Negotiating Curriculum Work in ESL

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Deakin University April, 2004
Candidate Declaration

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I certify that the thesis entitled

Negotiating Curriculum Work in ESL

submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Education

is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any other university or institution is identified in the text.

Full Name  Gavin Brett Melles.

Signed ..................................................................................……………….

Date......................................................................................……………….

...
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the staff and students of the ESL section at the (former) Waikato Polytechnic whose voices are distributed throughout this portfolio. It goes without saying that none of this would have been possible without your acquiescence to be subjects and participants in the projects referred to here. All representations and interpretations are ultimately partial and that is true of the research interpretations presented here. Hopefully, you may find some reflection of yourself in this work.

I must also express my gratitude to my family, Anne, Sophie, and Isabel, who have suffered from an absent father and husband while this work has been pursued. I hope the rewards of completion are worth some of the sacrifices.
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<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior Learning: successful formal RPL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAE</td>
<td>Centre for Adult Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCE</td>
<td>Community and Continuing Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CertEnglish</td>
<td>Certificate in GESOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELW</td>
<td>English for Living and Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWP</td>
<td>English for the Workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GESOL</td>
<td>General English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITO</td>
<td>Industry Training Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQF</td>
<td>National Qualifications Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZQA</td>
<td>New Zealand Qualifications Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFTS</td>
<td>Preparation For Tertiary Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QAC</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKILLS NZ</td>
<td>One of the funding bodies for TOPS migrant English programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPL</td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESL</td>
<td>Teaching English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESOL</td>
<td>Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOPS</td>
<td>Training Opportunities Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWP</td>
<td>The Waikato Polytechnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>WINZ</td>
<td>Work and Income New Zealand</td>
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Portfolio introduction

An increasing amount of research has appeared analysing the nature of teacher thinking and practice in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). Some of this work has adopted qualitative and naturalistic approaches to identifying the principles that teachers use to construct curricula with students. This portfolio uses qualitative research informed by critical and poststructuralist approaches in order to understand and represent curriculum work in ESL from an insider participant perspective. As a form of participatory teacher research it involves a reflexive component that considers my role in the research and my relationships with other practitioners. As a body of workplace research on ESL it examines practices (and discourses of practice) through a variety of research methods. It also critically examines research methodologies themselves in terms of their relevance to teacher research aims. Data collection is situated in a NZ Polytechnic through the years 1997-2001.

This portfolio contributes to understanding the complex professional world of ESL teachers working within vocational institutions like NZ Polytechnics, where curriculum work in general is aligned with competency-based curriculum frameworks. In the electives and the dissertation I examine particular practices in this ESL workplace, such as team teaching, and the values and discourses associated with these practices that affect curriculum processes and outcomes. In the portfolio I also consider questions about the adequacy of particular research methodologies, such as action research, for teacher research in ESL. I use the dissertation component of the portfolio to address the distinctive nature of ESL work within this environment. Although situated within a particular workplace, I also believe the work remedies a gap in the knowledge we have of curriculum work in NZ ESL, work that curriculum participants socially construct as they position themselves within discourses and practices of teaching and learning.

The portfolio is divided into two main sections: elective research and dissertation. The elective section includes journal articles, conference papers, and articles under review that I completed while working as an English as a Second Language (ESL)
teacher during the period 1997-2001 in the Department of Community and Continuing Education (CCE) of The Waikato Polytechnic (TWP), in Hamilton, New Zealand. The elective research section is followed by a dissertation based on interviews, written texts, and other information obtained for the most part from staff and students within the department during the first half of the 2000 teaching year, although supplemented by other material obtained at a later date. In its aim, nature and scope this dissertation complements and supplements the themes and directions explored in the elective research tasks. In terms of its chronological scope (four years), situated exploration of ESL practice, and critical examination of those practices, I liken the portfolio to a critical ethnography. This methodology is examined further in the dissertation.

0.1 Negotiation and ideology in the portfolio

My portfolio is titled *Negotiating Curriculum in ESL* because I see contexts of negotiation that practitioners need to manage underlying many of the perennial problems and issues raised in relation to curriculum work in ESL. The word ‘negotiation’ has a number of meanings which I take up in this portfolio. The first sense of negotiation I take up concerns how one negotiates a position as a teacher researcher in ESL. I suggest that not all research methodologies offer positions that enable teacher researchers to improve knowledge and practice in educational settings. I also examine the limits and tensions of existing teacher research methodologies, eg. action research, as they apply to this research site. I explore the second sense of negotiation in relation to team teaching, which is a characteristic of the culture of this particular ESL workplace. I examine how team teaching contributes to coherent practice in a challenging context where international students create new demands for curriculum work. The third sense of negotiation relates to the use of Action Research in ESL. I first report on an action research project in my workplace in which together with three colleagues I examine the place for computers in the ESL curriculum. In the review essay that follows the action research report, I consider some of the boundaries and tensions currently constructing action research in education. Finally, in the dissertation I examine ESL curriculum work through the discourses that managers, practitioners (ESL and non-ESL), and students take up in enacting curriculum work in ESL.
Throughout this portfolio I explore my own and others’ understandings of curriculum work in ESL. In my writing I attempt to find a balance between a sufficiently ‘rich’ representation of the complex reality teachers negotiate and an ideological critique that goes beyond common sense categories of understanding among ESL teachers. I believe that this complexity characterises many ESL adult education settings in different ways from other sites of English teaching in which I have worked, such as university language centres, high school ESL support, volunteer community support, continuing education (eg. part-time evening class programs), and private language schools. Because the portfolio documents research on ESL practices over a four-year period, is informed by critical educational research, and includes (but is not limited to) action research approaches, the portfolio can be seen as a critical ethnography. However, this should be seen as a provisional description rather than as a commitment to critical ethnography’s distinctive methods and methodologies.

I have ideological concerns about ESL practice which I address as an insider participant, that is, as a member of the culture or community of practice that I am investigating. In line with other work within traditions of critical educational research, in conferences and seminars I have directed some of my work explicitly to these communities, eg. ESL teachers,. In the course of conducting the research reported here, I became increasingly aware of how the critical agenda of empowerment is used in ways that make it questionable as to who benefits (see Ellsworth, 1989). In discussing the interviews with teachers about the relationship between practice and research, I briefly address existing critiques of the empowerment narrative associated with action research, in ESL and education, and the uniqueness of teacher insights compared to traditional research perspectives.

My overall concern with ideology, enlightenment and change in my work is consistent with several other critical educational researchers, (eg. Carr, 1995), feminist, (eg. Lather, 1991), and critical pragmatists, (eg. Cherryholmes, 1988). I also address at several points in this portfolio the difficulties of participating in the field as both teacher and researcher. In addressing curriculum work in ESL, I am
concerned simultaneously with what Wagner (1993) calls ‘blank spots’ in our knowledge about teacher thinking and practice in ESL that others have researched and with ‘blind spots’ that we may have created by using objectivist research methodologies, which Wagner (1993, pp. 16-19) suggests can only be overcome by adopting non-empiricist research approaches.

0.2 Elective Research

There are five chapters in the elective section of the portfolio. In Chapter One, I discuss appropriate research methodologies for insider research about ESL education, and consider the ontological and epistemological commitments of various paradigms before moving on to exemplify some of the choices I have made for my own research. This chapter includes reference to an internally funded (TWP) ethnography of teacher beliefs and practice (Melles, 1999) completed in 1998, and to other unpublished conference papers (eg. Melles, 1998a-c). Chapter Two is based on an evaluation of team teaching in which three teachers (myself included) worked together to produce a curriculum for international students. It looks at the representation of curriculum work in ESL through themes developed from teacher journals and team meeting notes. This is a substantial revision of an earlier paper on this project which looked at teacher identities in team teaching. Here I abandon the question of teacher identities and focus instead on curriculum coherence, which is the main objective of this evaluation project. This chapter is perhaps the most speculative in the elective section. Chapter Three, which is currently under review for publication, explores the research/practice binary through interviews with four colleagues, all of whom have some experience of action research. I conducted these interviews to inform a paper on the nature of community in ESL (Melles, 2000), a theme I take up in the dissertation. This paper develops a theme discussed in the earlier chapter on methodologies and also provides a link to the following two chapters on action research.

Chapter Four is a published review essay (Melles, 1998d), which highlights some of the tensions and meanings I see associated with the philosophy and practices of action research in educational settings. Although this review does not directly
address my specific research context, it provides an argued account of my position on the relevance of certain approaches to action research through a critical review of two anthologies. Chapter Five is a published book chapter (Melles, 2001) based on the action research project mentioned above. Situating and using action research became a very productive area in my research and connected readily with my workplace practices. In both chapters, I try to locate the borders of critical inquiry in action research, a concern that resonates with issues in other chapters in the elective section.

The elective references cover an enormous amount of ground in relation to curriculum work in ESL education, teacher research, qualitative methodologies, and other issues regarding the ethics and practices of workplace research. The papers themselves cross-reference each other in that they refer to the same workplace, similar issues, and, in some cases, actually refer to the previous work. In addition, these papers cover the four and a half years (1997-2001) during which I worked in the ESL section at TWP. I also believe the situations in which they were delivered and the audiences they were written for are a good reflection of the professional networks I belonged to and to whom I wanted to speak and be understood by. The papers refer to teaching situations that persist and to programs that continue to be taught, albeit in modified form. They also refer to staff, ESL teachers and students who have remained at the Polytechnic and to others who have moved on. These ongoing changes are very much part of the life of ESL teaching and the retrospective account developed here should be read in that light. Inevitably, individuals will have a different view of events and interpretations from those I offer. This is an unavoidable consequence of the nature of any research writing that acknowledges the partiality of perspectives and the lack of any fixed objective reality on which to pin research accounts.

0.3 Dissertation Outline

A fuller description of the aims, methods, and findings of the dissertation are included in relevant chapters of that section of the portfolio. Here I provide a very brief overview for the purposes of this introduction. Following a brief introduction,
which sets the scene and identifies the aims of the work in this component, I review the methodologies used for this critical ethnography of teaching in context, and also situate the work in relation to the communities of practice represented in it. Some of this discussion is foreshadowed in the elective sections. I provide a rationale for the methods I used, and the ways in which traditions of critical ethnography and discourse analysis informed my approach. Three chapters explore curriculum work through interviews with practitioners and managers (curriculum culture), recorded team meetings of teachers (doing curriculum), and interview and journal writing by students (experiencing curriculum). In the discussion sections of each chapter, and in the final chapter, I attempt to bring these threads together by considering the discourses teachers, managers, and students take up to explain their understandings of curriculum work. I draw some conclusions about what these respective representations say about the nature of ESL curriculum work in vocational institutions.

The final part of the portfolio draws together the various threads and themes explored in the research to discuss three issues: the ethics, benefits and methodologies of workplace research, the nature of curriculum work in ESL, and my own future directions as an ESL practitioner and educational researcher. Here I draw some conclusions about working within the ESL workplace and examining the work of self and others as a practically useful endeavour and a feasible career choice. Then I draw some conclusions about representations of the ESL (vocational) curriculum as it appears through the work in the portfolio, with particular reference to the dissertation component. Finally, I offer a personal view of how the work I report here might be extended by others and what place it might have in my own future career. In particular I address the continuities and disjunctions in my own practice that have followed from my move out of the NZ vocational education teaching space to an Australian university, with very different research and teaching expectations.
The following paper is a slightly edited version of a conference presentation given at the 1999 HERDSA International Conference in Melbourne, Australia. In this paper, I attempt to put workplace research in the context of research paradigms. I give examples from some of my own teacher research, prior to my portfolio projects, and describe some of the situational factors I see as important in doing such research. Thus, this paper is a statement of beginnings both in terms of the portfolio, and my exploration of research paradigms for teacher research. The verb tenses in the paper reflect the time the paper was given. At the beginning of the paper I also address the audience directly as ‘you’. I assumed, with some accuracy, that the thirty five people in the audience would be practitioners in a setting similar to my own; thus, the I/you juxtaposition.

1.1 Abstract

Conducting applied research in workplace settings on and/or with colleagues raises a host of ethical and procedural issues about research. Empiricist, interpretive, and critical approaches all have a place in understanding, describing and changing curriculum perceptions. As one moves from one paradigm to the other the voices of the agents in the curriculum process become increasingly prominent. With reference to some of my own workplace research under the three paradigms mentioned above, I describe ways in which educational research in workplace settings represents curriculum reality and can act as an engine of change.

1.2 Introduction

In what follows I discuss some of the factors I see constraining the development of an emergent research culture in a specific second language teaching context. I am concerned to establish the different discourses that inform and motivate teaching practice. Rather than presenting research findings as such it is writing about and exposing these ‘research’ discourses which is crucial here. I attempt to generalise
from my local setting where this is possible but this is not my main aim. What I write about below is important because it is the environment in which I work on curriculum and I believe it shares features with the contexts in which some of you work.

1.3 Curriculum and curricula

Curriculum is understood and interpreted differently by teachers, learners, and institutions (Smith and Lovat, 1991). Teacher procedural and student-centred approaches to second language curriculum construction are quite different from the object-oriented, rational models that governments and institutions perceive as guiding (or dictating) the curriculum process (Brindley, 1990; Nunan, 1991b; Nunan, 1993). Also, students bring to the curriculum process their own agendas and expectations and these also coincide to a greater or lesser degree with the visions of other stakeholders (Harlow et al., 1980; Lacasa and Lacasa, 1983; Luppiscu and Day, 1990). These agendas are doubly complex where cultural concerns and perspectives are foremost, as is the case with English as a Second Language (ESL).

In the process of teaching teacher, student, and institutional agendas are negotiated, and a curriculum created which reflects all three perspectives. From an individual teacher perspective, this negotiated product or implemented curriculum is what survives the successive interpretations by teachers of (institutional) syllabus plans (Nunan, 1988b), curriculum specifications, anecdotal and systematic student feedback, team meeting discussions, and prior and current personal trajectories. For research to engage teachers and contribute to curriculum development in the widest sense it must connect with these realities and constraints. This is the current focus of my own research on curriculum construction in ESOL.

1.4 Stable and emergent research cultures

Curriculum research in institutional settings is perceived differently according to the research history and individual identities of teaching staff. In contexts where research is already a normal part of individual and institutional agendas, including most
universities, the notion of curriculum research may be strongly associated with particular research paradigms and contexts that will reflect normative and field-specific interpretations of research in education. Where educational research is brought inside the institution and used to reflect and examine individual behaviours and routines, focusing on curriculum as a means to improve individual teaching behaviours and thinking can involve a personal challenge to existing routines and beliefs.

This challenge is experienced differently depending on the professional standing (or vulnerability) of the individuals in question. Where research and teaching (or practice) agendas remain largely separate processes and one’s status as researcher/academic is already established, curriculum research may be frustratingly personal but not career threatening. On the other hand, in contexts such as TWP, where professionalism and research are still going through a legitimating process, the research challenge is experienced differently.

1.5 Teaching profiles and vulnerability

Power relationships, gender imbalances, and perceptions of professional vulnerability contribute to maintaining the status quo in a large institutional framework characterised by normative research traditions and management structures that reinforce hierarchies and formal communication channels. As a number of the comments quoted below demonstrate, these are obstacles that surface in corridor and other conversations with colleagues and contribute to a sense of vulnerability. ESL teacher vulnerability also stems from teaching identities and roles historically constructed by a gender imbalance in management and research versus teaching positions.

The age, educational backgrounds and experience, and gender distribution of ESL teachers at TWP in NZ helps reinforce the potential for control by male ‘others’ and creates other forms of vulnerability. For example, among the thirty full-time and part-time staff in the ESOL and languages unit reported on here there are two male
teachers. In senior management the gender balance is reversed. The issue of gender balance, which is elsewhere salient in the educational literature, warrants further investigation. That this local setting is representative of the national picture is confirmed in a recent national survey of ESOL teachers in NZ (Haddock 1998).

Table 1.1: From Haddock 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ESOL teachers</th>
<th>Teaching in general</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGE</strong></td>
<td>Majority of ESOL teachers in the age range 44-55. Mean age 47.3. The 40-49 age group represents 45.5%</td>
<td>Teachers in the 40-49 age group represent 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENDER</strong></td>
<td>Overall: [F] 87.4% [M] 12.6% (similar to primary sector)</td>
<td>Tertiary: [F] 45.9% [M] 54.1% Secondary: [F] 56.2% [M] 43.8% Primary: [F] 83.6% [M] 16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXPERIENCE</strong></td>
<td>Range 1-30 years; Average 9.6 in ESOL Range 1-36 years; Average 8.6 in other education fields</td>
<td>n/d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JOB NATURE</strong></td>
<td>Part-time or Contract: 55% Full-time permanent: 45%</td>
<td>n/d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The salient characteristics for this discussion are age, gender, experience and job nature. Feelings of vulnerability among ESL teachers in institutions are encouraged by a similar gender balance as in the primary teaching sector, lack of job security, long experience and relativly high age compared to other groups. Haddock (1998) also reports on qualifications and attitudes regarding core competencies teachers should have. In relation to this discussion, research training receives minimal attention in terms of significance for the profession or as a feature of training backgrounds. So, experience and knowledge regarding research adds to other forms of professional vulnerability. These characteristics contribute a particular perspective to the implementation of research in ESOL settings.

Surveys of this kind provide useful background information and confirmation of the validity and potential generalisability of local teacher case studies to broader contexts, but they are not adequate for the task of understanding the multiplicity of factors that construct teacher identities and group norms. A careful analysis of these
parameters is essential to understanding teacher needs and attitudes regarding curriculum and research.

1.6 Alternative paradigms in vocational settings

In tertiary settings in which a research culture is still emerging the search for and challenge of non-empiricist qualitative research paradigms takes on a different perspective than it has in more stable research environments such as the university. In the context I discuss here – transitional tertiary and vocational ESL teaching in a New Zealand polytechnic – research has a short history, and is still largely associated with traditional empiricist designs conducted by academic ‘experts’. This empiricist interpretation of research is reinforced in funding application forms and processes which foreground as normative quantitative research. My role as member of the TWP research ethics committee helped confirm how alternative qualitative paradigms enjoyed less favour in the institution. For ESL in particular, the expert image is also reinforced in the literature on research methods and approaches in second language teaching and learning that assume that ESL teachers will carry out projects using empiricist approaches even where these are classroom-based.

The research induction literature also often assumes that the domains of teacher and researcher are essentially separate or at best that teachers learn to read, practice, and implement the empirical procedures and findings of researchers, (eg. Brown, 1988). Even if qualitative methods and approaches are recognised as valid ‘alternatives’ to normative traditions, the separate statuses of practitioner and researcher remain largely unchallenged. On the other hand, there has been some discussion about the roles of and relationships between professional researcher and teacher (Allwright and Bailey, 1991, p.198-199; Johnson and Chen, 1992). Miller (1998) has suggested that second language research needs a new framework for reconceptualising some key language acquisition issues, to take into account the social and interactional dimensions of language use that are particularly relevant to migrant and refugee language acquisition. She also suggests (Miller,1997) that discourse, i.e. language use in social contexts of practice, not simply language, is a more appropriate focus
for this migrant group. Seeing curriculum work constructed by ESL teachers requires a similar approach to language use.

