

# **Towards critical cultural and linguistic awareness in language classrooms in Norway: Fostering respect for diversity through identity texts**

## **Abstract**

This article reports the results of a school-based curriculum development project that aimed to support language teachers working with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations in Norway to develop teaching strategies that foster intercultural citizenship and multilingual competence. Three university researchers collaborated with two schools to increase mutual respect and tolerance for cultural and linguistic diversity in language classrooms, to increase awareness of the positive impact of home language maintenance on academic performance, and to improve the engagement of multilingual literacy and student identity in the classroom. Data were collected during teacher workshops and while following the delivery of the project, and consist of lesson planning materials, texts produced by students, and a follow-up teacher survey. The article presents examples of activities and materials the teachers at the cooperating schools designed and implemented, samples of student work, as well as teacher reflections on the extent to which the project promoted multiliteracy and intercultural citizenship. The findings suggest that while the project helped strengthen awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity at the schools, understanding of the relevance of the home language to literacy development and academic success and multiliteracy were not adequately supported. Implications for future work to promote language classrooms that foster linguistic and cultural diversity and multiliteracy are discussed.

## **Key words**

Language teaching, identity texts, minority language students, language awareness, critical cultural awareness, multilingual classrooms

## **Introduction**

Like other Western European countries, Norway has witnessed a rapid increase in its immigrant and refugee populations, leading to an unprecedented degree of cultural and linguistic diversity in Norwegian classrooms (Statistics Norway, 2016). At the same time, many teachers report low levels of experience working with students of multilingual background (Dahl & Krulatz, 2016; Krulatz & Torgersen, 2016). The sole emphasis in the classroom is on learning Norwegian as a second language in order to become better equipped to function in Norwegian society (Lødding, 2015), which is a manifestation of the “nation-state ideology.” Transitional language support practices that neither promote the use of the mother tongue nor support home culture identity may not only be detrimental to the development of multilingual and multicultural competences (Jessner, 2006) but may also fail to prepare both Norwegian and minority languages students “for living in a globalized economy or an international community” (Byram, 2011, p. 15).

Recognising the urgent need to support the ability of language teachers in Norway to foster cultural and linguistic awareness in their classrooms, this curriculum development project aimed to (a) foster mutual respect, tolerance for cultural and linguistic diversity and encourage dialogue among students of various identifications in the language classroom and beyond; (b) increase teachers’ and students’ awareness of the relevance of the home language to literacy development and academic success; and (c) increase opportunities for multilingual literacy engagement and identity investment in the classroom, and thus indirectly to promote intercultural citizenship. To affirm, welcome and draw together students of diverse backgrounds, the authors of this article chose an instructional practice that uses identity texts defined as “positive statements that students can make about themselves” (Cummins et al.,

2005, p. 41) using visual, spoken, written, musical, dramatic or multimodal expressions, which have been advocated as an approach to affirming identities and promoting cross-linguistic transfer and literacy development in bilingual settings. One of the key assumptions behind identity texts is that language learners' cultural and linguistic knowledge, which are important components of their identities, are seen as a valuable resource and therefore support the investment of identities in learning (Cummins et al., 2005). In this project, the concept of identity texts is extended to promote intercultural citizenship and multilingual development of children in multilingual settings where immigrant and refugee students learn Norwegian as a second language (NSL) and English as a foreign language (EFL).

The identity texts project was conducted within the initiative *Kompetanse for Mangfold* (Competence for Diversity), sponsored by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and aiming to improve teachers' qualifications to work with minority background students. In this article, examples of identity text activities designed and implemented by the teachers at the cooperating schools are provided, and the teachers' reflections on the usefulness of the project to promote multi-literacy development and foster intercultural citizenship of their students are discussed. The outcomes of the project are illustrated with examples of student work. The article concludes with the implications for the development of language teaching pedagogies that actively promote students' intercultural citizenship and linguistic and cultural capital through mutual respect and focus on literacy.

