; May, 1999), the activity fostered human rights, hence democratic and active citizenship (Brown, 2003; Osler and Starkey, 2005), by exposing learners to a case of child labour and child migration. In addition, it provided learners with an opportunity to experience another culture (both ethnic and social) and encouraged them to establish a

relationship between their own and the other's system (Byram, 1997; McKay, 2002; Skopinskaja, 2003). By connecting the syllabus to students' and the young migrant's (Galo) real-life situations and building student understanding on their own experiences (Matthews, 2005), the activity offered the means to see another perspective, and in this way rethink and re-experience their taken-for-granted worlds (Byram, 2003). The agency of a single student, who organised his writing around similarities of his life to Galo's life, helped me realise that my approach needed adjustment and led me to the concept of 'relational empathy' which emphasises similarities 'without ignoring differences' between the self and the other and leads to a new interpretation of "us" which includes "them" (Zembylas, 2007: 187); the term was used by Broome (2009), who refers to conflict resolution theory and practice and specifically to peacebuilding efforts in Cyprus through bicommunal (Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot) meetings. He explains that empathy must be grounded on the understanding of the other's worldview but also on the 'co-creation of meanings' (*op. cit.*: 185) through interpersonal encounters which engage individuals both cognitively and affectively (*op. cit.*). Hence, through their virtual interaction with Galo, learners noticed both their differences and similarities with him and their relationship to migrants may have grown. However, some learners who chose to focus on migrants in their final examinations generalise out of Galo's case to stereotype young migrants as poor, having problems at school, or consuming drugs and alcohol.

Time constraints may have played here an important role in reinforcing stereotypes instead of challenging them; the courses only extended over 39 teaching periods which, I felt, hindered the complex task of addressing learners' values and attitudes and which needed extensive work and revisiting of concepts in order to avoid 'oversimplified images or ideas'

(Hernández Sheets, 2005: 53). However, as I explained in chapter five, teachers constantly feel that time is never sufficient and is an obstacle to their work (Hargreaves, 1994) which leads me to relativise my judgement. A longer course might have given more tangible effects in learners' responses, but the main issue here is the complexity of intercultural competence which I came to view as an 'additive process' (Bennett, 2009: 127), one evolving over a life time.

Moreover, the activity on cross-cultural marriages seems inappropriate for writing a paragraph which focuses on a single idea or position, and would be more suitable for essay writing where learners can expand on both advantages and disadvantages of such relationships. The activity, as it was introduced, guided learners into taking a stance for or against cross-cultural marriages and further entrenched them into prejudiced attitudes. It would therefore be preferable that learners consider opposing viewpoints to theirs and reflect on the reasons behind successful intercultural marriages. In addition, I would introduce the idea of relationships between different cultures but perhaps not between different religions, which seemed to have challenged learners beyond their threshold of tolerance and strengthened student resistance. Religious values are a 'highly sensitive area' which can only be gradually approached (Keast, 2007: 11), especially in the local context where religion is an important component of most Greek Cypriots' identities.

Apart from the activity on the description of ethnic cultures, I would keep the intercultural materials for future implementation and readjust them as explained. I would, however, also adopt a less neutral stance, and be more explicit by connecting the syllabus to the students' context; data analysis revealed my apprehension to interfere with learners' views which often

held me back from a more demanding syllabus. Even though, following critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy, I included some controversial topics, such as migration, I would now go further in confronting learners with issues such as discrimination or racism in their own locational context. Even the young Mexican migrant in the USA was a safer choice than a Bangladeshi boy in Cyprus. At times, I felt that I adopted a more neutral stance than one of a critical educator, at others I felt guilty for having offended a single learner's convictions. Surely, my own socialisation within traditional schooling, as both a student and an educator, accounts for my partial neutrality which made me fear conflict and uncomfortable situations. Data collection and analysis have also raised my awareness around the ethical questions which may emerge during intercultural competence teaching. It became clear that my tendency towards neutrality was also due to the concern that interfering with learners' values was unethical (Byram, 1997). Influencing students' perceptions and ultimately their personality was the source of preoccupation which subsequently led me to the opposition indoctrination vs education and the exploration of the boundaries between the two. This self-reflective process led me to the realisation that my inner conflict was predictable and even desirable since it stopped me from indoctrinating learners into my 'political positions'; instead, my effort was to expose learners to issues and assist them in thinking critically and reaching their own conclusions (Hafernik *et al.*, 2002). Consequently, I would approach intercultural teaching with a similar cautiousness in the future, except that I would include topics which are more relevant to the learners' contexts and be more explicit about contentious concepts.

The above considerations highlight the difficulty in teaching values, especially in FLE, an area not usually viewed as transmitting 'moral values'



(Corbett, 2003: 209). There are no ready-made solutions for transformative teaching (Matthews, 2005), which is not an easy enterprise. There is no safe or prescribed path and the answers lie with the conscience and teachers' decisions in their particular contexts with specific students. However, it is important to keep in mind that a 'properly implemented' intercultural syllabus fosters values which 'respect rather than threaten learners' own systems of belief' so that it ultimately empowers and promotes learners' self-confidence (Corbett, 2003: 209).

#### **6.3.4 RECONCEPTUALISING MY PRACTICE: A SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATOR**

This research experience has taught me many lessons. One of them is that attending to learners' emotional needs is as important as focusing on their intellectual needs and learning information on the subject matter. The exploration of critical pedagogy and intercultural competence theories and practices has raised my awareness of the significance of the affective domain. Following critical pedagogues, I am striving towards dialogic teaching and more equal relations to learners, acknowledging their active role in the teaching and learning process. Through engaging with my research, I have moved further away from traditional pedagogical practices which construct teachers as the sole experts and students as passive recipients of knowledge (Freire, 1970) and which support dominant power relationships (Bartholomé, 2003: 413; Matthews, 2005). I have thus become more motivated to include in my practice positive pedagogical approaches in view of empowering learners to be active citizens. Transformative teaching involves being more attentive to classroom atmospheres of mutual respect among learners and between learners and teachers (Hafernik *et al.*, 2002). It entails actively involving students in knowledge production and connecting education to their everyday lives; this is of particular relevance in the Cypriot context where

the top-down model placing the teacher as the sole expert prevails as well as in higher education where lecturing is considered the norm.

The importance of affective learning necessitates a quest for balance between the cognitive and emotional components of the learning process (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997; Adams *et al.*, 2007). By teaching values, I have become equally interested in learners' behavioural, affective, and cognitive development. Building learners' intercultural competence entails that I do not simply deal with the acquisition of new knowledge but even more with learners' moral and affective development and personal growth: respect and openness to otherness in view of harmonious relationships (Byram and Zarate, 1997). My educational practice has thus become a space for the promotion of humanistic values such as respect for diversity, tolerance, and understanding amongst cultural groups. Ultimately, this experience has reinforced my view that teaching is much more than instruction; it is mostly a moral enterprise (Burton & Bartlett, 2005).