Alternative research approaches that are collaborative and practitioner-led have begun to be explored. However, teacher research, which has more recently featured in the literature, remains very much a practical form of professional development rather than a source of educational knowledge and theorising that can challenge existing research paradigms (Edge, 1993). The distinction between reflective teaching practice and teacher research is “a matter of degree” (Johnson and Chen, 1992, p.216). I believe that to legitimate the status of teacher research as research requires that in some way this matter of degree is resolved. To do this it is not sufficient to merely redefine action research so that it fits comfortably with existing teacher practice as some have done (eg. Nunan 1992). As I have argued elsewhere (Melles 1998a, p.125), enthusiastic advocates of teacher research have sometimes sacrificed rigour and careful documentation and reporting strategies for inspirational rhetoric and psychoanalysis using a language which is alienating for practitioners in social settings. Analyses of the quality of teacher research have rightly focused on these issues (Adelman, 1989; Huberman, 1996; Northfield, 1996). Good teacher research involves a time commitment, a research skill learning period, and potential threats to self-esteem where it incorporates critical reflection (Allwright, 1992).

In the ESL unit focused on here, the response from teaching staff to institutional encouragement and the provision of resources for research has been to explore the applied research paradigm through classroom-oriented investigations of second language teaching and learning, often invoking the rhetoric of teacher research. This has been achieved through a struggle to create the mechanisms and conditions for achieving research goals on the back of high contact timetables and workloads. Discussions of relevant research paradigms must take account of these practical time constraints, offer a way of connecting with practical teaching realities, and be sufficiently relevant to curriculum development to engage practitioners in critical analysis of existing teaching practices and beliefs. Beyond engagement, what is also required is the promotion of research approaches that represent the dynamics of curriculum construction from a practitioner perspective and which have sufficient
Elective Research Chapter One: Methodologies in workplace research

rigour and significance to warrant the label *research* for those new to the field. The development of a research culture must not be prejudiced either by assuming that a particular approach such as teacher research is inherently appropriate to the field and setting. The question is to probe methodologies and methods that promote curriculum change with a focus on benefits to students, practitioners, and institutions.

### 1.7 Relevant paradigms

Contemporary educational research literature reveals many unresolved debates regarding relevant paradigms in an era of economic performativity and new forms of knowledge production (Usher and Solomon, 1998). Key terms in the discourse on research in educational fields reveals a focus on method or methodology. In education, textbooks about research methods are common enough (Burns, 1994; Cohen and Manion, 1994), as are textbooks on epistemology and methodology (Guba, 1990). In applied linguistics and language teaching a common denominator is a binary division into quantitative (Brown, 1988; Hatch and Lazaraton, 1991) and qualitative approaches to research (Bailey and Nunan, 1996; Chaudron, 1986; Johnson, 1992, pp.30-38). Unlike discussions of qualitative research in education (Bryman and Burgess, 1994; Dey, 1993), in second language and teaching work brief comment on epistemology and methodology in second language research give way to extended discussion of methods, techniques, and instruments. This exclusive attention to method in research assumes, but does not make explicit, methodological commitments.

Confusion over terminology is another factor. Harding (1987) rightly claims that much discussion of research methods often confuses method (a technique for gathering evidence), methodology (a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed), and epistemology (a theory of knowledge) (Harding, 1987, pp. 2-3). This confusion is valid for methods texts in applied linguistics and language teaching, where terms for research approaches (not always sharply distinguished from paradigm) include correlational, multivariate, descriptive, experimental, case-study, survey, ethnographic, and multi-method (Johnson, 1992; Nunan, 1992; Seliger and Shohamy, 1989) as research approaches essentially growing out of a
quantitative-qualitative binary. Other more specific uses of methodology, eg. teaching methodology (Nunan, 1991a), need also to be distinguished. Overall in research texts for ESL, the focus is very strongly on research techniques in a simple binary framework of qualitative and quantitative paradigms.

In terms of teacher research in workplace settings, I find methodology a much more accessible topic and better starting point for discussion of research procedure, rights, and benefits, than epistemology. Epistemological issues like the adequacy of theories of knowledge seem too distant from the professional concerns of practitioners to be a useful starting point for applied research in workplace settings. I find that these issues can emerge when one begins discussing methodology. In my view, analysis of research procedure as a methodological task connects both downward to method and upward to epistemology; methodology seems a much more comprehensive term in this sense (and see below). Thus, I follow others (McWilliam, Lather, and Morgan, 1997) in segmenting research procedure and practice in research into three parts: (1) method as fieldwork technique, (2) methodology (along with epistemology) as part of headwork, and (3) text work. Methodologies are plural and imply choice and decisions to be made; decisions based on ontological, epistemological, and moral cum ethical questions. They precede and motivate method choices and eventually text choices. With these provisos in mind, I find a four-way division into, empiricist, interpretive, critical, and poststructuralist approaches a far more useful framework for curriculum research because it is more sensitive to reality (ontology), method, and knowledge, eg. Connole (1993). Ultimately also these options translate into choices for curriculum change and representation of voices central to the teaching process (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). I attempt to represent these options in the table below as I currently understand them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empiricist-analytical: explaining</td>
<td>Realist or critical realist; a search for justified belief or</td>
<td>Triangulation from multiple sources;</td>
<td>Objective knowledge an ideal or value neutral enterprise; inter-</td>
<td>Research on subjects with a view to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
other behaviours  | truth; reality a social construction but separate from our knowledge of it  | experimental and observational techniques; reliability and validity criteria  | subjectivity or triangulated techniques a goal  | establishing a justified or true picture of reality with an emphasis on behaviours  
---|---|---|---|---  
Interpretive: understanding informed action of others  | Multiple individual realities represented by actions informed by understandings  | Dialogue with participants to understand their meanings; interviews and negotiated reports; reflexivity important  | Knowledge and understanding depends on the process and researcher social, cognitive, linguistic skills; knowledge about personal values  | Research on subjects to understand the meanings and beliefs underlying the actions of others  
Critical: examining meaning in social context  | Individual realities and perceptions of self created and distorted by (group) socio-historical factors; individual and social reality a heuristic ideal  | Interpretive methods, eg. dialogue, supplemented by critical reflection on the grounds for belief and interpretation  | Knowledge as critically examined tool for personal understanding and liberation/empowerment  | Curriculum behaviours and beliefs partly blind to socio-historical constraints; collaborative examination and action the best source  
Post-structural: deconstruct discourse on meaning  | No reality beyond text and discourse; reality constituted through language  | An analysis of the discourses and power relationships in discourse and between researcher and researched  | Foundations and frameworks of knowledge questioned; social reality created through language  | Focus on understanding and deconstructing discourses about curriculum as curriculum reality  

It is worth pointing out that each cell in the table above represents a continuum of approach or procedure. This is apparent, for example, in the empiricist-analytical cell which incorporates both traditional positivist and post-positivist positions (Connell, 1997; Guba, 1990). Second, I believe these approaches do inform and motivate particular approaches to educational research and must be acknowledged. In particular, I think they connect to the emergent research culture in my workplace setting and to moves in the field in general. Thirdly, I find that simple divisions into normative, interpretive, or qualitative-quantitative, inevitably lead to the ‘alternative’ partner (interpretive and qualitative respectively) being judged in terms of the language and criteria of the dominant, traditional paradigm. This has been discussed
with regard to the decline of teacher research in the USA, and the cutting criticism it received as being methodologically immature (McTaggart, 1991, p.12).

In my opinion, by situating curriculum research in terms of its broadly methodological commitments, dialogue and understanding about what we are contributing to educational reform becomes clearer. It is historical accident that post-structuralist approaches are not yet fully represented in our research culture. It is this overall framework that I use to position my own past and present research and that of others in this context.

### 1.8 Local discourse on research

Identifying appropriate paradigms, methods, and ethical considerations requires first a careful situating of research in context. First, we need to consider research possibilities, i.e. methodological choices, from the perspective of the particular settings to which they are meant to contribute. Second, we need to locate methodological choices alongside existing understandings. This entails going beyond national profiles. Conversations with teachers and reading the literature suggest a number of critical ‘teacher’ features in this context, including:

- teaching is a practical endeavour
- research and practice are perceived as separate
- research is of dubious value to teaching
- practitioner questions should guide research
- positions taken are related to issues of power and status quo
- research is about groups and generalisations
- different fields have different views of what constitutes research
- some research approaches have higher status than others
- research uses a complex sometimes mystifying language
Elective Research Chapter One: Methodologies in workplace research

- research is associated with ‘serious’ contexts like university
- research knowledge viewed as detached from practice
- research deals with the surface and impressions of reality
- teaching is about high-contact routines
- funding is linked to objectivity and normative research traditions
- research is about hidden interests and agendas
- research follows trends

These features and others surface in the following text (Table 1.3) that positions three views of research and practice in my department. In creating this text, I invited two other colleagues to write separately about their impressions of the role of research on practice as a way of situating my own work in context; the middle text is mine. If research is to become part of the teaching agenda, awareness of these perceptions is critical in identifying paradigms and approaches that resonate with teacher concerns. In particular, we are involved in validating research paradigms in the context of specific professional constraints in an environment where communicative methodology and a learner-centred approach are theoretical reference points for teachers. As a corollary, teacher practitioners eye with suspicion academic research that does not relate directly to the development and implementation of second language curriculum. Moreover, where external researchers attempt to describe and analyse teacher thinking, this is viewed as a potentially dangerous intervention into already vulnerable identities.

Mary highlights the potential excesses of research practices as a form of ritual obedience to reproducing the textual and visual elements of academic research genres. She also takes a critical view of the strategy of researchers who find data and explanations to fit existing theoretical commitments; she also seems to suggest subterfuge in her use of the term ‘conceal’. Mary, who has some experience of action research, and is a senior teacher in the ESL unit, believes action research seems to incorporate an appropriate practical focus. Overall, Mary preaches
moderation, and in her critique of conventional research and foregrounding of action research raises issues that both Helen and I allude to. My own contribution restates some of the arguments I make in this paper. For example, I highlight the need for teacher researchers to move methodologically beyond conventional research perspectives, although this can challenge institutional scepticism (such as I experience at TWP) of non-empiricist forms of research. I also note that the academy workplace relationship which itself is constructed out of sometimes antagonistic and/or patronising attitudes to the respective other. Thus, my own reading of research and practice is more theoretical than that of Mary’s but converges with regard to the critique of conventional research. Helen, HOD of the department within which the ESL unit operates and with some background in critical educational theory and practice, admits that despite her location in a vocational institution the academy continues to define research for her. She suggests that efforts by TWP to widen the scope of research to include applied questions, while worthwhile, still do not sit comfortably with her current conceptions. Helen is also in a good position to point to the institutional privileging of quantitative research and the fact that funding and imperatives to do research are not yet in a consistent relationship. She clearly identifies action research as the most appropriate form of reflective practice and teacher development.

Table 1.3: research-practice perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cautious scepticism (Mary)</th>
<th>Research-practice gaps (Gavin)</th>
<th>New definitions (Helen)</th>
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<tr>
<td>I sometimes wonder if we are developing a research culture or a research cult. I think it is easy to do research for the sake of it, and to conceal a lack of ideas and direction under obscure jargon. Graphs and charts and tables look great, figures are a wonderful hook on which to hang an impression of reality. However, it is sometimes too easy to believe figures, which can be twisted to support whatever bandwagon the researcher was following at the time. Action research has the added value that it is supposed to be an instrument of change.</td>
<td>The issues of the value and significance of educational research are linked to all of the above factors [viz. research practice gap, applied science approach, non-empiricist approaches and validity, power and the status quo]. My beliefs regarding research and its place in the educational context in which I operate are bound up with my understanding and the conception of others . . . My overall position is that we need to redefine or clarify (depending on the particular context) what is relevant in research to the contexts and questions of</td>
<td>The concept of university comes up because I think I still hold the perception that that is where ‘serious’ research tends to take place. This flows from the idea that research is about generating new knowledge without any application or use in mind. This leads to my next word ‘scholarly activities’: The polytechnic is trying to widen the definition of research to include a whole range of other activities staff are involved in. I guess this really includes the idea of applied research and creative work which are the kinds of research more likely to</td>
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</table>
and therefore must have some practical application. I suppose my overall feeling is that, like most things, research is great in moderation but an uncontrolled tide is self-defeating.

importance to practitioners in the field. First, we need to recognise that professions often operate on the assumption that practice and theory are separate issues and that one (theory) should inform the other. This position is related to the assumption that the applied science perspective is the best model for the educational endeavour and that other approaches, including the critical reflective approach, are theoretically light and far too diffuse or loose as useful training or development frameworks. This then relates to what is valid in educational research and the view that scientifically (empirical) validated research is the only useful and secure source of information for practitioners and that non-empiricist approaches, eg. interpretative, critical, etc., approaches are at best (soft) alternatives to real research. Finally, attitudes and positions that are taken regarding research by academics and practitioners ultimately maintain (or not) the existing status quo that maintains the respective parties in their positions of power and authority. So all educational questions are ultimately social, political and philosophical questions.

1.9 Creating a culture

The ESL unit at TWP began developing a culture of collaborative teacher research in 1996 and this was represented in two practical action research projects (Musgrave, 1996; Musgrave and al., 1997). The overall aims of both projects included induction into research methods for the eight teachers involved and resolution of practical classroom problems related to mismatched student and teacher perceptions about what constitutes desirable ESOL classroom speaking practice, and perceptions of the
value of group speaking tasks in the classroom. From the outset, the intention was to ‘adjust teaching delivery’ to solve the problem. The teacher (Jacqueline, who appears later in the dissertation) whose name appears on the final report led the project.

Both projects were very much in the tradition of practical action research, eg. Grundy (1982), which have the following features:

- are generally facilitated;
- adopt a reflective and interpretive stance to action cycles;
- focus on practical classroom teaching concerns; and
- tend to adopt a problem-solution approach to change;
- are largely collaborative rather than individualistic

Notwithstanding attempts by some scholars to redefine action research in ESL as essentially individual classroom problem solving (eg. Nunan, 1992), other proponents of ESL teacher research have resisted this move (Burns, 1999), and collaboration remains a powerful dimension of current action research methods. Action research is especially promoted as a framework for introducing teachers to research and developing reflective practice (Crookes and Chandler, 1999). Some of the theorising for practitioner research in schools has been pursued by Elliot (1993), and especially Stenhouse (1975). In the broader tradition of action research, the practical approach lacks any sustained attention to the social and political context of teaching and works within the existing classroom and institutional constraints. As such, it lacks the critical intent of emancipatory or critical action research, viz. ‘a transformation of the language, organisation and practice of education’ (McTaggart, 1991, p.30). This is due to the focus of the research on classroom technique rather than a more open-ended probing of existing curriculum constraints and language.

In the TWP research reports mentioned above there is sustained reference to how the project gave teachers a chance to develop group cohesion and reflect on their existing
practices. When I joined the department, this was the existing research tradition. To understand how my own approaches to applied research differed from the existing culture, and to reflectively locate the research processes I used in relation to the paradigm schematic produced above, I briefly summarise and examine workplace research projects I completed prior to the projects for this portfolio.

1.10 Reflecting on interpretive workplace research

My first contribution to the applied research culture in the department was an insider look at teachers and curriculum. I asked six colleagues to be involved in a project that focused on reflective teaching, teacher decisions, and the role of collaborative critique and discussion. Some of the recent work on teacher decision making (Nunan, 1993; Woods, 1996), reflective teaching (Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Wallace, 1991), and classroom-based research within both qualitative and quantitative frameworks (Allwright, 1983; Allwright and Bailey, 1991; Bailey and Nunan, 1996) provided the background motivation for the project. Teaching beliefs and attitudes regarding curriculum and the attendant constraints on how this is fashioned by the interaction amongst all the curriculum agents seems a much safer base than observation on which to examine perceptions and behaviours regarding curriculum action, i.e. practice informed by intentions. Some of the more recent case studies and ethnographies on teacher decision-making and beliefs go some way to highlighting the complex situated principles ESL teachers use to plan and teach (Bailey 1996; Borg 1998; Burns 1992; Duff 1997; Graves 1996; Measor 1985; Smith 1996).

From the point of view of research paradigms, my project took an interpretive approach to research on subjects. At the time of the project I was yet to fit my reading of critical educational inquiry into methodology, and this limited the outcomes of the project in ways I explain below. Data collection included 24 hours of videotaped classroom teaching, 20 hours of audio-taped interviews with peer critique of interim reports, a comprehensive questionnaire on teacher beliefs and attitudes regarding communicative language teaching, further feedback forms, annotations and e-mail regarding negotiation of the meaning and interpretation of
classroom behaviours and beliefs (Melles, 1998d; Melles, 1999c). My research aims included explaining the intentions behind teaching and classroom behaviours as revealed in recall interview transcripts, surveys, and other conversations.

I gave my interpretations of these discourses and a record of the video observations back to participants to comment on. This I saw as a way of ensuring the critical dimension of the project was sustained through negotiating the interpretations that I provided of individual behaviours and beliefs as they were revealed in the data. In a variety of ways, participants were able to correct and comment on my constructions of their motives and behaviours in teaching. The second main aim of the project was to provide a context whereby teachers could reflect critically and individually on their teaching in a non-evaluative context and hopefully gain insights on their teaching. Thirdly, my own personal agenda was to remedy what I perceived as the deficiencies in research on teacher decision-making in the literature. Most of this I saw as strongly empiricist in its concern with observational categories and traditional researcher-teacher roles.

The survey of teacher beliefs and the lesson planning and feedback strategies I used with participants were grounded very explicitly on the communicative approach, (see Brumfit and Johnson, 1979; Littlewood, 1981; Richards and Rodgers, 1986). Communicative language teaching is very much part of the professional discourse of language teachers and has been incorporated into learner-centredness as the dominant teaching paradigm for ESL migrant teaching (Clarke, 1991; Nunan, 1988a; Tudor, 1996). Learner-centredness and communicative language teaching are incorporated into the language of curriculum documents, which in a NZ vocational context also place a heavy emphasis on competency-based assessment and learning outcomes.

Teacher commitment to communicative language teaching meant that they understood and were able to apply the classroom techniques normally associated with this approach, eg. group work, task-oriented activities, focus on communication and understanding rather than grammar. It also meant that the overall goal for
Elective Research Chapter One: Methodologies in workplace research

teachers was to develop the communicative (rather than grammar) competence of students and that their teaching role, wherever possible was that of facilitator rather than classroom manager. But for most teachers, the communicative approach in its strongest form could be interpreted as a method package, eg. audiolingualism, and this along with the resistance of students to the ‘liberatory’ communicative premises, meant that teachers interpreted communication with an eye to learner-needs and perceptions (elements of learner-centredness). Competency-based assessment and learning outcomes were and remain a tension for teachers since while it is the norm for vocational teaching environments, it does not necessarily sit well with teacher views and practices in curriculum construction and negotiation.

On reflection, there were problems with some of the procedures and assumptions in this work and two of the six teacher participants felt threatened by them. One problem was that I constructed the survey on beliefs and attitudes with respect to the communicative approach out of a literature search rather than directly informing myself about participant views (including my own) through face-to-face negotiation. It became apparent to me as I probed teachers’ behaviours that I was working with assumptions about teaching principles that they had never challenged, eg. group work is good. Second, as I worked with colleagues the relations of power between facilitator and research leader and participants became an issue; my role as facilitator came to be seen as that of critic. For four of the six participants there was a sufficient degree of confidence and trust between us that negotiation of teaching procedures and interpretations was not an issue.

