

**Fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning in the foreign  
language classroom: a case study of international students learning  
English at a higher education institution in Ireland**

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## **DECLARATION**

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*To my Dad,  
who would be very proud*

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning in the foreign language classroom: a case study of international students learning English at a higher education institution in Ireland**

**Aleksandra Sudhershan**

This study is concerned with the concept of autonomy in intercultural language learning, understood here as the capacity to take responsibility for one's own language and intercultural development. It examines how such autonomy can be developed among international students in the foreign language classroom as a means of helping this student group to maximise the potential for language and intercultural development that study abroad offers.

To investigate this issue, a qualitative case study was designed which involved 30 international students learning English in a higher education institution in Ireland over a period of one semester. The research drew on a variety of methods, including classroom observations, focus group and individual interviews as well as documents. The data were analysed by means of a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software called NVivo8.

The results suggest that it is possible to implement an approach to learner autonomy that not only gives justice to its multifaceted nature, but also incorporates the concept of intercultural competence. More specifically, it is argued that international students should be given the opportunity to manage their intercultural language learning, develop metacognitive knowledge in relation to this process, work collaboratively with others to develop intercultural interdependence and realise their potential as agents for change.

Furthermore, the study highlights the relevance of tools, activities and approaches that can be used by the teacher to support the development of autonomy in intercultural language learning. These include: an interculturally enhanced version of the European Language Portfolio, reflection, collaborative learning and a critical pedagogical approach. While the potential and merit of the above are highlighted, their weaknesses, as viewed from an international student perspective, are also discussed. In addition, learner-related factors that may adversely affect student engagement with this approach are also analysed. Finally, drawing on the case study findings, the study suggests a set of criteria that need to be met if foreign language courses are to develop autonomy in intercultural language learning among this student population.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BALLI	Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
DMIS	Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity
ELP	European Language Portfolio
FLE	Foreign Language Education
LOLIPOP	Language On-Line Portfolio Project

## **ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REPORTING OF DATA**

FG	Focus group
INT	One-to-one interview
J	“Reflection on learning” journal
OB	Classroom observation
Q	End-of-semester questionnaire
RR	Reflective report (in case of group reports, this is followed by a letter corresponding to a given group)
TAP INT	Interview following a think aloud protocol session

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

*What the research literature suggests is that despite the seemingly enormous potential for the study abroad environment to produce gains in language acquisition and intercultural competence, students who study abroad often do not take full advantage of the language or culture learning experiences afforded them. (Paige, Cohen and Shively 2004 p.254)*

### **1.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this introductory chapter is three-fold: firstly, to introduce the terms that are central to this study, the context within which it is situated and its area of concern (sections 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 respectively); secondly, to present the questions that have driven this research (1.5); and finally, to provide an outline of the thesis (1.6).

### **1.2 Key terms: learner autonomy, intercultural competence and autonomy in intercultural language learning**

The concepts of learner autonomy and intercultural competence have become ubiquitous in the field of applied linguistics. The former, captured in Holec's (1981 p.3) seminal definition as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning", has pervaded the theory and practice of foreign language teaching for over three decades. Moreover, it is unlikely that its appeal is going to diminish in the near future as is evident from the fact that the number of publications on the topic that appeared in the 2000s "exceeds the literature published over the previous 25 years" (Benson 2006 p.21). One of the main reasons for its enduring popularity is a belief that learner autonomy is a prerequisite for successful (language) learning (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002 p.1). Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that classroom practice in which the development of autonomy is an explicit pedagogical goal can lead to remarkable linguistic progress, often far exceeding that achieved by learners exposed to traditional teacher- and textbook-centred

instruction (Legenhausen 2000). As a result, it is argued that fostering learner autonomy in the classroom is “*not* an optional extra” (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002 p.1; emphasis added; see also Benson and Voller 1997 p.11).

Turning to the second key term used in this thesis, it is now generally accepted, even if still not widely practised, that “all language education should always also be intercultural education” (Sercu 2002 p.72). This particular direction in foreign language teaching and learning encourages learners to develop *intercultural* communicative competence (Byram 1997). It emphasises, as the name suggests, the need to foster not only communicative, but also intercultural competence in the language classroom, with the latter understood as a composite of an individual’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. The process of the development of such a competence in the classroom environment has been captured for the purpose of this study in the term *intercultural language learning*.

This study argues that if we accept the inseparability of communicative and intercultural competences in FLE, then the development of learner autonomy should also be vital for effective *intercultural* language learning. Yet, the need to integrate the concepts of learner autonomy and intercultural competence has been recognised only recently (see Benson 2006 p.25), and to date, relatively little attention has been paid to this approach in the field. The purpose of this study is to redress the balance as it examines the concept of *autonomy in intercultural language learning*, defined for the purpose of this thesis as the capacity to take responsibility for one’s own language and intercultural development.

### **1.3 Context: the internationalisation of higher education and international student mobility**

The literature dedicated to higher education that has been published in the last two decades contains many references to its internationalisation (e.g. Fortuijn 2002, Otten 2003, Knight 2004, Guo and Chase 2011), thus reflecting the growing importance of this process to the third-level sector. Although highly versatile and therefore difficult to define, the term can be understood as “the process of integrating an international, *intercultural* or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight 2003 p.2; as cited in Knight 2004 p.11; emphasis added).

One particular manifestation of internationalisation that is of direct relevance to this study concerns student mobility across national borders (Fortuijn 2002 p.264). In the European context international student<sup>1</sup> mobility is said to have already become an important feature of the higher education landscape (Kelo, Teichler and Wächter 2006). Andrade (2006 p.132) writes that it is now “a common practice” for students to do either a full degree, or part of it, abroad, and as far as short-term student mobility is concerned, EU initiatives such as the Socrates / Erasmus programme have been instrumental in its facilitation (Coleman 1998). In the case of Ireland, in which this particular study is situated, most recent data available show that almost 29,000 international students were enrolled in the Irish tertiary level institutions in the academic year 2009/10 (Education Ireland 2010 p.4).

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of this study, the term *international student* is used to refer to “a student who undertakes part or all of their higher education experience in Ireland, if Ireland is not their home country” (International Education Board Ireland 2004 p.8).

The internationalisation process, however, appears to be something of a double-edged sword, mainly because of the fact that at its heart lies a “diversity paradox” (Fortuijn 2002). This means that diversity is both “the ultimate reason for internationalisation” and “the main problem” in this process (ibid. p.264). On the one hand, international student mobility offers a number of benefits. As far as higher education institutions are concerned, the effort that is made by them to attract international students is often driven by the need to raise vital revenue (Andrade 2006 pp.132-133; Lebcir, Wells and Bond 2008 p.268). In relation to pedagogical benefits, it is argued that cultural diversity on campus:

makes the university vibrant, *enables contact, understanding*, and shared experiences between students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and allows university staff to broaden their knowledge about the education systems in different countries. (Lebcir, Wells and Bond 2008 p.268; emphasis added)

In other words, the presence of international students on campus is expected to be an enriching factor, particularly because it can facilitate intercultural learning (see also Otten 2003 p.13 and Andrade 2006 p.133). Consequently, the experience of studying in another country is said to have the potential to be “transformative” for international students (Bennett 2008, Hunter 2008), particularly in terms of the opportunities it presents for language and intercultural development<sup>2</sup>, an issue that is of direct relevance to this study.

On the other hand, even though there is substantial evidence to suggest that a sojourn abroad can generally lead to a significant improvement in an individual’s

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<sup>2</sup> Ife (2000 p.30; emphasis added) writes, for example, that, “within the European context [...] movements of students are [...] part of the European policy of generating intercultural communication between European nations and *few doubt the beneficial effects socially, culturally and linguistically* of such experience”.

communicative and intercultural proficiency (see, for example, Freed 1998, Engle and Engle 2004, Jackson 2006, Rees and Klapper 2007, Llanes and Muñoz 2009, Williams 2005, Gill 2007, Ruddock and Turner 2007), we also know that “cultural diversity and internationalisation do *not* automatically lead to intercultural contacts and intercultural learning experiences” (Otten 2003 p.14; emphasis added). In addition, in light of substantial fees that are sometimes paid by international students for their education, the question arises as to whether they receive “value for money” in terms of host institutions being aware of, and accommodating, the specific academic needs they may have (see, for example, Sheridan 2011). Unfortunately, as pointed out by Guo and Chase (2011 p.306), even though international students may comprise a significant percentage of the student population at a host university, often little is known about how “they adapt to an academic environment substantially different from their own, with a different language, culture and pedagogical traditions”. In fact, international students are often expected to “fit into” the new academic environment, even though they may face significant academic challenges (Sheridan 2011). Such obstacles are the focus of discussion in the following section.

#### **1.4 Area of concern: the educational experience of international students**

As pointed out by Swaminathan and Alfred (2003 p.31; emphasis added), “immigrants [...] arrive with images about higher education cultures and some are often both *surprised* and *dismayed* at what they meet in the new country”. This observation raises the issue of the gap that often exists between what international students may expect from a host institution and what in turn is expected of them, and which is likely to put them at a disadvantage when it comes to classroom learning.

For example, immigrant students are often accused of remaining silent during classroom activities; yet, the reason for their silence can be attributed to the initial “learning shock” experienced (Swaminathan and Alfred 2003 p.31). Insufficient language competence is particularly challenging (e.g. Sheridan 2011) and can lead to inequality, or “asymmetric power structures” in the classroom (Otten 2003 p.16). This is because academic staff and host students have an advantage over international students with regard to the former’s ability to communicate in the mother tongue and familiarity with the cultural setting and institutional requirements. Fortuijn (2002 p.267) writes, for example, that, “[i]n a multinational session with native and non-native speakers there is always the danger of relating differences in language mastery to differences in academic quality”. In other words, there is a perception that native speakers are more academically skilled by virtue of their fluency in the language.

Furthermore, even though campus diversity is expected to benefit students interculturally, cultural differences can be a source of tension between international students on the one hand, and academic staff and host students on the other. It is argued, for instance, that academic staff often do not know how to address cultural difference appropriately in the classroom as they either ignore it, emphasising commonality instead and in this way rendering immigrant students “invisible”, or single it out, thus potentially making them uncomfortable (Swaminathan and Alfred 2003). The relationship between international and host students is also likely to be fraught with difficulties as the former have reported finding it difficult to make friends with domestic peers (Sheridan 2011), and may consequently choose to self-segregate both in and out of class (Swaminathan and Alfred 2003, Otten 2003, Sheridan 2011).

As the above discussion shows, international students' academic achievement can be significantly undermined by linguistic and cultural differences that are manifest in the classroom environment. This naturally raises the question of whether host institutions can do more in order to prevent international students from missing on the opportunities that an educational experience in a host country presents with regard to intercultural language learning (see Llanes and Muñoz 2009), especially as language professionals have been called "to try to ensure that students benefit to the maximum from their experience abroad" (Ife 2000 p.30). This study argues that helping international students to develop "the competence to learn [languages and] cultures autonomously" (Sercu 2002 p.72) can be part of the solution to the problem, an issue that brings us directly to the research questions behind this study.

### **1.5 Research questions**

This study focuses on fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning in a multicultural foreign language classroom in a study abroad context. Even though learners may have a natural inclination to take control of their learning, the development of true autonomy requires systematic support (Benson 2001 p.75). This point is emphasised by Holec (1981 p.3; emphasis added), who writes that autonomy "is not inborn but must be acquired either by 'natural' means or (as most often happens) by *formal learning*". Consequently, the role that the language classroom can play in the development of autonomy in general, and autonomy in intercultural language learning in particular, cannot be underestimated. However, little research exists that can offer insight into what language professionals can do in order to foster such autonomy. Consequently, the purpose of the current study is to investigate, by means of a qualitative case study the following research questions:

**Research Question:** *How can international students in a multicultural foreign language classroom be supported in the development of autonomy in intercultural language learning?*

**RQ1:** Given the multifaceted nature of learner autonomy, what opportunities can a multicultural foreign language classroom environment provide for international students to take more control of their intercultural language learning?

**RQ2:** What obstacles can prevent international students from developing autonomy in intercultural language learning with regard to: a) their own beliefs and expectations; and b) the learning environment?

**Figure 1.1 The research question and its sub-questions**

In light of the emphasis on language competence in autonomy-oriented classrooms, this study, by answering the above questions, is significant as it brings the current debate on learner autonomy up to date with recent developments in foreign language education (FLE), namely the emergence of an intercultural approach. In addition, it provides a comprehensive appraisal of learner autonomy as a construct as it examines it from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, this study has important implications for classroom practice not only by virtue of its innovative approach to learner autonomy, described above, but also because of the fact that it advances further the cause made in recent years of a more culturally sensitive pedagogy (e.g. Otten 2003). By focusing on the “voices” of international students (Krishnan and Hwee Hoon 2002), the study also adds to the existing body of knowledge concerning the study abroad experience in general. More importantly, it aims to improve language professionals’ understanding of the difficulties that may be experienced by this particular student population as far as

fostering autonomy in intercultural learning is concerned, while also offering suggestions for addressing them.

## **1.6 Thesis outline**

The structure of this thesis is as follows: the literature pertinent to this study is reviewed in Chapters Two and Three. More specifically, Chapter Two focuses on the four different perspectives on autonomy that have been identified in the literature to date, the process of acquiring autonomy in the language classroom as well as the issue of assessment. Chapter Three focuses in turn on the definition, development and assessment of intercultural competence in the context of FLE before it turns to the concept of autonomy in intercultural language learning.

The two literature review chapters pave the way for the empirical section of the thesis: Chapter Four begins with an examination of the research questions behind this study before presenting the methodological approach adopted in its design. This is followed by the presentation of case study findings in Chapters Five and Six, and the discussion thereof in Chapter Seven, which also offers recommendations for further research. The thesis concludes with a summary of key findings and a discussion concerning its limitations as well as contribution to knowledge in Chapter Eight.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

*[A]utonomy is an essential characteristic of all truly successful learners, regardless of their age or the domain in which they are learning. (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002 p.1)*

### **2.1 Introduction**

In order to be able to support international students in the development of learner autonomy in the language classroom, we must know what exactly the concept involves. Accordingly, this chapter begins with a detailed examination of the construct that paves the way for its definition (section 2.2). This is then followed by a discussion of what the process of developing learner autonomy in the classroom entails in practice (2.3). Since the experience of international students is central to this study, the acquisition process is also examined from the perspective of this student population. Finally, the chapter examines the issue of how learner autonomy can be assessed in a formal learning context (2.4).

### **2.2 Conceptualising learner autonomy**

Even though it was introduced to FLE over three decades ago, the concept of learner autonomy is still beset by conceptual and terminological confusion (Benson and Voller 1997 pp.1-2, Oxford 2003 p.75). For example, according to Benson and Voller (1997 pp.1-2; emphasis original), the term can be used to denote any of the following:

1. [...] *situations* in which learners study entirely on their own;
2. [...] a set of *skills* which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
3. [...] an inborn *capacity* which is suppressed by institutional education;
4. [...] the exercise of *learners' responsibility* for their own learning;
5. [...] the *right* of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

As the above quote illustrates, the term *learner autonomy* can take on different meanings in different contexts; consequently, any attempt to provide a comprehensive definition of the concept, such as the one made in section 2.2.5, must take such different understandings into account. Oxford's (2003; see also Benson 1997 and Murase 2009) suggestion to distinguish between four perspectives on the construct - technical, psychological, socio-cultural and political-critical - is particularly useful in this regard. All four perspectives will be discussed in detail in the following four sub-sections respectively.

### **2.2.1 The technical perspective**

According to Holec's (1981 p.3) seminal definition, autonomy is a matter of the learner having the ability, or "a potential capacity", to "take charge of [his or her] own learning". In practical terms this means that the learner accepts responsibility for making decisions in respect of the five key components of the learning process, from specifying the objectives and contents, through selection of methods and techniques, to monitoring the acquisition procedure and evaluation of both what s/he has learnt and of the learning process itself (ibid.)<sup>3</sup>. For Holec, a learner who is autonomous "is himself capable of making all these decisions" (ibid.).

Although Holec's view of autonomy has certainly been influential, and his views have echoed through much of the literature on learner autonomy (e.g. Dickinson 1987,

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<sup>3</sup> A number of authors (e.g. Holec 1981, Dickinson 1987, Benson 2001) make a distinction between autonomy and self-directed learning. For example, Benson (2001 p.34) states that whereas the former is an attribute of the learner, the latter (which he also refers to as *autonomous learning* - p.110) is a learning mode in which learners manage the learning process more successfully, the more this capacity has been developed. Moreover, he emphasises the fact that mere engagement in self-directed learning does not guarantee that the learner will indeed develop the required capacity (ibid. p.110). In the words of Sinclair (2000 p.8), "[a]utonomous' learning is not the same as developing autonomy".

Cotterall 1995), there is now a growing consensus among language professionals that it does not do full justice to the idea as it focuses only on the *technical* dimension of the construct (e.g. Benson 2001 pp.48-49, Cotterall 2008 p.110). This particular approach to autonomy is most clearly evident in discussions on specific situations in which individuals have to manage the language learning process independently of the teacher<sup>4</sup>, thus emphasising the skills they require to this purpose (Benson 1997 p.19, Oxford 2003 p.81). According to Cotterall (2008 p.110):

The five types of decision [Holec] itemizes reflect the focus of many “learning to learn” programs in self-access centres; these programs seek to introduce the methodological skills that learners need in order to manage their learning in such settings.

Consequently, even though many existing conceptualisations do make some reference to the technical perspective on autonomy in one form or another (see, for example, Broady and Kenning 1996, Benson 2001), they also recognise that making decisions in respect of the organisation and management of learning does not itself constitute autonomy. Whereas Holec’s (op.cit.) definition, and by extension the technical perspective, explains “WHAT autonomous learners are able to do”, it does not explain “HOW they are able to do it” (Benson 2006 p.23; emphasis in original). The latter issue, in contrast, is the focus of the *psychological* perspective on learner autonomy that is examined in the following sub-section.

### **2.2.2 The psychological perspective**

In contrast to the previous perspective, the *psychological* perspective draws our attention to those learner characteristics that make it possible for the learner to take control of the learning process (Benson 1997 p.19, Oxford 2003 p.83). According to

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<sup>4</sup> This is often referred to in the literature as *self-instruction* (e.g. Broady and Kenning 1996).

Benson (2001), who defines autonomy in terms of *control* rather than responsibility, this particular perspective involves control over three cognitive processes: metacognitive knowledge, reflection and attention. It is the first two components that have been subject of much discussion in the literature over the last decade or so, and consequently, they deserve particular attention in this sub-section.

Metacognitive knowledge (also referred to as learner beliefs) is said to be one of the two distinct sub-elements of metacognition, the other one comprising metacognitive strategies, or the skills needed for self-directed learning: planning, monitoring and evaluating (Wenden 1998 p.519, 1999 p.436). It is precisely metacognitive knowledge, or “learning software” (Wenden 1995 p.192), that makes self-directed learning possible (Wenden 1998 p.528, Sinclair 2000 p.9), although there is no consensus on what exactly metacognitive knowledge involves. For example, Wenden (1995 p.185) defines it as “the stable, stable and sometimes fallible knowledge learners acquire about themselves as learners and the learning process”. Following Flavell (1979), she subdivides it further into person, task and strategic knowledge. The first type concerns knowledge about learner-related variables that impact on learning; task knowledge in turn refers to knowledge about the purpose, type and demands of a task<sup>5</sup>; and finally, strategic knowledge concerns knowledge about learning strategies and their application (1998 pp.518-519). Sinclair (op.cit.) in turn suggests that learners need to develop awareness in relation to the following three areas: the learner him- or herself (which corresponds broadly to Wenden’s construct of person knowledge but also places emphasis on awareness of the context), the target language itself, and the language

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<sup>5</sup> Referring to Wenden’s (1995) article, Benson (2001 p.97) writes that, “a task may be as broad as learning the target language in order to use it communicatively with others or as narrow as learning a new word”.

learning process. For Benson (2001 p.97), metacognitive knowledge that is required to organise and manage the language learning process is largely metalinguistic in nature<sup>6</sup>.

With regard to the second key component of the psychological dimension, i.e. reflection, this has been defined as a learner-controlled and purposeful activity that engages the learner both cognitively and affectively (Boud, Keogh and Walker 1985 p.11).

According to Benson (2001 p.95), reflection is:

an important component of autonomous learning at a number of levels. It may even be legitimate to state that the autonomous learner is essentially one who is capable of reflection at appropriate moments in the learning process and of acting upon the results.

As far as the development of autonomy in foreign language learning is concerned, Benson (2001 pp.93-95) argues that reflection can take three different forms: reflection on the target language, on the learning process itself, and finally, “on learning habits or ways of thinking about learning that are inimical to autonomy” (ibid. p.94).

A factor that also appears important to the psychological perspective but that neither Benson’s (2001) nor Holec’s (1981) definition mentions explicitly is the role of affect, or the willingness to assume responsibility for one’s own learning, and autonomy<sup>7</sup>. The former’s role cannot be underestimated since “a person may have the ability to make independent choices but feel no willingness to do so” (Littlewood 1996 p.428). Indeed, it is argued that, “one of the greatest barriers to the development of learner autonomy is a negative attitude on the part of the learner towards making decisions about their own learning” (Sinclair 2000 p.7). Consequently, it is suggested that autonomy be defined in

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<sup>6</sup> See also Broady and Kenning (1996 pp.14-15), Little (1997), and Ridley (2003 p.78) for a discussion on the role of metalinguistic awareness for the development of learner autonomy.

<sup>7</sup> Although Holec (1981 p.7) does state that, “experience shows that ability [to take charge of one’s learning] cannot be acquired without desire”.

terms of both the learner's ability to take control of the learning process *and* his or her willingness to do so (Littlewood op.cit.; see also Scharle and Szabó 2000, and Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002 p.71 for a discussion on the role of motivation for the development of autonomy).

### **2.2.3 The socio-cultural perspective**

In contrast to the previous two perspectives, the focus of the *socio-cultural* (or social-interactive) perspective is no longer solely on the learner, i.e. on his or her independence in decision-making and innate capacity, but rather on the context in which s/he functions. This is because it is now widely recognised that, “[a]utonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension” (Sinclair 2000 p.11). As Little (1991 p.5) points out:

Because we are social beings our independence is always balanced by dependence; our essential condition is one of interdependence. Total detachment is a principal determining feature not of autonomy but of autism [...].

Consequently, this particular perspective highlights the fact that learning is mediated through social interaction and it is firmly grounded in the work of Vygotsky (1978) (Oxford 2003)<sup>8</sup>, whose major contribution to our understanding of the processes of learning lies in his idea of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), defined as:

the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky 1978 p.86)

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<sup>8</sup> Oxford (2003) suggests that the socio-cultural perspective be extended to take into account also another type of socially mediated learning, i.e. learning that takes place in so-called “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998, Wenger *et al.* 2002).

According to Little, Ridley and Ushioda (2002 p.12), the above definition suggests that: the learner's current state of knowledge determines what s/he can learn next; social interaction is needed for learning to take place; and "the goal of all learning is autonomy ("independent problem solving")". In this perspective then autonomy is understood as self-regulation that is an outcome of social interactions with more competent individuals (or tools) that are situated in specific contexts (Oxford 2003 p.78). It thus emphasises the fact that learner autonomy "does not imply [working in] isolation" (Dickinson 1987 p.13), but rather that it "grows out of dependence on [more capable] others" (Little 2000 p.9). Therefore, autonomy is something of a paradox since, although it "implies freedom from the control of others, [it] turns out to be the product of interactive processes that are characterized not by independence but by *interdependence*" (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002 p.7; emphasis original). The latter has been defined as collaboration with others on common goals<sup>9</sup> (Benson 2001 p.14) and its role is emphasised in particular by the "Bergen" definition, which argues that:

Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's own needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently *and* in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person. (Dam et al. 1990 p.102; emphasis original)

#### **2.2.4 The political-critical perspective**

The nature of the fourth and final perspective to be discussed in this chapter has been described succinctly by Kumaravadivelu (2003) as "learning to liberate" or "liberatory autonomy". At its heart lies the argument that the idea of autonomy, albeit essentially political in nature (see, for example, Illich 1976), has become a mainstream concept in FLE, deradicalised in the process in favour of emphasis on its apolitical dimensions

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<sup>9</sup> The term *social autonomy* defined as "the ability to function effectively as a cooperative member of a group" (Broady and Kenning 1996 p.16; see also Scharle and Szabó 2000) is used to refer to the same idea.

(Benson 1996, 1997, Pennycook 1997). In the words of Pennycook (1997 p.35), “autonomy has become a psychologized, technologized and universalized concept”, occupied with “techniques, strategies and materials” (ibid. p.41). Indeed, whereas learner and strategy training have been central to promoting learner autonomy in FLE (Sinclair 2000), the field has “avoid[ed] issues of power and social change” (Benson 1996 p.34).

To counterbalance the trend towards the depoliticisation of the idea, it has been suggested that a different version of autonomy is required. For example, Benson (1997) argues in favour of a political version, understood as control over the content and processes of learning (see also Benson 1996, 2001). This should be embedded in his view in critical theory with its interest in the relationship between knowledge, ideology and power in society, and should help learners develop a critical awareness of the wider social context in which learning takes place and how it impacts on and relates to their own beliefs and actions. Furthermore, Benson (1996) argues that the political perspective on the concept draws our attention to its social and transformative character. In other words, taking control of learning in institutional settings implies not only that learners act collectively and engage with others (e.g. teachers) to this purpose, but also that their actions affect the status quo to a greater or lesser extent. Thus, the development of autonomy “not only transforms individuals, [but] also [...] the social situations and structures in which they are participants” (ibid. p.34).

At the same time, it needs to be borne in mind that autonomy is never absolute as it is impossible to escape completely “the cultural and ideological worlds around us” (Pennycook 1997 p.46; see also Little 1991 pp.4-5, Nunan 1996 p.13, Sinclair 2000

pp.7-8 for a discussion on the constraints imposed by one's socio-cultural, educational and political context). Therefore, according to Pennycook (1997 p.47), fostering autonomy implies being mindful of the particular cultural contexts of one's learners, of helping them to become aware of these influential forces in their lives, and encouraging them to seek "cultural alternatives" understood as "alternative ways of thinking and being in the world". Pennycook makes it clear that a quest for autonomy is by no means easy; rather, it is a struggle during which learners find their own "*insurgent* voices, voices that speak in opposition to the local and global discourses that limit and produce the possibilities that frame their lives" (ibid. p.49; emphasis original). Consequently, the political-critical perspective:

shakes us by the shoulders, forcing us to question assumptions and to critique existing power structures. It causes us to think hard about accepting the status quo. It creates an internal (and sometimes an external) struggle. It reminds us that we can critically analyse the discourses that frame our lives, we can create new alternatives for ourselves, and we can challenge our students to do the same. (Oxford 2003 p.90)

### **2.2.5 Converging the perspectives: a definition of learner autonomy**

The purpose of the discussion in the preceding sub-sections has been to present four different, although complementary, perspectives on learner autonomy as identified by Oxford (2003), i.e. technical, psychological, socio-cultural, and political-critical. As is evident from Table 2.1, the purpose of which is to demonstrate how some of the conceptualisations of learner autonomy discussed in this chapter can be aligned with the above-mentioned perspectives<sup>10</sup>, the four-fold nature of the concept has rarely been taken into account in the literature. However, in light of the criticism put forward by

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<sup>10</sup> Such comparison is, by its very nature, difficult, due to conceptual and terminological differences between the models. For example, Benson's (2001) control-over-content dimension appears to overlap with Oxford's (op.cit.) socio-cultural and political-critical perspectives in the sense that it implies social interaction with others and, possibly, educational reform.

some authors and discussed in sub-section 2.2.4, it seems important that the multifacetedness of the concept be reflected in both how it is defined and implemented in the language classroom.

With regard to the former issue, in the context of FLE learner autonomy is often understood as the capacity to take responsibility for one's own language learning (see Benson 2001 p.47). This succinct definition appears to reflect well the particular foci of the four strands of the construct discussed in this chapter, and is therefore also relevant for the purpose of this study. This is because being responsible for one's own learning can mean any and all of the following: organising and managing the learning process (the technical perspective); developing one's own metacognitive knowledge in respect of learning a foreign language (the psychological perspective); using the opportunities that learning with more capable peers presents to benefit one's own learning (the socio-cultural perspective), and finally, striving to overcome constraints that are imposed on one's own learning (the political-critical perspective).

Having thus reviewed the theoretical background to the concept, this thesis will now turn to the process of the acquisition of learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom.

	<b>FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON AUTONOMY (OXFORD 2003)</b>			
	Technical	Psychological	Socio-cultural	Political-critical
<b>Holec (1981):</b> Autonomy as ability to take charge of ones' own learning, i.e. taking responsibility for:	Making decisions in respect of all the aspects of the language learning process			
<b>Little (1991):</b> Autonomy as capacity for:		Detachment; critical reflection; decision-making; independent action		
<b>Broady and Kenning (1996):</b> Autonomy involves three dimensions + social autonomy:	Learning management skills	Metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness Attitudes	Social autonomy	
<b>Scharle and Szabó (2000):</b> “Building blocks” of autonomous behaviour:	Monitoring learning and self-assessment	Knowledge and use of different learning strategies Intrinsic motivation and self-confidence	Cooperation in group learning	
<b>Benson (2001):</b> Autonomy as capacity to take control of:	Learning management	Cognitive processes (attention, reflection, metacognitive knowledge)	Learning content	

**Table 2.1 Conceptualisations of learner autonomy in foreign language education**

## 2.3 Developing autonomy in the foreign language classroom

### 2.3.1 Focus on the process: the key factors

Even though, in light of the multifacetedness of learner autonomy, “there is no simple recipe for its implementation” in the language classroom (Dam 1995 p.6)<sup>11</sup>, a number of factors, which will be the focus of discussion in this sub-section, appear instrumental to the development of learner autonomy in this particular environment. These comprise: a change in learner beliefs; assumption of responsibility for the learning process; engagement in reflection; target language use; and finally, collaboration with peers on learning tasks.

It seems that one of the few prerequisites needed for the implementation of learner autonomy in a classroom context is “a willingness on the part of the teacher to let go, and on the part of the learners *to take hold*” (Dam 2000 p.22; emphasis added). Learners’ willingness “to take hold” has been referred to in the literature as “readiness for autonomy” that manifests itself in the specific beliefs they hold and which “may either contribute to or impede the development of their potential for autonomy” (Cotterall 1995 p.196). Consequently, it is argued that, in order to develop autonomy, learners must be first of all made aware of their own beliefs; it is only then that the teacher can “seek to confirm those beliefs that might foster [it] and change those [...] that might prove deleterious to [its] promotion” (Carter 1999 p.13). This implies that the transfer of responsibility in the language classroom should be preceded by exercises aimed at raising learners’ awareness of their own role in the process and attitude change (Scharle and Szabó 2000) and therefore should be gradual (Nunan 1996 p.15), allowing

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<sup>11</sup> Even though Dam’s (1995) account concerns specifically the secondary school context, her comment also appears to be true in relation to the third-level sector.

learners “only as much control as they are capable of exercising to their own benefit” (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002 p.17).

The final point brings us to the next factor pertinent to the development of learner autonomy, namely the transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the learner. This particular factor is among the three principles proposed by Little, Ridley and Ushioda (2002 pp.15-22) for fostering learner autonomy in a classroom context. More precisely, the principle of *learner empowerment* states that it is the learner who needs to start making decisions about the learning process, which ultimately leads to a greater sense of achievement and supports the development of intrinsic motivation. Dam’s (1995) account of how she fosters autonomy in her own classroom shows how from the outset learners can be gradually encouraged to take control of the learning process, set their own goals, select activities and resources to achieve them, and evaluate their learning. In her view, this process sets a “virtuous circle” in motion in which being in control of the learning process leads to growth in learner’s metacognitive and metalinguistic knowledge, boosting in turn his or her sense of self-esteem and ultimately leading to an even greater involvement in the learning process (Dam 2000 p.19).

The next factor identified by the authors draws our attention to the importance of learner reflection for taking control of learning management. Although, as is signalled in section 2.2.2, reflection appears to be central to the development of learner autonomy, it has to be borne in mind that in formal learning contexts:

The activity of reflection is so familiar that, as teachers or trainers, *we often overlook it* [...] and make assumptions about the fact that not only is it occurring, but it is occurring effectively for everyone in the group. It is easy to neglect as it is something which we cannot directly observe and which is unique to each learner [...] (Boud, Keogh and Walker 1985 p.8; emphasis added)

Once again, the work of Dam (1995, 2000) provides a good example of how learner reflection can be brought to the fore in the language classroom since her learners regularly engage in reflection on and evaluation of learning, both individually and with others. The focus is not so much on what the learners actually produce, but rather on:

the process and the knowledge gained as a result of the work undertaken, including knowledge about learning, which allows the learners to make informed judgements about what to do next. (Dam 2000 p.29)

It appears that journal<sup>12</sup> writing, described as “first-person observations of learning experiences which are recorded over a period of time” (Krishnan and Hwee Hoon 2002 p.227), is particularly beneficial as far as fostering reflection (and, by extension, learner autonomy) is concerned (see, for example, Dam 1995, 2000, 2009). The reason for this appears two-fold. First of all, in general, “reflection is unlikely to progress far without the support of writing” (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002 p.18; see also Matsumoto 1996 p.146); secondly, “[j]ournal writing not only provides a chance for learners to practice using the target language, but also results in *increased awareness of their learning processes*” (Yang 2007 p.1; emphasis added), i.e. metacognitive knowledge. The latter comment is supported by a number of empirical studies<sup>13</sup>; it also draws our attention to the final principle identified by Little, Ridley and Ushioda (2002), namely that of *appropriate target language use* that highlights the importance of using a foreign

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<sup>12</sup> A number of alternative terms, in particular *diary*, has been used in the literature. In her recent publication Dam (2009 p.256) has opted to use the term *logbook* instead of a *diary* since the latter “was often misinterpreted as being something very closed and only for personal use, which was not along the lines I envisaged its [sic] being used”. Throughout this thesis the term *journal* will be used to denote students’ writing on their learning experiences.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Matsumoto (1996 p.147) found that long-term (ten-week-long) daily journal writing about classroom learning experiences combined with a self-analysis of these entries “was perceived [by students] as effective in raising the learners’ consciousness of their own learning process”. In particular, the students felt that the task “helped them organize thoughts which might otherwise have remained largely obscure or even unconscious” (ibid. p.145). In a similar vein, Young and Sim (2001), who analysed journal entries, written over a six-month period, of a group of Chinese learners learning English in Singapore, found that the process heightened the students’ awareness of the three subtypes of metacognitive knowledge identified by Wenden (1998).

language from the outset for *both* “genuine communicative purposes” (ibid. p.19) *and* reflection on the target language itself as well as the learning process.

Finally, much emphasis has also been placed on fostering group-based learning (see, for instance, Dam 1995) since it is now widely accepted that autonomy develops as an outcome of interdependence, rather than independence (see section 2.2.3). According to Little (2000 pp.9-10; emphasis added), group work is important for the acquisition of learner autonomy since:

individual differences will ensure that learners develop at different rates and with different emphases, which in turn means that almost from the beginning *they will be able to support one another in task performance.*

It is argued that both *co-operative* and *collaborative* learning modes have the potential to foster learner autonomy: while the former can be described as “learning [which] remains within the control of the teacher or syllabus” (Littlewood 2002 p.34), the latter, in his contrast, takes place when it is learners as a group that “select the content and methods of their learning” (ibid. p.33)<sup>14</sup>.

In summary, the literature suggests that in order to develop autonomy, learners may need to be first of all challenged about the specific beliefs they hold where such beliefs run counter to those which would support autonomous learning. This process depends further on learners being able to make decisions about their own learning, engaging in reflection thereon, and using the target language for meaningful communication in the classroom. The final point also emphasises the fact that the development of learner

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout this study the term *collaborative learning* will be used to denote autonomy-oriented group work.

autonomy in a formal learning context presupposes interaction with peers in order to solve learning tasks.

### **2.3.2 Focus on the learner: international students and the acquisition of learner autonomy**

Whereas the previous sub-section identifies factors that appear important to the development of learner autonomy in the language classroom in general, the purpose of this one is to focus on this process specifically from an international student perspective in the context of higher education.

One of the first issues to consider relates to the relationship between autonomy and culture. In other words, does the learner's cultural background have an impact on his or her ability to take responsibility for the learning process (see, for example, Riley 1988, Ho and Crookall 1995)? For instance, it is argued that the highly hierarchical nature of Chinese society and the value that is attached by it to maintaining "face" means that the teacher is treated as an authority figure and that authority is not openly questioned in the classroom (Ho and Crookall 1995 p.237; see Littlewood 1999 for a similar analysis of East Asian students). Moreover, Chinese students are also likely to view themselves as part of a collective (i.e. a class) whose needs take precedence over the individual needs of its members, and in which self-effacement is highly valued (Flowerdew 1998). Consequently, it can be argued, on the basis of the above cultural profile, that the development of learner autonomy among Chinese students may be hindered for a number of reasons. These relate to the fact that they may be unwilling to assume responsibility for their learning since this may be perceived as behaviour that undermines the teacher's authority (Ho and Crookall *op.cit.*); that they are less likely to engage in either constructive peer assessment (in order to maintain their peers' face) or

meaningful self-assessment (to demonstrate personal humility); and that they may be unwilling to use the target language in class unless they are completely certain that what they say is completely accurate (personal “face” protecting strategy) (Flowerdew 1998).

However, there is also ample evidence to suggest that, whereas useful to some extent, cultural profiling of learners should be treated with extreme caution. This is demonstrated, for example, by Ho and Crookall’s (1995) study in which they show how the use of a group-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) simulation helped a cohort of Chinese learners, on the one hand, to avoid the constraints on the development of autonomy imposed by their cultural values and, on the other hand, make the most of those cultural traits that are conducive to autonomy. Another study (Press 1996) that investigated the relationship between learners’ ethnicity and their beliefs about, and motivation for, language learning, in addition to language strategy use, showed that although some correlation did exist<sup>15</sup>, it was not as clear-cut as was anticipated. Littlewood’s (1999 pp.89-91) study shows in turn how predictions that are made about students’ beliefs about learning simply on the basis of their cultural background can be proven wrong when the students are actually given a chance to comment on them (see also Chan 2001 for a similar view).

In light of the above, it is difficult to disagree with Littlewood (1999 p.83; emphasis original) when he states that cultural generalisations “can offer us, at most, possible *clues* to understanding why students react in particular ways”, but they should never be treated as absolute truth. Moreover, there also seems to be little empirical evidence to

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Asian students placed emphasis on the cognitive dimension of language learning, and these beliefs were also reflected in the learning strategies they preferred.

support the hypothesis that students from particular cultures are naturally incapable of being autonomous. On the contrary, Littlewood (1999 p.88) observes that:

at the individual level, there are no intrinsic differences that make students in one group either less, or more, capable of developing whatever forms of autonomy are seen as appropriate to language learning.

Rather, the extent to which learners can develop and exercise this capacity is largely determined by the specific context of learning.

Having established that the learner's cultural background should not be treated as a predictor of whether s/he is capable of developing autonomy, we turn now to the second issue that is of relevance to this particular study, namely the differences that may exist between academic expectations in the student's home country and those existent in the host culture. That such differences are to be expected is emphasised by Brown and Joughin (2007 p.58), who argue that, "approaches to knowledge, learning and assessment can be highly culture-specific". Therefore, in their view, international students' expectations of what higher education involves may differ significantly from those of the academic staff they meet while abroad. Furthermore, discrepancies between such expectations may lead to a "learning shock" that can be defined as "unpleasant feelings and difficult experiences that learners encounter when they are exposed to a new learning environment" (Gu and Maley 2008 p.229). It is argued that this phenomenon can be more acute in study abroad settings, particularly when a student lacks foreign language competence and prior exposure to alternative modes of teaching and learning (ibid.). The latter is especially problematic when a student has moved from a teacher-centred and textbook-based educational system to an academic environment that promotes autonomous learning (ibid. p.230). For Gill (2007 p.172), it is precisely such underexposure, rather than cultural incompatibility of educational values, that

appears to be at the root of the difficulties involved in international students' academic adaptation. Similarly, Brown and Joughin (2007 p.58; emphasis added) argue that, “[s]ome students may simply lack the intellectual skills required by certain tasks *because they have never had the occasion to develop them*”.

This naturally raises the question of whether those international students who have had little or no opportunity to develop learner autonomy in their own countries of origin can do so when abroad. Encouragingly, empirical evidence (e.g. Gill 2007, Gu and Maley 2008) suggests that international students are indeed capable of embracing autonomous learning. For instance, Gu and Maley (2008 p.238), reporting on the outcomes of their research project, observe that, “the most profound [academic] change in Chinese students appears to be in their greatly enhanced sense of self-responsibility and independence in managing the progress of their study”. The findings of Amuzie and Winke's (2009) investigation into the impact of study abroad, and its duration in particular, on international students' language learning beliefs lends credence to this conclusion. The authors found that learner beliefs were dynamic in nature, i.e. both short-term and long-term sojourners became more committed to the need to take responsibility for their language learning<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, it appears that the main reason behind the learners' stronger commitment to the idea of taking control of their language learning was dissatisfaction with their own involvement in seeking opportunities for contact with members of the host culture and progress they had made:

Though unfortunate, the paucity of meaningful communication in the face of an abundance of potential opportunities seems to play a role in helping learners realize what their own role and responsibility for learning should be, resulting

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<sup>16</sup> The authors found in particular that the latter group had not only held stronger beliefs in learner autonomy to start with, but also demonstrated a greater shift in their beliefs. Consequently, they pose an interesting question as to whether “those [students] with stronger beliefs in learner autonomy chose to study abroad for longer periods of time” (ibid. p.375).

*in a significant increase in beliefs about learner independence.* (Amuzie and Winke 2009 p.375; emphasis added)

To summarise the above discussion, it seems that whereas some international students may find the notion of learner autonomy challenging initially, due to lack of prior exposure to it, they can indeed learn to recognise its importance, particularly in light of missed opportunities for interaction with native speakers of the language they are learning. However, as a number of authors point out (e.g. McClure 2001, De Vita 2007), the development of learner autonomy and higher-level cognitive processes are some of the skills that international students may need assistance in mastering.

Having discussed the issue of conceptualisation and acquisition of learner autonomy in classroom settings, this chapter turns now to the problem of its assessment.

#### **2.4 Assessing learner autonomy**

In light of the complexity of learner autonomy, it is not surprising that this particular construct can be viewed, alongside that of intercultural competence among others, as “untestable” in FLE (see Paran and Sercu 2010). Although much progress has been made in recent years in terms of conceptualising autonomy (see section 2.2), we still know relatively little about its assessment, especially since few empirical studies exist that have investigated this problem.

First of all, it needs to be pointed out that there is no agreement among language professionals about the *need* to assess autonomy. On the one hand, Benson (2010 p.81), who suggests that it is possible to measure it by means of focusing on “the degree to which [learners] are actually in control of their learning”, remains sceptical about the current drive for the assessment of such control and the consequences of doing so.

While recognising the value of measuring autonomy for research purposes, he opposes the implementation of such assessment in educational settings on the grounds of it carrying the risk of students simulating autonomous behaviours in order to pass tests (ibid. p.95). On the other hand, Lamb (2010 p.101) argues that assessment for autonomy is meant not “to measure [it] for its own sake, with a view to defining levels of ability or ranking pupils”, but rather to put the concept centre stage as far as teaching and learning is concerned. Consequently, he proposes to make *assessment for autonomy*, defined as assessment that is designed and conducted with a view of *fostering* learners’ autonomy (ibid.), part of a broader assessment for learning. The view according to which assessing autonomy can be beneficial for the development of learners’ autonomy is also shared by O’Leary (2009 p.3), who states that even though such assessment may be challenging, it should take place as otherwise students are unlikely to recognise the need for becoming autonomous. One of the reasons for this is that, as pointed out by Jacobson, Sleicher and Maureen (1999 p.469) with regard to in-class learning, “most students value learning primarily in terms of how it is assessed”.

Having established that different rationales may exist for attempts to assess autonomy, the question naturally arises as to whether the construct can be assessed *at all*. A review of both theoretical (Benson 2010) and empirical studies (Lai 2001, O’Leary 2009, Dam and Legenhausen 2010, Lamb 2010) provides us with an affirmative answer, with a number of different approaches being suggested to this purpose. In general, proposed methods can be placed on a continuum from objective to subjective.

As far as the former is concerned, Lai (2001), for example, developed two different rating scales that can be used by external assessors to assess learner autonomy at two

levels - micro (or task) level and macro level (i.e. self-directed learning more broadly). With regard to the micro level, the author proposes to rate the aims set and self-assessment conducted by the learner when engaging in a particular task (a listening activity in this particular study). As far as the latter is concerned, it is suggested that learners' capacity for autonomy can be gauged by means of a seventeen-item rating scale that can be used to assess their personal course designs for self-directed learning.

With regard to more subjective methods, a number of authors have suggested that appropriate assessment methods should focus on "learners' voices" (Dam and Legenhausen 2010, Lamb 2010). These include, for example, focus group conversations that are supposed to elicit learners' metacognitive knowledge and beliefs, both of which are at the core of learner autonomy (Lamb 2010). In a similar vein, Dam and Legenhausen (2010) argue that autonomy cannot be "tested", but rather that it needs to be evaluated by means of qualitative data gathered from learners' regular self- and peer-evaluations recorded in logbooks and questionnaires. Portfolios also appear to have potential as an appropriate assessment tool: for example, O'Leary (2009) used the portfolio to gain insight into students' control over learning management and content on the one hand, and cognitive processes on the other. She concludes that this particular assessment model "appears to have the potential to encourage students to develop and use their capacity for autonomy in order to demonstrate this capacity" (ibid. p.6).

