

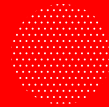
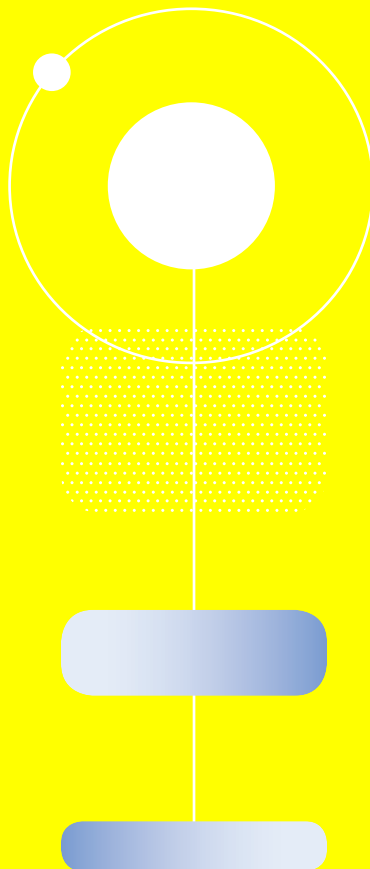
# Teacher Education Policy and Practice

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CONCEPTS  
SERIES

International Perspectives and Inspirations

Edited by  
Michelle Attard Tonna and Joanna Madalińska-Michalak

**TEPE Network**  
Teacher Education  
Policy in Europe



Wydawnictwo  
FRSE



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# The PACK checklist: A proposed pedagogical tool for multicultural foreign language learning settings

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## Abstract

This chapter initially presents the findings of a recent study (Cremona, 2015) collecting the views and responses of 11-year old Maltese students of German as a Foreign Language [GFL]. Reacting about these findings, the author takes the initial letter of the four most recurring points (i.e. **P**erspectives, **A**ttitudes, **C**hanges and **K**nowledge) and formed the acronym **PACK**. The chapter focuses on the PACK checklist aimed as a tool through which curricular change may be effected and/or facilitated in similar learning contexts which still need to acknowledge and discuss critically these predominant multicultural trends. The last part of the chapter discusses further possible ways and measures through which curricular change - encompassing diversities and multiculturalism - may be gradually initiated and facilitated. This last part looks at four levels, namely the classroom level, the school (wide) level, the policy-making level and the teacher education level in Malta. The chapter presents also a set of practical initiatives and examples of curricular change which might result as an effect of the use of the PACK checklist and the questions it includes.

## Keywords:

teacher education  
foreign language  
learning  
diversities and multiculturalism  
Malta

## Introduction

Recently published official statistics and daily media reports clearly suggest that multicultural learning backgrounds are constantly being experienced by teachers and students both in Malta and around the globe (Caruana et al., 2013). Seen in this light, this chapter intends to investigate how students react to similar multicultural realities. Initially, I will present the findings of a recent study (Cremona, 2015) collecting the views and responses of 11-year old Maltese students of German as a Foreign Language [GFL]. The results I will present in this chapter will all indicate that the 11-year old Maltese respondents, when answering about diverse multicultural situations, tend to adopt:

1. essentialist and limited **p**erspectives,
2. judgmental **a**ttitudes,
3. very conservative non **c**hanging views,
4. reduced and non-contextualised **k**nowledge.

Reacting about these findings, I took the initial letter of the four most recurring points (i.e. Perspectives, Attitudes, Changes and Knowledge) and formed the acronym PACK. In this chapter I will present the PACK checklist aimed as a tool through which curricular change may be effected and/or facilitated in similar learning contexts which still need to acknowledge and discuss critically these predominant multicultural trends.

The last part of the chapter will discuss further possible ways and measures through which curricular change – encompassing diversities and multiculturalism – may be gradually initiated and facilitated. This last part will focus on four levels, namely the classroom level, the school (wide) level, the policy-making level and the teacher education level in Malta. I intend to present a set of practical initiatives and examples of curricular change which might result as an effect of the use of the PACK checklist and the questions it includes.