## **Multilingual practice and intercultural citizenship**

The monolingual paradigm, which is a manifestation of the nation-state ideology, is rooted in the belief that each language is associated with one community and geographical location, that languages are pure and separated from each other, and that one's identity is associated with a single language (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 20). An important implication of the monolingual orientation for education is its legitimization of native-speakerism, i.e., the assumption that native speakers should be models and arbitrators of correct language use, and the notion that a person is a native speaker of a single language. For children of immigrants and refugees, this typically implies acquiring the majority language of the school and the national identity associated with it, and thus abandoning the home language(s), culture(s) and identity(ies). In contrast, multilingual orientation allows for practices such as mixing of languages, code-switching and creating hybrid languages to accomplish communicative and social goals, i.e., 'translanguaging' (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Such a perspective also recognizes "people's ability to align with multiple communities, treating them as mobile, constructed, hybrid, and heterogeneously constituted" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 198) and allows for a construction of identities that transcends the nation-state approach to language and ethnicity. It also opens up for internationalism, an ideology that promotes bonding within and across national borders (Byram, 2011; Holbraad, 2003).

As English has attained status as a global language, it "aspires to serve as a global medium of efficient communication in the network of communities centered around the technologically more developed Europe" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 24), which is a manifestation of linguistic imperialism. To counter this threat, English language teachers can promote the notion of English as an international language (EIL) and build on a culturally rich capital of EIL speakers of varied cultural backgrounds and identities. Byram (2008) argues that children learning foreign languages "must always have opportunities to discover a range of perspectives and experiences in other countries" (p. 86), and the authors of this article would like to propose that linguistically, ethnically and culturally diverse language classrooms offer excellent conditions for such experiences.

Thus, one of the goals of language education should be to promote intercultural communicative competence, comprising both language skills and an interest in understanding

one's own and the other person's culture (Byram, 2008). Byram states that intercultural citizenship education "involves creating learning/change in the individual: cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural change; change in self-perception; change in relationships with Others" (2008, p. 187). Another crucial dimension of citizenship education, namely 'action', is attained when individuals "suspend their usual categorisations of others as members of their in-groups or as outsiders, in order to find common aims and modes of co-operation" (Byram, 2008, p. 189). Through classroom practices that foster self-awareness and identity investment, and promote acceptance and understanding of community members who may be originally perceived as 'other', language teachers can promote a multilingual orientation and cultural citizenship at school and in the community.

## **Identity and citizenship**

Identity and citizenship appear to be incompatible concepts, the former being based on particular and the latter on universal features (Isin & Wood, 1999). While citizenship is associated with civil and social rights, identity is associated with distinctions based on categorizations, which are sometimes evaluating and discriminating. In order to overcome the dissonance of citizenship and identity, a conception of identity that transcends the tension between the two is needed.

In developing a non-essentialist view of identity, Hall (1996) highlights that identity is a political concept aligned to citizenship and that identity formation is processual. Individual and group identities are linked to the resources of history, language and culture. Identities are always relational, temporary, unstable, incomplete and in the process of coming into being. The main distinction between citizenship and identity "is that while the former carries legal weight, the latter carries social and cultural weight" (Isin & Wood, 1999, p. 20).

The self-biography can be viewed as the core of social identity (Giddens, 1991). An individual not only has but lives a biography, reflexively organized in the flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of living. The narrative aspect of the self-biography is tied to the individual's story-telling. Thus, identity takes form through storytelling and finds its foundation in a story that is constructed and reconstructed repeatedly. Identity is thus a life-long construction and subject to contextual negotiations. Social identity and self-identity are closely tied together in the biography each individual makes for themselves. A stable feeling of identity presupposes continuity between the past, the present and an anticipated future, i.e., a stable identity over time.

To develop self-identity, a child first has to learn how to share stories with others in a social context. Cognitive development and meaning-making are processes central to self-representation and identity-building, and research has shown that early parent-child conversations provide foundations for learning how to make meaning out of personal events (Reese, Jack, & White, 2010). Narrative identity is therefore contextualized in culture, and different cultures offer different menus for the construction of narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 237).

Identity and a sense of belonging are closely related. To belong is to share values, practices and social, symbolic, or material ties, and is related to emotional attachment and feeling safe (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Everything a child brings along from home, including language, religion, culture, ways of being, or clothing, is an expression of the child's identity and the sense of belonging. To be received and accepted is significant for both a feeling of belonging and for the identity of children living in new societies. As such, identity is regarded as a relational project, taking place within a social and cultural context. The individual develops through relating to others. The freedom to shape oneself is not separated from culture, place or context, and contextual responses inform the individual of the outcome of his or her expression of identity, and engaging in writing about one's identity allow for

expression and sharing of identities. Positive positioning of students through pedagogical practices such as identity texts can “[expand] their opportunities for identity investment and cognitive engagement” (Cummins, 2006, p. 59).

