Learner perceptions of a professional development immersion course

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ABSTRACT
Over recent years Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) have been offered an increasing number of immersion training courses, which are delivered in English-speaking countries for teachers from different language and cultural backgrounds. This paper outlines research focusing on an intensive language in-service and training (INSET) programme delivered in Australia for Chinese-speaking English teachers from Hong Kong. The teacher–researcher tracked participant perceptions of the development of their English language skills, learning about teaching and development of intercultural understanding. The aims of the research were to provide insights into the value of immersion INSET programmes as learning experiences and to inform future programme design of short-term, offshore intensive teacher-training courses.

Introduction
A recent growing phenomenon in international TESOL has been the provision of immersion programmes for ‘intensive language in-service and training’ (Bolam 1986: 18). Applying Bolam’s 1986 definition of INSET, Roberts (1998: 91) identifies three types of programmes: off-site courses, coaching projects and curriculum development projects. This paper investigates participant perceptions in an immersion off-site course delivered in Australia. The programme was a short-term INSET for Chinese-speaking secondary and primary English teachers from Hong Kong. The imperative of the programme was to align with the assessment and accreditation process mandated in Hong Kong for teachers of English and Mandarin. The teachers spent six weeks in Australia completing coursework and assessments for compulsory components of a syllabus designed by the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

For the teachers this programme was a high-stakes professional development experience and my purpose in this article is to describe their perceptions as learners. I have attempted to do this by revisiting the classroom context of the study, reviewing literature on such programmes and presenting the key data obtained from the teachers. I also reflect on possible
implications of these data for future immersion INSET design, and invite readers to share my journey as a teacher–researcher.

**Course design**

The syllabus, *Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language)* (LPATE) (Government of the HKSAR 2000), was an outcome of Hong Kong's Language Proficiency Requirement Policy, which was one of several education reform initiatives proposed by the Education Commission (1996) and overseen by the Standing Committee on Language and Education Research 2003. This policy mandated both pre-service and in-service language competencies for English and Mandarin teachers in secondary and primary schools in Hong Kong. The Language Proficiency Assessment is a set of four language proficiency papers administered by the Hong Kong Examinations Authority and two classroom language assessments administered by the Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau.

The LPATE syllabus was a test-driven response for teachers to improve their language proficiency in English with the aim of benchmarking English skills. For INSET designers, the specifications of the LPATE syllabus were highly prescriptive, with coursework, assessments and results closely monitored by the Hong Kong Education and Manpower Bureau. Accredited LPATE providers in Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand designed programmes for assessment of language proficiency in the five components: listening, speaking, reading, writing and classroom language assessment. The assessment scale ranged from 1 to 5, with a score of 5 reflecting near-native speaker ability. Some teachers were exempted on the basis of their qualifications, and non-exempt teachers were given until the end of the 2005/06 school year to reach the standard, either by successfully undertaking the LPATE assessment or through upgrading their qualifications. Those who attained high scores would be able to apply for promotion positions. Options for completing the LPATE included examinations, courses or a combination of the two. The Hong Kong Government sponsored teachers who undertook the LPATE, but the teachers needed to cover additional costs associated with completing the requirements overseas.

The syllabus components and their delivery mode framed how participating teachers formed and voiced their perceptions of the immersion programme. Providers in Hong Kong and overseas were closely regulated in the design, delivery and assessment of the five components, which are summarised in Table 1.