## Representations of culture in foreign language [FL] learning contexts

Foreign language classrooms are sites where representations of culture are continuously used and adopted in practice. Students are presented with representations of culture and identity. These representations are imported in class through texts produced, regulated and selected

either by the teacher her/himself or by national selecting boards responsible for the design of subject syllabuses. Students end up being the consumers at the receiving end.

Despite the fact that 'the extensive work on intercultural/global competence and the development of the intercultural speaker concept over the last two decades has irrefutably contributed much to the methods and aims of foreign language education' (Wilkinson, 2012, pp. 304-305), a question might still arise problematising the ability FL learners have when looking at culture through a reflective critical lens.

Unfortunately, empirical studies investigating the effects of such critical (inter)cultural measures on FL students are very sparse. In fact, till now very few studies have been conducted about the effects of the presentation of intercultural content and on FL learner criticality. Similarly, studies investigating the ability of children and adolescents to perceive culture through a critical lens are also very uncommon. Actually, a one-off study investigating the topic indicates that when a group of eleven-year-old young learners were presented with intercultural content, they did not manage to sustain it alone over time (Zhu, Jiang & Watson, 2011).

Notwithstanding these results, findings by Barrett (2005) do indicate that already from a very early age, six-year-old children can identify national stereotypes of other national groups. Reporting further on these findings Zhu, Jiang and Watson (2011) elaborate that an early study by Lambert and Klineberg (1967, cited in Barrett, 2005, p. 265) found age differences in the primary sources: while 6-year-olds reportedly rely primarily on their parents, direct contact with foreigners, television and movies, 10 and 14 year olds resort to input from television, movies, books, school, course work, textbooks and magazines (*ibid.*, p. 145).

Maijala (2008), who has researched extensively German as a Foreign Language [GFL] textbooks, identifies trends similar to those observed in the case of textbooks designed to teach other Foreign Languages<sup>1</sup>. In one study the author highlights that the cultural representation of Germany is very often reduced to punctuality, feasts, drunk Bavarians and strict environmental awareness (Maijala, 2006). A later study

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1. See Cremona, 2015 for an extensive discussion about this.



which analysed books used to teach GFL in Finland and Sweden, shows that whereas topics like globalisation and migration are increasingly appearing in the newly published series, Multiculturalism features very rarely in the same series (Maijala, 2008). In this same study the author highlights that these homogeneous stereotypes usually grow deeper through sections or chapters aiming for political correctness and which usually end up comparing the target culture and the native culture of students.

Furthermore, in a study conducted earlier, in which the same author analyses thirty-eight textbooks used to teach GFL in various countries, including the UK, Estonia, Finland, France and Norway, Maijala points out that the history of the country where the textbook is being used, is very influential on the way the cultural representation are perceived (Maijala, 2004). One other study (Maijala, 2009) refers to gender-oriented stereotypes. The author points out that the texts frequently present males in Germany as people occupying leading roles and working with prominent companies. Females in Germany, on the other hand, are still often subtly presented as followers or inferior to the masculine gender.

Other studies also indicate that these stereotypes may be reinforced not only through sections specifically oriented at presenting/discussing culture but also through other sections of the FL textbook which at first glance appear not to be culture related. These include grammatical exercises content. Stereotyped sentences like “‘Mary likes cooking’; ‘John likes football’, ‘The French like...’, ‘Germans are ...’, ‘Older people...’ used to teach a particular grammar point are commonly found in FL textbooks and may also serve as channels through which ideology may be inculcated” (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002, p. 21).

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### **Methodology: how data was collected**

Aware of the situation where similar studies are sparse, with the intention of contributing to knowledge in the field, as a teacher of GFL I embarked on a research venture focusing on two particular research questions:

1. Which cultural representations of Germany are held by first year secondary students in the Maltese German as a Foreign Language (GFL) learning context?

2. Which characteristics (i.e. their nature and qualities) do these representations of Germany tend to manifest?

The design I have opted for applies the mixed-methods approach defined in John Creswell's *Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods*, where the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data, analyzes them separately and then compares the results to see if the findings confirm or disconfirm each other. The key assumption of this approach is that both qualitative and quantitative data provide different types of information – often detailed views of participants qualitatively and scores on instruments quantitatively – and together they yield results that should be the same (Creswell, 2013, p. 261).