## **Identity texts**

Identity has been posited to be a crucial factor “that in the long run accounts for the speed, ease or difficulty and the outcome of second and subsequent language acquisition” (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 83). It is therefore important for schools to consider that students’ home languages, religions, cultural knowledge, ways of being and other aspects of identity are considered as instructionally relevant resources, and pedagogical practices in the classroom should affirm all students’ identities and “enable them to invest their identities in learning” (Cummins et al., 2005, p. 40).

Coehlo (2012) asserts that “positive recognition of the languages [immigrant children] bring to school with them can encourage them to maintain and continue to develop their own languages while they are learning the language of the school” (p. 196). Maintenance of the first language is also an important factor in the development of personal and cultural identity, and it enables learners to access prior knowledge that is “encoded in their home languages” (Cummins et al., 2005, p. 38).

*Identity texts* is an instructional approach promoting academic expertise and multi-literacy development that was originally implemented in schools in Canada (Cummins, 2006; Cummins et al., n.d.; Cummins et al., 2005). It is an approach which promotes cross-language transfer, literacy engagement and identity development through the creation of spoken, written, musical, dramatic, or multimodal texts in contexts where multiple languages and cultures are present in the classroom (Cummins et al., 2005). Students engage in cognitively challenging projects on self-selected topics that are relevant to their personal interests and lives. Examples of identity texts include dual-language books and bilingual stories, and the projects are often collaborative in order to promote student-to-student scaffolding of language skills.

As a pedagogical practice, identity texts are rooted in the academic expertise framework (Cummins, 2006) which emphasizes the important role of critical literacy, active learning, deep understanding, and integrating students’ prior knowledge in pedagogical practice. Identity negotiation and identity investment are central concepts in the academic expertise framework – it is assumed that learning and academic development are optimized when classroom interactions create favorable conditions for students’ cognitive engagement and identity investment (Cummins, 2001; Cummins, 2006).

Identity texts are based in the assumption that academic growth can be promoted through identity construction. Additionally, Cummins (2007) postulates that language development can be supported through engaging pre-existing knowledge of and in the first language, and that active engagement with literacy promotes academic success. According to Cummins (2004), “Students invest their identities in the creation of these texts [...]. The identity text then holds a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light” (p. 91). Sharing the texts with classmates and teachers through websites or classroom displays creates opportunities to receive positive feedback and “affirmation of self” (Cummins, 2006, p. 60). The texts support student identity because learners identify with the text personally and take full ownership of it. They also support multi-literacy because they invite students to employ a wide range of forms to convert meaning thus engaging them in “communication in the widest sense, including gesture, oral performance, artistic, linguistic, electronic, graphic, and artifact-related” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006, p. 6).

Identity texts can also be used to introduce students to other cultures represented in the classroom. As a result, students develop mutual respect and tolerance for cultural and

linguistic diversity, build awareness of the relevance of the home language to literacy development and academic success, and encounter increased opportunities for multilingual literacy engagement and identity investment, all of which lead to their development of intercultural citizenship in the language classroom.

Moreover, identity texts are an example of a task that “takes learners beyond the assumptions of their own cultures and involves them in an activity that is transnational” (Byram, 2008, p. 206). The use of identity texts fosters explicit acceptance of all students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds, increases self-awareness of their existing identities and promotes the inclusion of a range of social identities. It heightens interest in new ways of thinking and other cultures and promotes “willingness [...] to engage with otherness in a relation of equality” (Byram, 2008, p. 180). Because identity texts allow students to learn about each other’s values, beliefs and cultural behaviours, writing such texts is an excellent way to create intercultural experiences in the classroom and thus opportunities for intercultural citizenship education. The goal is to promote respect for cultural and individual diversity and to initiate cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural changes in individuals and thus improve the quality of the classroom community.

## **The project**

### *The Competence for Diversity initiative*

Competence for Diversity is an initiative by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training based on Government White Paper 6, titled *En helhetlig integreringspolitikk - Mangfold og fellesskap* (Ministry of Children and Equality, 2012), which recognizes the rights of immigrants to Norway to receive respect for their cultures and religions and at the same time highlights their legal and social rights and duties to participate as active, responsible and self-governed citizens in the Norwegian society. The document stresses that all children in Norway have an equal right to receive education and to participate in all arenas of social life. Language skills are regarded as central for successful participation in Norwegian society.