This investigation has also strengthened my stance that teachers possess the agency to adapt curricula to their needs and values (Wideen *et al.*, 2002; Reagan and Osborn, 2002) and become curriculum-makers (Stenhouse, 1975; Pinar, 2004). Creating a syllabus has been an empowering experience in that it has built up my confidence in my capacity to shape the curriculum, hence engage in transformative intellectual work (Giroux, 1988; Stanley, 1992) for a larger humanistic vision rather than for the mere transmission of imposed content on linguistic skills. The starting point of the syllabus was my beliefs, which gave more sense to my work, lived as socially meaningful. Accordingly, I had the opportunity to live out my values of social justice in my practice and experience my role as one of a 'change agent' (Fullan, 2007). In this

way, I was able to reshape my professional practice so that it improves my students' education and ultimately benefits society. Moreover, researching my own teaching and adopting a self-reflective stance towards my work has enhanced a more critical positioning towards my practice, the assumptions and beliefs which inform it, my biases, and the need to strive for more democratic relationships with students.

In addition, the experience of this study assisted me in gaining insight into students' worlds: their perceptions of otherness but also their life experiences. Aspiring to guide students into reading the other outside stereotypes within a few teaching sessions now seems a more complex enterprise, especially in a conflict-ridden area such as Cyprus, where stereotypical and prejudiced attitudes are not simply individual but also 'historical and political' (Zembylas, 2007: 187). However, despite the ethnocentric constructions promoted in the educational system which I believe determines significantly learners' perceptions of all cultural others, learners have been exposed to other, less ethnocentric influences which surface in their interviews. One of these influences will have been this learning experience which adds to previous and future exposure and which may enable them to adopt more open attitudes to cultural otherness in the future.

The most significant gain for me is that this study has been a personal journey into further accepting the various cultures as of equal value in the spirit of interculturalism; I have deepened my understanding of cultural identity, which I now view as multidimensional, fluid, and as self-perception of one's race, social class, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, and physical and mental ability (Tatum, 2003). This influence has been integrated into my educational practice and is expressed in the

increased respect I show learners and their views that stem from their different cultural backgrounds, thus in the creation of more positive learning environments. A commitment for more inclusive democratic practices which value student knowledge and experiences is henceforth part of my teaching.

The study has provided me with the opportunity to critically reflect, clarify, and challenge my values and my taken-for-granted practices (Atweh *et al.*, 1998; McNiff *et al.*, 2003). Awareness-raising through critical reflection in order to help teacher-researchers become conscious of their perceptual biases is one of the key principles of action inquiry (Winter, 1996). Some of my decisions, even if unconscious, reproduce cultural and social inequities and it is part of my responsibility to critically reflect on them. Adopting a critical stance towards my practice has not been an easy enterprise, especially as I am not a novice teacher and my practice is based on long-held assumptions and on deeply rooted routines (Somekh, 1995). This critical positioning towards my practice is, just like intercultural competence and transformative teaching, an open-ended route, 'an ongoing learning process' (Matthews, 2005: 96).

Self-reflection helped me become more accountable for my practice by giving me the opportunity 'to validate critical theories of teaching' in my own professional context (O'Hanlon, 2000: 149). The exploration and integration of intercultural competence and critical pedagogy theories in my practice have helped me clarify my positioning within my profession and reassess my role as a foreign language educator. They have thus strengthened my wish to strive towards a more humane world by transforming my educational practice into a more socially just one and placing antiracism at its centre. Critical pedagogy has reinforced my view

that education is political, that pedagogical choices have ideological implications, and that schools reproduce official knowledge and social inequities. I have therefore become more motivated to view my teaching in more than classroom methodology and techniques and to foster an interdisciplinary approach which draws on citizenship education, human rights, and peace education (Byram, 1997; Starkey and Osler, 2005) in order to prepare global citizens. Moreover, I have been enabled to elucidate feelings of contradictions that I experience as a teacher of “powerful” languages, imposed through colonisation and economic domination; this project offered me the means to question the unattainable native speaker model, to view English and French as global languages which open doors to communicating with the rest of the world, and to focus on the concept of the intercultural speaker and the experience of otherness in the learning of a language. As a language teacher in tertiary education, I have been empowered to react to directives limiting my autonomy and reducing my work to a specialised craft in the service of the university’s theoretical courses and students’ employability; critical pedagogy has given me the “weapons” to respond to the assigned role of a technician (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2004) which would deprofessionalise me (Smyth *et al.*, 2000) and to foster the social, political, and ethical implications of my profession (Guilherme, 2002).

Ultimately, critical pedagogy represents for me a utopia which inspires me to aim at creative and meaningful teaching; it assists me in reconceptualising my practice into a democratic space where students are active constructors of knowledge, and my profession into a social justice issue.

## 6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The effort for IC enhancement was isolated and not part of an institutional endeavour. Even though my data suggest some impact on learners, it does not mean that it will be of long-lasting effect: attempts for change in 'curricula and learning activities that are not part of an integrated system of the whole' cannot succeed in educating the youth for cross-cultural understanding, 'most especially in regions where deep-seated fears and mistrust have, over the decades, infiltrated collective ways of being' (Shepherd Johnson, 2007: 22). A curricular initiative needs to be supported by efforts in the whole educational institution, for instance by the integration of intercultural learning into all the other courses for long-term effects (*op. cit.*).

A collaborative effort might have also supported changes in the institutional culture. Collaborative action inquiry that involves collaboration among teachers is reported to be of greater efficiency (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998; McNiff *et al.*, 2003) as it 'can provide the base of ideas that could generalize to policy and practice' (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006: 567). Even though my working environment is friendly, and I have often had discussions with colleagues who have assumed the role of critical friends and empathetic outsiders, this study has been an individual endeavour. A demanding schedule of teaching and research has made collaboration with other lecturers impossible, especially as this research was part of my doctoral studies. Somekh (1995) describes very well my case when she refers to action inquiry conducted by lecturers who study for higher degrees. This, she notes, fills an institutional need of higher education for research but has often led teachers to work alone rather than form real collaborative partnerships. Moreover, collaboration is seen as difficult to implement as teachers are not familiar with collegiality and

individualism prevails in their occupational culture (Hargreaves, 1994). Collaborative reflection by engaging in communication within a critical community would have helped me in reducing confusion (Rearick & Feldman, 1999) while multiple views and interpretations would have reduced my subjectivity, thus preventing the study from 'becoming one-sided' (O'Hanlon, 2003: 65). Finally, collaborative research would have assisted the validation of the research process since a diversity of perspectives also ensures the triangulation of the process (*op. cit.*).