To sum up the discussion in this section, available literature seems to suggest that, first of all, assessing learner autonomy that is aimed at developing this capacity in language learners is highly desirable, and secondly that autonomy can be assessed in different ways, as demonstrated by a number of studies reviewed in this section. Even though

there is some consensus that formative assessment can be particularly beneficial as far as fostering learner autonomy is concerned, we still do not know which of the proposed assessment methods has potentially the greatest impact in terms of the development of autonomy (see O’Leary 2009 p.6). In addition, the use of subjective assessment methods that rely on learner self-assessment may also raise scepticism among some language professionals about their reliability and validity, although, as argued by Dam and Legenhausen (2010 p.124):

Evidence has [...] accumulated in the past that the learners’ self-evaluations can be as reliable and valid as the results of ‘objective’ tests, especially in contexts in which they have been systematically encouraged to monitor their learning over a longer period of time.

## **2.5 Conclusions**

Learner autonomy, defined for the purpose of this thesis as the capacity to take responsibility for one’s own learning, is a highly complex concept that nonetheless can be dissected into four different “strands”: technical, psychological, socio-cultural and political-critical. Even though certain factors appear to be particularly conducive to the development of autonomy in the language classroom, its promotion in this setting remains challenging, not least because we still know relatively little in terms of the relationship between assessment and the development of this capacity. A review of the literature on the experiences of international students reveals further that fostering autonomy may be even more difficult where this student group is involved. Taking into account the fact that international student mobility is on the increase, more research, such as the current study, is therefore required to gain an understanding into how exactly international students can be supported in the language classroom in becoming autonomous learners.

One additional problem which has not been mentioned in the course of this chapter but which nonetheless is central to this thesis concerns the lack of attention paid in the literature on learner autonomy to the fact that learning a foreign language involves not only the acquisition of communicative, but also intercultural competence. This particular issue will be examined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE: FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

*ICC [intercultural competence] is enhanced by grappling with, and developing proficiency in, a second language. Learning to perceive, conceptualize, and express ourselves in alternative ways is a sine qua non of intercultural competence. A monolingual who has never grappled with a foreign communication system may develop many intercultural talents but will be excluded from the insights arising from the struggle to communicate in alternative ways and the differing conceptualizations encoded in other language systems. (Fantini 2000 p.29)*

### 3.1 Introduction

While the preceding chapter concentrated on the concept of learner autonomy, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss a more recent and equally important line of inquiry in FLE, namely the emergence of an *intercultural approach* to foreign language teaching and learning (e.g. Chambers 2004). Its basic premise is that teaching for communicative competence should be inextricably interwoven with teaching for *intercultural competence*<sup>17</sup> (e.g. Byram 1997, Seidl 1998). The reason why language learners should develop the latter is that focusing only on the target language carries the risk of them “becom[ing] *fluent fools*, able to insult people at ever-higher levels of sophistication” (Bennett 2008 p.17; emphasis added). In contrast, *intercultural speakers* (Byram and Zarate 1996, Byram 1997, Kramsch 1998, Zarate 1999, Byram, Nichols and Stevens 2001) or *intercultural mediators* (Alred and Byram 2002) are aware of the fact that learning another language involves moving beyond the level of linguistic (or even communicative) competence to learning to “view the world from another perspective” (Seidl 1998 p.102). However, in contrast to communicative competence, which can be expected to be relatively familiar to language professionals, the concept of

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<sup>17</sup> Although at least twenty alternative terms have been coined to refer to the term *intercultural competence* (Fantini 2006), it is this particular word combination that appears to be most common in the FLE literature (as well as intercultural communication literature - see Koester, Wiseman and Sanders 1993 pp.5-6) and which will be also used throughout this study.

intercultural competence is still relatively new in the field<sup>18</sup>. Nonetheless, it is argued that, “there are compelling reasons why FL [foreign language] students should develop intercultural competence *as a matter of urgency*” (Mughan 1999 p.64; emphasis added). This naturally raises the question as to how exactly such competence should be conceptualised, developed and assessed in the foreign language classroom, especially since it is sometimes wrongly perceived as “airy-fairy, touchy-feely, founded on supposition, and [...] [lacking] a discipline” (Rollin 2006 p.57). These three issues, which are of particular relevance to this thesis, will be examined in detail in sections 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 respectively.

### **3.2 Defining intercultural competence**

In light of the fact that intercultural competence has been particularly well researched and theorised in the field of intercultural communication (see, for example, Imahori and Lanigan 1989, Chen and Starosta 1996, Gudykunst and Kim 1997, Spitzberg 1997, Wiseman 2001, Lustig and Koster 2006 and Martin and Nakayama 2007), one could expect that defining the concept in the context of FLE would be relatively simple. However, it needs to be borne in mind that intercultural communication models of intercultural competence generally pay little attention to foreign language skills. Although intercultural scholars are aware of benefits of learning another language in general (e.g. Ruben 1989 p.233, Gudykunst and Kim 1997 p.250, Lustig and Koster 2006 p.203, Martin and Nakayama 2007 p.439), they seem to have given little serious consideration to the issue of what language one actually *communicates in* with members

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<sup>18</sup> Sercu (2006 p.68; emphasis added) observes that, “[c]ommunicative conceptions of foreign language education can be said to constitute the core of teachers’ views. These conceptions affect the way in which teachers teach the language and approach culture teaching. [...] At present, intercultural competence teaching is perceived to be *an important proposal for innovation* [...]. Yet, it is also viewed as *peripheral* to the commonly accepted linguistic goals of foreign language education”.

of other cultures, in line with Fantini's (2008 p.21; emphasis original) observation that interculturalists "generally ignore the specific *language* of encounters". Consequently, not only has linguistic competence rarely been the focus of debate on the nature of intercultural competence<sup>19</sup>, but also there is no agreement among intercultural scholars on whether the ability to speak another language is important for the development of intercultural competence *at all* (see, for example, Deardorff 2008). Consequently, attempts to "customise" existing intercultural communication models appear to be quite problematic as illustrated by Bennett, Bennett and Allen's (2003) suggestion to align the six stages of Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) with the three traditional stages of target language proficiency (i.e. beginner, intermediate and advanced). The DMIS posits a progressive scale of six stages that individuals move between as they experience cultural difference, grouped into two categories: ethnocentrism, in which "the worldview of one's own culture is central to all reality" (Bennett 1993 p.30), and ethnorelativism, which concerns the belief that "cultures can only be understood relative to one another and that particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context" (ibid. p.46). More precisely, the former comprises the stages of *denial* of the existence of cultural difference, *defence* against it, mainly by means of denigrating the other culture, or emphasising the superiority of one's own, and *minimisation* of such difference in favour of the belief in human similarity; in contrast, the ethnorelative end of the spectrum comprises the stages of *acceptance* of, and respect for, cultural difference both in terms of behaviour and values, *adaptation* which involves *inter alia* the development of empathy, or the ability to suspend one's worldview temporarily and instead to understand the perspective of the

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<sup>19</sup> One notable exception to this trend is the framework of intercultural competence proposed by Fantini (2000) in which foreign language proficiency is *on a par with*, rather than *part of*, the other dimensions of the construct he proposes.

other culture (ibid. p.53), and finally *integration* where the individual does not identify him- or herself with any one worldview but instead displays cultural marginality in relation to a number of cultures (ibid. p.60).

Aligning the DMIS stages with the three traditional stages of target language proficiency is, however, problematic as it presumes a “proportionate” relationship between foreign language proficiency and intercultural competence. In other words, a “beginner” learner of language is expected to be at the denial / defence stages of intercultural sensitivity, whereas an “advanced” learner is supposed to be at the adaptation / integration stages. This, however, is not necessarily the case: according to Meyer (1991 p.157), learners who have “low linguistic competence may be excellent in intercultural mediation, and vice versa”. In addition, the model also assumes that when starting to learn a foreign language, “learners have no prior exposure to issues of intercultural communication” (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler 2003 p.20), i.e. that *by definition* they have to be highly ethnocentric. However, as Byram (2008 p.79) points out, even children of primary school age are nowadays experiencing contact with Otherness. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to expect that even young learners at the beginner level can actually be skilled intercultural speakers.

In light of the difficulty involved in tailoring existing models of intercultural competence to the needs of FLE, it is not surprising that many language educators have chosen instead to make their own suggestions for such models, using foreign language competence as a starting point in their discussions rather than *vice versa*. A number of alternative models has been proposed in recent years and since none of them has gained unanimous approval, “[f]oreign language education finds itself at a crossroads with

multiple models of language and culture competence” (Álvarez 2007 p.126). Out of those, however, Byram’s (1997) framework of intercultural communicative competence<sup>20</sup> appears to be one of the most comprehensive and influential models of the construct and as such, it will be the focus of discussion in this section.

Byram (1997) uses van Ek’s (1986) concept of communicative competence as the foundation of his own model of intercultural communicative competence comprising linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences, alongside intercultural competence. He therefore makes a distinction between intercultural competence, which involves intercultural interaction in one’s mother tongue, and intercultural *communicative* competence, which involves interaction in a foreign language (Byram 1997 pp.70-71). As far as intercultural competence is concerned, it consists of five components, or *savoirs* (pp.34-38)<sup>21</sup>. The first one (*savoirs*) refers to the learner’s knowledge of his or her own culture, as well as a foreign culture, and of the processes involved in individual and societal interaction. The second component (*savoir être*) involves affective factors such as the attitudes of curiosity and openness. For Byram these attitudes have a special purpose in the sense that they support the individual’s ability to “decentre”. Such “decentring” is, in his view, a two-way process in which the learner, on the one hand, abandons the ethnocentric standpoint, attempting to see his or her own culturally determined behaviour and ways of thinking from the perspective of a member of another culture, and, on the other hand, withholds judgement on the latter’s own cultural practices and beliefs. Therefore the aim behind it is “to make the strange

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<sup>20</sup> The framework is grounded in an earlier model developed jointly by Byram and Zarate (1996).

<sup>21</sup> Byram and Zarate (1996) distinguish only between four different *savoirs*, i.e. *savoir-être*, *savoir-apprendre*, *savoirs* and *savoir-faire*. Sercu (2002) in turn proposes that communicative competence be considered a sixth *savoir* which she calls *savoir communiquer*.

familiar and the familiar strange” (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey 2002 p.19). Such de-centring is required if the individual is to adapt one’s behaviour to act in an appropriate way (Byram 2008 p.69). For Byram (1997 p.33), the knowledge and affective dimensions together constitute two prerequisites for successful intercultural communication, although they are also refined further through actual engagement with members of other cultures.

In addition, intercultural competence also involves two sets of skills: the skill of interpreting (documents or behaviours from another culture) and relating (those documents / behaviours) to those from one’s own culture (*savoir comprendre*), as well as the skill of discovery, i.e. the ability to gather cultural information, and the skill of interaction (*savoir apprendre / faire*). Byram emphasises the fact that all the above-mentioned components are interdependent. Thus, for instance, to interact successfully with a member of another culture, the learner must draw on his or her existing knowledge frame, the ability to decentre, and the skill of discovery and interpretation.

As is evident from the above overview, not only is Byram’s model particularly comprehensive, but also it broadly reflects a growing consensus among intercultural communication scholars concerning the nature of intercultural competence, i.e. the fact that it comprises the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains (e.g. Chen and Starosta 1996, Gudykunst and Kim 1997, Lustig and Koster 2006 and Martin and Nakayama 2007)<sup>22</sup>. Even though the terms used to refer to the three domains abound,

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<sup>22</sup> What distinguishes, however, Byram’s model from those proposed in the intercultural communication literature is his suggestion that FLE integrate the teaching for intercultural competence with *political education* and thus the development of learners’ critical cultural awareness (*savoir s’engager*) (Byram 1997, 2008). This he defines as “an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (Byram 1997 p.63).

researchers place emphasis on the fact that all three dimensions are inseparable and equally important (e.g. Chen and Starosta, 1996 p.369, Lustig and Koster 2006 p.69). The tripartite nature of the concept is reflected, for example, in the definition put forward by Deardorff (2008 p.33; emphasis added)<sup>23</sup>, which is relevant for the purpose of this study and which describes the concept as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural *knowledge, skills, and attitudes*”.

Having examined the nature of the construct of intercultural competence, this thesis turns now to the issue of its acquisition in a formal learning context.

### **3.3 Acquiring intercultural competence in the foreign language classroom**

It is argued that the development of intercultural competence is considered to be “natural to the language classroom” (Bennett, Bennett and Allen 2003 p.245), especially since the specific qualities involved “are seldom acquired without help, *are seldom learnt without teaching*” (Byram 1997 p.2; emphasis added). However, since it is argued that “intercultural competence is *not* a ‘natural’ or ‘automatic’ result” of FLE (Meyer 1991 p.157; emphasis added; see also Bennett 2008 pp.16-17), the question arises as to what approach language professionals should take in order to help learners with its acquisition. This particular issue will be the focus of discussion in this section.

Traditionally classroom-based culture learning has focused on “the acquisition of knowledge about another country and culture” (Byram 1997 p.65), or teaching “the truth” about the target culture (Sercu 2002 p.67), an approach that Wright (2000) refers

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<sup>23</sup> The definition is an outcome of a study in which a panel of twenty-three internationally renowned intercultural scholars were asked to reach a consensus on a definition and assessment methods of intercultural competence.

to as *knowledge-based* and which can be criticised on two grounds. Firstly, the image of the target culture presented in the classroom is often divorced from reality (e.g. Chambers 2004). Secondly, empirical evidence shows that focusing only on cultural facts may actually lead to less, rather than more, positive attitudes towards the target culture (Wright 2000).

Consequently, the literature (e.g. Murray and Bollinger 2001, Liddicoat et al. 2003, Liddicoat 2008) argues for the need to adopt what Wright (2000) refers to as a *process-oriented* approach. Its defining characteristic is the fact that it is embedded in constructivism with its view of learning as a socially-mediated process whose aim is “to help individuals operate and adjust within their interpersonal contexts” (ibid. p.331). The principles of such an approach have been outlined by Liddicoat et al. (2003 pp.46-51), in whose view intercultural language learning<sup>24</sup> is, first of all, about *active construction of knowledge, making connections, and social interaction*. In other words, the learner must actively engage in language and culture learning, which is a social and interactive process that requires a reconceptualisation of the learner’s existing knowledge base in light of new stimulating input about other languages and cultures and how these relate to his or her own. It depends furthermore on critical *reflection* on the part of the learner, as well as the acceptance of *responsibility* for his or her own role in successful communication and interaction with people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

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<sup>24</sup> The authors define intercultural language learning as “developing with learners an understanding of their own language(s) and culture(s) in relation to an additional language and culture” (Liddicoat et al. 2003 p.1).

However, since “constructivism is an epistemology and *not* a teaching approach replete with suggested classroom activities” (Murray and Bollinger 2001 p.63; emphasis added), the question arises as to how exactly the above constructivism-informed principles can be translated into classroom practice (see, for example, Liddicoat 2008 p.282). As the literature makes clear, there is no single recommended approach. Suggestions include, for example, the use of a culture portfolio combined with culture training, which can “explicitly and systematically engage[...] [...] participants in a comparison of others and self to stimulate L1 reflection on and (critical) questioning” of another culture (Wright 2000 p.332), and increasingly, telecollaboration, or online intercultural exchanges (see, for instance, Murray and Bollinger 2001, O’Dowd 2007, Helm 2009). Telecollaboration has been described as “an *approach to intercultural learning* that uses Internet technology as a tool to facilitate intercultural communication between classes of learners in different countries” (Helm 2009 p.91; emphasis added). Indeed, research evidence suggests that, “telecollaborative activities have the potential to support the development of students’ ICC [intercultural communicative competence] in a way that traditional culture learning materials would not be able to achieve” (O’Dowd 2007 p.146; see also O’Dowd and Ritter 2006).

On a more general level, Liddicoat (2008) proposes that classroom activities geared towards fostering intercultural language learning should be focused on four interrelated processes. More specifically, classroom tasks should facilitate *noticing* of cultural input manifest in language, and encourage learners to *compare* cultural similarities and differences as well as new information with their existing knowledge base. This in turn should lead to *reflection* aimed at “mak[ing] personal sense of experiences” and *interaction* “to create personal meanings about their experiences, to communicate those

meanings, to explore those meanings and to reshape them in response to others” (ibid. p.284).

The final point to be raised in this section concerns the relationship between classroom learning and the development of learners’ *savoir faire*. This issue merits more attention since, as pointed out by Byram (1997 pp.65-68), whereas the language classroom provides language learners with opportunities to develop relevant knowledge and attitudes as well as the skills of interpreting, relating and discovery, the same does not normally apply to developing the skill of interaction in real time. In a similar way, Meyer (1991 p.137; emphasis in original) argues that traditionally FLE “fosters the students’ awareness of cultural differences, but it does not systematically allow the students to learn to *act* in cross-cultural situations”. This shortcoming of formal learning is particularly problematic if we bear in mind Fantini’s (2008 p.21) argument according to which “acceptance by others is more often strained by offending behaviors than incorrect grammar”. Consequently, it can be inferred that, as far as formal instruction is concerned, without learning to actually interact with members of other cultures, language learners will not be in a position to develop their intercultural competence (see also Meyer 1991 p.155).

Whereas this problem may be particularly difficult to overcome in culturally homogeneous classrooms, culturally diverse classes, such as those that are increasingly characteristic of an internationalised higher education system and which are also of particular relevance to this study, would seem to offer more opportunities for learners to develop their intercultural competence, including *savoir faire*. However, it needs to be taken into account that “cultural diversity and internationalisation do not automatically

lead to intercultural contacts and intercultural learning experiences” (Otten 2003 p.14). For example, lack of interaction between international and host students on campus “hinders in-class interaction, creates resentment and reinforces stereotypical views” (Eisenchlas and Trevaskes 2007 p.415). Consequently, it is argued that in order to maximise the potential that culturally heterogeneous classes have for the development of intercultural competence, it is paramount that emphasis is placed on those learning activities that encourage intergroup interaction such as collaborative learning (Eisenchlas and Trevaskes 2007).

### **3.4 Assessing intercultural competence: from objective testing to assessment via the European Language Portfolio**

In spite of a widespread acknowledgement that an intercultural approach to FLE should support the development, and hence also assessment of linguistic and intercultural competence in equal measure, assessment of the latter is generally recognised to be problematic (see, for example, Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein and Colby 2003 p.212)<sup>25</sup> and remains “the least well-developed dimension of intercultural language teaching and learning” (Scarino 2007 p.3). It is argued that the traditional, or psychometric approach (Scarino 2007) to assessment, which focuses on measurement of knowledge about both “small c” and “Big C” target culture (Seelye 1984, Valette 1986, Lafayette and Schulz 1997, Barnwell 2004), mainly through discrete-point formats such as multiple-choice, true-false, and fill-in-the-blank (Lee 1997 p.357), is inadequate for an intercultural approach. This is because although the above-mentioned formats are recognised to have their advantages (e.g. ease of correction and objectivity), they are also likely to make

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<sup>25</sup> Problems with intercultural assessment are certainly not unique to FLE as intercultural communication experts themselves have failed recently to reach an agreement on appropriate assessment methods (Deardorff 2006), and in light of lack of consensus, it is not surprising that some eighty-five different assessment tools have been developed until now (Fantini 2006).

overgeneralisations, reinforce stereotypes, and test superficial knowledge (Seelye 1984<sup>26</sup>; see also Paige et al. 2003 p.225 for a criticism of this format), or “shallow” rather than “deep” intercultural learning (Corbett 2003). For example, it is argued that objective culture testing has generally focused on cognitive dimensions of learning, while overlooking the behavioural and affective aspects (Paige et al. 2003 p.225). It is argued furthermore that although the issue of the reliability of assessment, which is central to the psychometric paradigm, cannot be ignored, particularly where certification is concerned, too much focus on it carries the risk of assessing only those aspects of intercultural communicative competence that lend themselves to easy measurement, thus potentially “over-simplifying and misrepresenting a learner’s ability in order to ensure objectivity in measurement” (Byram 1997 p.29).

Consequently, there has been growing emphasis on the need to abandon objective culture testing methods and instead replace them with more innovative modes of assessment (Moore 1994 p.169). Byram’s (1997) framework with its emphasis, in contrast to some other proposals, on a need for *holistic* assessment of intercultural competence<sup>27</sup>, i.e. one that takes into account all the components of the construct<sup>28</sup>,

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<sup>26</sup> Seelye (1984) argues that some of above problems can be remedied by means of various validation techniques, including pretesting items with members of the target culture and asking for expert opinion. However, according to Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002 p.17), members of the target culture are not necessarily experts on it.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, Lafayette and Schulz (1997) deliberately omit attitudinal objectives from their culture teaching goals since they do not believe that the language teacher should “manipulate attitudes directly and systematically toward a specific culture”. Other intercultural scholars have avoided the pitfalls involved in assessment of attitudes altogether by focusing instead on the behavioural dimension that is easier to assess externally (e.g. Ruben 1976).

<sup>28</sup> This includes also its affective dimension that appears to be particularly problematic in an educational setting. It is argued, for example, that it does not lend itself to quantification (Fantini 2000 p.31, Byram, Gribkova and Starkey 2002 p.30) and that it involves an ethical dilemma. With regard to the latter, “a human being’s personality is, at least according to western ways of thinking, in many respects inviolable, almost sacred, and must therefore be respected” (Kaikkonen 2001 p.66); yet, assessment of this particular dimension involves language professionals making a decision as to whether “education want[s] to be prescriptive

certainly reflects this trend as it fits into an educational, rather than psychometric, assessment paradigm as suggested by Gipps (1994). The former, *inter alia*, recognises the multi-dimensionality and complexity of constructs in question; sets clear standards for performance against which pupils are assessed; fosters metacognition by encouraging learner reflection on their own work and self-monitoring; and seeks a “thick” description of achievement rather than a single score (Gipps 1994 pp.159-161).

In his attempt to identify educational assessment methods that fit the above-mentioned paradigm, Byram (1997) rules out both performance (criterion-referenced) assessment and objective testing as the only means of evaluation of intercultural communicative competence<sup>29</sup>. Instead, he emphasises the potential of a *portfolio* approach, the advantages of which are also mentioned by Moore (1994). In Byram’s view, this particular assessment method offers a number of benefits. Firstly, it emphasises the interconnectedness of teaching and assessment since evidence for the learner’s *savoirs* can be selected from what has been learnt in the classroom (op.cit. p.107). Secondly, it supports documentation of these aspects of intercultural competence that are not immediately observable to an external assessor, and which require reflection, e.g. during or after stay abroad (ibid. pp.93-94). Thirdly, it makes it possible to combine not only atomised and holistic assessment, but also criterion- and objective norm-referenced assessment since evidence for specific *savoirs* selected by the learner can be placed alongside objective test results (ibid. pp.107-108).

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about the intercultural attitudes learners should develop and ... [if] learners [have to] be punished for not having particular desired personality traits” (Sercu 2004 p.78).

<sup>29</sup> In the case of the former, this is because his model of *savoirs* is not limited to observable behaviour (Byram 1997 p.89).

However, even though a number of empirical studies from the field of FLE shows that this form of evaluation is indeed an effective way of increasing not only cultural knowledge and understanding (Moore 1994, Lee 1997), but also intercultural competence more broadly (e.g. Jacobson, Sleicher and Maureen 1999), the approach does not appear to be without its pitfalls. Jacobson, Sleicher and Maureen (1999 p.487) point out, for example, that the concept of the portfolio may be difficult for students to embrace, in spite of support and feedback provided, due to lack of familiarity with reflection and self-direction. The authors also argue that the process of portfolio development requires regular guidance, and is time-consuming; therefore it is suggested that it should be the focus of instruction, rather than an additional task in which students engage. In addition, they write that portfolios are difficult to evaluate since they are not necessarily “a definitive portrayal of students’ learning” (ibid. p.486). This is due to the fact that:

because portfolios rest on how students choose to represent their learning, and because they may value different types of learning or may not know how to best represent themselves, the portfolios themselves may provide only a limited picture of what students have learned. (ibid. p.488)

The final point raises the issue of identifying suitable criteria that can be used to assess intercultural language learning via portfolios. Suggested solutions to this problem involve marking students’ portfolios “simply on the basis of completion; [since] more subtle distinctions in quality remain difficult to make” (Jacobson, Sleicher and Maureen p.491), or, in the case of using the portfolio to assess cultural knowledge and understanding, using teacher-developed criteria, e.g. the topic, content, presentation (Moore, 1994 p.174, Lee 1997 p.366).

Another, more recent and increasingly popular recommendation involves harnessing the potential of the European Language Portfolio (ELP), a tripartite tool which has been designed to foster not only learners' plurilingual and pluricultural competences, but also learner autonomy, and which serves two functions: reporting and pedagogical (Council for Cultural Cooperation 2000 p.2)<sup>30</sup>. The former, which is mainly realised in the Passport (Lenz 2004 p.27), is intended to provide the learner with a means of recording his or her language competence, in particular through self-assessment of plurilingual competence with reference to a self-assessment grid. The grid, which was developed originally for the Council of Europe's (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR), is organised along two dimensions: the vertical scale comprises six common reference levels of foreign language competence (i.e., in ascending order, A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2), whereas the horizontal dimension subdivides it into five skills: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing (see Council of Europe 2001 pp.26-27). The distinctive feature of the grid is the fact that language competence is described in terms of *Can do* descriptors with their emphasis, as the name suggests, on what the learner *can* do, rather than on his or her deficiencies.

The latter function in turn is fulfilled in particular in the Biography (Lenz 2004 p.28) that enables the learner to plan, monitor and evaluate his or her language learning (Council for Cultural Cooperation 2000 p.3). This is made possible through self-assessment checklists in the form of *Can do* descriptors based on the common reference levels, as well as reflection on language and intercultural experiences. The Dossier in

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<sup>30</sup> The fact that in the space of little over a decade since its launch, the number of validated ELP models has grown to an impressive 107 at the time of writing (Council of Europe 2010) can be seen as evidence of its growing popularity.

turn provides the learner with the opportunity to include examples of work that best reflect his or her competence (Council for Cultural Cooperation 2000 p.3).

However, in spite of the fact that the ELP is designed to acknowledge “the full range of the learner’s language *and* intercultural competence and experience regardless of whether acquired within or outside formal education” (Council for Cultural Cooperation 2000 p.2; emphasis added), the portfolio has been accused of failing to adequately address the issue (Little and Simpson 2003, Rantz and Horan 2005, Bruen, Péchenart and Crosbie 2007, Murphy-Lejeune 2007), leading Little (2006 p.184) to claim that, “we have a long way to go before we can claim that the ELP has had its intended impact on the development of intercultural learning and intercultural awareness”.

The shortcomings of the ELP are most clearly evident in the sections concerning reflection and self-assessment. According to Little and Simpson (2003 p.4), even though ELP models tend to “encourage the owner to write reflectively on intercultural experiences of various kinds”, they also do so “without providing a specific focus”. In addition, the authors also concur that in the ELP Passport “[a]t present no provision is made for self-assessment that focuses on non-linguistic socio-cultural practices” (ibid. p.3), a limitation also reflected in the Biography checklists. It needs to be borne in mind that language educators remain divided on the issue of whether it is possible at all to develop descriptors of intercultural competence in line with those that exist for the five language skills. For example, Little and Simpson (2003 p.5) remain sceptical about a possibility of developing such descriptors since:

Even if we had empirically validated scales of intercultural competence, it is not certain that they would lend themselves to self-assessment, since they would necessarily differ from the common reference levels of the *Common*

*European Framework* in one important aspect. The common reference levels are defined by descriptors that refer to communicative behaviour: on the whole we know what we are capable of doing and what lies beyond our competence. By contrast, the components of intercultural competence may well be opaque in the absence of reflected intercultural experience: in many circumstances ELP users may not be in a position to judge their own intercultural competence.

Another difficulty involved in the development of intercultural *Can do* descriptors for the ELP lies in the fact that it may be difficult to distinguish between different levels of intercultural competence. Indeed, the issue of how to determine learner progress in acquisition of intercultural competence is particularly controversial, although in general there seems to be a consensus that it is possible to identify different levels of it (see Meyer 1991, Byram 1997, Fantini 2008). According to Byram (1997), for instance, it is possible to define a threshold for each of the *savoirs* and for the learner's overall level of intercultural communicative competence upon whose reaching the learner can be considered to be interculturally competent<sup>31</sup>. Sercu (2002 p.82) in turn argues that there are two approaches to differentiating between levels of intercultural competence, and these can be represented by means of either the "hurdle" or the "ladder" metaphor: whereas the former involves a simple distinction between "pass" and "fail", the latter subdivides the competence into a number of levels. The second view therefore resembles closely the approach taken in the CEFR (2001) in relation to the six levels of language proficiency<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Byram (1997) claims that it is also important to determine levels below and above the threshold, especially in certain circumstances, e.g. residence abroad. However, the exact specification of such a threshold depends in his opinion on the context of assessment since in some circumstances certain components may be emphasised more than others.

<sup>32</sup> In a similar vein, Fantini (2008 p.22) argues that individuals' achieve different levels of intercultural competence depending to a large extent on their motivation – be it instrumental or integrative - towards another culture, hence the need for various benchmarks to be developed to distinguish between different stages of this process.

In spite of the above-mentioned limitations, language educators are increasingly recognising the opportunities that the ELP offers for both the development of intercultural competence (see, for example, Rantz and Horan 2005) and assessment thereof (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey 2002, Barnwell 2004, Caffrey 2004, Murphy-Lejeune 2007)<sup>33</sup>. More specifically, the idea of ELP-based learner self-assessment of intercultural competence has been given more prominence and a growing number of language professionals has expressed the opinion that such self-assessment is both desirable *and* possible. For instance, Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002 p.30) not only argue that the “language biography can [...] include self assessment of intercultural competence”, but also they provide examples of what such self-assessment may look like. It is evident from the examples they offer that not only are the authors of the opinion that ELP-based self-assessment can cover all three subcomponents of intercultural competence, i.e. attitudes, knowledge and skills, but also that it can be expressed by means of statements similar to *Can do* descriptors<sup>34</sup>. The recommendation that intercultural *Can do* descriptors be developed, also for the ELP, has been made also by other authors, most notably Barnwell (2004), Bruen, Péchenart and Crosbie (2007) and Murphy-Lejeune (2007). For example, Barnwell (2004 p.116) in his discussion of the current limitations of the CEFR encourages any effort to develop parallel scales for cultural knowledge, in spite of the negative response this may evoke. In his own words:

There is no reason why parallel scales cannot be drawn up for knowledge of culture. While whatever scales might be produced would be sure to attract critique, even attack, many educators would welcome and appreciate an honest effort to take culture testing as seriously as language testing. The effort to

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<sup>33</sup> For example, Byram’s (1997 pp.107-108) own proposal for a format of a language and intercultural portfolio resembles closely the design of the ELP.

<sup>34</sup> This is evident from the following examples provided by the authors: “I am able to cope with a range of reactions I have to living in a different culture [...]” or “I know some important facts about living in the other culture and about the country, state and people” (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey 2002 p.31).

create some kind of hierarchy of cultural knowledge / understanding should go hand in hand with the creation of purely language-based scales” (ibid. p.116).

In a similar vein, Murphy-Lejeune (2007) argues that in order to redress the overemphasis on plurilingual experiences in the ELP, it is vital that the portfolio takes into account both learners’ pluricultural capital, understood as overall breadth of linguistic and intercultural experiences, and mobility capital which refers specifically to the experience of life abroad. She argues further that the ELP should comprise “an appropriate description of pluricultural experiences, which would include specific descriptors, *such as those which exist for language learning*” (ibid. p.220; emphasis added), which would enable learners to have their pluricultural experiences formally recognised by educational institutions which otherwise may ignore them, partly because of the difficulties involved in their assessment.

That the development of a suite of intercultural *Can do* descriptors *is* possible is demonstrated by an innovative model of the ELP called the LOLIPOP ELP<sup>35</sup>, whose self-assessment grid contains both language and intercultural descriptors in recognition of the inseparability of those two competences. Consequently, whereas the horizontal dimension of its self-assessment grid consists of the six common reference levels, the vertical dimension comprises *six*, rather than five, skills, i.e. listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing and intercultural skills<sup>36</sup> (see Appendix A for screenshots of the LOLIPOP ELP self-assessment grid). The final “skill” contains six

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<sup>35</sup> The LOLIPOP ELP is an outcome of a three-year collaboration between twelve higher education institutions across Europe to develop an online, interactive and multilingual version of the ELP, designed with adult learners in mind, and to enhance its intercultural dimension. The portfolio is freely available online in seven languages (English, French, German, Latvian, Norwegian, Polish, and Spanish) at [www.lolipop-portfolio.eu](http://www.lolipop-portfolio.eu). It should be signalled at this juncture that the researcher was actively involved in the development of the portfolio. This issue is addressed further in Chapter Four.

<sup>36</sup> Since in the language classroom context learners tend to acquire intercultural competence in relation to a specific target language, intercultural self-assessment via the LOLIPOP ELP is tied with the specific target language selected by the learner.

“global” and thirty-four detailed *Can do* descriptors, which are embedded in two aforementioned theoretical frameworks, i.e. Byram’s (1997) *savoirs* model and Bennett’s (1993) DMIS. Whereas the former delineates the specific subcomponents of the construct of intercultural competence (five in total), the latter describes a progressive scale of intercultural sensitivity, suggesting how it may be possible to distinguish between different levels of intercultural competence<sup>37</sup>. Any single descriptor refers to only one of the five *savoirs* and the number of descriptors ranges from five (for levels A1 and A2) to six (B1 to C2). However, this does not mean that each *savoir* is represented at every level; for example, neither at level A1 or A2 is there a descriptor representing the skill of relating and interpreting (*savoir comprendre*) as this particular skill is more likely to be displayed by more interculturally competent learners.

The intercultural dimension of the LOLIPOP ELP is also supported by a number of other features not present in either traditional hard copy or electronic models. These include the provision of examples and explanations for each of the intercultural *Can do* descriptors; an intercultural Glossary that includes the key intercultural terms used throughout the portfolio; and the “Share” function which can be used for

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<sup>37</sup> The LOLIPOP ELP descriptors reflect therefore the consensus that emerges from the intercultural communication literature that concerns the tripartite nature of intercultural competence (see section 3.2) and the view that it is a developmental process. As far as Bennett’s (1993) model is concerned, it needs to be pointed out that the stages at the lower end of the DMIS concern predominantly negative responses to cultural difference; this naturally poses a challenge when writing positively formulated *Can do* descriptors that draw on this particular model. To overcome this problem, at the lower levels of intercultural self-assessment the LOLIPOP ELP descriptors emphasise what the learner can do / knows already while also pointing out remaining gaps. This is illustrated by the following example: “I can now try to use my observation skills and intercultural experience to understand how native-speakers of the other language behave in everyday situations, although I *do not yet have* any particular strategies for coping with unfamiliar or confusing situations. (*savoir apprendre/faire*)” (emphasis added).

telecollaborative projects<sup>38</sup> as it enables “users from different countries and cultures [...] [to] share their impressions and intercultural and linguistic experiences” (LOLIPOP n.d. p.5). Finally, in the reflection section in the Biography (see Appendix A for a screenshot of the page) the learner is prompted to reflect on particular experiences from both the linguistic and intercultural angles<sup>39</sup>, and is given the opportunity to upload files that are in some way linked with them<sup>40</sup>.

To sum up the discussion in this section, it is argued that as far as the assessment of intercultural competence is concerned, FLE needs to embrace an educational model of assessment, as exemplified by the portfolio approach in general and the ELP in particular. Even though the latter has until recently been found wanting in relation to the intercultural dimension of foreign language learning, projects such as the LOLIPOP ELP demonstrate that the balance can be redressed.

### **3.5 Conceptualising autonomy in intercultural language learning**

Having examined the concepts of learner autonomy, defined for the purpose of this thesis as the capacity to take responsibility for one’s own language learning, and intercultural competence, understood here as a combination of the learner’s knowledge, skills and attitudes that make intercultural communication possible, this thesis turns

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<sup>38</sup> Since the LOLIPOP ELP is embedded in the Moodle Virtual Language Environment, it offers a number of tools that are central to synchronous and asynchronous CMC such as fora, chat facilities and a collaborative writing facility (wiki).

<sup>39</sup> As mentioned earlier in this section, reflection on intercultural experiences in the ELP has received some criticism due to its lack of focus. In contrast, in the LOLIPOP ELP the students are guided in their reflections on intercultural language learning in a number of ways: by means of a “Help” button that poses a number of questions to the learner on the different linguistic and intercultural aspects of a given experience and in this way “guides” the description and analysis process; by means of a series of “yes” / “no questions that prompts the learner to consider how a particular experience helped them “to become more linguistically / interculturally competent”; and finally, by being prompted to update their self-assessment, if needed, in light of such reflection and to upload supporting files.

<sup>40</sup> For more information about the LOLIPOP ELP see, for example, Bruen and Sudhershan (2009).

now to the issue of lack of intersection between the two in the foreign language classroom.

As pointed out by Benson (2006 p.25), until now the literature on autonomy has tended to ignore “the sense in which foreign language study necessarily involves inter-cultural learning”. Instead, discussions on the relationship between autonomy and culture have been limited to the issue of cultural appropriateness of the concept of autonomy in general (e.g. Riley 1988, Benson 2001, Schmenk 2005), or whether one’s cultural background affects the development thereof (see, for instance, Riley 1988, Ho and Crookall 1995, Littlewood 1999). Consequently, whereas language professionals have gained a better understanding, on the one hand, of what learner autonomy involves and how it can be fostered in the classroom, and, on the other, of the nature of intercultural competence and how it may be developed in the same environment, relatively little is known about the process of encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own language *and* intercultural development. This idea has been captured for the purpose of this study in the term *autonomy in intercultural language learning*.

The first issue to consider here concerns the question of *why* it is important for language learners to take such responsibility. As far as language learning is concerned, the concept of autonomy has been promoted *inter alia* because of empirical evidence which suggests that an autonomy-oriented classroom pedagogy is more successful than traditional teacher- and textbook-centred instruction (Legenhausen 2000). With regard to intercultural learning, the most important reason for this need concerns the fact that we cannot “teach” culture to learners since “whatever is taught [...] is inevitably insufficient” (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey 2002 p.11; see also Liddicoat 2008 p.280)

in today's world where not only is intercultural contact in one form or another inevitable, but also its precise circumstances cannot be specified in advance. Rather, as argued in this chapter, we need to help learners develop intercultural competence, or an intercultural skillset, mindset and heartset (Bennett 2008), which will enable them to act competently in future intercultural communication situations. In addition, we also need to encourage them to continue developing this competence once formal education is complete. The reason for this is that the development of intercultural competence is considered to be a "lifelong journey" (Deardorff 2008 p.39) that is neither "likely to be constrained to a classroom setting and [...] be constantly supervised by a teacher" (Jensen, Jæger and Lorentsen 1995 p.14), nor limited in duration as "there will always be new situations, new contexts to adapt to" (Coperías Aguilar 2009 p.251). Consequently, not only is autonomy considered to be a prerequisite for life-long intercultural language learning (see also Jensen 1995 p.40, Byram 1997 p.65, Sercu 2002 p.72, Coperías Aguilar op.cit.), but also it is argued that language learners need to develop "the competence to learn cultures autonomously" (Sercu 2002 p.72). In other words, they need to develop autonomy in intercultural language learning.

As is evident from the literature review in Chapter Two, the concept of learner autonomy defies a simple definition. It is argued that an autonomous learner takes control of the learning process by making decisions in respect of it (the technical perspective); has the underlying cognitive and affective capacity that makes learning management possible (the psychological perspective); engages in collaborative learning activities in order to develop autonomy (the socio-cultural perspective); and finally, strives towards his or her empowerment in the learning process (the political-critical perspective). Until now the literature on learner autonomy has examined these different

dimensions by and large with language learning in mind. It can be argued, however, that for an autonomy-oriented pedagogy to embrace an intercultural approach, and therefore to help learners take the responsibility for their intercultural language learning, the focus of each of these perspectives needs to be broadened to incorporate the intercultural dimension. This raises the issue that is behind this study and which concerns the question of how the foreign language classroom can support this process.

Furthermore, this study examines the above issue with the international student population in mind. As explained in Chapter Two, students who undertake study abroad often find being autonomous difficult in general, mainly due to lack of prior experience with this mode of learning. Consequently, it can be expected that encouraging them to develop autonomy in intercultural language learning can be a particularly challenging task. In addition, we should not overlook the fact that just as learners may be unwilling to take control of their language learning, so too they may oppose assuming responsibility for the acquisition of intercultural competence. As pointed out by Sercu (2006 p.69), even if teachers are committed to adopting a more learner-centred approach to fostering intercultural competence, a conflict of interests may occur, i.e. the teacher may want his or her students “to become independent explorers of cultures, but students [may] prefer teacher-directed instruction”. Consequently, in order to be able to encourage international students to take responsibility for their intercultural language learning, we must also gain an awareness of those factors that are likely to inhibit this process in the classroom setting.

### **3.6 Conclusions**

An intercultural approach to FLE assumes that not only is culture learning an integral part of learning a foreign language, but also that it should go beyond mere acquisition of

factual information, and instead encourage language learners to be actively engaged in the development of their intercultural competence, understood to be a composite of knowledge, skills and attitudes. This chapter has argued that the nature of the construct requires in addition that learners develop the capacity to take responsibility for the development of such competence, and not only, as is currently the case, their language competence. This brings us to the research issue behind this study, which is outlined in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*[R]esearch focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education. (Merriam 1998 p.1)*

### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research design used in this study. A research design can be defined as “*a logical plan for getting from here to there*, where *here* may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and *there* is some set of conclusions (answers) about [them]” (Yin 2003 p.20; emphasis in original). Consequently, section 4.2 discusses the research issue and the questions behind the study, which is followed by a discussion of the qualitative research methodology (section 4.3) and the research approach chosen to investigate them, i.e. a qualitative case study (4.4). Even though qualitative case study research tends to feature “emergent” designs whose focus may change in light of, for example, unexpected events, the approach, like any other, does require an initial research design, even if only provisional (Simons 2009 p.31). This need is even more pertinent in light of the traditional criticism levelled at it concerning its perception as “soft” research (Yin 2003 p.17). Consequently, the remainder of this chapter focuses on specific methodological decisions made. These include the issues pertinent to sampling and data collection (4.5), data analysis (4.6), and trustworthiness (4.7).

### 4.2 The “intellectual puzzle” and the research questions

According to Mason (1996 p.6), the aim of qualitative research, such as the current study, is to produce “social explanations to intellectual puzzles”. The latter can be construed either as “an *issue* to be explored, or a *problem* to be tackled, or a *hypothesis*

to be tested” (Bassey 1999 p.66; emphasis original). A research issue (or problem, or hypothesis), however, “is not directly knowable itself; it is articulat[ed] through the questions it generates” (Freeman 2009 p.28). Those questions are “the engine which drive [...] the train of enquiry” (Bassey 1999 p.67) and they should be explicit, “researchable” and “intellectually worthwhile” (Mason 1996 p.15). Drawing on the discussion in the preceding chapters, the aim of this section then is to outline the research issue behind this study and the specific research questions it led to.

As pointed out in the introductory chapter, cross-border student mobility, which is increasingly expected to foster intercultural language learning, is an important feature of today’s higher education landscape. However, even though it has been shown to be generally valuable and “transformative” in terms of language and intercultural development (e.g. Freed 1998, Engle and Engle 2004, Jackson 2006, Rees and Klapper 2007, Llanes and Muñoz 2009, Williams 2005, Gill 2007, Ruddock and Turner 2007), a period of study abroad may fail to make a substantial difference for students. The reason for this is that learners often do not make an effort to seek opportunities for communication with host culture members (Llanes and Muñoz 2009 p.362), or “invest great amounts of *out-of-class* time in establishing contacts” with them, in spite of self-reported integrative reasons for the participation in the sojourn (Allen and Herron 2003 p.382; emphasis added). Neither can intercultural interaction *within* the classroom be guaranteed as uneasy relationships with domestic students may lead to self-segregation in class (Swaminathan and Alfred 2003, Otten 2003, Sheridan 2011), and the fact that international students’ language competence is often insufficient (e.g. Sheridan 2011) may be an obstacle to greater participation in classroom activities. This is exacerbated further by the fact that international students may demonstrate “a disappointingly low

level of perception of a need or *an ability to help themselves*” (Ife 2000 p.35; emphasis added).

The failure to exploit the possibilities for intercultural language learning offered by study abroad is particularly worrying if we consider the fact that lack of engagement with cultural difference during a sojourn can be partly to blame for a *regression* in students’ levels of intercultural competence (Engle and Engle 2004). Furthermore, lack of willingness on the part of students to engage in intercultural interaction appears to have serious implications also for the development of language competence which seems to depend on the amount of effort invested in seeking intercultural encounters abroad (Jackson 2006 pp.148-149).

In light of the worrying tendency among international students to miss the potential of the study abroad experience for intercultural language learning, it appears that this target group in particular must recognise the importance of taking responsibility for their own language and intercultural development. In other words, they need to develop autonomy in intercultural language learning.

This naturally raises the issue of where and how such autonomy can be fostered. With regard to the former, it seems that since learner autonomy can be developed in the language classroom (see the discussion in Chapter Two) and since many international students partake in formal language instruction while abroad<sup>41</sup>, the language classroom at a host university is a natural choice for this task. However, the value of formal

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<sup>41</sup> For example, Dłaska (2000 p.252) observes that, “[i]n the university environment, a large number of students joining institution-wide language programmes come from all over the world”.

instruction for study abroad appears to be an under-researched area<sup>42</sup>, even though international students acknowledge the benefits it offers. In one study, for example, students were of the opinion that it “focused out-of-class learning, activated passive knowledge, aided in comprehension, and provided a forum for trouble-shooting out-of-class communication breakdowns” (Brecht and Robinson 1995 p.323). It can be argued that if formal language instruction offered by a host university manages, in a systematic way, to foster autonomy in intercultural language learning, international students will be more likely to benefit from a linguistically and culturally rich immersion environment, although it also has to be borne in mind that:

In seeking to create learning environments that will facilitate and enhance the development of learner autonomy teachers need to take into account the obstacles that may impede its development. (Ho and Crookall 1995 p.237)

This brings us to the question that is behind this study and which concerns the issue of *how* exactly such autonomy can be fostered in the language classroom. The specific sub-questions are presented in Figure 4.1.