Notwithstanding, the research helped me to situate my own views on curriculum, syllabus, and communicative methodology and articulate them better. It gave me the opportunity to understand the position of my colleagues with regard to these issues better and I know that my views also became clearer to them as we worked on interpreting behaviours and rationales. The following example of a classroom-based quantitative research project is situated within the empiricist paradigm. Here I focused on student learning and attempted to generate results that could have application to practice. Again I reflect on the outcomes with respect to relevance to workplace research and change.
1.11 Examining empiricist classroom-oriented research

As part of an academic transition course called Preparation for Tertiary Study (PFTS), ESL students were required to write assignments on given topics and to keep a journal during the process. Teaching towards the assignments took place over a three-week period and the journals were kept over the same period. Both pieces of writing were included for assessment purposes. Both the assignments and the journals were examined in stages over the three-week module and teaching was explicitly directed to preparing students to cope with the topic and writing demands.

I decided to examine ways in which students’ academic acculturation to writing was helped or hindered by their first language and I was strongly influenced in my approach by work on genre theory, (eg. Swales, 1990), and contrastive rhetoric studies, (eg. Connor, 1996). I gathered together the journal entries of 12 students over three weeks and also took their assignments. I ran the latter through a concordancing program looking for a descriptive outline of their writing that included a comparative analysis of their writing in terms of sentence size, topic organisation, and other features. I looked at correlating this information with survey data I had obtained from students on their perceived writing difficulties, motivation and other background variables. Research results were reported in-house and externally (Melles, 1998b).

I managed to categorise student writers into more or less successful based on their topic organization and sentence and vocabulary complexity and this correlated reasonably well with final results for the course. That is, those whose organisation more nearly matched native speaker writing on the same topic and who showed grammar and vocabulary sophistication proved to be the most successful in the course. My intention was to provide a contribution to the literature on the subject, provide some feedback to the department, and try my hand at classroom based research. The design of the research was couched in quasi-experimental terms and included statistics and tables. My results produced few surprises for myself or colleagues and had, to my knowledge, no impact on the teaching of the course.
There were a number of ways in which the research could have been improved. In its representation of research and curriculum reality, while the voice of students was represented in the data it was only as a retrospective record of what they had done (assignments and journal entries). At no point was there a negotiation of what concerned them, nor a discussion of how and if the research process could benefit them in some concrete way. Furthermore, I did not consult with colleagues about their perceptions of the relevance and nature of the research although most were happy to attend a final report session and discuss results. So I ignored essential questions about benefits, processes, and power relationships. Despite the methodological limitations of the project, I assumed in my approach that a normative approach to educational research was an appropriate way of contributing to teaching or local educational reform. Here then was a standard representation of the relationship between research and practice as separate dimensions.

The second piece of classroom research I engaged in considered the question of reading strategies and the role of multimedia instruction in enhancing this awareness. I began this project by surveying students on their existing reading strategies and gathering also other base line data at the beginning of the project. For comparative purposes, the survey was given to a comparable group of students who did not have access to the software and who experienced a similar teaching and assessment process. Results were disseminated at a conference (Melles 1998c). I ran the project over twelve weeks of a semester and it involved students having an hour per week to work with a commercial CD-ROM based program teaching academic purpose reading strategies to ESOL learners. Students were only required to attend the one hour session and report on the total time they spent in the computer lab (and at home in a couple of instances) using the software to enhance their strategy awareness and practice. I did not monitor activities in the lab as such. A final evaluation questionnaire gathered evidence on students’ perceptions of the value of the exercise and what they had learnt.
Not surprisingly, some students were very inconsistent in their attendance at the lab. Some also had poor computer literacy and spent some time acclimatising to the program although we did spend an initial tutorial session to familiarise the 12 students with the software. I was hopeful that the encounter with the software would have a positive effect on their strategy use, and explicit instruction and practice of strategies was a major organising feature of the program. I had also collected an initial diagnostic test from students using the IELTS format as a way of measuring initial reading proficiency and, by implication, strategy use. Naturally, all the features and focuses of the program were also part of the normal syllabus and methodology content of the course, so in a very real sense there was an intention to reinforce existing teaching practices and goals.

The involvement with the software made no significant difference to final reading test scores although in their final evaluations some students did show that they had taken note, in cognitive terms, of some of the reading strategies that were highlighted in the program. As noted above, there was some student apathy towards the program and I hadn’t taken this into account in my initial analysis of student backgrounds. One could quite legitimately claim that the design was poor and the numbers too small to effect any real change. But I would suggest that it was a fairly typical example of classroom-based teacher research with a practical aim, i.e. the enhancement of student reading ability, and the design and number questions were not a major issue in this respect.

One of the reasons the project was not as successful as it could have been, I believe, was that it was conducted in an environment where ESL teachers opposed, or simply ignored, the capabilities and purposes of computer aided language learning (CALL) in the teaching environment. For some students, the computer hour was a needless waste of classroom time and for others the training in reading strategies via the computer was needlessly complicated. It is worth noting in passing that one of our teaching goals during the course was to help students become independent learners and most of them came from environments where the teachers’ role was much more authoritative and based on a strong dependency relation. So there were some
significant environmental problems in conducting the project and this project likewise seemed to have no impact on teaching.

1.12 Conclusions and current directions

Both my experiences of interpretive and empiricist workplace research could have been better conceived to take into consideration significant features of the social context of language teaching and learning. However, although an existing practical action research culture existed, it did not offer obvious scope for my investigations of teacher research. First, practical action research eschews critical institutional discourses and practices, and this limitation was true of the previous action research at TWP. Second, time constraints and pressures on ESL teachers, along with a limited background in research, mean ESL teachers are not necessarily willing to engage in projects which demand more of their limited time and energy; this was reported to me in a number of conversations with teachers. Third, successful collaboration in small teaching communities requires a basis of mutual trust and respect that is only achieved with long term experience and commitment. Such trust and respect was not something participants in my ethnography, for example, were willing to allow on such short notice.

Further developments of a collaborative research culture continue with an ongoing project on self-access centre teaching and an action research project on CALL and syllabus integration. These compete with normal teaching loads and current straightened economic circumstances. In the sense that there is a development and continuity with an existing collaborative research tradition in this specific ESOL environment, this news is good. Is communication and clarity about the nature of curriculum and the role of teachers clearer among teachers themselves? I think in some cases it is but in others, it has made little or no impact.

Sometimes teacher research or classroom-oriented research fails because, as with my own work, research approaches have been ill conceived. Often I think it is simply because the existing circumstances of teaching make communication difficult if not
impossible. In addition, sometimes the research literature seems complicit, through its objectivist neutrality, to not invite teachers to challenge themselves and their histories and environment enough. There are also other factors constraining curriculum change, which I have mentioned above, and there are other stories that could be told about this teaching environment.
Elective Research Chapter Two: Negotiating curriculum through 
team teaching

The existing literature on negotiation in language teaching suggests that the process engages students and teacher in discussion and decision-making at different levels of curriculum planning and action. Negotiation and curriculum coherence, I suggest, is more complex than this when institutional frameworks, student cultural expectations, and different understandings among ESL communities of practice are taken into consideration. I give the example of curriculum negotiation through team teaching in a NZ ESL unit as an environment for the production of coherent curriculum in ESL. I examine teacher representations of negotiation with students, among teachers, and with administration through activity and material choices recorded in teacher talk. I look particularly at textbook and activity choice, tasks and procedures, and evaluative comments provided by teachers in team meeting minutes and teacher log books as evidence of the processes and outcomes of such negotiation. I raise questions about the tensions and practices within the ESL unit that do not encourage coherent program outcomes.

In this chapter I analyse notes from team meetings, teacher logs, and curriculum documentation to explore the broader senses of negotiating curriculum in ESL, which come from an international student course I co-taught in the second half of 1999 with Caroline and Elaine, two ESL teachers in my ESL unit. The texts used here focus on the second ten weeks (term 2) of semester two. This paper develops earlier papers I gave on the negotiation of identities in team teaching (Melles, 2000a), negotiating curriculum in ESL (Melles, 1999b), and curriculum constraints in ESL, including competencies (Melles, 1999a). I use a teacher research project for program evaluation, focussing especially on teacher practices and understandings. In the conclusion, it examines the claim made by one of the teachers involved in coordinating the program that the choices teachers make give evidence of a ‘negotiated syllabus’.
2.1 Existing meanings of negotiation in language teaching

Although negotiation is frequently cited as a key term in language learning, a negotiated syllabus has been called a ‘radical’ subtype of communicative language teaching (Clarke, 1991) because it involves greater learner control of syllabus design. While in many situations, ESL learners still may have little decision-making power over the nature of curriculum, they are not perhaps a radical minority. In particular, negotiated syllabus and curriculum are considered part of the inherent philosophy of learner-centred migrant ESL programs in Australasia (Nunan, 1988). So, perhaps the situation is less unorthodox than Clarke believes.

In a recent collection of case studies of negotiation and process syllabuses in ESL, Breen and Littlejohn (2000) suggest that the literature on negotiation and language learning can be divided into three categories: personal negotiation, interactive negotiation, and procedural negotiation. Personal negotiation involves ‘the unobservable and complex mental processing that occurs in our search for understanding and our efforts to be understood’ (Breen and Littlejohn, 2000, p.6). The authors relate this to language learning, and different research tools, eg. student journals, observation, etc., have been used to try to represent this negotiation process. This is not explored in this paper.

Interactive negotiation is used to describe classroom based teaching that focuses on the negotiated interaction of form and meaning among learners. Long (Crookes and Long, 1992) has been promoting this kind of interaction as pivotal to language learning for some time. Negotiation is used to refer to the central mechanism by which language learners manage group tasks in task-based teaching (Pica, 1987, 1994, 1996.). The focus here is the way in which students accomplish set language tasks through negotiation with each other on task requirements and procedures through a second language, (eg. Crookes and Gass, 1993). Discourse analysis of classroom interaction has been used to record and analyse this kind of interaction, (eg. Boulima, 1999). This is not directly a concern of this paper.
Procedural negotiation is closest to the notion of curriculum negotiation developed here, and has as its main purpose, ‘to reach a shared understanding at appropriate moments in classroom work of both the requirements that may be implicit in, for example, an external syllabus or the teacher’s experientially informed view of efficient ways of working and the different learning agendas in the class’ (Breen and Littlejohn, 2000, p.9). The authors develop the notion of ‘appropriate moments’ in classroom work by referring to what they call a curriculum pyramid, which subcategorises the curriculum process into different institutional levels within which negotiation can take place, eg. classroom, ESL unit, department, faculty.

This sense of negotiation has links with learner-centredness in migrant ESL teaching (Tudor, 1996) where negotiation is a key word in the learner-centred curriculum literature, (eg. Nunan, 1988). Parkinson and O’Sullivan (1990), for example, argue that shared ownership of an occupational purposes ESL program is possible through negotiation where both teachers and students are prepared to modify their beliefs about their respective roles in curriculum practice. Thus, syllabus negotiation has effects on teacher roles and identities. Another notion of negotiation as a form of teacher-learner social contract is developed in the work of Boomer (1992).

Reaching compromise is never simply the result of a rational decision-making on the part of student and teacher. It involves negotiating with social values and institutional practices. For example, Arkoudis (2000) suggests that the lower value of ESL in the school system relative to science makes negotiation problematic. Negotiating curriculum often requires multiple decision-making partners with different aims. Student proficiencies and cultural expectations about teacher-learner relationships limit the degree to which curriculum negotiation is possible. Slembrouck (2000) also suggests that teacher methodological preference for negotiation is always in competition with the dominant educational culture, which students and institution use to resist alternative forms of curriculum work. Cooke and Hunter (1999) have suggested that the dominant educational and institutional culture in NZ is a barrier to students that is reinforced by social stereotypes and marginalisation of the migrant learner, which ESL learners struggle to understand and negotiate.
In ESL teaching, ‘learner-centred approaches compete with subject-centred, teacher-centred, text-centred and system-centred approaches, but none of these can be “pure”’ (Malcolm, 1999, p.93). Malcolm’s point is a relevant critique of approaches to curriculum work in ESL that adopt the view that it involves the development and implementation of systems. Not only are methodological choices never pure but also teacher-student relationships change. Teacher identities are also susceptible to change as a result of practice. Duff (1997), for example, claims that teaching students from other cultures is an opportunity for re-negotiation of teacher socio-cultural identities. She alludes to the fact that if teachers are open to reflections on their relationships with learners in curriculum work they may construct new identities for themselves. Identity, I read with social constructionists as the active social construction of the other by conferring identities on the other, ‘and the identity you confer has more to do with your purposes than the “nature” of the thing itself’ (Burr, 1995, p. 30). Students, for example, may bestow an authoritative expert identity on the ESL teacher, since such a bestowal allows the student to shift responsibility to the other.

Thus, far from a radical form of curriculum making, negotiated curricula are relatively mainstream. Curriculum negotiation, as I perceive it, involves individuals - teachers, students, and management – attempting to get their version of curriculum recognized as the model for practice. The interaction between these three groups includes attributing identities, negotiating definitions, negotiating power relations, and negotiating curriculum frameworks. Learners negotiate meaning in the classroom as a result of the opportunities created by teachers to do so. In this sense learner negotiation is a by-product of teacher practice. Since in my workplace ESL teachers work together in teams the negotiation of practice and understandings is foregrounded in ways it is not among sole charge teachers. The literature also generally leaves out contexts of negotiation such as team teaching practices described here.
2.2 Team culture as community practice

Team teaching is part of the special culture of my workplace. Team teaching, in name at least, resists the dominant individual models of ESL teaching, which are reflected in teacher training practices and writing on teacher development and research. Most ESL teachers at TWP acknowledge that their actual experiences of working in teams varied in terms of satisfaction, sharing and support.

Team teaching in ESL usually implies interdisciplinary collaboration between an ESL teacher and a mainstream teacher, such as ESL and Science teacher in secondary education (Arkoudis, 2000) or an ESL and literacy teacher in migrant ESL (Cameron and Howell, 1994). Such situations are unusual in that ESL teachers usually work alone. Fecho and Lytle (1993) describe this isolation as an intrinsic phenomenon of teacher culture, which ‘creates an atmosphere of both autonomy and estrangement’ (Fecho and Lytle, 1993, p.129). This solitude, which is not specific to ESL, is reflected in textbooks on training and development, so that ESL teacher development is about individual self-reflection (Freeman and Richards, 1996) and self-direction (Nunan and Lamb, 1995) and individual action research projects (eg. Nunan, 1992); even where, in the latter case, this goes against the tradition of collaboration in this approach to teacher research (Burns, 1999, pp. 12-13). The idea of teachers as a collaborative team, therefore, is not a typical image in ESL teaching.

Team teaching at TWP is not interdisciplinary but bears some relationship to what is described elsewhere as ‘partnership teaching’ (Bullough Jr. et al., 2002), in that it is meant to be supportive for teachers, where different levels of experience and expertise provide an environment for mentoring. Teaching in teams is meant to allow individuals to share responsibility for a particular program and the contact hours - twenty per week - assigned to that program are divided among two to four teachers in varying proportions.
2.3 The student body and schedule

In the ESL unit, ESL teachers simultaneously teach on a variety of programs. For example, the seven hours scheduled for me below were supplemented by eleven to sixteen hours teaching on other programs. By term 2 of Semester two we had fourteen students between 18-25 years, many of whom had Mandarin as a lingua franca because there was also a small group of Indonesian and Thai students. Mandarin was used early on by students to exclude others from in-group conversations, and log books and team meetings refer to this.

Table 2.1: Teaching Schedule Term 2, Semester 2, 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-11</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>GM</td>
<td>GM</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>GM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>EL/LAB</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>CA/SAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>EL/CAL</td>
<td>GM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When I joined in 1997 and through 1998, international students were generally mainstreamed with other adult migrant ESL learners. Enrolment of international students has brought the ESL section into competition with the university and some private establishments which had established histories of dealing with this group. The influx of international fee paying students brings with it the competitive and marketing discourses of education that ESL teachers at the Polytechnic were trying to come to terms with. Prior to this the ESL section dealt largely with migrants and the focus was on social integration into New Zealand aimed at adult migrant students.

As Breen and Littlejohn (2000, p.34) point out, negotiation in language teaching requires working with existing curriculum frameworks. Curriculum documents in my workplace reflected the historically important adult migrant group and did not yet
reflect the international group. The first unofficial\(^1\) ‘international’ student curriculum plan proposed in early 1999 had no proficiency level attached, but a mix of the existing curriculum assessments for the pre-intermediate and intermediate programs were initially proposed to allow students to qualify for the intermediate certificate; a modified syllabus outline was developed for 1999, which took the pre-intermediate level curriculum content and added some verb structures to this; this document is included in the appendix. This *unofficial* modification of the curriculum document avoided bureaucratic formalities of formal recognition of a new program by administration, which were lengthy and complicated. This practice of working in ESL under the auspices of official documentation is maintained by the rigidity in administrative systems, which make it a complicated bureaucratic process to accredit new programs, and the uncertain life of any new program in an environment of shifting enrolment figures makes it unwise to develop fixed guidelines. ESL teachers develop unofficial interpretations of curriculum based on their experiences, which become (local) cultures of practice new staff members must learn; curriculum documents per se provide very little direct guidance on detail as I show in the dissertation study.

During the second term of 1999, I had taught a motivated group of international students who had further study ambitions. The activities of this program went beyond the original expectations proposed above. In a meeting in mid-1999 Mary, the section manager, Elaine, another ESL teacher, and I met to discuss the particular needs of a new international group. As a result of my recent experiences, I proposed a study skills curriculum framework for the group (see attached), based on a textbook I had used previously (Waters, 1995). While enthusiastically supported, however, this detailed skills outline was replaced by a more conventional team framework where teachers were assigned specific macro-skills, e.g. reading. In fact, my proposed study skills scheme quickly proved too ambitious for the students in the

\(^1\) Unofficial because no accredited curriculum document was written for the program; see Mary’s comments below on why this approach is taken.
first ten weeks of semester because student proficiencies, study habits, and study agendas seemed incapable of sustaining such a program.

The successive modification of curriculum plans, and the high stakes attached to this fee-paying group suggested to me that the international student program was a natural context for (internal) program evaluation focussing on curriculum coherence, and idea I proposed to my two co-teachers. The different curriculum alternatives that were proposed, abandoned, and modified, illustrate that the curriculum was a challenging issue.

2.4 This evaluative study: methods and purposes

In the ESL unit, log books are sometimes used by teachers to record their lesson activities so that their co-teachers can see what they have done and avoid duplication. Not all teachers maintain them, and details included in entries vary in length and scope. Although some work has been done on insights into language teaching using teacher journal narratives, (Bailey, 1990) log books do not lend themselves to the same kind of analysis since teacher reflection is not their principle purpose. They do, however, provide sufficient material for an evaluation study of teaching since they document tasks, student responses, textbooks and resources, used to build a curriculum. Together with the team meeting notes, they provide a picture of teacher response to student demands and how teacher responses reinforce or conflict with each other in a team teaching setting.

I suggested we systematically maintain the log books and divide the pages into two columns: The left column noting tasks and activities, typically over an hour session but sometimes more, and the right for (reflective) comments and other observations on the session; an example of the log book is included in the appendix. During the first ten weeks of semester 2 of 1999, we used the log books in this fashion and it seemed to work well. During the second ten week segment of the program I analysed the texts. During the final week of semester records were more haphazard as students began to move on to other institutions or return home. Elaine and I had
the bulk of the teaching hours with this group while Caroline only had fewer and consequently her entries are less frequent. Characteristic topics of the logs and meetings, include, choice of textbooks and assessments for academic and general English training, specification of procedures for classroom tasks, and evaluation and reflection on of student responses.