Moreover, 'intercultural communicative practice is a messy business' which 'involves much trial and error' (Byram *et al.*, 2001: viii). A main difficulty has been the assessment of student learning after the implementation because of the nature of IC, which deals mostly with moral and affective development. Despite rich data, observing student attitudes and behaviour has been a very complex task; if the study had extended over a longer period, assessment of student intercultural learning might have been enhanced by alternative data sources such as those recommended by Lázár *et al.* (2007): anecdotal records, observation checklists, observation rating scales, documentation of task-related behaviours, attitudes inventories, surveys, journals, collection of written products, interest inventories, and logs.

My initiative can be seen as an effort to promote tolerance and empathy and to provide students with some exposure to the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to live in harmony with other cultures. It mainly aimed at reducing ethnocentricity by working against stereotypes and prejudiced views of other cultures. However, intercultural competence cannot happen over a course or two. It is 'a lifelong process' (Deardorff, 2009: xiii) which demands that learners are exposed to intercultural learning throughout

their education, regularly engage in reflection and introspection, and experience substantial intercultural interactions and relationships (*op. cit.*). It therefore sets long term goals for both educators and learners.

I therefore consider that this research opened doors for me, for new learning and new ways of being which I will be exploring for the rest of my life.

## **6.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study may be justified in the light of a deficiency in Foreign language teaching and learning: despite the increasing recognition of the importance of cultural and intercultural learning in language research, foreign language teaching still seems reluctant to apply these theories in practice. Accordingly, there are few examples of intercultural competence in practice (Byram *et al.*, 2001). Similarly, critical pedagogy has hardly been applied in classrooms because it is seen as introducing a theory of little relevance to practice (May, 1999). On a more specific level, in Cyprus there is no similar research addressing higher education students and teachers' intercultural competence in FLT.

Unlike traditional classroom-based research whose main purpose is to 'measure performance' (Burton & Bartlett, 2005: 18), this study primarily intended to explore the complexities of intercultural teaching and learning. Concerned with student and my own perceptions and attitudes and our ability to relate successfully with others, it reflects an ideology about the moral purpose of education which opposes current technicist approaches expecting education to serve the market (*op. cit.*; Smyth and Shacklock, 1998; Murray and Lawrence, 2000).



Somekh (1995: 341) asserts that, unlike traditional research measuring findings and outcomes, action inquiry findings are fed back directly into practice in order to generate 'practical wisdom' or 'situational understanding'. Its strength therefore lies in its transferability to similar situations (classrooms, institutions). My findings may be of interest to the various stakeholders in education who want to find out how a FL teacher viewed and approached intercultural competence in a specific context.

More specifically, this study may inform:

- educators and practitioner-researchers who want to include IC in their pedagogical aims. The increased understanding which results from this investigation may be of use to those who implement intercultural learning in their courses, especially FL educators who are reconsidering the sole focus on linguistic goals and aim at integrating a cultural and an intercultural dimension in their courses. My study points to the inclusion in FL pedagogy of concepts such as solidarity, tolerance, empathy, and respect for human rights. It places the focus on universal values and morality (Alred *et al.*, 2006), on dialogic teaching and democratic learning environments in view of preparing learners for an active participation in multicultural democratic societies (Guilherme, 2002; Corona, 2005; Byram, 2008).

- teacher educators and trainers: teacher education and training is reported to inadequately prepare teachers for addressing intercultural concepts (Cushner and Mahon, 2009) and to pay little attention to the intercultural and political dimensions of language teaching and learning (Lázár *et al.*, 2007; Byram, 2009). Teacher education therefore needs to provide teachers with the theoretical background and the practical skills

enabling them to 'understand more fully' the concept of IC (Deardorff, 2009: xiv) and integrate it in their practices. FL teacher education and training should include values education (Byram, 2008) in their curricula and address teachers' beliefs, seen as the best means for altering teaching practices (Sercu *et al.*, 2005). This preparation calls for critical self-reflection, a key component in intercultural competence (Phipps and Guilherme, 2004; Byram, 2008), which can facilitate educators' awareness of their own perceptions and values around cultural diversity and the concept of culture which they bring into the teaching and learning process.

- curriculum and textbook designers: policy makers and textbook authors also need to address learners' preparation for successful communication in multicultural and international encounters. For ELT, English as a lingua franca must be emphasised so that it serves the needs of wider communication for intercultural interactions (McKay, 2002; Decke-Cornill, 2003); the native speaker should cease to be the unattainable model for language learners and replaced by the notion of intercultural speaker which fosters the ability to discover and relate to other cultures (Byram and Zarate, 1997; Lambert and Shohamy, 2000; Guilherme, 2002). The cultural component must be upgraded in curricula and textbooks and should not be considered as a fifth or a marginal skill (Valdes, 1986; Kramsch, 1993; Lange and Paige, 2003). The recognition that grammatical and lexical competences alone are insufficient for preparing learners to live in an increasingly globalised world leads to considering culture teaching and learning an integral part of FLE (Byram *et al.*, 1994; Doyé, 1996; Hinkel, 1999; Fenner, 2006; Risager, 2007).

Overall, my findings may facilitate better understanding of intercultural teaching and learning and contribute to the ongoing debate of the importance of intercultural competence in foreign language education.

## **6.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Since qualitative studies are not intended to generalise but to bring to light the uniqueness found in specific cases, there is always room for similar studies. Moreover, intercultural competence in FLE is a rather recent concept offering fertile ground for further research.

My participants represent young adults studying at a specific private institution, in a particular country at a specific time. The representation of student views on intercultural issues is one area which can be further researched, for it allows us to gain insights into their worlds; the more we learn about student perceptions, the better suited we will be to address learner needs with appropriate pedagogy. Students are the main stakeholders of education and any initiative in curriculum or textbook design, teacher education or educational reform should be primarily inspired by their worlds.

