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Social connectedness in a community-based language and culture programme: voices of volunteer tutors

Ann Dashwood [a], Jeong-Bae Son [b] and Sang-Soon Park [c]

aSchool of Education, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia; bSchool of Education, University of Southern Queensland, Springfield Central, Australia; cUniSQ College, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article explores the roles of local volunteers in developing social connectedness among culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) parents seeking to gain English language and cultural confidence in a regional community in Queensland, Australia. Interview data from a case study of nine non-specialist tutor volunteers identified characteristics of their interactions with the CALD parents during informal language learning sessions. This case study analyses characteristics of the types of interactions reported by the volunteers teaching English and Australian Culture to a group of CALD adults. The nine interviewees had not completed formal TESOL qualifications at the time they engaged in the informal language learning sessions. Their reported perceptions highlight the range of ways in which social connectedness emerged during contextualised dialogic sessions in a regional community English learning setting. The study found that the volunteers' common interest in advancing a sense of parents' social connectedness accompanied an increased confidence using English in the safe learning space that the volunteers created. The results of the study advocate an outcomes-based dialogic approach to support the expressed social connectedness needs of newcomers into a regional community.

1. Introduction

Regional communities in Australia consist of a broad spectrum of residents. Most first language speakers of English in the regions manage their social and linguistic lives in the majority language without referring to an additional language. Newcomers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds express the need to learn how to communicate in English for a number of reasons, not least of which to connect meaningfully in the social circumstances they find themselves in. Government sponsored programmes are often associated with high stakes goal achievement. Female parent attendees with small children and 'babes in arms' have not been eligible for child-care assistance, so they do not commonly access government programmes beyond formal English sessions. Those who have attended find that there is little time devoted to

CONTACT Jeong-Bae Son ✉ jeong-bae.son@usq.edu.au

informal social conversation in English which as newcomers they express what they want and need. Additional help is actively sought by new residents to enhance their ability to communicate effectively outside their home language networks. Community English language programmes are commonly run by volunteers without government or affiliation funding. When newcomers' demand is noticed within a community, and a programme is set up, learners come to sessions from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds and varying English language proficiencies. The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA, 2019) found that such programmes are 'crucial for refugees and migrants to develop English language skills in a supported environment that considers their specific needs' (p. 12).

Volunteer teaching in regional communities refers to community generated English language sessions of an informal nature with a non-award curriculum managed by volunteers with an interest in the social wellbeing, language, and literacy development of adults who attend at no financial cost. Voluntary English language support is provided within a community that recognises a need for the learning, yet individual perspectives of volunteers who continue to provide support are rarely reported. Their voices in Australia on matters of social connection through language activities have not been heard yet. Lavery (2015) says, 'Social inclusion, social exclusion, social isolation and social connectedness as concepts are multi-dimensional, complex and the terms are often used interchangeably' (p. 4). The feeling of belonging to a group, being close to them, offers a connection that newcomers to the local community often struggle with. Social connectedness generates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional, and physical well-being. Developing the community connection is the means for gaining the wellbeing that social connectedness provides (Harris et al., 2014). Limited understanding of cultural ways hinders the attainment of that connection.

This study aims to identify through the voices of volunteer tutors the social connectedness afforded to CALD adults during Australian English language sessions in a community-based programme. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do volunteer tutors express awareness of developing social connectedness among CALD adults who attend English language and culture sessions?
2. What effects do volunteer tutors notice of their dialogic approach to English language and culture sessions with CALD adults?

2. Literature review

Following a review of relevant studies of regional communities and a call for social connectedness, the study turns to volunteers and informal learning before discussing a role for dialogic approaches in education.

2.1. Social connectedness in regional communities

Regional communities in Australia are composed of people from various cultural backgrounds of origin, which include immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and sojourners. According to the Australian government's regional migration scheme (Australian Government Department of Home and Affairs, 2021), the Australian government

cooperates with each state, territory, a vast number of local governments, and regional communities to attract new immigrants to regional areas rather than to big cities. Wulff and Dharmalingam (2008) identified that finding factors that affect social connectedness is an essential part of initiating relevant government policies that will assist migrants to stay in regional Australian communities and, as pointed out by Davies et al. (2018, 2021) in their West Australian rural studies, to retain volunteers with socially critical awareness.