INSET programme design for all providers was restricted to fulfilling the syllabus requirements and participants expected an exam preparation
### Table 1: Overview of LPATE components from syllabus specifications
(Government of the HKSAR 2000: 3–7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Specified task/s</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper 1 Reading</td>
<td>Part 1 Multiple choice cloze</td>
<td>Testing competence in reading and understanding texts of an appropriate nature and level within the context of professional language teaching</td>
<td>Part 1: 30 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 2 Reading (various items including open-ended short questions on texts from journals, newspapers etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Part 2: 1 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 2 Writing</td>
<td>Part 1 Expository writing</td>
<td>Testing competence in expository writing as required of practising teachers including meta-linguistic analysis</td>
<td>Part 1: 1 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 2 Correcting and explaining composition errors</td>
<td></td>
<td>Part 2: 1 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 3 Listening</td>
<td>Listening and responding to a single playing of a 30-minute audio recording of spoken discourse broadly related to education</td>
<td>Testing competence in listening to and understanding educated native and non-native speakers of English in educational settings</td>
<td>Approx 1 hr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 4 Speaking</td>
<td>Part 1a Reading aloud a poem</td>
<td>Testing competence in: 1. pronunciation, stress and intonation 2. reading aloud with meaning 3. grammatical accuracy 4. organisation and coherence 5. interacting with peers 6. talking about language with peers</td>
<td>Part 1: 10 min  Part 2: 10 min  5 min preparation time for each part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 1b Reading aloud a prose passage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 1c Telling a story Recounting an experience Presenting arguments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 2 Group interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper 5 Classroom Language Assessment</td>
<td>Two live classes on two days by two assessors, each visiting one single class</td>
<td>Testing competence in the language the teacher uses in a live class</td>
<td>Two separate occasions of one single lesson each</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arrangements for Paper 5 were modified for overseas providers and included alternatives such as peer teaching and videotaping of lessons after returning to Hong Kong.

A course that would provide necessary and sufficient knowledge to meet the assessment standard.

The Australian provider added an Independent Learning Consultation (ILC), non-assessable module to the five components. For one hour each day, learners had open access to self-directed learning. They could access language instructors for individual and small group tutoring, borrow self-access materials from the special collection or study individually in the university library.
Programme writers and language instructors adopted a communicative, learner-centred approach to content and delivery, focusing on developing communicative competence and fluency with a critical awareness of professional language. These design principles underpinned the curriculum and the learner data show that participants recognised these principles as either implicit or explicit features of the experienced curriculum.

I taught two of the three classes undertaking the programme. The two groups operated differently, leading to different opportunities for data collection, as shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: INSET structure](image)

In the Group 1 programme, I taught the Speaking and Classroom Language components and conducted ILC sessions. Participants in Group 1 had enrolled to retain their teaching positions by successfully attaining the required proficiency assessment. Consequently, in the programme for Group 1 there was a stronger emphasis on language skill development and preparation for the LPATE examination. During the one-hour ILC sessions at the end of each day, language instructors provided structured, small-group instruction, unstructured individual tutoring and counselling.

I co-taught Group 2 across the Speaking, Writing and Classroom Language components, supervised Learning Portfolios and conducted ILC sessions. Participants were exempted from the LPATE because of their prior qualifications, but they needed to achieve an overall rating of 4 or above across the LPATE components to be eligible for future promotion. In response, the INSET design and teaching overtly focused on methodology for this group.

**Literature review**

As a teacher–researcher I needed to identify the key contextual frames surrounding this particular short-term immersion INSET. To develop an understanding of the learners and the relevance of this specific programme for these teachers, I drew on academic literature, policy documents from Hong Kong and Australia, and personal accounts.
Of particular interest to this study are imperatives for Australian higher education to internationalise. After World War II, according to Trevaskes, Eisenchlas and Liddicoat (2003: 1), Australian policy shifted from aid to educational trade in the 1970s and 1980s, with the current focus on internationalisation beginning in the 1990s. The current trend has seen aggressive marketing and recruitment and a corresponding focus on regulation and quality control (IDP Education Australia 2003). Market placement and competition in a global knowledge market are major issues for the Australian Government and individual institutions. The drive for the Australian provision of INSET can be seen as a response to the trade aspect of internationalisation (Welch and Denman 1997; Liddicoat 2003; Marginson 2004), the hegemony of English as the language of internationalisation (Liddicoat 2003) and the global TESOL trade.

Understanding the policy context of Hong Kong was critical in understanding the motivation of participants to enrol in the Australian programme. In 1997 Hong Kong changed from British colonial sovereignty to the status of a special administrative region of The People's Republic of China. This was accompanied by a monumental change to Hong Kong’s governance (Bray and Koo 2004) and a territorial policy of trilingualism (Cantonese, Mandarin and English) and biliteracy (Chinese and English) was established (Cooke 2000; Tsui 2004). This prompted widespread concerns regarding language education and language proficiency in Hong Kong.