Team meetings are an opportunity to discuss what has been taught the previous week, what will be taught the following week, and also exchange impressions about student progress. Team meetings are used by teachers to advise each other on teaching, avoid repetition, and report experiences. Although I was keen to record the team meetings and analyse the transcripts, Caroline objected to being put on public record. As a result, I took notes at the meetings and provided an e-mail summary, which I sent for approval and commentary. Along with the opportunity to amend meeting notes, as a form of peer debriefing, teachers were given a copy of an earlier paper from the study for comment (Melles, 2000) I also sent several memos to staff giving an update on the themes I saw emerging in the study during the research process.

2.5 Individual understandings and coherence

Mary uses the expression ‘negotiated syllabus’ to describe our (Caroline, Elaine, and I) ongoing curriculum compromises with students. Although there is the potential for collaboration in team teaching, both Caroline and I question the coherence of this negotiation in the final team meeting. Team meetings and the teacher log/journal of classroom activities are settings with the potential for maintaining curriculum coherence and accountability but are not documented and used systematically for ongoing evaluation. In week 7, in an email summary of the team meeting, I explicitly challenged the value of team teaching for a coherent program. This challenge was picked up by Caroline and responded to in weeks 7 and 8. Elaine, in week 8 posted a comment on how she felt her teaching could be seen as a coherent program:
**Table 2.2 Week 7 and 8 email communication between GM, EL and CA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It still seems that everybody is very consistent in their own teaching and working with students. Given the varying agendas and levels of students this individual focus may be the only realistic approach. There is as much coherence as before (the previous term with this course) I think in terms of reinforcing each other’s teaching but the question is how much of this is fortuitous and how much informed. I think there are lessons for the future (next year) if a course similar to this runs in 2000. I think there are questions and issues worth addressing regarding the advantages and disadvantages of team teaching, the nature and purpose of assessment, and the purpose of the International study class in terms of syllabus and curriculum. More to come (GM/ week 7)</th>
<th>We need to keep a balance here - continue to use test and marks as a carrot and stick kind of motivation, but also build in structured activities which promote independence. The culture gap between East and West is seen most strongly in this aspect, I feel, and we really need to focus on building a STRUCTURED independent learning focus when we talk at the end of the year - in my opinion, this is where the coherence should come, and this should be the driving force of the program (CA/ Week 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am particularly interested in your final comments re coherence as this is where I see the benefits from your research for this course. I would be interested to pursue this with you and EL, maybe when the pressure is off towards the end of the year - will you be back from Melbourne during the week of Dec 6 -11? (CA/ week 7)</td>
<td>As my brief (apart from research reports) is to work on basic grammar and skills, I feel what I do is always coherent in the sense of all being relevant - or totally incoherent in the sense of necessarily being bits of this and that, revision and practice . . . you choose! (EL/ week 8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In my contribution, I suggest that there are three individuals pursuing compatible but still personal goals. Such a comment explicitly challenges the value of a practice - team teaching as an enhanced form of supportive teaching together, and Caroline notes this. Elaine’s response reinforces the underlying individualism in team teaching when she suggests that what she teaches she sees as relevant in terms of her teaching brief, grammar and skills. In fact, as the log book shows, no single macro-skill, eg. reading, is taught exclusively by any one individual. At the same time, she admits that responding/reacting to students does not make for a coherent *look* in teacher reports, like teacher journals.

Caroline’s response positions coherence in terms of overall (curriculum) aims, and specifically, the inclusion of both structured activities and learner independence. Caroline’s reservations about students’ lack of autonomy and independence are found in the journals and team meetings. In addition, her teaching (and that of Elaine), which I had observed as a researcher in 1998 and which was recorded in the
log books always revealed a concern with careful staging of activities. Both the log books and the summary team meeting notes provided a way of shifting this issue of coherence from a personal assessment to an evaluation based on the retrospective analysis of curriculum choices.

2.6 Curriculum through textbook and activity choice

Entries in the log books focus on textbooks used, class activities, and include some evaluative comments on the successes and failures of activities; an example is included in the appendices. As the term developed we all began incorporating other activities into teaching apart from academic oriented English to change the heavy focus on reading, grammar and writing, for test purposes.

Textbooks are a mainstay of practice in ESL and although slavish uses of textbooks can become an obstacle to good practice, teachers attempt to make creative decisions about how to adapt, ignore and critically use textbook tasks, (eg. Richards and Mahoney, 1996). They are used to bridge the gap (Swan, 1991) between what students want - often they want textbooks - what teachers feel they can achieve given time constraints and perceptions about the students, and what is available in terms of resources. ESL textbooks are a genre in themselves (Swales, 1995) and some recent work on textbooks has indicated limitations in the kinds of worlds they present, including a lack of realistic social comment (Wajnryb, 1996), and dominant discourses of ways of knowing, such as learning as transmission (Ninnes, 2001). Textbooks can, therefore, when used uncritically, position learners outside dominant cultural discourses and communicative language teaching materials are a particular example of this (Santoro, 2000). Recognising this sets up an opportunity for critical approaches to language teaching and textbook use. This has become a very important theme in discussions of in English for Academic Purposes (Benesch, 2001), and in adult ESL in Australia (Brown and Burns, 1999; Burns and Hood, 1998) and in the USA (Smoke, 1998).
Most entries make reference to specific textbooks teachers chose to use throughout the program. Since students demanded an IELTS focus it fell to me to maintain a testing and training program while Caroline and Elaine chose textbooks to achieve a balance between language structures, proficiency, and study skills. We all chose textbooks as a compromise between texts we had experience with, texts that gave students the impression they were studying for academic English, and texts, which contained presentation of specific language structures we felt that they needed.

We did, however, make choices that moved us away from academic preparation to connect with students interests and in some cases to the goal of developing independence. Caroline, for example, used extracts from a popular soap opera (Shortland Street) for listening practice and this seemed to work well since it was colloquial language in a media (TV) that all students were familiar with. Mid-way through the term I organised sessions in the gym - volleyball and soccer - for students on Friday; students were able to continue with other class work if they wished. Towards the latter part of the term Caroline and I started using games such as Monopoly. As our team conversations revealed these choices were made to relieve the pressure on students of managing academic English, which they struggled with; and also appealed to the differing levels of maturity we judged these young Asian students had.

I chose to maintain the focus on practising for the IELTS test, something the students had insisted on from the beginning of semester, and my materials, (eg. Garbutt and O'Sullivan 1996) were taken from this area. Where I was not reviewing or presenting IELTS topics, I used other texts for grammar practice, (eg. Hall and Shepheard, 1991) and specific practice of skills (Greenall and Swan, 1986). Many of my log book entries refer to IELTS practice tests and examples. Most students had specific band level results in mind for university or Polytechnic, and in some cases a very singular goal and attitude, a phenomenon De Prada (1997) has discussed, and some students made this abundantly clear in their behaviours in class. Elaine, for example, reports on X, a male Chinese student who had major difficulties in practice tests for IELTS, refusing to join in a game of monopoly in the last week specifically because
it was not exam practice. In response, she surreptitiously gives him work she knows he will succeed at without telling him its origin.

X refused to join in - I corrected the bits of the IELTS Practice test for him, obviously too difficult for him . . . He insisted that I should write in the answers for the parts he hadn’t done - I refused but finally gave up, he was so insistent. Sad guy really. I also copied a unit for him, reading focus, but simpler than academic IELTS. (2/12/99 1-3 PM EL)

Elaine also notes other occasions where all students insisted on IELTS practice in her sessions especially towards the end of the term. A number of the students who finished the program made little substantial progress through test practice and preparation, and would end up repeating this preparation and practice when they enrolled in other Polytechnic ESL classes or enrolled in foundation courses either at the Polytechnic or University. Such courses, in addition to test preparation, attempt to teach critical thinking and independence skills students need for university (Herbst, 2001; Barrett-Lennard, 1997) although there is some doubt as to whether such EAP programs actually enhance IELTS test scores, and therefore meet student aims (Brown, 1998).

Caroline chose an introductory academic writing textbook (Oshima and Hogue, 1991) as her basic text and supplemented this with video segments, other tasks from texts, and sources she had on hand. Elaine used a range of academic oriented texts and general textbooks, (eg. Benn and Dummett, 1995) to select classroom tasks from. She also included Headway Australasia (Bradley, Dyer, and Hayman, 1997) for local content, varying her choice between pre-intermediate and intermediate level texts depending on how students seemed to be responding. She supplemented her books with video, games, and took charge of assessment tasks. Elaine was also responsible for the computer lab session in which students completed IELTS practice exercises or other tasks I had developed.

Overall, we seemed driven by students to follow an academic preparation program which they were unable to cope with practically. The academic testing and tasks students insisted on, and which I took charge of, continually confronted the students
with skills in reading, eg. paragraph structure, that they were still developing. As a team we selected separate textbooks, which dealt with different areas of learning, and helped avoid overlap. However, the activities chosen from textbooks were not designed to mutually reinforce teaching aims except accidentally; this conclusion I raised in referring to the lack of coherence in the program.

A glance at the log books and team meeting notes indicates that teachers follow their own themes, tasks, and textbooks through in ways that are consistent with their individual aims and purposes. On the other hand, the lack of an integrated study skills curriculum outline, which had initially proved too ambitious and then had been replaced by individual teacher decisions about responsibilities and activities, may have contributed to the fragmented curriculum. Mixed final student evaluations reinforced the fact that something had not worked well, and this was raised in the final team meeting (below).

Teachers in practice appear to rarely use long term aims such as course outcomes to either plan or evaluate the purpose or success of tasks, (Shavelson and Stern, 1981; Nunan, 1993). This is also the impression that the log book gives. In some cases, tasks and sequencing of tasks is given in detail like a lesson plan. These sequences are often carried over into following sessions or days, sometimes stretching over more than one session; in many cases a teaching session closes with homework given to complete for the next day. In other cases, a list of topics for the session is given, without specifically highlighting the sequence of tasks.

Individual teacher sequence rather than explicit reinforcement of teaching activities and goals seems the norm and the potential for a collaborative ‘team’ negotiated syllabus is not realized. Individual teachers operate under the assumption that they are responsible for a macro-skill such as reading, and this forms the basis of their responsibility to the team. Students push for an IELTS agenda that is inappropriate. No official curriculum document and assessments exist to which the program can be held accountable. These are all factors which help create a ‘fragmented’ product. Further contributing factors are discussed below.
2.7 Evaluative students and activities

Many entries include an evaluative comment on student response or progress. I had specifically inserted a column in the log book to accommodate this requirement and included it as part of the research rationale for the project. The majority of the evaluative and reflective comments come from Elaine and myself. Caroline was generally very positive in her assessment of how students were working, especially during the first weeks of the week program. After some initial enthusiasm with her focus on writing structures, students did seem to struggle increasingly with this and Caroline notes this in her entries where she talks about how hard and boring it seems at times. However, later in the same term students still respond well to a task like outlining a writing task.

Towards the end of the first term Caroline begins to question students’ preparedness for university. Underlying her concern was the fact that some mainstream departments in the Polytechnic were asking teachers individually for recommendations for individual students who had applied to other courses, eg. business. This is her entry from week 8.

Log entry: 18/11/99 11-12pm Caroline

| a) I provided students with an outline about study options at the Polytech - they needed to turn it into English, b) I checked the outlines they wrote for homework | No evidence of any homework done, except A and D. I am seriously concerned about how these students will fare in tertiary study and the reputation our department might acquire as a result of their attendance in mainstream courses |

Elaine comments regularly on the reaction of students to exercises, her impression of their overall attitude and feeling, and also provides full details about her class procedures throughout. The following example, although a little longer than usual, is characteristic.

Log entry: 10/11/99 11-12PM Elaine

| All students to work individually on writing | V Sick, B?? A had added an extra desk right up by |
This entry is typical of Elaine in that it includes close attention to her relationship to individual students and her impressions of them as individuals. She also notes, as in this entry, how students react to working with each other and, on occasions, the role of culture in influencing this. So, for example, she notes in her entry on 2/11/99 that CH comments on not liking Hong Kong Chinese, after one of the two students from Hong Kong had said he did not want to work with him. My entries also focus on students’ reactions to work. Since I was principally responsible for the IELTS exercises and students had difficulties with this many of my own observations about them highlight their weaknesses.

Final student evaluations were mixed for the course. In particular, although homework was given on a regular basis and was only competed sporadically, it was surprising that students felt there was not enough. In addition, the comment that the course was not hard enough and the workload too light seemed to contradict what we had seen and discussed in our team meetings. The other interesting comment from the point of view of the course was the three comments on the lack of speaking (and listening). Reviewing the log book activities and team discussions, there did seem to be ample opportunity for this although admittedly there had been a stronger emphasis on reading and writing in line with the academic and testing focus students had claimed they wanted. It seemed, therefore, that despite being driven by students they were dissatisfied with our choices.

Nonetheless, we had all invested a great amount of energy and time over the year to respond to this increasingly important group of students. A final meeting at the end of the year was scheduled to review progress and project future developments. In
addition, Caroline had put the question of a coherent syllabus on the agenda for the meeting. Other factors redirected this agenda in unexpected directions, and raised, in its wake, a series of issues in relation to negotiation with administrative and power structures that is largely ignored in the literature.

### 2.8 Micro-politics of the ESL section

The final meeting revolved around three issues: Different views of course aims, divergent views about course relationship to existing curriculum frameworks, and divergent views about the future of the program and internal politics of the ESL section. Responding to my comments, Caroline proposed that the nature of coherence and the production of a coherent program should be an item for discussion and negotiation in the final meeting about the course. In fact, rather than considering curriculum coherence, which Caroline raises, Mary, the section manager, made it clear that no development of a new program would take place and the study skills focus and, to some extent, the IELTS focus of the international course would be abandoned. This was unfortunate, in my view, since it deferred again the question of program evaluation, continuity and development.

What became clear was that the international class, with its study skills focus, represented competition for another program of ESL tertiary preparation also offered by the ESL unit. The danger from Mary and Caroline’s perspective was that we had created something of a ‘double agenda’ and in an environment of low numbers this competition has to be eliminated. The course program, with its focus on IELTS and study skills, duplicated many of the aims of the PFTS program. Low numbers and the uncertainty of which courses would run was also a constant background issue to this discussion. During our discussion, some insightful comments were made on the relationship between curriculum documents in ESL and the way programs were actually taught.

During the meeting I noted that even though some of the students in our course had only achieved 5.0 on IELTS they had been accepted into a foundation course at the
university (6.0 is the official minimum for undergraduate entry). This left us facing a new group and Elaine and I wondered what they would be like. It was then that Mary reminded everyone about the perennial uncertainty facing ESL teachers and the department. Student numbers had been low this year and she was worried that they would be again and that management would ‘crack down’ on this. Although a number of international students were due to arrive, Mary said nothing was known about their levels or aims and there was no certainty they would show up. On the issue of what students might be like, Mary said,

‘No point discussing this, we have no idea at all until . . . We don’t know how many more will come in the next few months. We don’t know if all these ones will front up. We have no idea of what level they are at or what class they will actually go into. So really we are wasting our time.

Elaine and I discovered in this meeting that enrolment into PFTS (a program with similar goals and currently taught by Caroline and Mary) was to be revised to make it more flexible and some of the students who had been excluded this time from enrolling in PFTS would have been able to join. The PFTS group this time had not been that successful, even though it excluded some international students, because at one point minimum numbers of enrolled students became an issue. As Mary pointed out,

And that was one of the problems with that class. They were very split and they had a group of people very, very strong and another group either really, really weak or totally demotivated. So, they actually couldn’t keep up and the others didn’t want to. So, because they (teachers of the program) end up scrabbling for students at the last minute, they ended up with a very unhappy class . . . Its probably relevant to how we take them in every year. It’s likely to happen again, is what I’m saying.

We discussed the fact that a division into weak and strong students also happened in the international group although not everyone agreed on who belonged in which group. As I raised the particular purpose of this program and our large investment of time and energy, Elaine commented on what she thought was the pastoral function of
the class, which Caroline commented enthusiastically on. It differed quite markedly from my own conception of the purpose of the class. The consensus between Elaine and Caroline was that the purpose of the class was to offer a program to young international students who may have problematic backgrounds and could be treated like high school students in terms of discipline. This was, although I said nothing, a long way from the study skills aims that had been proposed as the motivation for the group.

Mary, as section manager, was concerned to preserve the status quo and not propose the development of any new program, even if the existing curriculum document for the course - Certificate English - bore almost no resemblance to what teachers taught. Mary, focused on the fact that curriculum document writing was a long-term and highly rigid bureaucratic procedure, neither she nor Caroline wanted to engage in. Both Caroline and myself again raised the issue of curriculum coherence in relation to the gap between document and practice, which Mary hastily redirected.

GM  We had IELTS testing, formative tests on the way. Grammar stuff at certain points, interviews. There was a project, so a number of things in there but its not connected

CA  It’s not coherent

GM  Not coherent and not yet connected to any policy document because this is a separate scratch creation

CA  Exactly

MA  But it’s all part of the Certificate English Programme. It comes under the documentation for Certificate English.

GM  Right, so that’s maybe an issue, a problem, I don’t know.

MA  I would strongly suggest that we cannot create this as a new course

CA  I don’t think we want to do that but I agree with you GM although the mishmash we ended up with was successful, you’re right it was ad hoc and you want to try and formalise it.
Mary saw the different ‘strands’ that teachers had developed in response (or reaction) to student demands as a ‘negotiated syllabus’. It is clear from the extract above that Mary’s sense of negotiated syllabus, a recognizable pedagogical label, potentially conflicts with Caroline’s description of a ‘mishmash’, and the formalised senses of negotiated syllabus that Breen and Littlejohn (2000) discuss.

As we discussed giving recommendations to other departments about our students, the different views on the nature of the international class and the way it could be seen to be competing with the PFTS class were made clear. In effect, both courses focused on IELTS and study skills but Mary did not want there to be competition between the two and enrolment procedures for PFTS would change to accommodate some of those students in the international class who should have been, in Mary and Caroline’s eyes, in PFTS. This implied, as I finally read it, that the international class would lose its study skills focus and return to having a general English focus, although there was still some disagreement about how this would translate into practice.

GM  On the basis of the comments it seems international class shifts back to a proficiency (i.e. no study skills) EFL focus

CA  Which makes it easier to teach because more homogenous

EL  But the IELTS focus is important also.

MA  That is also proficiency and so fine.

CA  It’s not study skills, it’s studying for IELTS tests.

EL  But within that you are studying and developing reading skills, understanding logical relationships, sense relationships, inferences, these are reading skills.

MA  But they are reading skills required for anything.

Elaine, in my view, who had invested some time in teaching study skills of various sorts to this group was naturally doubtful that the IELTS training had no relationship to study skills. In addition, Caroline seemed to have forgotten that she had spent a term teaching writing skills from an academic text in ways that bore no relationship
to the content of the intermediate curriculum document. What was clear was that although Elaine and I differed on what the purpose of the class was, we had both invested a lot of time and energy over the year, working with two groups, on teaching study skills. What we did not realise was how divisive this was seen by Mary and perhaps others in terms of diverting enrolments from another program and creating what Caroline called ‘a double agenda’. This program had now been revised to eliminate the competition, as Mary made clear.