Social connectedness in regional communities is related to the measure of how both majority and minority groups get along together and interact with each other to pursue common equity and equality within their communities. Rural volunteering is more than simply the delivery of front-line activities and services. Social connectedness plays an important role in assimilating not only refugees and asylum seekers but also migrants through community-based activities such as conversation clubs (e.g. Chao & Mantero, 2014; Schmidt, 2016; Thompson & Nasimi, 2022). Chao and Mantero (2014) pointed out that there has been a lack of English as a second language (ESL) classes for immigrant families and students. They found that the level of family literacy became established by steady interactions among family, school, and local communities and argued that offering church-based ESL programmes would help families settle in local communities. Schmidt (2016) also noted that diverse language background speakers in most churches in the US required local communities to provide ESL ministry.

In a different context, Sorgen (2015) asserted that new settlers' language acquisition and competence in a stable location greatly assisted the process of their integration emphasising the role of the social bridge, which enabled the widening of social networks. She said that 'connections between members of different communities are particularly relevant for integration, as it highlights the essential two-way process that facilitates such transitioning' (p. 255). Similarly, Block et al. (2015) stressed the importance of promoting social inclusion and its urgent needs for CALD backgrounds primary school students. They argued for wider engagement of immigrant families to promote social inclusion and raise awareness of a school community's role in drawing positive cross-cultural images of immigrants.

The literature has examined diverse types of voluntary programmes run by local communities. The systematic review of studies by Mahoney and Siyambalapitiya (2019) showed that community-based programmes have a positive effect on participants by increasing their social inclusion and connectedness. Support groups that aim to assist integration into local society embed English language acquisition or communication skills and tools that tap into and build on the refugees and asylum-seeking groups' skills and knowledge. As Anderson and Cairncross (2005) explained, volunteer perspectives on how they assist newcomers informally with social interaction has yet to be explored. Empirical evidence from volunteer tutors through a themed dialogic process in an informal learning environment would add some of the missing evidence of change that can occur through regular social communication in interaction and exchange. Consequently, the concept of social connectedness in regional communities and its significance for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants needs to be carefully considered from the perspectives of those who are interacting socially and regularly with them.

2.2. Volunteer teaching and informal adult learning

A range of community-based English language learning and culture programmes are offered to serve various groups of people. They have relied on local volunteers who offer support to CALD adults, indigenous people, refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and/or sojourners (e.g. Anderson & Cairncross, 2005; Balyasnikova, 2020; Bauer, 2018; Clary et al., 1998; Gooch & Stevenson, 2020; Hassemer, 2020; Kerr et al., 2001; Krumm, 2017; Townsend, 2008; Townsend et al., 2014). In a study of volunteers' involvement in English language and conversation clubs in England, for example, Gooch and Stevenson (2020) reported that volunteers were mainly retired teachers, ex-teachers, and aspiring teachers. The volunteers' main challenges were: 'cultural awareness and consideration; a lack of resources, space and other volunteers; education levels of participants, including managing different levels in one group; and attendance and turnover of participants' (p. 6). They also pointed out that the volunteers needed to get appropriate and digestible resources and feasibly adjust their situations to support refugees.

The nature of voluntary teaching and voluntary teachers' contribution to programmes need to be examined in context. Kerr et al.'s (2001) study among indigenous and non-English speaking background (NESB) in South Australia and later Balyasnikova's (2020) study in a Canadian community found that multilingual volunteers had 'more understanding of what it takes to learn a language' (p. 86) than dominant culture volunteers. Yet, it is not clearly known how volunteers with lived knowledge of Australian western cultures and family experiences have responded to newcomers who have requested Australian socialisation through personally relevant conversation.