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<sup>42</sup> For example, Ife (2000 p.30; emphasis added) writes that, “[t]he assumption is that for the most part language learning will take place *in naturalistic conditions* rather than in the context of the language classroom”. In other words, it is the experiential, rather than classroom learning that is viewed as the main factor that fosters language learning in study abroad contexts.

**Research Question:** *How can international students in a multicultural foreign language classroom be supported in the development of autonomy in intercultural language learning?*

**RQ1:** Given the multifaceted nature of learner autonomy, what opportunities can a multicultural foreign language classroom environment provide for international students to take more control of their intercultural language learning?

**RQ2:** What obstacles can prevent international students from developing autonomy in intercultural language learning with regard to: a) their own beliefs and expectations; and b) the learning environment?

**Figure 4.1** The research question and its sub-questions

### **4.3 Qualitative research methodology: an overview**

This study draws on qualitative research methodology situated within the interpretive research paradigm (Basse 1999 p.13), and consequently follows in the footsteps of a number of recent qualitative studies that investigated the experience of international students (e.g. Alred and Byram 2002, Koskinen and Tossavainen 2004, Langley and Breese 2005, Penington and Wildermuth 2005, Gill 2007). Although authors warn against too rigid an interpretation of the quantitative-versus-qualitative dichotomy (Mason 1996 p.6, Merriam 1998 p.8), a brief overview of the ontological and epistemological assumptions inherent in this paradigm is useful for explaining the rationale for choosing the qualitative route to investigate the research issue outlined in the previous section. This is due to the fact that such a choice “presupposes a certain view of the world that in turn defines how a researcher selects a sample, collects data, analyzes data, and approaches issues of validity, reliability, and ethics” (Merriam 1998 p.151).

Unlike the positivist paradigm, which argues that “there is only one, fixed, agreed-upon reality” (Croker 2009 p.6), the interpretive paradigm places emphasis on the fact that there exists no single version thereof, but rather that it is subjective (Bassey 1999 p.13). Consequently, instead of trying to measure it “objectively”, the researcher is expected “to understand these multiple ways of looking at the world – a fascinating, and intriguing, challenge” (Croker 2009 p.7). The purpose of a qualitative inquiry is then to depict the *emic* (or research participants’) understanding of the phenomenon, rather than the *etic* (or the researcher’s) views (Merriam 1998 pp.6-7, Croker 2009 p.8), even though the latter’s role cannot be underestimated in the research process. This is due to the fact that, rather than claiming to be neutral observers, qualitative researchers recognise the fact that they themselves are “potential variables” in the inquiry (Bassey 1995 p.13). Firstly, their very presence may in some ways influence participants’ behaviour, a phenomenon referred to as “the observer effect” (Denscombe 2003 p.39) or “paradox” (Cowie 2009 p.177). Secondly, in a qualitative inquiry researchers themselves are the instruments through which data are collected and interpreted (Merriam 1998 p.7, Croker 2009 p.11). As each researcher brings his or her own set of beliefs and experiences to the field, subjectivity is inherent in the process and must be openly acknowledged (Croker 2009 p.11).

Turning to the “intellectual puzzle” (Mason 1996) behind this study, a qualitative, rather than quantitative, research methodology was chosen to investigate it primarily on the grounds that quantitative methods “simply cannot capture many of the complexities of language and culture learning” (Jackson 2006 p.135), the construct of autonomy in intercultural language learning being a case in point. In contrast, qualitative research, which has grown in popularity in the field of applied linguistics (Duff 2008 p.31), and

which emphasises in-depth and holistic investigation of phenomena in their natural settings (Merriam 1998, Richards 2003), appears most suitable to address the complex research issue at hand. Moreover, its attention to the emic perspective makes it a natural choice to investigate the international student experience since research on the subject “has stressed *the need to respect the voices of individual students*, beyond the statistics, in order to better understand their learning process on both an academic and personal level” (Mendelson 2004 p.44; emphasis added).

#### **4.4 The case study approach**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the key features of case study research chosen to investigate the research questions discussed in section 4.2. Case study is among the five most widely used types of educational qualitative research (Merriam 1998), and is also widely used in applied linguistics (Richards 2003, Duff 2008, Hood 2009). However, in spite of its apparent popularity, much confusion still surrounds it in relation to “what constitutes a case study, how it differs from other forms of qualitative research, and when it is most appropriate to use” (Merriam 1998 p.19). Hood (2009 p.68) notes, for example, that “[a] simple definition of case study is elusive”, for Gerring (2007 p.17) it is a “definitional morass”, and Bassey (1999 p.22) states that the question ““What is case study?” is a good example of a question easy to ask and difficult to answer”. All three statements point to the difficulty inherent in conceptualising this approach, which may partly stem from the fact that in the literature the term “case study” is used to refer to not only the process of investigating a case and the report which is an outcome of such investigation (Stake 2000 p.436), but also the unit of analysis itself (Merriam 1998 p.34). The “definitional morass” (Gerring op.cit.) is exacerbated further by the fact that case study is sometimes understood as a particular method rather than an overall research approach (Hood 2009 p.68, Simons 2009 p.3),

although case study should not be viewed in terms of methodology since it is characterised by “interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used” (Stake 2000 p.435). As is evident from the above discussion, the issue of conceptualisation merits more attention, and consequently it will be the focus of this section.

The main intent in case study research is to *understand the particular* (Merriam 1998, Bassegy 1999, Stake 2000, Denscombe 2003, Dyson and Genishi 2005, Simons 2009). Hence for Merriam (1998 pp.29-30), this approach is respectively “heuristic” and “particularistic” in nature (in addition to being “descriptive”). In relation to the problem of what constitutes a case, many authors agree that a case as a unit of study should be defined by its *boundedness* (Merriam 1998, Bassegy 1999, Stake 2000, Denscombe 2003, Hood 2009), where the boundaries of the case refer to its spatial and temporal limits, as well as to what happens inside it (Cousin 2005 p.423).

Furthermore, a case is also an “*integrated system*” (Stake 2000 p.436; emphasis added), i.e. it is an entity that comprises a number of interrelated parts within its boundaries. In order to depict the *complexity* of a case and the relationships between the different components involved, a case study adopts a *holistic* approach (Denscombe 2003 p.31), examining an issue from multiple, sometimes contradictory, perspectives (Hood 2009 p.81, Simons 2009 pp.21, 23). Since international students by the virtue of their diverse cultural, educational and linguistic backgrounds are likely to bring a variety of different perspectives into the language classroom, a case study approach, with its emphasis on understanding the complexity of the singular and multiplicity of participant views, was therefore a natural methodological choice for this study.

Moreover, a case is not studied in a vacuum, but rather it must be analysed in relation to its *context* (e.g. Yin 2003). The reason why context is so important in this approach is that a phenomenon which is supposed to be illuminated through the study of a particular case does not possess a universal but rather multiple meanings that depend on a constellation of context-related factors such as the physical setting, what happens in the case, as well as the larger sociocultural context (Dyson and Genishi 2005). As far as the current study is concerned then, the phenomenon of intercultural language learning may be understood differently in an Australian secondary-school classroom where students learn French as a foreign language than in an English language module offered to international students at a third-level institution in Ireland. Consequently, Simons (2009 p.21; emphasis added) defines case study as “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system *in a ‘real-life’ context*”. Other authors (Bassey 1999, Denscombe 2003, Cousin 2005, Duff 2008) emphasise the fact that a case takes place in its *naturalistic settings*, and that it focuses on “naturalistic social units” (Dyson and Genishi 2005 p.43), e.g. a foreign language classroom as in this study. This means that the object of study has not been “tampered with” by the researcher, unlike in experimental research. Instead, studies aim to achieve so-called “ecological validity”, i.e. “the ability to interpret the results in as natural a context as possible” (Duff 2008 p.125). Therefore, Yin (2003 p.9; emphasis added) explicitly states that a case study is concerned with “a *contemporary* set of events over which the investigator has *little or no control*”. Finally, a case study report also employs *thick description*, understood as “the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated” (Merriam 1998 pp.29-30). Such descriptive language allows readers to “vicariously experience

what was observed and utilize their tacit knowledge in understanding its [the case's] significance" (Simons 2009 p.23).

#### **4.5 Introduction to the case: LAN01 module**

Whereas section 4.2 has introduced the "background" to the case, i.e. the issue that has driven this study and which concerns fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning among international students, the current section aims to introduce the "foreground", i.e. the case selected to investigate it (Dyson and Genishi 2005 pp.43-44). A case study approach requires a two-stage sampling process that involves, firstly, a selection of the case itself, and secondly, a within-the-case sampling whose aim is to determine what particular aspects of the case (e.g. the number of interviewees or activities to be observed) the researcher will focus on (Merriam 1998 pp.64-65). These issues are addressed in sub-sections 4.5.1 and 4.5.3 respectively. The purpose of sub-section 4.5.2 is to provide a description of the course in question (LAN01)<sup>43</sup>.

##### **4.5.1 Case selection**

It is argued that when selecting a case, the researcher not only needs to choose it carefully, but also be able to justify that choice (Denscombe 2003 p.33). The literature suggests a number of selection criteria to consider (see, for example, Yin 2003 pp.40-42, Denscombe 2003 pp.33-35), but for Stake (2000 p.446), the main selection criterion is the "opportunity to learn" a case offers. In other words, a case should be selected based on its potential to offer the greatest degree of insight into both the case in question and some broader issue of interest. As a result, the case that was selected for the purpose of

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<sup>43</sup> The module code and the names of the lecturer, the school and the university which offers the module are pseudonyms.

this study was chosen on the basis of its potential to illuminate the research issue<sup>44</sup>, i.e. fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning, as well as pragmatic reasons<sup>45</sup>.

#### **4.5.2 Description of the case**

LAN01 is an English language module offered by the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures at the IU and runs for twelve weeks (inclusive of one-week-long mid-semester break) in the spring semester of each academic year. At the time of data collection, the students met twice a week for a two-hour seminar and one-hour session in a computer laboratory, which officially amounted to thirty-six hours of in-class instruction (see Appendix B.3 for an overview of the different activities that the students engaged in during the course). In addition, the students were also expected to spend almost forty hours on independent study, e.g. by working on course assignments.

The course was open to international students who were either enrolled in various degree programmes at the IU or were exchange students there, although potential students were required to have achieved at least B1 level in English (as per CEFR). The

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<sup>44</sup> It needs to be stated at this juncture that the original focus of the project changed as the study progressed, in line with Duff's (2008 p.57) observation according to which "[qualitative case] studies do evolve from the investigator's original intentions for a variety of reasons". More specifically, this project was originally designed to investigate, with the international student experience in mind, the potential of self-assessment of intercultural communicative competence, by means of an innovative e-ELP (i.e. LOLIPOP ELP), for fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning. To investigate this issue, it was paramount that the case selected would involve international students who would have the opportunity to work with the portfolio, which was pioneered at that time only in a very small number of third-level institutions across Europe. These included the Irish University (IU), the site I was familiar with and which was an obvious choice for pragmatic reasons. Only in one course at the IU - LAN01 - was the LOLIPOP ELP to be used extensively with the students (the lecturer in question was involved in the development of the portfolio), and consequently that module was chosen to gain insight into the research issue. However, since the portfolio was not completely ready at the time of data collection, and in light of empirical data collected, the original focus of the project shifted. More specifically, the research issue was broadened from its narrow emphasis on the role of self-assessment towards an integrated framework for promoting autonomy in intercultural language learning among international students. The change of emphasis led to a revision of research questions, and a refocusing of the literature review.

<sup>45</sup> The study can therefore be classified as an "instrumental case study" (Stake 2000 p.437).

group of students which was the subject of investigation in this study was highly heterogeneous, comprising students from no fewer than fifteen different countries of origin, and with students from Japan comprising the single largest national sub-group (see Table 4.1 for a detailed breakdown). As far as gender is concerned, there were four male and twenty-six female students in the class.

<b>COUNTRY OF ORIGIN</b>	<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</b>
Japan	9
Spain	4
Poland	3
Germany	2
Lithuania	2
Denmark	1
Ukraine	1
Bolivia	1
Italy	1
Kenya	1
Switzerland	1
France	1
Latvia	1
Columbia	1
China	1
<b>TOTAL: 30 students</b>	

**Table 4.1 LAN01 class composition by country of origin.**

LAN01 is a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) module in the sense that students are expected to develop their English language skills as they critically explore the topic of globalisation (see Appendix B.1 for the course descriptor). Explaining the origins of the module in an interview, Liz, the lecturer, said that its focus not only “changed from being skills based language development into a more CLIL approach where [...] the content was as important, if perhaps not more important in a way than the language [...]”, but also that the choice of the content - globalisation - was influenced by her encounter with critical pedagogy. The latter made her in turn not only

“question all the way [she] was teaching”, but also move the module “more in the direction of a critical pedagogical approach”. In addition to embracing critical pedagogy and placing emphasis on the development of language skills, the module also aims to foster learner autonomy and collaborative learning (see Appendix B.1).

Assessment in the module is continuous and, at the time of data collection, consisted of three components (see Appendix B.2 for assessment details). The first part required the students to prepare for, in groups, and deliver a thirty-minute-long interactive teaching session on a topic globalisation, which was worth 40% of the final grade (see Table C.1 for a list of topics selected by the students in this study). Secondly, students were required to write reflective reports on the teaching sessions they had observed (three reports per student), as well as a group report on their own teaching session. Altogether the reports were worth 40% of the final grade. Finally, the students were also required to write a series of “Reflection on learning” journals (six in total) on the topics suggested by Liz and which were by and large connected to what the students did in the classroom (see Table C.1 for a list of topics the students reflected on during this study). This component was worth the final 20% of the grade. Students were required to submit their written assignments via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Moodle, which was also used *inter alia* for course management, uploading relevant teaching and learning materials as well as lecturer-student and student-to-student communication.

#### **4.5.3 The data collection process**

One of the important features of case study approach is the fact that it is “eclectic” (Bassey 1999 p.69) as far as the process of data collection is concerned. In other words, a case study can draw on multiple methods and multiple data sources (Merriam 1998, Denscombe 2003, Yin 2003, Cousin 2005, Hood 2009, Simons 2009), and particular

methods, understood as “ways of collecting information in and from a particular setting” (Freeman 2009 p.32), are chosen on the basis on their appropriateness for investigation of the case in question (Bassegy 1999 p.69, Hood 2009 p.69, Simons 2009 p.5). The emphasis on different methods of data collection constitutes one of the strengths of the case study approach as it facilitates *triangulation* (Denscombe 2003 p.38), the aim of which is “to gain the broadest and deepest possible view of the issue from different perspectives”, and in this way to reveal “both the complexity of the issue and apparently contradictory ways of viewing it” (Hood 2009 p.81)<sup>46</sup>. Since inadequate methodological triangulation is among one of the most common problems in qualitative case study (Hood 2009 p.85), this section will describe in detail the three methods, i.e. interviews, classroom observation, and documentary analysis<sup>47</sup>, that were used to prevent this problem, and outline the rationale for using them (see Appendix C.1 for an overview of the various research methods and data sources used in this study).

#### **4.5.3.1 Interviews**

Interviews are perhaps the most popular data generation method in educational qualitative research (Merriam 1998 p.70), while in the field of applied linguistics, they are no longer used solely for linguistic insights into various aspects of oral production, but also to elicit learners’ perspectives on their experiences (Duff 2008 pp.132-133). The literature points to numerous advantages that interviewing, particularly in its more loosely structured format, offers to the researcher. For example, Richards (2009 p.187)

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<sup>46</sup> The term *triangulation* carries different connotations in quantitative and qualitative research (Hood 2009 p.81). Traditionally this strategy “required that data gathered in multiple ways (or from multiple sources) should corroborate – that is, the data should confirm one another” (Rallis and Rossman 2009 p.266). However, nowadays triangulation “is less concerned with confirmation or convergence [...] but with exploring different perspectives and how they do or do not intersect in the particular context” (Simons 2009 p.131).

<sup>47</sup> Research methods are often classified into three broad categories, i.e. interviewing, observation and documents (e.g. Bassegy 1999, Simons 2009), and qualitative case studies usually draw on all three methods (Merriam 1998 p.134).

appreciates the potential of this approach for gaining significant insight into the emic perspective of the interviewee, which does not lend itself to exploration through other methods such as observation or questionnaire. However, the literature also makes it clear that this method is rather demanding as far as the researcher's role and responsibilities are concerned. For Richards (2009 p.195) interviews are "easy to do but hard to do well".

For the purpose of the current study two types of semi-structured interviews<sup>48</sup> were conducted with the students: *focus group* (FG) and *individual interviews*<sup>49</sup>. The aim of the former is "to bring a number of different perspectives into contact" (Morgan 1997 p.46), hence this method appears to be particularly suitable to case study research with its emphasis on plurality of perspectives. However, it requires that a number of decisions regarding selection of participants, the degree of structure, group size and group number be taken into account in a research design (Morgan 1997 p.34). Ten out of the thirty students in the module volunteered to take part in this part of the project. Consequently, two rounds of focus group interviews were conducted, once in the beginning and once in the middle of the semester, with two groups each time, and four

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<sup>48</sup> Interviews can be placed on a continuum from highly structured to unstructured interviews, which differ in the amount of control that the researcher holds over the sequence and the form of the questions asked (Merriam 1998, May 2001). The former can be described as oral questionnaires; the latter are exploratory in nature and allow the respondents the freedom to talk about a topic in the way they wish (Merriam 1998, May 2001, Richards 2009). Semi-structured interviews, which are the type most commonly used in applied linguistics (Richards 2009 p.196), are something of a compromise between these two.

<sup>49</sup> Two of the focus group students also volunteered to take part in a *think-aloud protocol* session. The purpose of the session was to record the students talking aloud as they were completing their language and intercultural self-assessment via the LOLIPOP ELP, which was then followed by a short follow-up interview. However, unlike the follow-up interview, the data from the think-aloud protocol sessions did not yield any insight into the research issue and were not used in the analysis.

female students in each group<sup>50</sup> (not all ten students were available for both rounds and no male students volunteered to take part in the interviews; see Appendix C.1 for a list of key topics covered). When setting up the two groups, I ensured that the group composition was different each time: this was not only an outcome of the students' availability for the suggested interview dates, but also my intention to have the students interact with a different set of classmates each time as far as possible.

As far as the first round of focus group interviews is concerned, I prepared an "interview protocol" (see Appendix C.3) in which I outlined the steps I considered important for establishing rapport with the students, creating a relaxed and collaborative environment (e.g. by using an "ice-breaker" to settle interviewees down), and conducting the interviews in an ethical manner. The "protocol" also included an "interview guide" outlining the questions that I wanted to cover and my rationale for asking them<sup>51</sup>. However, in line with the semi-structured nature of the interviews, I remained flexible about the content and the sequence of the questions. As a result, the natural flow of the discussion led to some variation in the order of questions asked; questions were explored in more or less depth depending on the interviewees' engagement with them; and unanticipated but significant issues touched upon by the students were pursued further. At the end of the interview the participants were offered the opportunity to add any additional information, and thanked for their time.

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<sup>50</sup> As far as group size is concerned, focus groups have normally between six and ten participants, although "one should not feel imprisoned by either this lower or upper boundary" (Morgan 1997 p.43). Morgan (1997 p.44) recommends that where fewer participants are available, "it is wisest to run several groups of smaller size".

<sup>51</sup> In semi-structured interviews the researcher has an idea of the issues that need to be addressed during an interview, and may consequently prepare and follow an "interview guide" in which these are clearly stated, although he or she remains flexible about the content and flow of the conversation, particularly when the participant offers some important, and unexpected, insight (Richards 2009 p.186).

In addition, I conducted *face-to-face individual interviews* shortly after the module finished, with seven out of the ten focus group students. Originally I envisaged a third round of focus group interviews; however, it became clear to me at this stage that I might gain more insight into the students' experiences in the module by interviewing them individually. The interview procedures for one-to-one interviews resembled closely those for the focus group interviews, i.e. I followed an "interview guide" I had drawn up in advance.

All the interviews, with the exception of one focus group interview, took place in the researcher's office. The focus group interviews took fifty minutes on average, while individual interviews lasted thirty minutes on average. All interviews were recorded to "ensure[...] accuracy of reportage and add[...] to the veracity of reporting" (Simons 2009 p.52) on a digital voice recorder, which made it easier to upload them to a computer, thus facilitating transcription (Duff 2008 p.137), which I did personally. How oral data are transcribed (e.g. the level of detail) depends on a number of factors, including the researcher's purpose and theoretical perspective (Duff 2008 p.154)<sup>52</sup>. For example, less detailed transcriptions are recommended when the researcher is not interested in linguistic aspects of an interviewee's speech (Duff 2008 pp.154-155). As far as the current study is concerned, I decided to transcribe all the recordings fully. Moreover, since the focus was the content, rather than the linguistic form of students' utterances, I decided to limit the amount of additional information in the transcripts to an absolute minimum. Although the process was time-consuming, particularly in the case of the focus group interviews where at times student responses overlapped and

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<sup>52</sup> This is because incorporating unnecessary information (e.g. the exact length of pauses) in transcriptions may be of little benefit to the actual data analysis, is extremely cumbersome, and, in addition, may also negatively affect "readability" of the report (Duff 2008 p.155).

individual utterances were difficult to understand, it was extremely valuable for two reasons. Firstly, it helped to protect confidentiality as no third persons had access to the recordings. Secondly, repeated listening to the discussions allowed me to get “the intimate familiarity” with the data the process ensures (Merriam 1998 p.88).

#### **4.5.3.2 Classroom observation**

Observation can be defined as “the conscious noticing and detailed examination of participants’ behaviour in a *naturalistic* setting” (Cowie 2009 p.166; emphasis added), such as the foreign language classroom. It therefore allows “a *firsthand encounter* with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview” (Merriam 1998 p.94; emphasis added). Consequently, whereas my intention in interviewing the students, individually and in focus groups, was to develop insight into their previous experiences of, and attitudes towards, intercultural language learning, I expected that through classroom observations I would get a sense of not only how autonomy in intercultural language learning could be fostered in a classroom, but also of how the students themselves manifested their engagement, or disengagement, with this approach. In other words, I found that these two methods – observation and interviewing – not only complemented each other well in my quest for understanding in relation to my research topic, but also contributed to methodological triangulation the need for which is emphasised in the literature (e.g. Merriam 1998, Cowie 2009, Simons 2009).

In general, fieldwork can be divided into three distinct stages: entry into a setting, data collection, and exit (Merriam 1998). The first stage coincided with my introduction of the project to the students in the first week of the semester, when they were also asked for their consent to taking part in it, including their permission with regard to being

observed, which had to be sought of all the students in the class. According to Dyson and Genishi (2005), from the outset the researcher needs to be clear with the participants about the degree of his or her involvement in the setting, although the role he or she assumes does not have to be fixed. Consequently, when introducing the project to the students, I made it clear that I would join their class as a non-participant observer<sup>53</sup>, taking notes. Indeed, during the period of prolonged observation that followed the introductory phase of the project, I generally remained “outside” the activities in which the students engaged in the classroom; I was usually seated away from the students, e.g. at the side / back of the room, and throughout the lesson I would take field notes of what I was observing. In reflecting on my own role in the field, I find Mason’s (1996 p.64) comments about the nature of complete observation particularly insightful. In her view, complete detachment from a setting is deemed undesirable not only because the researcher is “supposed to know what it feels like rather than simply act as a detached witness”, but also because lack of involvement is not equivalent with being absent from a setting altogether (ibid.). Hence, the researcher is always to a greater or lesser extent part of it. Consequently, and bearing in mind the “fluidity” of the researcher’s roles (Merriam 1998 p.102), on a few occasions I did indeed take the role of a participant observer, either voluntarily or due to circumstances.

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<sup>53</sup> With regard to the role that the researcher can assume while in the field, Gold (1958) identifies four different “master” roles that depend on the level of researcher involvement with informants: complete participant; participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and finally complete observer. Merriam (1998 p.102) points out, however, that not only are “researchers [...] rarely total participants or total observers”, but also they are likely to fluctuate between different roles in the course of an inquiry (see also Cowie 2009 p.167). Consequently, the literature pays most attention to the “middle” part of the spectrum, often referred to as participant observation. Cowie (2009 p.167) defines it as “both participating in and observing a particular context at the same time”, which does not mean however full engagement in the setting activities, but rather “interacting with people while they are carrying out their normal tasks such as teaching or studying” (ibid.).

As far as the second stage of fieldwork is concerned, over a period of one teaching semester (i.e. three months) I conducted thirteen (out of a possible twenty) “unstructured” observations<sup>54</sup> of both lectures and computer lab sessions, which were however guided by my overall research focus, i.e. fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning. My observations resulted in extensive field notes, which are an essential component of this research method (Cowie 2009), and which can be described as “written account[s] of the observation” (Merriam 1998 p.104). These can be seen as “the foundations of the case” as their purpose is to provide the readers with “an ethnographic sense of being in the world we call our case” (Dyson and Genishi 2005 p.63)<sup>55</sup>. Although approaches to taking field notes vary from researcher to researcher (May 2001 p.160, Cowie 2009 p.171), it is recommended that, in addition to descriptions of the setting and quotations of what people say, either verbatim or summarised, they should also comprise the observer’s comments, although clearly distinguishable from the descriptive account (Merriam 1998 p.106). This amounts to initial data analysis in the form of “the researcher’s feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, and working hypotheses” (ibid.). I found this approach useful, and strove to write up my field notes in full as soon after each observation as was possible, in line with other authors’ recommendation (e.g. Merriam 1998 p.104), transforming my initial “scratch notes” into more detailed “headnotes” (Emerson et al. 1995; as cited in Dyson and Genishi 2005 p.63). Finally, the exit stage of my fieldwork coincided with the end of the semester.

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<sup>54</sup> Just like interviewing, observation can range from structured to unstructured (Merriam 1998 p.97, Simons 2009 p.55).

<sup>55</sup> Fieldnotes should strive towards achieving what Geertz (1973) defines as “thick description”, i.e. description that is rich in detail enabling the audience to “imagine that they are there”, and in this way strengthening the truthfulness of a research account (Cowie 2009 p.171).

#### 4.5.3.3 Documents

Although documents are among the six most common data sources in case study research (Yin 2003 p.85), in general their potential appears underestimated (May 2001 p.176, Simons 2009 p.63). This is despite the fact that since in this method data often exist prior to data collection, it does not share the weaknesses of the other two methods, i.e. interviewing and observation, in relation to the impact of the researcher or participants on the quality of the data gathered (Merriam 1998 p.112). Thus, they can be “a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (ibid.).

Documents used in case study research can, as mentioned above, exist prior to data collection, or be produced in the course of an inquiry (Mason 1996 p.71). As far as the current study is concerned, a variety of different textual data was analysed to contribute to the understanding of the case. These concerned mainly learner “artefacts”, or documents that were produced by the students as the module progressed, namely their “Reflection on learning” journals and reflective reports on the interactive teaching sessions<sup>56</sup>. In addition, the end-of-semester questionnaires distributed by the lecturer were also used in the analysis, as were the two documents pertinent to the module itself (i.e. modular descriptor and the assessment criteria).

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<sup>56</sup> Since the reports and journals were not produced specifically for the purposes of this study, but rather for module assessment purposes, the issue of their authenticity and accuracy, which in general must be considered when using documents as a data source arises (Merriam 1998 p.121). In other words, the fact that they were written with a view to being assessed by the lecturer might have had an impact on what the students actually wrote (see section 8.3). However, I expected that by focusing on triangulation of methods, I would be able to verify the information they contain.

#### **4.6 Data analysis**

The process of data analysis has been described in the literature as a process whose purpose is “to let the data ‘speak’” (Richards 2009 p.191). In a qualitative case study it is particularly challenging, as there appears to be relatively little guidance on how to approach it. Not only is “there [...] no right way to do case study research” in general (Simons 2009 p.7), but also “only recently have there been discussions about how to analyze the data collected” (Merriam 1998 p.42). Consequently, there is no agreed-upon procedure for analysing qualitative case studies (Hood 2009 p.80). In general, however, the process of data analysis in qualitative case studies does not appear to differ significantly from the process as conducted in other qualitative research traditions. It needs to be pointed out, however, that the very nature of this research method with its emphasis on “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit” means that the data analysis process places particular emphasis on “[c]onveying an understanding of the case” (Merriam 1998 p.193). Moreover, the sheer volume of data that are collected via different methods means that data management should be of primary concern to the researcher (ibid.). Hence the first step in analysing a qualitative case study is to bring together and organise all the information pertinent to the case (ibid. p.194). This involves the preparation of a “formal, presentable database”, which increases the overall reliability of a study (Yin 2003 p.102). Only once pertinent data have been brought together can the researcher proceed with the analysis (Merriam 1998 pp.194-195).

The first stage of data analysis in the current study involved therefore the preparation of the case database, the contents of which were then transferred to a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) for analysis. Denscombe (2003 p.275)

points to several advantages of electronic management of qualitative data, particularly in relation to storage, coding and retrieval of such data. However, a number of disadvantages has also to be considered. These include the fact that familiarising oneself with such software is often costly and time-consuming (Duff 2008 p.170), and involves “steep learning curves” (Merriam 1998 p.169). Another major difficulty involves selecting the most appropriate software to use from the many packages available on the market (Merriam 1998 p.170).

The software that I chose to analyse the data with for this study is called NVivo8<sup>57</sup>. Having participated in a two-day “hands-on” workshop dedicated to a previous version of the software, I was convinced of its potential for my project. The decision to use it was further strengthened by availability of a number of publications dedicated to it (Gibbs 2002, Ozkan 2004, Richards 2005), and the fact that this particular software package has been recommended in the case study literature (e.g. Duff 2008 p.170) and successfully used in a number of research projects discussed in the preceding chapters (e.g. Jackson 2006).

The creation and transfer of the database into NVivo8 (see Appendix C.1. for a list of items included in the database, and Appendix D.1 for a screenshot of the database in NVivo8) was followed by a period of data analysis<sup>58</sup> and memo writing. Qualitative data analysis is multi-phased in nature and involves several stages of coding from initial or open coding, through category creation, to further conceptual development (Richards,

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<sup>57</sup> For more information about NVivo see [http://www.qsrinternational.com/#tab\\_you](http://www.qsrinternational.com/#tab_you).

<sup>58</sup> It needs to be pointed out, however, that data collection overlapped with early data analysis in the sense that data collected initially, e.g. during the first round of focus group interviews, guided and were followed up on in further data collection, i.e. subsequent interviews. This strategy is in line with “the interactive, recursive nature of data collection in a case study” (Merriam 1998 p.141) and the fact that data collection is interwoven with early analysis (ibid. p.151).

2003, Hahn 2008). The purpose of *open* or *initial* coding is to “to generate a set of labels from which categories can be derived” (Richards 2003 p.273). This step in the coding process is greatly facilitated by the NVivo software, which makes it possible for the researcher to develop a list of initial codes (or “free nodes”<sup>59</sup> as they are known in NVivo). Consequently, the early stages of analysis involved careful reading of the data sources (e.g. students’ journals, interview transcripts *etc.*) and simultaneous coding of the text (see Appendix D for examples of coded data), bearing in mind the fact that coding at this level should be done rapidly, without spending too much time on perfecting the code phrases (Hahn 2008 p.96).

The next stage of qualitative data analysis involved the development of categories (or “tree nodes” as they are called in NVivo) as a means of bringing order and organisation to the initial codes (Richards 2003 p.274, Hahn 2008 p.121). In relation to this study, the processes of initial coding and category development were interwoven in the sense that once I had read and coded the first few data sources, I began creating first tentative categories. As pointed out by Richards (2003 p.274), even though “the data themselves provide the main resource for categorisation”, the process can be also guided *inter alia* by literature review. This was the case in this study as the four perspectives on learner autonomy discussed in Chapter Two, i.e. technical, psychological, socio-cultural and political-critical, provided much intellectual stimulus for this stage of analysis.

The final stage of data analysis involved further refinement of codes and categories, which were then arranged around the two broad themes I had anticipated as potentially emerging from the analysis. These concern the *opportunities* that a multicultural foreign

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<sup>59</sup> As pointed out by Ozkan (2004 p.596), terminology used tends to differ from one CAQDAS package to another.

language classroom presents for fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning on the one hand (Research Question 1), and the obstacles that international students may face in the development of such autonomy on the other (Research Question 2) (see Appendix D.1 for sample screenshots of the “tree node” structure in NVivo8).

#### **4.7 Trustworthiness**

The issue of the evaluation of qualitative case studies should be seen in the broader context of the ongoing debate on the quality and rigour of qualitative inquiry in general. Educational and social research has tended to be evaluated with reference to concepts developed within the traditional positivist paradigm, i.e. validity (both internal and external), reliability, and objectivity (Simons 2009 p.127). However, in recent years this approach has been subject to critical examination, particularly in the literature dedicated to qualitative case study research. For example, it is argued that in qualitative research the two main criteria of validity and reliability should be approached differently than in quantitative (positivist) research to take into account the ontological and epistemological differences between the two paradigms (Merriam 1998 p.200). Bearing in mind the brief overview of both presented in section 4.3, it is difficult to disagree with this argument. However, since some of the most common criticism levelled against the case study approach concerns precisely its apparent lack of rigour and potential to make generalisations (e.g. Denscombe 2003 p.39, Yin 2003 pp.10-11), a number of strategies<sup>60</sup> have been put forward for ensuring that qualitative case studies meet the criterion of trustworthiness, while also taking into account the distinct nature of

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<sup>60</sup> While some authors discuss such strategies under the “traditional” headings of internal / external validity and reliability (e.g. Merriam 1998), others prefer instead to use alternative concepts of credibility, usefulness, and rigour respectively (Rallis and Rossman 2009). Both “sets” are used in this section.

qualitative inquiry. How such strategies were employed in this study to ensure its quality is the focus of discussion in the remainder of the section.

#### **4.7.1 Internal validity / credibility**

It is argued that in qualitative research internal validity, which is traditionally concerned with the issue of “how research findings match reality”, must be approached differently than in quantitative research (Merriam 1998 p.201). This is due to the fact that reality is viewed not as “a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research” (ibid. p.202), but rather as subjective and multifaceted, i.e. based on “people’s constructions of reality – how they understand the world”; it is through the researcher that those can be made known (ibid. p.203). Hence the strategies outlined in this section aim mainly at decreasing the risk of a researcher’s misinterpretation of emic perspectives, and as a result, enhancing the “credibility” of research findings (Rallis and Rossman 2009). These include: (1) prolonged fieldwork; (2) triangulation (of data sources, methods, researchers and/or theories); (3) use of member checks (also called participant validation) for verification of / elaboration on data and inferences, and, in the more extreme form, inviting participants to act as co-researchers; (4) peer review, i.e. consulting colleagues on the progress of inquiry and the findings; and (5) displaying reflexivity, i.e. being transparent about role in the research process (Merriam 1998 pp.204-205, Rallis and Rossman 2009 pp.265-266; see also Bassey 1999, Duff 2008, Simons 2009).

As far as the current study is concerned, almost all of the above-mentioned strategies were used to ensure its credibility. Strategies one and two are directly linked to the data collection procedure, and as such they have been discussed in section 4.5.3. It may be useful, however, to reiterate at this point that a number of data sources and methods,

including prolonged observation, were drawn on in order to get a holistic and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in its natural settings. With relation to the third strategy – member checking – only one participant, i.e. the lecturer, was given the opportunity to comment on the study’s findings, for two main reasons. Firstly, I considered it important to gain her perspective on the data to ensure that my analysis did indeed, in her view, reflect the complexity of the issue and multiple ways of viewing it. Secondly, while member checking has the potential to increase the credibility of case study research and is a sign of respect for participants and their views (Rallis and Rossman 2009 p.266), this strategy should be used “if possible and appropriate” (ibid. p.284). One reason for this caveat is that, especially in the case of case study research in applied linguistics, it:

assumes that the research participants have cognitive and linguistic maturity, technical sophistication to understand some kinds of analysis, and sufficient language proficiency, time, and reflexivity to examine documents containing transcripts, analyses, interpretations, or draft reports. (Duff 2008 p.171)

Bearing in mind that the research participants in the current study were undergraduate international students with varying degrees of English language proficiency, this strategy might have been ultimately counter-productive. Moreover, as the current study was not designed with participatory research in mind, greater involvement of the students throughout the inquiry was not required. Finally, in relation to the final two strategies, the meetings I held with my research supervisors, as well as presentations of my project at international conferences and symposia (e.g. Sudhershnan 2010) helped to ensure that I engaged with a “community of practice” (Rallis and Rossman 2009 p.284) on a regular basis, and in this way had an opportunity to discuss any problems that arose, present and critically examine tentative insights, and become familiar with publications that were pertinent to the issue.

The final issue to be raised in this sub-section concerns recent calls for researcher reflexivity (e.g. Mason 1996, Stake 2000, Duff 2008, Hood 2009, Simons 2009). It is argued that qualitative researchers need to address personal “blind spots” (Hood 2009 p.76) because of the central role that they have in the process of collection, interpretation and reporting of data in qualitative research (Simons 2009 p.81). This in turn implies that they “cannot be neutral, or objective, or detached” (Mason 1996 p.6), but rather that their “gender, age, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, politics, religious beliefs, and life experiences – their worldview – are the lens through which they see their research” (Croker 2009 p.11)<sup>61</sup>.

The literature offers a number of suggestions for “taming” (Peshkin 1988 p.20) one’s own subjectivity. These range from overarching methodological decisions such as employing triangulation of methods and data sources (Croker 2009 p.11), to more specific techniques such as conducting a “subjectivity audit” (Peshkin 1988), memo writing (Hood 2009 pp.76-77), or keeping a research diary and holding “debriefing” meetings with colleagues (Koskinen and Tossavainen 2004 p.114).

As far as the current study is concerned, I addressed this issue in a number of ways. Firstly, by drawing on the three key methods of data collection (interviews, observation and documents), and different data sources, I hoped to be “fair” to the students and their experience<sup>62</sup>, to “let the data speak”, rather than impose my voice on them. However, mindful of the existence of “subjective I’s” in a research process, prior to data analysis I

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<sup>61</sup> In a particularly striking metaphor Richards (2005 pp.25-26) compares engaging in reflection on one’s own preconceptions and values to “declaring” what is in one’s luggage when going through customs at the airport.

<sup>62</sup> For Simons (2009 p.81), being reflexive is inextricably linked with being ethical in research. This means that the researcher’s reflection on how his or her actions and values might have tainted the portrayal of those whose experience he or she seeks to understand is a matter of being “fair” to them.

also decided to conduct my own “subjectivity audit” (Peshkin 1988). In other words, I spelled out, retrospectively and in writing, my own “selves” that I thought had surfaced during data collection<sup>63</sup>. Whereas I was aware of them to a greater or lesser extent while in the field, such formal reflection on their impact, both “actual and imagined” (Peshkin 1988 p.18), on that stage of the research process was important as it helped me to become aware of my own biases and perspectives. Throughout the coding process, I also engaged in memo writing, and met with my supervisors to discuss any problems I encountered.

#### **4.7.2 Reliability / rigour**

According to Merriam (1998 p.205), in qualitative research fulfilling the criterion of reliability as understood in the positivist paradigm, i.e. with its emphasis on the replicability of research findings, “is not only fanciful but impossible” because of the very nature of qualitative inquiry (ibid. p.206)<sup>64</sup>. Consequently, this particular criterion has been reconceptualised as one that “is concerned with whether an outsider would agree with your findings, given the data you have collected and written up” (Rallis and Rossman 2009 p.267). To this purpose, it is recommended that the researcher pay due consideration to, and is transparent about, all the key decisions made throughout the inquiry, from its conception, through data collection and analysis, to dissemination, and which can be achieved by means of triangulation, transparency, and journal / analytic

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<sup>63</sup> As pointed out by Dyson and Genishi (2005 p.57), each researcher is a sum of multiple identities; being a reflexive researcher implies critical reflection on “particular aspects of our selves that influence the lenses we look through” in the course of an inquiry.

<sup>64</sup> For example, according to Yin (2003 p.37), the purpose of this criterion is to ensure that, “if a later investigator followed the same procedures as described by an earlier investigator and conducted the same case study all over again, the later investigator should arrive at the same findings and conclusions”. However, in light of the fact that in qualitative research the researcher’s subjectivity is an integral part of inquiry, although also one to be accounted for, the assumption that two *different* investigators would shape the same inquiry *in exactly the same way* appears to be problematic.

memo writing (or keeping an “audit trail” - see Merriam 1998 p.207, Bassey 1999 p.75) (ibid.).

In relation to the above advice, this chapter provides a detailed account of the decisions I made at the stages of research design, implementation and analysis. The analytic memos written during the data analysis process also contribute to this, as does the case study database created prior to data analysis.

#### **4.7.3 External validity / usefulness**

Even though the issue of external validity, or generalisability, is problematic in qualitative research in general (Merriam 1998 p.153), in case study research this issue is even more contentious since this approach is often concerned with an examination of single cases: in the words of Bassey (1999 p.30), “[t]he familiar criticism facing case study researchers is ‘How can you generalize when  $n = 1$ ?’”. Consequently, its potential to draw generalisations about phenomena is often met with scepticism (Denscombe 2003 p.36, Yin 2003 p.10), in light of which, “it is good practice for any researcher who decides to choose a case study approach to pre-empt possible criticism by addressing the issue head-on” (Denscombe’s 2003 p.36). Indeed, some researchers insist that case study research has the potential, or even an obligation, to generalise (e.g. Bassey 1999, Dyson and Genishi 2005) without recourse to traditional experimental design. To this purpose, the whole concept of generalisability has been redefined to make it compatible with the nature of qualitative inquiry (see Merriam 1998 pp.208-211 for a comprehensive overview of such proposals). One such conceptualisation that has found resonance in the literature concerns Bassey’s (1999 p.12; emphasis original) notion of “fuzzy generalisations”, i.e. conclusions which are much more tentative in nature and which “arise [...] from studies of singularities and typically claim [...] that *it is possible*,

*or likely, or unlikely that what was found in the singularity will be found in similar situations elsewhere?*

For other authors (Denscombe 2003, Hood 2009), it is precisely this similarity with other cases that makes conclusions transferable to different contexts. As Denscombe (2003 p.36) points out, although each case is distinctive, it can also be viewed as an instance of something else. For Dyson and Genishi (2005 p.117), one of the reasons behind the controversy about generalising from case studies stems from the mistaken belief that a case *is equivalent with* a phenomenon itself, rather than viewing it *as a case of* it, thus neglecting the importance of contextual factors. Therefore, case study findings can be generalisable to other cases within the same group, provided that they share key features<sup>65</sup> (Denscombe 2003, Hood 2009). This approach then places the responsibility for drawing generalisations not only on the researcher, whose task it is to provide sufficient description of the case to make meaningful comparisons with other cases from the same class, but also on the reader, who, in light of this information, can “make an informed judgement about how far the findings have relevance to other instances” (Denscombe 2003 p.37).

To fulfil the reconceptualised standard of generalisability, the literature recommends first and foremost that case study report provides rich, thick description to allow readers to see the commonalities and contrasts between the case and their own contexts, and in this way to decide on the transferability of the research findings for themselves

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<sup>65</sup> This is similar to how case law is practised, where “the applicability of a past court decision to a case under consideration is determined by the factual and legal similarities between the two” (Hood 2009 p.73).

(Merriam 1998 p.211, Denscombe pp.36-37, Rallis and Rossman 2009 pp.268, 285).

The case study report presented in the following chapters draws on this strategy.

#### **4.7.4 Ethics**

Conducting trustworthy case study research requires not only fulfilling the criteria of validity and reliability, but also doing research in an ethical manner (Merriam 1998, Rallis and Rossman 2009). This includes *inter alia* showing respect to research participants by protecting their privacy; avoiding doing any harm to them; maintaining confidentiality; and obtaining informed consent and ethical approval from relevant bodies (Rallis and Rossman 2009 pp.284-285).

As far as the current study is concerned, the project was approved by the university's research ethics committee prior to its commencement. In line with general recommendations on ethical research conduct (e.g. Cousin 2005, Simons 2009), "informed consent" was sought from all the participants involved<sup>66</sup> (see Appendix E.1). To ensure that the students were sufficiently informed before making a decision whether or not to participate in the project, they were also provided with a "Plain Language Statement" explaining its purpose, as well as identifying potential benefits and burdens (Appendix E.2). The students were also assured of the confidentiality of the information they would provide, and assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy, as recommended in the literature (e.g. Simons 2009).

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<sup>66</sup> This included a "general" form for all the students in the module that asked specifically for their consent to classroom observation and my access to their module-related work, as well as two "specific" forms for those students who volunteered to take part in the focus group interviews and the think-aloud protocol.

To summarise the discussion in this section, Table 4.2 (compiled from: Merriam 1998, Bassey 1999, Rallis and Rossman 2009) outlines the different strategies that were used in the study to ensure its trustworthiness.