Let’s not refer to the past, the PFTS (entry) test needs to be revamped. Procedures for placement have been inconsistent. The more flexible approach will make it more equitable so that the top end of this class is creamed off.

2.9 Conclusions

Team teaching is a significant element of ESL culture at the Polytechnic. Its significance can be measured in terms of improvement of curriculum practice and outcomes and this can be evaluated by an insider evaluation such as this, and also compared to student evaluations. It seems to me that the potential for collaboratively constructing curriculum through teams is not realised in practice. One reason is that log books are not actually used to inform practice in ways they could nor are team meetings used to collaboratively negotiate activities that reinforce each other. Teachers are assigned certain responsibilities vis-à-vis macro-skills like reading and they pursue these in personally meaningful and relevant ways throughout the curriculum cycle. However, it is not clear to me how this is better than ESL teachers having individual responsibility.

In a constantly uncertain climate of enrolments time is not allocated for more careful consideration of curriculum in the course of teaching. On the other hand, I think practices within ESL also conspire to maintain these fragmented practices. Ignoring the potential of the log book, and ignoring the potential of more detailed specification of curriculum goals such as a skills or competency specification help sustain potentially haphazard curriculum products. Even given the uncertainties
associated with enrolments, the internal politics of ESL teaching should also be made much clearer so that energies are not misdirected in teaching.

Despite the difficulties in revising curriculum documentation, both the loose interpretation of curriculum documents and the sustained practice of teaching without any strong commitment to curriculum frameworks does not only give freedom to ESL teachers but also leads to inefficiencies and, perhaps, continued positioning on the margins of institutions. The paradox for ESL in NZ and is that although external assessment frameworks like standards and competencies challenge existing ways of working they may in fact, as in Australia, also provide an important context for the open discussion and development of ESL pedagogy. I suggest that despite the possible appropriateness of team teaching to this environment it should remain open to evaluation to measure its actual efficiency in enhancing curriculum.
Elective Research Chapter Three: Interpreting the research/teaching divide

The paper which follows is currently being reviewed for publication. In this paper, I examine the responses of four practitioners, who appear elsewhere in this portfolio, regarding their views of the research/teaching binary in ESL. This paper is intended to be read in conjunction with the following action research project in which two of the interviewees (Mary and Sarah) participate.

3.1 Abstract

Action research is now a frequent strategy for professional development among second language teachers. As a form of practitioner-oriented practice it attempts to bridge the theory/practice divide, engage practitioners in research, and contribute to the improvement of educational work. I interviewed four practitioners, three with direct experience in collaborative action research, in a small community of ESL practice in a NZ Polytechnic, to understand their position on the theory/practice divide in teaching, the nature and scope of action research, and the relevance of a critical applied examination of the politics of curriculum work. Their responses, part of a larger project on this question, suggest that a variety of discourses currently construct practices of action research in ESL. This has consequences for the extent to which educational change can in fact be made in the field.

3.2 Conversations about the research/teaching divide in ESL

In preparation for a paper I gave on the nature of community in TESOL (Melles, 2000b) I interviewed four teachers, three of whom had been involved in an action research project prior to my arrival that had been facilitated by another staff member (Musgrave, 1996). Two of the interviewees had also participated in an action research study I facilitated (Melles, 2001), in which I tried encourage critique of institutional policy regarding computer access and use in the ESL curriculum. These interviews emerged from a desire to know why action research continues to be taken
up as professional development rather than as critical educational research (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

One of the aims of action research is to bridge the theory/research divide. I wanted to know how these four teachers, who worked in different areas of the teaching in the ESL section, saw the relationship between published research and teaching. On the basis of their teaching and research experiences, I also wanted to discover their thinking about the processes of teacher research, such as the need for collaboration or not, since this has been raised as an issue dividing current approaches to action research in ESL (Burns, 1999; Melles, 2001). Finally, I addressed the issue of the place of critical applied linguistics and the politics of practice as part of the action research process since this is one of the current boundaries (Melles, 1998) in the ESL field that divides teacher research.

Following a brief profile of interviewees, I focus on three themes that were raised in the interviews: the relationship between research and practice in ESL, appropriate forms of research for ESL practitioners, the politics and ethics of workplace research. The text positions interviewees as members of a ‘community of practice’ (Cutting, 2000), who use a common professional or social language (Gee, 1999), while, nonetheless, taking up different, perhaps competing discourses (Lee, 1992) of ESL practice in relation to teaching and research. The interview, and my position as researcher, helped construct the interviewees as a community. I include some commentary below and divide the responses into three broad themes: the research-practice relationship, forms of teacher research, political contexts for ESL.

3.3 Four individual profiles

Sarah, who had a background in foreign language teaching (Japanese), often worked with lower level ESL students (elementary) and also coordinated short courses for Japanese students. She had joined the Polytechnic in 1993 as a full-time tutor teaching both Japanese (night school) and ESL until recently. Mary, was a section manager of the ESL unit. We had worked together on a number of courses and she
had also been involved in confirming my probation as a teacher in the ESL section. Mary appears in a number of places in this portfolio. During 1987-1994 she worked as a part-time tutor in the ESL unit at the Polytechnic and from mid 1994, with some slight variation worked full-time at the Polytechnic. Olivia worked on the work oriented TOPS English program and in that capacity had direct experience of using unit standards in her teaching. She had started working as a part-time tutor at the Polytechnic in 1993 and from 1995 onwards had had a more full-time position. Olivia appears in the dissertation interviews on curriculum culture in the dissertation. Renata had recently joined the Polytechnic. She had recently completed her Diploma in Second Language Teaching (1999) and had also become full-time recently. She was the one of the four interviewees who had not been involved in the action research project in ESL in 1996 and 1997.

The profiles of these teachers are similar to those in Haddock’s (1998) national survey. Three of the four women ESL teachers had training and experience in general education, eg. high schools, and had moved into adult ESL from this background. Their training and origins also placed them in different positions to understand education and ESL. All had begun teaching ESL before they gained official qualifications and then having secured their diplomas had also taken up more permanent ESL positions. Three of the four also had backgrounds in foreign language teaching. All four had balanced and continued to balance work responsibilities with their roles as mothers. With the exception of Renata, the Polytechnic had employed them in ESL teaching in some capacity for at least seven years and, in Mary’s case, somewhat longer.

3.4 Research-practice relationship

I first asked the four teachers to tell me how they saw the relationship between what was published in journals such TESOL Quarterly and Applied Linguistics, and teaching practice. For most teachers the last occasion they had spent time reading these journals was during their training. All teachers seemed to prefer social contexts of understanding such as conferences, or discussions with colleagues as
preferable to interpreting alone a (research) literature that seemed irrelevant to the classroom.

### 3.4.1 Antagonist discourse and obscurantist citation practices

Academic discourses have their own ways of using power through language to circumscribe their communities of practice (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995). The idea that academic discourses and writing practices create a barrier to practitioner understanding and involvement in the research process is often cited in practitioner-oriented texts on classroom research, (e.g. Hopkins, 2002). Clarke (1994) calls it the dysfunctions of the theory/practice discourse; Zeichner (1994) simply refers to it as a divide.

Interviewees signal some particular ways in which academic discourses and practices informed by these discourses create the divide. Mary, in a written (peer) response to the copy of her interview I gave her, expanded on this theory/practice divide by suggesting that practice was far too simple to engage with the sophistication academic discourses of research writing appeared to privilege:

> I often feel with theories of Applied Linguistics that what teachers actually do in the classroom is far too pedestrian to write about.

In fact, Mary stressed throughout her written response that most of her comments on the theory/practice relationship she regarded as common sense, as principles that would be widely shared by others. As some of the responses in this interview suggest, this shared interpretation may be less widespread than she believes. Olivia highlights how these sophisticated discourses involve citation practices among academics that do not contribute to broader community (researcher/practitioner) understanding,

> A lot of the research I was reading (during diploma training), or the papers I was reading, were often getting down to personal rebuttals of other people’s criticisms of the previous papers, and a lot of the papers seem to seek corroboration of their ideas, and so a lot of them are lists of names of see so
and so, and so and so, in such and such a journal, and you actually have to wade through a hell of a lot of rubbish to get to anything that seems particularly pertinent.

Olivia was the only one to single out the antagonistic discourse of academic writing and citation practices as obstacles to ESL teachers using research texts. Underlying this criticism seems to be an awareness of the self-referential nature of the academy and its practices, both textual (citation) and professional (antagonism), that are not compatible with teacher discourses of practical relevance. This circumscribing of the borders between the academy and practitioners is achieved through the positioning of academics/researchers in a conversation with those already within its borders. This inner circle is also maintained by discourses of ESL practice that give the illusion of being discourses for ESL practice.

3.4.2 Rhetorical Claims of relevance for the classroom

One of the ‘moves’ (Swales, 1990) in the research genres of applied linguistics and TESOL research is to claim the findings of research are relevant to the classroom. This is a rhetorical strategy which is sometimes realised in a section entitled implications. ESL practitioners are not convinced that such claims are warranted.

Olivia takes up this issue of lack of correspondence between research rhetoric and reality, referring specifically to a university-based course in CALL which did not meet her expectations for practical suggestions to implement computer based activities in the classroom,

I’m thinking particularly of all the CALL stuff that I read, I did that course thinking I will read the research on stuff that people have tried in classrooms and see how successful things have been with students, but none of it actually gave any concrete suggestions as to what to actually do, what to base a lesson around, it was all just theory.
Mary suggests that the research: practice binary is maintained through an academic fiction about relevance proposed from positions that are too dislocated physically from ESL teachers to be able to cross the teacher-researcher gap,

I suppose the obvious thing is that those journals publish the theory . . . from people who presumably have time to sit down and think about it and who are a lot of the time not talking about things which relate to the day to day work of a teacher, they are not talking about what happens in the classroom even when they talk about what happens in the classroom its, I suppose, what ought to happen in the classroom or what could happen in the classroom.

While at the same time positioning researchers as rhetorically constructed outside of the classroom, Mary’s intuition that perhaps the research discourse is about hypothetical applications is in itself something of an insight in relation to other responses from teachers. Rather than excluding the topics of research texts as inherently irrelevant to practice, there is notice that claims of relevance require a language of relevance, and this language should not be hypothetical. Thus, research texts may be about practical scope - future - rather than description of the present or past although they may be at the same time about prescription - what ought to happen - and censure, as Renata points out below.

3.4.3 Practical realities, censure and who’s up to date?

One of the understandings that informs action research in ESL is that it deals with present issues within specific local contexts. The timeless expression of relevance in some research, often underscored by the use of present simple, and the need to generate hypothetical applications for the present or future do not sit well with this fact. Renata gives one way in which practical realities are not considered in research on ESL. Research-based approaches to ESL, she maintains may give the impression of being straightforward but never are when you try to implement it in the classroom.

Okay, the main difference is that what’s published seems so straightforward. It seems that, yes, this is a good idea . . . but when it comes to the implementation stage there are other factors that have to be taken into
consideration . . . factors that affect the students, how they’re feeling . . . whether its acceptable to them.

Sarah also, who alludes to computer-based teaching, makes the point that if she were disposed to read research, which she is not for reasons she gives, it would be dictated by present teaching concerns.

I don’t do a lot of reading at the moment so that would tend to indicate that I don’t think it’s relevant because I’m not bothering to read it, I suppose. But it’s a time factor I guess, and If I was searching an article . . . I would be searching for stuff that is classroom based or I would search a topic that it relevant to my teaching right at the moment.

Thus, as Mary notes, although it might be possible for teachers to see the scope of research texts as potentially relevant beyond the immediate present, the immediate present exerts a much stronger influence for Sarah. The limits of time and family responsibilities also meant that even though she knew that some of her current work with elementary students could be informed by speech therapy research, she did not have the time to explore this.

**3.4.4 Censure and reproduction**

The idea that discourses can discipline and punish those who refuse to take them up in normative ways belongs principally to Foucault (1977). Not only can discourses in education exclude, as the academic literature appears to do to ESL practitioners, through the use of language and practices of competitive citation and reference, but appear to be able to produce feelings of censure by the academy of practitioners.

Applied linguistic research often claims that it illustrates the most recent empirically valid ESL practices so that those who are unable or unwilling to follow are censured for not doing so. Renata points out how this censure works. She gives the example of using the computer lab, where she had expected eighteen machines to be working
and five were not; and she had had no warning. The lack of correspondence between research and reality also reflected on the teacher, who ends up not being able to use the computer program she has identified for her class and, therefore, looks inadequate or behind the times because she is unable to work with the existing environment,

Yeah and there’s something wrong with you if you can’t (use the computer like the article says) . . . it does put a real strain on the teacher having to think through beforehand what could possibly go wrong when you haven’t been given any help with this in the article itself, that there are no contingency plans.

This points to an interesting issue about the effect or power of professional research to not only exclude the teacher through obscure citation practices and antagonistic discourses but also to censure or discipline the teacher. Mary, in response to a question about the usefulness of action research makes the claim that the censure is unjust because the practice of teaching involves the most important qualification for knowing about best practice,

I think it’s teachers who are the people who know most about teaching ESOL because they are the ones who have to face the day-to-day reality of the changing clientele and the changing expectations . . . who in some ways are right up with the latest developments because they’re dealing with the latest students who are coming through even if they haven’t got the latest materials to teach them with.

Thus, not only can academic discourses censure the teacher and exclude the teacher from its discourse but also the academy itself, in this case the university, through its own teaching practices can perpetuate this exclusion by not challenging the research-practice binary but simply reproducing it.
3.4.5 The medium not the message: reading or listening

All ESL teachers in high contact teaching, including my interviewees, refer explicitly or implicitly to time constraints. Reading research is a luxury (or necessity) of training and professional development. Sarah raised this in her reply to my question about reading research and added, as a subtext that I read, that more social occasions for hearing research, such as conferences, where the space to listen already exists, were preferable for learning what was potentially relevant. When I suggested that as a result of not reading research she may be unaware of recent work that might be relevant, Sarah referred in general to the relevance of hearing (rather than reading) conference papers and in particular to some of the recent work of a sociolinguist in Wellington, which she thought relevant, and said

But within sort of like attending conferences and hearing papers that people are giving or something, and presumably they’ve published, then I pick up on some of the stuff that’s there . . . (referring to Janet Holmes) I haven’t gone and read her paper but I’ve attended the workshop and what have you.

Thus, Sarah suggests that social forums like conferences, and she mentions two, are more engaging and potentially rewarding. On the other hand, while she stresses classroom immediacy as the origin of her (hypothetical) selection of research reading, she also suggests that her interest in the work mentioned - language of the workplace - was not an immediate concern but potentially inspirational for her classroom practice, nonetheless.

I mean, I would find reading that article or whatever . . . very interesting and fascinating and relevant to what I’m doing because it’s real language that may not be classroom based if you like but then I would find it very interesting and relevant to what I would then want to do in the classroom.

(Sarah)

3.4.6 Research and practice: summary

In general, the responses of all four interviewees suggest there are ways in which the academy (university) is seen to reproduce exclusion through its own teacher training
courses. In addition, there is a suggestion about how the texts affect participation in the practice of research. Practical relevance and the immediate present also play an important role in teacher judgements about research writing although at the same time there is recognition in various ways that the scope of research does or can help look beyond the present. Given the experiences of these teachers of teacher research and classroom-based research, does this approach manage to narrow the gap? The next question I asked raised this issue.

### 3.5 Closing the gap: teacher research

Three of the four teachers had experience of an action research project within the department (Musgrave, 1996) and two had also participated in a project which I have reported on elsewhere (Melles, 2001). Action research has become a popular medium for ESL teacher development, (eg. Wallace, 1998) although something of a divide has been established between those who promote it as a matter for individual teacher development, (eg. Nunan, 1992) and those who advocate collaborative models, (eg. Burns, 1999). An additional tension between researcher and practitioner has emerged, principally in North America, where the notion of ‘teaching as research’ has especially taken hold (Patterson 1993). Teacher researchers have claimed unique insight into educational processes and excluded mainstream researchers as out of touch with a qualitatively better paradigm of research (Huberman, 1996).

In both of the situations in which the interviewees had been involved in action research projects they had been collaborative to a greater or lesser extent. One of the aims of action research is to engage teachers in forms of research that have practical ends and relevance. Bearing their experiences in mind, I asked the four teachers to explain how they viewed action research as a bridge between research and practice.

#### 3.5.1 Participation and collaboration with whom?

One common response to the relevance of action research that teachers have was that such research considered the practical circumstances of teaching excluded by other traditional forms of research. In addition, all four respondents signalled
collaboration as crucial to the success of such work although not necessarily collaboration among teachers alone. One of the questions in the current critique of action research is who to collaborate with. Elliott (1993) suggests that too much action research in schools excludes dialogue with participants who are not practitioners on the assumption that such potential partners will hijack the process. ‘ Presuming a conflict of interest between managers and teachers the critical social scientist takes sides and identifies with the teachers s(he) defines as oppressed by the system’ (Elliott, 1993, p.181). This view of the teacher as oppressed takes institutional structures to be a self-evident source of power domination.

Elliot uses Giddens (1984) theory of structuration to remind teachers that ‘structures impose limits on what individuals do, but at the same time enable them to do things’ (Elliott, 1993, p. 183). Such an approach is rather similar to Foucault’s reminder that power/knowledge is productive (Foucault and Gordon, 1980) not simply oppressive although Giddens position includes the role of human agents, i.e. teachers, in making choices, whereas Foucault’s position on the agency of individuals is both more obscure (McNay, 1994), and affected by his belief that discourse produces subjectivities. For Elliott, to achieve the kind of discursive rather than simply practical consciousness of some forms of action research entails collaboration and dialogue with non-practitioners so that one can ‘describe what one is doing (practical consciousness) and why one is doing it to others (discursive consciousness)’ (Elliott, 1993, p. 184).

Renata contrasted this collaboration with the isolation of the lone researcher, when I asked what was more applicable:

Yes, the kind of research that takes place in the classroom because those factors that we were talking about before would be more likely to be considered . . . also research that involves more than one person because I

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2 The brackets are mine
Elective Research Chapter Three: Interpreting the research/teaching divide

think there’s an awful lot to be gained from talking through problems or discussing issues with colleagues and using them as sounding boards.

Renata did emphasise, however, that for her the discussions did not have to be with teaching colleagues but also could be with outsiders, such as university staff. This kind of relationship, could help avoid political tensions:

I think that might work very well actually to have people from outside the department working with teachers who are practicing in the department. Yes because then you’re getting the outsiders view . . . I think it could help balance people who are use to working together, are used to behaving towards each other in certain ways. And there are behind the scenes politics all the time, I don’t want to offend him, or perhaps I really have to impress this person . . . they’re not involved in that sort of political situation.

Based on her own experiences, Olivia particularly highlighted the networking aspect of collaborative action research as a rare opportunity too see others at work, and as an opportunity to question one’s own view of truth. While peer observation is also included in the tools used for professional development (Wajnryb, 1992) it is neither a regular part of teaching culture nor, in my experience, frequently used in practice:

I think it really makes you examine your practices, and it forces you to get around and seeing other teachers in action, which is really useful. And it allows for much more interaction between teachers and then you get different perspectives on students too, which is really useful because we get very set in our ways of seeing our own truth.