Since the 1997 handover there have been language and educational policy reforms in response to perceived imperatives for mother tongue education (Johnson 1997; Mok 1999; Tsui 2004), language teaching innovation (Pennington, Lee and Lau 1996), language proficiency upgrading (Standing Committee on Language and Education Research 2003) and teacher education and accreditation. Embedded within the sociocultural context of the INSET programme is the systematic response in Hong Kong to these perceived needs.

Recent case-based research (Crew and Bodycott 2001; Dimmitt and Dantas-Whitney 2002) reflects heightened interest in the area of INSET for TESOL in post-secondary settings. Useful models and recommendations for INSET design were posed by Wallace (1991) and Roberts (1998). Wallace (1991) advocated that a structured programme in TESOL teacher education should include both received and experiential knowledge within a reflective cycle. The later work of Roberts (1998) identified two issues of concern that were of particular relevance to this study. The first is that long-term learning should be incorporated into a short-term programme. This is supported by a recent study on INSET in the Philippines (Waters and Vilches 2000), which identified post-INSET follow-up as a key concern.
The second issue identified by Roberts (1998) is the linking of content to curriculums and the educational contexts of the schools in which participants are to teach.

Intensive, offshore programmes can offer much in initial delivery and short-term input, but the issue of follow-up is critical for enduring learning. Key conditions for effective, substantive and enduring learning have been identified (Bruner 1994; Shulman 1996) as:

- activity/agency
- reflection/meta-cognition
- collaboration
- formation of a supporting community or sustaining culture.

These conditions are critical to the sustainability of learning following a programme and beyond the place of acquisition.

Lo Bianco, Liddicoat and Crozet (1999) proposed a model of intercultural language teaching that is relevant to rethinking INSET design. While the focus of their work was mainly on foreign language teaching, applicability to English language teaching was also recognised. The aim was to develop intercultural competence in foreign language acquisition through a focus on the connection between language and culture in learner L1 and in the target language. This theoretical orientation to the learning of culture and language is significant in the light of the cross-cultural context of immersion INSET.

There has been heightened interest in recent literature in theories on intercultural communication. Scollon and Scollon (2001) placed social interaction and personal identity as central to intercultural communication. In defining culture from an interculturalist perspective, Bennett, Bennett and Allen (2003: 242–44) divided the construct into objective and subjective culture, with the former being cultural creations and the latter being the abstract constructs that constitute the worldview of societal members. This echoes the earlier work of Roberts (1998: 108), who called for INSET providers to understand the perceptions of the participants so as ‘to attain sociality’. Attaining sociality with learners and understanding different worldviews are important considerations for providers of short-term English immersion INSET.

Critics (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat and Crozet 1999: 12) warn against the assumption that culture and intercultural competence can be learned through osmosis. Crew and Bodycott’s (2001) recommendations regarding intercultural communication and interaction in offshore INSET support such a view. Maximising learning of culture through explicit teaching is an issue
for short-term immersion INSET, because the duration of the programme imposes restrictions on design. Recent research (Song and Fu 2003: 57) into intercultural competence in English language programmes in China called for an ‘integrative approach’ that ‘combines the teaching and learning of language form and language use in meaningful sociocultural contexts’. These findings hold clear implications for an immersion delivery of INSET.

**Procedures**

While the overarching case study (Bridges 2005) was not established as a course evaluation, learner perceptions provided insights into the value of an immersion INSET programme as a learning experience and highlighted considerations for future INSET design. The two groups of participants enrolled in the LPATE immersion programme in Australia operated differently, and the forms of data collection were designed to explore the following research questions:

- What were the goals of the Hong Kong teachers who were learner participants in the INSET immersion programme?
- Did the Hong Kong teachers see coming to Australia to participate in this specific INSET as fulfilling these goals?

To address these overall questions, the following specific questions were investigated:

1. What did the participants learn about language? Was it test preparation alone? Did they find implications in the INSET for enduring learning?
2. What did the participants learn about pedagogy? Did they see this as relevant or transferable to their own classrooms?
3. How did the immersion experience affect the learning of the participants? What did the specific INSET offer that was different from an in-country INSET?

A hybrid approach was adopted. This not only suited the overall case study design, but also was highly appropriate, given the different agendas of the groups. Table 2 outlines the variety of data collected.