One of the main goals of Competence for Diversity is to prepare teachers to teach in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, including gaining the ability to adjust instruction to the individual needs of all students. The programme is designated as a school-based initiative, meaning that participating schools and local education authorities are responsible for identifying specific areas for in-service teacher development and training, as opposed to following an agenda imposed from above, although it is clear that developing multicultural and multilingual pedagogical practices to improve Norwegian language skills is central to the initiative. Local institutions of higher education serve as consulting bodies, and school–university collaborations are a central component of the initiative. In practice, this means that schools and universities are assigned partnerships. After a school has conducted an initial needs assessment, a request for specific resources is issued to the higher education partner institution, which then compiles the needed materials and plans and delivers in-service training directly at the school. Funding is subject to application procedures and is provided for a period of one school year.

It can be noted that the underlying principles of Competence for Diversity are based in the respect for equality and individual rights, and in the recognition that all children, regardless of social, ethnic or cultural background have the right to receive education and instructions based on their individual needs (The Norwegian Education Act [Opplæringslova], 1998; The National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training [Læreplan for Kunnskapsløftet], 2006).

In the classroom, this primarily translates into all teachers’, students’ and school administrators’ “ability to understand and maintain social relationships with people of another

country [or social group]" (Byram, 2008, p. 163). The authors of this article view such mutual understanding as the first step towards creating respectful multilingual and multicultural classroom communities, where all students' identities are seen as valuable resources, and where all children have access to differentiated instruction rooted in respect for individual needs, goals and preferences (The Norwegian Education Act, 1998).

### *Participants and objectives*

The project presented in this article was conducted in two rural schools in Mid-Norway by three academic staff members from the former Sør-Trøndelag University College (presently the Norwegian University of Science and Technology), the authors of this article. Both schools offer education in grades 1-10, with student ages ranging from 6 to 15. Although the actual size and composition of the minority student population differed between the two schools, both had experienced a relatively large influx of immigrant students over a short period of time. The majority of these students come from Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia and Sweden (The Directorate of Integration and Diversity, 2016). The collaborating staff members were selected based on their expertise and interest in participating. They were assigned to specific schools depending on those schools' needs assessments as well as their own availability.

The identity texts project was just one component of a year-long collaboration between the two schools and Sør-Trøndelag University College. The collaboration included several cycles of needs assessment, meetings of school and college representatives, in-service training and assessment of outcomes. The identity texts project consisted of professional development sessions for teachers in which the concept of identity texts was introduced, followed by lesson planning and material development work in small groups. After the projects were conducted in the classroom, the teachers were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey, samples of student work were collected and the researchers provided the schools with brief feedback and suggestions for continued professional development. While at one of the schools, participation in the workshop was required of all teachers, at the other school, the workshop was designed for all 8th grade teachers. This article focuses specifically on planning materials compiled by Norwegian as a Second Language (NSL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, survey responses from seven teachers, and selected samples of student work. It also briefly discusses multilingual brochures aimed at the parents of the immigrant students.

### *Sources of data*

Data types in this project included lesson-planning and community outreach materials, samples of student work and a follow-up survey for the teachers. The lesson-planning materials were compiled by teachers working in groups, but submission of these materials to the researchers for analysis was voluntary. In all, four teacher teams shared their identity text lesson plans with the researchers.

In addition, the researchers visited the schools after the projects had been completed to collect samples of student work. In total, 58 texts have been obtained. To ensure students' anonymity, the identity texts have been transcribed, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms and the files have been stored on a password-protected computer.

The teachers at both participating schools were invited to provide feedback through an anonymous online survey. The survey was administered in Norwegian, and it included background questions, questions about the actual project conducted by the responding teacher, as well as questions prompting reflection and feedback. It was available through a web link, and was sent to the teachers via email, but IP addresses were not stored. Due to a low response rate, follow-up emails were sent with a repeated invitation to participate.

Nevertheless, only 23 responses were obtained, and only seven were complete. Additionally, one group of teachers submitted a reflection text via email.

### *Project delivery*

The first step in the project consisted of a communication between the schools and the three designated academic staff members to determine the schools' needs in relation to Competence for Diversity and the focus of in-service workshops. As the initiative was in principle school-based, the researchers expected to receive specific lists of goals and objectives from the schools. The needs statements, however, tended to be quite general. For instance, one of the schools delivered the following list of needs:

- Expertise in how to conduct language teaching (e.g., vocabulary instruction) in a classroom with minority language students;
- Methods and activities that support language development for minority language students (practical tips);
- Awareness of culture and language in the classroom, including research-based knowledge and concrete classroom ideas.