Sarah, who came to ESL teaching through the common route of secondary foreign language teaching, added that collaborative reflection and research is not only an uncommon practice among teachers but that it is an unusual process for those who some to adult migrant teaching through high school experience as a second language teacher.
So, my previous teaching background was very much being an autonomous teacher in my classroom with not a lot of contact as a foreign language teacher . . . when it came to the ESOL thing, I guess I took over and I sort of carried on at that sort of same level . . . and do my job in my classroom, with my students and so this was a developmental thing because it was exposure to a wider range of other teachers, and talking and hearing all their ideas.

3.5.2 Teaching as research

One possible response to the relationship between research and practice is to see practice as inherently a form of research. On this view, action research is a formalised strategy for reflection and professional development, similar to existing informal strategies, such as discussion with colleagues (Wallace, 1998). It fits into the reflective practitioner model that has become a normalised discourse of the ESL profession (Wallace, 1991). Burns suggests collaborative action research ‘has the capacity to initiate and enhance teachers’ research skills as a natural extension of teaching practice’ (Burns, 1999, p.15). When I suggested to Mary that some ESL teachers took up teacher identities within discourses of ESL practice that excluded the need for research, Mary objected:

I think it’s very kind of short-sighted, and in a way almost insulting to say that teachers don’t need to do research. Teaching is research. In away every time you go into a classroom and decide to change something you’re doing some sort of research. Every time you have a team meetings and talk about what you want to do with a group, you’re doing a kind of research.

Mary went on to specify how the outcomes of action research related to problem solving and professional development for the classroom.

Well research is about asking questions related to a problem or something you feel you need to know. In the practical teaching sense it would be in order to make your teaching better, right, or to make something work smoother, right. And that’s what you’re doing all the time.
Sarah, meanwhile, who had some experience of action research, questioned the label research applied to action research:

I suppose for me it [her experience] was always, almost a case of though, to what extent is that part of reflective practice anyway, and where does sort of action research become research rather than reflective practice.

Olivia explicitly rejected the idea that research should be a part of teacher practice, suggesting that this was a new burden imposed on practitioners, which helped generate a lot of irrelevant and poorly written work:

I believe that research is a specialist field for academics, and I think there’s a big division between academics and teachers. Academics are centred on the area of study and teachers are centred on the students . . . I think we should always examine our practices, the old reflective practitioner bit . . . actually publishing, I don’t believe personally is of that much value unless you’ve got something stunning to say . . . I’ve often read articles and I’ve thought, well what was the point?

Olivia gave an example of the kind of writing that she did appreciate, stressing that it would exclude excessive theorising and outline,

The questions that many teachers want to know the answers to, basically being what’s the best way to teach? What do the students expect? And are we meeting their expectations or not? And I think that’s particularly relevant.

Thus, a shared experience of engaging in action research, which Olivia, Mary, and Sarah had, does not encourage these practitioners to all feel that they have joined the research community. They question the definition of research in relation to reflective practice and also question whether it does lead to genuine production of quality knowledge by practitioners, a claim that is sometimes made (Huberman, 1996).
3.6 Politics and the research process

The question I raised about politics and workplace research was partly self-interested since at the time of the interviews I had explored, through a number of projects, workplace discourses of ESL in ways which could uncover processes, relationships, and practices that questioned the unity of community, which the ESL section tried to maintain. Responses from interviewees recognised that practice was embedded in political understandings, and needed careful attention.

3.6.1 Recognising the importance of political dimensions of practice

While it moved research away from traditional formats, Renata stressed that bringing a critical (political) dimension into research was important, needed to be addressed constructively, and should be addressed to the workplace,

It’s getting away from the traditional, what we were referring to as traditional research, and taking outside factors into consideration. So these are factors that influence everyone, politics can’t be divorced from any job really . . . I think a research paper is a safe place to address them as long as it’s approached in a positive kind of way, not a mean criticism . . . the purpose is not to be mean to anyone but to resolve the issues if possible . . . developing teaching practice and so on . . . I think that would be really helpful because other people reading the research can identify with these problems and say, oh my god, that’s what’s happening in our department.

When I referred specifically to my investigation of team teaching in the section, she added that despite the ethical difficulties publishing such work could entail, it was still important to do so,

If they (participants) withhold their permission then it’s withheld . . . but certainly even that, in its published form is probably quite helpful to practising teachers, is the acknowledgment that gee, the idea of working in teams sounds very good . . . but team members are human beings and the have problems . . . (Renata)
3.6.2 The time bound nature of political critique

Research critique which engages with the political, and is situated in a particular location and time, cannot, therefore, claim general validity. Some forms of action research in ESL simply accept this local ‘bias’ and claim that the main intention is simply to solve a classroom problems rather than generating theory (e.g. Nunan, 1992). Such a response is, however, a contestable conception of the nature and purpose of action research as educational inquiry (Carr, 1995), i.e. educational critique and knowledge production.

Mary, whose role as section manager meant that she needed to confront corporate and professional discourses (Scollon and Scollon, 2001) raised the issue that critique that engaged with political issues could never be timeless, it always connected to specific historical circumstances.

I think it’s easy to make blanket statements about those sorts of things, where it’s actually just something that related to your particular situation and particular time, the thing about political angles, if you like, is they do change and they change remarkably quickly . . . but that doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t look at it.

If, as qualitative researchers claim, the local situated nature of research is unavoidable then all ideology critique will be always situated and particular. Quantitative research paradigms judge the acknowledged ‘temporality’ of qualitative research as a weakness (Eisner, 1991). However, such empiricist approaches simply choose to ignore their historical roots. As Cherryholmes (1988) notes in relation to construct validity, ‘Constructs, measurements, discourses, and practices are objects of history . . . Construct validity is thoroughly discursive, with the discourse a product of history and an effect of power and its consequences’ (Cherryholmes, 1988, p.116).
3.6.3 Politics of curriculum and classroom practitioners

One of the key arguments of critical applied linguistics is that political awareness and action should form part of the field which helps define ESL teaching (Pennycook, 2001), and Benesch (2001) has developed this into an extended argument about that way academic English courses should be taught. Edge suggests that ESL teachers engaged in action research cannot necessarily take on this political burden (Edge, 2001). Harvey (1999), following Pennycook, suggests that politics are absent from the discourses of NZ ESL teachers and need to be put back on the agenda through negotiated understandings between practitioners and academic researchers.

Mary notes that awareness of, for example, injustices visited on refugees by government policy, needed to be developed into critique for action to happen but that at the level of the classroom practitioner this was beyond the scope of practitioner research,

Now, if you never asked the question some of those issues will never get resolved because some of the issues that come down to us in the classroom or wherever, are actually things that can’t be solved by classroom practitioners.

Olivia takes up the idea that politics is an additional burden to ESL teachers, but interpreted my reference to politics as part of the marketisation and politicisation of teacher practice,

I yearn for the olden days when teachers taught and . . . where you weren’t so directed by policy, and where you weren’t regarded as a business, a profit making business . . . but you can’t make a profit out of education. And I feel that the politics is putting a lot more pressure on people to perform in areas in which they’re not trained . . . you find that it interferes with your interaction with students.

3.6.4 Research politics and community of practice

Having referred Renata to my own process of sharing findings with staff through ongoing opportunities for peer feedback and eliciting comment on conference papers,
she stressed how fragile communities like the ESL section needed to address the political contexts of teacher practice in safe environments:

I think our strength lies in not being divided. It lies in behaving as a community. And the only way communities can flourish is if these issues are addressed, but they have to be addressed in a safe and open and public forum.

Mary added that critical applied research could affect relationships within a small community of practice and lead to (resentful) silence:

You can be perceived in all sorts of ways by the person you’re raising it with . . . if they don’t look on what you’ve said with any sympathy then they can just see you as raising something in the wrong forum, in the wrong way, and they hide behind process. And once they start doing that your voice is effectively smothered.

Sarah suggested that a combination of dangers to existing relationships and the fear of change were both key elements in a resistance to political approaches to research:

I suppose the dangers are that it could be extremely threatening to people because change is threatening to anybody and when you start exposing or highlighting or talking about these things, I don’t know if you’re going to be talking about relationships or power structures.

Sarah then added that the ultimate criterion was whether the research was constructive, i.e. helped students:

Well I suppose if it makes clear and apparent or transparent exactly what is happening as opposed to what we think is happening . . . it could introduce constructive dialogue, it could introduce efficiencies, it could generate new plans of action, I guess.

In all the responses of interviewees, sensitivity to the fragile nature of relationships in the community of ESL practice was a key theme. Research has to contribute to
the ongoing unity of this community although, at the same time, promote reflection and development.

3.7 Conclusions

All interviewees show some reluctance in taking up applied linguistic research as relevant to practice and allude to practices in the discourses of applied linguistics that encourage a research-practice divide. On the basis of their own practical experiences, all four practitioners also believe that teacher research can provide a more useful contribution to teacher development, the strengthening of community bonds, and resolution of practical student issues. They differ, however, in the ways in which they value action research as a form of research and the extent to which it may simply be a form of existing reflective practice in disguise.

Interviewees also vary in their understanding of the scope and effects of a critical applied linguistics as a source of theorising for institutional critique. The long-term effects of action research, i.e. its ability to effect educational change in the workplace has yet to be demonstrated. Reports of action research sometimes provide inspirational tales of collaboration and personal insight. The extent to which such processes and outcomes then lead to educational improvement for students and teachers has yet to be demonstrated. One way in which educational improvement can take place is if action research engages in theorising itself as a methodology. This would entail taking on board the socio-political questions of curriculum work in institutions which critical applied linguistics suggests need foregrounding. Such a move currently runs counter to understandings of action research in second language teaching, and entails fully engaging with research cultures and methodologies in education.
Elective Research Chapter Four: Action Research: Boundaries, Tensions, and directions

The following article appeared in the Australian Educational Researcher (Melles, 1998a). In this review I look at the representation of action research in two recent texts and draw some conclusion about the limitations of these representations in terms of my own critical agenda and experience of action research, which is illustrated in the previous chapter.

4.1 Review Essay


While thematic and rhetorical continuities exist, these two volumes explore the boundaries of the theory and practice of action research in highly individual ways; this, despite editorial efforts to introduce umbrella headings and suggest itineraries. The Hollingsworth collection (hereafter IAR) distributes its twenty-seven texts unequally into four broad perspectives of action research: historically constituted discourses, political/epistemological debates, personal/pedagogical perspectives, and cross-professional approaches; there is also a final chapter overview. The Carson and Sumara texts (hereafter ARLP), on the other hand, eschew boundaries and milestones. Sustained attention is given to personal narratives and other genres in an attempt to ‘reconceptualize’ action research as a living practice where ‘epistemological concerns are conflated with ontological ones’ (ARLP, p.xviii).

While I am not yet convinced that poststructuralist approaches that ignore critical metanarratives should have unique access to educational reform, the debate regarding the horizons of educational research in a post-modern world is a very necessary one.
My approach in this review is thus to consider the ways in which educational action research is represented in these volumes, especially where critical and post-structural approaches are thrown into contrast or opposition.

### 4.2 Politico-historical reconstruction

Susan Noffke flags the recurrent historical theme of the ‘contradiction’ between democracy and social engineering in the US. Noffke, though, had nothing to say about the current political and industrial agendas of schooling in her country. Is this absence real or a product of her ‘humanistic’ (see below) stance to teacher research, or due to some other factor? In an earlier paper, Noffke (1994) also has little to say about the emancipatory role of action research in the US. David Hursh (IAR), however, suggests not only the existence of a socio-economic efficiency model in the US but also how it must be combated by local initiative and political awareness and discourses. He describes two local collaborative efforts between teachers and schooling management to create alternatives to government led reform.

Social and political inequalities are definitely on the agenda of John Elliott’s discussion (IAR) of curriculum developments in Britain. Propelled by Lawrence Stenhouse’s Humanities Project in the mid-1970s, change is now being arrested by a new ethos of economically sanctioned schooling controlled by school managers, cost-efficiency and standards-driven (competency) models that have emerged since the implementation of a prescriptive national curriculum in 1989. This has had an impact on the academy, ‘academics appear to be caught between merchandising action research as a form of personal salvation from the woes of life in schools and merchandising it as a way of optimising performance in a functional role’ (IAR, p.27). The practical reality of this mercantilistic approach and the academic dilemma signalled above are explored in the chapters by Adams et al. (IAR) on university-school collaboration in urban inner city UK. The authors show how the School Effectiveness Movement in the UK (under the impetus of the 1989 national curriculum) has brought pressure to bear on schools and individuals attempting to implement the bureaucratic discursive frameworks of government education policy.
Adams et al. look at successes, tensions and failures in their own project to bridge gaps in social justice and heighten appreciation of individual teacher efforts.

The threads of managerialism, political debate and academics are also present in Kemmis and Grundy’s chapter (IAR). An emergent centralised managerialism in education and a discourse-practice non-correspondence in the academy is threatening the vitality of action research in Australia, according to the authors. Government pursuit of central control of educational systems is not universally accepted, however. Herbert Altrichter (IAR) describes a different situation for the development of action research in Austria. While still lacking a coherent discourse, it has been paradoxically the growing public recognition of the limits of centralised government control of schooling, fed also by local initiative, that have contributed to the somewhat fragmented development of action research in this country.

4.3 Political commitment or professional growth

Noffke and Brennan (IAR) refer to two options in action research: one informed by emancipatory approaches and the other sensitive to local circumstances. The authors plump for the latter as more sensitive to the individual circumstances of practitioners and as a palliative to marginalising those who refuse to take up globalised political concerns (IAR, p.67). Gitlin and Hadded (IAR) also refer to the political (referring to Stephen Kemmis’s work) or humanist (referring to Kenneth Zeichner’s work) contrast, linking ‘educative research’ to the latter and preferring its chalk-face approach to developing emergent awareness in teachers and its avoidance of ‘a priori political commitment’ (IAR, p. 73). The paper by Chayanuvat and Lukkunaprasit (IAR) on an initial project in classroom-centred research in Thailand is politically ‘light’ in terms of this distinction they make.

Now, I think the suggestion that emancipatory approaches are top heavy with political discourse and too distant from classroom concerns is wrong. However, at the same time I accept that sometimes ‘liberatory’ (Lather, 1992) discourses either mask other intentions or attempt to impose uniformity on complex settings.
Nonetheless, both in ideological terms, in the way Carr and Kemmis (1986) describe these, and in practical terms (eg. Grundy and Kemmis, 1981), the political dimension has a key role to play. A number of other authors refer to broader social and political issues as central to the action research paradigm. Thus, in his discussion of action research on environmental education in Italy, Mayer (IAR) suggests that one of the central problems for ‘facilitators’ of action research is to induce practitioners to engage in debate about the relationship between their practice and broader social constraints.

By so doing, they will be able to ‘deconstruct their common sense’ (IAR, p. 120). The ‘dynamic networks’ created through school and community in the Environmental and Schools Initiative Project (ENSI) alluded to by Mayer, are outlined in the paper by Mair and Posch (IAR). This community and school involvement is one way of broadening the participants in the negotiation about best practice, a process that is threatened by classroom-only practical approaches. In another clear socio-political context, Davidoff (IAR) openly acknowledges the discrepancies and the palpable effects of macro-social political decision making on educational practice and reform. This is recorded against the backdrop of the current social and educational malaise of political change in South Africa. The enormity of the problem facing schools does not, therefore, allow simplistic classroom-centred awareness raising of first local and then global issues since they are mutually dependent. The macro-social issues are patently obvious and discourses of change in these locations are only beginning to be written.

4.4 Collaborative voice: Discourse on method

Collaborative writing has an increasingly important place in the panoply of educational research genres as ‘a genre that lingers between the cracks between an academic essay and a personal letter’ (IAR, p.49). Houtekamer, Chambers, Yamagishi and Striker (ARLP) explore ‘sacred’ and culturally distinct personal histories beyond the pale of ‘orthodox’ action research parameters in an ‘effort to reflect upon what we do without becoming paralysed by self-consciousness’ (ARLP,
A disposition to question publicly the status quo within a community of fellow practitioners and to do so in a sustained fashion also appear as critical features of teacher as ‘sojourner’ in Oberg, et al. (ARLP). ‘The complexities between the experiences of engaging in action research, the shifting results of those experiences and appropriate means of representing them’ (IAR, p.49) are the questions Hollingsworth, Dadds and Miller address in their collaborative response to the notion of the divide between personal and professional change. The constraining and liberating power of available discourses for meanings of research (IAR, p.157) discussed here are then picked up by Luce-Kapler (IAR), who explores the notion of these constraints as she struggles to reconstruct the ‘human’ essence of a three-person dialogue where her own ‘voice’ predominates. Kapler also attempts through poetic reframing to question feminist conceptions of the research process.

### 4.5 Cross-cultural tensions

Liberatory and transformative discourse are not the intellectual property of the industrial West. For example, Fals Borda (1979) has articulated a sensitive critique of colonialist tendencies in applying action research in third world contexts. Geoffrey Smith (ARLP) gives perspective to this dialogue in his reflections on the West’s ideological impasse at the fiction of personal autonomy (ARLP, p. 266). For Smith, social constructionism and interpretive approaches fall into the homocentric fallacy of a ‘world erected and focused on man’ (ARLP, p. 270). John Willinsky refocusses the religious undertones in Geoffrey Smith’s piece in his suggestions for ‘accountability’ in action research. Willinsky sees a need to investigate notions of ‘causality’ in schooling and educational reform as part of a program to overcome undemocratic prejudices.

Eastern reports of action research show little awareness of an ideological conflict. The overview of environments of action research in Malaysia provided by Phaik-Lah (IAR) makes no mention of this. However, the paper is generally thin on substantive discussion of epistemological, ethical and methodological issues. Yatt Kanu’s (ARLP) observation of action research is equally thin on the notion of ideological
conflict. However, Kanu finds indigenous, colonial and neo-colonial obstacles to educational development that require consideration in applying methodological principles to local contexts (ARLP, p.183). The same absence of ideological conflict is present in Fosas (IAR) on the implementation of collaborative teacher education in rural Mexico. To my mind, it is only the discussion by Socket and Zellermayer (IAR) of the specifics of implementing a critically oriented US-based course of teacher education in Israel that anything approaching explicit cultural conflict surfaces. Zellermayer points to the importance of the role of historical context in the construction of identity in Israel and the lack of a stable notion of social homogeneity as a distinctive feature for negotiating the import of educational programs in Israel (IAR, p.389).

4.6 Theory and adhesion

In focusing on the need to avoid the recycling of common sense and ‘romantically’ celebrating practice (see also Huberman, 1996), Melanie Walker (IAR) reminds practitioner-researchers that so-called common experiences are always ‘structured by particular cultures and settings’ (IAR, p.138). Theory in action research approaches can provide frameworks and categories to recapture ‘the good sense in common sense’ (IAR, p.138) and this theorised discourse of good sense needs to be articulated jointly by practitioner and academy to avoid practitioners in particular merely celebrating difference. Wells and Wells (IAR) see this joint discourse being created through ‘negotiation among equals’ requiring change in traditional orientations and participants roles (p.158) for students, teachers, and community. It also demands attention to writing, which ‘serves as a more powerful tool than oral discourse in the maintenance of social networks and structures’ (IAR, p.152).