EVALUATION CRITERIA	MEANING		QUALITATIVE STRATEGIES USED IN THE STUDY
	POSITIVIST	INTERPRETIVIST	
<b>Internal validity</b>	The “fit” between the findings and the single and static reality	Credibility / being faithful to the multiple emic understandings of the phenomenon under study	Prolonged engagement in the field
			Triangulation
			Engagement in the “community of practice”
			Member checks
			Reflexivity
<b>Reliability</b>	Replicability of findings	Systematic and rigorous conduct of inquiry	Triangulation
			Transparency
			Audit trail
<b>External validity</b>	Generalisability	“Fuzzy generalisations” (Bassey 1999); the reader decides on the applicability of findings to other contexts	Rich, thick description
<b>Ethics</b>			Ethical approval from university’s ethics committee
			Informed consent
			Pseudonymisation

**Table 4.2 The strategies used in the research study to ensure its trustworthiness.**

#### **4.8 Summary**

In order to show that qualitative research “is anything but a soft option” (Richards 2003 p.6), this chapter outlined the “intellectual puzzle” and the specific research questions

behind this study, explained the reason for the choice of qualitative research methodology to investigate them, provided an overview of the chosen research approach, i.e. case study, and discussed in detail how it was used in this project. The purpose of the two chapters that follow is to present the results of the data analysis process.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FOSTERING LEARNER AUTONOMY IN A MULTICULTURAL LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

*When I read through the course description at the beginning of the semester, I was not too sure in what way a course with the title 'globalisation' should help us improving our language skills; I expected a normal lecture - rather passive for me as a student. The opposite came true [...] (Elsa; J6<sup>67,68</sup>)*

### 5.1 Introduction

When language professionals discuss the concept of learner autonomy, they often draw on a dichotomy between a “passive” and an “active” learner to illustrate it. It is argued, for example, that learners “are accustomed to *the passive role* that school traditionally assigns to [them]” (Little 2007a p.17; emphasis added). The commonly held belief is that not only is it the former that somehow reflects the “default setting” of the vast majority of learners, but also that in an autonomy-oriented classroom environment they will undergo some sort of *transformation* from the former into the latter<sup>69</sup>. This naturally raises the question as to how exactly language teachers can bring about this sort of change in their students, or, to borrow Caffrey’s (2004 p.111) apt phrase, how can we move beyond “the level of noble aspirations”? Promoting autonomy in the language classroom is often described in terms of “sharing the power” with learners, e.g. in relation to the identification of their needs, the specification of learning objectives, the design and implementation of learning tasks, and assessment (Myers 1990; see also section 2.3.1). In relation to the case behind this study, such power-sharing is evident, for example, from Liz involving the students in choosing the criteria for the assessment

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<sup>67</sup> All italics in the students’ reflections, comments *etc.* have been added unless stated otherwise. In general, I refrained from correcting the students’ comments unless specific mistakes would hinder understanding.

<sup>68</sup> Please refer to the List of Abbreviations for an explanation of abbreviations used to refer to the data sources used in this study.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Nix’s (2007) article entitled “Telling tales of transformation”.

of their “Reflection on learning” journals or selecting the topics, learning activities and materials for their interactive teaching sessions. However, while the literature that has been published over the last two decades shows that such an approach is useful as far as promoting autonomy in language learning is concerned (e.g. Dam 1995, 2000, Chan 2000), there is much less available to draw on in terms of helping learners to take more responsibility for the development of both language *and* intercultural competence. By opening a metaphorical “door” to Liz’s multicultural classroom, this part of the thesis aims to show how this may be achieved in practice<sup>70</sup>.

More specifically, the current chapter focuses on the issue of fostering learner autonomy in a culturally diverse classroom environment. Following data analysis, it examines the process from four different angles, namely *setting students off on independent learning tracks*, *developing the learning software*, *fostering interdependence*, and finally, *nurturing global citizens*. The purpose of the following chapter in turn is two-fold. First of all, it examines the impact of that approach on helping international students to become autonomous intercultural speakers. Secondly, in light of the findings of the case study, it discusses the interrelationship of developing learner autonomy and acquiring intercultural competence in a multicultural foreign language classroom. Both chapters also highlight the potential difficulties that international students may face in the process of developing autonomy in intercultural language learning.

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<sup>70</sup> Since research methodology literature advises us to be wary of making generalisations from single cases, I do not want to claim that the approach taken by this particular teacher in this particular module can be applied universally. Rather, the onus is on the reader him- or herself to decide to what extent the findings of this case study may be applicable to other contexts and other classrooms (see the discussion on the approach to generalisability in case study research in section 4.7.3), including possibly their own.

## 5.2 Setting students off on independent learning tracks

When discussing the origins of the LAN01 module, Liz explained in an interview how she has been keen to promote learner autonomy since she took over that module some years previously:

if I look at it from a historical perspective it started out as an English language skills module and designed specifically for European business students [...] I took over a programme and modules and I found with these students it wasn't really working because a lot of them had really good English to begin with and so ... you know, I would ask them what would they prefer and so on [...] they were being very pragmatic [...]. So I put in CVs and ... preparing for interviews, all of that on the agenda. But *I was also keen to look at learner autonomy and to encourage them to be independent learners so I set them all off on their own tracks of learning.* They had to assess themselves [...] and they then were asked, you know, "Well, what would you like to be able to achieve by the end of this semester?" and for each student it was different [...]. And so I had all of these independent tracks of learning going on, very, you know, as ... Leslie Dickinson<sup>71</sup> et al. would be happy to hear about [laughs]

Liz's continuing interest in "setting students off on their own tracks of learning" was reflected in LAN01 by the incorporation of the LOLIPOP ELP into the module. Even though the students' exposure to the portfolio was quite limited in the sense that, due to delays with software development, they were asked only once during the semester to conduct self-assessment and objective setting via the tool, their comments provide nonetheless an interesting insight into their beliefs about the role it can play in the development of learner autonomy.

The students' feedback shows that one of the main contributions to fostering autonomy that working with an interculturally enhanced version of the ELP can make is to help

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<sup>71</sup> Leslie Dickinson is the author of *Self-instruction in language learning*, published in 1987, one of the earliest and most quoted books that deals with the topic of fostering learner autonomy in language learning.

learners gain an awareness of their own competence. Even though “finding the right level” (Carla, J5), or, in other words, deciding on which of the six self-assessment levels the students “belonged to” was mentioned by six students as a difficulty involved in working with the ELP, overall they seemed to appreciate the opportunity it gave them to find out their own proficiency level. This point is exemplified by the following comment from Laura, one of the six students to raise this issue:

From my point of view, Lolipop is a very good way *to check what level you are at* in the target language. (J5)

Closely related to this aspect is the issue of the impact that self-assessment had on bringing to the fore an awareness of the students’ strengths and weaknesses with regard to their own competence. As far as the latter is concerned, in general, the students seemed to agree that the self-assessment helped them to identify the areas they needed to focus on improving, an issue that was mentioned by fourteen of them. In Lisa’s view, for example, not only did self-assessment make the awareness of her own limitations much more pronounced, but also it could make one realise that s/he is perhaps not as competent as previously imagined:

so there are things where you see ... *I kinda knew it, sitting at the back of my head* but I don’t know it, it never really comes up and it shows you where you have to work. (2FG1)

I suppose it helps, it brings you down or something. You might think you’re good enough and *it shows you that you are not*. So it helps to put you down a little bit (2FG1)

On the other hand, as the students’ feedback clearly demonstrates, self-assessment was also useful in raising an awareness of their own strengths. This includes (welcome) surprises, such as a realisation that one’s own skills are actually better than expected. For example, Danilo, wrote that the self-assessment helped him to understand that:

for certain skills, like listening and reading, my English *was better than I thought it to be.* (J5)

In contrast, Marina had this to say about her self-assessment for the reading and listening skills:

My average mark is B2. I thought that I am very good at Listening (B1) but according to self-assessment I have the best ability in Reading (C1). To be honest, *I do not agree with that.* Usually, I have to read a text more than once to understand and remember it well. (J5)

Whereas most students did not go into too much detail with regard to what it was exactly that the self-assessment made them realise they could or could not do<sup>72</sup>, four of them were indeed more specific about the kind of awareness they gained through self-assessment. For instance, Kaori had this to say about her experience:

*I realized my listening skills is not so good* though listening skills is very important for communication with others, so I thought I should improve my listening skills more (J5)

This brings us up to the next aspect related to the issue of managing one's own learning via the ELP, namely identifying learning objectives since having recognised their own limitations in certain areas, the students were then able to mark those as their objectives. Once again, whereas the students generally seemed to appreciate the possibility of doing so, as reflected by the fact that ten of them raised this particular issue, few of them commented on the specific goals they had set for themselves. Kaori, who, as has already been mentioned, realised through self-assessment that her listening skills were inadequate, was one exception:

I have one – it's listening skills because I did the self-assessment with LOLIPOP and I realised my listening skills is very low level because

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<sup>72</sup> This can be illustrated by the following quote from Keiko: “This self assessment, especially for language, is very useful for me to study languages. *I can see what I can do, and can't*, so after doing that, I can address specific skills”. (J5)

sometimes I can't understand the TV programme or the Irish TV programme like that *so I have to focus on the listening skills* because it's important to communicate with other people so it's a particular thing for me. (2FG2)

Isabel was another student who commented on her language objectives:

One thing I liked was the possibility to set objectives. *I decided to set a couple of them related to oral skills* and the deadline I chose was the end of my Erasmus year<sup>73</sup>. (J5)

Even though the vast majority of students did not state specifically what skills they needed to improve on, nine of them acknowledged that gaining an awareness of their own weaknesses and / or identifying them as learning objectives was conducive to taking action to address them. For example, having identified some weaknesses in relation to her own competence, Hanna “started thinking a lot more about the work [she did] and *how [she could] help [herself] best*” (J6). In two cases, the students involved - Kaori and Isabel - explained the concrete steps they had taken in order to accomplish their goals, i.e. improving their listening and speaking skills respectively, even though in the latter's case, this sometimes required a considerable effort on her part:

For example, I was weak at listening, so *I set the date to raise my level of listening and I tried to improve it*, like I spent more time watching TV or talking to native English speaker or so. *From those things my English skill became better*. (Kaori; J6)

I don't particularly do anything because I don't think you can do exercises from that or anything so that's-- *I mean, I live with 6 Irish girls so sometimes I feel like just going to sleep but they are watching TV in the living room and I go them and try to participate in the conversation*. I mean, they are-- most of them they are really nice and they want me to, so *sometimes it's hard* because when you're tired - I don't know - when I'm tired, my English grows [laughter] horrible but I try to keep [in?]. I think that's a good way or [agreement] the

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<sup>73</sup> In the LOLIPOP ELP, when students select their learning objectives, they have an option of setting themselves a “deadline” by which those should be achieved and being reminded about it by email.

way-- a little way I had to improving that. *I also set it for the end of my-- when I'm leaving. I hope I'll get some then.* (Isabel; 2FG2)

Interestingly, both students decided to set themselves a “deadline”, which incidentally was the end of their study abroad experience. Even though not all the students were convinced about the benefits of specifying such dates, claiming that this would only put pressure on them, two students considered it to be a good idea that motivated them to achieve their objectives. According to Laura:

It is also very useful the fact that *you can challenge yourself* to achieve some objectives in a limited space of time, the length of the period of time is chosen by you. In my opinion, *it encourages students to fulfil their objectives.* (J5)

The students thought that working with the ELP could increase their motivation also in other ways. First of all, being aware of their own level of competence, and weaknesses in particular, as explained by Hanna below, was a motivating factor:

I knew like when I started that my reading English is not as good as I want to be and then when I had to do the self-assessment, I felt really bad. It didn't-- like I had to be honest and it wasn't stupid so ... but [inaudible word] *it's a nice eye-opener so you know that ... well if I want this to work I have to do something* and now I have the point standing there with the red thing like beaming at me so ... yeah, I hope it'll work. (2FG1)

Secondly, achieving one's own objectives was said to increase the students' self-esteem and motivate them to do more work, a view expressed by Isabel in the following remark:

I think setting objectives through portfolio is a good idea, specially if you work with it for a long period. *It is really satisfactory* to set an objective and some time later see that you can change its colour from orange to green because you are already able to say 'I can do this'. That way, *students can feel more confident* about their possibilities for future objectives. Even if the one you have completed is a small step, reflecting on it and knowing that it was something you have been able to achieve *helps you go for the next objective.* (J5)

Finally, the students mentioned also the potential of an interculturally enhanced model of the ELP as a monitoring tool. Even though the self-assessment via the LOLIPOP ELP was a “one-off” experience because of the delays with software development, at least two students had actually self-assessed their competence in another module run by Liz in the previous semester when the software was still being developed. One of them, Agata, shared her views on the experience of working with the portfolio during both semesters: having done the self-assessment the second time, she was able to notice progress with regard to her language competence:

I was amazed to find out *how different my self assessments from last semester and this semester were*. It just proved to me that *I have changed*, becoming more open and confident. As far as I can remember my first self-assessment was at level B1 and it took me quite long time to do it, whereas this time at levels B2 and C1, I did it in a considerably shorter period of time. (J5)

Even though it is difficult to argue, on the basis of feedback from a single student, that working with the ELP can help students to monitor their progress and therefore assist in the development of autonomy in learning, this argument is given further support by three students who wished they had been given an opportunity to work with the portfolio more systematically in order to observe progress made. For example, Keiko said that:

now I've been here for 7 or 8 month but I can't feel that my English has improved so *if I did it before*, and I did it last time *then I could feel: "OK, I could improve this point"*. (2FG2)

Whereas for Keiko the difficulty lay in not being able to notice progress during her stay abroad, for Hanna it was equally important to be able to see, by conducting self-assessment, whether her competence improved as a result of participating in the course:

All in all I think the self-assessment was a great and interesting experience and I would have liked to have started it when I started this course *so I could be*

*able to follow my development.* It would have been of great meaning to me because I have not been used to assess myself before. (J5)

In addition, one student expressed the view that it was the possibility of setting herself a deadline for achieving her learning objectives that aided the monitoring process in particular:

I thought the good think was that you can set a date by which you can check if you achieved your skills. I think that this is useful because *you can see if you are making progress with your English and that is very important.* I set up few dates myself and I can't wait to see if I made any progress or not. (J5)

Whereas the above discussion draws our attention to the benefits of working with the portfolio, it needs to be borne in mind, however, that the students experienced problems with two of the three metacognitive strategies identified by Wenden (1998), i.e. planning and evaluating, and which are central to the ELP model. The student feedback reveals that not only was setting their own learning objectives perceived as difficult generally, an issue that was mentioned by two students, but also that their accomplishment was likely to be hindered by a number of factors. These included some broader issues such as the busy lives (e.g. raising a family, working part-time) some of them had as well as the problems they identified with time management and study skills.

In relation to the first point, Hanna observed, for example:

But I think it is *too hard to actually find time to work on my personal ability to write when I have so much homework to do* so I figure that I will spend time on it during the summer. (J5)

Of more importance to this study are the problems directly related to the portfolio. More specifically, having followed up on the students' experience of working with it during a focus group interview approximately two weeks later, I became suspicious about how much of an impact the self-assessment / objective setting experience really made on some of the students. When asked about what kind of objectives they had set for

themselves, Lisa, for example, had difficulty remembering what it was that she had challenged herself to do, and once she did remember, she admitted that she had not done anything in order to achieve her objective:

RESEARCHER: [...] did you actually manage to set yourself any objectives or did you think about setting yourselves any objectives when doing the self-assessment?

LISA: I did. Yeah. *I don't know what it was any more* [...]. (2FG1)

Therefore, whereas it appears that working with an interculturally enhanced version of the ELP supported the development of autonomy, it needs to be borne in mind that very few students appear to have actually made an effort to achieve their learning objectives. One reason for this could be that, because their engagement in self-assessment / objective setting was a “one-off” experience, and since the ELP was not properly integrated into the module, the students did not take it seriously enough or felt it was necessary to do anything in that direction. This explanation is given some support by the fact that two other students mentioned the fact that they would not have enough time to accomplish their objectives in the time that was left. One of them, Hoshiko, observed:

Honestly speaking, I am not sure that I can accomplish the date that I planed *because I am going to go back home quite soon* though I set the date. There I suppose I have less opportunity to improve my English and exchange culture since my mother tongue is Japanese and Japan itself hasn't got used to English.

(J5)

The student feedback also reveals, through their feedback on the experience of conducting self-assessment, that they found the strategy of evaluating particularly challenging. It seems that lack of previous self-assessment experience, an issue mentioned by eight students, was a major reason behind this difficulty. The following comment made by Agata sums up this point well:

it was *strange*, it is really because-- you know all my life or whatever *we were assessed by a teacher*, by professional who knew and now that you have to do it yourself, *you don't really know*. (1FG1)

As the above quote illustrates, the students were used to relying on language professionals for assessment. In light of the lack of experience with self-evaluation, it is not surprising perhaps that some of the adjectives that were used by the students to describe self-assessment via the LOLIPOP ELP included: “a hard thing to comprehend” (Hanna; J6), “strange” (Katia; J5), “weird” (Keiko; INT) and “difficult” (Agata; J5). Two students also mentioned the fact that, whereas they were used to having their language assessed, (self-)assessment of intercultural competence was a new experience altogether. As Isabel explained:

we are more used to evaluate ourselves or being evaluated in questions more or less objectives, like the use of language, *than in something that has more subjective points, like intercultural knowledge*. (J5)

The second major challenge involved in self-assessment concerned objectivity. As Chapter Two explains, self-assessment is often treated with suspicion by language professionals because of problems with its reliability and the data seem to confirm that objectivity did pose a major challenge for the students. This is evident from the following three issues identified by them: the need for verification (identified by three students), problems with being honest with oneself (mentioned by nine students), and finally, the tendency, signalled by five of them, towards underestimating their own competence, or “putting themselves down” (Agata; J5). The essence of the first problem is captured particularly well in the following remark made by Lisa:

When we first talked about the LOLLIPOP self assessment, I had imagined something *quite different* than what it turned out to be. When thinking about self assessment, *I imagined some kind of an online test* where one would have to answer questions and fill in gaps, which would then be *corrected* by an online program. So when we finally got to work with the LOLLIPOP program I

was surprised to find out that it really was just a set of questions that I would have to ask myself. (J5)

However, whereas Lisa, in spite of her misgivings about the usefulness of such self-assessment, seems to have understood that it served a different purpose to that of a “test” (i.e. “to know yourself what you can do and what you can’t” (2FG1)), Hoshiko did not as she expressed concerns about the possibility of self-assessment results being abused by a student in order to gain advantage:

The hardest aspect of self-assessment is that *nobody knows the reply is true or false*. In other words, a person who is going to answer the questions *can lie* so that he or she can get better reputation. (J5)

With regard to the remaining two issues identified by the students, they seem to be interwoven, although they place emphasis on two different aspects of the difficulty involved in being objective about one’s own competence: the former concerns the issue of honesty in general, whereas the latter concerns only the tendency towards underestimating one’s own skills, which four out of the five students to mention this issue attributed to the influence of their cultural backgrounds. As far as the former is concerned, Danilo explained:

The *most difficult* part of the self-assessment was *trying to be honest with myself* about what I recon is the level of my English. This was particularly hard when it came to Spoken, Writing, Intercultural areas that had no examples to refer to. (J5)

As the above quote demonstrates, the provision of examples for some of the skills (i.e. reading and listening) was helpful in terms of overcoming this particular obstacle. With regard to the issue of “putting oneself down”, Keiko, for example, remarked:

I found it very *difficult to be honest about my good point*. Maybe it’s a part of *Japanese culture thing* that I can’t claim my good point because I’m not confident about myself, and it’s *embarrassing to say “I’m very good at something*. (J5)

Finally, the third major challenge involved in self-assessment concerned the fact that, whereas many of the students felt generally comfortable with the exercise, for six of them the experience was a source of discomfort. Agata, for instance, observed that:

For some reason *it felt wrong*, I felt like I was reversing roles with the teacher. (J5)

The expressions that some of the other students used reinforce this point further: Hanna said that it was “*awkward at first*” (J5); Noriko felt “*really confused*” (J5); while Hoshiko experienced “embarrassment” (J5). It seems that the students’ lack of experience with self-assessment was one of the key reasons for such feelings, as explained by Noriko:

The questions are so specific, and I have not done this before, so I felt *really confused*. (J5)

Other reasons mentioned by the students concerned: the need to be honest about one’s own limitations (e.g. Hanna; 2FG1), lack of confidence in one’s own evaluation (Hoshiko; J5), and finally, feeling that one is taking over the teacher’s job (see Agata’s comment above). It seems, however, that being asked to engage in self-assessment on a regular basis might have been helpful in overcoming this particular obstacle. This was evident from the comments made by the two students who had done LOLIPOP self-assessment in the previous semester and who, as the following comment illustrates, found the task easier the second time round:

Yes, I felt *comfortable* making a self assessment of my language skills and intercultural skills. I used LOLIPOP before to assess my skills so *I knew what to expect*. (J5)

Finally, as far as problems with evaluating are concerned, one of the students, Lisa, mentioned difficulty in motivating oneself to conduct self-assessment. In her own words:

I think it’s even *the moment to say: “I’m doing it”* I think that would be the hardest for me like “I’m doing it now” and maybe not even cheating but yeah

just ... the ... your own will to say: “OK. I’m doing it, I’m doing it *for myself*,  
*not to prove something to anyone* but just to prove to myself”. (1FG2)

To summarise the discussion in this section, even though the students’ comments often lacked specificity, the analysis of their feedback on their experience of working with the LOLIPOP ELP shows that such a tool was thought to have potential for fostering learner autonomy. In particular, the students not only found that it created an awareness of their own competence, encouraged them to identify and achieve their learning objectives and, in a very few cases, made them take concrete steps to achieve those, but also considered it to be a useful tool in terms of monitoring the learning process. At the same time, however, it needs to be borne in mind that the two metacognitive strategies that the ELP emphasises - planning and evaluating - seemed to pose a significant challenge for some of the students.

### **5.3 Developing the “learning software”**

The preceding section has shown how, by introducing the students to the LOLIPOP ELP, Liz provided them with the opportunity to take responsibility for the management of their learning with regard to its planning, monitoring and evaluation. However, as Chapter Two explains, these three metacognitive strategies are not enough in their own right to foster learner autonomy (Wenden 1995). Rather, its development in the classroom environment “is likely to be a matter of teachers helping learners to become *reflective* managers of their own learning” (Little 2000 p.70; emphasis added) since “it is impossible consciously to accept responsibility for anything, and then act on that responsibility, *without thinking about what you are doing*” (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002 p.17; emphasis added). As Chapter Two explains, in the language classroom reflection traditionally has been promoted by means of journal writing (and recently

also the ELP), with research evidence suggesting that if systematic, it can foster the development of “learning software” (Wenden 1995), i.e. metacognitive knowledge.

Turning to LAN01, as signalled in section 4.5.2, reflection featured prominently in the module, and this included Liz’s plans for the students to use the LOLIPOP ELP to reflect on their *intercultural* language learning. Even though the impact of such reflection could not be investigated in the current study<sup>74</sup>, the data analysis confirms nonetheless that reflection writing in general was important for the development of metacognitive knowledge, and by extension learner autonomy, although the process seems to have been a challenging experience for some students. This is not surprising if we take into account the fact that “being able to reflect well is quite difficult for many learners” (Yang 2007 pp.1-2). The two main difficulties involved in reflection writing in the module concerned apparent lack of experience with reflection writing on the one hand<sup>75</sup> (i.e. not knowing how to write the reflections, not knowing what reflection is and not writing reflections before), mentioned by five students, and lack of feedback on the students’ entries during the term on the other<sup>76</sup>. These two points are illustrated by the comments by Agata and an anonymous student respectively:

During the module I discovered how to reflect on my learning. That was *a new experience* for me. (J6)

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<sup>74</sup> The students were asked to write reflections on their intercultural language learning, including their experience of working in multicultural groups, in week nine (see Appendix B.3) but since due to a technical glitch, the content of these reflections, bar the first sentence or two, was not saved, those entries could not be used as data sources in this study.

<sup>75</sup> It has to be mentioned, however, that Liz did provide prompt questions for the reflections the students were supposed to write.

<sup>76</sup> In addition, two more issues that were mentioned concerned the need for honesty (mentioned by Aileen) and the fact, pointed out by one student in his / her anonymous end-of-semester questionnaire, that some of the topics suggested by Liz were not regarded as useful. In relation to the latter point, as is evident from the list of the topics for the “Reflection on learning” journals presented in Table C.1, their focus were not limited to the language learning process.

I would have liked *to know whether my reflections got better or not* during the semester in stead of just writing something I was very unsure of. (Anonymous; Q8)

Although only two students specifically acknowledged that writing reflections had given them an insight into their own competence<sup>77</sup>, the process was important for the development of learner autonomy mainly because it brought to the fore the students' metacognitive knowledge. As Chapter Two explains, learners hold specific beliefs about different factors pertinent to the process of language learning and while those can be compatible with the principles of autonomy, often they are not. Even though different instruments can be used to investigate the relationship between such beliefs and readiness for autonomy<sup>78</sup>, it is also recommended that teachers use carefully designed activities with a view to gaining an insight into learners' metacognitive knowledge and improving it so that they can develop autonomy (Wenden 1998 pp.530-531; emphasis added). It has been argued that:

For the greater part, language instructors will view their goal as the provision of instruction that facilitates the development of linguistic autonomy. However, [...] learners also need guidance *in improving and expanding their knowledge about learning* so that they may also become more autonomous in their approach to the learning of their new language. (ibid.)

In Wenden's (ibid.) view, such activities should *elicit* learners' metacognitive knowledge and let them *articulate* it, while also providing them with *alternative views* and encouraging them *to revise* their existing knowledge base if needed. That such activities can play an important role in fostering autonomy among international students is demonstrated by an activity that was introduced by Liz in the first week of the

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<sup>77</sup> Agata observed, for example, that, "While writing reflections I have noticed areas in my overall learning that *need improvement*" (J6).

<sup>78</sup> For instance, Carter (1999) used the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) while other researchers (e.g. Cotterall 1995, Chan 2001) developed their own instruments to this purpose.

semester. During this particular session the students were encouraged to discuss their own views on the topic of what makes a good language learner before listening to a recording on the same subject<sup>79</sup>.

As is evident from the entries submitted by the students and my own fieldnotes, this activity, combined with journal writing, managed to achieve the goals of a metacognitively-oriented task suggested by Wenden (op.cit.). In particular, not only did it allow Liz to elicit the students' metacognitive knowledge, but also expand it. In relation to the latter point, five students acknowledged the fact that the exercise raised their awareness of what it means to be a good language learner, and / or offered suggestions with regard to what they could do to improve their learning. Michiko wrote for instance:

It was also very good that we had oppotunity to learn what the good language learner is, *so that we could have some strategies to improve our English skills.*

(J6)

Furthermore, the activity also encouraged the students to modify their existing beliefs, although, it has to be said, that was not always the case. More specifically, whereas Sakura felt the need to revise her belief about the role of personality in language learning, Ana was not convinced by the argument made in the recording according to which intelligence was not among the most important qualities of a good language learner:

in the discussion before the listening in today's class, I thought the certain kinds of personality of the good language leaner were sociable, open-minded and so on. It is because, in my opinion, people who have such personality tend to have

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<sup>79</sup> The students were prompted to consider the role of such factors as intelligence, personality, motivation/enthusiasm, memory, hard work as well as others. According to the recording, independence from the teacher was the most important factor out of the factors considered, the other five being motivation, personality, intelligence and learning skills.

more opportunities to converse with others. [...] However, according to the tape, the answer was that it is important not to be extravert but to be confident. *Although the answer from the tape was different from my prediction, I was, indeed, persuaded by it.* It is because, when I do not have confidence in speaking English, the volume of my voice is turned down, vocabularies escapes from my mind, I feel frustration and, at last, I hesitate to speak English. (Sakura; J1)

About the qualities of a good Language Learner I must disagree with the Listening exercise -He said "intelligence" is the less relevant quality..."- I think intelligence is the most important quality [...] You need to be intelligent to be able to express yourself accurately in your own mother language, nevermind learning a foreign language. (Ana; J1)

Equally important is the fact that the activity let the students articulate their beliefs, both verbally in class and subsequently in writing in their first "Reflection on learning" journal. In the latter the students were asked *inter alia* to "think about their independence [as learners] and consider whether they [were] influenced by their culture in being independent" (OB1). This allowed the students to express their beliefs about learner autonomy in general as well as their self-beliefs, both positive and negative, on the issue. However, the fact that nine students experienced difficulty, at least initially, in verbalising their beliefs in relation to whether or not they considered themselves to be good language learners would suggest that the students' metacognitive knowledge may have been underdeveloped. Interestingly, this seemed to be also the case for those few students who had some English teaching experience themselves. As Isabel remarked:

After a couple of courses on Methodology in my home university and three years of teaching English (as a private teacher), *I still find difficult* to define myself as a language learner, which is a bit strange. (J1)

Encouragingly, being autonomous appeared most often, alongside being motivated and not being afraid of making mistakes, in their reflections among the thirty different

qualities that, in their view, made a good language learner<sup>80</sup>, with eleven out of the twenty-eight students who submitted their reflections on the topic acknowledging this factor as important. Kaori observed, for example:

It is no wonder that we are asked to take responsibility for our own learning.  
People who just go to class and take it can not improve their skill of language.  
(J1)

In addition, nine students considered themselves to be autonomous language learners. For example, Angelika described how during her school education, having previously depended on her teacher to tell her what to do and grades to motivate her, she started taking responsibility for her language learning:

In the final two years this has changed a lot. I started to change my learning style completely as I felt that the way our teacher wanted us to study English is *not the most efficient way to learn English for me*. Instead of learning vocabulary and answering working with the textbook I borrowed English audio-books from the library and listened to them as a way of listening comprehension. I also watched English films and read English books. (J1)

However, in their self-analysis the students were able to identify not only positive qualities, but also their deficiencies<sup>81</sup>, also in relation to their capacity for autonomy. In fact, four students mentioned specifically that they did not feel autonomous. For example, in spite of acknowledging the vital role of learner responsibility, Sakura observed:

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<sup>80</sup> The qualities suggested by the students can be grouped as follows: autonomy-related (being autonomous; being realistic about own competence; having good study skills; learning from others; paying attention; practising; and using strategies, i.e. monitoring own speech; making notes; revisiting what one has learnt; and using a dictionary); language competence-related (having a good ear; learning vocabulary); motivation-related (enjoying communicating; being focused on improvement; having interest in language; liking the language; and being motivated); personality-related (being free from preconceptions; being hardworking; not being afraid to ask questions; not being afraid to make mistakes; and being sociable); and finally, other factors (being able to pass exams; being able to concentrate in class; having a good memory; being intelligent; and understanding the teacher).

<sup>81</sup> Liz asked the students specifically not to “write what would please her”, but rather to “write about their difficulties” (OB1).

To be honest, *it is hard to say that I am learning English completely independently*. As I mentioned above, because I have the English exams that I must take, I can get the motivation for studying. Therefore, although it is true that I sometimes buy some texts and study English independently, now, I am taking the English language service class at IU and I cannot deny that I am depending on assistance to the class in order to improve my English. (J1)

In a similar vein, Isabel had this to say about her own capacity for autonomy:

If there is something I do know, is that I do not feel completely independent nor dependent on the teacher. That is, I like doing things which could help me learn on my own, but *I do not feel ready* to take most of the responsibility of my learning process. I guess this is *influenced by the system in which I have studied languages*. (J1)

Isabel's observation brings us to the very important issue that concerns the role played by the students' prior learning experiences, or their "educational baggage" that they brought with them into the classroom, in the development of learner autonomy. That is, whereas the above-mentioned data seem to indicate a generally positive attitude towards the concept in approximately one-third of the students, it needs to be borne in mind that, as their reflections clearly show, at least seven out of the eleven students who considered autonomy to be an important factor came from educational systems that can be described as very traditional as far as the teacher's and learner's roles are concerned. Indeed, five students wrote specifically that the education systems in their countries of origin did not support the development of autonomy. For example, Katia wrote:

I think that my country (Lithuania) *not giving an opportunity for learners to feel independence*, even in universities, in comparison with Ireland-IU practice it everywhere. (J1)

That the students' previous educational experiences were significantly different from those in LAN01 is evident from a number of issues that they raised in the course of data collection. This manifested itself, for example, in them being used to a high power distance between the teacher and themselves, as well as being accustomed to the teacher

telling them what to do. With regard to the former, Agata had the following to say about the difference between studying in Lithuania and studying at IU:

Comparing my experience of studying at university at home in Lithuania and here in Ireland I can definitely say that there are quite a few differences. What strikes me most is the interaction between lecturer and student. In Lithuania I found the 'relationship' very formal and 'cold'. I had never called any of my lecturers by their first name. *The barrier was clearly defined and that did not make me feel at ease.* I think because of that *I felt less confident asking questions.* (J1)

As far as the latter is concerned, in one particularly telling reflection, Olivia, one of the six students to mention this issue, wrote that “*We were like robots that did whatever the teachers say to us to do*” (J1), while Lisa juxtaposed being told at school to be autonomous and being “*basically fed everything we needed to know and study for the exams*” (J1). In light of such dependence on the teacher, it is not surprising perhaps that two students mentioned that the emphasis in their country of origin was placed on regurgitating knowledge. Agata observed, for instance:

in Lithuania *I was given information, required to learn it (usually I learned by heart) and then write that information down on paper in a form of an exam. I was even given the exam questions.* For example, I was given 20 questions and told that 5 of those questions I will get during the exam. (Agata; J1)

Furthermore, three students mentioned not being used to studying the language by themselves outside the classroom, a fact that is important is we consider that developing autonomy involves studying by oneself in one's own spare time, as Dam's (1995) account of making homework an integral part of her teaching clearly shows. This point is illustrated by the following comment from Kaori:

In my country, in Japan, independent learning do not consider as important. Most teachers just teach language in the class and *there are little homework* and that it. (J1)

Another important issue, mentioned by five of the students in this study, concerns being

used to taking a passive role in class. For example, classes in the Japanese educational system were described by three of the Japanese students as “lecture style” (Keiko; INT), with students using English only when “asked to speak by a teacher” (Aiko; J1), and with their role in the classroom limited to “*listening to the lecture quietly, taking perfect notes, and trying to memorize all things*” (Noriko; J5). In addition, it was also pointed out by two students that English language classrooms in Japan lacked communicative focus, and that lessons were characterised by textbook dependence, which seems particularly important since one of the three principles of learner autonomy identified by Little, Ridley and Ushioda (2002) concerns appropriate target language use (see subsection 2.3.1). The following two quotes illustrate those two issues respectively:

In most of Japanese junior high or high schools, students study mainly *grammar and reading*. There are *little time for practicing speaking*. (Makoto; J1)

However, the system of learning English in Japan is not good for encouraging independence of students. Because English classes are usually lecture type which *a teacher just teaches English using textbooks* in junior high schools and high schools. (Aiko; J1)

Finally, the comments from four of the students indicate that the educational systems in their countries of origin encouraged extrinsic, rather than intrinsic, motivation, a fact that is important if we take into account the fact that it is the latter that seems to be vital for the development of autonomy (see, for example, Scharle and Szabó 2000). For example, Noriko mentioned that in Japan “many students study English just for the exams or tests” (J1), accusing the educational system of “killing” students’ motivation for learning the language.

Even though it would be misleading to claim that such experiences were common to all the students in LAN01, as six of them did claim to have been encouraged to develop

autonomy in learning<sup>82</sup>, it is reasonable to expect that, in light of the above discussion, for some of the students the experience of being asked to take a more autonomous approach to their learning was indeed something of a “learning shock”. This argument is supported by the fact that six students expressed the belief that autonomy is not easy in practice. This is evident from some of the phrases that were used by them to describe what being an independent language learner meant. For example, Agata mentioned “hard work” and “pushing oneself” (1FG1); Kaori claimed that it was “difficult” because individual study “ha[d] no end” (ibid.); while Olivia thought that it was “very difficult” because “[n]obody is going to judge you or mark [you]” (2FG1).

Furthermore, the data show also that an encounter with an autonomy-oriented classroom may have been disorientating for some students, as evident from the comments made by two of them. Isabel’s experience with developing autonomy in her German class at IU is a particularly telling example of the sense of insecurity that some of the students may have experienced also in the module at the centre of this study:

this year I had the opportunity as an Exchange Student to take a second language at IU. As the first weeks went by, I had the feeling that I was not learning German at all. *The teacher did not tell me to do concrete exercises* and, though I tried to work with the workbook myself, I somehow felt that *this was not the right way to learn a language*. However, when it was time to prepare our first assessment, I did surprisingly good. On the final assignments, I reached goals that I never thought I would be able to do when I started with the subject. I suppose, in a way, I reached the same place I would have reached if I had learnt German in Spain, but *going through a path I did not know* and because of that it made me -and still makes me, sometimes,- feel *insecure* about whether I was doing things right or wrong. (J1)

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<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, three of these students expressed the view that what they perceived as inadequacies of their former educational systems made them actually more independent learners. For instance, Keiko thought that the fact that the students were not required to work hard at her university encouraged her to take the initiative: “So in that university if I want to study then *I have to work hard* because anyone else doesn’t study”. (1FG1)

In a similar vein, reflecting on her participation in LAN01, Isabel signalled a similar sense of insecurity when she said: “in the beginning I was like: “I don’t know what she wants from me and I’m not sure if I will be able to do what she wants”” (INT).

To sum up, the students in this study were encouraged to access their own metacognitive knowledge, to verbalise their learner beliefs and to share them with Liz. Their comments provided a valuable insight into a number of issues that are of particular relevance to this study, namely their generally positive attitudes towards learner autonomy and beliefs about their own capacity for it, as well as lack of prior exposure to learner-centred modes of teaching.

#### **5.4 Fostering interdependence**

Whereas the previous two sections focused on the technical and the psychological dimensions of fostering learner autonomy in a multicultural language classroom, the purpose of this one is to demonstrate how this environment supported its development among the LAN01 students in relation to the socio-cultural perspective. This particular dimension places emphasis on fostering learner interdependence by means of collaborative learning (see Chapter Two), which, as explained in sub-section 4.5.2, the module placed particular emphasis on. More specifically, during the course of the semester the students were asked by Liz to prepare for (in groups) and engage in a tandem exchange with the students from France, to do group presentations on world bodies related to globalisation, and finally, to prepare and deliver an interactive teaching session on a topic related to globalisation of their own choice (see Appendix B.3 for an overview of the activities in the module).

The importance of that final component - peer teaching - for encouraging learner interdependence is clearly evident from the data. This concerns, first and foremost, the “preparatory phase” of this task, which, according to Carpenter (1996 p.27), concerns learners “tak[ing] responsibility for their own as well as other class members’ language learning”, and which involves the selection of the topic as well as learning activities and materials (ibid. p.24)<sup>83</sup>. Indeed, the student feedback demonstrates that this phase made them more responsible for their own and their peers’ learning.

With regard to the former, for example, the group that prepared a session on the topic of “entertainment” highlighted the fact that not only did they do a significant amount of reading in the target language while looking for relevant information, but also, prior to the presentation, sought help from native speakers in order to improve their pronunciation. Whereas the former stage had a beneficial effect on their vocabulary, the latter in turn had a positive impact on their self-confidence in using the target language:

The most important and difficult part in the process of language learning-vocabulary has improved greatly. *We read many articles and web information, to present most important and interesting facts.* (RR/E)

Next very important thing was the improvement of ours oral skills. We were anxious about our pronunciation, so *we asked several times few native speakers for corrections*, which is so valuable for language learners. We feel now better and more self-assured when speaking in front of the audience. (ibid.)

The fact that the preparation for peer teaching encouraged the students to look for and process materials in the target language is evident also from the following two extracts:

As the course progressed, I did quite a lot of research for my presentations which further developed my English grammar and speech. (Ana; J6)

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<sup>83</sup> It therefore gives learners greater control over learning (cf. Little, Ridley and Ushioda’s (2002) principle of learner empowerment).

By doing the research, watching ‘The Great Global Swindle’ documentary and reading articles in ‘TIME’ magazine, newspapers and IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] reports Sakura [...] was able to enrich her insufficient knowledge about the disputable causes of global warming. (RR/H)

In addition, the experience of peer teaching helped the students develop a sense of responsibility for their classmates’ learning. This included having a sense of responsibility for the language performance of their own group members as well as maximising the learning potential for the “students”. The former point is illustrated by the following extract written by the group whose session was dedicated to the issue of child labour:

Aiko said that she could not have enough confidence with her pronunciation because we had only about 30 minutes to practice own speech. She felt, however, her presentation became better compared to practice presentation *thanks to colleagues’ advices*. We knew it would be better to practice speaking *and advise each other* many times before the day of the presentation. (RR/C)

Furthermore, the reflective report submitted by one of the groups demonstrates how this particular group felt responsible for providing learning opportunities for their peers in the audience. More specifically, the students aimed during their preparation at providing their classmates with “advanced vocabulary, so that our colleagues *could also take a profit from it*” (RR/E). To this purpose, the group also designed a vocabulary exercise in which the students were expected to fill in gaps in sentences with the words / phrases used by the peer teachers in their presentation.

Whereas it is the “preparatory” phase of peer teaching that seems to have had a particularly beneficial influence on encouraging learner autonomy, there is also some evidence to suggest that the second stage of this task - the “teaching” phase (Carpenter 1996) - supported this process further. The latter has been characterised as a stage

during which “peer tutors learn through their direct experience of running a class, while class members *learn through experiencing their peers’ teaching*” (ibid. p.27; emphasis added), thus encouraging learner interdependence. This is demonstrated in this study by the comments made by two of the students who specifically acknowledged the fact that being exposed to other groups’ presentations was beneficial for the development of their language competence. One of them, Aileen, had this to say about her experience with the presentation on global warming:

During the session I was pleased we were asked to take some notes as there was so much to take in I found useful as I listed *vocabulary I didn’t know*. (RR)

However, while collaborative learning activities such as the peer teaching sessions were beneficial for the development of autonomy in learning among this cohort of students, their feedback also shows clearly that the two stages of preparation for and delivery of presentations / “lessons” were problematic for a number of reasons. With regard to the former, the students mentioned problems in relation to agreeing on the topic and focus of the presentation, finding relevant information and not being sure of what is involved, although the consultations Liz had with each group prior to presentations seemed helpful in this regard. Working in groups towards a common goal, an issue that will be examined in detail in the following chapter, was also a source of concern for some students.

As far as delivery of presentations is concerned, the most important issues relate to the overall difficulty the students experienced in speaking in public, which was signalled in the reflective reports submitted by three different groups and also mentioned by eight students individually. For example, Kaori observed that “it is difficult to speak in English in front of the student, many student” (INT), while Zara wrote that “it is a real challenge to talk in front of people, and it becomes tougher when we are expressing

ourselves through a foreign language” (J6). The interactive nature of peer teaching sessions was also particularly challenging, as reflected by the fact that this issue was raised by six out of the eight groups. For instance, the group that had delivered a presentation on education observed that, “one of the things we found hard is how to interact with classmates and how to draw people’s attentions on our presentation” (RR/G). Other difficulties associated with the task of giving presentations such as technical problems, running out of time, lack of practice, poor language skills, practical arrangements and having to deliver more than one presentation on the same day also contributed to a sense of anxiety among the students.

To summarise, the focus of the discussion in this section has been on fostering learner autonomy on the socio-cultural level. It has shown how the task of peer teaching that Liz promoted in her module allowed the students, on the one hand, to take responsibility for their own and their peers’ learning, and, on the other hand, to learn from one another, although the various difficulties that the students encountered when engaging in the task cannot be ignored. The purpose of next section is to concentrate on the fourth and final perspective on learner autonomy, namely the political-critical perspective.

## **5.5 Nurturing global citizens**

In section 2.2.4 I explain how a number of authors propagating the political-critical version of learner autonomy has lamented the depoliticisation of the concept. To reiterate, it has been argued that attempts to promote it in the language classroom should move beyond the current emphasis on the issue of transfer of power from the teacher to learners. As Pennycook (1997 p.47; emphasis added) suggests, language professionals should focus on helping the latter to search for “cultural alternatives”, understood as “*alternative* ways of thinking and being in the world” to the constraining discourses and

ideologies that operate within learners' contexts of learning. Pennycook's conceptualisation of a pedagogy of "cultural alternatives" is therefore firmly embedded in the domain of critical pedagogy, which has made some inroads in recent years into the field of FLE, LAN01 included. The purpose of critical pedagogy, or "teaching for social justice" (Kelly and Brandes 2001), is, *inter alia*, to bring about transformation in learners, and, by extension, in the world, by educating them "about various forms of *inequality* and *injustice* in the wider society and to address and *redress them* in purposeful and peaceful ways" (Kumaravadivelu 2003 p.14; emphasis added). Consequently, foreign language teachers who are interested in becoming "agents for change" have a duty to introduce important, if potentially controversial, topics (Brown 2004), or "the macro-structure themes - human rights, environmental problems, crime and punishment, women's rights - as well as the concerns and needs in [the students'] everyday lives" (Royal 2010 p.133). Such complex issues, as Brown (2004) explains, need to be analysed in depth and take into account the multiplicity of perspectives thereon, a process that in turn should foster learners' critical thinking.

Turning to LAN01, the fact that, as explained in section 4.5.2, it was partly focused on a critical examination of the process of globalisation, allowed Liz to weave such "macro-structure themes" into the course. Indeed, whereas in the first half of the semester it was Liz who introduced "critical" topics to the students, in the second half it was the students themselves who decided on the topics to be discussed through the task of peer teaching (see Appendix B.3). As far as Liz's input is concerned, for example, one of the issues that received a lot of attention over the course of the semester concerned that of Fair Trade: early on in the semester the students watched a documentary in which the issue of the adverse effect of *unfair* trade practices on developing countries was raised,

while on another occasion they listened to an interview broadcast by an Irish radio station in which the pros and cons of the phenomenon were discussed; the students even organised a Fair Trade “picnic” in class for which Liz encouraged them to bring in Fair Trade products. The topics chosen by the students were also pertinent to a greater or lesser extent to the “teaching for social justice”. For instance, the group that chose to discuss the topic of entertainment raised the issue of how the fashion industry has been involved in the exploitation of workers and child labour, while the presentation on ecotourism included a discussion on the negative impact of mass tourism on local cultures (see Appendix C.1 for the full list of topics chosen by the students).