Given the time and resource constraints, the researchers decided to use these objectives as a starting point in developing more concrete and focused goals that could be realistically attained within the time frame of the project. In addition, the guidelines outlined by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training were consulted. As a result, the following objectives were formulated:

- To foster mutual respect, tolerance for cultural and linguistic diversity, and a dialogue among students of various identifications in the language classroom and beyond;
- To increase teachers' and students' awareness of the relevance of the home language to literacy development and academic success;
- To increase opportunities for multilingual literacy engagement and identity investment in the classroom.

Due to the fact that our intervention at the schools was limited to one three-hour workshop and a follow-up discussion via email and phone, as well as taking into consideration the expressed interest in practical tips, one specific instructional practice that allows for the promotion of the above objectives was selected. Identity texts were singled out as an approach that best suits these needs because they foster cross-language transfer and literacy development (Cummins et al., n.d., p. 5), while at the same time creating opportunities for intercultural experiences and intercultural citizenship education (Byram, 2008, p. 206–207). In addition, focusing on one concrete approach allowed us to equip the teachers with a practical tool to meet the general goals expressed in the needs statements, namely language teaching to minority language students and promotion of culture and language awareness among all students.

The next step consisted of preparing instructional materials and resources. The researchers created a short lecture that discussed the benefits of multilingualism; falsified common myths about multilingualism, including misconceptions about code-switching and the use of the mother tongue at home; and introduced creating of identity texts as a practice that fosters critical cultural and linguistic awareness, supports multilingual literacy and identity, and leads to development of intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2008, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013). However, because the goal was to engage the teachers and school administrators in a discussion and arrive at solutions best suited for their specific educational needs and contexts, most of the time was devoted to a workshop. During this stage, the participants worked in small groups. They received two articles which discuss the concept of identity texts in detail and provide concrete examples of classroom projects and student work, namely "ELL students speak for themselves: Identity texts and literacy engagement in

multilingual classrooms” (Cummins et al., n.d.) and “Affirming identity in multilingual classrooms” (Cummins et al., 2005). The participants were instructed to read the articles, select ideas and concepts that they considered particularly useful, and design an identity texts project for their own students. The teachers were reminded that identity texts can be created using a range of modalities, including various written texts, such as personal narratives and poems, as well as songs, posters and other visuals, and dramatized performances. Each group kept track of their ideas using hand-written notes or a word-processing document.

In order to foster intercultural citizenship and active participation in the local community, teachers at one of the schools created informative brochures aimed at the multilingual parents. These materials provided information about the school and the local community, including the goals and procedures of teacher-parent conferences and offers of leisure time activities for children and parents, and aimed to empower the families to become active and self-directed citizens.

We did not specify when the identity text projects should be delivered in the classroom, as this decision was left to the individual teachers and schools. Some teachers reported that they were planning on doing the projects right away, whereas others stated that they wanted to wait until the beginning of the next academic year and engage in the projects as a way of welcoming new minority students to their schools. The researchers followed up with the schools within 3–6 months of the workshop to obtain the remaining sources of data, namely samples of student work and survey responses.

## **Results and discussion**

### *Planning materials*

The data obtained provide evidence of positive teacher and student engagement with the identity texts projects. Most of the teachers were highly enthusiastic during the workshop, and the planning materials that were submitted to us contain several examples of creative classroom ideas. The teachers stressed the importance of giving students options as well as the inclusion of a sharing component. In the planning documents, the following ideas were listed: an identity poster about yourself or a friend; a picture book about learning and play both at school and at home; a video-diary of a series of school days; class visits by adults from the community; sharing stories and fairy tales from other countries and cultures; and an “identity week” consisting of several activities such as drama performances, storytelling, story writing and culinary activities. Various ideas to share the outcomes of the projects included posting student work on classroom walls, sharing projects with other classes and hosting events involving several groups of students and their teachers in shared activities. All of the projects submitted to the researchers aimed at increasing student awareness of the diversity of cultures and languages present in their classrooms, promoting respect for other languages and cultures, and thus fostering some aspects of intercultural citizenship.