However, even attention to theory and equal discourse will have no effect unless the individual (practitioner) is personally motivated to change. As Day (IAR) points out, ‘Teachers change or do not change according to whether they perceive a need, diagnose a problem, and conceive of a response to the problem that is both within their intellectual and emotional capacity, and appropriate to their personal, educative
and ideological perspective and the context in which they work’ (IAR, p.201). This potential ‘imperviousness’ of the individual teacher to ‘better’ models also appears elsewhere in papers that attend less to global discourses and more to the situated individual perspectives of collaborative action, especially those in the Sumara and Carson volume. It is not, therefore, simply the case that a rational/textual view (read, discuss, be convinced) can operate as sufficient incentive and process to get practitioner commitment to research and change. Nor, in fact, as Goodson (ARLP) points out, will some objectified notion of personal resonance do while notions of identity or lifestyle shopping certainly will operate as sufficient engagement and outcome for some teachers. Goodson sees in the emerging discourses of teacher as intellectual, scientist, and researcher, three alternative selves of the practitioner: the educative, ideological, and personal selves. These selves, he argues, are revealed in the verbal and non-verbal responses of teachers to teaching situations and create different possibilities for engagement and commitment to the different forms of action research on offer. On the other hand, the academy may actually thwart the movement of teachers towards clarifying these versions of self on offer and forms of engagement by re-presenting research in the romantic light of ‘escape and transcendence’ (ARLP, p.217). Thus, by appropriating certain discourses and practices of action research, the academy retains control over what it is possible to know and challenge as educational knowledge and practice.

4.5 Text as catalyst: commonplace locations

Text is a commonplace location for interpretive inquiry and deconstruction of textualised self is visualised by a number of authors. Mary Doll describes the self and other transformations achieved as non-reading undergraduates reluctantly grapple with oral recorded readings of Virginia Woolfe’s *To the Lighthouse*. The struggle with text and self becomes a locus for ‘flight’ for teachers and students and transforms a solitary (reading) experience into a communal discovery, ‘community’ understood as the teacher and student body. Similar reluctance to engage with educational texts and activities is present in Clifford and Friesen’s chapter (ARLP), where a text whose narrative of a dying community partly mirrors the experience of the local school and community, but also helps restore some to the joy of
abandonment in literature. In both the previous texts and in that of Dahlia Beck (ARLP), personal and collective memory is partly embedded in reading texts. Dahlia Beck tackles the notion of personal and collective memory through constructing and teaching curriculum to teachers in training. Through excerpts from a children’s text, Something from Nothing, Dahlia questions the role of memory in the transmission and transformation of curriculum to her elementary school teachers-in-training. These questions she links to her own desire for continuity and location.

The notion of text as catalyst for community reflection and action in social contexts is crucial also for Brennan and Noffke’s (ARLP) paper where data is a ‘catalyst for mutuality and reciprocity … to further the communicative action of members of the group (ARLP, p.26). Student teacher textual biographies reveal the semantic spread of key culture terms, eg. discipline, whose validity and emergence must be understood and perhaps contested in socio-historical hindsight. Thus the notion of diachrony and memory, if you will, returns to situate discourse. In social context and mentor-like relationships, text mediated by these (texts) surfaces in strikingly similar fashion in all three accounts.

For Sumara and Davis, text ‘as commonplace location’ (as in The Giver by Lois Lowry), becomes a focus of a collaborative school-community reorientation. The authors discuss how involving community in the choice of text for school students, texts which discuss culturally marked practices like sexuality, becomes a powerful tool in overcoming institutional fears about the results of provoking parents, being rebuked, and ultimately alienating them. The authors invoke the notion of complexity and complicit systems, articulated in the Gaia hypothesis and other post-Kuhnian approaches to ecological scientific thought and practice, to describe the nature of human sub-systems they see constituting educational processes. This biological-educational parallel is being used increasingly in some work on curriculum, such as that by William Doll. Expectations of sexuality and gender are also at issue in Lock and Minarik (IAR) who examine student-oriented exploration of gender as socially constructed through playground interactions and male and female prejudices revealed in the talk of children. Open discourse with the researchers on the attitudes of boys
and girls to one another reveal not only the existence of borrowed stereotypes but also the potential for renegotiated understandings through different contacts and encounters between the children.

### 4.6 Freud, Lacan, Brecht and pedagogy

History, semantics and text genres also find a place in the interface of psychoanalysis, drama and pedagogy that informs the next group of chapters. Derek Briton (ARLP) revisits his own earlier reflective texts and finds not only truths about his unconscious self but also new meaning in his re-reading of himself through the Lacanian notion of the divided ‘I’. Educational practice generates an inexhaustible potential for learning and involves ‘not the transfer of knowledge but the creation of conditions that make it possible to learn, the creation of an original learning disposition’ (ARLP, p.55). In this way, the practices and texts of educational action research become a source for psychoanalysis as living practice.

Freud’s voices (Ana and Sigmund) also feature in Britzman and Pitt’s article (ARLP) on transference in pedagogy. Teachers must learn about and control their own conscious and subconscious conflicts and not allow them to be re-enacted in new teaching situations, argue the authors. Without critical examination of these conflicts, the identities, desires and difficulties of students can be viewed as dissociated from those of the teacher. This situation is re-enacted for Britzman and Pitt who find that student-teacher responses to texts embodying powerful social taboos about sexuality do not match their assumed interpretation. This, they argue, is a powerful reminder of the fact that texts can be used as stages (platforms) for posing problems rather than being content for the cure of pre-conceived problems. There is, therefore, a need to resist ‘our own impulse to self-mastery that seems to require us to view the students as in need of our correction’ (ARLP, p.74).

Terence Carson (ARLP) relates the experience of teacher educators engaging students in reflective discourse through journal writing so they can fathom the relationship between the development of teaching skills and self-conscious
understanding of self. At the same time the authors develop the theme of overcoming individual and institutional resistance to reflective practice. As O’Hanlon (IAR) points out, text types vary across and within the professional journal, and these variations respond to the local contingencies and experiences of the individual. There is no single stable image of the journal and this perhaps affects its potential usefulness. While useful as a tool for examining identities and constitutions of self, the journal has limits, as Carson indicates. The sense of control and certainty of having found oneself in the text cannot be substantiated. In relation to this, Lacan’s notion of the divided self and the dynamically constructed ego has two implications for teaching. First, the desire for professional identity can never be fulfilled since the unified self is an illusion and one’s identity as a teacher is largely constructed unconsciously, a process that is beyond one’s control.

Paula Salvio (ARLP) adds a distinct coda to this particular discussion about notions of self in educative contexts with her recourse to Brechtian geste to produce moments of interruption and estrangement ‘so teachers can insert political, pedagogical, or epistemological commentary on the emotional life in their stories’ (ARLP, p.254). Theatrical improvisation based on a selective re-symbolising of critical moments in narrative autobiographies can help the teacher ‘begin to recognise emotions as a viable path toward understanding the relationships between their pedagogic intentions and the curriculum in their classrooms’ (ARLP, p.261). The notions of self identified through dramatic or psychoanalytic technique draw inspiration from the force of analogy to provide models of interpretation in educational inquiry.

4.7 Discourse and practice: non-correspondences and hermeneutics

A series of critical incidents articulate a set of reflections on self and identity as Couture, Grimmet and Miller note significant non-correspondences between discourse and practice that are enunciated by a shifting self. The critical incident in Jean-Claude Couture’s narrative is the sacking of a colleague and the sense this
person has of being personally betrayed. This event provokes a flood of reflections on the notion of self and selves set in the visual context of the day-to-day journey from home to school. Couture’s piece is partly cathartic and partly evocative and he believes that memorable stories of whatever ilk will resonate for others (ARLP, p.116).

The critical incident in Peter Grimmet’s piece comes through an attempt to transform ‘didactic professor’ into ‘learner-focused teacher educator. This practice-what-you-preach attitude re-surfaces in other narratives in this volume including Miller’s (see below). Grimmet reflects on what seemed to him a successful classroom practice and finds a number of disjunctions between discourse and practice, including his realisation that ‘what I had characterised ‘communal discourse’ was in fact, classroom talk about a series of disconnected ideas’ (ARLP, p.127). Moreover, when the activism of the group experience is exposed to the open critique of student journals this reveals that there are some who do not wish to be forced into communal collaboration.

The need for academics to critically re-read their conventionalised discourse is apparent also in Janet Miller’s contribution to the conversation. Here, academic self-criticism stems from her collaboration with five classroom elementary teachers. She is motivated by her own ongoing concern to avoid her ‘academically induced tendencies to romanticise, generalise, or technologise the purposes and forms of collaborative action research’ (p.199). It is in the reciprocal ‘disruptive’ interpretations of teacher and researcher concerning classroom realities that the dynamics of transformative research are realised. A critical incident serves to crystallise for the researcher her intellectual role as guide and mentor. Her cohort’s apparent willingness to adopt a packaged curriculum stuns Miller into silence. Their decision-making ignores all the ‘theoretical positions and collaborative research goals’ (p.209) she believed she had helped to inculcate. She realises in hindsight that the dialectic process of the decision-making revealed in the student-teacher negotiations was a valuable outcome. At the same time, the ‘disappointing’ choice of
texts by the teachers helped her realise that there is a gap between abstract notions of critical discourse and practical teacher realities (ARLP, p.206).

Textual hermeneutics married to action research inform Hans Smits’ recall of five aporias present in the narrative restoration of self. Dissatisfied with the theoretical notion of reflection and the procedural ‘method’ aspects of action research (ARLP, p.283), Smits searches for a method to cope with the multi-layered narrative essential to identity. He argues that ‘one’s self and identity grow not out of self-reflection but rather out of a narrative possibility, that is, ‘of story that has a potential to be told’ (ARLP, p.284). The problematic issues (aporia) that emerge in response to this program all refer in direct or oblique ways to notions of truth, validity, authority, and responsibility. Smits identifies reproduction, authority and emancipation, conversation, theory and practice, and ethics as genuinely problematic issues in the constitution of educational meaning, understanding, action, and knowledge through discourse. He concludes that ‘To the extent that action research can contribute to solidarity, to developing spaces for conversation and dialogue in order to support the creation of self and identity, then that is indeed living practice, one inspired by hermeneutics’ (ARLP, p.293).

4.8 Metaphors

The power of action research to animate fields other than education is now as sufficient a commonplace as is the role of metaphor in educational research (Oldfather and West, 1994). Both of these factors are present in the report by Montgomery-Whicher (ARLP) on analogies between art and phenomenological research. The grounding of artistic observation and research in the everyday world, the orientation toward a ‘renewed’ contact with the world, and the aim to relearn to see, constitute for the author three parallels across both fields (ARLP, p.217).

Metaphor as a tool for refocussing is also discussed in Tahler and Somehk with contributions from Draper and Doughty (ARLP) who address the notion of agency in organisational change and note in particular how professional roles are explored
Elective Research Chapter Four: Action research – boundaries, tensions, and directions

through recourse to metaphor as a technique to identify and ‘figure’ identities ‘allowing the starting of a process of clarification without freezing conceptions in a definition’ (ARLP, p.324). Losito and Pozzo (ARLP) find metaphor a useful tool in delineating their respective researcher roles in a collaborative project with heads of schools under the auspices of the European-funded MOHD (see below for details).

4.9 Cross-professional perspectives

Action Research has had an increasingly positive reception in nursing and health care, including cross-cultural contexts of political and social inequality and exploring women’s empowerment (Khanna 19996). Less stridently political accounts in industrialised countries point to other individual and social tensions in the micro-social contexts of the nursing community. Here Foucault’s notice about the working out of power-knowledge confrontations in local small-scale instances seems relevant. Learning to re-see brings its own pains and emotions as David Jardine’s (ARLP) shows in a critical encounter between a nursing researcher and a patient. In an interview setting, unexpected emotions, reactions and fears emerge as the human reality of suffering is exposed under the clinically appropriate but ethically inappropriate attitudes and methods to research. Angie Titchen (IAR) adds some social depth to the notion of transformative nursing practice and education explored by Jardine. She documents the tensions, events and encounters produced under a collaborative approach to patient-centred nursing in a British hospital where nurse, patient, and institutional power relationships craft expectations and behaviours.

Somekh and Thaler contribute texts to both volumes on the nature of organisational change under the auspices of a European funded Management of Human and Organisational Development (MOHD) program. In looking at organisational hierarchies and agency for change in different management contexts, the authors note that those advocating and promoting change tend to operate outside traditional roles and thus position themselves politically with their respective organisations. Overcoming resistance to change requires that change agents whether working as external facilitators or not, have principled access across organisational hierarchies to all participants. In commercially oriented environments such as company sites,
transforming existing power relationships brings with it its own tensions. Winter et al. (ARLP) show that vocational tertiary teaching contexts are not anathematic to collaborative research methods. They show how competency-based assessment, a guiding principles for the National Council for Vocational Qualifications in the UK, may be explored through an action research approach in developing personal competency statements for teachers. This paper touches on concerns within my own workplace in a New Zealand polytechnic.

4.11 Conclusions

We seem to have touched every possible base in the ballpark. What is educational action research? Are we being over essentialist in asking the question and thereby excluding certain practices? Sumara and Carson attempt to answer the first question,

We have come to believe that any form of inquiry that seeks to learn about the complexly formed, ecologically organised relations of lived experience are, of course, forms of inquiry, forms of research. When these forms of research are specifically organized around questions of learning, understanding, and/or interpretation, they are in the broadest sense, concerned with education and, thus, may be considered educational. When they self-consciously attempt to alter perception and action they are transformational. Any form of inquiry that fulfils these three criteria, we believe, constitutes a form of action research (ARLP, p.xxi.).

This definition in its broad scope naturally embraces both critical and post-structuralist responses to the demand for educational reform in post-modern contexts of dynamically constructed teacher identities and practices. However, we can ask whether such a definition responds to the needs of practitioner-researchers trying to locate personal and professional growth within the myriad of conflicting pressures they experience in the workplace? Does such a catch-all definition allow for a community response to social injustice and democratic educational reform or does it deflect attention from these issues by overtly legitimising personal narrative to the exclusion of any attempt to set understanding in social context, however real one
wants to view this? Critical theorists contest the nature of post-modern scepticism to the meta-narratives of social injustice and democratic goals. They will, I believe, also contest the efficacy of personal narrative for educational reform. As a ‘workplace-bound’ practitioner, I also question the assumption that methodological, epistemological, and ethical boundaries are reified fictions. But I leave this conclusion open to reinterpretation through further encounters with action research as living practice.
Elective Research Chapter Five: In Search of Individual, Group, and Institutional Coherence: Does This Compute?

The following chapter is included in an anthology of case studies of action research in second language teaching (Edge, 2001). In this paper I work with three teachers to develop an action research project on the integration of computer-based work in the curriculum. In chapter three, Mary and Sarah position themselves with respect to the research/practice binary, and also evaluate the nature and purposes of action research. Sandra, who appears in the dissertation, had no experience with teacher research prior to the project. This chapter can be usefully juxtaposed to the reflections of chapters three and four.

5.1 Introduction

ESOL teaching in the 1990s was marked by the increasing presence of computers in the classroom and in the literature - this being just one instance of a more general movement toward the greater use of educational technology and computers in education. In language teaching the whole range of available software and environments is flagged as a potential source of independent and collaborative learning activities (eg. Crookes, 1993; Flowerdew, 1996; Schcolnik and Kol,1999; Warschauer, 1995). Teachers are enjoined to take advantage of the power of these tools to encourage learner autonomy and to develop more flexible activities and syllabi (Pennington, 1996). There is, therefore, a strong claim that computer-assisted language learning (CALL) can help construct a learner-centred curriculum and develop learner independence.

Of course, learner centredness as a language teaching philosophy demands a redefinition of teacher and student roles (Tudor, 1996), and the effect of the computer as tool (Levy, 1997) on the teaching environment will, it is claimed, entail further challenges to teacher and student roles and identities. Teacher authority (ego) will be challenged as independent learners forge their own way to learning through interaction with computer-based activities. Consequently, teachers ‘will have to find
new roles, as advisers, as managers, even as fellow learners discovering new insights into language by using the same facilities as their students’ (Higgins, 1995, p.7). In this sense, the computer becomes something of a democratic leveller or instrument of change, in that it forces teacher and student to interact under the constraints of a new relationship.

At the same time, research has begun to investigate, among other issues, teacher resistance to the use of computers (Moore, Morales, and Carel, 1998), the development of autonomy through computer use (Blin, 1998), student perceptions of CALL (Brown, 1998), and the limitations of software applications (Kluge, 1997). What these findings highlight is that we are still finding our way in a search for research approaches to CALL in order to measure the actual educational benefits and limitations of computers in language teaching (Chappelle, 1997; Chappelle, Jamieson and Park, 1996; Motteram, 1998).

An ideal solution for this state of affairs would be to find a research approach that engaged both teachers and students and that aimed at working toward educational improvement broadly conceived to include cognitive and behavioural modifications or adjustment as goals. Action research promises to resolve some of the issues by engaging teachers and learners in a systematic collaborative investigation of their practices and beliefs with a view to transformation and change in the classroom (Cohen and Manion, 1994)

Within second language teaching, action research has recently received much attention (Burns, 1999; Chen and Johnson, 1992; Crookes and Chandler, 1999; Edge and Richards, 1993), although not all of this work has been consistent in its recognition of the critical foundations of action research in education (eg. Crookes and Chandler, 1999). This lack of attention to educational definitions, history, and discussion of action research has led to an individualistic, descriptive focus that eschews the necessity for change and collaboration (Nunan, 1992) and supports the idea that action research can be fitted neatly into existing normative traditions (see Carr, 1995).
The issue of concern in this project is the integration of computer-based activities in the ESOL syllabus. It is not about an individual teacher’s solution to an immediate classroom problem but about a more open investigation of problematic themes with a broader focus than the classroom which includes curriculum policy and the generation and validation of teacher knowledge and reflection. It is about a group of practitioners trying to investigate and transform teaching practice through individual action within a broader group concern. Finally, this report touches on the issue of definitions in teacher research to the extent that participatory action research in practice cannot and should not be bound by method guidelines that exclude flexible responses to local circumstances. Disseminating our experience as collaborative researchers through this report aims not only to represent our voices from the classroom (Bailey and Nunan, 1996) but also to take a stance on what constitutes professional development as a critical endeavour.

5.2 Situation

ESL teaching at the Waikato Polytechnic includes a broad range of specific (ESP) and general (EGP) English programs aimed at recent immigrants and international students. Typically, students enrol for a 10-week (term) or 20-week block (semester) and are timetabled for 15-20 hours of classroom teaching. Depending on the nature of the course and the teacher, the students will have varying amounts of homework and assignments to complete as part of their program. The timetables of most programs include a computer hour and some of the assessment tasks, especially in the ESP courses (eg. English for Tertiary Study, English for Living and Working), which include tasks that mandate or strongly recommend the use of word processing.

Team teaching is the preferred teaching dynamic in the department, and this means that two or three teachers take responsibility for managing particular areas of the program, eg. reading and grammar. This typically leads to one teacher becoming responsible for the computer hour. All the full-time staff have at least two years experience of teaching in the ESOL section, and some have more than ten. Of a total staff (full-time and part-time) of more than 30 people, two are male. The typical
educational background for teachers is an undergraduate arts degree, a postgraduate diploma in ESL, and roughly ten years experience in general and ESL education combined. Three staff have MA degrees in language (French), linguistics, or ESOL; other staff are pursuing MAs and other postgraduate courses. Research experience and training is not a major feature of teacher profiles, and academic research (as reported in journals) is not much referred to when teachers talk about their practice.