Through a study of indigenous communities in Northern Territory, Bauer (2018) argued that all local people could become teachers when asked to help improve literacy in the community. She claimed that, when the learning was informal and constructed by social interaction and engagement, it was likely to be successful, improving adult literacy and numeracy, and fostering a sense of social connectedness. She concluded, 'Informal learning is significant for socialisation into literacy, as using everyday activities grows a person's identity as a successful learner and increases confidence' (p. 143). Similarly, Krumm (2017) advocated informal voluntary learning. He recognised the value of volunteers introducing the national language to learners, facilitating immediate language needs, and being tolerant of distracted refugee learners undergoing societal pressures that are confronting when faced with formal language learning. In another study conducted in Austria, Hassemer (2020) dealt with the benefits of volunteering for local people and for their individual social values when helping refugees in their local communities. Earlier, Townsend et al. (2014) had studied issues associated with volunteering in a primary school kitchen garden programme in Victoria. They reported that volunteering itself had great benefits for volunteers who could obtain social, psychological, and physical advantages. They highlighted the mutual benefits to students and volunteers, consisting of 'confidence, capabilities and connections' (p. 245).

Reasons for offering volunteering relate to the social and psychological goals of volunteers. Motivation tends to be intrinsic for the feeling of inherent personal satisfaction without a tangible reward and/or extrinsic from the expectation of an external tangible reward that is instrumental in motivating the individual. In a study of volunteer motivation, Anderson and Cairncross (2005) used six individualist functions from Clary et al.'s

(1998) Volunteer Function Inventory. The functions included values, understanding, social relationships, career opportunities, self-protection, and enhancement promoting a positive environment. According to Volunteering Australia (2022), personal satisfaction, doing something worthwhile, helping others, and sense of community have been long-standing reasons given for volunteering. 32% of Australians were counted as informal volunteers in unspecified roles, as yet providing no information on the percentage of volunteering tutors of English to newcomers.

2.3. Dialogic approach to teaching

A dialogic approach to teaching is based on a teacher's awareness and ability to facilitate a student's construction of knowledge in learning. The nexus of dialogic pedagogy (Alexander, 2004, 2018) is meaningful dialogue expressed as respectful interaction between the teacher and the learner. It was based on children's learning in classrooms helping them understand a discipline to manage a task or to develop a skill and to overcome any misunderstandings. Constructed on principles from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning and Bakhtin's (1981) internalised speech and reflection, a dialogic approach enables the learner to interrogate information, ask questions, and acquire skills through cooperative social interaction. When a teacher develops a learning environment, which encourages dialogue, engagement is encouraged. Although initially applied in classrooms for school-aged children (Alexander, 2004), similar engagement principles can be observed among people of any age and circumstance. Within an informal context of non-high stakes English language learning, dialogic approaches to teaching can facilitate the kind of learning environment that enables the development of two-way social connectedness. Extrapolating from Alexander (2004), a teacher allows time for the learner to think and phrase an utterance and to talk with others. The teacher uses a range of questioning types and strategies for learners to construct knowledge through talking and questioning. From a sociocultural perspective, Mercer and Howe (2012) exposed talk with reference to classroom contexts as a product of culturally situated forms of social interaction. Knowledge is not just an individual possession but also the creation and shared property of community members who use spoken and written language as cultural tools for sharing knowledge in relationships and in learning environments. Mercer and Howe (2012) also acknowledged that true dialogue and socio-cultural concepts had relatively little impact on educational policy and practice at the time.

3. The study

3.1. Context

CALD adults often feel marginalised from mainstream social interaction in a predominantly monolingual environment where English is the majority language. Further, women who are confined to the home for extended periods with significant childcare responsibilities and no regular engagement in the broader community become isolated in their households. Separation of interests, experiences, and even respect increases as command of Australian cultural and English interaction of members of their families grows far ahead of theirs. This study emerged from such a context as CALD women

presented at their children's school, seeking social help in a range of ways, primarily for intensive English support.