The student feedback, particularly their “Reflection on learning” journals and the reflective reports, shows clearly that the topics that were raised in the course of the module, by both Liz and themselves, helped indeed raise their awareness of social justice, or provide them with “cultural alternatives”, stimulated their critical thinking thereon, and encouraged them to implement such alternatives in their lives.

As far as the first issue is concerned, in a number of cases it was the first time that the students had considered some of the issues they were exposed to in the module. This point is illustrated in the following quote from Keiko:

*There're many things that I didn't know – like everyone's presentation and for example my presentation was about ecotourism and I had no idea about ecotourism but now I really have an idea and my group mates will do internship in that company and she was really interested in that company and she told us lots about ecotourism; now I'm really interested in and before I didn't buy any Fair Trade but now I know much about it and now I notice that there is some Fair-- many Fair Trade products than before (INT)*

Furthermore, as the following two quotes demonstrate, a number of students viewed such topics as relevant personally. For Danilo, for instance, the topics discussed throughout the module “were interesting in that they really *belonged to our present time*. This allowed us to express our opinion and speculate on something *we can actually experience in our everyday lives*” (J6). This is exemplified further by Olivia’s experience with watching a film that concerned the blood diamond trade and the exploitation of the developing nations:

For me the film was good because is showing what is unfortunately still happening in some countries not only in Africa but also Latin America or South America and some people are not aware of that. *The stories were credible for me because I come from a country (Colombia) with similar conflicts* resulting from the greediness of few people for having the profits of so many natural resources we have. (J4)

Moreover, both Liz and the students tried to ensure that the topics raised were discussed from different angles, thus fostering the students’ critical thinking. Once again, as illustrated by Kaori’s reflection on the interactive teaching session dedicated to Fair Trade, a critical examination of the issues was sometimes a new experience for the students altogether:

This group focused on *not only good aspects, but also bad aspects* in that presentation, which makes it good. Considering this points, I think their presentation succeeded. Before I listened to the presentation, *I have never thought about bad aspects* of Fair Trade. However, after I listened to, I came to realize situations and think about that is it actually working or is cost too high. (RR)

Finally, the “teaching for social justice” that took place in the module did encourage many of them to act on the world, or at least consider what could be done to redress some of the problems that were brought to their attention. With regard to the former, it was the topic of Fair Trade that seems to have made a particular impact on the students

with a few of them making a decision to practice ethical consumerism, in particular by buying Fair Trade products and checking the origins of products in the future. For example, having watched the video on the impact of unfair trade practices on developing countries, Milena wrote in her journal:

Generally, ‘One dollar a day dress’ video has been really interesting for me. The video showed the sad truth that people really work for nothing and without our support they have no chances for better life. From now on *I will definitely check the origins of the produces I’m buying and I will be looking for the fair-trade marks*. Bad working conditions, second hand underwear, begging - this is just so humiliating! I believe that *we all can have an influence* on making the poorest people life better. (J3)

Another student, Agata, whose group’s peer teaching session was dedicated to the topic of global warming started making changes in her workplace:

I got interested so much into global warming that every time even at work I’m going around and saying: “*Turn off the lights, you’re wasting the energy!*” [...] you know and going around and switching lights off so it’s just good. (INT)

Other students seem to have been moved also by the presentation on child labour, in response to which Marina, for example, started donating money “to Africa” (J6). A number of other students, while apparently not taking any concrete action to address social injustice, were at least motivated to consider potential courses of action. Danilo suggested, for example:

As consumers we must be aware that our actions sometimes can be the cause of misery and pain in some other parts of the world. *We must strive for a consumer behaviour that is ethical* and conscious of the effect that may have on other people’s life. (J4)

To summarise the discussion in this section, the critical pedagogy approach that Liz took in this module seems to have supported the students in developing their “insurgent voices” (Pennycook 1997), and therefore autonomy on a political-critical level. More specifically, the students acknowledged the fact that the critical topics raised throughout

the semester helped raise their awareness of social justice issues, see them from a variety of angles, and, in some cases, “address and *redress them* in purposeful and peaceful ways” (Kumaravadivelu 2003 p.14).

## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter has begun by asking how foreign language professionals can initiate a process of transformation in international students to encourage that particular student group to develop learner autonomy. In order to answer this question, I opened a metaphorical “door” to a particular multicultural classroom - LAN01 - in which the teacher took on this very task. Throughout this chapter I have shown that such transformation was possible and that it involved a more holistic view of learner autonomy, such as the one that has been presented in Chapter Two. The purpose of the following chapter in turn is to examine the impact of such an approach on the other issue central to this study, namely the development of intercultural competence.

## CHAPTER SIX: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS AUTONOMOUS INTERCULTURAL SPEAKERS

*Overall, I think that I have learned more about cultures and intercultural interaction than about the English language. This is mostly due to the multicultural environment the course took place in. Studying together with people from so many different cultures was definitely an advantage regarding my intercultural competence. I believe it has helped us all to improve our understanding of each other's cultures and countries. (Lisa, J6)*

### 6.1 Introduction

In my investigation of the issue behind this study - fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning - I examined the ways in which Liz encouraged a cohort of international students to develop learner autonomy in her LAN01 classroom. To this end, in Chapter Five I discuss how she took a holistic approach to this task by providing them with opportunities to develop this capacity on a number of different levels. More specifically, the students were given the opportunity to manage their learning; to expand their metacognitive knowledge in relation to it; to develop interdependence; and finally, to open themselves up to “cultural alternatives” (Pennycook 1997 p.47). The purpose of this chapter is to consider the impact of this approach on the students assuming responsibility for the development of their *intercultural competence*. To this purpose, Chapter Six focuses on the three key issues to emerge from the data, which will be now discussed in turn: the role of the interculturally enhanced ELP model (section 6.2); the potential of experiential learning in the language classroom (6.3); and finally, supporting intercultural citizenship education (6.4). The purpose of the final section (6.5) is in turn to relate the findings presented in this and the previous chapter to the overarching question behind this study by discussing how developing learner autonomy

and intercultural competence are intertwined in a multicultural foreign language classroom.

## **6.2 Helping international students to become “independent explorers of cultures”**

According to Sercu, Méndez García and Castro Prieto (2005 p. 485; emphasis added), constructivist approaches to culture teaching, which, as explained in section 3.3, have gained considerable ground in FLE over the last decade, require *inter alia* that language learners develop the “ability to *independently* explore unfamiliar cultures”. This naturally raises the question as to what exactly such independence should involve and how it can be fostered in the classroom environment. The answer to the first question seems to lie in the principle of learner responsibility, one of the five principles of intercultural language learning identified by Liddicoat et al. (2003 pp.46-51) (see section 3.3). It emphasises that not only does the learner have to acknowledge that successful intercultural communication depends partly on his or her own intercultural attitudes, skills and behaviour, but also that the development thereof is a process of which s/he must *take control*, and this includes being involved in goal setting, monitoring and self-assessment (ibid. p.51). As is evident from the discussion in Chapter Two, these three metacognitive strategies are central not only to the technical perspective on learner autonomy, but also to the ELP model created to promote it and which, incidentally, is also increasingly expected to assist learners in managing the language *and* the intercultural learning processes.

Since until recently the potential of the ELP in this regard remained unfulfilled, the feedback from the students in this study on their - brief - experience of working with the LOLIPOP ELP is particularly valuable as it provides insight into the benefits of using a

portfolio with an enhanced intercultural dimension for helping international students “to become independent explorers of cultures” (Sercu 2006 p.69), or, in other words, to take responsibility for the management of their intercultural learning in relation to its planning, monitoring and evaluating.

To reiterate the key points raised in section 5.2, having completed a self-assessment of their language and intercultural competence via the portfolio, the students not only found that it helped them to create an awareness of their own strengths and limitations, to identify learning objectives and, in a very few cases, take concrete steps to achieve those, but also considered it to be a useful tool in terms of fostering motivation and monitoring learning progress. The final issue appears to have been of particular importance to those students who were in Ireland only for a limited period of time.

In light of the above findings, one can be relatively optimistic about the role that such an ELP model can play in fostering international students’ independence in intercultural learning, although two caveats need to be borne in mind. The first one concerns the fact that not all the students were convinced about the benefits of such self-assessment, an issue that was raised by four students<sup>84</sup>. For example, Milena wrote the following:

I am a bit scared to say that but *I did not find the self- assessment program LOLIPOP very useful*. Answering the can-do questions I did not feel like this is helping me assess my knowledge and learning. I don’t need to ask myself those questions to know that, e.g. I have problems with writing long essays or understanding some scientific programs on tv, because *I know that anyway*. (J5)

The second issue concerns the fact that, with a few exceptions, the students’ comments lacked specificity, particularly as far as the distinction between the language and

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<sup>84</sup> It was also mentioned in five anonymous end-of-semester questionnaires.

intercultural sections of the self-assessment grid is concerned. In those cases when the students *were* more specific, language issues seem to have been the focus of their feedback (cf. the quotes in section 5.2). Even though more research is therefore required to validate the above-mentioned findings specifically in relation to intercultural self-assessment (see section 7.4 for directions for further research), it is encouraging to note that seven out of the twelve students who answered the question, posed in the end-of-semester questionnaire, concerning the impact of the LOLIPOP ELP on their intercultural self-assessment believed that the tool did “assist [them] in the assessment and awareness-raising of [their] intercultural skills” (Q).

In addition, the data analysis points to two other important issues identified by the students in relation to the use of such a model of the ELP for fostering independence in intercultural learning. These concern abstractness of intercultural self-assessment, mentioned by six of the students, on the one hand, and the impact of such self-assessment on the development of students’ “metacultural” awareness on the other. The former point is illustrated particularly well by Isabel in the following comment:

for me it was *a bit difficult to do the intercultural one*, much more than the ones about oral comprehension because these ones are easier. In fact you know if you can do it or not. Like the other ones you start doubting, like, it’s more difficult to know, to evaluate yourself, I think. (2FG2)

Isabel’s statement echoes therefore the point made by Little and Simpson (2003 p.3) according to which it is much easier to self-assess one’s own communicative competence since “on the whole we know what we are capable of doing and what lies beyond our competence”. In contrast, some of the expressions that were used by the students to describe intercultural self-assessment included the following: “*obscure*”

(Hoshiko; J5); “*vaguer* than language” (Keiko; J5); and “more of an *abstract* subject compared to the language questions” (Lisa; J5).

The above-mentioned difficulty seems to have been exacerbated further by the problems some students experienced with the examples provided in the LOLIPOP ELP self-assessment grid<sup>85</sup>. More specifically, Olivia wished for more specific examples (2FG1), while Danilo thought that lack of examples for some of the skills made this part of self-assessment difficult (J5). With regard to the examples provided for the intercultural section in particular, opinions on their usefulness were divided, as illustrated by the following two quotes:

Especially intercultural self assessment was difficult because it’s *vaguer* than language, so *the examples were very useful* as an example and I could put myself in that situation. (Keiko; J5)

So I checked the examples every time I had any doubt about what the can-do descriptor exactly meant and found them quite useful in the English language area, but *not that much in the Intercultural knowledge*. (Isabel; J5)

Furthermore, the observations made by six of the students suggest that their previous intercultural experiences were a prerequisite for conducting a meaningful intercultural self-assessment. This is exemplified by the following comment by Noriko:

Before, I didn’t take those questions seriously, because they are really vague, and *don’t make sense if we haven’t experience the things*. For example, about question, “I can behave in accordance with the expectations of the other culture in most everyday situations both private and professional, even though it might sometimes require effort on my part.” *I might not have cared much about this before*, and maybe checked it as “I can do”, *but now, I faced many difficulties by being in different situation from my home culture and are feeling this problem personally*, for example, I argued with my boyfriend who is Irish because he required me being more talkative and expressive which might be

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<sup>85</sup> These are provided for reading, listening and intercultural skills.

rude or vulgar in Japan, rather than being so modest which is so called virtue in Japan, and I found it really difficult to adapt myself to Irish style, *so though this subject is not high level, I checked it as “I want to do it”*. (J5)

In this case, the intercultural problem behind that particular *Can do* descriptor clearly resonated with the student *because of* the personal and cultural dilemma she was experiencing in Ireland. Little and Simpson (2003 p.5) argue that ELP users may not be in a position to judge their own intercultural competence because its components may well be opaque in the absence of reflected intercultural experience. The comments made by some of the students seem to support this argument.

The second issue to be considered here concerns the contribution that an ELP with an enhanced intercultural dimension can make in relation to fostering international students’ “metacultural” awareness. In section 5.3 I explain how the classroom discussion and subsequent reflection on the topic of what makes a good language learner was beneficial in terms of the students accessing their own metacognitive knowledge and sharing it with Liz, particularly in terms of their attitudes about learner autonomy and their own capacity for it. However, the students’ reflections were important also because they signalled a gap in their task knowledge in relation to the intercultural dimension of foreign language learning. More specifically, only four out of the twenty-eight students who had submitted entries on this particular topic mentioned interest in the target culture(s) as an important quality. For example, Aileen had the following to say:

a part of of being a good language learner includes *an appreciation of the culture* such as, the way of life, the food , social conduct etc. (J1)

This naturally raises the issue of how aware the students were of the fact that learning a foreign language involves not only the development of language, but also intercultural

competence. This is evident, for example, from the following comment made by Agata, who, when asked about the impact of doing self-assessment on her, observed:

I became more aware. Yeah. I became more aware definitely. Intercultural, looking at the intercultural, doing the-- all the things – language and reading because I did Cambridge exams, I kind of knew it so that's-- *that wasn't really new to me but intercultural* ... Yeah. *I became more aware and more I suppose open to other opinions* and ... I was never the person who said: "This is my opinion and this is the way it should be". No, I wasn't that but *now I know that there are other ways of thinking* (TAP INT)

Her observation indicates that whereas the students might have developed strictly metalinguistic awareness, they may not have had the same type of awareness in relation to the intercultural dimension. This argument appears to be supported by Angelika, who claimed that, "*we almost never reflect on our intercultural abilities*" (J5). In addition, as far as the students' strategic knowledge is concerned, there is some evidence to suggest that they may have lacked specific strategies to develop their intercultural competence. When asked about their strategies in relation to the above, two students mentioned travelling abroad, while another three students admitted not having any specific strategies. For example, Lisa had this to say:

Strategy - like I don't think I really have a strategy. I don't know - just go out and interact with people from different cultures I suppose and then I think this degree all kind gives us intercultural competence [inaudible segment] just because of the people we are studying with. (1FG2)

It is encouraging to note, however, that the students' engagement with intercultural self-assessment made some of them aware of this aspect of learning a foreign language. For example, Danilo observed:

With regards to the Intercultural area, I ranked myself as being good at it, and this may depend on the fact that in my life I've had the opportunity of living and interacting with people from many different cultures, western and non-western ones. The intercultural field was therefore very comfortable for me to complete

and I found myself pretty much spread all over the various levels. This is to testify that, without me realizing it, my life experience has broadened my intercultural skills and knowledge. *This self-assessment has helped me to be aware of and appreciate those skills.* (J5)

While Danilo became more aware of “what it means to be culturally skilled” (ibid.), both Agata and Carla found the experience useful because it brought to the fore an awareness of their *savoir faire*. The former observed that intercultural self-assessment made her “*start analysing what way you behave yourself* or what way you react to certain things” (TAP INT). Carla in turn found self-assessment-induced reflection on her behaviour particularly useful in light of her study abroad experience:

Regarding the intercultural part I think that it is a very interesting section because *it makes you think about your own behaviour and as an international student I consider that I need plenty of time to sit down and think about it.* This is because I am coming from a different background therefore my culture it is not only different from the Irish one but it is also different from any other international classmate. And given the circumstances I really need to change my perspective and open myself in order to fit in and make these moments not only more pleasant but at the same time educational ones. (J5)

### **6.3 Maximising the potential of experiential learning in the language classroom: “interculturality in practice”**

One of the criticisms of the traditional mono-cultural approach to culture teaching in FLE concerns the accusation that it focuses, first of all, on a foreign language as the national language of a country where it is used, and secondly, on that country’s single and idealised culture (Risager 1998 pp.243-244). The emergence of an *intercultural* approach, as explained in Chapter Three, redresses the balance, although, according to Risager (1998 p.249), FLE should aim at promoting a *transcultural* approach, the impetus for which has been provided by:

the growing importance of cross-cultural personal contacts between learners [...], especially in situations where the target language is used as a *lingua franca*. This establishes a culturally complex situation encompassing at least three different cultures, including the cultural background of the target language.

Indeed, the ongoing internationalisation of higher education, discussed in Chapter One, means more multicultural (foreign language) classes, such as the one in this case study, where the emphasis is placed less on communication with native speakers of a given language, or “[t]he bilateral communicative model which has underpinned FL learning” (Mughan 1999 p.62), and more “on all aspects of communication across cultures, and in all kinds of situations”, including instances where the foreign language is used as a *lingua franca* (Álvarez 2007 p.127). Therefore, whereas learning the culture of the host country remains undoubtedly a priority for international students, the multicultural nature of the language classroom appears to offer opportunities for students to develop their intercultural competence in a much broader sense as they come into contact with not one, but various cultures in class. The language classroom then has the potential to provide students “with a healthy dose of experiential learning” that is said to be characteristic of study abroad in general (Hopkins 1999) but that is not associated with a formal learning context (Penington and Wildermuth 2005).

However, as a number of authors have pointed out (Swaminathan and Alfred 2003, Otten 2003, Sheridan 2011), and research evidence has confirmed, an assumption that is sometimes made in light of such cultural diversity, namely that it *must* lead to intercultural learning, is incorrect. For example, Furlong and Kennedy (forthcoming) in their investigation into the impact of a tandem learning experience on the development of intercultural communicative competence in a class comprising international and host students found that there was an “absence of contact between Irish and international

students over the 1.5 years of shared modules/learning prior to this exchange”. The feedback from the students in this case study seems to confirm further the hypothesis that multiculturalism on campus does not guarantee intercultural learning. This is evident first of all from the comments made by two of the students who juxtaposed their experience in the LAN01 classroom with that in other classes. Keiko had this to say:

I really feel that in this class I met so many students from many countries and I - well they were in my class in first semester as well but *I didn't really talk to them but in this class I could talk with them* and I could hear their opinion so I think *I knew much about many other cultures now...* (Keiko; INT)

In a similar vein, when asked to assess her intercultural competence having completed the module, Hanna made the following observation:

I think my language skills ... they way they're-- I mean they're getting better but I don't think that's the main thing that has changed. I really *think it is the intercultural thing* 'cause *even though the last semester we were in a mixed class* as well or intercultural class but we never really-- or *I didn't really discuss things with the other* do you know *about our countries* and it was just talking about the school (INT)

As is evident from the above comments, both students emphasised lack of (intercultural) interaction between themselves and other international students in the classes they had attended previously. Conversely, a few students found the LAN01 module quite interactive. As Agata recalled:

we worked in groups for different modules as well but this module especially is *very interacting - interactive* and you know it makes it much more interesting and you learn-- *it's not only you know a lecturer giving you information and you just take notes* and that's it and then you go home and you forget about it or you read it but you're not exactly sure but *when you have discussions* and you talk and *that's how you learn* and that's actually how it sinks in and sometimes without you even realising it (INT)

The above quotes also illustrate the general consensus that existed among the students that the multicultural character of the class was beneficial for their intercultural development. The following remarks were indicative of this view, signalled by eleven students:

It was so fascinating studying together with students from Spain, Japan, Colombia, Poland, Switzerland,... At the end of this course *I feel like I could go to almost any country in this world* and come along well because I got to know all these nice people from all over the world. (Angelika; J6)

Most importantly though, the class' multicultural environment has taught me that understanding and tolerance of "the different" are the basis of good communication among people. (Danilo; J6)

In light of the research evidence quoted above, one may ask why exactly the students found the module so useful in terms of their intercultural development. It seems that the reason for this was that whereas, as is evident from my fieldnotes, "culture instruction" was present to some extent in Liz's classroom (i.e. she tried to broaden the students' understanding of the Irish culture and the concept of culture in general), intercultural learning that took place was to a large extent a result of *learner interdependence*. Even though the students were not always specific in their reflections about the factors that had made the module worthwhile in terms of intercultural learning (see, for instance, the quotes above), two factors seem to have played a particularly important role.

The first of these concerns the fact that the students had opportunities to listen to their classmates sharing information about their own cultures in class, as the following observation made by Kaori illustrates:

Before I start this lecture, I only knew the friend who's from the same university and after that I knew the many of the class mates and they are from the different countries and *in the class they talk their own culture or experience*

and so I saw any other cultures and the beliefs and so I think *my intercultural skills improve a little* (INT)

A number of fieldnotes that I wrote during classroom observations include examples of the students taking the initiative during class time to share knowledge about their own cultures. For instance, in response to watching a video about problems facing fabric producers from developing countries, a student from Kenya decided to bring some African *lessos* to the class and talked to her classmates about their purpose. Below is an extract from my fieldnotes describing this event:

Aileen comes to the front of the room with some sheets of cotton. She says that in “The dollar a day dress” video they watched in class, African cotton was mentioned and that in Kenya there’s a lot of African fabric. She mentions a particular street which is known as the street of the *lesso*. She shows the cloth to the students [...] – they are very colourful and the students are listening to her fascinated. She says that each of these sheets contains a printed proverb or words of wisdom and she translates a few of them from Swahili into English. Olivia asks where one can wear these clothes and Aileen answers that you “never ever” wear them outside the house. Daria asks whether one doesn’t wear underwear underneath, to which the students laugh. Aileen also explains that the sheets can be used to carry babies. [...] Aileen explains further that the sheets can be worn either as a two-piece dress or can be sewn together as one piece – she demonstrates a dress she had made for herself. Someone asks why the dress shouldn’t be worn outside the house and Aileen replies that if you wear it outside, it means you are very poor. She then shows another piece of cloth and explains that the striped ones are worn by men and that they are called *kikoi* whereas women’s ones are called *lessos*. (OB5)

As the above quote shows, the students responded with genuine interest to Aileen’s presentation on that particular aspect of her own culture; furthermore, in their subsequent reflections a few of them acknowledged the value of such peer-led “culture teaching”. For example, Daria, who by her own admission, lacked experience with Kenyan culture, was appreciative of Aileen’s initiative(s):

We also got a chance during the session to listen to some peoples experience, which was very enhance for a globalised citizen. *I liked when Aileen was talking about Kenya, because I do not know many people from African continent, who are keen on talking about problems and culture.* (J6)

Although, as my fieldnotes show, on a few occasions it was Liz who sought a student's view on an issue related to his or her culture, often it was the peer teaching sessions that were used by the students themselves for the purpose of such "culture teaching": for instance, during the session on education, the Japanese member of the teacher group announced that the presentation would be done "Japanese style", which, according to her, meant that the students were "to 'listen carefully and quietly', [...] write everything they [said] on a piece of paper and that no questions [were] allowed" (OB11). During another peer teaching session, this time dedicated to the topic of child labour, Olivia talked about this problem in her own country, a fact that Isabel found helpful:

*I found specially useful how Olivia talked about the concrete case of her country, offering lots of interesting data that helped us, listeners, to go from global to local, from the abstract concept of child labour to the particular case of a fellow student's nation.* (RR)

The other factor that seems to have played a major role in the students taking more responsibility for their intercultural learning concerns, as signalled in section 4.5.2, the emphasis that was placed in the module on group work. In practice, this meant that Liz encouraged her students to interact with each other both in and out of class. As far as the former is concerned, Liz not only from very early on placed emphasis on the fact that, when posed with an issue for discussion, the students were expected to consider it in pairs or groups, rather than reflect on it individually, but also presented them with tasks that required of them to engage in collaborative learning in the classroom.

For instance, during the session dedicated to the phenomenon of global warming in week six, Liz first presented the students with a vocabulary list containing words and phrases pertinent to the topic before asking them to discuss their meanings in groups and then work on different vocabulary-related tasks such as, for example, writing a brief report using some of the words and phrases. On another occasion, the students formed groups based on cultural similarities<sup>86</sup> in class to work on an exercise for the tandem exchange whose purpose was, as Liz explained, “to find how we use colours to describe the world around us” (OB12). In their groups, the students were supposed to think of different expressions and associations involving colours in both the English language and in their mother tongues. Below is an extract from my fieldnotes:

Agata is not sure about the collocation “red meat” to talk about “raw meat”. Julia answers that you say “czerwone” [“red”] in Polish while Agata says that in Lithuanian you say “green meat” and *the others are surprised about this*. Julia comments that if in Polish you say that meat is green, it means “you shouldn’t be eating it” and *they find this difference “very interesting”*. (OB12)

Olivia adds that in Spanish and Italian they use the word “black” to describe anger and Liz finds it “interesting” but Ana then says that you don’t use the colour “black” in Spanish in that sense. They conclude then that the expression is not language but culture specific [Olivia speaks Spanish but is from Columbia]. Olivia adds as a joke that “maybe we [i.e. people from Columbia and Italy] turn black” and the students find it amusing. (OB12)

As the following quote illustrates, this particular exercise helped the students to understand something about culture in general:

It was also interesting the lesson about the ways of seeing colours depending on the different cultures. This practice was very helpful, as *we realised how colours link but also separate cultures*. For instance, in the European countries we divide colours in similar categories, but in some African countries they have a totally different classification. (Laura; J6)

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<sup>86</sup> For instance, one of the groups comprised students from Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine.

With regard to out of class interaction, a number of collaborative learning tasks were provided by Liz, which required that the students met in groups outside the contact hours. These tasks included the preparation for the tandem exchange in the first few weeks of the semester, and in the latter part, the preparation of short presentations on bodies and organisations related to globalisation as well as the peer teaching sessions<sup>87</sup>. The students' comments indicate that such activities were an important factor in them taking responsibility for their intercultural development, which seems to have been aided by the fact that the composition of the groups for both the presentations and the peer teaching sessions was decided by Liz with the criterion of cultural heterogeneity in mind. In the following interview extract Liz reflects on her rationale for this decision:

to maximise the learning potential of the classroom space when you have such a rich diverse group of students, you know, rather than have them all in their own nationality groupings I where possible try to either have the same groupings together focusing on something related to their own culture with a view to telling others or *mixing them* [...] I was trying to be mindful of those group dynamics in the classroom and getting the students at the micro-level of the classroom to learn about *interculturality in practice* (INT)

That this strategy was beneficial for the students is illustrated by the following comment from Hanna, whose own group comprised, in addition to herself, three other students - from Spain, China and Japan - and who described this experience as being "forced to work together":

I think it's nice we have to do the big presentation in-- like groups [inaudible segment] like my group is *completely mixed* I think that's the idea. [cross talk] Yeah. And I think that's good 'cause *we're forced to work together* even though maybe we have difficulties understanding each other (2FG1)

That the experience of group work benefited the students interculturally was acknowledged by several students. For example, for some of them it was an opportunity

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<sup>87</sup> In addition, a number of class outings were also organised at Liz's suggestion; this included two trips to the cinema and attending a concert given by one of the students.

to work with students from cultural backgrounds they were unfamiliar with. As Daria explained:

Thanks to the presentation, we have got also a chance to meet and *exchange ideas with some of the Japanese students*, which was not that easy before because of the different timetables. (J6)

When reflecting on her experience of group work, Agata in turn recalled how she and her group mates would “drift away” from the task at hand to share knowledge about their own and the others’ cultures:

I think it had an impact on me looking from the cultural side of you because for example even *when we were working in groups* - OK you do some work but then we-- I’ve noticed *we would drift away from the topic and start talking about* - I don’t know - *something in for example in Japan*, what’s happening in Japan or how do you do this or how-- you know so it was enriching very enriching so we learnt a lot of - or *I learnt a lot of things about other cultures and as I said I’ve learnt a lot about myself* [...] (INT)

working in groups it’s just *opened my eyes* you know and it’s very good. You see how the-- *you not only learn about the different cultures but also about your own* and the way people *ask you questions* about for example Lithuania you know and you start thinking about it and telling them [...]. (INT)

In other words, by working in culturally heterogeneous groups on common tasks, the students took responsibility for each other’s intercultural learning by sharing knowledge about their own cultures. Referring to Byram’s (1997) model of intercultural competence, the experience of working in groups seems to have fostered the acquisition of a range of different *savoirs*. These seem to have included first and foremost the knowledge component (*savoirs*), including knowledge not only about specific cultures but also culture in general. Agata acknowledged, for instance, the experiential dimension of group work:

it’s like *your vision expands*, you find out like- for example we have a student from Kenya in our group and *it’s amazing the way she was talking about tribes*

and what they do and things and she was just “Wow!” [impressed] you know because you don’t really think of it or you-- OK you can see in-- on the television but that’s nothing when you’re having a con- *we you come into the contact with another person who is from that place and can tell you exactly what it’s like* so I found it *very very enriching working in groups* and I have to say I loved it. (INT)

*Savoir comprendre* was another skill that seems to have been an important “by-product” of the students engaging in collaborative learning:

Especially when working in groups, I have noticed how different the reactions and ideas are from people who come from different countries. I find it very enriching to be able to share and *compare information about our cultures*. Sometimes I am pleasantly surprised to find the similarities, other times to see how different people's perspectives are. (Agata; J5)

There is also evidence to suggest that the experience had a beneficial role in the development of the students’ *savoir être*. For instance, whereas Keiko became more open towards other points of view, Hanna managed to overcome her own prejudice:

I think even I couldn’t do that in the whole class but *I tried to discuss in a small groups with other international students* and I think *now I can understand the students from other countries opinion more than before*, in like, I think before ...how do you say? I was like: “OK, that opinion is really original” and I wouldn’t think of that opinion in-- as a Japanese and I would think is just a strange opinion but now I know that everyone is from different cultures and they have different background and I think *I can respect their opinion more than before* so I think that is the biggest achievement in this modules ... (Keiko; INT)

Constantly I find myself talking to people from countries *I would not have known* unless I started this course and I have wondered how I will be able to corporate with students from different countries *without feeling either superior or just judgemental*. So *I have worked hard* and found that *there is no need for prejudices* because deep down we are all the same and we all want the same in this course. I has been the most *eye opening experience* for me and for that i am thankful. (Hanna; J5)

However, it needs to be pointed out that in spite of the above-mentioned benefits, collaborative learning was also a source of problems for some of the students. In section 5.4 I explain the various difficulties that the students experienced when preparing for and delivering presentations that were the outcome of their collaborative work. As far as the former is concerned, these included also the problems the students experienced when working in multicultural groups, an issue that is particularly important from the perspective of this study. While some of the problems mentioned can be said to be characteristic of group work in general (in relation to arranging meetings, one's own learning style being not compatible with group work, not being able to depend on team mates, and lack of experience), others appear to be more relevant to working in culturally heterogeneous groups. More precisely, six students mentioned dealing with different cultures as sometimes problematic, although it does not seem that the students experienced any major difficulties. Aiko wrote, for instance:

Moreover, presentations and group work encouraged to realize globalization. There were three colleagues who had different nationalities and age in my group. They had different opinions and perspective compared to me. I sometimes felt *it was a little bit troublesome*, but mostly it was very fun and interesting to spend time talking with them. (J6)

In addition, some students found it difficult to take an active role in group work, in particular as they thought they were incapable of expressing their own opinions. The following two quotes corroborate this point from two different perspectives:

Only maybe in my presentation group I think I tried to speak but also there're, like, Polish girl, German girl and they had a really strong opinion so *sometimes I couldn't really speak* so I don't think of any impact that I made but they did have big impact on me. (Keiko; INT)

OLIVIA: [...] Sometimes is difficult you know to understand. For example, the Japanese people they have a little-- I don't know, *they don't want to talk too much* and ...

LISA: They are very very *quiet*.

OLIVIA: Quiet yes. So ... but again is interesting because we learn they are not as [cross talk]

LISA: Talkative. [cross talk]

HANNA: *You have to talk to them* because in our group there is a Spanish girl and she is ...

OLIVIA: We tend to talk a little [inaudible segment]

HANNA: Yeah 'cause-- no, yeah and I talk to her 'cause she has like no difficulties understanding me and the opposite way and then there is a Japanese girl and she is-- she really wants to talk and I really want to talk to her and ... but *sometimes she just doesn't talk* but we still-- it's a nice thing to try as well that we have to kind of make her part of the group and as soon as you talk to her, she will like just talk away and I think that's nice experience as well. Yeah.

(2FG1)

Related to this is the issue of some of the students following the decisions made by the group, for which insufficient language skills appear to be possibly partly to blame. For instance, in relation to the former point, Keiko observed: "I worked with group members. They made a plan of presentation like that and so *I followed them* and so I worked by the guideline" (INT). The latter in turn is illustrated by the following comment made by Shinobu: "We did a lot of group works in the lecture. Actually I did not like it at first, because *my English in to so good*" (J6).

In addition, the students did not appear to be able to benefit from one other form of collaborative learning that was included, although not central, in the module<sup>88</sup>, and which is generally believed to be beneficial in terms of fostering intercultural learning (see section 3.3), namely the asynchronous telecollaboration in English with a class of French students via the "Share" function of the LOLIPOP ELP. This fact was recognised by both the students and Liz herself. For example, one of the students

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<sup>88</sup> The exchange was not mentioned either in the module descriptor or the assessment information.

observed in one of the end-of-semester questionnaires that the students “didn’t actually have a exchange it was more one sided” (Q1); in a similar vein, during one class Liz said that “even though both sides did a lot of work on the exchange, there’s been no “linkage” yet between classes and encourage[d] them to work on it” (OB9). According to O’Dowd and Ritter (2006 p.623), “failed communication” in online exchanges is by no means an exception, and the student feedback on this activity suggests a number of issues that may have been behind the students not utilising its potential for intercultural learning. Following O’Dowd and Ritter (2006), these factors can be classified into three categories: individual (which concerns how the students approached the exchange); classroom (which concerns how the exchange was organised); and socio-institutional (in relation to problems with technology and a certain lack of synchronisation between the two courses).

#### **6.4 Sowing the seeds of intercultural citizenship education**

In section 5.5 I explain how the political-critical perspective on learner autonomy, itself embedded in the discipline of critical pedagogy, strives to open language learners towards “cultural alternatives”, to help them develop their “insurgent voices” (Pennycook 1997), and ultimately, to transform the world around them. One can see therefore parallels between this particular view on autonomy in learning and another emerging concept in the FLE, namely education for intercultural citizenship (Byram 2008), which combines education for intercultural communicative competence with political education. For Byram (ibid. p.187; emphasis added), the aim of this new approach is to help educate *intercultural* citizens capable of *acting* transnationally with members of other cultures with a view to “*promotion of change or improvement* in the social or personal lives of the intercultural individuals or their fellows”. In other words, rather than focusing exclusively on helping learners to develop intercultural

communicative competence, teachers should aim at encouraging them to *use* the language and intercultural competences they have acquired to take action, ideally in co-operation with people of other cultural and linguistic backgrounds, oriented towards redressing some of the problems facing some wider community. According to Byram (ibid.), it is possible to distinguish between five levels of “acting interculturally”. The first level involves, in his view, learners “engag[ing] with others (through documents and artefacts or ‘in person’ [...]) and reflect[ing] critically on their own assumptions, and those of the other” (ibid. p.212). The second level in turn adds an expectation that learners will consider alternatives to the current situation in their own society. Moving on to level three, learners are not only expected to *think* of possible alternatives, but also *implement* changes in their own society, while, on the next level, having formed a “transnational community” with learners from other countries, they take action to instigate change in their own societies. The fifth and final level requires that “learners from two or more societies identify an issue that they act upon as a transnational group” (ibid. p.213) such as, for example, promoting language rights for minorities in a region overlapping national boundaries (ibid. p.218).

Turning to LAN01, the students acknowledged the fact that the exploration of the theme of globalisation helped to raise their awareness of various social justice issues globally and see them from a variety of angles. As is evident from the discussion in section 5.5, this process made some of them consider possible alternatives to such problems, and, in a few cases, take concrete action, albeit individually, to address them. Therefore, it can be argued that embracing the political-critical perspective on learner autonomy via critical language pedagogy allowed the students to *embark* on the process of “acting interculturally”, although an issue that merits further attention concerns how

international students may use their “insurgent voices” (Pennycook 1997) in a way that has been suggested by Byram (2008). This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

## **6.5 Conclusions: developing learner autonomy and intercultural competence in a multicultural foreign language classroom**

Drawing on the research findings presented in this and the preceding chapter, the purpose of this concluding section is to focus on the issue of how developing learner autonomy and intercultural competence is intertwined in a multicultural foreign language classroom. The discussion in this section then aims to address the gap in the literature on autonomy identified by Benson (2006 p.25; emphasis added) and which concerns the issue of how “foreign language study necessarily involves *inter-cultural* learning”.

As the results of this study demonstrate, the process of intercultural learning can be made inherent in the process of developing autonomy in a culturally diverse language classroom. More precisely, not only is it possible to integrate the four perspectives on learner autonomy into classroom practice, but also the scope of each of them can be broadened to include an intercultural dimension to foreign language teaching and learning. In other words, it is possible to move beyond “the level of noble aspirations” (Caffrey 2004 p.111) and to initiate a process of transformation in learners that will encourage them to take responsibility for their intercultural language learning.

With regard to the technical perspective, the data collected in this study show that incorporating an ELP with an enhanced intercultural dimension into classroom practice has the *potential* to help international students to focus on planning, monitoring and

evaluating not only language, but also intercultural learning. Engaging in this process is important also because it can help to broaden learners' metacognitive knowledge in relation to it, particularly by bringing to the fore an awareness of what it means to be an intercultural competent communicator and the extent to which one fulfils those criteria. In this way, working with the tool can be said to foster the development of "the competence to learn cultures autonomously" (Sercu 2002 p.72).

In addition, studying in a multicultural language classroom provides international students with the opportunity to benefit from experiential learning. Whereas collaborative learning is said to be conducive to the development of learner autonomy (see section 2.2.3), in a classroom environment too often the focus is on target language use, while less attention has been paid to how group work can assist learners in developing autonomy in intercultural language learning.

According to Littlewood (2002 p.34; emphasis added), "[t]he aim [of collaborative learning] is that each group within the class should be a *learning community* within the broader learning community of the whole class". The discussion in this chapter has demonstrated that group work did indeed help to create such "micro" learning communities within the "broader learning community" of the LAN01 classroom. On the "micro" level, "forcing" the learners to work with one another on a common goal assisted the students not only in taking responsibility for their language development, but also the acquisition of intercultural competence as the students sought and shared cultural information with each other, reflected on cultural similarities and differences, and generally developed a more open attitude to intercultural communication. This process was supported further on the "macro" level by some of the students taking the

initiative to raise their classmates' awareness about their own cultures. The outcome of these two parallel processes was the intercultural learning that was noted by many of the students in the module.

Finally, as far as the interconnectedness of developing autonomy and intercultural competence is concerned, we should not neglect the potential of critical language pedagogy for helping international students to become intercultural citizens capable of “acting interculturally” with a view to instigating change in a wider society. It can be argued that studying in a multicultural classroom makes it possible for international students to form yet another type of learning community - a *transnational* community (Byram 2008) - which places emphasis not only on, to paraphrase Pennycook (1997 p.47), finding other ways of “thinking and being” (which is already implied in an intercultural approach to FLE), but rather on alternative ways of *acting* in and *on* the world.

On the other hand, it has to be borne in mind that, as explained in Chapter Two, fostering autonomy in the language classroom is by no means an easy task. Indeed, the data show that this type of pedagogy was problematic for the students for a number of reasons, which can be classified as obstacles that were somehow “inherent” in the students, e.g. in relation to their beliefs and prior learning experiences, and those that relate more to the activities that they engaged in over the course of the module. Whereas I have discussed the positive impact of such activities on the development of autonomy in intercultural language learning, the data analysis has also shown that working with an interculturally enhanced ELP model, reflection writing and group work was also a source of problems for many of the students in this study. According to Krishnan and

Hwee Hoon (2002 p.235; emphasis added), learners can be “*either motivated* by a new learning experience, and [take] it as a challenge, or *resist[...]* the unfamiliar activity”. They go on to say that consequently, their “emotional reactions to activities *cannot be ignored* if learning opportunities are to be optimized” (ibid.). Extrapolating this conclusion to the findings of this study, it can be argued that ignoring the difficulties experienced by students with the above-mentioned activities may make the development of autonomy more difficult, and consequently have also an adverse effect on the development of intercultural competence. To give just one example, by not taking into account the fact that the process of self-assessment may be uncomfortable for some students, language professionals risk that they will be unwilling to work with the portfolio and as a result, will miss on the opportunity it seems to offer for managing the intercultural language learning process.

Having discussed the interrelationship of learner autonomy and intercultural competence in a culturally diverse foreign language classroom, and the role that different elements, namely an interculturally-enhanced version of the ELP, reflection, group work and the emphasis on critical language pedagogy, can play in the process of fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning, this thesis turns now to the implications of the study findings for research and practice. These are examined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

*Once the students depart [...] the 'ball is in their court' [...]. It is clear [...] that ultimately the people who are really in a position to control their own destiny are the students themselves, but in this they may need assistance. (Ife 2000 pp.35-36)*

### 7.1 Introduction

This thesis has begun by asking how international students can be supported in the foreign language classroom in the development of autonomy in intercultural language learning. To investigate this issue, a qualitative case study was designed, the findings of which are presented in Chapters Five and Six. However, since a qualitative case study researcher wants to move from “case-bound, past-tense assertions about what *happened* to present-tense assertions about what *happens*” (Dyson and Genishi 2005 p.115; emphasis original), the purpose of this chapter is, firstly, to consider a number of important issues that arise from considering the findings of the study in relation to its two main areas of concern, namely international and foreign language education (section 7.2). Secondly, because an educational case study is expected to feed into educational practice (Bassey 1999 p.58, Simons 2009 p.21), this chapter also examines the possible implications of the study for teaching and learning. More specifically, it suggests criteria for the development of courses oriented towards fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning among international students (7.3). Finally, this chapter also makes a number of recommendations for further research aimed at increasing our understanding of this process (7.4).

### 7.2 Study implications for international and foreign language education

Research into the outcomes of study abroad has become an important line of inquiry in the field of international education. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition among

international educators that such research should include not only linguistic, but also intercultural aspects of the experience since, as pointed out by Coleman (1998 p.197), “[t]o limit residence abroad research to the linguistic outcomes is to distort the experience”. This growing interest in the impact of study abroad can be attributed to the fact that:

In an era of ever-greater accountability and cost-benefit analysis, *hard evidence is being demanded* to demonstrate that investments in various forms of education, including study abroad, are worthy ones that are realizing their learning objectives. (Paige et al. 2004 p.253; emphasis added)

Yet, while research into linguistic and intercultural impact of study abroad is needed to advance educators’ knowledge, the findings of this study demonstrate that international students are also likely to feel the need to be able to monitor their progress during the limited time some of them spend in the host country. Even though empirical research suggests that learners can develop interculturally and linguistically while abroad (see, for example, Freed 1998, Engle and Engle 2004, Jackson 2006, Rees and Klapper 2007, Llanes and Muñoz 2009, Williams 2005, Gill 2007, Ruddock and Turner 2007), not providing them with the opportunity to set their own language *and* intercultural objectives prior to, or at the beginning, of a sojourn and then assessing the extent to which they have been achieved makes it difficult for students, as well as the teaching body, to monitor the progress made. That such a monitoring tool is vital for the process of intercultural learning is emphasised by the findings of Helm’s (2009) study, which examined the impact of a telecollaboration project on the development of one student’s intercultural competence. The author concludes that it is impossible to know if the student’s *savoirs*, detectable from his diaries, can be attributed to his participation in the project, or whether they existed *prior to* his engagement in it (ibid. p.101).

In relation to the current study, it appears that working with an ELP with an enhanced intercultural dimension, such as the LOLIPOP ELP, can be useful in this regard as it helps learners to self-assess their language *and* intercultural competence, set learning objectives and *monitor* if they are being achieved.

However, the findings of the study also point to a number of factors that need to be considered if international students are to take full advantage of such a portfolio for developing autonomy in intercultural language learning. The first of these concerns the issue of the implementation of the ELP in the language classroom. Bruen and Sudhershnan (2009 p.101; emphasis added) recommend that, “[I]n order to realize the tool’s potential [...] it is important that [it] *be introduced theoretically* before it is actively used, and that the ELP be *properly integrated* into a language course”. The case study findings indeed seem to support the need for a careful introduction and integration of the portfolio into classroom practice. The reason for this is that without it, few students may make the vital leap from setting their own learning objectives to actually working on them. As Little (2007b p.10; emphasis added) puts it, “it is all too likely that unless the introduction of the ELP is appropriately embedded, it will *sink without trace*”.

Another important issue pertinent to the relationship between the ELP and fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning concerns lack of international students’ experience with “one of the pillars of learner autonomy” (Harris 1997 p.12), i.e. self-assessment. That this may not be unique to this particular student group is indicated by the results of a survey conducted with another cohort of international students who participated in the same module, LAN01, in the year previous to the current study. In that particular class, out of the twenty-one students surveyed, “[o]nly one [...] had ever

been asked to conduct a self-assessment exercise before starting that class” (Crosbie and Sudhershnan 2009 pp.13-14). However, it seems to be misleading to assume that this particular problem concerns exclusively international students. On the contrary, writing in the context of Irish higher education, Bruen and Sudhershnan (2009 p.97; emphasis added) state that:

The process of self-assessment can be a difficult one for student language learners, in part because many students enter university *with little or no experience of a process of this kind*. They are used to an assessment system in which they complete course work, tests and exams, and are then informed by an external source, such as a teacher or examiner, what their level is in their different subject areas. Classroom work that is based on a system of self-reflection and self-assessment *may therefore seem very alien*.