Teacher education and training for language teachers, which generally neglect the cultural and intercultural components (Lázár *et al.*, 2007; Byram, 2009), can greatly profit from classroom-based research and the practical application of interculturality. My syllabus and teaching strategies represent one approach which can be enriched through similar attempts by colleagues. It would be interesting to see how these ideas might translate into other educational or cultural contexts or in areas other than FLE. As previously noted, transformative teaching is an exigent project that gains

in being informed by numerous studies which can identify good practice in building IC. Greater investigation is needed into the question of how teachers can maximise the effects of IC enhancement. Future research can therefore seek the implementation of IC syllabi and strategies across the curriculum through collaboration with peers. It can foster long-term IC in students exposed to intercultural teaching during longer periods or seek to reassess student understanding a certain period after the end of a specific intervention in order to determine whether learning is long-lasting. The nebulous concept of intercultural competence needs to be further evidenced by the analysis of a variety of materials, pedagogies, and data collection methods and in a diversity of contexts.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: THE SYLLABUS: DESCRIPTION OF ETHNIC CULTURES

#### Autumn 2007

#### Writing task 1: Description of a culture (150-200 words)

Based on chapter 7: Description of your book and the article 'What is a US American?' prepare an outline home to describe **one** of the following ethnic cultures:

- The English
- The Italians
- The Cypriots
- A culture of your choice

Before preparing your outline, revise chapters 2 and 3 in your textbook so that you properly use a pre-writing technique and know how to prepare an outline.

Make sure that you narrow your topic in **one** aspect/characteristic of a culture because you will write only **one** paragraph. You therefore need to choose a sub-topic that inspires you most e.g.

- Time orientation,
- relation to nature and environment,
- religious beliefs and traditions,
- entertainment habits
- family values or family relationships etc.

You can go online and search for information on the Internet but you must not use the texts as such in your paragraph. Otherwise this will constitute plagiarism. You must paraphrase, that is express information in your own words.

## **APPENDIX 2: THE SYLLABUS: SUMMARISING TASKS ON STEREOTYPES AND MIGRATION (EXAMPLES OF TEXTS)**

### **I. Summer 2007**

#### **YOUTH STEREOTYPES WHAT ARE THE STEREOTYPES?**

##### **Teens are all Violent and Dangerous**

The percentage of students who report carrying weapons has declined steadily since 1991. (YouthInfo)

98% of San Francisco's youth did not commit a violent crime last year. (Coleman Advocates)

The adults polled estimated that youth were responsible for 43 percent of violent crimes. The truth? FBI statistics show that juveniles are responsible for 13 percent of violent crime, less than a third of what the adults polled thought. (SF Chronicle)

News stories often portray youth as perpetrators of crime but rarely report when youth are victims of crime, especially when they are victims of adult crime. Almost three-quarters of the news stories examined depicted youth as perpetrators of crime. (SF Chronicle)

For every violent or sexual offense committed by a youth under 18 years of age, there are three such crimes committed against a youth by adults. (SF Chronicle)

83% of murdered children, half of murdered teenagers and 85 percent of murdered adults are slain by adults over age 20, not by "kids"--or, in President Clinton's stock phrase (AP, 11/14/93), "13-year-olds...with automatic weapons." In fact, FBI reports show 47-year-olds (people Clinton's age) are twice as likely to commit murder than are 13-year-olds. (Extra!)

##### **Teens are Disrespectful of Adults**

In commercials, teenagers are depicted as individualists above all else, hostile to any authority (parental or otherwise) that impinges on their self-expression. In real life, they're more apt to disdain than admire those who break the rules. (Adweek)

In a study, when asked to identify the major causes of problems in schools, 64% of teens said "students who don't respect schoolteachers and authorities." When asked what the major causes of the nation's problems, 56% said "Selfishness, people not thinking of the rights of others," and 52% said "People who don't respect the law and authorities." (Adweek)

## **Teens are Apathetic and Don't Care About the Future**

95% of San Francisco's public school youth did not drop out of school last year while 4,500 graduated from public high school. (Coleman Advocates)

"Teens in America work harder than their counterparts anywhere else in the world," the survey found. More hold jobs (58 percent) and do housework regularly (69 percent). (Hotwired)

More than 78 percent say they enjoy learning, and 75 percent "definitely" plan to go to college. (Hotwired)

(It's a) myth that teens care about nothing but fun. In truth, found Moses, the number one worry of teenagers is getting a good job, and their number one expectation is completing their education. (Hotwired)

## **Teens are all High**

A study by the US Drug Abuse Warning Network found that 95% of the drug-related deaths in 1994 were adults over the age of 26. (Crimson & Gray)

The 23rd annual Monitoring the Future (MTFS) survey of drug use among adolescents shows that, after years of dramatic increases, illicit drug use among young adolescents leveled off from 1996 to 1997 and decreased slightly for marijuana, cigarettes and certain other substances. (YouthInfo)

## **SOURCES**

[YouthInfo](#), a website developed by the US Department of Health and Human Services

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[Adweek](#) 12-14-98 "Seeing Beyond the Stereotype of the Defiant Teen" by Mark Dolliver

[The Crimson & Gray Online](#), 10-5-97 (The Student News magazine of W.F. West High School, Chehalis, WA)

SOURCE: <http://www.kqed.org/w/ymc/empowered/stereotypes.html>

## **II. Autumn 2007**

### **LONDON'S SMALLER COMMUNITIES**

**For centuries, people have been coming to settle in London from all over the world. New arrivals formed communities based on shared ethnicity, nationality, or religion. Some communities have large representation and are well established: the West Indian, Chinese and Irish communities, for example. Others are smaller, such as the Japanese, or less visible, such as the Traveller community. The groups described here are just some of London's smaller communities.**

Some communities in London are transient. Many North Americans come as temporary residents to study or work, but the number of permanent migrants is quite small. There are also large Australasian and South African communities. Although increasing numbers are staying to pursue long-term career goals, most young visitors from Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa stay for a year or two at most. These communities have made their presence felt in London. A free-media industry has grown to publish papers for ex-pats. West London is well known for its Australian theme bars such and shops that stock popular New Zealand groceries and South African newspapers.

#### **Greek-Cypriot community**

Cyprus became a British colony in 1925 and Greek Cypriots began to settle in London from the 1930s. The earliest migrants came to the area around Soho, and many more arrived at the end of the Second World War. As rents in the West End increased, Camden and Fulham became popular areas for Greek-Cypriot migrants. Early integration was slow and many women worked from home in industries such as dressmaking. By the 1960s, a Greek language school and Greek Orthodox church, St Nicholas, had been established in Fulham.

A second wave of Greek-Cypriot settlers arrived after Cypriot independence in the early 1960s. Many migrants started their own businesses and, as economics improved, families moved out to suburbs. Many more refugees fled from Cyprus after Turkish military intervention in 1974. The Greek Cypriot identity is strongly preserved, with church still a focal point of the community.