By word of mouth, volunteers came forward to a school community setting to provide Australian English to the relatively new residents, mostly women whose language spoken at home was not English. Henceforward, the word 'tutor' was used in place of 'volunteer' as they were regarded as tutors and respected by the parents as their teachers. The tutors delivered sessions of conversational English on a range of topics, many requested by the CALD women requested. Topics encompassed going shopping, visiting health professionals, completing government and school regulation forms, managing money and budgeting, developing computer skills, and reading. Interrelated topics generated opportunities on relationship of the learners' needs to community engagement. Of personal interest to some adults included obtaining an Australian driving licence, finding out about citizenship, raising children, and the perennial global concern of managing children's demands including overuse of handheld devices. The volunteers adapted their lived experience skills and brought them to the weekly language and culture sessions. The topics and themes of the sessions expanded to accommodate the school curriculum. The focus of this study is volunteer tutors' experiences of a developing sense of connection by being reliably present as a tutor among CALD adults who came to expand their use of Australian English in the context of their living in the regional city where the study was conducted.

3.2. Participants

Participants in the study were 9 volunteer tutors (7 women and 2 men) who provided social and cultural conversations in Australian English supported by resources at a local school in regional Queensland. The tutors were retired from a range of full-time professions. Their careers included roles in public libraries, accountancy, business, nursing, and school teaching (see Table 1). They were recruited by open invitation to a group of fourteen, all of whom offered attentive time once a week to support CALD parents who attended sessions to develop their English language skills. Sociolinguistic aspects of communication for connectedness within the school and wider the community were the focus of the sessions each term.

3.3. Data collection instruments

A qualitative research design was employed consisting of semi-structured individual interviews with the volunteer tutors. In order to find out the features of volunteer connections

Table 1. Participants' profile.

Name	Gender	Age	Linguistic heritage	Previous/current profession/work
Carol	Female	60+	Monolingual (Australian English)	Health
Christy	Female	50+	Monolingual (Australian English)	Bookkeeping, informal carer
Faith	Female	70+	Monolingual (Australian English)	Primary school teacher
Heidi	Female	30+	Monolingual (Australian English)	Postgraduate education
Holly	Female	65+	Monolingual (Australian English)	Librarian
Jackie	Female	60+	Monolingual (Australian English)	Nursing
Jaco	Male	80+	Bilingual (Dutch and English)	Self-employed handyman
Mac	Male	60+	Monolingual (Australian English)	Businessman
Raini	Female	30+	Bilingual (Indonesian and English)	Postgraduate education

Note: $N = 9$. All participants' names are pseudonyms.

in community-based English language and culture support for CALD adults, interviews were chosen as the effective instrument for collecting data. The participants were familiar with the interviewer whom they knew well and trusted. Other data types such as requesting volunteers to write a journal of their experience in interaction or participate in a survey were dismissed as intrusive, requiring extensive and unfamiliar reporting for the participants. The following main questions were asked in the interviews:

(1) What were some of the things you noticed about how the adults were getting on with their language use and social interaction?
(2) What strategies were important for a tutor to use?
(3) Can you say why you decided to become a volunteer and work with CALD adults?

3.4. Procedures

The volunteer tutors were invited to self-nominate as participants. The purpose of the study was explained to them orally and in writing through an ethically approved Participation Information Sheet. During the interviews, each participant was asked to identify key aspects of their interactions with the CALD parents, focussing on language use and their sense of connectedness that was developing through the language and culture sessions. The interview protocol was rehearsed, and an experienced adult ESL teacher conducted the interviews. The participants chose to conduct their interviews face-to-face as audio recordings. The interviews were transcribed and sent to the participants to confirm the fidelity of the transcriptions as a means of obtaining trustworthy data. An active process of reflexivity was utilised in reading and analysing transcripts of the interviews. This process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021) was conducted from the transcriptions to identify recurring themes in the discourse samples found to be accurate attributions of social connectedness and meaningful use of English in conversational communication. Themes were identified by cross matching the participants' verbatim responses to the dialogue generated during the interviews. Frequency of expressions that indicated commonality were colour-coded and reviewed to categorise connectedness to the context of home cultural ways and wider community ways. The nature of dialogic teaching and learning emerged as a didactic approach to teaching reduced and engagement of the tutors with the parents increased.

3.5. Ethical considerations

The study followed ethics guidelines of the authors' university and received an approval from the university ethics committee. Ethical practice was observed throughout the interviews with native and near-native speakers of English about their role as volunteer tutors. As volunteers, they were not required to be formally trained as teachers despite using elements of the Australian curriculum with the CALD adults. While a minor psychological risk to the participants was identified prior to the interviews, a consistent procedure was followed, offering anonymity in reporting results to allay any concerns they might have held when reflecting on their practice as volunteer tutors and in their responses to the adults' stories and life issues.