Furthermore, it is reasonable to expect that lack of prior self-assessment experience was closely related to the other problems that the students in this study experienced when assessing their own competence, namely the difficulty in being objective about their own skills and the discomfort some of them felt during the activity. Self-assessment can be described as “the art of balance between self-denigration and self-inflation” (Heron 1988 p.86) and it seems that in many cases the students lacked such an “art”. In addition, it has to be pointed out that some of the students blamed their cultural backgrounds for the need to *under-estimate* their competence. The role that the learner’s culture plays in self-assessment appears to be an under-investigated area of research. While Harris (1997 p.12) observes that, “in many countries the very concept of self-assessment goes against deep-rooted cultural expectations about learning”, few empirical studies seem to have been conducted to examine this particular issue. One exception concerns Blue’s (1988) study, in which the author examined the correlation between learners’ nationalities and the discrepancies between their self-assessment and tutor assessment. His findings seem to give support to the view that culture may indeed play a role in

accurate self-assessment as the author found that certain nationality groups were more prone to overestimate their skills, while others showed the opposite tendency. The results of this study support therefore the need for more research into the issue.

Another major difficulty experienced by the students in this study concerns the perceived “vagueness” of intercultural self-assessment. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the issue of whether learners are able to assess their own intercultural competence is a contentious one, with some authors arguing against this idea. The findings from this study seem to support Little and Simpson’s (2003 p.5) argument according to which “the components of intercultural competence may well be opaque in the absence of reflected intercultural experience”; it was exactly such intercultural experience that appears to have made the self-assessment experience more meaningful for some of the students.

On the other hand, it also needs to be pointed out that intercultural self-assessment, in spite of its “vagueness”, also appears to have the potential to raise international students’ awareness of the intercultural dimension of foreign language learning. It therefore enables us to make a tentative claim that, to paraphrase Little (2006 p.184; emphasis added), “the ELP [can have] its intended impact on the development of intercultural learning and *intercultural awareness*”. It is argued that:

In attempting to self-assess their intercultural competence, learners are [...] forced to consider what this “intercultural competence” might be, what their own level of intercultural competence is, and whether it should be and how it might be improved/changed, all at the same time. In other words, in attempting to use the six global descriptors for intercultural competence [...] they are not only attempting to assess their own level but *to work out what it is that they are assessing*. (Bruen and Sudhershnan 2009 p.97; emphasis added)

This specific finding that emerged from the case study is particularly important since the students may have lacked knowledge not only in relation to the importance of the intercultural dimension of language learning (i.e. task knowledge), but also in relation to the specific strategies that they could use to improve their intercultural competence (i.e. strategic knowledge). In a similar vein, it is argued that, “learners are frequently unsure about the nature of intercultural competence itself” (Bruen and Sudhershan 2009 p.97), and that they “lack strategies for culture learning and do not have a coherent overall plan for learning the culture or developing intercultural communication skills” (Cohen et al. 2005 p.16; as cited in Álvarez, Beaven and Garrido 2008 p.179).

The question that merits further investigation then concerns the issue of whether writing reflections in an ELP with an enhanced intercultural dimension can further support the development of students’ metacognitive knowledge in relation to intercultural language learning. Reflection is considered to be vital for the development of intercultural competence (McAllister , Whiteford, Hill, Thomas and Fitzgerald 2006); yet, in the context of FLE, we know that journal writing may be perceived by some students as difficult, a conclusion also supported by the findings of this study. As Krishnan and Hwee Hoon (2002 p.227; emphasis added) explain, “if learners are forced to keep a diary (which may be an unfamiliar task to them) and to use a language that is not their native language, *they may not find the task simple*”. Matsumoto (1996 p.147) in turn suggests that “learners tend to just ‘go forward, but not backward’, i.e. [they] do not usually voluntarily reflect upon their own learning processes, analysing and evaluating their classroom L2 learning experience”.

Although potentially difficult, reflection writing, as demonstrated by the findings of this study, is nonetheless invaluable for gaining insight into international students' metacognitive knowledge (including person, strategic and task knowledge), and therefore vital for supporting the development of autonomy in intercultural language learning. One of the key issues that emerged from the students' journals is the fact that many of them seemed to acknowledge the vital role of autonomy in the learning process, while some of them were also positive about their own level of autonomy. Although this finding may seem surprising considering the fact that some of them appear to have come from traditional, i.e. teacher-centred, educational systems, it gives credence to Littlewood's (1999) warning against compartmentalising students on the basis of their cultural background. Chan (2001 p.513; emphasis added) reports a similar conclusion in her study of beliefs of tertiary Hong Kong students of English:

All in all, there were strong indications of a *highly positive attitude towards learning autonomously than one would expect in the local context*. The study results were unexpected and somewhat surprising given the fact that this group of learners largely came from traditional and authoritative backgrounds. It was very likely that they had little or no previous autonomous learning experience nor had they received any learner training in such direction.

However, the findings that have emerged from the current study also indicate that, in spite of appreciating the need for developing learner autonomy, international students may consider the process difficult and disorientating. According to Krishnan and Hwee Hoon (2002 p.232), international students possess different "agendas", or beliefs, in relation to their expectations of language learning, which they develop as a result of prior learning experiences. In their own words:

It is perfectly understandable that learners have such beliefs, since they spend a reasonable amount of time in the learning environment *being exposed to teachers using various methods*. (ibid. p.231)

The findings of this study indeed appear to indicate that international students' prior learning experiences, or the "educational baggage" they bring with them into the language classroom, may play an important role in the development of learner autonomy. First of all, they provide support to Swaminathan and Alfred's (2003 p.31; emphasis added) observation concerning the fact that "immigrants [...] arrive with images about higher education cultures and some are often both *surprised* and *dismayed* at what they meet in the new country". Secondly, the study also highlights the phenomenon of "learning shock" (Gu and Maley 2008) that is caused by the discrepancies that may exist between international students' prior learning experiences and those at the host university.

Moreover, the fact that the process of autonomous learning was perceived by some students as difficult further underlines the need, emphasised in the literature, for gauging students' beliefs concerning autonomy *prior to* attempts to implement it in their classrooms. This is because, as Krishnan and Hwee Hoon (2002 p.231) point out, just as learners have their own beliefs about language learning, so, too, do teachers. As a consequence:

When the learner's expectations match the teacher's beliefs, there is a strong possibility that learning will take place. [...] At other times, the learner's agenda *may be in conflict* with other people's. (ibid.)

It seems that such conflict may also occur where the focus is on intercultural language learning. This is because, as Sercu (2006 p.69) points out, even if teachers are committed to adopting a more learner-centred approach to fostering intercultural competence, a conflict of interests may occur, i.e. the teacher may want his or her students "to become independent explorers of cultures, but students [may] prefer teacher-directed instruction". Krishnan and Hwee Hoon (2002) go on to say that where

such mismatches occur and cannot be resolved, *resistance* on the part of learners is possible, e.g. through non-participation in classroom activities, disruptive behaviour or even absenteeism. Even though there is no evidence to suggest that the students in this case study engaged in this type of resistance, this possibility certainly should not be ignored. Encouragingly, as the findings of the case study have shown, some students were capable of expanding and modifying their metacognitive knowledge, which seems to confirm Amuzie and Winke's (2009) conclusion that international students' beliefs are dynamic in nature, although we also need to bear in mind that changing learner beliefs in general is "a slow process" (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002 p.121).

Turning to the socio-cultural perspective on fostering learner autonomy, it has often been argued that because of its lack of emphasis on experiential learning, the language classroom is not sufficient in itself for the acquisition of intercultural competence (e.g. Penington and Wildermuth 2005). However, a *multicultural* environment, such as the LAN01 classroom, appears to have a rich potential for its development. In Dlaska's (2000 p.252; emphasis added) view, "teaching foreign languages in increasingly multicultural, and multi-ethnic classrooms offer[s] us new *ways and unique chances* in our approach towards introducing cultural awareness". She goes on to say that:

the topic of Turkish citizens living in Germany takes on new dimensions in a German class with Turkish students. In the end, one of the most important skills we may provide our students with in preparing them for the international workplace is '*learning how to learn from one another*'. (ibid.; emphasis added)

The findings of this study show that it is possible to "encourag[e] [learners] to investigate for themselves the otherness around them" (Byram, Nichols and Stevens 2001 p.3), although, bearing in mind the "diversity paradox" (Fortuijn 2002) that is inherent in the internationalisation of higher education, the process cannot be taken for

granted. Rather, as the students' feedback demonstrates, opportunities must be created for the students to take advantage of cultural diversity in the classroom as otherwise they may fail to interact with one another in class. Volet (2004 p.4; emphasis added) observes, for instance, that:

If students declare that they prefer to stay with their own groups and if teachers believe that students perform better in self-generated groups, then students will continue to study in parallel and *opportunities for intercultural learning will be missed*.

This brings us to the issue of, to paraphrase one of the LAN01 students, "forcing" international students to work together by means of collaborative learning such as peer teaching. According to Nakata (2007 pp.48-49; emphasis added), fostering learner autonomy in the classroom context can take two different forms: explicit and implicit. Whereas in the former the goal of autonomy and how it can be achieved is directly discussed with students (e.g. by introducing them to the ELP), in the latter the teacher "provide[s] *opportunities* for learner autonomy to flourish" by encouraging social interaction and freedom of choice (e.g. in relation to choosing project topics) (ibid.). The results of this study indeed support the argument about the beneficial role that this "implicit" approach in the form of collaborative learning can play in developing learner responsibility (see, for instance, Carpenter 1996, Nakata 2007), although we have to bear in mind that "virtually no models of cooperative learning methods designed specifically for L2 classroom learning [exist]" (Allen 2006 p. 12),

However, as demonstrated by this study, collaborative learning in culturally heterogeneous groups can also lead to what can be referred to as "intercultural interdependence", i.e. a situation in which working towards a common goal provides students with the opportunity to develop an understanding of their own and others'

cultures. This particular finding supports therefore the general belief in the beneficial effect of this mode of learning on promoting intercultural education (see, for example, Manning and Lucking 1993, Coehlo 1994, Batelaan and van Hoof 1996, Volet 2004, Eisenchlas and Trevaskes 2007). Coehlo's (1994 p.25; emphasis added) argument in particular is worth quoting in full:

Cooperative learning provides an environment that *equalizes the status of students*. The shared goals of the group members result in a common sense of identity and purpose. Shared goals foster positive interpersonal interaction and the frequent, meaningful and mutually supportive contact *helps students view each other in non-stereotypical ways*. By assigning students to work in heterogeneous groups, the teacher makes a strong statement about expectations that students can - and - will work effectively and cooperatively with people of different backgrounds. In fact, *more may be achieved by this kind of organizational change in the classroom than by any amount of reading, writing and overt talking about race relations*.

A question that arises in light of such positive impact of collaborative learning on intercultural learning, and which will be addressed in the following section, concerns the issue of what language professionals can do to ensure that the latter is not a kind of “by-product” of collaborative learning activities, but rather a specific learning goal.

At the same time it needs to be borne in mind that working collaboratively in multicultural groups may be a challenging experience. As is evident from the student feedback in this study, peer teaching appears to be particularly demanding on learners during both the preparatory and the teaching phases, which raises the issue of support that may be required of the teacher if students are to benefit from it. In particular, not all students may feel able to take an active part in group work. According to Batelaan and van Hoof (1996 p.14), participation in collaborative learning activities can be affected by students' “status” that is “determined by expectations [...] of other group members,

of the teacher, of oneself”. The data presented in section 6.3 show that such expectations may indeed have affected the ability of some students to participate more fully in collaborative activities. In addition, insufficient language skills appear to be partly to blame. As Volet (2004 p.6; emphasis added) points out, students whose foreign language competence is underdeveloped “are inhibited in their capacity to grasp concepts quickly, read complex materials, think analytically and *engage in argumentative discussions*”. It is important therefore that such issues are taken into account if international students are to benefit from collaborative learning.

Finally, this study also highlights the need to embrace the political-critical perspective on learner autonomy in an autonomy-oriented classroom, which, according to Oxford (2003 p.90), “is very important and was ignored for too long within applied linguistics”. Its emphasis on the transformation of both the individual and the world around him / her suggests similarities with a relatively recent development in FLE, namely intercultural citizenship education (Byram 2008). What differentiates the two, however, is the latter’s emphasis on intercultural communicative competence as a prerequisite for embracing social change.

Consequently, this study has suggested that fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning at the political-critical level should involve encouraging learners to see the development of language and intercultural competence not as an end in itself, but rather as a means towards addressing issues of importance to a global community. In the words of Byram (2008 p.229), the new remit for language teachers entails “show[ing] learners how they can and should engage with the international globalised world in which they participate”. Raising critical themes and analysing them from

multiple perspectives appears particularly relevant to this purpose, as demonstrated by the fact that it can motivate students to either take action to instigate change or, in the very least, to consider it. An issue that has not, however, been addressed in this study, but which merits more attention concerns the challenge of facilitating international students in the creation of “transnational communities” that presuppose students interacting with people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds while working together towards a common goal that is of significance to a supranational, rather than solely national, society (Byram 2008 pp.186-190). Although a multicultural foreign language classroom can, by its very nature, be expected to be a space within which such communities can be created, more research is required to support this view.

Another important issue to be borne in mind concerns the issue of resistance that is often associated with the implementation of a critical curriculum (see, for example, Royal 2010). Although such resistance to the critical pedagogical approach taken by Liz was apparently absent from the LAN01 classroom, we should not forget that it can take place and that fostering autonomy always requires teachers being sensitive to students’ contexts of learning (Pennycook 1997). In addition, the teacher also needs to consider what stance to take when critical, and at times highly controversial issues, are discussed in the classroom. In other words, is it desirable (or even possible) for the teacher to remain “neutral” when facilitating classroom discussions on social justice issues (Kelly and Brandes 2001)? Kelly and Brandes (ibid.) recommend instead that the teacher’s stance should be one of “inclusive and situated engagement”, although as their research findings clearly demonstrate, not every teacher agrees with this point of view. The aims of this stance is:

- [...] to signal a concern to attend to the perspectives of excluded minorities;
- [...] to signal that all teachers (or knowers) are located within a particular

landscape of identities, values and social situations from which they view the world; and [...] to signal the need to make their viewpoints open to critique as well as to model reasoned inquiry and action. (ibid. pp.451-452; emphasis original)

### **7.3 Fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning in a multicultural foreign language classroom: criteria for course development**

As the quotation in the introduction to this chapter shows, responsibility for improving the quality of study abroad experience is increasingly placed in the hands of educators. This includes foreign language professionals who have been called “to try to ensure that students benefit to the maximum from their experience abroad” (Ife 2000 p.30). This study has argued that by encouraging international students to develop autonomy in intercultural language learning, language educators can indeed help them to make the most of the opportunities for language and intercultural development that studying in another country offers. Drawing on the findings of this study, the discussion in the preceding section and other relevant literature, the purpose of this section is to propose criteria that need to be met if language courses are to support international students in this process.

Firstly, taking into account the argument that fostering learner autonomy in the classroom is “*not* an optional extra” (Little, Ridley and Ushioda 2002 p.1; emphasis added), it is recommended that foreign language professionals should strive to integrate all four perspectives on learner autonomy identified in Chapter Two in their classrooms to ensure a holistic approach to the development of this capacity. In practical terms, this means that they should provide opportunities for learners to actively manage the learning process and to reflect on it in order to access and expand their metacognitive knowledge; create a collaborative learning environment so that learners can develop the

responsibility for their own and each other's learning; and finally, incorporate "teaching for social justice" so that learners can develop an understanding of the social and transformative character of the learning process.

Secondly, bearing in mind that "all language education should always also be intercultural education" (Sercu 2002 p.72), it is also recommended that language professionals should broaden the scope of each perspective to incorporate an intercultural dimension to learning a foreign language. Based on the results of this study, it appears that a combination of tools, activities and approaches can be particularly beneficial in this regard.

Since being an autonomous learner involves *inter alia* taking control of the learning management, it is important that international students are given the opportunity to engage in objective setting, monitoring and conducting self-assessment of both their language and intercultural competences. To this purpose, language professionals are recommended to use a version of the ELP that takes into account the dual nature of the foreign language learning process. The model that was investigated in this study - the LOLIPOP ELP - appears to fulfil this function well, although due to the limited nature of the exposure to it by the students, more research is required to explore not only its full potential, but also pitfalls. However, irrespective of the model used, it needs to be borne in mind that the implementation of the ELP "may meet with some *resistance* on the part of students" (Bruen and Sudhershnan 2009 p.101; emphasis added), especially since international students may lack exposure to learner-centred modes of education that the ELP promotes.

Consequently, it is recommended that not only should the ELP be carefully introduced to students, including the explanation of the principles behind it (Bruen and Sudhershan 2009), but also that its introduction should be preceded by what González (2008) refers to as “an ELP-oriented pedagogy”. Based on the outcomes of this study, it can be argued that “an ELP-oriented pedagogy” should first of all involve developing an awareness of international students’ learner beliefs which, as argued by Krishnan and Hwee Hoon (2002) are formed on the basis of their prior learning experiences. Understanding such beliefs is important as it can signal to the teacher some of the problems that students may encounter when asked to not only work with the ELP (e.g. lack of self-assessment experience), but also develop learner autonomy in general (e.g. not being used to use English for communicative purposes in the classroom). In practical terms, this means that language professionals should make an effort to probe students’ “readiness for autonomy” (Cotterall 1995), which may be achieved by means of questionnaires such as BALLI (e.g. Carter 1999). However, as demonstrated by this study’s findings, language professionals may get a better insight into students’ beliefs, attitudes and expectations by encouraging them to engage in a guided process of written reflection. This is because, as concluded by Sakui and Gaies (1999 p.486; emphasis added) in their study of learner beliefs among Japanese learners of English:

*There are limits to what can be learned about language learners’ beliefs from questionnaire items. Questionnaires consisting of closed items allow respondents only to state their beliefs - and then only the beliefs which are included in the questionnaire.*

Furthermore, as suggested by Wenden (1998), it is important not only to elicit students’ beliefs, but also challenge them if necessary. Empirical evidence suggests that international students’ beliefs about learning can undergo a change during a sojourn abroad. This is demonstrated by Amuzie and Winke’s (2009) study, which found that

“students came to more strongly believe in the importance of learner autonomy and came to less strongly believe in the importance of the teacher’s role in learning”. Publications such as the one by Scharle and Szabó (2000) may be particularly useful in this regard as they provide practical activities for the language classroom that are designed *inter alia* to raise learners’ awareness and change their attitudes.

Furthermore, since self-assessment, which is central to ELP use, appears to be particularly challenging for international students, it is recommended that an “ELP-oriented pedagogy” should also prepare them for this experience. Blue (1988 p.114; emphasis added), commenting on the outcomes of his own study, observes, for example, that:

with *multilingual, multicultural groups*, the teacher still has a very important role to play in advising students in the area of needs analysis, assessing students’ language proficiency and *guiding them towards more accurate self-assessment*.

Possible suggestions include the provision of self-assessment training which should “provide a series of experiences and opportunities for reflection so that learners could ‘operationalise’ self-assessment concepts” (Cram 1995 p.296). Learners can also be encouraged to compare their self-assessment with that generated by using the diagnostic tools such as DIALANG, “an on-line language assessment system, which contains tests in 14 European languages and is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)” (Alderson and Huhta 2005 p.301). It can be expected that this approach may be particularly useful for those learners who find lack of verification of their own self-assessment difficult to manage or have problems with identifying their own level of competence.

With regard to self-assessment of intercultural competence, for which no parallel diagnostic tool is available, it may be beneficial first to generate students' reflection on the nature of intercultural competence, especially in light of the fact that international students may have little awareness of the intercultural dimension of learning a foreign language in general. One way of encouraging such reflection is by means of asking students to consider "critical incidents" (McAllister et al. 2006) that they may have been involved in since their arrival in the host culture. Critical incidents can be described as:

brief descriptions of situations in which there is a misunderstanding, problem, or conflict arising from cultural differences between interacting parties or where there is a problem of cross-cultural adaptation. (Wight 1995 p.128)

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned definition, Noriko's experience concerning the difference in cultural expectations between her own and her boyfriend's cultures that is described in Chapter Six can be viewed as one example of a critical incident. It can be expected that by thinking of such experiences and sharing them with their classmates, students may be able to operationalise more easily the distinct components of intercultural competence, and in this way to overcome both the perceived "vagueness" of intercultural self-assessment and the problems with the intercultural examples provided in the LOLIPOP ELP<sup>89</sup>.

Having introduced such an ELP-oriented pedagogy, teachers should integrate it into classroom practice. To this purpose, they should consider how exactly and how often the ELP should be used in the classroom, and in addition, how (and if at all) it should be integrated into the assessment process. Whereas teachers can refer to a number of publications for guidance on the ELP implementation is concerned (see, for example,

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<sup>89</sup> Teachers may also want to draw on the LOLIPOP ELP Glossary that includes definitions of some key intercultural terms used throughout the portfolio.

Little and Perclová 2001, González 2008 and Bruen and Sudhershan 2009), the final point merits consideration as it raises the issue of whether students' self-assessment should be taken into account and to what extent in the assessment process. Little (1999 p.6; emphasis added) recommends, for example, that learner self-assessment should be included in formal assessment since "learners are likely to take the business of self-assessment all the *more seriously* if it is an integral part of the overall assessment process". However, this issue appears more problematic in the case of intercultural self-assessment: the fact that it includes the affective dimension means that the teacher first needs to consider the ethical dilemma involved (see section 3.4).

Furthermore, bearing in mind the fact that collaborative learning in culturally diverse groups encourages international students to take responsibility for their intercultural language learning, it is important that not only should this learning mode be firmly embedded into classroom activities, but also that the process of intercultural learning it facilitates be brought to the fore.

To this purpose, language professionals may want to draw on a particular type of collaborative learning called the "group investigation method" that involves the following six-stage plan created specifically with the foreign language classroom in mind: selection of a cultural topic for group investigation and group formation; task planning; researching the topic; preparation of group presentation; the presentation itself; and finally, evaluation in multiple forms, including peer- and self-assessment (Allen 2006). As is evident from the above description, the model resembles closely the peer teaching format used in the current study. To adapt it further for the purpose of fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning, it is important, first of all, that it is the

teacher who should divide students into groups and (cultural) heterogeneity should be the defining criterion (Batelaan and van Hoof 1996), especially in light of the fact that cultural self-segregation is often a feature of multicultural classrooms (Swaminathan and Alfred 2003, Otten 2003, Sheridan 2011). With regard to the topic selection, rather than investigating a topic solely on the target culture, as suggested by Allen (op.cit.), international students can be asked to investigate it in relation to their own cultures. Having completed individual research into the topic during the second stage, students can then engage in the process of analysing and synthesising the information provided by each group member, which can encourage the “comparative analysis” that is so important in an intercultural approach to FLE (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey 2002 p.14). Since the issue of participation is key in designing collaborative learning activities (Batelaan and van Hoof 1996 p.11), having each member be responsible for sharing the information gathered in relation to their own culture with the group mates may help individual students overcome the difficulty in taking an active role in group work, which is mentioned in the preceding section.

The outcomes of the current study indicate that the model proposed by Allen (2006) be adapted further in four different areas. The first one concerns the issue of using “critical” themes to be used for group investigation. For example, students may be asked to research problems such as attitudes to immigrants or the role of minority languages in their respective societies. Secondly, teachers may want to extend the “transnational communities” beyond the classroom by including telecollaboration. For instance, groups of students can be paired with groups investigating the same or similar topics in another country, e.g. via the LOLIPOP ELP’s “Share” function, to obtain yet another perspective on the issues. However, it has to be borne in mind that

telecollaboration projects require careful planning if “failed communication” (O’Dowd and Ritter 2006) is to be avoided. The literature is full of examples of good practice in setting up such learning projects that teachers can refer to for guidance<sup>90</sup>.

Thirdly, to maximise further the potential of this learning mode for developing autonomy in intercultural learning, students should be encouraged to set their own language and intercultural learning objectives, via the LOLIPOP ELP, prior to their engagement in the task so that they can realise their individual needs as they are working on the common goal. For instance, a student who may have difficulty in reading at level B2 may set him- / herself the following objective: “I can read more demanding texts about familiar topics and readily grasp the essential information, and decide if closer reading is worthwhile, eg: articles, reports, academic texts / papers and correspondence”. In a similar vein, the same student who, as a result of intercultural self-assessment, has identified a weakness in relation to his or her skills of intercultural interaction may want to set the following objective at level B2: “I can act with greater confidence when interacting with people from other cultures and can generally avoid intercultural misunderstandings”. In the course of engaging in the investigation, the student can then pursue such individual learning objectives and evaluate if they have been met once the project is finished.

Finally, taking into account that developing autonomy also involves reflection on the learning process, students should be encouraged to engage in regular journal writing, which is also facilitated by the ELP. This may assist them not only in accessing and expanding their metacognitive knowledge, as suggested earlier in this section, but also

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<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Little and Ushioda (2008) for a discussion of the design, implementation and evaluation of a tandem learning project via e-mail.

can serve the purpose of “authentic communication between the learner and the teacher” (Dam 2009 p.130) that may be difficult otherwise. This is particularly important in light of the fact that participation in group interaction may be challenging for some learners. Journal writing can be beneficial as it can provides students with a channel for voicing their concerns, which can then be addressed by the teacher. This implies therefore that the teacher responds to student reflections during the course of the semester, although this is not universal practice (see, for example, Halbach 2000 p.87). Yang (2007 p.2; emphasis added) recommends, for example, that:

Rather than emphasising the importance of simply writing journals regularly, we would help our students better by guiding them in such a way as to provoke deeper reflection, and providing opportunities *to discuss the processes of learning that arise from their experiences.*

The need for teacher feedback is emphasised by the fact that international students may lack experience with journal writing. As Young and Sim (2001 p135; emphasis added) observe, “[p]ositive feedback from teachers on the diaries, to a certain extent, is *an important motivating factor* for students to be frank and persevering in their diary writing”. In addition, in light of the array of difficulties likely to be experienced by students prior to and during the delivery of presentations, it is important that tutors “swap their roles of “the ones in command” for those of advisors, counsellors and resourcers” (Carpenter 1996 p.31).

#### **7.4 Directions for future research**

The purpose of this section is to recommend a number of possible avenues for future research that, by building upon the findings of this case study, could advance further our understanding of the concept of autonomy in intercultural language learning.

First of all, in light of a dearth of research available in relation to integrating an intercultural dimension into autonomy-oriented foreign language pedagogy, it is vital that more studies are conducted with a view to increasing our understanding of this new approach. Researchers who are interested in exploring this issue may consider conducting other (single- or multiple-) case studies in order to corroborate the findings of the current research and / or to validate the proposed framework for course development. While a qualitative approach is recommended in order to respect students' individual "voices" (Krishnan and Hwee Hoon 2002) and gain insight into the experiences of "real" students behind the statistics, there is also a significant scope for incorporating a quantitative dimension into the research design, e.g. by measuring the impact of this approach on the actual linguistic and / or intercultural gains experienced by international students. We know that learning a foreign language in an autonomy-oriented classroom can lead to remarkable linguistic progress (see Legenhausen 2000) and it is recommended that similar effort is made to determine the scope of intercultural development. To this purpose, researchers may consider conducting studies with control groups.

Secondly, bearing in mind the characteristics of the "case" in the current project, it is equally important that future research into the issue of fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning takes into account different variables. For example, since the language proficiency of the students in this case study could generally be classified as upper-intermediate / advanced, a question that merits further investigation concerns the issue of how students with a lower level of language competence would respond to the same pedagogical approach. Another interesting avenue for research concerns the feasibility of this approach in "mixed" classes, i.e. classes attended by both host and

international students. Finally, as far as the variable concerning student characteristics is concerned, research with more homogeneous student groups (e.g. only short-term exchange students or immigrants) may also add further interesting insights into the concept of autonomy in intercultural language learning.

Thirdly, recognising the limited exposure that the students in this study had to the online, interactive and multilingual model of the ELP with an enhanced intercultural dimension, i.e. the LOLIPOP ELP, further research into the relationship between its integration in the classroom and the development of autonomy in intercultural language learning may provide more valuable information about the latter. One of the issues that merits further investigation concerns the question of whether an *online* model of the ELP is actually more or less advantageous for the development of such autonomy. In recent years a number of electronic versions of the portfolio has been made available to learners<sup>91</sup>, and a number of claims has been made about the general benefits of such models over hardcopy editions. For example, the developers of the eELP (<http://eelp.gap.it/about.asp>) state that the advantages of the digital format include *inter alia*: the ease of updating and sharing; the inclusion of multimedia files as learner's samples of work in the Dossier; and the possibility of tracking learning progress over a period of time. Although this particular aspect was not central to this study, the feedback gathered from the students in the current study indicates, however, that an electronic dimension of the ELP may be something of a double-edged sword. Given the paucity of studies on the advantages and disadvantages of electronic models of the ELP in general, and their potential for the development of learner autonomy more

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<sup>91</sup> Examples include: eELP aimed at university students (<http://eelp.gap.it/default.asp>; accessed 2 Jan 2011) as well as the ALTE/EAQUALS eELP (<http://www.alte.org/projects/eelp.php>; accessed 2 Jan 2011).

specifically, more research is required to investigate this issue. As far as the non-electronic features of the LOLIPOP ELP are concerned, and in the light of the ongoing controversy concerning the reliability of intercultural self-assessment, future studies examining this particular aspect of the portfolio could yield further interesting insights into the issue.

## **7.5 Summary**

The purpose of this chapter has been to relate the key issues to emerge from the data analysis process to the theoretical and empirical discussion presented in the literature review section of this thesis. This has been followed by the presentation of criteria for the development of courses aimed at fostering autonomy in intercultural language learning among international students. In addition, this chapter has also made a number of recommendations for further research dedicated to this topic.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

*[T]he act of transforming learners must be founded on something more than a little faith and the proverbial push. We cannot continue to believe that simply dropping students into a foreign country will result in the kind of learning we want them to take from a study abroad experience. This just does not always happen, and [...] we must do more as educators than rely on serendipity in meeting our objectives. (Hunter 2008 pp.93-94)*

### 8.1 Introduction

The question that is often asked in FLE literature concerns the issue of how language learners can be encouraged to take greater responsibility for their learning in formal settings, or, to quote Ho and Crookall (1995 p.235), “how might the classroom be transformed into a learning environment that facilitates the promotion of autonomy”? In spite of the formidable effort that has been made to address this issue in the last three decades, “the practical realisation of language learner autonomy remains elusive” (Little 2007a p.15). In a similar vein, not only is there “still a lack of good practice” as far as pedagogical efforts aimed at fostering intercultural competence are concerned (Byram, Nichols and Stevens 2001 p.1), but also, as Sercu (2006 pp.67-68; emphasis added) points out:

teachers tend to take little account of their pupils’ abilities, needs and interests in the area of culture learning and the acquisition of intercultural competence, and *adopt teacher-centred approaches to culture teaching.*

In light of the gap that exists in the literature on learner autonomy in relation to integrating an intercultural dimension to FLE, the purpose of this study was to investigate the concept of autonomy in intercultural language learning, defined here as the capacity to take responsibility for one’s own language and intercultural development. The question behind this study, i.e. how precisely such autonomy can be fostered in the foreign language classroom, was investigated from an international student perspective

since it is argued that this student group often does not utilise the potential that studying in a different country offers in terms of the development of intercultural communicative competence, and may therefore benefit significantly from this approach.

Following the presentation and discussion of the findings of the qualitative case study designed to examine this issue, the purpose of this final chapter is therefore two-fold. Firstly, it summarises the key research findings (8.2). Secondly, it discusses its limitations (8.3), and, in the concluding section, its contribution to knowledge (8.4).

## **8.2 Summary of research findings**

In relation to the “intellectual puzzle” (Mason 1996) behind this study, the key finding to emerge from it concerns the fact that the two highly influential concepts in FLE, i.e. learner autonomy and intercultural competence, can and should intersect in a multicultural foreign language classroom. It therefore supports Sercu’s (2002 p.61; emphasis added) call for a “move away from a *teacher-led* language-and-culture pedagogy to a student-centred *autonomous* learning approach”, which appears to be still peripheral in FLE. In their investigation of the Spanish foreign language teachers’ views, Sercu, Méndez García and Castro Prieto (2005 p.494; emphasis added) conclude, for instance, that:

Because teachers tend not to teach culture, they *may not yet have come to realise* that the cultural dimension of foreign language education *is well suited for promoting learner autonomy* and that such an approach might be beneficial to language learning as well.

Moreover, the findings of this case study show that the intersection of the two concepts can happen on a number of levels that correspond broadly to the four different conceptualisations of learner autonomy identified by Oxford (2003) and outlined in

Chapter Two. Often the discussion on promoting learner autonomy in the foreign language classroom has focused on one or a selection of those four perspectives, and studies that have considered all four are few and far between. That those perspectives are, however, intertwined in the language classroom is demonstrated by Nix's (2007 p.143) study in which he explores the relationship between "the 'technical' skill of note-taking and the psychological, socio-cultural and political aspects of [...] students' transformation into more academically-literate and autonomous learner-users of English".

The findings of this research demonstrate that it is possible to broaden the scope of each of the above-mentioned perspectives to include an intercultural dimension to teaching and learning a foreign language. More specifically, they appear to suggest that an ELP with an enhanced intercultural dimension, the need for which has been argued for some time now, has the potential to bring into focus international students' pluricultural and mobility capital (Murphy-Lejeune 2007). There is a growing body of research confirming that, when properly implemented, the ELP, as a tool developed *inter alia* to support the development of learner autonomy and pluricultural competence, can achieve the former objective (see, for example, Little 2003 and González 2008). However, since its introduction, the ELP's role as tool for fostering the latter has raised significant concerns among language professionals, as outlined in Chapter Three. As is evident from the results of this case study, both aims can converge as an interculturally enhanced ELP model can help international students, firstly, to become managers of their intercultural language learning, and secondly, to develop their metacognitive knowledge in relation to it.

Furthermore, by encouraging collaborative learning in culturally diverse groups, language professionals can help to create “learning communities” (Littlewood 2002) which provide international students with the opportunity not only to develop “proactive autonomy” in which “the groups themselves can [...] select the content and methods of their learning” (Littlewood 2002 p.33), but also to benefit interculturally from the experiential learning component that has traditionally been absent from the foreign language classroom.

Finally, by introducing a more critical pedagogical approach into the classroom, language professionals can help international students to become “the author[s] of [their] own worlds” (Pennycook 1997 p.48) by using their “autonomy as an individual” (Littlewood 1996) to take action on the globalised world they increasingly feel part of (Montgomery 2010 p.109).

The challenge in embracing such an autonomy-oriented pedagogy lies, however, in being aware of the difficulties that international students may encounter in this process. These relate, on the one hand, to the impact of their previous educational experiences and the resulting beliefs that they bring with them, and on the other hand, to problems those students may experience with the very activities that are meant to help them develop autonomy in intercultural language learning: working with the ELP, writing reflections and collaborative learning. As a result, instead of “rely[ing] on serendipity in meeting our objectives” (Hunter 2008 pp.93-94), it is vital that language professionals who are interested in fostering such a model of learner autonomy not only acknowledge such difficulties, but also take concrete steps to assist their students in overcoming them.

### **8.3 Limitations of the study**

A number of limitations relating to the current study can be identified. The first concerns the fact that the project evolved from its original design, which had implications for the extent to which the role of the LOLIPOP ELP could be examined in the study. It is reasonable to believe that had the development of the portfolio been completed prior to data collection, valuable insight into its advantages and disadvantages as a whole, rather than only its self-assessment grid, could have been gained. In addition, the fact that much of the student feedback concerning the experience of self-assessment and objective setting was quite general in nature, and, more often than not, did not distinguish between the language and the intercultural components of the grid, made a more nuanced analysis of this aspect difficult.

Secondly, even though the study draws on a rich variety of data sources, in retrospect, a number of additional sources could have been used to gain more insight into the research issue. In particular, it would have been useful to administer a questionnaire to the students at the beginning of the semester in order to gain not only demographic data (e.g. age), but also other relevant information, including, for example, the length of their stay in Ireland and prior intercultural experiences. Gaining information about the duration of the students' stay may have been helpful, for instance, in investigating similarities and differences in how the different student groups participating in the module, i.e. immigrants, long-term and short-term sojourners, responded to an autonomy-oriented pedagogy. Also, it can be speculated that taking part as observer in several out-of-class meetings during which the students worked on the collaborative learning tasks as well as the consultation sessions with Liz, during which the students

had the opportunity to discuss the progress of their preparations for the peer teaching sessions might have added additional valuable insights.

Finally, even though this study has employed a triangulation of data sources and methods to ensure its trustworthiness, it needs to be borne in mind that some of the data that this study has relied on were submitted to fulfil assessment requirements. This concerns the reflective reports and “Reflection on learning” journals, which taken together were worth 60% of the final grade. This raises the issue of whether the data may have been “distorted” in some way by what Liz referred to as the “pleasing the teacher” syndrome (INT).

#### **8.4 Contribution to knowledge**

This study is significant to research and practice in the field of applied linguistics and beyond it in so far as it first of all broadens our understanding of the concept of learner autonomy, thus heeding Oxford’s (2003 p.90; emphasis added) recommendation that research into the construct should take into account its multifaceted nature. In her own words:

Future research should *combine as many perspectives as possible in any given study*. No single perspective should be considered antithetical to any other perspective, although some theorists would have us believe that antagonism is inevitable.

Secondly, the study brings the current debate on the concept up-to-date with more recent developments in the field of FLE, namely the emergence of an intercultural approach. Until now the literature on autonomy has neglected the issue of how “foreign language study necessarily involves inter-cultural learning” (Benson 2006 p.25) and the fact that few publications dedicated to this topic exist vindicates this point. This study

emphasises the need to make the concept of autonomy in intercultural language learning a more salient aspect of current discussion in FLE, thus helping to move academic debate on learner autonomy in a new direction. By proposing a set of criteria for course development it makes the implementation of the concept less “elusive” (Little 2007a p.15) and therefore offers practical support to language professionals who may be interested in embracing it in their classrooms.

Thirdly, it adds to the body of literature dedicated to the implementation of the ELP and collaborative learning in FLE. Taking into account the fact that, in comparison with all the other educational sectors (e.g. primary, secondary etc.), the ELP is least widely used in higher education (Mansilla and Roldán Riejos 2007 p.194), and that no studies appear to exist that examine specifically international students’ engagement with the portfolio<sup>92</sup>, the findings of this case study make a significant contribution as they help to redress the balance. In addition, in spite of the growth in academic interest in the theory and practice of self-assessment in FLE since the 1980s, “there has been little detailed analysis of how learners feel about [self-assessment] or about how teachers might introduce self-assessment into their programs” (Cram 1995 p.271; see also Andrade and Du 2007 p.162). In contrast, this study not only highlights both these issues, but also it broadens the discussion on the topic to include also intercultural self-assessment.

In addition, the findings of this study add to the body of knowledge in domains other than that of foreign language education, namely critical pedagogy and international education. With regard to the former, Kelly and Brandes (2001 p.441) argue, for

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<sup>92</sup> For instance, none of the nine case studies include in Little (2003) appears to relate to higher education sector, and only one of them seems to concern the experience of adult learners, namely refugees learning the language of their host community.

example, that there is “the tendency of critical scholarship to remain at the level of abstract theorizing”, while relatively little is known about “what teaching for social justice might look like inside classrooms”. In contrast, this study demonstrates how the “teaching for social justice” may be implemented in the foreign language classroom. With regard to the domain of international education, it adds to our understanding of the educational experience of international students, particularly in relation to the concept of “learning shock”. It thus makes a case for the need to “spend time listening to the ‘voices’ of learners, [...] [so that] language learning in the multicultural classroom can be a more pleasurable experience for all” (Krishnan and Hwee Hoon 2002 p.238).

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## APPENDIX A: SCREENSHOTS OF THE LOLIPOP ELP

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Intercultural - C1		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>I can feel comfortable and can behave more or less naturally when meeting, working or living with people from a different culture. I have the ability to identify and use alternative ways of viewing the world and to modify my behaviour to make it appropriate to other cultures. I feel I am able to mediate between different cultures.</p>	Examples	
<p>I can understand the connection between language and culture and recognise the</p>		

**Figure A.1 Self-assessment grid**

The letters at the top of the grid correspond to the six levels of the CEFR (2001), whereas the icons on the left represent the five language skills (from top to bottom: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing) and the intercultural skills. A grey line corresponds to a single *Can do* descriptor. If it is marked green, it means that the learner has achieved that skill; if it is marked orange, it means that the learner has chosen a particular descriptor as his or her learning objective.

LOLIPOP: LOLIPOP ELP

http://polya.computing.dcu.ie/tmoodle/mod/elp/SelfAssessment/SelfAssessment.php?id=6

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lipop ELP

		<input type="text"/>				
		<input type="text"/>				
		<input type="text"/>				

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			Intercultural - A1	Examples
			<b>I can show that I have some basic knowledge of the other culture, and would like to know more about that culture and what the people are like.</b>	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I can give some examples of facts about the other country, (geography, climate etc.) ( <i>savoirs</i> )	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I want to be able to show that I am becoming familiar with everyday situations in the other culture (eating habits, greeting practices, ways of addressing people, and politeness). ( <i>savoirs</i> )	Objective Date: <input type="text"/> Reminder: <input type="text"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I want to be able to appreciate the opportunity to have new intercultural experiences, although I have not yet had many opportunities to do so. ( <i>savoir-être</i> )	Objective Date: <input type="text"/> Reminder: <input type="text"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I can understand and use some of the skills I need to communicate with people who have different beliefs, values and ways of behaving to myself. ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I can identify basic cultural differences and similarities between the products and practices of my own and the other culture. ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )	

Figure A.2 Intercultural self-assessment page (level A1).

LOLIPOP: LOLIPOP ELP

http://polya.computing.dcu.ie/tmoodle/mod/elp/SelfAssessment/SelfAssessment.php?id=6

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lipop ELP

		<input type="text"/>				
		<input type="text"/>				
			<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

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			Intercultural - A2	Examples
			<b>I can understand basic cultural differences, and although I do not always understand all of them, I do respect these differences and can learn from them.</b>	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I can demonstrate basic knowledge of the organisation of daily life (work times, meal times, festivals, school year, etc.) in the other country. ( <i>savoirs</i> )	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I can see that there are formal and informal ways of addressing people, depending on the relationship and/or context. ( <i>savoirs</i> )	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I can see some of my own culture's products and practices as they might be seen by people from other cultures. ( <i>savoir être</i> )	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I can now try to use my observation skills and intercultural experience to understand how native-speakers of the other language behave in everyday situations, although I do not yet have any particular strategies for coping with unfamiliar or confusing situations. ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I can compare some aspects of the other culture's products and practices with my own, although I need to develop my understanding of what they might mean on a deeper level. ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )	

Figure A.3 Intercultural self-assessment page (level A2).

Intercultural - B1			Examples
☺	✓	✗	I can understand the underlying beliefs and values that make me and members of the other culture behave the way they do, and I can also see that they have views on how my culture functions. This makes me more critically aware of my own and the other culture.
●	●	●	I can describe in general terms how my culture is perceived by the other culture. ( <i>savoirs</i> )
●	●	●	I can understand the reasons for the different values, beliefs and practices of the other culture, although I sometimes feel that my own perspective is more natural. ( <i>savoir être</i> )
●	●	●	I can understand some of the underlying meaning of the other language and images used in film, literature, the media and advertising from the other culture. I would like to increase this understanding. ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )
●	●	●	I can obtain and analyse information about cultural beliefs, values and behaviour. ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )
●	●	●	I can behave in accordance with the expectations of the other culture in most everyday situations both private and professional, even though it might sometimes require effort on my part. ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )
●	●	●	I can see how my judgements are influenced by my own culture and want to learn to be more open to the ways of other cultures. ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )

Figure A.4 Intercultural self-assessment page (level B1).

Intercultural - B2			Examples
☺	✓	✗	I can handle situations where I need to step outside my own cultural background to explore other possible ways of thinking and doing things, accepting the possibility of different ways of thinking and behaving.
●	●	●	I can understand and interpret the main features of body language and non-verbal communication in the other culture. ( <i>savoirs</i> )
●	●	●	I can accept that people from other cultures have different ways of behaving and thinking, and I can see many of my own culture's behaviours and values from the perspective of an outsider. ( <i>savoir être</i> )
●	●	●	I can reflect on and explain underlying reason for the types of products and practices I see in the other culture. ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )
●	●	●	I can act with greater confidence when interacting with people from other cultures and can generally avoid intercultural misunderstandings. ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )
●	●	●	I can identify what kind of information could help people from other cultures to understand my culture better ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )
●	●	●	I can understand how my judgments are influenced by my own culture and want to improve my critical appreciation of other cultures. ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )

Figure A.5 Intercultural self-assessment page (level B2).

Intercultural - C1			Examples
☺	✓	✗	I can feel comfortable and can behave more or less naturally when meeting, working or living with people from a different culture. I have the ability to identify and use alternative ways of viewing the world and to modify my behaviour to make it appropriate to other cultures. I feel I am able to mediate between different cultures.
●	●	●	I can understand the connection between language and culture and recognise the challenge of translating culture-bound words and phrases, eg. <i>glasnost</i> , <i>Schadenfreude</i> , <i>craic</i> . ( <i>savoirs</i> )
●	●	●	I can happily take up the challenge of operating in a multi-cultural environment and am aware that my own culture is neither inferior nor superior to other cultures. ( <i>savoir être</i> )
●	●	●	I can recognise and be sensitive to a wide range of products and practices no matter how different they are from my own. ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )
●	●	●	I can act as a mediator between people from my own and the other culture and I can use a variety of strategies to resolve cultural misunderstandings and conflict. ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )
●	●	●	I can appreciate the advantages of diversity, and find it stimulating to be in a situation where I have to question my own way of thinking and behaving, and adapt to a new environment. ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )
●	●	●	I can distance myself from my own culturally influenced judgments in order to engage in critical appreciation of the point of view and behaviour of the other culture. ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )

Figure A.6 Intercultural self-assessment page (level C1).