At the beginning and end of scholastic year 2012-2013, I collected student questionnaires that offered a snapshot of Maltese first-year state school GFL student representations of Germany. A sample of 160 students (from 14 GFL classes) selected from a population of 196 possible participants completed both parts of the questionnaire. Assuming a 95% confidence level, this has guaranteed a maximum margin of error of 3.33%.

From the same GFL classes, in both phases, I also collected student drawings, which helped me further understand (because they gave me more details) the nature of the cultural representations of Germany presented in the student questionnaires. I also adopted convenience sampling techniques and chose one of the fourteen classes that filled out the student questionnaires. I interviewed each student in this particular class at the beginning and at the end of the first GFL learning experience. Through the interviews and through the thematic analysis of their outcomes, I intended to glean deeper understandings of the data collected through the student questionnaires.

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### **How things stand: A brief results outline**

After a long data-analysis exercise, from the two sets of cultural representations collected from the first year Maltese GFL learning context I could identify:

**Table 1: An overview of my interpretation of the results obtained from the Maltese GFL learning context (A detailed article about this can be found in Cremona, 2016).**

<b>Perspectives</b> adopted	Within the Maltese first year GFL learning context essentialist <b>perspectives</b> adopted were frequently limited. Students only essentialised about Germany (i.e. the nation) and its people (the individuals living in Germany). Although the perspectives referred to in the textbook used were somewhat more inclusive, they still tended to lack the wider (i.e. the global) perspectives and details about the included perspectives;
<b>Attitudes</b> and their nature	Within the Maltese first year GFL learning context attitudes were frequently judgmental. Very often attitudes towards Germany are (very) positive while attitudes toward the people living in the country are generally somewhat less positive;
<b>Changes</b> (and their nature) observed with time	Within the Maltese first year GFL learning context changes in representations from the beginning to the end of the year were very limited and rather shallow;
Cultural <b>knowledge</b> and its nature	Within the Maltese first year GFL learning context the cultural <b>knowledge</b> was based on limited reduced essentialist information. The predominant essentialist representations which one can observe in the Maltese GFL learning context usually only referred to non-contextualised and traditional dominant discourses.

An evaluation of these four recurring elements in the light of intercultural and global competence frameworks based on Saniei (2012), Guilherme (2002) and Majjala (2006) indicated that the Maltese GFL learning context could (and needs to) adopt curriculum measures through which a broader, diverse and more Critical Cultural Awareness of the German target language context might be developed.

My definition of critical (inter)culturally aware FL student is in synchrony with Maiala's (2006) views suggesting that while critical culturally aware students naturally still essentialise about the foreign culture, rather than just absorbing the first (few) essentialist representations, i.e. those based on limited one sided essentialist dominant discourses presented to them, they keep looking for situations through which they can multiply their essentialist cultural representations and critically question them and think about them. In this way, gradually, the reduced one-sided essentialist ideology-laden representations of culture stop being nuisances and instead start

serving as sources of reflection, hopefully leading to more balanced and informed representations of the foreign culture. Seen in this light, therefore my position in this chapter deliberately refrains from rejecting 'essentialism' and instead argues for the need for a wider range of 'essentialist representations' in GFL teaching in order to make students more aware and thereby critical of essentialism.

As a reaction to all this, I felt I had to start thinking of ways through which I could myself contribute to start bringing about this change. I tried to think of ways how the Maltese curriculum could change and I planned to come up with a set of suggestions through which hopefully those learning within the Maltese GFL learning context could start: questioning dominant cultural patterns and seeking the reasons which lead to these patterns being blindly accepted and unquestioned (Guilherme, 2002, p. 19).

Once I started working on the task, I felt that what would help is a checklist based on the outcomes of the study (Cremona, 2015 i.e. a summary presented in Tables 1 above) which could serve as an emergent and critical conceptual tool through which the Maltese GFL learning context, particularly GFL students and their teachers can unpack, examine, contest and transform taken-for-granted assumptions that are ingrained in language programme direction, curricular and teaching practices (Levine & Phipps, 2012).