Questionnaires were devised in the form of pre-test and post-test instruments that yielded quantitative data on each learner’s perceived level of proficiency and qualitative data to expand on these self-assessments. The Appendix combines the pre-test and post-test questionnaires, which were designed to assess whether the perceptions of the participants changed as a result of the course. These data were triangulated with those obtained from
Table 2: Summary of learner data corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant/s</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Number collected</th>
<th>Time collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>During immersion (July – Aug 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 (n = 17)</td>
<td>Pre-test questionnaire</td>
<td>n = 13</td>
<td>Week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured interview (individual + focus group)</td>
<td>1 x Participant A 1 x Participants B, C, D 1 x Participants F, G, H</td>
<td>Week 4  Week 5  Week 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-test questionnaire</td>
<td>n = 10</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 (n = 12)</td>
<td>Pre-test questionnaire</td>
<td>n = 11</td>
<td>Week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learner journal</td>
<td>n = 7</td>
<td>Weeks 2–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured interview (individual)</td>
<td>1 x Participant E</td>
<td>Week 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-test questionnaire</td>
<td>n = 10</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective essay</td>
<td>1 x Participant E</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher/Teacher</td>
<td>Policy document</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>September 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher journal</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>Week 1–6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

interviews and journals. Semi-structured interviews sought elaboration of issues arising from the pre-test questionnaire and researcher observations. The journal entries recorded learner and researcher reflections.

Results

LEARNER PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE

Comparison of pre-test and post-test data across the two groups indicated that participants perceived linguistic growth in each of the five LPATE components. The data set outlined in Figure 2 is based on Group 1 (n = 10) and Group 2 (n = 10) participants who submitted both pre-test and post-test questionnaires. Questionnaire responses for self-assessment of the five LPATE components were given on a four-point Likert scale under the heading content...
area knowledge (see Appendix). Figure 2 presents the averaged pre-test and post-test difference in the scores of the two groups. For example, in Classroom Language, Group 1 rated an average improvement of 0.65, while Group 2 rated an average improvement of 0.25.

![Figure 2: Skill level self-ratings (Groups 1 and 2)]

Both groups registered slight positive growth across the skills, with the exception being the zero growth in writing skills for Group 2. Given that these averaged differences were from a small (four-point) Likert scale with a pre-test and post-test time-lag of less than six weeks, Figure 2 depicts a cautious but positive response to the intensive immersion INSET. Also, the context of a high-stakes programme with multiple assessments could account for the lower self-reporting. It is positive, therefore, to see an overall perception of language enhancement across both groups in the quantitative data. The quantitative data reflect an upward tendency despite the narrowness of the scale, but this perception of linguistic improvement is perhaps more marked in the qualitative data, as indicated in the following statement from one of the participants in Group 2.

**Group 2 Participant E**
Learner journal
Week 6
To my surprise, I can see improvements in my English during the six-week … course, which is a comparatively short period of time.

Focus group interviews and learner journals indicated appreciable growth in valuing the programme, particularly for its diagnosis of linguistic skills.
Those participants who were highly motivated saw this as an opportunity for personal goal-setting in terms of future learning and language enhancement. Group 1 interviewees noted the diagnostic value of the programme, identifying this as a key factor in contributing to a change in perception of linguistic skills. When discussing speaking skills, particularly issues of pronunciation and phonetics, Participant D stated that it helps me to diagnosis the weakness point. Her recognition of the need to diagnose her own spoken errors in order to correct them could be seen as critical to her self-perception of improvement in language skills. These findings regarding the issue of focusing on the diagnosis of errors in spoken production were triangulated with an entry from the researcher’s journal in Week 2 of the programme.

Linguistic awareness-raising in the INSET programme extended to other language skills. In a discussion of error analysis, Participant B acknowledged the impact of the writing component in identifying fossilised errors.

Considering their different compositions and agendas, it is interesting that the self-rating of the exempt group (Group 2) was lower (see Figure 2). The qualitative data did not shed light on this apparent discrepancy, as positive learning was recorded in interviews and journals from both groups. However, the participants in Group 2 were Language Proficiency Requirement-exempt teachers and, as already highly competent learners, perhaps they perceived less upward movement in the short timeframe. Low self-ratings in writing could be due to concerns regarding the demands of the error analysis task.