SOURCE: 'Exploring 20<sup>th</sup> century London'

<http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk>

### **APPENDIX 3: THE SYLLABUS: COMPARISON AND CONTRAST OF ONE'S LIFE WITH A YOUNG IMMIGRANT'S LIFE**

Immigration [WireTap](#)

Young Immigrants Have to Grow Up Fast

By Paloma Esquivel, November 16, 2006



Teenaged immigrants often put aside school and social lives to hold down jobs and support their parents even as their wealthy American counterparts stay young and irresponsible indefinitely.

...According to research by the Pew Hispanic Center, 7.5 million undocumented immigrants in America are 18-39. 1.7 million are under 18 years.

...They have likely grown up fast -- very fast. At 12, 13, 14, many of the young people interviewed for this story had their first job. They worked to support their parents (not vice versa) and to help brothers and sisters along the way. For them, youth's milestones -- education, friendship, fun and youthful indiscretion -- were overshadowed by two major responsibilities: to help support family and to keep from getting deported.

Galo is a soccer-playing, music-loving community college student living in Oregon. Like most of his peers he has a penchant for sports. He spends hours a day practicing with his college soccer team -- but he also has loftier plans. At 19, he says he'll eventually become a politician. "I want to help my people," he says.

Six years ago, just before Christmas, when temperatures in the border deserts drop to below 20 degrees at night, Galo spent several nights walking across Arizona with his brother's wife and kids. His parents stayed behind in Michoacan, Mexico, and he was pretty much on his own, with some help from his older brother.

The way he tells it, he came to the United States at 13, without parents, without much money and without legal permission to work, because he had decided to straighten out his life, get a good education and become more responsible.

"I was drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana. I had problems at school," he says, describing life as a preteen, "One day I went to church and I asked God to give me a path to change my life, and he helped me decide to talk to my brother about coming to the U.S."

As a high school student Galo worked clearing Idaho's onion fields, picking corn and picking up whatever odd jobs came his way. After high school, he says, came the time to decide how his life would turn out -- would he keep his promise to get an education in the United States? Undocumented immigrants don't qualify for financial aid to go to school. In most states, they pay out-of-state tuition (which, with fees, can equal up to \$30,000 a year) to attend even the most basic public colleges.

At 18, he says, his decision was made when his brother helped him get a job milking cows at a dairy farm. The job paid well, he says, and he was able to send money back to family every 15 days. "Not much, just \$200, \$300 dollars," he says. While this might have been the end of the line, Galo says he'd come to the United States with a clear vision of his responsibilities -- to educate himself and to help his family. So, he saved - - \$3,500 by the end of the year. Enough to start community college.

Despite a schedule that includes going to school full time and playing on the soccer team, Galo still works at a restaurant on weekends and after practice, "to pay the rent, pay for lunch," he says, "the basics." The money he's saved up should pay for one year's tuition -- after that, he says, he'll find a way to make ends meet.

**Writing task 2:** Find at least five different points to compare or contrast Galo's life and yours. Focus on the differences. Then, write a paragraph using the block arrangement or the point-to-point method.

Galo's life	My life



## APPENDIX 4: THE SYLLABUS: A PERSUASIVE TEXT ON CROSS-CULTURAL MARRIAGES

Type of paragraph: **Persuasion**

Topic: **Cross-cultural marriages**

**Fiddler on the Roof** (1971): The film relates the life of a Jewish community in a small Russian village at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, before the revolution. The main character is Tevye, a poor milkman, who lives with his wife and five daughters. One of the film's themes is the tradition of young people finding a spouse (husband or wife) through an arranged marriage and with the help of a matchmaker. Normally, the parents decide for the children without necessarily consulting them. Also, they all marry within their own community.

○ **Scene 16** (1:14): Chava meets Fyedka. Here, his third daughter meets a young Russian peasant. Fyedka offers her a book.

*Chava*: No, thank you.

*Fyedka*: Why? Because I'm not Jewish? Do you feel about me the way they feel about you? And what do you know about me?

○ **Scene 29** (2:16): They are in love and Chava asks for her father's consent.

*Tevye*: As the Good Book says, "Each shall seek his own kind".

*Chava*: But the world is changing, papa.

Her father does not consent to her marriage and Chava runs away to secretly marry her beloved.

- Choose a side, the father's or the daughter's, then, find three other people in the class who agree with you.
- In groups of three or four brainstorm for arguments to support your opinion.
- At home do an internet search for related arguments to support a persuasive text. Keep the references of your sources.
- During our next lesson you will write individually a paragraph in favour of or against cross-cultural marriages (marriages between different cultures or faiths).
- Refer to your notes on Persuasion and include at least three different types of arguments.

## **APPENDIX 5: TEXT ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FOR INTRODUCING SUMMARISING**

### **International Students**

All around the world, there are international students at institutions of higher learning. The definition of an international student is "a postsecondary student from another country." The meaning of postsecondary is "after high school." Another phrase for international students is "foreign students." The word foreign means "of a different country or culture." Even so, some people don't like the word foreign, so they use the phrase "international students." For institution of higher learning, they usually say "university," "college," or "school." International students leave their home countries and go to school abroad. One meaning of the word abroad is "in a foreign place." By far, the country with the most students from abroad is the United States. Canada, Great Britain, and some European countries also have a lot of students from other countries. But more and more, students from around the world attend colleges and universities in the developing nations of Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Developing nations don't yet have a high level of industrialization or technology.

Why do high school and college graduates go to colleges and universities far from their homes? Undergraduates are postsecondary students without college degrees. Often, undergraduates want the experience of life in new cultures. Maybe they want to learn another language well, in school and in real life. Many older students want degrees in business, engineering, or technology. These subjects are not always available in their home countries. Some governments and companies send their best graduate students and workers to other countries for new knowledge and skills. And some students from expensive private schools at home save money through study abroad, especially in developing nations.

Why do institutions of higher learning want international students? Of course, students from other countries and cultures bring internationalism to the class room or campus. They bring different languages, customs, ideas, and opinions from many places around the world. Usually, they study hard. Also, educational institutions need money. Tuition is the fee or charge for instruction, and private schools everywhere charge high tuition. One definition of citizens and immigrants is "legal members of a nation or country." International students are not citizens or immigrants, so they pay full tuition and fees to state or government schools. And all students away from home spend money for housing, food, recreation, and other things. For these reasons, many schools and groups of schools want students from other countries.

For various reasons, many high school and college graduates want or need to study abroad. For other reasons, many nations want or need students from other countries and cultures on their college and university campuses.

SOURCE: Kirn, E. and Hartmann, P. (2002) *Interactions 1 – Reading* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) New York: McGraw Hill Contemporary

## **APPENDIX 6: THE SYLLABUS: DESCRIPTION OF CYPRIOTS ACCORDING TO A PAN-EUROPEAN SURVEY**

The Cyprus Mail  
By Jean Christou

(archive article-Tuesday, November 13, 2007)

CYPRIOTS have little tolerance for foreigners, homosexuals and unmarried parents compared to their European counterparts, according to a new study.