### — **Proposing the PACK checklist: a tool for curricular change**

Based on my interpretation of the data sets collected from the Maltese first year GFL learning context (see Table 1) as well as on the interviewed GFL teacher views and voices (see Cremona, 2015, Chapter 6), I felt I could finalise a list of suggestions aimed to lead to curricular change within the Maltese learning context. Keeping this unpacking idea in mind, I took the initial letters of the four most recurring points (i.e. **P**erspectives, **A**ttitudes, **C**hanges, **K**nowledge) and formed the acronym **PACK**. What follows in Table 2 below is a presentation of the PACK checklist aimed as a tool through which curricular change may be effected and/or facilitated within the Maltese GFL learning context.

Table 1: The PACK Checklist – Suggestions through which cultural knowledge and (critical) cultural awareness may be facilitated within the Maltese GFL learning context

<p><b>P</b> <i>erpectives</i></p> <p>Which essentialist perspective(s) is/are being adopted when forming (this) particular essentialist representation of culture?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the global perspective</li> <li>• the zone perspective</li> <li>• the regional perspective</li> <li>• the regional/locality perspective</li> <li>• the individual perspective</li> <li>• the historical perspective</li> <li>• the centre perspective</li> <li>• the periphery perspective</li> <li>• other possible perspectives</li> </ul> <p>Are any essentialist perspective(s) left out/ not feature in the way the particular essentialist representation of culture is/are being presented?</p> <p><b>Rather than just looking at the foreign realities adopting limited narrow essentialist perspectives, look for wider (as many as possible) more inclusive and multi-layered essentialist perspectives.</b></p>	<p><b>A</b> <i>ttitudes</i></p> <p>Which attitude(s) is/are being adopted when looking at the cultural aspect and/or cultural representation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive attitude</li> <li>• negative attitude</li> <li>• ambivalent attitude (i.e. based on a mix of positive and negative feelings)</li> <li>• judgemental attitude</li> <li>• other possible attitudes</li> </ul> <p><b>Rather than just looking at a foreign culture and judging it ambivalently, positively or negatively, attitudes should be more of an informed understanding and critical nature.</b></p>
<p><b>C</b> <i>hanges</i></p> <p>How did the cultural representation change with time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no change?</li> <li>• there was a change</li> <li>• there was pseudo-change where the representation seems to change but still remains the same (in type or in nature)</li> <li>• other possible types of changes</li> </ul> <p>Which changes were observed in the nature of the cultural representation with time?</p> <p><b>Changes should gradually reflect development - from cultural knowledge to cultural awareness to critical cultural awareness. Obvious and less obvious changes should be observed. One should also distinguish between changes and pseudo-changes.</b></p>	<p><b>K</b> <i>nowledge</i></p> <p>Questions one should ask at this level include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is choosing and/or deciding about the essentialist cultural content being presented?</li> <li>• Why is this particular representation (of this or that culture) being presented?</li> <li>• Is the essentialist representation of culture based on selected essentialist information i.e. leaving out other relevant information such as that about variations and/or exceptions?</li> <li>• Is the essentialist representation of culture based on limited (i.e. very few details) reduced essentialist information?</li> <li>• Is the essentialist representation of culture only referring to dominant essentialist information?</li> <li>• Is the essentialist representation of culture only referring to traditional essentialist discourses (i.e. one-sided ideologies)?</li> <li>• Is the essentialist representation of culture being presented out of context?</li> <li>• Is the essentialist representation of culture being presented by external or internal sources?</li> <li>• Is the essentialist representation of culture being articulated (only through words) or are different examples given using various modes?</li> </ul> <p><b>Situations characterised by knowledge only referring to reduced essentialist information and/or limited essentialist information based only on dominant essentialist discourses should aim to start seeking ways to include more informed and inclusive essentialist comments about the particular representation(s) of culture</b></p>

## **Practical initiatives based on the PACK checklist: initial recommendations**

Curricular change might need some time to start and/or to be effected within the Maltese GFL learning context. Aware of this, with the intention to hopefully increase (even further) my contribution to the field, I went on thinking of further possible ways and measures through which I could facilitate the process towards curricular change based on the PACK checklist.