In addition, while language, culture and literacy were the overarching goals of all the projects, many of the teachers chose cross-curricular topics that included other disciplines such as science and mathematics. For instance, one of the teacher teams proposed a series of activities to be organized during a “cultural week,” including learning how to greet each other in all the languages present at the school; sharing fairy tales, stories, songs and poems from various languages and cultures; and creating a dramatized performance depicting a trip around the world. In addition to these group activities, the students had a choice of individual projects, including creating a short book about themselves, a poem about themselves, a picture of themselves, or a combination of any of the three. Another team of teachers created a project combining curriculum objectives from Norwegian, English, social studies and mathematics. In this project, students were to prepare a presentation about a country of their choice, including information about the country’s capital city, its population and the



geographical area. In addition, the students had to perform a range of calculations, such as the distance from the country to Norway, the time it would take to travel there by plane and a comparison of the prices of a number of selected goods. Based on this information, the students were asked to estimate a travel budget to visit the country.

Overall, in the planning stage, the teacher included a range of topics and activities and showed evidence of aiming to create opportunities for identity investment, increased knowledge and tolerance of cultural and linguistic diversity, and literacy development, which overlap with the goals set for the project by the researcher team.

### *Student work*

As the researchers were not able to attend any of the events at the schools, the samples of student work that were collected are limited to written texts. These include mini-posters with personal information, such as family background and interests; large posters depicting the past in the home country, the present in Norway and future plans and dreams; short personal narratives; and posters describing a friend. The texts were written in English and Norwegian, with a few texts being bilingual. All students, even those of limited proficiency in English and Norwegian, were invited to participate. As a result, the texts range from very short and simple to extensive and elaborate. The following samples were written by students who had arrived in Norway very recently:

#### *Excerpt 1. Familie*

*My mom name: Tanja*

*My dad name: Dimitri*

*My sister name: Mira*

*My kæt name: Marmin*

*Jeg bor på Lyshaug*

(Translation: Family. My mom's name: Tanja. My dad's name: Dimitri. My sister's name: Mira. My cat's name: Marmin. I live in Lyshaug).

*Excerpt 2. Hi, my name is Famir. I am 14 years. I love my family, I have one brother.*

*My favourite sport is basketball. I love pizza :D. I come from Norway in Bulgaria.*

*END.*

In one of the classes, students wrote short texts and poems about their best friend, such as this one:

#### *Excerpt 3. My best friend*

*Nergiz*

*Kind, funny, nice, pretty*

*Playing football*

*Together,*

*The best*

*My best friend!*

Longer texts contained extensive personal information (i.e., place and date of birth, place of residence, family members); favourite activities, foods, films, books and music; information about the home town, country of origin and current place of residence; culture and religion; favourite vacation destination; and future plans, including profession. Several of the texts were also accompanied by photos or pictures drawn by the students. Here are short excerpts from two such texts:

*Excerpt 4. Dette er meg og broren min Erlend. Dette bildet er tatt der vi bodde i Laksvær. Nå bor vi i Sindal i xxxvegen 20. Før det bodde vi på Katem og flyttet til Sindal når jeg var to år og vil bo her lenge. Dette er foreldrene mine. Mamma kommer fra Florø og pappa fra Laksvær. De er veldig snille begge to og begge jobber på Storlia barneskole. De møttes på et kurs de var på. De har to unger meg og Erlend.*  
(Translation: This is me and my brother Erlend. This picture was taken when we lived in Laksvær. Now we live in Sindal at xxxxstreet 20. Before that we lived in Katem and moved to Sindal when I was two years old and will live here for a long time. These are my parents. My mom comes from Florø and my dad [is] from Laksvær. They are very nice both of them and both work at the Storlia primary school. They met at a course they attended. They have two children me and Erlend).

*Excerpt 5. Dette er meg!*

*Fødested: Szczecin*

*Familie: Far Jurek (41), Mor Basia (40)*

*Mitt favoritt mat: Cheezburger*

*Mitt favoritt film: Harry Potter*

*Fakta om religion: Vi feirer jul, påske*

*3 ting som er typisk norsk: ski, rulleski og lutefisk*

*Når jeg blir voksen, vil jeg jobbe med: Kanskje politi, militær*

(Translation: This is me! Place of birth: Szczecin, Family: Father Jurek (41), Mother Basia (40), My favourite food: Cheeseburger, My favourite film: Harry Potter, Facts about religion: We celebrate Christmas, Easter, 3 things that are typical Norwegian: skiing, roller skiing and lutefisk, When I grow up I will work as: Maybe police, military)

In all excerpts, family, friends and place are important markers of the children's identity. In texts such as Excerpt 5, some evidence of evolving multicultural identity can be seen, as elements of the student's home culture and country affiliation are visible alongside his involvement in Norwegian culture. Overall, participation in the projects gave the students a chance to make their identities more present at school. The researchers were very pleased to see that all students were included, and that everybody's work was displayed on classroom walls, as this gave opportunities to affirm students' identities and create a culturally inclusive and interactive classroom community.