Neither do they care much for exercise or reading newspapers, but they are the most religious and optimistic people in the EU, said the survey carried out by the European University in Nicosia, and published by Phileleftheros at the weekend.

The survey describes many Cypriots as apathetic, basing the conclusion on the fact that nearly 50 per cent spend three hours or more a day watching soaps on television.

"And while television appears to monopolise the way in which these Cypriots pass their time, they don't seem to consider it particularly problematic," the report said, adding that 94 per cent of those polled said they felt no reason to cut down on their viewing time.

"We could say it appears the Cypriot seems to prefer being a spectator of the lives of others more than a protagonist of his own," the report added. "This attitude classes the Cypriot as the most apathetic compared with other Europeans because he does not seem occupied with the loss of his creativity. If you combine this with the fact that roughly half of Cypriots do not read a newspaper, it gives a relatively negative picture of how the modern Cypriot spends his free time."

Cypriot are also the lowest internet users, with only one in ten going online compared to the European average of seven out of ten. Exercise is also a no-no, according to the survey, which says that 54 per cent of Cypriots say they do not exercise at all. Only around 25 per cent exercise on a regular basis. This puts Cypriots again in last place among other Europeans. The poll warns that this increases the risk of chronic illnesses.

When asked if Cypriot society was xenophobic, the results put Cypriots in last place among Europeans saying that immigrants contribute positively to both the economic and cultural development of their society.

Less than 40 per cent agreed with the sentiment.

"This particularly is extremely worrying if one takes into account the number of Cypriots who lived as immigrants in other countries," the report said.

The UK and Estonia were closest in attitude to the Cypriots when asked the same question but were around ten per cent higher when it came to more positive views on immigrants.

Homosexuality also scored as unacceptable in Cyprus, with only 38.4 saying it was acceptable to them. Estonia was the lowest with 36.5 per cent while in Denmark 88.1 per cent said people should be free to live

their lives as they wished. Sweden and Norway came in a close second and third.

Another area where Cypriots were the most disapproving of all Europeans was unwed mothers. Almost 67 per cent said they disapproved of unwed mothers while 62 per cent disapproved of unwed fathers, even if the couples were living together. In this instance, Slovakia came in second with 63.3 per cent and Estonia in third, where the figure dropped to 54.1 per cent.

"This picture reveals that Cypriot society is lacking in social unity and solidarity," the report said.

"Evidently, Cypriots do not have confidence or trust in most other people and rarely think that others have good intentions."

This may appear contradictory, given that Cypriots, according to the poll, are the most religious people in Europe. Around 70 per cent say they are religious, but only 30 per cent go to church once a week, while over 40 per cent say they pray.

"While on the one hand, Cypriots appear to be the population with the closest relationship to religion, on the other hand they do not appear to practice such things as tolerance, acceptance and love for their neighbour," said the report.

But Cypriots are also the most optimistic citizens of the EU with an overwhelming majority – 80 per cent – saying they were looking forward to a bright future.

According to the European University (formerly Cyprus College), the survey titled European Social Survey is a new, conceptually well-anchored and methodologically rigorous survey that aims to pioneer and 'prove' a standard of methodology for cross-national attitude surveys that only the best national studies usually aspire to. It was the first time Cyprus participated in the survey.

1. How does this survey describe Cypriots? Which are their positive and which are their negative characteristics?

2. Do you feel that this description is accurate and why?

3. Would you like to change anything in Cypriots and what?

## **APPENDIX 7: THE SYLLABUS: ACTIVITY ON IDENTITY**

### **I. Interview a class mate**

**Take notes, and then report to the class**

**Name:**

(the story behind the name? Why this name and meaning?)

**Family:**

**Major (studies):**

**Interests/hobbies:**

### **II. Find two people who share a characteristic with you. Find a characteristic that nobody shares with you.**

**Follow-up discussion**

Report to the class the information on your classmate.

What do you share with others? What do you have in common?

What is unique about you?

What else constitutes your identity? Which aspects of the self determine us?

What is the most important aspect of our identity?

How important is nationality?

## **APPENDIX 8: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSING ETHNIC CULTURES AFTER STUDENTS' PRODUCTION**

### **Summer 2007: Discussion after prewriting task**

Consider the result of your work.

Which ethnic group inspired most comments to the class?  
Which ethnic group do you feel that you know best?  
Where does your knowledge about these populations come from?  
Which similarities and differences do you see in your ideas?  
Do you see any ideas that you consider correct or wrong about a specific ethnic group?  
Which ethnic group gathered most of the positive comments and which group the most negative ones?  
Which mentality do you consider closest to yours and which one most distant from your way of living?

### **Autumn 2007: Discussion after descriptive paragraph**

**Let's compare how you view the cultures described. Who is right? Who is wrong?**

Italians are all good-looking and fashionable.

Most Italians are Roman Catholic, but some are Christian and Jews.

Cypriot food is known to be heavy and spicy.  
Cypriot food is delicious.

Cypriots eat a rich breakfast.  
Cypriots don't have breakfast; a coffee and cigarette are enough.

Cypriot men's hobby is football and women's is shopping.  
Cypriots are only interested in football, politics, and clothes.

Cypriots are egotistic, individualistic and narrow-minded.  
Cypriots are friendly and hospitable.

Cypriots are independent.  
Cypriots are overprotected by their family, so they never grow up.

Cypriots are very religious. Almost every Sunday they go to church.  
Cypriots are Christian Orthodox, but most of them don't care much about religion.

## **APPENDIX 9: STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **SUMMER 2007**

1. Try to remember what we did during the course and more specifically the following:

Some of the materials and activities I brought in class were:

- Ethnic cultures (prewriting and writing 1)
- International students (text to introduce to summary)
- Stereotypes (ethnic or youth cultures - summary)
- Cross-cultural marriages (persuasion)
- Migration (compare and contrast)

2. What do you think that you have learnt from these topics?

3. Which topics did you like best?

4. Why do you think that I have chosen to bring these topics in class?

5. Do you feel that these lessons have influenced you and in which ways?

### **AUTUMN 2007**

1. What do you retain most from this course? Which classes do you remember most, and why?

2. What classes have you found most beneficial? Why?

3. Which classes annoyed you most? Why?

4. Which topics that we did made you think, after class? Why?

5. If not commented before, read each topic and task related and ask for reactions.

6. Why do you think that I chose these specific topics?

7. Is there something you would like to add?

## APPENDIX 10: SAMPLES OF STUDENT INTERVIEWS

### **I. Interview with Eleni (E), August 2007. Translated from Greek Cypriot.**

E: I am glad that you were our teacher, I really like it very much, if you exclude the trouble with the grades that some youngsters made, it was silly, it was what helped us most, because we benefited a lot, and I did well in the in-class paragraph writing because I had the time to look at them again at home, I assimilated them.