In summary, analysis of the multiple sources of data indicates that learners in the immersion INSET perceived varying degrees of positive growth in language acquisition. The questionnaire items had not allowed for elaboration, and the interactional dynamics of the qualitative data may have affected participant self-reporting. I was both teacher and researcher and this relationship...
may have led to more positive self-reporting. However, exploration of the
nexus between the data sources provides insight into participant perceptions.
A future approach to research design could administer a second post-test
questionnaire six to twelve months after the programme when participants
have returned to Hong Kong.

LEARNER PERCEPTIONS OF PEDAGOGY

Despite differing agendas and programme structures for the two groups, data
reflected growth in personal pedagogical constructs across both groups. The
participants in Group 1 recognised the focus on skill development and
the embedded nature of methodology in the programme. For example, Par-
ticipant A saw opportunities to acquire new methods in teaching listening.

Responses from Participant D in Group 1 to the final, open-ended item on
the questionnaire – Please comment on how in-service courses affect your own
teaching style – reflect the qualitative impact of the programme on her own
pedagogy. There is a strong stylistic contrast between the pre-test and post-
test responses of this participant.

The first entry is in note-form and reads stylistically as a litany of correct
responses for in-service course feedback. However, the open response given
in the post-test questionnaire can be read very differently as extended prose
with its choice of lyrical language and strong positive affect. Qualitatively,
there is an affective change in terms of pedagogy and this view was supported
by other Group 1 members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1 Participant A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Week 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this course, mm, although it’s not a course on methodology but, er, the, the skill that the other tutors use I, I observe it sometimes and I can learn something about, er, for, for example the listening, er, lesson (instructor) conducted this course and I can observe how she, how she conducts, ah, listening lessons and from that I, I learn much from her.</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1 Participant D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test Week 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the in-service courses, I acquire the following improvements:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teaching method – more update</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• brainstorming – enable me to adopt new methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• team work – be cooperative with my colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teachers and students – to be understanding and improve T–S relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• attitude – be helpful and accept different ideas and look for improvements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1 Participant D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-test Week 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They refresh my teaching style, brainstorm my nearly rusty mind. I am embraced by and enriched with different teaching strategies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants in Group 2 saw value in the more explicit focus on methodology in their programme. This, and inclusion of a reflective journal in their learning portfolios, heightened their awareness of learning about teaching. In the reflection below, Participant E displays metacognitive shifts as she oscillates between her identity as an INSET student and her identity as a classroom teacher. She had engaged in the role of teacher-as-learner, reflected upon her engagement and projected to her teaching the benefits she perceived as a student.

The open-ended response items on the post-test questionnaire provided a forum for a final reflection by another participant from Group 2, who saw pedagogical insight as the most valuable thing that I gained from this in-service course.

While reflection on methodology was positive for some, it raised issues regarding cultural relevance and the possible cultural tension between pedagogic styles.
Participant P contrasts her eagerness to innovate against established practice – the traditional method. Implicit in immersion INSET is the tension between a demand for innovation and the possible hegemonic importation of Western pedagogies (Hu 2002). This is a factor for careful consideration in the future design of INSET programmes.

LEARNER PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURE THROUGH IMMERSION

In addition to learner perceptions of linguistic growth, heightened diagnostic awareness and reflections upon pedagogy from the INSET programme, there was evidence that the broader immersion experience had been very positive. Within this was a marked interest in learning about culture. This aspect of learning was not singled out for examination in the pre-test and post-test questionnaire design, but it came through strongly as another area of significant learning in the focus group interviews and the learner journals. The following journal entry made in the final week of the INSET programme reflects perceptions of the depth of learning provided through immersion.

Journal and interview data indicated that participants saw benefits from various interactions with native speakers across multiple academic and social contexts. Academically, they saw four key benefits:

1. the structured input and learner-centred approach provided in lessons and materials by qualified native-speaking instructors
2. the individualised diagnostic evaluations, which focused personal study programmes
3. the self-access sessions in which participants engaged language instructors in learner-directed tutorials or accessed a range of specialist library resources
4. the structured analysis of classroom language that enhanced sociolinguistic insight during peer teaching and classroom observations.