However, the only languages present in the identity texts submitted to the researchers were Norwegian and English. It can thus be concluded, based on these samples, that the goal to increase teachers' and students' awareness of the relevance of the home language to literacy development and academic success was not reached. The other two goals, namely to increase opportunities for multilingual literacy engagement and identity investment and to foster mutual respect, tolerance for cultural and linguistic diversity and a dialogue among students of various identifications and thus to implicitly promote intercultural citizenship were only partially reached through the delivery of the identity text projects.

### *Teacher reflections*

After the projects were completed, the teachers were invited to provide feedback and reflection through an anonymous online survey, and one group sent their feedback directly to one of the researchers via email. As all of the responses were in Norwegian, the selected quotations below are our translations.

Overall, the teachers reported relatively high levels of motivation and enthusiasm among the students. They commented that the projects were useful, educational, eye-opening and exciting. One of the teachers wrote, “The identity week was a positive experience. It strengthened the relationships among students. They learned a lot about themselves and each other”. Another participant commented that “the project allowed the students with minority language backgrounds to tell us about their country of origin, and the other students in class gained more insight into the country”. The teachers also noted that they themselves were able to get to know their students better. To quote one of the teachers: “I have learned something new about every single student”. These responses suggest that, at least from the teachers’ viewpoint, the goal to foster mutual respect, tolerance for cultural and linguistic diversity and a dialogue among students of various identifications in the language classroom and beyond was attained.

The use of languages other than English and Norwegian was explicitly encouraged by some of the teachers. Nevertheless, it seems that model texts were often presented in English and Norwegian, and the texts the researchers were able to collect were written exclusively in these two languages. One of the teachers stated that in her class, all minority language students used English, while Norwegian students tended to use Norwegian. However, the teachers commented that the projects allowed the students to learn words in various languages and to see some similarities and differences between the various languages represented in the classroom. Thus, the objectives to increase teachers’ and students’ awareness of the relevance of the home language to literacy development and academic success and to increase opportunities for multilingual literacy engagement and identity investment in the classroom were only partially reached.

Most of the teachers agreed that they would like to do a similar project again, and some pointed out that it should be completed by all students in primary school. It was even suggested that similar projects should be done more often: “If we had done more such projects throughout the school year, the students would have a better understanding of the multilingual and multicultural community at our school”. The teachers also agreed that displaying identity texts on classroom walls helps create positive attitudes to cultural and linguistic diversity and makes minority students’ cultures and languages more visible, once again suggesting that the projects helped promote respect for and interest in all languages and cultures represented in the classroom. We experienced that engagement with these various cultural resources present in the classrooms allowed for construction of spaces that foster intercultural citizenship. Both the students and the teachers were prompted to reflect on their personal values and beliefs, strengthen their self-esteem and re-evaluate their attitudes towards others, which in turn is expected to improve the life of the classroom community. Additionally, the informative brochures created by the teachers enabled the immigrant families to be more active and self-directed citizens in their local communities. Thus, the project promoted two crucial aspects of intercultural citizenship education: the emphasis on identity awareness and the creation of community of action and communication (Byram, 2008, p. 198).

## **Conclusion**

This curriculum development project aimed to help language teachers at two schools in Norway to promote critical cultural and linguistic awareness and the development of intercultural citizenship among their students. Although the project was designed to address the specific, local needs of the participating schools, some implications that apply to teaching practice and teacher education in general can be drawn from it.

If language education is to promote intercultural citizenship and a multilingual orientation, all students’ languages, cultures and identities need to be seen as equal and legitimate, and language teachers play an important role in this process. As an approach that

promotes incorporation of all languages, cultures, and identities present in the classroom into the pedagogical practice, identity texts allow for creation of an inclusive learning community (Cummins, 2006). However, using identity texts to promote multilingual literacy and intercultural citizenship in language classrooms has both promises and challenges.