4. Results

Choosing to volunteer locally in an informal Australian English and culture programme attracted a range of people with diverse professional backgrounds. Few classified themselves as an expert in either language teaching or social work and fewer still were familiar with the psycho-social conditions parents face raising children in a different cultural environment from their own upbringing in another country. The volunteer tutors offered a service, using their experiential knowledge as an extension of professional behaviour while expressing an obligation and desire to help the adults adapt to Australian ways. They expressed empathy for the women and men and extended practical care at the same time as gaining a sense of personal satisfaction themselves. Many had free time and perceived the volunteering as serving primarily the social needs of the adults whose home language was additional to English. In social conversations, the volunteers reflected on how they had managed parenthood and child raising, amid discussions of the types of relationship that families have with schools. The volunteers experienced personal fulfilment as they connected socially to the parents from diverse backgrounds. They shared talk on social experiences, education opportunities, and the value of literacy in daily life using English outside the sessions as the parents used English in their homes with their families and in the wider community. The tutors connected with the parents through the ways they interacted socially creating an informal shared context. They connected with empathy, feeling a shared sense of gain with their learners, and developed strategies that perpetuated connectedness using English meaningfully. Themes emerged as connectedness were expressed as social interaction in authentic situations, co-connection through a shared language, and natural adoption of strategic dialogic approaches to tutoring Australian English as a volunteer.

4.1. Connectedness through social interaction

The volunteers noticed changes in the extent to which the parents engaged in the sessions. Five tutors observed the parents' readiness to share cultural norms in class; two tutors remarked that the parents were sharing their learning at home with the family. Carol observed:

> They are talking more in English, and some tutors are actually learning the parents' first languages and I am gaining more understanding about the importance of living together in a community, no matter who or what religion you are, or where you're from.

Heidi summed up the common experience: 'Empowering is absolutely important'; 'sharing knowledge' enabled them to be 'more confident' and 'listening to what they want' such as 'different ways of cooking', which led to 'bringing along food to test and share'.

Mac insisted that 'word recognition like "shopping" and connecting with Australian people' had changed positively. Carol noted 'socially learning about do and don't topics in Australian society, respecting cultural norms'. Christy explained that she had 'helped a lady with a grant from Lifeline. She got the grant and was able to finish her course and get a job.' The changes Raini noticed were 'communicating with other parents, Australian parents from their children, making more connections and discussing

what happens, sometimes from the Australian perspective' while Heidi encouraged the parents 'to take home games to play with their children'. Heidi also noticed that 'following a session on sending email invitations … what they are doing now at a birthday party in Australia' is singing 'hip, hip hooray, which is specific to Australia', then they sang 'their own birthday song, showing this is what we've learned and want to do'.

There was a sense of confidence growing as the parents attended regularly. All nine tutors noticed that the parents had relaxed and kept coming back to join the sessions; six tutors noted that the parents changed their approach to 'having a go' by making sounds and by reading and writing willingly. Faith said, 'More progress in the actual learning is happening', such as 'writing down her phone number'. Tutors were impressed by the gain in confidence, noticing how the parents had become more relaxed and, as Faith claimed, 'after six months, you see them come into the room more confidently'. Carol explained: 'She's using her fingers to break down syllables of long words.' Heidi noticed pronunciation changes:

> She wants to fix phonetic issues such as changing 'barty' to 'party' and she is becoming more confident in her written English as well. With another Arabic speaker there she moved from checking in Arabic to assigning value and meaning to an English word.

Christy claimed, 'They're very keen, happy to learn how to sound words out. Very open minded and it's lovely to see as they progress, their reading and their writing and their speech, their language in general.' Mac was attentive 'to see their English improve' and for a parent to pass the formal driving licence test: 'That was a big step for him and very satisfying … mastered English enough to do the tests and to get his PR.' Raini was clear: 'Parents are more involved with their children, with their children's schooling. We talk about what school is doing for the children and what parents can do at home. They keep coming back for more conversation.' Carol noted, 'She's wanting to learn more. She is passing on to her 3-year-old daughter many of her learnings. She is aiming for PTE assessment. She is talking about her culture and respecting Christian celebration of Easter.'