I now move on to focus on four levels, namely the classroom level, the school (wide) level, the policymaking level and the teacher education level in Malta. I present a set of practical initiatives and examples of curricular change which might result as an effect of the use of the PACK checklist and the questions it includes.

From the beginning, I would like to clearly point out that while these initiatives and examples (as are the suggestions included in the PACK checklist) in themselves are a contribution to the field, I constantly offer and present this material (i.e. the PACK checklist and practical curricular change it might lead to) as points to be discussed further with the different stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning of GFL in Malta (and elsewhere). I intentionally refrain from offering my views and suggestions as rules or top-down laws based on the outcomes of this study.

Instead, I present and share these with others through continuous activities which include school lessons, projects with GFL teachers, workshops, and seminars. Through these activities my aim is to give the major stakeholders including students, teachers, school administrators, prospective teachers, parents and policymakers in Malta, the opportunity to share their views, challenge my suggestions (and therefore the PACK checklist) and give feedback about these and other related suggestions/questions/initiatives they can think of. Only through such continuous discussions could we all get the opportunity to start heading towards curricular change, moving from our limited cultural knowledge towards cultural awareness and (hopefully) later to situations based on Critical Cultural Awareness.

### **Possible curricular change through measures at classroom level**

To start with, the PACK checklist might serve to initiate curricular change through a number of initiatives at classroom level i.e. at the roots where things actually happen on a daily basis. Among others, at this level the questions included in the checklist should/could help teachers and students:

1. when looking for GFL resources and when using these GFL resources. The questions set in the checklist and the suggestions should help those in class realise that any resource they have at hand should be viewed as a tool presenting just one/a limited number of many possible essentialist realities (Jorgensen & Philipps, 2002) from (within) Germany and/or the people living in Germany. Furthermore, when defining the term 'texts', teachers and students should realise that textbooks are just one of the many resources through which they can obtain essentialist representations of Germany and its people. The definition of 'text' should be extended to include other types of resources (Walker, Bean & Dillard, 2010) among others the Internet, media sources and other authentic materials from Germany;
2. when designing self-made resources. Teachers should also think about ways how to help students think themselves about the content of the PACK checklist. This gradually could start leading to situations where students themselves develop a number of resources to be used in class (Cummins et al., 2005);
3. when discussing/reacting critically about essentialist representations presented during the GFL lesson and/or about other essentialist representations they encounter in other contexts outside the GFL learning context (e.g. at home, on the media).

### **Possible curricular change through measures at school level**

Stopping at initiatives only addressing the GFL classes could imply that the latter do not operate within a wider educational context i.e. the school context. Instead, the questions and suggestions of the PACK checklist could also lead to curricular change addressing the wider school learning context where the GFL classrooms are located.

For example, when setting physical spaces such as the German room i.e. a special class where all those learning GFL meet for the lesson, one should consider keeping in mind the points raised by the PACK checklist. The charts, authentic materials and other resources which the GFL teacher exhibits inside and outside (e.g. on the door or on notice boards hanging outside) the special German classroom, all directly and indirectly present a number of cultural representations (Kilickaya, 2004) to those learning German as well as to other students who do not learn German but who frequent the same school. Among these there might also be students who opt to study German at a later stage. Therefore, critically following the elements of the PACK checklist could help in the choice of these resources related to Germany.

On a similar note, the way school administrators, guidance teachers and teachers talk about GFL should – as much as possible – consider points raised by the PACK checklist and among others avoid comparisons between GFL and other subjects. Very often these comparisons happen before students choose to study the subject (Dörnyei & Uschioda, 2001).

Frequently those helping students to make subject choices (i.e. guidance teachers) describe GFL either as the toughest among the foreign languages or as a harsh language linked to negative historic connotations. Instead of these judgmental prejudices (Arnold, 1999; Richards and Lockhart, 1994), the criteria highlighted by the PACK checklist could help in the school-wide presentation of GFL. This would lead to a presentation which is as non-judgmental as possible. GFL should be presented as a foreign language offering benefits and challenges as all the other FLs which students can choose from.