One of the benefits of the project described here was raising teachers' and students' awareness of the various languages and cultures represented in the classroom, and creating opportunities for students to face their own attitudes towards their home languages and cultures and to be seen by others in a positive light, which can be considered the first important step in building culturally and linguistically responsive classrooms. In Binder and Kotsopoulos's words, through engaging in activities that promote identity, the students were prompted to "find validation and empowerment through a redefining of self, which ultimately transforms their relationship to themselves, others, and the world around them" (2011, p. 341).

Another promising outcome of the project is that it enabled the teachers to reflect on and begin transforming their educational practice. Both during the planning stage and the reflection stage the teachers had opportunities to examine their pedagogical approaches and to implement changes in order to better promote a classroom environment that promotes critical cultural and linguistic awareness and that values diversity. In the view of the authors' of this article, teacher reflection is the first important step in building culturally and linguistically responsive classrooms.

Finally, through creating informative multilingual materials for the parents of immigrant students and thus empowering them to participate more fully in the school and local community, the project also contributed to developing an 'action' element in intercultural citizenship education. The goal was to enable the families to be more active and self-directed citizens in their local communities.

The challenges of the identity texts approach were also evident in this project, for although, overall, the projects at the two schools can be considered at least a partial success, some weaknesses need to be noted. The most important area for improvement is the inclusion of students' home languages. If identity texts are to serve as a tool that promotes the development of literacy skills in English and Norwegian "that build on, rather than replace, students' home language and literacy skills" (Cummins, 2006, p. 52), more explicit encouragement to use home languages in the classroom is needed. Reflecting on how the workshop was designed and conducted, it can be noted that the multilingual aspect of identity texts was mostly implicit (i.e., when a summary of the benefits of multilingualism and examples of code switching was given), and only very brief explicit mention of it was included in the instructions to the teachers. Instead, teachers should be provided with specific strategies to foster the presence of various languages in the classroom, for example, models of multilingual identity texts.

Another important area for improvement is time for preparation, delivery and follow-up. The authors of this article feel that the Competence for Diversity initiative was somewhat ad-hoc and disorganized. More time should be devoted to the development of the school-university partnership and to the development of project objectives and adequate teacher training materials. As well, more engaging and thorough follow-up discussion, feedback and evaluation and future opportunities for well-planned collaborations are needed.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the research design and data collection in this project. Due to the low response rate to the survey, it is impossible to make valid generalizations about teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the identity text project. In addition, as no student reflections and evaluations were included in the data, it is impossible to measure to what extent the aims of the project were attained from the perspective of the students.

Identity texts are only one example of an activity that promotes an ‘additive’ ideology which fosters cross-language transfer, literacy engagement and increased self-awareness as well as engaging students and teachers in discovery of other perspectives, values and presuppositions. In the future, our goal is to educate teachers in Norway about other ways in which they can foster more linguistically and culturally inclusive classroom environments and promote multi-literacy and intercultural citizenship. For example, another useful resource that actively promotes literacy development, linguistic and cultural awareness, and intercultural citizenship is the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) along with the adaptation, Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters through Visual Media (AIEVM), each of which has a version for young learners, designed by the Council of Europe (n.d.). The activities enable students to analyse an intercultural encounter they have experienced in order “to benefit from it, make it part of their way of seeing the world around them, and decide how to take a full part in the intercultural world to which they belong” (Council of Europe, n.d., p. 4). Other options include conducting a survey of languages spoken in class, sharing language profiles through student-designed posters that contain information about their own language or regional variety, creating multilingual bulletin boards, celebrating a language of the week, and conducting various multi-literacy projects such as a multilingual poetry café (Coelho, 2012). Yet other types of activities can draw on students’ funds of knowledge, or “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992, p. 133) that students bring into the classroom from their home cultures, thus relating new content to students’ social and cultural knowledge and creating deeper understanding. Language teachers need to be aware of the importance of engaging their students in such activities, and teacher education programmes are responsible for including focus on multilingualism and intercultural citizenship in their curricula.

“Fantasizing about multilingualism in school,” Shohamy (2006, p. 172) states that support for multilingual competence, acceptance of language mixing and the deconstruction of the myth of the monolingual native speaker are the main characteristics of the ideal, imagined schools. Similarly, Pavlenko and Norton (2007) express a wish that teachers should “consider the ways in which [...] multilingual classrooms can be reimagined as places of possibility for students with a wide range of histories, investments, and desires for the future” (p. 678). Through engaging language teachers and their students in multilingual identity texts activities, the project presented here aimed to bring this dream one step closer to reality.

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