Intercultural - C2			Examples
☺	✓	✗	I can interpret and evaluate people's behaviour based on many different cultural theories I have encountered and experiences I have gained and can reconcile sometimes conflicting world views. I often seek out the role of an impartial intercultural mediator.
●	●	●	I can demonstrate and have developed, as a result of my multicultural experiences, a system of beliefs and principles distinct from the norms of any specific culture, which give me another identity, distinct from my own individual or cultural one. ( <i>savoir être</i> )
●	●	●	I can see my own and other cultures from an outsider's and insider's perspectives, which allows me to 'decentre' and mediate between cultures. ( <i>savoir être</i> )
●	●	●	I can interpret values and behaviours from a variety of cultural frames of reference, so that there is never only one possible way of viewing things. ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )
●	●	●	I can interact successfully in many different and challenging contexts with people from other cultures and I find these encounters enjoyable and enriching. ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )
●	●	●	I can use my skills and experience as an intercultural mediator to help reconcile potentially difficult situations between people of different cultural backgrounds. ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )
●	●	●	I can analyse different points of view, products or practices found in other cultures and can bring a new perspective into this analysis, based on my intercultural experience. ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )

Figure A.7 Intercultural self-assessment page (level C2).

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LIPOP: Lolipop ELP

**REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING** Target language: English

Enter your information in the text boxes below

**Experience** meeting somebody from another culture **Date** 1 February 2011 **Duration**

**Title**

**Describe and analyse experience**

Trebuchet 1 (8 pt) (Lang) B I U S **Path:**

**Reflect on experience** How did this experience help you to become more linguistically / interculturally competent? Click yes or no to the questions below. Yes/No

- This experience has increased my knowledge of the target culture (e.g. people and how they behave, history, geography, institutions) (savoirs)  Yes  No
- This experience has encouraged me to learn more about the target culture, and to apply this knowledge in intercultural situations. (savoir apprendre/faire)  Yes  No
- This experience has created a more positive attitude in me towards the target culture, and a deeper understanding of the behaviours, values or practices of that culture. (savoir être)  Yes  No
- This experience has made me reflect on my own values and how they can influence my way of perceiving the target culture. (savoir s'engager)  Yes  No
- I can now identify possible misunderstandings while dealing with the target culture. (savoir comprendre)  Yes  No
- This experience has increased my knowledge and competence in the target language  Yes  No
- This experience has increased my competence in at least one of the following: reading, listening, speaking, writing  Yes  No
- This experience has encouraged me to learn more about the target language, and to use this knowledge in communication with other people.  Yes  No
- This experience has created a more positive attitude in me towards the target language.  Yes  No

**File**  Max size: 2MB

**Figure A.8** “Reflections on learning” page.

Here the learner has the opportunity to reflect on his or her language and intercultural experiences, update his or her self-assessment if necessary as well as upload files that pertain to that experience.



**Indicative Syllabus:**

Learning to learn skills (learner autonomy)  
Listening to authentic materials: extensive/intensive  
Reading reports and articles and extracting information: gist/detail  
Writing reports and essays  
Extending existing passive / active vocabulary  
Making presentations  
Planning for the use of interactive language and topic specific classroom activities  
Group work

**Assessment:**

Continuous assessment: 100%

**Indicative Reading List:**

Ellis, G. & Sinclair, B. 1989. *Learning to Learn English*. Cambridge University Press.  
Kirby, P. , Gibbons, L., Cronin, M. (eds) 2003 *Reinventing Ireland : culture, society and the global economy*. London: Pluto Press.  
Mittelman, J.H. 1996. *Globalisation. Critical reflections*. Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers  
Worchel, S. 2005. 'Culture's role in conflict and conflict management: Some suggestions, many questions'. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. Vol 29 (2005) 739-757.

Realia such as TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, the internet

**Programme or List of Programmes:**

Programme Reference Number

**Date of Last Revision: May 2006**

## B.2 ASSESSMENT DETAILS

### Task 1: 30' Interactive group session 40%

In groups of 3-4 you will plan and conduct an interactive session on a topic of your choice related to the theme 'Globalisation'.

As part of this session, you can choose to work with the following media: PowerPoint, Overhead slides, blackboard, video-recorder, tape-recorder, internet; and choose from the following activities: presentation; jigsaw reading; vocabulary tasks - crossword puzzle, hangman, word webs, collocation, lexical sets, cloze test; class discussion; debates; questionnaire; worksheets... comprehension questions, true/false, multiple choice, test your students, draw pictures, design posters, role play, etc.

Your session will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- content
- relevance
- clarity
- interactivity
- entertainment
- individual contribution\*
- use of English\*
- body language, ability to communicate\*

Asterisk (\*) denotes individual criteria

Assessment load: 40% (20% group; 20% individual)

### Task 2: Reports 40%

Each group will write 4 reflective reports, one as a collective group and the others on an individual basis:

**a) Group report:** reflective assessment of own interactive session (as teachers) 25%

You can structure report as follows:

- Preparation: why you chose the topic, how you divided the work, how you went about the preparation
- Session: what happened on the day – did things go according to plan; were you pleased with results; what might you have done differently if you were to repeat the experience; did you feel you made an impact on the audience; if so, how can you measure this (what evidence do you have); how did it feel to be teaching the class
- Aftermath: Do you think you achieved your aims? What skills did you develop through the planning and delivery of your interactive session? How did your group function together? What did you gain from it personally?

Group of 4 students: 2,000 words; Group of 3 students: 1.500 words

**b-d): 3 individual reports:** Reflective assessment of three other sessions which you have participated in (as a learner)

You could look at the following:

What did the group aim to do? Did they succeed? What did you like about the session? Is there anything you would suggest that they might change? Did you learn anything new from the session? If so, what? (Remember, your reports may be forwarded to the groups in question if they request it, so please bear in mind that they will be reading your comments! (Please indicate if you would like your name to be attached or whether you would rather be anonymous. If you do not indicate anything, your name will be included.)

250 words for each individual report; each worth 5%

All reports will be graded according to the following criteria:

- Content
- Clarity
- Use of English
- Ability to critically reflect

All reports are to be uploaded to Moodle via the assignment function. Assignment activities have been placed in the box each week there is a group presentation. All will remain open until the 4<sup>th</sup> May (i.e. one week after the end of semester).

### **Task 3: reflections on learning 20%**

You will be expected to write a series of journal entries throughout the semester where you reflect on the learning that is taking place in module [REDACTED]. This will include reflections on the following:

- Globalisation – course work
- Intercultural competence
- Use of LOLIPOP and learner autonomy
- Working in groups
- Impact of learning on self
- Other

### B.3 COURSE OVERVIEW

Week	Seminar sessions (2hrs)	Computer lab sessions (1hr)
1	Introduction to the module and to the topic of globalisation;	Listening comprehension exercise and discussion: “Are you a good language learner?;  The students are asked to write their first “Reflection on learning” journal entry on the same topic;
2	Newspaper presentations	The students discuss what reflection is;  The students are asked to write their second journal entry on “the art of reflection”;
3	The students discuss the topic of “Free trade / fair trade”: they watch a documentary called “The dollar a day dress”;  The students are asked to write their third journal entry on the video they watched in class;	Students negotiate the criteria for the assessment of their “Reflection on learning” journals;  The students start preparing for the asynchronous online exchange with a class of French learners of English: in groups they have to prepare four different “profiles” (e.g. the class profile) to be shared with the tandem class;
4	The students discuss the topic of ethnicity and reflect on their own ethnic identities;	Liz reports on a globalisation conference she attended;  The students are introduced to the LOLIPOP ELP “Share” function in preparation for the exchange;
5	Liz subdivides the class into eight groups in preparation for the interactive teaching sessions; the students engage in a bonding exercise and brainstorm potential topics for their peer teaching presentations;  The students listen to a radio interview on the advantages and disadvantages of the Fair Trade campaign;  The students discuss in groups their individual ethnic identities;  Fair Trade “picnic”	Discussion on the film (“Blood Diamond”) the students watched in the cinema together with Liz;  The students are asked to write their fourth reflection on the film;  The students are asked to prepare short group presentations on different bodies related to globalisation to be presented later in the course;

6	The students discuss the topic of global warming: they do vocabulary exercises in groups, which are followed by Liz’s presentation on the topic; the students watch a clip from “An Inconvenient Truth”;	The students are introduced to the LOLIPOP ELP: they engage in language and intercultural self-assessment;  The students are asked to write their fifth “Reflection on learning” journal entry on the self-assessment experience;
7	<b>Mid-semester break</b>	
8	Group presentations on world bodies related to globalisation: group A (World Bank); group B (UNESCO); group C (Amnesty International); group E (World Economic Forum); group F (G8);	<b>No class</b>
9	Group presentations on world bodies related to globalisation: group G (UN)  Interactive teaching session: group A (Fair Trade);	Interactive teaching session: group E (Entertainment);  The students are asked to use LOLIPOP ELP to reflect on their language and intercultural learning experiences;
10	<b>Bank holiday</b>	Group presentations on world bodies related to globalisation: group H (Council of Europe); group D (Centre for human rights and global justice);
11	Interactive teaching sessions: groups B (McDonaldisation), G (Education) and C (Child labour);	“Colour my world” exercise for the tandem exchange: the students discuss in groups and plenary how different cultures perceive colours;  The students are asked to communicate their findings to the tandem group via the LOLIPOP ELP’s “Share” function;
12	Interactive teaching sessions: groups D (English as an International Language) and F (Ethical tourism);	Interactive teaching sessions: group H (Global warming)  The students are asked to write the final “Reflection on learning” journal entry on the impact of the module on themselves as language learners and global citizens;

**APPENDIX C: DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO DATA COLLECTION**

**C.1 OVERVIEW OF DATA SOURCES USED IN THE STUDY**

<b>RESEARCH METHOD</b>	<b>TYPE</b>	<b>TOPIC (IF APPLICABLE)</b>	<b>NUMBER OF DATA SOURCES</b>	<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS INVOLVED</b>
<b>Interview</b>	Focus group	1 <sup>st</sup> round of interviews: see Appendix C.3 for the topics discussed;  2 <sup>nd</sup> round: students' views on the experience of collaborative learning, self-assessment via the LOLIPOP ELP and the tandem exchange; intercultural learning in the course; the use of Moodle in the course (see Appendix C.4 for a sample FG transcript)	<b>4</b>	4 groups; 4 students per group
	Individual	Students' views on: the experience of being autonomous in the module; assessment in the module; multicultural nature of the class; impact of the module on their further education and study abroad experience; impact of the module on the self; use of technology in the module (see Appendix C.5 for a sample interview transcript)	<b>10</b>	7 end-of-semester one-to-one student interviews;  2 one-to-one interviews with students after the think-aloud-protocol session;  1 interview with the lecturer;

<b>Observation</b>	Classroom observation		<b>13</b>	Whole class
<b>Documents</b>	Learning journals (the entries were supposed to be between 200 and 300 words in length and submitted on a bi-weekly basis)	Being a good language learner	<b>28</b>	1 journal entry per student
		Art of reflection	<b>25</b>	1 journal entry per student
		“The dollar a day dress”	<b>24</b>	1 journal entry per student
		“Blood diamond”	<b>26</b>	1 journal entry per student
		Self-assessment of language and intercultural competence via the LOLIPOP ELP	<b>21</b>	1 journal entry per student
		Impact of LAN01 on students as: a) language learners; and b) global citizens	<b>24</b>	1 journal entry per student
	Reports	<u>Group</u> reports on the experience of peer teaching	<b>9</b>	6 groups of 4 students; 2 groups of 3 students (NB one group’s report consisted of a joint report and a separate report from one of the group members)
		<u>Individual</u> student reports on the peer teaching observed concerning the following topics:		
		Child labour	<b>13</b>	1 journal entry per student
		Ecotourism	<b>10</b>	1 journal entry per student
		Education	<b>9</b>	1 journal entry per student
		English as an international language	<b>2</b>	1 journal entry per student
		Entertainment	<b>11</b>	1 journal entry per student

		Fair trade	<b>14</b>	1 journal entry per student
		Global warming	<b>8</b>	1 journal entry per student
		McDonaldisation	<b>12</b>	1 journal entry per student
	End-of-semester questionnaires	Course evaluation; impact of the course on development of students' identities, language and intercultural competence as well as transferable skills (e.g. presentation skills)	<b>13</b>	1 questionnaire per student
	LAN01 documents	Assessment details	<b>1</b>	
		Module descriptor	<b>1</b>	

**Table C.1** An overview of the different research methods and data sources used in this study.

## C.2 SAMPLE “REFLECTION ON LEARNING” JOURNAL ENTRY

In the last class, I learned there are four main points to become a good language learner: motivation, personality, learning skills and independence. Through these aspects, I consider my types of a language learner and also think about learning language. One of my motivations to learn English is the idea that I want to communicate with people from various kinds of countries such as Irish students and other international students. In this university, there are lots of students who are not from English speaking countries, however, we can talk with them in English. Therefore, I have good opportunities to make friends with Irish and international students in everyday life. When I talk with foreign friends, I always think I want to speak English more fluently. It is another motivation for me to learn English.

Although I have such motivations, I cannot become an active person. If I want to make friends with foreign students, I should talk with them without hesitating. However, I feel comfortable to be with Japanese friends and I am afraid of being with foreigners. I know this is not a good way for both making friends and learning English, but it is difficult for me to change my personality. It might be true that my personality prevents from improving my English skill. I think I am such kind of a language learner.

Next, I think about other points of a good language learner: learning skills and independence. As learning skills, it is very important for a language learner to have a good ear. The reason is that we have to listen to what a partner or teacher says when we talk with a friend and attend a class. If we do not understand what they say, these situations will happen that we cannot keep conversation with the friend and understand teaching at all. Listening is a first step for learning language. Even if we do not have a confidence in speaking English, we can participate in conversation of foreign people when we understand what they talk about. In a class, it is the most important what a teacher tells us. So, to have good ear is necessary for a language learner.

Independence is also an important aspect for learning language. However, the system of learning English in Japan is not good for encouraging independence of students. Because English classes are usually lecture type which a teacher just teaches English using textbooks in junior high schools and high schools. Students do not have lots of opportunities to speak English except the moment that they are asked to speak by a teacher. This kind of classes does not suitable to encourage independence of students. It is necessary to change the way of teaching English in Japan for growing student's independence.

### C.3 INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR THE FIRST ROUND OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

**Before the interview:**

- Arrange the table and chairs
- Set up the recording equipment (bring spare batteries and digital recorder manual) – use the backup recorder
- Prepare the refreshments

**Interview protocol for the first focus group interviews (22nd and 23rd February):**

1. Welcome the students and thank for joining the group
2. Explain briefly the purpose of the project again
3. Ask for the consent forms and if there are any questions
4. Offer refreshments
5. Explain the interview process:
  - The duration of the interview (approx. 70 minutes)
  - I’m there to learn from the students
  - There are no right or wrong answers; instead, I’m interested in hearing their personal opinions
  - The purpose of the interview is to hear from everyone
  - All their experiences and perspectives are equally important
  - I’d like the students to interact with one another during the discussion
  - Say that the interview will be audiotaped with back up
  - Ask if there are any questions
6. Be like a “jazz musician in a jam session” during the interview (Arksey and Knight 1999 p39)
7. Start the interview:
  - “ince-breaker” question: introduce myself and ask students to do the same (name, cultural background, course of studies etc.)
  - check the recording
8. Ask the interview Qs:

No	Question:	Purpose of the question:
1.	How would you describe your stay/ life in Ireland so far?	I want to know: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what students broadly think of their stay / life abroad experience so far</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• which aspects of life (e.g. values, customs, education system) here they consider to be difficult / strange / surprising etc.</li> <li>• how they approach reflection on their experience</li> </ul>
2.	What does the term intercultural competence mean to you?	<p>I want to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how students understand the idea of intercultural competence</li> </ul>
3.	How can you become more intercultural competent?	<p>I want to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if students have / use any strategies for developing their intercultural competence</li> </ul>
4.	On a scale from 1 to 5 how intercultural competent do you think you are and why?	<p>I want to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether they have ever reflected on their intercultural competence</li> <li>• how they approach the idea of self-assessment of their intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes</li> <li>• if there is any evidence that students can judge their own intercultural competence</li> <li>• whether they can give any examples to support their self-assessment</li> </ul>
5.	Can you explain what it means to take responsibility for your own language learning?	<p>I want to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether the students are familiar with the notion of autonomy</li> <li>• how they understand it</li> <li>• whether they consider themselves to be autonomous language learners and why / why not</li> <li>• whether they can give any examples from their own experience and in this way be reflective about it</li> </ul>
6.	<p>On a scale from 1 to 5 how important is it in your culture to take responsibility for your learning? Why do you think this is?</p> <p>NB: I don't want to limit their answers to language learning only</p>	<p>I want to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if / how students' different cultural backgrounds may influence their ability to take responsibility for their own learning</li> <li>• whether students can look at their own culture and its values critically (savoir s'engager)</li> </ul>
7.	How do you feel about	<p>I want to know:</p>

	being encouraged to take more responsibility for their learning in the [redacted] module?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how they feel about being more autonomous</li> </ul>
8.	Have you ever assessed yourself in any school subject or skill? How did you find this experience?	<p>I want to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if students have any previous experience of self-assessment</li> <li>• what they think of it</li> </ul>
9.	What do you expect from your participation in the [redacted] module?	<p>I want to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how well students are familiar with the module's outcomes</li> <li>• know what students' own priorities are with regard to their participation in the module (e.g. improving language skills, exploring globalisation issues, working with the e-portfolio etc.)</li> </ul>
10.	What do you expect from your stay / life in Ireland?	<p>I want to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how students value their stay / life abroad (e.g. as a component of their degree, intercultural experience, tool to improve their language skills)</li> </ul>

- |  |
|--|
| <p>9. Finish the interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask whether the students would like to add anything</li> <li>• Thank them for their time</li> <li>• Say about the second interview in March</li> <li>• Ask if there are more volunteers for the TAP group</li> </ul> <p>10. Do self-evaluation (based on Arksey and Knight 1999 p108)</p> <p>11. Transfer the recording onto the computer</p> |
|--|

#### **C.4 SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**RESEARCHER:**

I thought maybe we can start with some warm-up really before I start asking you questions. So I just thought maybe we can talk briefly about the presentation that the girls did today in the class and just ... if there were any issues or any things the presentation made you think about. I'm not asking you to assess how well they did it or anything like that – it's just about what they talked about – whether it rang any bells or ...

**AGATA:**

Well, it was-- I found very interesting the fact that-- 'cause they were talking about entertainment and the way they connected entertainment with globalisation and for example Isabel was talking about cinema-- no music – fashion and the way she linked globalisation and the way-- and also – what's her name? – Daria - magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, I knew there was you know it came out in different countries in different languages but I didn't even think it would be over a 100 or something she said so I thought that was very interesting. Then you don't think of it, entertainment is you know entertainment, OK, people come from different countries to [inaudible word] the plays, with the concert but you don't really think about it in kind of deeper sense.

**RESEARCHER:**

Kaori, where you there?

**KAORI:**

Yeah. I don't think the relation between the globalisation and entertainment so it's a first time to think about this so it's a very interesting something-- sometimes it's surprised me. Yeah?

[Isabel enters the room]

**RESEARCHER:**

Hi Isabel.

**ISABEL:**

I'm sorry.

**RESEARCHER:**

No, don't worry, don't worry. Just started.

**ISABEL:**

OK. [sits down] [irrelevant section - the Researcher offers refreshments]

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. We are just talking very briefly about your presentation and it's not-- just you know about the issues you talked about and I thought they were very interesting.

**ISABEL:**

Thanks. We tried [inaudible segment]

**RESEARCHER:**

Very good. OK. Today I would like to focus a bit more on the self-assessment you did a couple of weeks ago in class and Agata, I think you-- we talked about it anyway in detail but it's more about again sharing your views with others so that's what I'm interested in. And the first question: last time I asked you to rate your intercultural competence on a scale from 1 to 6 – I don't know whether you remember it – I said 1 would be the lowest and 6 would be the highest and you said: "Yes, I'm 3" or "I'm 4" and then you did the intercultural and language self-assessment, the LOLIPOP self-assessment, and I'm just wondering whether ... how these two compare? Can you remember what initially your self-assessment was when I asked you about it in the interview? Do you remember what you said?

**KEIKO:**

Not exactly but kind of. I think I was 4 or 5 because like mainly foreign friends and I enjoy talking with them and I think I didn't have any strong discrimination but sometimes like I have small stereotype of culture or country so I wasn't 6. Yeah, I think I thought like that.

**RESEARCHER:**

And when you were doing the LOLIPOP self-assessment, did you discover anything new or did you thought: "Yes, what I thought about myself before is right"?

**KEIKO:**

Yeah, I thought it's the same as I thought.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. Can you remember what level you were?

**KEIKO:**

I don't remember.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK.

**ISABEL:**

I think I have put myself a 5 when we first discussed it and if - I don't remember - but I was a bit higher on the scale than I thought I would be when we did it in the LOLIPOP thing. But still I was like in between two levels. There was some things I totally agreed on and some I didn't really ... yeah. And for me it was a bit difficult to do the intercultural one, much more than the ones about oral comprehension because these ones are easier. In fact you know if you can do it or not. Like the other ones you start doubting, like, it's more difficult to know, to evaluate yourself, I think. [inaudible word]

**RESEARCHER:**

And did you use any of the examples that were included on the page – did you have a look at them at all?

**ISABEL:**

Yeah I think I did because sometimes I was not sure what it meant. Because I have an idea but I was not sure. So ... yeah, I think they were helpful.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. [pause] And did you discover any strengths you had or-- and weaknesses you didn't expect you would have? Was there anything surprising about it?

**KAORI:**

I think the reading is difficult for me because we have the different types of the character between Japanese and English so it's compares on the-- complete is a other-- the European people like they have alphabet. It's difficult for me to read quickly.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. [pause] It was so long ago, it's difficult to remember it. [laughter]

**ISABEL:**

And reading week in the middle. [laughter]

**RESEARCHER:**

Yeah, I can imagine. OK, but anyway you know if there are any issues you still remember or which were important, that's what I'm really interested in so don't worry if you can't remember the details exactly, that's absolutely fine.

[pause] And how did you feel in general when you were doing that?

**ISABEL:**

I like doing it because normally when you-- all the things I has self-assessed myself because I had to do that for class years ago, I didn't really like it, like, it's like marking yourself and in LOLIPOP you kind of-- because you recognised to yourself what you know and it's-- and for me the way it's presented like the sentences you have [inaudible segment] explaining what you should-- it's quite helpful because it would be much more difficult if they were more general, all that questions. Because they help you centre what your attention and what you ...

**AGATA:**

Kind of step by step. [agreement] Concentrating on a small topic and if you can or you cannot do.

**ISABEL:**

And I didn't really feel uncomfortable doing that-- I like I have in other self-assessments.

**AGATA:**

No, it was interesting to do it. I don't know if you guys did it the first semester as well, we did LOLIPOP the first semester and that's why I kinda knew a little bit about it so it was not exactly a new thing but it was very very interesting doing it. Yeah.

**ISABEL:**

I understand it theoretically but I haven't really used it like when I started like in-- when I was the third year you have to study "methodologie" and we have-- because we're

supposed to be the teachers of English and we have this, the whole level things: A1, A, B. Yeah so it was-- I really enjoyed doing-- using it. I know what it looks like.

**RESEARCHER:**

I remember Isabel you mentioned you knew the theory behind the ELP but you never actually used it. Was that ...?

**ISABEL:**

Yeah!

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. And Isabel you said you did some self-assessment before ...

**ISABEL:**

Yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

And what do you think the purpose of the previous self-assessment was and what would be the purpose of the LOLIPOP self-assessment?

**ISABEL:**

On the previous one - I mean I haven't done them lately, they were like the middle secondary school like that and I think that was where ... to kind of develop our sense of critical thought about what we have done and try to look at our work in an object way. I think that was ... yeah, main aim, that's-- nothing more than that. And with this one it's-- the good thing about LOLIPOP is you don't only know what you can do and what you can't - but you can also set your objectives, what you want to do and that's - yeah - that's challenging.

**RESEARCHER:**

I'll ask you a bit later the question about the objectives - that's on my list as well [laughter] so I'll get back to it. And did you have any difficulties in particular - I can't remember which group it was but I think in your group, Isabel, it was-- someone mentioned being honest as one difficulty in doing self-assessment.

**ISABEL:**

Yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

Did you have any particular difficulties when doing it?

**KEIKO:**

[long pause] For me when I do self-assessment like, for example if I'm confident with something I can't say strong because maybe I'm confident but I can't say I can do it really well. So to be honest is - yeah - it's difficult because I don't know if it's about honest or not but it's hard to say a good point about me.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. [long pause] And do you think it would have been useful if you had done this self-assessment before you came to Ireland?

**KAORI:**

I think so because I don't know which level I am in now so if before I came here I did it, it's-- it is proof of studying English, which part should I focus on studying. Yeah.

**KEIKO:**

And also now I've been here for 7 or 8 month but I can't feel that my English has improved so if I did it before, and I did it last time then I could feel: "OK, I could improve this point".

**AGATA:**

You could compare. [agreement]

**ISABEL:**

Because it really feels good when you realise [?that you did improve it?]. [laughter]  
Even if it's a little thing [agreement]. For example, when I was doing it – I think it was [inaudible segment] oral comprehension or something like that, I realised I didn't really tick this if I had done it before I came but now I can [laughter] so it was-- yeah, feels good. [agreement]

**RESEARCHER:**

And if you had done it before, and if there were some issues that you thought maybe you are not that good at, do you think you would have been able to do anything about them before you came here?

**AGATA:**

I think so. You can take that only you know what the problem, then you can start-- or not the problem but, you know, the issue or what theory you should concentrate more on, then you can attend a few classes or kind of-- when you're conscious about it, you start doing something towards completing it or helping it where-- Yeah. I think.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. And do you think that this self-assessment can help you or perhaps already helped you with your work in this module, or if it can help you with your-- during your stay abroad here or your life abroad really – thinking of Agata. [laughter]

**AGATA:**

You know, as been mentioned, it's good to know when-- it's a good feeling when you can for example and you can't do things and when you realise, it's ... I don't know, it makes you grow and I think it does help and it already helped. Isn't it? When you know what area you're weaker, you can pay more attention to that and [inaudible word] change and improvement. So I think it definitely helps. It helped me as well. Yeah, just to know that I can – yes, I can, and like Isabel was saying about-- to be honest or not to be honest, I think that's a cultural thing, when you try to put yourself a little bit down because you think you are doing-- because I would be exactly the same. I'm getting better now but I think it definitely helped me. Yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

[long pause] And what-- you are saying you can see what things you can do or you cannot do – for the things you can do, what kind of evidence you think you can show to prove that you really can do these things?

**AGATA:**

[pause] Well, working in a group I suppose or whatever like producing like you guys [?did it, produce?] so lovely a presentation and you know because before that I never thought I would be able to do and to stand in front of the whole class, it takes, you know, courage to go and you know and the more you do it the better you get and I think that's [inaudible segment] proves and working in a group, in a multicultural group, where there are different cultures and we have to look at each aspect you know there is a question or a suggestion and everybody have to agree, not only for example I say one

thing and everybody have to do it. It's working in a group you know looking at everybody and I think working in a group, that is when you see different cultures you know, one person might say: "Yes and would you mind doing ..." and another person would strongly say: "No, I won't do it!" and then you know the rest has to just: "OK, don't do it then" you know and yeah ... So I think it's interesting.

**ISABEL:**

Because the cultural difference I see when you are just having a [?coffee?], when you have to work, like when you-- [cross talk]

**RESEARCHER:**

And how are you-- Isabel you presented your work today, have you already presented yours? [student's say they haven't]

**KEIKO:**

Only a small ...

**AGATA:**

A 15-minute one.

**KEIKO:**

I didn't do any yet.

**RESEARCHER:**

And how are you are finding the whole experience of ...?

**AGATA:**

Great – pushing myself out of the comfort zone. In the first semester I just-- it was so hard for me, I was I literally couldn't sleep during the night because I-- I just standing in front of the whole class was unbearable but I'm getting better and now - although people said to me: "You look very confident, you're always ..." whatever, I said: "No, I'm not, it's only outside [laughs] but you don't know what's happening inside" so I'm getting better, definitely, and I'm glad I can do it because you know, now I can even raise arm-- you know, want to raise my hand and ask something but before that never I would have done it, you know, so yeah ... improvement.

**KEIKO:**

I feel that too 'cause in Japan I could-- I felt really really nervous in front of people and I couldn't do a presentation in English but now I don't know but I got used to do it and I feel confident in front of people more than in Japan and I'm really happy about that 'cause ... yeah, but the difficult thing in like group work is sometimes I can't push my opinion so usually European students say something and I say-- sometimes I can ask question and I can say some opinion but usually they talk and: "OK, go ahead"  
[laughter].

**AGATA:**

Yeah, that's standing up for your- well not actually standing up for yourself but yeah, I've noticed as well working in a group, for example, Media and Communication we had a few Japanese girls, yeah, and I've noticed that it's only Europeans who were kind of talking and I said: "Listen, OK, now what do you think guys?" you know and then "No, it's fine, it's fine" you know and ... I don't know, yeah, that's the thing and I think it's not fair as well and it's very hard to kind of think of how to-- not, it's not really a problem but you know, yeah, but standing up for yourself, that's another thing and that you learn as well when you come and do presentations and you know, first few times like-- 'cause I was exactly the same. Now it's comple-

**KEIKO:**

I think I improved this point too because I think in the first time I really couldn't say anything and I just didn't say anything and "Go ahead, you can do it" but now I don't want to do this. I want to reflect my opinion so I think ... Yeah.

**AGATA:**

I suppose you learn [inaudible segment] [laughter] It is. It is.

**RESEARCHER:**

And how do you think you can help this process of group work? Keiko, you mentioned the Europeans kind of imposing their views on you and you mentioned that the Japanese students perhaps don't express themselves that much. How do you think you can achieve better working-- work, group work?

**AGATA:**

I think it's up to the individual and by doing for example these sessions like here talking where people can say what they really think and not, you know ... Just it depends on individual as I said, you know, it's in the group when you see-- but then when you know that you're kind of trying to-- or tend to always raise your opinion or whatever, just to draw back and just say nothing, let the others talk because you know for me it's very important so it's-- everything is fair, not-- looking at any areas in life or whatever, so just to stay behind kind of try to-- of course it's not everybody can do that, you know, and just to-- I'm trying to encourage it you know say: "OK, now you said that. OK, what about the other people, what other people think?" you know so ... but it's not easy. How to do it? I don't know. I suppose by talking in the group but not alw-. You know, here like in a small group people can come up and, for example, Hanna, we did here as well the session, Hanna was here and from that session I kind of became much closer with Hanna, you know, I saw her-- she seemed so confident, her English was so good and you know and you think kind of, "OK, yeah, maybe I can't really" you know and now she's not, you know, she is confident and everything but she kind of seems to be drawn back and not, you know-- One thing we think when we see a person, we think: "She's this, this and this" where in reality she's not, that other person might be very shy and if you don't approach and don't help, then it might-- you know, that might not come out so I think it's up to an individual [agreement] and maybe just to have [inaudible word] the groups and talk or sessions or something like that.

**KEIKO:**

And it's important for Japanese people to have an opinion because like, for example, those European students asked us: "Did you have any opinion?" but if we don't have, then like they would stop asking me, asking us so ...

**AGATA:**

Yeah.

**ISABEL:**

And sometimes I think we just have to stop and ask a reason but sometimes it takes a little ... just a little thing to ask.

**AGATA:**

Exactly.

**ISABEL:**

And let them talk.

**AGATA:**

Yeah.

**KAORI:**

I think now the reason is the English because [?as far?] I came here, I have idea but I couldn't express my opinion so ... but now, yeah, I can do it very good so maybe to-- we're improving English is also a reason, I think.

**ISABEL:**

I think I know what you mean. I think it happens to more or less extent to all of us but it's so frustrating when you want to express something in English and-- [cross talk]

**KEIKO:**

You don't know what to say. [laughs]

**ISABEL:**

I mean and I think it's important to know: "Oh, it happens to all the rest of people". It's not only you. [agreement] Yeah.

**AGATA:**

And when you know that, that helps you kind of to ... become more confident.

**ISABEL:**

[inaudible segment] when you have to do your presentations and you know all the rest of people are nervous too.

**AGATA:**

Exactly!

**ISABEL:**

And they're going to go through the same [?debut?] so you feel part of something and you-- that you are altogether trying to get this so ... it makes it easier, for me at least.

**RESEARCHER:**

And Keiko, you mentioned that in the previous semester, before, you had difficulty in expressing yourself and now you are better at it. How did you achieve it?

**KEIKO:**

Maybe the first thing is I have-- I'm more confident with my English and I think it's also from the presentation because I'm more confident to speak to other people in English and also maybe many European students had influence on me so I want to express myself too and ... and I have been here for a long time so ... so I wanna be a part of the group or part of the class so I wanna do it well.

**RESEARCHER:**

And Isabel, you are the one who has already done the presentation – what is your reflection on the whole experience?

**ISABEL:**

Well, I enjoyed doing the previous part. I always liked doing the previous part of the presentation because it means you work with people and even it might be difficult, you always [inaudible segment] to you and it's-- you give to them. Maybe that something, you create something yourself and you can be-- it might be-- it might not be the best presentation at all but it's yours and you have managed with other people to create and to-- and that's something you give the rest of the class and maybe just a little bit of your-- you gave them, they will keep it. I think I find that completely satisfying thing and being in front of the class today, it really felt quite well. First semester when I had to do a presentation for Contemporary Society, I was feeling so nervous and now, today, I was more confident. I mean, I was thinking that I made some mistake [inaudible word] or whatever, "Can you say that?" [laughs] but still I was not THAT nervous and I felt-- well, do you remember the two slides at the beginning and we had a handicap because we had that [?black?]? I really didn't think so. I liked the way that people were in the class, they were [inaudible segment] and you felt them closer and now you know all of them.

**KEIKO:**

Yeah, the class atmosphere is really friendly and I know everyone's face so I can feel more relaxed in front of the class. I think it's important thing to know.

**ISABEL:**

I also [?prefer it?] as well. Maybe it's a strange thing that only happens to me but I feel more nervous when I have to talk in front of people who are native speakers of English. [agreement] [laughter]

**AGATA:**

You're more conscious [inaudible segment] think of your mistakes.

**ISABEL:**

Yeah. With them I know-- they might be but even if I am in a place where everybody is a better foreign and they are foreign but better speakers than me, I still know they-- once they did the same mistakes I did, so they can understand and they-- well, of course, native speakers will understand it but ... it's different. It makes it a little bit easier, much easier. Yeah. In the first one there were lots of [inaudible segment] lots of American people and I had to do my presentation with three American girls and I was terrified. [laughter]

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. Thanks for that. You mentioned before the question of setting yourself objectives. Did you set yourselves any objectives when doing the self-assessment, or did you think about setting yourselves any objectives?

**KAORI:**

[inaudible segment] I think. I did the limit to the end of the May because I will live here till the end of the May and so until then I have to study a lot more and I have to improve my English skills so ... yeah, but I don't do it now [laughs] but I have to do it – I WILL. I will do it.

**RESEARCHER:**

So did you set yourself limit the limit, the--

**KAORI:**

Yes.

**RESEARCHER:**

Completion date till the end of May?

**KAORI:**

Yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

And can you remember any particular statements you set as your objectives?

**KAORI:**

No. I always tick - [?like?] later.

**RESEARCHER:**

[pause] What about the others? Did you manage to set yourselves any objectives?

**ISABEL:**

I think I set vocabulary related to the oral interaction and I think one was about taking part in conversations with natives, where they are not talking to you, like knowing you're foreign [laughs] so I don't particularly do anything because I don't think you can do exercises from that or anything so that's-- I mean, I live with 6 Irish girls so sometimes I feel like just going to sleep but they are watching TV in the living room and I go there and try to participate in the conversation. I mean, they are-- most of them they are really nice and they want me to, so sometimes it's hard because when you're tired - I don't know - when I'm tired, my English grows [laughter] horrible but I try to keep [?in?]. I think that's a good way or [agreement] the way-- a little way I had to improving that. I also set it for the end of my-- when I'm leaving. I hope I'll get some then.

**RESEARCHER:**

And do you think it's a good idea to be reminded about it by email? I don't know – I think Liz has mentioned it that [they confirm] in the final version of LOLIPOP, you'll be able to set yourself little reminders. Do you think it's a good idea? Would you like to be-- to do it, or do you think it's not good at all?

**KEIKO:**

I don't think it's not good but I think it doesn't make any difference because I know it that I said and like if I don't do that, then if I'm reminded by an email, then I won't do it anyway so it's a problem about myself and like I think it doesn't make any difference.

**ISABEL:**

I think it might depend on the person. [agreement] For some it will be like a good reminder, something to help you keep going with it, and for some it will be like putting pressure on you.

**RESEARCHER:**

And did you-- perhaps- if you remember - were there any things you wanted to achieve by the end of this module or by the end of your stay abroad in particular? Isabel, you mentioned being able to speak to native speakers ...

**ISABEL:**

Yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

Or interacting with native speakers.

**ISABEL:**

Yeah. In a conversation. [inaudible segment] Yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

Was there anything in particular in relation to the module you are doing – the globalisation module – or your stay abroad as a whole?

**KAORI:**

[long pause] I have one – it's listening skills because I did the self-assessment with LOLIPOP and I realised my listening skills is very low level because sometimes I can't understand the TV programme or the Irish TV programme like that so I have to focus on the listening skills because it's important to communicate with other people so it's a particular thing for me.

**ISABEL:**

You have to watch more TV. [laughter] That's your homework. [more laughter] But I think it's really helpful. [agreement] [cross talk]

**AGATA:**

Radios are. Yeah. What's very good also, I find, in the library you can get books on tape and they are very helpful and you can [inaudible segment] different accents as well and I used to listen before I went to bed and all the different accents, different books, it

helped me a lot to improve the pronunciation and [inaudible segment] but yeah, it's very good so I would definitely suggest. And then when you listen to the books but you don't have to read, but then you can imagine things and, for example, word- different words, that's how I learnt as well because my-- it's like conversations or things and it was very good for me to remember, for example, part of conversation, what was said or something and that's how I could remember the word and sometimes I wouldn't exactly know one 100 per cent what the word meant but I knew when I could use it. [laughter] And yeah, that's really funny [more laughter] and it would be correct but don't ask me what exactly it means. Yeah, so books on tape are really good and very helpful.

**ISABEL:**

Yeah films and [?so looking?] at things and just listening to native speakers.

**AGATA:**

Exactly.

**ISABEL:**

[inaudible word] sometimes my classmates laugh at me when I tell them I almost have a notebook because when I hear something which is-- because it's not-- they are not normal things you learn at class or any other-- for example, once one of my house mates said that someone had [inaudible segment] text – I would never say that. I mean, I would say: “to text something” or “to receive a text” but-- or “send a text” but I would never say “you have [inaudible segment] [laughter] and [inaudible segment] I managed to use it. [more laughter]

**RESEARCHER:**

Good. And ... so it seems you have lots of language objectives. Did you have any intercultural objectives as well? Did you think about any of them?

**AGATA:**

[long pause] I think for me the one that, [?was?] most important to be [?a lot?] more in-- with the students or other people from other cultures and because at IU, I'm really-- or I really am proud that you know working in the groups and everything, that you find out more about other countries, where outside IU, it's work and Irish people or your-- and you basically you are in contact with Irish people and your own community here and there's nothing-- no other cultures really. You don't really mix. Now, of course if you

go out then maybe but if you don't go out-- you know it's so -- that would be for me to kind of to do a bit of-- more work with different cultures and, for example, we have a student from Kenya in our group and she was telling about tribes and in my head I could picture these-- the mud huts and everything. She said: "No, we don't have any mud huts, we have a tribe" and this and that. You know different facts that you learn about other cultures which is REALLY interesting. In a way, you think: "Yeah, Kenya – OK", you see on the television and yeah, mud huts and you know and the people but ... yeah and it was so interesting as well because that person wears the- a shawl or whatever, and one of the days there were no men and she took it off and we were [inaudible word] "Your hair is so beautiful!" because you don't know how the person looks. It's just nice like you know it is really nice to work with other people. You learn a lot about the different cultures as well. Yeah.

**ISABEL:**

I think just going to class, our class has given us lots of things related to intercultural competence even though they maybe don't realise how much.

**AGATA:**

Yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

[pause] OK. [pause] You are saying about going to class and I know in the last weeks you've been doing the exchange with the school from France [students confirm] and I just wanted to know how you're finding this experience or how did you find it really?

**AGATA:**

I find-- it's great, yeah, and we had to do at the beginning as Liz mentioned also in the beginning, we all-- we had a task what to do and that's when we all uploaded things and [inaudible segment] but now it's stopped because we have so many things other to do and there's no [?completely?] time [?when?] to send a message or trying to listen to that African video or something. I couldn't get in and I just left it and I-- you know, no other questions kind of came up where I could ask other students. It's great, it's really great but I think we need more time or more-- I don't know. Now at the beginning of the semester-- at the end of the semester it's really-- you can feel the pressure and I think OK, you see, you have a list what you have to do and you do the most important things and you try to do everything as well but sometimes you just ... I don't know. Where at

the beginning we all put the-- you know – work uploaded, photographs, everything and ...

**KEIKO:**

Yeah. It's a great thing and interesting but ...

**AGATA:**

Yeah, yeah.

**KEIKO:**

It doesn't work really.

**AGATA:**

Yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

And did you have a chance to look at their website at all?

**AGATA:**

Yeah. Yeah. [inaudible segment] but I couldn't get into all the other stuff they uploaded on, I couldn't get in and some stuff that I got in was in French and I thought: "Ooh!" [laughter] you know and-- because Liz, I think she managed to watch some video but the African - tribe African music – something like that – I couldn't get in, so I don't know why or how and [inaudible segment]

**ISABEL:**

I'd like to see the video.

**AGATA:**

Yeah, it's a great idea and it would be nice to do it maybe during the summer as well rather than-- when we finish, like exams are finished and then you have time so then you can more ask the people, you know, about their free time or whatever you know have a conversation thing.

**ISABEL:**

Yeah.

**AGATA:**

You know kind of bit stopped.

**ISABEL:**

Because we have-- we always have too many things to do for this module when we have the presentation [agreement] [inaudible segment] the presentation, I'm not talking about the other present-. [agreement] It kinds of mixes everything.

**AGATA:**

You kind of think: "Oh, my goodness, [inaudible segment] 2 weeks' time!" [more laughter]

**ISABEL:**

And you [inaudible segment] with everything you have to do.

**AGATA:**

Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. That kind of stuff.

**RESEARCHER:**

And did you learn-- I know you didn't have the time to see all the videos and everything -- but did you learn anything about them?

**AGATA:**

[pause] I thought it was very interesting the introduction [inaudible segment] not only the students introduced themselves but [inaudible segment] some-- lots of them were like you know -- one guy is from Britain and then the other ones are from [inaudible word] different countries. It was very interesting to know that in France they're exactly the same-- not exactly the same group but intercultural group as well -- studying different things so ... yeah.

**ISABEL:**

[pause] They had this kind of questionnaires about themselves in their website...

**AGATA:**

Yeah, yeah.

**ISABEL:**

Which were kind of fun.

**AGATA:**

Yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

[pause] I have to admit I haven't looked at it myself. [laughter] [pause] Do you think that-- the self-assessment you did was done online so you needed a computer to do it -- do you think doing an assessment online is better or worse, maybe the same, as doing it with pen and paper?

**KEIKO:**

[pause] I think it's the same.

**RESEARCHER:**

[pause] Would you have any preferences? Would you prefer to do it with a pen or would you prefer to do it online?

**ISABEL:**

The self-assessment I prefer to do it online, because all the things, you answer yes, now you have your automatic response so ... [agreement]

**KAORI:**

An easy.

**ISABEL:**

It's also-- it's easier, it's quick. [agreement]

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. [long pause] And ... well, if we are talking about online and computers, I just wonder how useful do you find the Moodle course site? Do you use it at all and if you do, for what purposes you use it? For example, do you use it to communicate with your group mates? [Students [in unison]: No!]

**AGATA:**

You don't?! [with surprise] Oh, I think Moodle is great. Yeah, I do, I really do because you can go and you know like communicate with others-- this semester not really but it's in the previous semester we really communicated a lot, it was just different-- now we kind of all got each other's mobile numbers and we just text and it's kind of quicker

whereas going on Moodle but ... and I find it important as well all the-- you know, the setting up like you know different modules you are doing and the teachers uploading their work on it and you can go in and check so I really find it very helpful and you can go in and check and, you know, some lecturers even put their lectures on like you know as a PowerPoint and you [inaudible word] go back and see--compare your notes and so ... Yeah... really helpful.

**ISABEL:**

[inaudible segment] you can have all of it together and all the resources [inaudible segment] – maybe not only what you do at class but things that she asked me to have a look at. Yeah, it's much nicer than having a lot of pedagogies. [agreement] [inaudible segment] they might be-- it's different, [inaudible segment] see everything you have and ... I don't really use it to communicate because, for example, with most of my group we see each other in class every day.

**AGATA:**

Every day.

**ISABEL:**

So ...

**KEIKO:**

It's useful that I can see like every source or lectures, PowerPoint, but for me Liz is the really the only one teacher who put everything on Moodle, so other lectures don't use it much so I often look at that class on Moodle but not the other classes. They are not using it so often so ... and I don't use it for communication. We just use text.