MG: *Do you mean the fact that we wrote in class?*

E: Yes, it is very good. And the way that you taught us the new theory with everything that was being said in class was the right one. I liked it a lot, a lot really. And for me it was difficult, and I know that it will even be more so in the next level. And the fact that there was an open discussion was very important. For me you spoke, you listened. When you were in class, you were there. It was very good.

MG: *Good. Concerning these topics, the specific ones, the material that I created, right? I want you to tell me, what do you believe that you have learnt?*

E: Concerning these topics.

MG: *Exactly. These topics.*

E: The discussions? Do you mean concerning the grammar, our English?

MG: *No. Concerning the knowledge that you have gained, concerning these topics, not the rest.*

E: Look, it was an opportunity for us to learn a few things about other cultures of other countries, for which I was clueless, maybe I knew some things about the Italians and someone did a research on Italians, so it was a chance to have... to listen to the knowledge that the other had, it was good.

MG: *You liked it when we had discussions.*

E: Yes, it's that there were different opinions, one said no for example I prefer those because they are cheerful people, they are hard-working, they are beautiful, another said, no, I prefer the other ones, I always like comparisons in discussion. For and against. (interruption so that I check the audio-recorder)

MG: *The rest of the topics?*

E: Concerning mixed marriages, again it was very interesting for me, especially because of my age maybe, I'm older than the other kids, I consider it to be an advantage a lot of the times... but I better learn the way they think, my sons at the same time... we had a fellow student in class, a foreigner so it was also an opportunity for a discussion and hear how he sees things, because us wanting to be racist is one thing, but on the other hand each one of us had his one opinions, you hear what he believes.

(interruption, her mobile rings. She speaks to her son saying that she will call him later)

MG: *What about the other one, the last one that I gave you, about the immigrant, that I had you compare to your life.*

E: That topic especially, the specific topic which was given was the best I could say, because we are talking about a student, at the same age of most students, so they could compare, what we had, what he has. At the same time we had Nikitas who is a troubled boy (with hardships), who has worked and knows what it means not to be able to buy because I don't have the money. Or not to be able to count on my father's money.

MG: *I was impressed, he is the only one who said that his life is similar, I will find the similarities not the differences.*



E: Exactly! So, during the break when we went down, we talked to Nikitas, I always talk with Nikitas, Chloe came, the others came and started the chat, and I am saying, guys, Nikitas has similarities, there, one laughed, he laughed at him, it set another one thinking, they can consider what they have, thank your parents, respect what your parents offer to you... As topics, they were especially good, really. First of all, it was not tiring, standardized things, paragraphs from the book as usual simply for you to learn grammar or whatever, it was a topic where you really could, whether you want it or not, say your opinion, whether wrong or not, you will learn from others. It was good.

MG: *I was cautious at first, thought that students can find these topics heavy-going.*

E: On the contrary, I have the impression that everyone had a positive response.

MG: *Good. Do you think that these topics had an influence on you?*

E: ...Listen, the fact that I am at the age I am, I can't say that they influenced me like the kids, because it is something we have been through. If I speak about my childhood they were worse than Galo's, e.g. very difficult, very poor... then I am simply glad that I was in that space, I saw the other kids who are my son's age.

MG: *And?*

E: I am glad with their reactions, I see that we have good kids, we always have exceptions too and in general terms the children are good.

MG: *Have they influenced you? I mean, as far as your views as concerned?*

E: Whether I have drawn/drifted away from some facts on which I had my own thoughts?

MG: *Yes, in a way...*

E: I am never absolute however, I avoid being absolute about anything. If I hear something else, OK, I am ready to reconsider. I was simply given the opportunity to listen to the young one's views, I enjoyed the conversations that took place. Even during the breaks, whereas I thought, well of course they won't talk about the discussion we had, what are you talking about? It's a break, they want to forget, but, if you start them off with a word there was a discussion.

MG: *Oh, yes? There were discussions during the break. I have never thought of that.*

E: That's very good, because if it was really heavy-going, there wouldn't be discussions during the break. Especially about cross-cultural marriages, then the last topic about the teenager the cultures, OK, there it was also about curiosity to find out about the world but that one!

MG: *Was there a discussion during the break?*

E: Yes, yes. In this class, and in another one, I was so surprised with young people's behaviour. Even their acceptance of me... down deep inside they have values, quite many...

MG: *Did you have trouble with stereotypes?*

E: Oh, God. That was difficult. That was a lesson in the strict sense. Very, very difficult. I think that we were all in trouble. Difficult vocabulary.

**II. Interview with Stephanos (S) - extract, February 2008.  
Translated from Greek Cypriot.**

MG: *I would like you to tell me what you remember most about our course, in relation to the topics we did around cultural diversity (in English).*

S: The one about marriage we had to... do (inaudible) Jewish to Orthodox. This one, because I also live with two religions. Is that it?

MG: *Yes, yes. So?*

S: Because I liked that one.

MG: *Why did you like it?*

S: I liked it because it is something I lived... that I live with every day. And I believe that it is right for me. I wrote it for you that it is right.

I wrote it for you (smiles). For both essays (laughs).

MG: *For both essays ?*

S: You gave us an essay *to marry or not* (in English) something like that, *to be accept* (in English). At the *final* (in English) it was something similar. I wrote about the same topic in both.

MG: *So you chose this topic. And what was your position? For or against.*

S: I am for.

MG: *You are for.*

S: It is something I experience, I told you.

MG: *Yes..*

S: It is not something bad. Even if I don't know the language but it is good... (inaudible) because my grandmother came, she came to live with us and I don't know how to speak to her. It is ugly for me now. Fortunately I am in Nicosia and I am not there every day. If I was there every day...

MG: *Your mother does not speak to you in Czech?*

S: My dad considered that since we were in Cyprus permanently the language was not needed. My grandmother tells me that it is inside you, you will speak it. There are times I understand what she says, but it doesn't come out. I just throw in some words (inaudible) and it doesn't come out. But I do want to speak to her.

MG: *Aha.*

S: I feel ashamed, and I should feel ashamed. Does this thing work? It works.

MG: *Yes, it's digital (in English). Are there topics which disturbed you, eeh, which shocked you?*

S: Yes. The one with the kid, the Mexican, who has been through so much, who did so many kilometres because (inaudible) made a big impression on me, and if it's a true story, well done for the kid, he is great, I mean he did a sacrifice. But is it a true story?