The fourth benefit is evident in the following primary teacher’s observation regarding learning by doing.

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**Group 2 Participant G**

As it is the most efficient and fun way to gain familiarity with the English language in an English-speaking country like Australia, immersion in first-hand language has given me plenty of opportunities to practice English both at university and in the local community.

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**Group 1 Participant G**

I like, um, the teaching method here because … um, in Hong Kong I, I think because of the syllabus, we, oh, teacher always need to, um, ah, hurry … but here … let them think by, by themselves … what we say is learning by doing so I think this is a very good, um, method, um, not only in Australia classroom, um, but also in Hong Kong classrooms.
This structured input also provided a metalanguage for the teachers to reflect on their own classroom talk and pedagogy.

In interactions outside the classroom, participants appreciated the strengths of the linguistic immersion in expanding their linguistic and sociolinguistic repertoire. They recognised the more complex linguistic benefits that the immersion experience had provided. Benefits were seen in terms of growth in appreciating pragmatic demands across a range of sociolinguistic applications including simple communicative interactions with community service providers, simple and complex interpersonal interactions with homestay providers, and complex professional interactions. An additional benefit was the development of intercultural competence through reflections on interpersonal interactions and cross-cultural negotiations. An example of cross-cultural negotiations included the issue of privacy within a home, which became an area of cross-cultural reflection.

Interviewees also engaged with matters regarding cultural norms in host-family situations, such as the issue of gender and the execution of home duties and the interaction of Australian parents with and expectations of their teenage offspring. School-based observations also promoted intercultural reflections.
While these data on the immersion experience are highly positive in terms of intercultural learning, this area is not explicitly addressed in immersion INSET programme design. Short-term INSET programmes generally work with the assumption that immersion will lead to intercultural learning through ‘osmosis’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat and Crozet 1999: 12) and may lose a valuable opportunity for teaching, learning and effective communication. Learners in this study recognised additional benefits from the intensive nature of immersion INSET in terms of duration, focus, being offshore and collegiality.

**Group 1 Participants G & F**

**Interview Week 5**

G: Study here and, um, I can learn, um, much (than), um, what I learned in Hong Kong, um, yes, I know there, there are some courses, ah, we can, um, ah, study in different period we can study, um, single module in, in, um, some period … but, um, I think it’s better to study, ah, intense … intensely because, um, I can, um, more concentrate, ah, in Hong Kong if we study different module in different period, um, we study a-after work but as you know, um, um, ah, Hong Kong … Hong Kong teacher is quite stressful so I think it’s, it’s good for us to study, um, quite intensely.

F: Yes, I agree with G, full-time, ah, study is better than the part-time study and, um, for example, I cho … I choose, um, to study in [Australia] because I think, um, because I have the many chance to speak English than in Hong Kong …

**Group 2 Participant K**

**Post-test Week 6**

I also cherish the chance to share ideas and experiences with the other participants of the courses.

**POSITIVE EFFECT CHAIN OF LEARNING**

Learners saw a chain of effect building their constructs of intercultural and interpersonal understanding alongside the development of competence and confidence in English language. The key components of this theorised positive effect chain are reflection, awareness, projection, implementation and impact, spanning both onsite learning and practice after returning home. Teachers participating in the study, particularly those in Group 2, became increasingly critically reflective about language, pedagogy and culture. Linguistically they became aware of areas for improvement and pedagogically they became aware of new practices. Culturally, they became more aware of their own culture and Australian culture and of building an intercultural space between the two. This heightened awareness evolved into projections of enactment in their own language use, classroom practice in Hong Kong and intercultural communication. This projection is theorised
as linking the INSET experience with the return to their home country. Data indicated a keen interest in trialling new constructs as teachers. Within a positive effect chain, participants had evaluated the general impact of INSET on their lives and the particular impact on classroom practice.

**Reflections**

The philosophy behind INSET design is that each programme is unique, but my own experience confirms general frames of reference, which include deliberate consideration of:

- forces driving the INSET initiative
- sponsorship and individual, local or government accountabilities
- curriculum in the country of origin
- norms in pedagogy that are locally accepted.