4.2. Co-connecting

The range of responses to the question 'Why did you decide to become a volunteer?' reflected the volunteers' varied experiences with diversity in the wider community. Holly expressed the common reflection: 'I just feel I am giving back to the community and get an enormous feeling of self-satisfaction out of being able to do that.' Faith felt similarly, also with 'free time' to 'meet new people'. The tutors became aware that the women whose children attended the school no longer had access to a formal programme themselves. The conditions of their visas or family commitments to very young children prevented them attending formal classes at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Queensland.

Jackie explained that 'these people need English and friendship', and she wanted to 'contribute to their lives'. Christy came to volunteer for the experience saying, 'I love the diversity' and 'have not having anything really to do with them before'. Her self-esteem was also lifted: 'My son is proud of me.' Raini wanted to

> try to bridge the two cultures; not just about the language; As a migrant myself, because my husband is Australian, I feel like I have the understanding of Australian culture. I understand how they feel whether accepted or not; I try to keep the balance

as a volunteer. There were also pragmatic supporting reasons for Carol: 'getting all this practical experience to finish off a diploma in TESOL', having already been a community volunteer with CALD adults in the city's library. Heidi found her service-learning placement at the school as an opportunity to 'practice that sort of English literacy skill' by teaching in 'a school that does a lot of fantastic work in the community'.

4.3. Strategic dialogic approaches to learning

By connecting their experiences with their parent learners' responses, the volunteer tutors established their own strategic dialogic approach to social connectedness. The quality of learning materials guided the tutors to strategic use of English. Carol said,

> I like the fact that as a tutor we get information prior to the lesson, so the tutor does have an idea of where to go for a low-level student or a high functioning English speaker. We give parents positive feedback, which is so important to continuity, as is being connected … keeping 'sessions' open for anyone who wants to come in.

Jenny used 'maps, something they hadn't known how to do before' and made 'drawings as stick figures' as a strategy to encourage 'them to ask questions now more than before'. Faith found that they struggled with structure, 'so I asked the question'. Further, Christy used the strategy to 'ask them their name and write down their name, discuss where they're from and their languages. Some speak four or five different languages. I ask them about their children and their beliefs, what they've been doing, how they're feeling.'

Mac was alert to the adults' quest for 'subject matter … they are wanting more'. He also found that 'to do the apprenticeship thing and sit in and learn from other tutors' was effective. He advised new tutors to 'speak slowly with good English, find the words, put the grammar back together in many different methods, and respond sensitively' and to do what comes naturally: 'I like to teach them about Nature. I like to teach citizenship. Australia is very blessed with its constitution, very fortunate to have freedoms.' Heidi found that 'sharing personal stories and perspectives to create like deeper context' led to her 'being positive, supportive and trustworthy'.

Jaco's strategy was to 'learn to listen and let them talk about their culture and let them tell you in their own words'. It was Faith who recognised that 'friendship is vital. We can share and contribute something to each other smiling, looking in their face, showing a bit of loving care.' A light-hearted effective strategy from Heidi was to use 'Australian colloquialisms, such as I'm a stickybeak and follow up with diagrams as an illustration' and then

> saying truthfully, I'm really interested in you, and finding out their stories … a hugely important lesson that I believe every Australian should learn … and linking worksheets to what is happening in the school. Parents who come are motivated and want to engage in what they're learning. Just give them some space to practice what they know and to just develop new skills.

5. Discussion

The volunteers connected the parents to their children's learning, the school, and the wider regional community, establishing trust through dialogic communication.

5.1. Volunteer tutors' roles in social connectedness

Volunteering is not uncommon in Australia. Reasons given for the practice are dominated by a sense of personal satisfaction from doing something worthwhile, helping others, and being in community. The analysis by Anderson and Cairncross (2005) had identified that the values orientations of volunteers were the triggers to volunteering. Concern for others, sustaining relationships and/or building new ones were either accompanied by or separate from using existing skills or developing new skills. This study revealed similar motivation for individuals to offer, then commit to facilitate English and culture learning sessions in an informal supportive environment. Career development by undertaking a TESOL related qualification was occasionally provided as a reason and motivation for volunteering, alongside caring and helping CALD parents of young children adjust into community life.