MG: *Yes, it is a true story.*

S: That one?! (surprised)

MG: *Yes, it is a newspaper article.*

S: He is unbelievable. Well done.

MG: *OK. Are there topics, let's say this one, you can consider that you thought about it after class. Were there topics which you thought of after class?*

S: This topic?

MG: *The one you mentioned or another one.*

S: Yes, because I found some similarities with myself. I mean, I came to study at age 24, I thought I'd get some money first and then... he did the same thing, he was working while getting an education. But of course, taking care of my family, not to that point. I mean, normally, like a Cypriot would do. But for the rest I found some differences and it is a

topic that stuck to my mind. I am forgetting the name of the kid, right now.

MG: *Galo.*

S: Galo, yes.

MG: *I remember...*

S: (he interrupts me) The photo was, there was a bus and he was (inaudible)

MG: *I remember that you wanted to write about similarities.*

S: Yes.

MG: *Why did you write about differences after all?*

S: Because it was easier (laughs)

MG: *Why?*

It was easier, I don't remember why but it was easier.

MG: *Aha.*

S: Because I did not want, you know, I thought if this thing was read out loud in class I didn't want others to know what is personal to me. At least differences, OK, let's say, I have a good life, better than him, but OK, some these ones, I mean, these are the differences.

MG: *Why did it occur to you that it would be read out loud in class?*

S: OK, I... I didn't want to write my problems on a piece of paper, I didn't want that.

... (discussion shifts to some of his secondary school experiences)

MG: *Do you remember other topics we did? You just mentioned comparison and contrast with Galo's life.*

S: (interrupts me) (inaudible) ...hip hop. Something about cultures, something... I think about foods, I don't know, may be we were wrong, during the first lessons...

MG: *How do you mean you were wrong?*

S: We should have talked about cultures, and we talked about something specific. Culture, something like that, Italians, English... Muslims.. and Cypriots, something like that, right? Hip hop, marriage, the kid... and... I don't remember.

MG: *You remember right. And... in your opinion why did I choose these topics?... What was my aim?*

S: Comparison I think. That's it I think. I don't know.

MG: *That is?*

....

MG: *Comparison to what?*

S: To other cultures, the, the similarities, differences. If there is hostility, let's say, Cy... as Cypriots towards others or how foreigners see us. These ones, comparison I think. Is it something else?

MG: *More or less.*

S: More or less? That's what I understood. OK (inaudible) I think. We learnt a lot of things. Oh yes, we also did a text about Levis. Levi Strauss. And Virginia. About Mm's, didn't we? Mm's, the chocolates?

MG: *Aha.*

S: These ones.

MG: *The last thing I brought in class... the article on a paneuropean survey... which talked about things Cypriots believe in, were you in class when I gave it?*

S: Last lessons?

MG: *The last one I think.*

S: I think I was not in the last lesson.

MG: *Or the one before the last. Which said that Cypriots are racist and don't accept easily what is different.*

S: OK, here I agree but I wasn't there. It must have been during the lesson before the last one. OK. Racism, I see it with myself. Because for

example it may have to do with my family but they see me as that half. You know. They see me differently. They won't see me as another member of the family, who is let's say a pure Cypriot. They see me as different. And OK me too, I had in my class last year... foreigners are more self-centered than us but I don't forget that me too I am... half a foreigner. I am one too basically, even if they think that they see me as a Cypriot. I mean I see others as they are. I mean I hang out with foreigners, whether they are white or black, for me I see a human being. There is no difference. They have the same rights as me. Ee, that's what I believe... Am I wrong?

MG: *There is no right or wrong. Each one of us has his opinions. I mean who says that I am right? In my opinion I am right. In somebody else's opinion, I am wrong.*

S: It depends on judgements, right?

MG: *Exactly.*

## **APPENDIX 11: REQUEST FOR INSTITUTION PERMISSION**

University of Nicosia  
46, Makedonitissas Av.  
P.O.Box 24005  
1700 Nicosia

Dear Sir,

As part of my EdD research programme with the University of Nottingham, I am undertaking some action research into how I can raise awareness on cultural diversity and discrimination in my language classes (ENG 100). I would be grateful if you grant me permission to conduct this research.

My data collection methods will include materials as well as teaching methods related to diversity and discrimination at the same time as I will be covering the expected course content. I will be using a research diary and note-taking, based on class observations, as part of the project. I will also be using some of students' writings and I may ask some of them to be interviewed. In addition, two of my colleagues in the Languages department, will support the reflective part of the project. I will seek permission from both students and colleagues to become involved in the research. I guarantee confidentiality around any information collected, and promise that no names of the institution, colleagues or students will be made public without your permission and the permission of those who wish to be named.

I guarantee that I will observe good ethical conduct throughout and that I will make my research report available to you for scrutiny before it is submitted.

I enclose two copies of this letter, one for your files and one to be returned to me for retention in my files. I would be grateful if you would sign the permission slip below and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Georgiou

## APPENDIX 12: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

### Information and Consent Form

University of Nicosia  
46, Makedonitissas Av.  
P.O.Box 24005  
1700 Nicosia

Dear student,

As part of my doctorate research programme, I am doing a project that I hope will raise awareness on cultural diversity and discrimination, and I would like your help in carrying it out.

I will be using, in this course, materials as well as teaching methods related to diversity and discrimination and at the same time I will be covering the expected course content. I will be using a research diary and note-taking, based on class observations, as part of the project. I will also be using some of your writings, ask you to answer some short questionnaires and ask some of you to be interviewed. Answering questionnaires and interviews will not exceed the duration of 15 minutes.

Participation in the research is voluntary and you are free to refuse that I use your writings or that I interview you. You are also free to change your minds at a later stage and ask me to destroy your writings or interviews. Your refusal will not affect my attitude towards you or your grades.

I promise not to reveal your name in writing the report of the project and to use the information for the sole purposes of my research. Data collected will be stored in my office. My research report will be available for scrutiny at my office before it is submitted to my university.

In the case that you are unhappy with my research you can contact my supervisors at the University of Nottingham:  
[Roger.Firth@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Roger.Firth@nottingham.ac.uk) and  
[Lindsey.Smethem@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Lindsey.Smethem@nottingham.ac.uk)

I would like your permission for you to take part in the project. If you would like to take part, please sign the permission slip below.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Georgiou

.....

I ..... (name) agree to participate in the study as outlined to me and wish to give permission for class observations and my writings to be used in the research report. If I am asked to be interviewed I retain the right to refuse.

..... (signature)