For the INSET case reported here, the context was framed within a government policy of high-stakes assessment of language standards, a strong external and instrumental motivator, which heightened the perceptions of learning through the immersion experience. Learners reported enhancements in professional development and in personal growth beyond the expected LPATE curriculum, prompting an informed rethinking of short-term immersion INSET design.

While the study was not intended to generalise findings, it did show that mature participants, with a good level of language proficiency, are capable of sophisticated reflection on intercultural communication and the development of intercultural competence. Longer-term study-abroad programmes, incorporating ethnographic and sociolinguistic research, are beneficial in developing levels of intercultural competence (Carr 2003), but such elements are not made explicit in the shorter intensive INSET programmes.

The proposed model of an intercultural INSET programme outlined in Figure 3 is drawn from the theorised positive effect chain in my main study (Bridges 2005), which connects pedagogy, language and culture in a cycle of critical reflection and learning. It builds upon the models and design principles described in the literature review (Wallace 1991; Roberts 1998; Lo Bianco, Liddicoat and Crozet 1999). The proposed design also aligns with Bruner’s (1994) principles for substantive and enduring learning by incorporating agency, metacognition, collaboration and the formation of a supporting community. The latter is achieved in the post-INSET phase as the community of learners supports and evaluates the implementation.
The current, one-shot nature of short-term INSET programmes limits the likelihood of longer-term professional mentoring and engagement with language instructors. In particular, the LPATE is problematic as the basis for a programme, especially in relation to Roberts’s (1998) conclusions and Wallace’s (1991) concerns regarding cohesion. A post-immersion component that builds capacity and consolidates INSET learning is envisioned in the intercultural INSET model. The key aim is to increase the probability of longer-term impact. This might be implemented through online forums and structured interactions with language instructors. Ongoing mentoring would then facilitate the implementation phase as the three learning domains are consolidated and become further integrated. This process would acculturate participants as they experiment with and reflect on classroom innovation. If it was an explicit feature of INSET, rather than occurring informally as at present, it would establish a prospect for researching the sustainability of INSET. However, creating a post-immersion component has cost implications and a pilot study is recommended to investigate this and to test efficiencies.

As a teacher–researcher, the process of mapping learner perceptions has led me to a number of key reflections. The first is that developing INSET programmes must be done through a principled research base. The second is that the unique characteristics of such programmes make generalisations difficult and providers need to work from a highly-contextualised understanding of their learners and the sociocultural forces at play within
each INSET. Third, a hybrid approach to data gathering and analysis is useful in gaining insights into learner perceptions. Finally, the study has prompted a pragmatic re-examination of short-term immersion INSET programme design.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to Associate Professor Brendan Bartlett, who provided feedback on early drafts of this paper.

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SUSAN BRIDGES


Appendix

PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRES

Hong Kong Language Proficiency Assessment (Benchmark)
July 15 – August 23

Name: ____________________________________________________

Thank you for participating in this survey.
Please note – Answers to the following questions will be used only for my personal research and NOT for any purpose related to your participation in this course.

BACKGROUND (only included in the pre-test questionnaire)

1 Are you a secondary or primary teacher? _________________
2 For how long have you been teaching? _________________
3 Are you currently employed as a teacher? Yes / No
4 If yes, in which type of school? (eg government) _________________
5 If you have you completed any Benchmark papers please indicate the details below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAPER</th>
<th>COMPLETED?</th>
<th>HOW WAS IT COMPLETED?</th>
<th>RESULT?</th>
<th>WHEN WAS IT COMPLETED?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>Course / test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>Course / test</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>Course / test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>Course / test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Language</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>Course / test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 Please tick the appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content area knowledge Please rate your English content knowledge in the following:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>a listening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b reading</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c speaking</td>
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<td>d writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>e classroom language</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General pedagogy Please rate your knowledge of teaching methods in general.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content area pedagogy Please rate your knowledge of methods for teaching English language.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routines (a) In teaching English, please rate your general effectiveness.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routines (b) In teaching English, please rate your general efficiency.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 How do you rate the following statement?

*An in-service programme for non-native speaking teachers of English should be about improving both participants’ English and their exposure to new methods in the teaching of English.*

☐ Agree strongly ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Disagree strongly

8 Please comment on how in-service courses affect your own teaching style.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Thanks for your help