Another school-based event where the PACK checklist and questions might help is the language awareness day organised annually by most Maltese state schools. These days aim to offer all the students attending the particular school the opportunity to experience various elements from within the different countries speaking the different FLs offered in the particular school (Hawkins, 1984). As the teacher and student interviews indicate, very frequently on these *language awareness days* GFL teachers in Malta encourage their students to prepare charts and hang them in the main hall of the school for all to see. Seen in the light of the suggestions included in the PACK checklist, the student charts and exhibits - as seen in the example below presented in



Figure 3 – frequently only include a number of very reduced essentialist representations (Soons, 2008) presenting very limited tiny segments of what is presented as 'the German reality'. Students (even non-GFL learners) are invited to try the German sausages and 'Lebkuchen' (i.e. a traditional German baked cookie, somewhat resembling gingerbread). These two food items are presented as 'the food people living in Germany eat'.



Figure 3: The 'German corner' set up in the main hall of a Maltese state school on one of the *language awareness days*.

The charts prepared by students and teachers include very reduced and limited essentialist representations of Germany. On the smaller table with the three flags, one can also see cooked sausages being presented as delicious German delicacies. Students visiting the stand could pre-order and buy this 'typical German food'.

For example, the Maltese girls' state school in which I took the photo (above), selects two GFL students yearly and asks them to wear the traditional Bavarian 'Dirndl' (female) and 'Lederhosen' (i.e. a female student wears the costume usually worn by males in Germany). An annual competition is organised. The GFL students attending the

school are very willing to be among the winners selected to wear what is presented as the 'clothes people living in Germany wear'. Similarly, in December GFL teachers in Maltese states schools organise German Christmas markets. These events, once again, frequently present very limited sets of essentialist representations of Germany and its people only referring to reduced essentialist dominant discourses. Among others, on such occasions German weather is presented as very cold with snow. In these Christmas Markets sausages and pastry (presented as the food one eats in Germany) are also sold. Therefore, on similar occasions the PACK checklist could serve as a guidance to GFL teachers and their students helping them to choose, present and integrate more inclusive and informed essentialist representations of Germany and its people during these school-based activities.

The same applies for GFL teachers and other non-GFL teachers who organise school exchanges and educational trips to Germany. Since GFL and non-GFL students are frequently allowed to participate in these trips, I feel this point affects the whole school cohort i.e. not just the GFL students. Very frequently when drafting the trip programme, these teachers end up focusing only on very limited essentialist representations (Kirkebæk, Du & Jensen, 2013) of Germany and its people. Instead the PACK checklist and the questions it includes could help these teachers to organise and to plan these school exchange programmes differently. Rather than just offering their students the opportunity to experience the main tourist attractions, teachers keeping the PACK suggestions in mind when drafting the programme would also include other less touristic elements. This would give students (and the teachers themselves) the opportunity to encounter more authentic realities which different people living in Germany experience daily.

### **Possible curricular change through measures at the Maltese policymaking level**

I feel that, most of the above-mentioned initiatives – proposed for the classroom and the school level – can be actually effective (and effected to the full) only if the policymakers, administrators and education directors in Malta think about them critically and evaluate their relevance (Honig, 2006). If those drafting policies and making decisions do reach this stage where they critically evaluate the proposed suggestions and questions included in the PACK checklist, it gets easier

for those working in schools and within classrooms to start reflecting about and hopefully benefiting from the PACK suggestions and the recommendations included in the checklist.

These discussions with policymakers need to point out and encourage the idea that any curricular change(s) we aim to do/reach following or based on the PACK checklist should avoid monologues among policymakers and instead involve the GFL teachers (and to a certain extent their students) from the very initial stages (Griffin, 1995). Avoidance of such top-down implementations would make it easier for those at the grassroots to accept more readily the policies which they should implement. Once teachers feel involved from the very initial stages i.e. not simply at the policy implementation stage, they would have a greater sense of ownership over the policies since they would have had the opportunity to comment and share their views about what is being proposed before its actual implementation (Kolderie, 2003). This approach very frequently also serves to bring policymakers closer to the grassroots since those writing policies in Malta (with the exception of heads of departments) very frequently are those with administrative roles and frequently have limited direct contact with the classroom level and what happens within it (Coburn & Stein, 2006). Therefore, having teachers involved from the very initial stages of policy drafting, facilitates policy implementation success.