As with the English language programme in British Columbia in which Balyasnikova (2020) found that the volunteers in the programme all felt part of a community, with a focussed sense of connection to the groups they worked with, so did the volunteers in this study. The school's organisation was involved, but the volunteers' facilitation, rather than teaching, connected the parent learners to their children in English. As in Townsend's (2008) study, the volunteers developed heightened awareness of connecting across cultures that fostered social connectedness among individuals in the group.

This regional Queensland study contrasts with Hassemer's (2020) study in Vienna of translators who were volunteering with refugees to construct social connectedness to the community. Hassemer claimed that the motivation to volunteer was either to fulfil their self-perceptions of themselves as a functional part of the community, or to create that image to achieve residency for themselves. By contrast, the Australian volunteering citizens were natural users of English. They were focussed on providing school and neighbourhood community social access to the parents through their role as facilitating tutors during regular informal communication sessions.

While Townsend's (2008) analysis had shown that the formal structure of adult and community education could prevent the development of social connectedness, Krumm (2017) argued that language learning and social connectedness are best fostered in an informal environment, in which the volunteer facilitates the learning. Experience of a welcoming informal environment dominated the voices of the volunteer tutors in this study. Being interested in the learner as a person with integrity and individual value was a clear indicator of how the volunteers understood and performed their role facilitating the learning and sharing. The welcoming environment in the informal learning context of the study was developed through communication in English by means of and facilitating natural ways of connecting with people in the community.

5.2. Dialogic effects noticed by volunteer tutors

A sense of community was generated through the volunteering nature of the dialogic interactions. Balyasnikova (2020) also found a similar sense of community by bonding with the adopted culture while not losing personal integrity and identity in the mother tongue. In this study, sharing and trust were a dominant cultural trait that emerged as the English language programme progressed in what was a safe place. The study also revealed that

empowering strategies are importantly achieved by sharing knowledge, indicative of the informal learning effects the tutors noticed by engaging with the CALD parents.

As pointed out by Chao and Mantero (2014), regular interconnection among school, family, and community impacts the level of family literacy. The volunteers themselves became committed to consistent regular interaction with their learners as a key feature of facilitating learning. Such results are similar to the claims Bauer (2018) and Krumm (2017) made for the power of informal learning for building confidence and enabling socialisation. The tutors observed the parents' readiness to share cultural norms in class, noting that, with encouragement and guidance, the parents were sharing their learning at home with the family. The volunteers provided consistent regular interaction. By focussing on the learners' interests and language development, they adopted strategic approaches to communication. The dialogic approach adopted naturally by the tutors may act as an indication to mainstream teaching and a natural means to enhance the learning-teaching interface in a range of teaching situations in which teacher presentation practices remain dominant.

6. Conclusion

Volunteering as a local informal language and culture tutor in a regional community bridges the socio-cultural gap for CALD adults. Hearing the voices of volunteers in their dialogic approach to communicating with their learner parents attests to the role that volunteers play in community. This study revealed that achieving outcomes as a volunteer tutor does not require expert knowledge in the field of linguistics or social psychology. A willingness to care, to listen, and to engage in relevant contextualised learning appears to facilitate a two-way exchange of benefits. The study advocates a social outcomes-based role for volunteers in enhancing CALD parents' confidence and sense of social connectedness. Considered with other studies in international contexts, the results of the study bring to light the facilitating advantages of non-formal language pedagogies for establishing social connectedness. Further exploration of facilitating practices for social connectedness is needed as demand for volunteers increases in regional and remote communities. Greater attention is needed to strategic dialogic approaches to cater for the increasing diversity of adults who use an additional language to English, including among First Nations women and men.

ORCID

Ann Dashwood 🄳 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7311-3765
Jeong-Bae Son 🄳 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5346-5483
Sang-Soon Park 🄳 https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2560-3425

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