**AGATA:**

Yeah, I'm using Moodle for communication. Some students do not have computers at home so they have to come here to IU to go to the library, we have the computer here and sometimes by text it's much quicker but I find as well when you send a message and some people check it and some people don't check it and then can-- some people turn up on meeting and the others don't [agreement] so to do that, then you just send a text and you know the person got it and you know the person will definitely come in, where some students I know don't really-- have no opportunity to check every day because they don't have a computer at home.

**RESEARCHER:**

I know that some of you have to leave soon so I'll ask one final question and that will be it for today and it's a kind of summary I think for what we've been talking about today and I know the course is not finished yet – there's another almost month to go but I just wonder: how are you finding the course in-- how it helps you to become more interculturally competent – if at all? [irrelevant segment] Do you think it is useful in any way to help you become more interculturally competent?

**KEIKO:**

Yeah, because first of all there're so many students from many countries and we often have class discussion and I think it's a great thing because like we-- I think Japanese people don't that much but many students talk to class mates and like I'm not taking the same English class with them so I don't really a good friend of them but I can listen to many opinions from like France or Kenya, many countries, and I think it's a great thing, and for me that class is the most intercultural class because there are many nationalities and they speak in group of people and they give us opinion so I think that class helps a lot.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. [pause] OK, thank you. [laughter] That's the summary for today. That's great, thanks a lot.

## C.5 SAMPLE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

### **RESEARCHER:**

Isabel, I would like to know first how independent do you think you were in the module and why do you think that was the case?

### **ISABEL:**

Well, I was independent because we had to kind of create our own programme and we had-- some things we had to do – thing we had to go over but for example in the reflection we had to write them so we'll-- could bring them to the-- I mean, inside that issue that took-- to [?linking?] it to the topics we felt like doing, and it was the same-- we also had quite a lot of freedom doing the presentations so we could really do ... I think that was quite different of what I'm used to. I'm used to just having a programme and going through it. It was-- I really liked doing that. It was different.

### **RESEARCHER:**

And did you have any particular difficulties with this independence, with this freedom?

### **ISABEL:**

At first in the first reflection it was difficult for me because I didn't really know what was expected from me. And before I started writing I was like: "I won't be able to write 200 words" because I don't really know what-- how to describe myself a exchange student. But once you get to writing, it's-- it becomes easier.

### **RESEARCHER:**

OK. And do you think that there were any barriers that stopped you from becoming more independent?

### **ISABEL:**

[long pause] I don't know. Probably I would like to have more time for this module, like, because we had so many things to do in just one semester that even if you really wanted to write more or reflect more on one of the single things, you didn't really have time. I would have prefer like doing all this for the whole academic year and it would have been different. Maybe was that we had too many things to do and very little time so you didn't really spend as much time as you wanted with some of them.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. And how would you describe the role of the teacher and your own role in this module?

**ISABEL:**

Well, there were moments in which she was like more traditional teacher, for example when we were doing vocabulary things and-- or in the very very first days. And then she was kind of guiding us to what she wanted us to do but not really saying: "You have to do this". She just gave us some hints and we had to work our way towards [?you?], where we wanted and where she wanted. So I think we pulled more of ourselves in this module than we usually do in others.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. And what do you think your role was in the course?

**ISABEL:**

I don't know - that's difficult. [laughs] [pause] Well, I had - yeah- to create my own work ... my own, like, field of study. We had some limits and then I-- yeah, like writing our reflections and doing the oral work with the group and ...

**RESEARCHER:**

And how happy were you with both roles – with the role of the teacher and with your own role? How satisfied were you with them?

**ISABEL:**

Yeah. In the end I really liked it because it was different and I felt it was more satisfying than just studying for an exam and passing it because I had both much of myself in the work in module. But in the beginning I was like: "I don't know what she wants from me and I'm not sure if I will be able to do what she wants" and then when you stop thinking that much about what she wants and try to do it for yourself, what you're in, it's-- it gets easier and you stop thinking: "I don't know what [laughs] I have to do". Just do it.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. Were there any times when you thought you needed some help or some guidance and if there were, where did you look for that help?

***ISABEL:***

I think I need some when we were preparing our presentation because there was a moment in which we felt a bit lost, like, it was too wide, we didn't really know what was it- what were-- we're supposed to do in the teaching part. And yeah, we had more or less a wide topic and we were not sure. [?We were worried?], doubting if we will do it OK and then when we had this meeting with Liz to talk to her, then she gave us this guidance like to start with brainstorm and then when we had like a clear structure of what we were doing it was much easier and ... Yeah.

***RESEARCHER:***

OK. And Isabel, in what ways and by whom were you assessed in this module?

***ISABEL:***

Well, with the like writing the journals, all I'm assessed by Liz and ... then in the presentation I'm assessed both like Liz – well, she will have part- whether yes - what the other students write about my presentation will have to do something with my mark - I'm not sure if it will but I kind of felt when I was doing my presentation and I had to keep them - well not happy but I mean it was for them, it was for my mark but it was for them and they were-- in a way they were assessing me. Even if what they think doesn't have anything with my mark and when I read their feedback it will be important for me.

***RESEARCHER:***

So what do you think – which form of assessment was most valuable to you?

***ISABEL:***

Well, I haven't read, yes, like the things they wrote about me but I think probably that is most valuable one because if they are like sincere and they really tell what they think it is, because I'm supposed to be doing that, like, reading in front of a class, speaking to people for the rest of my life [laughs] so I need to know how people see me and what are the things I do bad and what are things that I do wrong. I don't like those reports just if only they say that they liked this and this and they don't say what they didn't like.

***RESEARCHER:***

OK. Isabel, now that you have completed the module, how would you assess your language skills and how would you assess your intercultural competence?

**ISABEL:**

My language skills - I think they've improved a little, just for example having to talk in class in front of everybody, that helps me because if- -when I first did it - the thing with the newspaper, I was so nervous, I couldn't really get to speak and when I did the presentation, I was a bit afraid. I'm not usually nervous when I have to do a presentation but I was a bit afraid I won't do it quite right and I had all my notes and there was-- I started talking and then I left my notes, just had it in my hands. And I was really happy about that, even if probably I could have have like a better pronunciation [inaudible word] I was really happy, I could just do it and stop worrying about if I'm saying that's right or wrong because still I think I managed to communicate with the other students even if I was not like perfect speaking and well and it also helped me the writing part because if I-- I don't have so many things to write here as I had in my home university and if I stop writing, I can forget it the next time I'm going to do a written exercises like I didn't-- I don't find the connector I want to use and doing every-- it every now and then and [?grading?] myself and because-- yeah you'll do it and suddenly you [inaudible word] the hands like: "Oh, this is a mistake I shouldn't have done even if I was like 60" [laughs] yeah, and you correct yourself. The intercultural - I really-- the other girls I knew it from the rest of the modules but I really found interesting having all those Japanese students with us in that module because I never worked with them and they are so different and it was a bit difficult in the beginning that train-because you don't know what to do, for example you were in their group and they didn't talk and you were think: "Probably they are feeling uncomfortable with me or I'm speaking too much!" [laughs] I don't know. And [inaudible segment] some moment in which-- yeah, I think they put something of- from themselves and we put something from ourselves and the final work - the one we did like the our presentation, it was mu- that was much better understanding and that must have something to do with our intercultural knowledge.

**RESEARCHER:**

And how are you going to act on these language skills and intercultural competence in your further studies? Are you going to do anything about this knowledge you have?

**ISABEL:**

Well, the language knowledge I hope I will come and like spend some time in an English-speaking country every now and then because I don't want to be one of those teachers of English who haven't been in like England or Ireland like in 20 years and they are completely lost because when you-- you really lose lots of things if you-- I mean last time I had been in English-speaking country was 2 summers ago and I realised when I came here I was a bit worse and [?I wasn't in?] - maybe not like grammatically worse but less fluent. It takes some time to get more that confidence you get and being able to speak like we did in class in front of all people. I'm not sure how to keep our intercultural ski- [inaudible segment] problem, probably if you like do something in, try to find a group when they-- where they work with foreign people who come to live in your region or something it will be useful but it's not that easy to keep your intercultural knowledge than it is to keep ... and still I will-- I think I will keep contact with Hoshiko, for example, the Japanese girl who was in my group because we ha- [?we'd send?] emails and used to talk. [inaudible segment]

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. Good. And Isabel how did you feel being in a class that consisted only of international students?

**ISABEL:**

It was the first time I did that. It was a bit strange because when I first came here I didn't think it-- I thought I was going to go to class with Irish people, I didn't really know. And then it was like: "No!" [laughs] It was really interesting because there are sometimes you have like European-centred opinion and suddenly Aileen says something and it's like: "Oh, my God, she's right! I have no idea of this!" [laughs] For example, with the Fair Trade I would have never thought about the farmers who don't receive. I mean it's-- when you come to think of it – of course it is but nobody tells you. You just go like Fair Trade is perfect and there's nothing wrong about it except for the price. And then Aileen goes and says: "Well, the farmer next door to the one who is doing the Fair Trade thing is becoming poorer and poorer every day" and you are like: "Oh, my God!" [laughs] Yeah, and it's the kind of things that you-- you change completely your perspective and things you have like completely set suddenly are like not that sure.

**RESEARCHER:**

And what impact do you think they had on you linguistically and interculturally, the students who are in the module?

**ISABEL:**

Linguistically at first it was like worse for me because I felt all of them spoke English better than I did [laughs] so I was kind of frightened, frightened not to speak much. But then once you realise, yeah it's easier – I mean, you say: “OK”, and you can-- I get to speak to Agata and [inaudible word] she's been living here for 5 years and say: “OK, I'm not that bad”, I mean, I've been only here for like some weeks. And then when you get closer to them, you just see they are just like you and in some moment they were exactly like you so then I-- they help, they really help me getting more confidence because there are some moment in which you think: “I'm not sure I'm going to get any better speaking English” but you see them and they are- yeah like “I was like you learning” and [inaudible segment] yeah, acts like a prompts to go on with it because you can get it. And intercultural - well, I had never been in such an intercultural context and yeah, it's-- sometimes it's a bit overwhelming because you have your ideas and suddenly there are lots of different ideas from different cultural backgrounds and you are like, you kind of get lost because you don't really have definitions you've always had, the things you've always relate suddenly they are not quite there. [laughs] But still when you get used to being around them, it's so enriching and you-- when I finished the module, I was sad I was never again going to like being with all of them, receiving all that information, all that-- those things you could learn from them, just listening to what they might talk. Even-- not even in class, probably just talking waiting for Liz to come or something like that.

**RESEARCHER:**

And what impact do you think YOU had on them?

**ISABEL:**

[laughs] I'm not sure. Well, at least they all were-- they are not shocked any more that I'm Spanish, I'm blonde. That was the first thing because I spent the first month like all of them saying: “But you're Spanish?” “Yeah” “But your - both your parents are?” like [laugh] And ... yeah. Because I think in the first moment it was a bit of a shock I didn't- - like I didn't look Spanish and I was a bit strange, I was far from like stereotype of

Spanish. But then I think they got used to me. [laugh] And I don't know, I don't really know if I had any impact at all. I mean, I know I had with Hanna or with Bogdana because they are my friends but I don't really know. I guess – yeah – they will remember me a little [laughs] next year when I'm not here. I hope so.

**RESEARCHER:**

Do you think this module was in any way helpful for your stay abroad experience?

**ISABEL:**

Yeah, yeah, I do. Specially like the reflection part because it's easy to just go to class and – not forget about what you've done – but if you don't stop to think and when we had to stop and think about some things - some things you have to go back and ... yeah. And these sessions they also really helped me ... Yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

[laughs] I'd like to hear that.

**ISABEL:**

Yeah, just talking to the other students, listening to them and ... yeah, it helped me feel like I was one more, I was not alone in this.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. Great. [laugh] Isabel, did you achieve any of-- first of all, did you set yourself any goals in the beginning or during the module and if you did, did you achieve any of them?

**ISABEL:**

Well, I said when I did my-- the newspaper presentation, I could-- I wanted to do – I don't know if I gave presentation at home better than that. I think I did. I still think I talked too much on my presentation [laughs] but well, usually happens to me. But yeah, that was something I was really happy about; I don't think I would be able to do that.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. Great. How useful do you think was the use of technology in this module for your learning?

**ISABEL:**

I loved it! We were-- I li- I do like computers but I like using Moodle, I have never used something like that. And it's-- you could write your thing and then you thought about something else, you could delete something and write something else and you have two weeks to correct them. And the LOLIPOP thing, I liked that too. I would have liked to work more with it because I really enjoyed that like doing things [laughs] and I'm a bit of a child, I [inaudible segment] start seeing colours and things you had to do and it's so easy and it's fine, you can-- we were doing it with like with a partner or something like that I think; we were doing it and marking yourself and then just show this - the result. And I liked the part where you-- we didn't really work that much with that but the one-- not the self-assessment but the one when you-- where you kept record of the things you did that helped your language learning.

**RESEARCHER:**

Reflections on learning, was it?

**ISABEL:**

No, was-- it's-- I'm not sure if they were reflection like-- you had to choose-- there were some things that you could choose for example a journey to an English-speaking country or something; I like that and I do think it's useful and it-- that should be used more widely with people who are learning languages.

**RESEARCHER:**

OK. Did you use it? Did you actually write anything in the field?

**ISABEL:**

Yeah, I wrote-- yeah only one – Liz she [inaudible segment] us because I was-- with a-- I had lots of reflections to do but ... I- yeah I [?don't?] want to do like “Oh”. [laughs]

**RESEARCHER:**

It's great. Very encouraging. [laugh] What impact do you think the topics you explored in this module might have had on you as a global citizen?

**ISABEL:**

As I said like seeing all these things with a critical view and listening to people who don't necessarily share your cultural background and they might have some opinion which is completely different. I-- and probably their opinion is right and yours is right

too but it helps you see like the whole picture. And ... [quietly] I forgot the question. [louder] I forgot [inaudible word] the question really! [laughs] I don't know what was talking about ... [laughs]

**RESEARCHER:**

Don't worry. I was asking whether the topics you explored in the module ...

**ISABEL:**

Oh yeah.

**RESEARCHER:**

Whether they had had any impact on you as a global citizen?

**ISABEL:**

Yeah and above all the presentations. I really liked you know learning lots, for example, about McDonaldisation, you have this idea that McDonald's is bad and you will get so fat if you eat every day McDonald's; that's-- and they gave like a global view and they talk about - yeah - the different branch because you always get to McDonald's like they are lots of branch when Hanna talk about those all those branch. It was really interesting. And [?in?] all of them, I really loved child labour too, the one they did and yeah, like having all the perspectives they found – I really learnt [?have?] a lot listen to their presentation.

**RESEARCHER:**

And do you think you will use that knowledge in any way when you go back to Spain?

**ISABEL:**

Yeah, I will [inaudible segment] to argue with people! [laughs] They'll only have one view and I will have more! [laughs]

**RESEARCHER:**

Right. OK. And my final question is: was there anything in this module that you think will be useful for your further studies?

**ISABEL:**

I don't know. I'm not sure. Well, of course yeah presenting and I like a lot this kind of things so I was really keen on, at my home university I'm studying - oh, what's the name? - postcolonial literature and-- which it has a lit- yeah a bit to do with some things

we were doing and there are some topics I'd like to explore and I'm not really sure yet because I'm just finishing my degree this year and then it's like I don't know what am I going to do. [laughs] Yeah, I'd probably if I ever, I wouldn't go for linguistics, I could go like for linguistics or for literature and I will probably go for literature, and if I go for that, I will probably [?got?] postcolonial things. Yeah.

***RESEARCHER:***

OK. It sounds interesting. I'm afraid I don't know much about postcolonial literature. Is there anything you would like to add, Isabel, to what you said and I didn't ask? And it's OK if you don't have anything to add.

***ISABEL:***

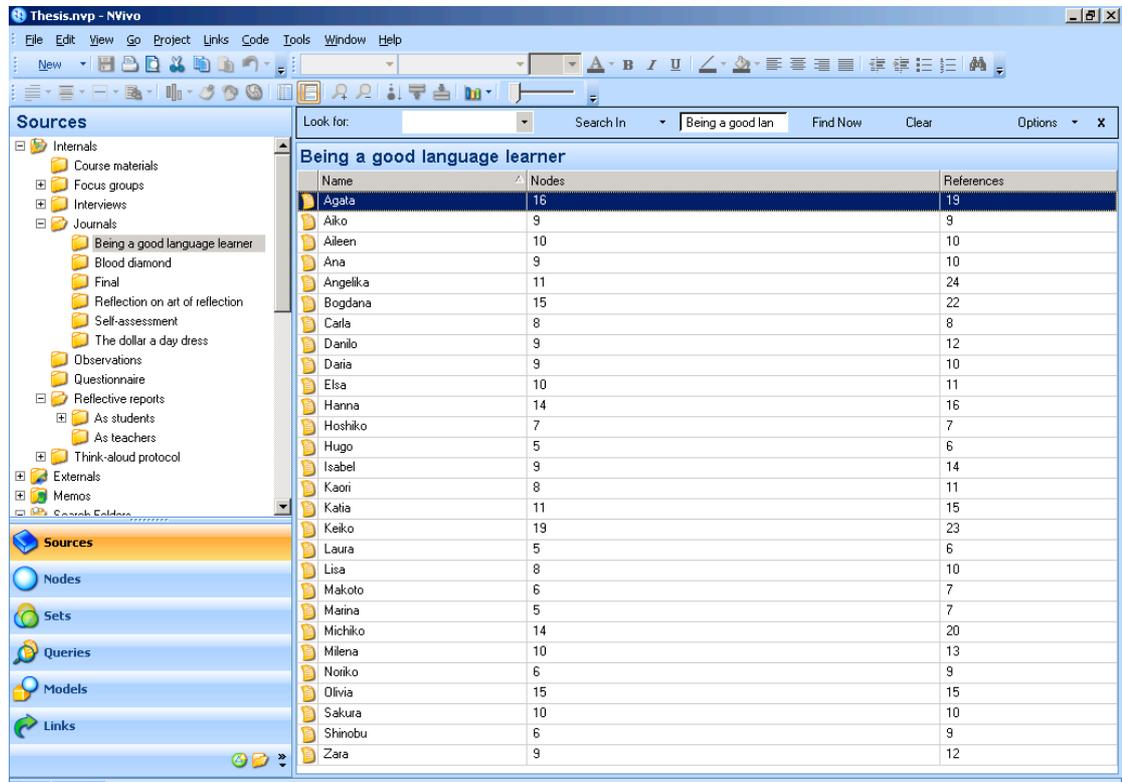
[laughs] No.

***RESEARCHER:***

That's absolutely fine.

## APPENDIX D: DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO DATA ANALYSIS

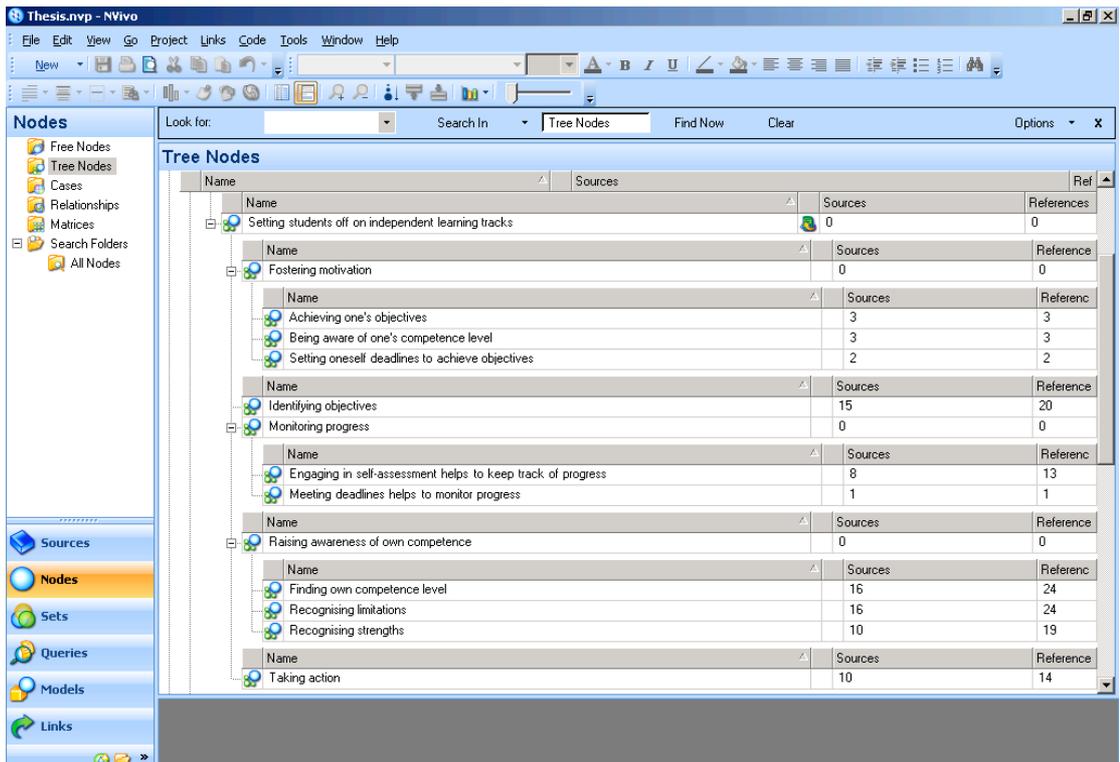
### D.1 Sample screenshots of data analysis in Nvivo8



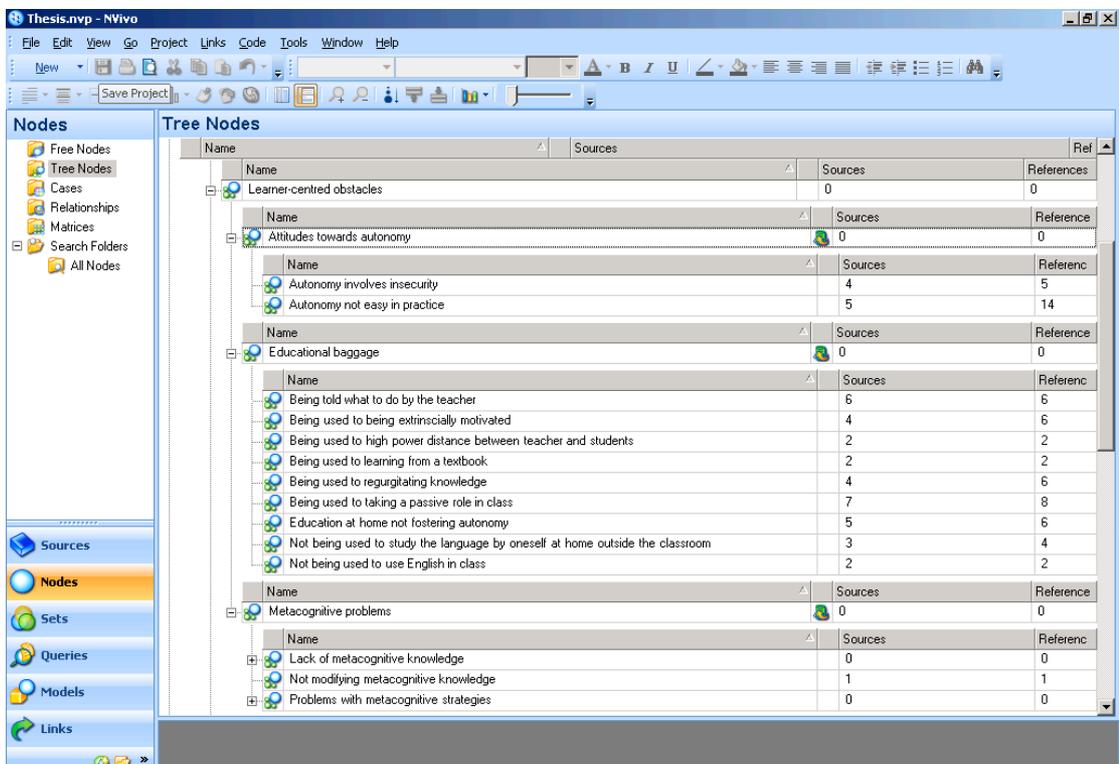
The screenshot displays the NVivo8 software interface. The main window shows a search results table for the document 'Being a good language learner'. The table has three columns: Name, Nodes, and References. The data is as follows:

Name	Nodes	References
Agata	16	19
Aiko	9	9
Aileen	10	10
Ana	9	10
Angelika	11	24
Bogdana	15	22
Carla	8	8
Danilo	9	12
Daria	9	10
Elsa	10	11
Hanna	14	16
Hoshiko	7	7
Hugo	5	6
Isabel	9	14
Kaori	8	11
Katia	11	15
Keiko	19	23
Laura	5	6
Lisa	8	10
Makoto	6	7
Marina	5	7
Michiko	14	20
Milena	10	13
Noriko	6	9
Olivia	15	15
Sakura	10	10
Shinobu	6	9
Zara	9	12

Figure D.1 Screenshot of the database in NVivo8



**Figure D.2** Sample screenshot of the tree node structure in NVivo8  
(Sub-theme: Setting students off on independent learning tracks)



**Figure D.3** Sample screenshot of the tree node structure in NVivo8  
(Sub-theme: Learner-centred obstacles)

## D.2 Sample coded data (Codename: Being told what to do by the teacher)

[<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\Hanna>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.59% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.59% Coverage

we're used to always the teachers always telling us what to do and what's right and wrong

[<Internals\Journals\Being a good language learner\Aiko>](#) - § 1 reference coded [2.25% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.25% Coverage

In a class, it is the most important what a teacher tells us.

[<Internals\Journals\Being a good language learner\Angelika>](#) - § 1 reference coded [3.49% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.49% Coverage

During almost all of the time I was learning English at school I learned vocabulary by heart as we were asked to do, I read the texts we had to read and answered the questions we had to answer without much effort.

[<Internals\Journals\Being a good language learner\Katia>](#) - § 1 reference coded [5.82% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 5.82% Coverage

I started to learn English in the school, for me it was not independent process, as I totally relied on the teacher

[<Internals\Journals\Being a good language learner\Lisa>](#) - § 1 reference coded [29.91% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 29.91% Coverage

In Germany the school systems vary from "Bundesland" to "Bundesland" so I can really only speak for Saxony and my own school. While we were told that we should be more independent and critical with our thinking and learning in grades 11 and 12, we were basically fed everything we needed to know and study for the exams. Although teachers are trying to promote independent learning, it is difficult to start with it after your time at school is almost over and you spent 7 years of learning and studying what you were told.

[<Internals\Journals\Being a good language learner\Olivia>](#) - § 1 reference coded [19.18% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 19.18% Coverage

One of the reasons to creating writing is very challenging for me is maybe due of the kind of education I grew up into. I study my primary, secondary and started third level education in Colombia, South America, where I was born. We weren't encourage to be independent thinkers, we didn't have discussions in classes and we didn't give opinions about anything. We were like robots that did whatever the teachers say to us to do.

### **D.3 Sample coded data (Codename: Self-assessment in uncomfortable)**

[<Internals\Focus groups \Transcripts\Transcript\\_Second FG1>](#) - § 2 references coded [0.95% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.28% Coverage

And then it's uncomfortable I think to assess yourself you know to think about yourself

Reference 2 - 0.67% Coverage

I knew like when I started that my reading English is not as good as I want to be and then when I had to do the self-assessment, I felt really bad. It didn't-- like I had to be honest and it wasn't stupid

[<Internals\Journals\Self-assessment\Agata>](#) - § 1 reference coded [3.28% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.28% Coverage

For some reason it felt wrong, I felt like I was reversing roles with the teacher.

[<Internals\Journals\Self-assessment\Hanna>](#) - § 1 reference coded [2.59% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.59% Coverage

LOLIPOP should be used more, I think because it would help people like me who find it awkward at first to assess themselves

[<Internals\Journals\Self-assessment\Hoshiko>](#) - § 3 references coded [18.76% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 7.37% Coverage

When I do the self-assessment, I feel embarrassment because I have not perfect confidence in my decision.

Reference 2 - 8.76% Coverage

At the same time assessing myself is equal to admit my own limitation. I know I have to do that, but I don't feel comfortable.

Reference 3 - 2.64% Coverage

Sometimes It might make you depressing

[<Internals\Journals\Self-assessment\Katia>](#) - § 1 reference coded [2.56% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.56% Coverage

Firstly it seemed very strange for me, as it is my first time when I was doing self-assessment.

[<Internals\Journals\Self-assessment\Noriko>](#) - § 2 references coded [13.52% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 10.55% Coverage

This time, when I did self- assessment, I felt what I have felt at the beginning of this class again. I had to evaluate myself objectively. The questions are so specific, and I have not done this before, so I felt really confused.

Reference 2 - 2.97% Coverage

I was confused and felt difficult to manage this self- assessment

#### **D.4 Sample coded data (Codename: LAN01's multiculturalism fosters intercultural learning)**

[<Internals\Focus groups \Transcripts\Transcript\\_Second FG2>](#) - § 1 reference coded [0.49% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.49% Coverage

##### ***ISABEL:***

I think just going to class, our class has given us lots of things related to intercultural competence even though they maybe don't realise how much.

##### ***AGATA:***

Yeah.

[<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\Ana>](#) - § 3 references coded [1.82% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.70% Coverage

sometimes we meet in the cafeteria and is interesting you know because sometimes somebody talks about their own country and you hear different traditions and things like that. I think is very interesting.

Reference 2 - 0.29% Coverage

And it's always interesting to hear people you know talking about their own things.

Reference 3 - 0.83% Coverage

we talk about how the Spanish influencing Columbia or whatever and you know exchanging information or what's going on now in Bolivia or Colombia, politics and things like that, the problems they have or the problems we have in Spain you know.

[<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\Hanna>](#) - § 2 references coded [8.81% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 6.04% Coverage

##### ***RESEARCHER:***

OK. [pause] And now that you have completed the module, how would you assess your language skills and intercultural competence?

**HANNA:**

Like from when we started until now? I think my language skills ... they way they're-- I mean they're getting better but I don't think that's the main thing that has changed. I really think it is the intercultural thing 'cause even though the last semester we were in a mixed class as well or intercultural class but we never really-- or I didn't really discuss things with the other do you know about our countries and it was just talking about the school and this class really ... I think it's really interesting just getting to know the other people and getting to know their culture as well and finding out the differences and finding out what we can learn from each other as well. So I think my intercultural skills are the ones who had really developed.

Reference 2 - 2.76% Coverage

in Denmark we have problems with people from Turkey whatever 'cause [clucks annoyed] all these-- we don't know anything about each other really and I think that's important to make us-- I was fed up with that as well before I left and now I know that you can't really judge people just because they're from a certain country and I didn't know anything about anything actually. So I know I'll always bear that in mind

[<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\Isabel>](#) - § 3 references coded [10.83% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 4.14% Coverage

the other girls I knew it from the rest of the modules but I really found interesting having all those Japanese students with us in that module because I never worked with them and they are so different and it was a bit difficult in the beginning that train- because you don't know what to do, for example you were in their group and they didn't talk and you were think: "Probably they are feeling uncomfortable with me or I'm speaking too much!" [laughs] I don't know. And [inaudible segment] some moment in which-- yeah, I think they put something of- from themselves and we put something from ourselves and the final work – the one we did like the our presentation, it was mu- that was much better understanding and that must have something to do with our intercultural knowledge.

Reference 2 - 4.17% Coverage

well, I had never been in such an intercultural context and yeah, it's-- sometimes it's a bit overwhelming because you have your ideas and suddenly there are lots of different ideas from different cultural backgrounds and you are like, you kind of get lost because

you don't really have definitions you've always had, the things you've always relate suddenly they are not quite there. [laughs] But still when you get used to being around them, it's so enriching and you-- when I finished the module, I was sad I was never again going to like being with all of them, receiving all that information, all that-- those things you could learn from them, just listening to what they might talk. Even-- not even in class, probably just talking waiting for Liz to come or something like that.

Reference 3 - 2.52% Coverage

Well, at least they all were-- they are not shocked any more that I'm Spanish, I'm blonde. That was the first thing because I spent the first month like all of them saying: "But you're Spanish?" "Yeah" "But your - both your parents are?" like [laugh] And ... yeah. Because I think in the first moment it was a bit of a shock I didn't-- like I didn't look Spanish and I was a bit strange, I was far from like stereotype of Spanish. But then I think they got used to me. [laugh]

[<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\Kaori>](#) - § 1 reference coded [2.20% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.20% Coverage

when I speak some people, they have the different culture or language or experience and [inaudible segment] very good experience and [?not?] sometime [?I was?] surprised at something that cultural difference and I think it's a good thing of the living the foreign country

[<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\Keiko>](#) - § 2 references coded [8.59% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 5.37% Coverage

### **RESEARCHER:**

And even if you didn't set yourself any goals, what do you think you achieved by the end of this module?

### **KEIKO:**

[very long pause] I think ... I think even I couldn't do that in the whole class but I tried to discuss in a small groups with other international students and I think now I can understand the students from other countries opinion more than before, in like, I think before ...how do you say? I was like: "OK, that opinion is really original" and I wouldn't think of that opinion in-- as a Japanese and I would think is just a strange

opinion but now I know that everyone is from different cultures and they have different background and I think I can respect their opinion more than before so I think that is the biggest achievement in this modules ...

Reference 2 - 3.22% Coverage

I liked to know the cultural difference because it's really interesting for me and first I learnt that a lot from my class mates because they are from different countries and ... I can't think of exactly what it is but I think I found many aspects that I found interesting because of the cultural differences and that makes the different way of thinking about things and it is from different backgrounds so I don't know how but I think it would affect my future studies

[<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\Olivia>](#) - § 2 references coded [2.57% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.35% Coverage

because we are so diverse group you know people from everywhere so is so interesting to hear what other people think about what is happening in the world. [?Yeah?] Very interesting.

Reference 2 - 1.22% Coverage

### **OLIVIA:**

I love it. I love it because, as I say, you learn so many things from different parts of the world. There are so many personalities, cultures, is so nice.

[<Internals\Journals\Final\Agata>](#) - § 1 reference coded [8.91% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 8.91% Coverage

Interacting with people from other countries made me realise that no matter where you come from we all are globalised citizens sharing cultural similarities as well as differences.

[<Internals\Journals\Final\Angelika>](#) - § 1 reference coded [7.06% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 7.06% Coverage

It was so fascinating studying together with students from Spain, Japan, Colombia, Poland, Switzerland,... At the end of this course I feel like I could go to almost any country in this world and come along well because I got to know all these nice people from all over the world.

[<Internals\Journals\Final\Danilo>](#) - § 1 reference coded [11.77% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 11.77% Coverage

Most importantly though, the class' multicultural environment has taught me that understanding and tolerance of "the different" are the basis of good communication among people.

[<Internals\Journals\Final\Hanna>](#) - § 3 references coded [29.21% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 16.62% Coverage

Eventhough I am not completely sure about the improvement as a language learner I know that I have learned a lot about my role as a globalized citizen and about how to interact with fellow students from countries far away from mine. I have learnt that I should never feel superior to people from other countries because deep down we are all the same. And in this class we were all there for the same thing; to learn. It has been a beautiful experience that I will always remember and I hope that I will be able to keep up an open mind later on.

Reference 2 - 8.23% Coverage

It was challenging to have to work as teachers in the final presentation but I got to know three wonderful people from countries I have never given a thought before - and before I knew it I was invited to Spain and Bosnia and I know I will have these friends for life.

Reference 3 - 4.36% Coverage

It is a module that every racist should be forced to do. It really gets rid of prejudices. Thank you for this semester! ["smiley icon" – smile]

[<Internals\Journals\Final\Laura>](#) - § 1 reference coded [22.38% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 22.38% Coverage

The LAN01 course has been an important key to a better understanding of some aspects and principles of intercultural learning. The fact that all the students belonged to many different countries helped to achieve a general notion of what globalisation is and its impact in the world nowadays. The course also took into account the cultural differences of the countries represented by the students in the class.

[<Internals\Journals\Final\Lisa>](#) - § 1 reference coded [26.32% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 26.32% Coverage

Overall, I think that I have learned more about cultures and intercultural interaction than about the English language.

This is mostly due to the multicultural environment the course took place in. Studying together with people from so many different cultures was definitely an advantage regarding my intercultural competence. I believe it has helped us all to improve our understanding of each other's cultures and countries.

[<Internals\Journals\Self-assessment\Ana>](#) - § 1 reference coded [9.43% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 9.43% Coverage

Our multicultural class is very exciting, I love talking to people of different cultures and learning about their customs, history...

[<Internals\Journals\Self-assessment\Hanna>](#) - § 1 reference coded [10.16% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 10.16% Coverage

Constantly I find myself talking to people from countries I would not have known unless I started this course and I have wondered how I will be able to corporate with students from different countries without feeling either superior or just judgemental. So I have worked hard and found that there is no need for prejudices because deep down we are all the same and we all want the same in this course. I has been the most eye opening experience for me and for that i am thankful.

## D.5 Sample coded data (Codename: Practising ethical consumerism)

[<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\Agata>](#) - § 1 reference coded [1.21% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.21% Coverage

even about Fair Trade you know because OK you hear it on the television, you do this but when you don't get your hands onto it, you don't really-- it's just another thing you know but when you do it and now I'm more aware now, I'm going to the shops, now I look for Fair Trade products and you know and I buy them now because it does make a difference you know and you know life is too short and if you don't do anything then it will just pass you by.

[<Internals\Journals\Blood diamond\Agata>](#) - § 1 reference coded [10.35% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 10.35% Coverage

Before seeing this film I have never thought of the story behind diamonds, but now that I am aware of the situation in Sierra Leone, I look at my engagement ring and wonder if someone suffered in it's making. I would be more aware in future when buying jewellery and would ensure that any diamonds used came from a reputable source.

[<Internals\Journals\Blood diamond\Angelika>](#) - § 1 reference coded [3.95% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.95% Coverage

I think that in the future I will try to be more aware of where the imported goods (unfortunately not diamonds ;) that I buy are from. If available I will prefer fair-trade products to those which might have been produced by exploited farmers.

[<Internals\Journals\Blood diamond\Marina>](#) - § 1 reference coded [15.37% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 15.37% Coverage

"Blood diamond" film was affected me a lot. After watching it I decided, that I would never like to have any diamond jewelers in my life. I think that it is horrible when hundreds of people pain and suffer because of the bright stone. People can easily live without it, it is not as important as food or water.

[<Internals\Journals\The dollar a day dress\Agata>](#) - § 1 reference coded [6.00% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 6.00% Coverage

Before seeing this film I have never paid much attention to the origin of the clothes that I bought. Now that I am aware of the Fair Trade mark I will look out for it.

[<Internals\Journals\The dollar a day dress\Darja>](#) - § 1 reference coded [10.64% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 10.64% Coverage

In my personal opinion the film was very successful, it has certainly breaded my mind

and horizons. A few days after watching this film I was not so keen on buying T-shirts for,,2euro,,.

[<Internals\Journals\The dollar a day dress\Hanna>](#) - § 1 reference coded [13.11% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 13.11% Coverage

I think it made a great picture of how globalisation is changing the world and how we have to be more careful and thoughtful when it comes to the countries we maybe do not know too much about besides the fact that they are poor. It made you want to think twice and do more than just donate old and rotten clothes.

[<Internals\Journals\The dollar a day dress\Katia>](#) - § 1 reference coded [11.64% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 11.64% Coverage

I think that many people will think of what kind of product to buy. The matter here is not how much will this product cost, but about people who made it. Personally this film makes me feel this way.

[<Internals\Journals\The dollar a day dress\Milena>](#) - § 2 references coded [23.03% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 18.09% Coverage

Generally, ‘One dollar a day dress’ video has been really interesting for me. The video showed the sad truth that people really work for nothing and without our support they have no chances for better life. From now on I will definitely check the origins of the produces I’m buying and I will be looking for the fair-trade marks. Bad working conditions, second hand underwear, begging - this is just so humiliating! I believe that we all can have an influence on making the poorest people life better.

Reference 2 - 4.94% Coverage

This video was very important for me because not only it learned something but also it changed my life a bit (e.g. my shopping habits).

[<Internals\Observations\Ob5>](#) - § 1 reference coded [1.27% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.27% Coverage

I chat to Agata who says that she had trouble buying FT products in the local Spar and that she even spoke to the manager about the lack of such products there but that the person was not very impressed with her question. She says that she even went to Ballymun to get some FT products.

[<Internals\Reflective reports\As students\Fair trade\Sakura>](#) - § 1 reference coded [11.82% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 11.82% Coverage

They mentioned where we could buy the Fair Trade products in order to answer the question in the questionnaire from the colleague. It helped people like me who did not know so many places to buy the Fair trade products.

## APPENDIX E: DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO RESEARCH ETHICS

### E.1 INFORMED CONSENT FORM

#### [University logo] DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY Informed Consent Form (general)

**Research Project Title:** Promoting autonomy in intercultural learning: self-assessment of intercultural communicative competence using an e-portfolio.

**Name of Researcher:** Aleksandra Sudhershan (PhD student with the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies - SALIS).

**Project Supervisors:** Ms Veronica Crosbie and Dr Jenny Bruen (SALIS)

I understand that the purpose of this research project is to explore how an online portfolio called the LOLIPOP ELP can help international university students to take, and reflect on, the self-assessment of their competence and in this way to become more responsible for their intercultural learning.

(Please complete the following by circling Yes or No for each question)

I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement.

Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study and I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions.

Yes/No

I am aware that I will be observed in class.

Yes/No

I am aware that my LOLIPOP ELP will be analysed by the researcher.

Yes/No

I am aware that my "reflection on learning" journals will be analysed.

Yes/No

I am aware that the documents and reports I will create for my assessed course presentation will be collected and analysed.

Yes/No

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. I understand that my withdrawal from the project will not affect my grades or my relationship with the lecturer or █████ in any way.

I understand that the information I provide will be treated in strictest confidence and that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

I understand that my responses will be anonymised after analysis and prior to thesis write-up and further publications.

#### **Signature:**

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

**Participants Signature:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name in Block Capitals:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Witness:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E.2 PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

### [University logo] DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY Plain Language Statement

**Research Project Title:** Promoting autonomy in intercultural learning: self-assessment of intercultural communicative competence using an e-portfolio.

**Dear Students of** [REDACTED],

*My name is Aleksandra Sudhershan and I am a PhD student with the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS) in DCU. As part of my degree, I will be conducting a research project in [REDACTED] and would like to invite you to participate in it. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand what this project is about and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If you would like to ask any questions about the project or if anything is not clear, please feel free to contact: myself (at Aleksandra.Sudhershan@dcu.ie), or my PhD supervisors: Ms Veronica Crosbie (on 017005782 or at veronica.crosbie@dcu.ie) and Dr. Jenny Bruen (on 017005779 or at jenny.bruen@dcu.ie) who are lecturers in SALIS. Please take time to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this project. **Thank you for reading this.***

#### **What is the purpose of the research project?**

In this project I am interested in exploring how an online portfolio called the LOLIPOP ELP can help international students to take, and reflect on, the self-assessment of their intercultural competence and in this way to become more responsible for their intercultural learning. In the module [REDACTED] you will be working with the LOLIPOP ELP and your experience of and reflections on this work with will be very important for this project. The research project will be conducted from [REDACTED]. I sincerely hope that the findings of this study will be useful to future students who will take part in international exchange programmes.

#### **What will you be expected to do?**

If you agree to take part in this project, I will ask for your permission to:

- let me observe you in the class
- analyse your LOLIPOP ELP
- analyse your “reflection on learning” journals
- collect and analyse any work (for example, handouts) you will use in your final course presentation in class

Moreover, I will also ask for **a few volunteers** who would like to help me with the project by:

- participating in three focus group interviews which I will conduct in the beginning, middle and at the end of the semester and which I will audio tape; the times for the interviews will be arranged to suit you and your classmates; each interview will take approximately 80 minutes of your time
- completing a short questionnaire in the beginning of the semester (approximately 15 minutes)
- completing an open-ended questionnaire when you have returned to your home country; the questionnaire will be sent to you by email towards November 2007 and will take approximately 20 minutes to complete

I will also be looking for **four volunteers** who will agree to:

- audio-tape their thinking aloud (for example, saying what you are looking at, reading, feeling, thinking) once when doing the LOLIPOP ELP self-assessment of their intercultural competence, which will be followed by a short interview with me (altogether approximately 80 minutes)

**Are there any risks or disadvantages involved?**

No physical, psychological, social, legal or economic risks to you have been identified. However, if at any stage of the project you feel uncomfortable about your participation in it (for example, during an interview), you are free to withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. I would also like to assure you that any information you provide will be treated in strictest confidence and any findings which will be disseminated will have all traces of identifying characteristics removed (for example, your name etc.).

**What are the benefits (direct or indirect) from involvement in this project?**

Participation in this research project does not involve any immediate benefits. However, by taking part in it, it is expected that you will have a chance to engage more fully with the LOLIPOP ELP and in this way to enrich your intercultural learning. I would also like to emphasise that your participation in this project can contribute to helping future international university students to make the most of their stay abroad experience.

**Will the data be kept confidential?**

All information which I will collect about you during the course of this project will be kept strictly confidential and held securely in paper and electronic format. I will disseminate the findings of this project by writing my PhD thesis and by writing conference and journal papers. Also, I may use the data collected here for further research. However, in both cases any information about you will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be identified from it. Confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

**Do I have to take part in this project?**

The participation in this research project is completely **voluntary**. It means that you can decide whether or not to take part in it. If you decide to take part in it, I will ask you to sign a consent form. However, you can withdraw from the project at any point without giving any reason and without any penalty (your withdrawal from the project will not affect you grades or the relationship with the lecturer in any way).

**Additional information:**

The research project has been approved by the DCU Research Ethics Committee.

Involvement in this project will not affect your ongoing assessment / grades / management in module [REDACTED].

**If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:**

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000