I feel taking this stance would be very appropriate in a context seemingly characterised by a tradition of top-down measures imposed on Maltese GFL teachers and learners. A number of interviewed GFL teachers taking part in the discussion (see Cremona, 2015) indicated that one of the most recent top-down policy implementations which the teachers recently had to adapt to was the newly-drafted jam-packed syllabus, which in the view of the interviewed teachers constrains their daily conduct in class. The interviewed GFL teachers tended to feel that this top-down approach only led to a situation where they must rush against time in order to ensure that they cover as many syllabus topics as possible. All the interviewed GFL teachers tended to suggest that policymakers need to re-evaluate the methods of assessments (i.e. very summative exam-oriented assessments) that are currently used within the GFL learning context. Furthermore, they also indicated that in their view policymakers assumed that the way they had designed the new syllabus – i.e. setting the syllabus topics but

leaving it up to the teacher which culture-related material to include – gave GFL teachers autonomy while implementing the syllabus. However, the five GFL teachers indicated that this freedom is frequently leading to a situation where they end up feeling lost about which culture-related topics they should talk about and others they should leave out. Probably such a situation could have been tackled or addressed better earlier if only the policymakers had involved teachers and students more while originally designing and drafting the new syllabus (Wang & Cheng, 2005).

All this indicates that any curricular change we aim for should be based on hand-in-hand collaboration between policymakers and the GFL teachers. The former should help the latter through guidance rather than acting as top-down overseers over teachers (Schleicher, 2011). In this way the role of policymakers would eventually make it easier for teachers to feel more secure in their daily conduct since what they do in class has been discussed with those involved in policy drafting (Ledesma, 2011).

Instead of top-down measures, the two stakeholders (i.e. teachers and policymakers) could reflect about the questions set in the PACK checklist and constantly discuss challenges the teachers encounter in class. One of these discussions could be about the pros and cons of leaving value-related topics aside. Seen in the light of the PACK checklist, leaving these value-related topics aside would mean giving GFL students only reduced one-sided essentialist versions (i.e. perspective, attitudes and knowledge) of Germany and of the people living in Germany. Furthermore, through these initiatives based on collaboration, GFL teachers and policymakers could discuss and re-evaluate the view shared by most of the interviewed GFL teachers that one should avoid these topics because first year students are still very young. The PACK checklist should help the two sides reflect about the possibility that this avoidance of certain topics too could lead to a situation where students start forming reduced essentialist representations of Germany and its people which later lead to confused misunderstandings. Seen in the light of the PACK checklist, leaving these representations for later stages would mean that students start forming reduced and limited essentialist representations of the country and its people which they have to change later, once (if ever) these value-related topics are presented in class. Therefore, in these continuous collaborations between policymakers and GFL teachers,

the PACK checklist could help both sides discuss about the effects and risks brought about by the inclusion of these topics from the earliest stages of the GFL experience. Through these critical reflections based on the content of the PACK checklist, teachers and policymakers could possibly help their students form a more consistent essentialist representation of Germany and its people throughout the course.

Furthermore, the PACK checklist could also help policymakers and GFL teachers:

1. consider (and think about) the importance of presenting as many perspectives and situations as possible. These should also include sensitive value-related topics which are still frequently considered as taboos (Arabski & Wojtaszek, 2011) within the GFL learning context;
2. think about ways through which they can present the cultural topics in a way which appeals to the younger target audience (Beebe & Beebe, 2011). Therefore it is not only the choice of topic which matters, but the way in which the topic is presented to the particular target audience;
3. stop fearing that discussions referring to more inclusive essentialist representations of Germany would just increase prejudices and/or intolerance and see these more inclusive essentialist representations as a way through which students may become more critical. This would help students (and teachers themselves) avoid adopting positive or negative attitudes and instead try to look at things (with the help of their teachers) adopting more informed non-judgmental attitudes (Maijala, 2008).

This curricular change should be given time and these initiatives at policy level should be seen as a gradual (possibly lifelong) process. Additionally, the process should start from the very first day of the GFL learning experience, therefore as early as the first primary school sessions (i.e. the Foreign Language Awareness Programme: a set of 10 lessons offered to primary school students in Malta through which students get their first taste of the various Foreign Languages they can choose from once they start their secondary school experience). This should go on throughout (i.e. every single lesson of) the secondary GFL school learning experience and be extended to the post-secondary and tertiary levels, even reaching those interested to further their GFL studies.

### **Possible curricular change through measures at teacher training level**

As subject coordinator for German at the University of Malta one of the many responsibilities I have is drafting and implementing teacher-training programmes for future Maltese GFL teachers. The questions set in the PACK checklist continuously give me further insight(s) about the way I should/could draft and re-draft the university courses offered by my faculty (i.e. the Faculty of Education).

Eventually, this could also have an impact on a national level since in (the near or further) future when these GFL university students start teaching:

1. they would feel more prepared and hopefully constantly re-evaluate and think critically about the representations of Germany they present in class;
2. they may one day be policymakers and in this way the ideas discussed during lectures might be contributing to facilitate further the development of cultural knowledge and Critical Cultural Awareness within the Maltese GFL learning context.

Furthermore, bearing in mind the above-mentioned top-down situations which seemingly lead to little success, when I lecture I feel I should not present the PACK suggestions as fixed rules. Instead, university students and my other colleagues should constantly be given the opportunity to discuss and share their views about the checklist. Through this, as a team, we can constantly re-evaluate cultural representations of Germany included in materials presented during lectures. This should also help me to re-evaluate continuously the contents of the PACK checklist (i.e. therefore my current position) and adapt it accordingly.

In addition, my role at the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta gives me the possibility to develop workshops and professional development training seminars offered to experienced and less-experienced Maltese GFL teachers as well as to policymakers. Through these too, I feel that the PACK checklist can help me initiate discussions about measures which could facilitate (and lead to) nation-wide curricular change. I constantly remind myself that the approach these sessions should adopt, should avoid lengthy sermon-like one way explanations. Instead, policymakers and teachers should get the opportunity to:

1. familiarise themselves with and react to the results collected from the first year GFL learning context;
2. get to know/listen to what the PACK checklist suggests;
3. discuss and share their views about the PACK checklist while even offering further suggestions/alternatives based on their own experience(s);
4. link other theoretical ideas through which Cultural Knowledge and (Critical) Cultural Awareness may be developed in practice;
5. acknowledge that this development entails a gradual (possibly lifelong) process.

The offer of such training courses is also open to other GFL teachers elsewhere (i.e. not only in Malta). Similarly, the suggestions raised might also serve as helpful tips for other FL teachers who do not teach GFL. From all these suggestions, the latter could find valuable suggestions through which they could develop their own checklist (similar to the PACK checklist) and apply it critically in their daily conduct.

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### **Conclusion: slowly but hopefully steadily**

It should be clear – through the main points raised by the discussion in this chapter – that curricular change is needed within the Maltese first year GFL learning context. Student representations of Germany could start moving towards more cultural knowledge and then gradually move towards (critical) cultural awareness through the set of ideas and practical sample initiatives which I have included in this chapter.

Based on the outcomes of the study (i.e. the situation summarised in Table 1), the chapter presented the original PACK checklist as a tool through which the major stakeholders working, learning and teaching within the Maltese GFL learning context could start moving towards curricular change.

However, I also feel that this conclusion, rather than just highlighting the need of curricular change should re-emphasise the idea that everything should happen constantly, gradually and at its own pace. This rate towards curricular change could be slowed even further (i.e. at all levels including the classroom level, the wider school level, the policymaking level and the teacher education level) by my suggestion to avoid top-down measures towards curricular change. Moreover, moving slowly means proceeding steadily, hopefully being more successful and effective in reaping the desired fruit proposed throughout this chapter.

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