Despite the difficulties associated with pursuing academic research topics, as well as the doubtful practical relevance with which normative research findings are perceived, a teacher research culture has begun to develop over the past couple of years. The preferred approach has been in the action research paradigm, although other forms of research have also been employed. Naturally, the way the action research paradigm has been explored has differed in each case. This particular project, regarding the integration of CALL into the ESOL syllabus, fits in, then, with an emerging tradition of teacher research in a department where a teaching, rather than an academic, identity is an important factor.

Within the past couple of years, a computer lab has been set up in the department at considerable cost. This includes ten IBM-compatible and ten Macintosh computers. Due to poor network connections and other circumstances, students do not have access to the Internet from the lab location; networking problems also lead to substantial and unpredictable down-time for staff and students. Computer lab activities in ESOL have been limited by this constraint, and it continues to be a source of some embarrassment and difficulty for teaching staff who would like to explore the Web with students.

Despite these practical difficulties, the Polytechnic has developed a technology plan that encourages extensive and innovative use of educational technology (The Waikato Polytechnic, 1998) and reinforces this discourse in its promotional materials. Thus staff are caught on the horns of a dilemma: they are faced with institutional imperatives to develop and use technology, while in practice they are
aware of the limitations of student and teacher access to computer hardware and software.

5.3 Focus

Within the constraints mentioned above, I had experienced my own difficulties in managing computer-based learning activities within the timetabling of ESOL courses I had taught in the department. In discussing these frustrations in corridor conversations and more formal meeting settings, one of the key terms to emerge for me personally was the notion of coherence.

My use of the term coherence hinges on a number of senses that were relevant to the question at hand. First, there was my own feeling of the lack of relationship between the computer lab activities students did and the topics they were otherwise studying. My feeling was that there should be a greater integration of computer activities and the ESOL syllabus as it was planned and implemented by teachers. The issue here was whether others shared this perception. The second sense of coherence that was important related to the team-teaching dynamic. It seemed to me that computer teaching was an isolated optional activity that was not coherently and consistently pursued by co-teachers in a course. So, for example, there was no reinforcement of the computer-based activities in the language and activities of team-teaching members not concerned with this issue; incoherence related to the human dynamic of teaching. Was this simply a personal disjunction? Had others experienced this? Finally, my feeling was that there was a lack of coherence in the departmental approach to computer-based activities and policies, which seemed ad hoc in their definitions and application. This lack of coherence included the mismatch between the institutional directives embodied in the technology plan and the technological realities of using computers with students. The formula was complicated further by the acknowledged difference of opinion, knowledge, and attitude of staff with regard to the role of computers in ESOL teaching. Was greater cohesion possible at the level of the ESL unit as a whole? Was this a feasible and worthwhile objective? I return to these negotiable notions of coherence and some of the answers we received (or not) in the outcomes and reflections below.
I began expressing my concerns about these issues in e-mails to colleagues, which I sent over a six-month period (January-June 1999). Colleagues in the department responded encouragingly and critically to my suggestions to pursue a more coherent application of computers to the syllabus. Some felt it was simply a matter of individual choice and decision. Others felt ill equipped to give answers to these questions. A discussion group formed that debated some of these issues during those first six months, and this included some of the teachers who eventually joined in on the project. At the end of this six-month period, I proposed that we pursue the issue of CALL and ESOL syllabus integration through a teacher research project, employing an action research framework. I believed that addressing the issue through a research approach that already had an established credibility in the department was an essential factor. Eventually, three other teachers agreed to work together with me, with some participation also from a technical allied staff member.

An essential milestone in this process was the convergence of views on the nature of the issue at hand. This notion of issue is important to stress. Too often, action research is framed in terms of a problem-solution approach for an individual teacher. So, for example, a teacher feels (or is told) that her use of questions in the classroom is not adequate. She, consequently, engages in an action-observation-reflection spiral to discover what is wrong so that she can remedy the situation, that is, so that she now asks more open questions. The difficulty with this kind of framing of the action research topic is that it closes the door on a more open exploration of the educational issues. Where a collaborative group shares a general concern, as in the case of this study, there is no obvious solution nor any specific problem to resolve. There is rather a perception of incoherence and an attempt to clarify what is at stake with a view to improving the correspondence between what we say and what we do in an educational context.

To help focus the thematic concern, I used an instrument called the Aristotelian table of invention (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). Each prospective member of the action research group received a copy of the table and was asked to explore the table
as a way of focusing our concerns. The table and some model answers I supplied as provocateur follow. I need to stress that the answer I suggested for each intersection of the table is only one possibility. When we had worked through this chart and identified all the intersections we could, it became clear that we all had some conceptions about why computer-based activities and the syllabus did not work well together. These included, for example, poor attitudes on the part of colleagues, poor knowledge on our part, and difficult jargon in the literature in relation to the topic. This analysis helped give substance and focus to our future work. We discussed each factor that emerged in our team meeting as we worked toward articulating our group concern and our individual action plans for the first cycle.
5.4 Response

Our action research proposal comprised a collaborative investigation broken into three cycles of action-observation-reflection-planning over a 20-week semester teaching period. At the end of each cycle, there would be a focus group meeting to draw individual and group conclusions and prepare for the cycle ahead. Individual members of the action research group were left to explore the issue of computer and ESOL integration within the limits of their own timetabling. Thus, there was an essential individual element of the research within the framework of the group concern.

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Table 4.1 Sample Aristotelian Table of Invention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CALL/ ESOL</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Subject Matter</th>
<th>Milieux</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Teachers do not communicate with others about their experiences and knowledge of CALL.</td>
<td>Some teachers believe students derive little benefit from CALL activities.</td>
<td>Some staff have had training in CALL at university.</td>
<td>Teachers are not fully aware of the computer resources available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Some students have better computer literacy and knowledge than teachers.</td>
<td>Some students like the independence of working alone at a computer, not with others.</td>
<td>We have students who have poor attitudes to computer-use.</td>
<td>Students are not fully aware of the computer resources on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Matter</td>
<td>Much of the CALL literature is pitched in terms of language that alienates teachers.</td>
<td>There is still not enough computer-based, good quality language learning material.</td>
<td>Critical evaluation of CALL is thin on the ground.</td>
<td>There is quite a lot of discussion about CALL in this milieu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milieux</td>
<td>The Polytechnic has a strong technology discourse that teachers cannot ignore.</td>
<td>There are a number of access points to computers for students in the institution.</td>
<td>The library has a growing number of texts on computer topics.</td>
<td>Departments do not share information about this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.1 Participants

Four teaching staff, including myself, formed the action group. All participants had different roles with regard to the course syllabus, and this introduced an element of diversity and coverage into the project. In my own case, I was a computer tutor not responsible for the course syllabus per se in the ESP course on which I taught. Two of the other tutors involved in the project were responsible for the language syllabus on their course as classroom co-teachers. As I discovered, trying to integrate computer activities into the language syllabus where one was not also a classroom teacher, as in my case, strongly emphasised the need for constant communication with classroom teachers. A fourth member of the action team was teaching on-line through an external arrangement that was not linked to teaching students in the department. In essence, she was working on creating and teaching an on-line syllabus in listening outside of the departmental teaching program. We were keen to include her because she was doing on-line teaching, and this was an area that the department wanted to introduce although we were thwarted for some of the administrative reasons noted above. Finally, one of the members of the action research group was a technical support person, whose overall input was limited but a collaborative educational context, it is a bonus to have representation from across departmental or institutional boundaries.

5.4.2 Overview

Table 4.2 illustrates the groups, resources and student feedback mechanisms used by each teacher.
Table 4.2: Groups, resources and student feedback mechanisms used by each teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gavin</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Sandra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group</strong></td>
<td>Vocational English students</td>
<td>Preparatory EAP group</td>
<td>Beginning ESL students</td>
<td>Two different groups of on-line students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main resources</strong></td>
<td>PowerPoint 97 Word 97 CD-ROM</td>
<td>PowerPoint 97 CD-ROM</td>
<td>Word processing CD-ROM</td>
<td>Web-based listening course Web-based EAP writing course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback</strong></td>
<td>Student survey forms</td>
<td>Student survey and discussion</td>
<td>Video recording, student surveys</td>
<td>E-mail and face-to face surveys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.3 Action Plans

Individual action plans were formulated to address the following questions:

1. What class am I going to work with?
2. What am I going to do, that is, what software approach am I using?
3. What difficulties do I perceive?
4. How does this work help explore and improve the CALL and ESOL syllabi?
5. How will I gather evidence on student participation and attitudes?

Another member of the action group (the ‘buddy’), who would comment on the substance of the plan and make any suggestions, then annotated the formulated action plan. Here is an example of annotation, based on Sandra plan to use Sonicmail, available at <http://www.lycos.com/computers/downloads/lycosware/soncimail> in a Web-based listening course for which she was responsible for developing the syllabus in negotiation with students. I responded to her first action plan with the following,

I will be interested to know how the Sonicmail works, technically I mean. As you know, I will be developing an on-line course during this semester, so your experiences are crucial. It is per se interesting to explore listening via web-based teaching because it does require a minimum set of technology
standards. It also interests me that you have to deal with the question of individual versus group contact because of time and number commitments; I think this is a reminder that on-line teaching, while it may be more flexible in a sense, is not necessarily quicker. The evaluation sheet three-weekly is a bit of a bind, I suppose, since you don’t know what is happening; can they also send you personal e-mail about individual gripes? I see you have already thought ahead to the questions you need to address in terms of the relationship between what you are doing and syllabus/curriculum integration. Good luck. I will try to think of anything that might be useful to read or visit if you want to know. (Gavin)

No limitations were set on what constituted valid evidence-gathering instruments. Teachers chose to use video, anecdotal observations, survey forms, and narrative to get responses from students and integrate this into their data collection.

### 5.4.5 Reflective Journals

All the participants kept reflective journals. Immediately following the teaching session, teachers would record their observations about the class: a basic description of the lesson, an evaluation of success, and a reference to evidence gathered. At a later stage in the week, the teacher would then add a later, slightly distanced, reflection. Sometimes these would be motivated by conversations with other teachers or by having read literature. The buddy from the group would then read the reflective note and add her annotation to his comment. By ensuring an ongoing dialogue among participants about the realisation of the action plan, we helped promote a critically reflective dimension to the project. Below is an example of a journal entry and annotation.

**SANDRA - July 1999 - Journal Entry 1**

**Class Description**

My class is a Listening class on-line. In May, I originally had a class of 188. Only 60 of those wrote an introductory letter to me when asked. Only about 20 of them responded to the first lesson sent. After having been away on
holiday for four weeks, none of them responded to the lesson I sent them. They came from all over the world and from many backgrounds. Quite a few of them were in jobs connected with computers and obviously needed English for their job. I have now asked to be sent a new class and am waiting for it to start.

Evaluation

Obviously, I haven’t been a great success at my first attempt to teach on-line.

Evidence about students gathered

I intend to send students an evaluation questionnaire every three weeks or so.

Later Reflection on CALL and Syllabus

I have done several things to try and learn what I did wrong. Firstly, I wrote to a mentor on-line. They said that most teachers have a large drop out rate because the lessons are free and most students are already into full time work. The second thing that worried me was that I felt that I couldn’t give individual feedback, only group feedback, because of time restraints. I know this would have affected some of the students. The mentor said that group feedback was all right in the circumstances and many teachers do choose to do things that way. I then went and talked to BL. He pointed out perhaps a major aspect of on-line teaching, that of the need for social interaction amongst the class members. He encouraged me to have a Bulletin Board for my next class and to use it every few weeks as part of the lesson. He also showed me some other ways of producing listening lessons so that I wasn’t always just using Sonicmail. I did have quite a few technical problems at first getting used to Sonicmail. Many of the students couldn’t hear me. That would have been frustrating for them. All of the above issues are relevant to CALL and the syllabus in that we’re on a learning curve and by making mistakes we are learning better ways of doing things for the future. There are major issues involved of time, social aspects, technical knowledge that have
to be ironed out early on if we are to be successful in developing future courses.

**Annotation**

Your frustration with losing a class is something similar to the frustration one feels when technology fails in the lab. It certainly is interesting to see the issue of the social dynamic surfacing everywhere because this is a major research issue also. It certainly is salutary to see the kind of low uptake rate you get with on-line courses and to think about the factors involved. The notion of group and individual feedback is something I am thinking about for my own WebCT course and I am about to give individual feedback to my 12 students in ELW; now those numbers are manageable. I hope you get back on line soon and we can talk about what you and I are learning about that kind of teaching. One question I would ask you is, how constrained are you in terms of course design for this listening course because drop out can, of course also relate to poor design and/or teaching. What do you think? (Gavin)

### 5.6 Group Focus Meetings

Group focus meetings were planned for the end of each cycle, for all participants to discuss the results of the previous cycle in terms of their action plan and the group theme. The focus group meeting allowed everyone a chance to hear and comment on progress, both their own and that of others. Intended actions and observations measured up more or less with previously stated intentions, and rationalising (individually) modifications to plans formed part of the interim discourse of the project. The results of these meetings were to lead to the design of modified action plans for the next cycle and the pursuit of revised goals. I volunteered to record these meetings and then turn them into a summary (not a transcript) for participants to check. A critical incident from the first group focus meeting is represented in the summary extract that follows. One of the participating teachers, with some experience and knowledge of action research, raised the question about whether what we were doing, in fact, measured up to the paradigm.
Mary questions whether there was any real sense of change in Cycle 2, in particular with reference to my work. I responded by saying that there were difficulties in conceiving of the project in the way it had been done before action research project because

- The area (CALL) was still very uncharted.
- There were many constraints, for example, technology, which were part of the environment.
- There was a lack of software.
- Teacher knowledge was still developing.
- Pupil attitudes to computers were not clear.

Sarah added that, even so, the process had raised broader questions about policy regarding software purchase and what money was available in the account to do this. Sarah added that this particular question could become a research focus, ie. purchase policy and analysis of student needs.

As illustrated in the quotation above, group focus meetings are occasions where the history of the project is negotiated, and the outcomes to date inform the next research focus. It is essential at these meetings that participants have an opportunity to describe how their individual action plan is being realised, what some of their conclusions have been on the research process, and what the results are vis-a-vis the students. It is also an occasion where the future begins to be mapped out as the next cycle of planning is decided or debated as a way forward. Finally, it is an opportunity in which existing frameworks (eg. methodologies and policies) can be challenged and discussed within the confines of a group committed to change.

5.7 Outcomes

Outcomes in terms of a collaborative research project like this can be conceptualised in at least three ways: milestones, individual/group products, and student benefits.
5.7.1 Milestones

Each group focus meeting has both a retrospective and prospective function. It is a simultaneous opportunity for interim outcomes and critical moments of decision to be noticed and recorded in their own right, and at their own time, as milestones in the project. Action plans are in principle tentative and affected by all the contingencies of teaching during semester, for example, technology breakdowns, teacher illness, and student response. For one teacher (Sandra) this meant coping with the fact that an on-line class almost disappeared and trying to understand why, while at the same time reorienting her work to another group so that she could continue her action plan intentions. For myself, it meant describing my difficulties with a group of students who lacked clear personal direction and motivation and therefore frustrated my attempts to be systematic and coherent in ways that seemed valid to me. For all of us, it meant explaining to a greater or lesser extent how classroom and external constraints had thwarted, redirected, and informed what we did. The effect of these milestone experiences extends beyond the project itself.

5.7.2 Individual/Group Products

In terms of measuring up to our goal of improving the integration of CALL into the ESOL syllabus, there were successes and setbacks. Successes came through sometimes as individual development, as teachers talked of their own enlightenment and empowerment through new experiential knowledge. As I listened to recordings of our group focus meetings and revisited the journal entries, there were moments that I identify as critical, moments where, either individually or collectively, we seem to be saying something that shows we have moved on, or that we are interested enough to want to find out more about an issue.

I see some of this at work in the following extract from Action Plan 2, where Mary talks about personal enlightenment and achievement through the experience of the project in her work with beginners:
I found there is a real interest and motivation for students to actively engage in the learning task with the computer and take control, i.e. not to be passive learners waiting to be directed. This has definite implications for the learning-to-learn aspects of ESOL syllabus, developing autonomy and for a student-led, self-paced syllabus. (Mary)

Sarah, also reflects on her ‘enlightenment’ as a result of the project.

From the practical teaching and classroom management side of things, I have learned a lot about how it works in practice with this level: for example, establishing routines of having pen and paper and dictionary handy for taking notes of new vocabulary, printing a hard copy to take away, and gathering the group together at the start of the lesson. I have gained some clarity about CALL and syllabus and the need to be clear about what aspects of the syllabus the lesson is really focussing on, for example, the learning-to-learn syllabus, or vocabulary development, or reading or writing or speaking, and the question presents itself: is work-processing an accepted part of our writing syllabus? One aspect of the writing syllabus which I found the CALL work helpful with at this level was teaching punctuation. (Sarah)

Action research is about improving practice, but improving it in specific ways. One essential element of this improved practice is the development of a more coherent discourse about the issue in question - practitioners began to talk the same language in a way that was not the case before. A group-oriented outcome is the coherence that developed among participants in terms of discourse, practice, and social organization within the project constraints.

This came home to me in an in-house dissemination session held at the conclusion of the project. A slightly sceptical but interested audience asked one of the participating teachers (Mary) whether working with a particular piece of software (Microsoft PowerPoint97™) in a computer environment had in fact been the motivation for an enthusiastic, focused debate about a discussion topic for an English
for academic purposes class. The teacher replied that she felt that, yes, it was in fact the environment that had made the difference. Knowing both where Mary had come from in the project (with little knowledge and some scepticism about computer activities) and something about the attitude of the questioner to computer-based activities, this was a significant statement about the power of CALL that had emerged through a knowledge-in-practice; experience.

So what about the students? Whereas the focus of the action research was strongly on ourselves as teachers, the project itself necessarily involved learning and student benefits (and potential hazards). Ongoing reports in journal entries and in focus group meetings highlighted for some how students were enjoying the greater coherence between syllabus/classroom activities and computer activities. Each of us gathered impressions from students through surveys, questionnaires, and discussions with them about how they viewed our explicit focus on computer-based activities as part of the language syllabus. These reports highlighted a number of key points:

- Students positively evaluated teacher enthusiasm and preparation with their awareness of coherence between the computer lab activities and their classroom activities.
- Working with students with very different attitudes and experiences of computers was a challenging issue on which we needed to focus.
- The great majority of students wanted more time with the computer. This had not been our impression or experience before, and this issue is being addressed in current computer lab scheduling.

Finally, here, an outcome with great future resonance: in the course of our closing group meeting (Cycle 3), Mary reported on her class survey and discussion of what they had done. She found that while students appreciated the focus on computers she had adopted, they did not see the language practice benefits she thought were obvious. For example, when her EAP group used PowerPoint97™ as a tool for group discussion and consensus building, students were engaged in animated,
focused speaking practice, and Mary was amazed at how well the sessions went in comparison to her previous experiences with similar groups in a non-computer environment. When students reflected on this experience, which they enjoyed, they did not acknowledge the language practice benefits that Mary saw as central to the whole activity - central to her syllabus and plan. Her reporting this incident led to our group’s discussing the mismatch of student and teacher perspectives and how we might investigate this gap.

5.8 Reflections

There are four points about the mechanics and nature of the project that I would suggest are worth repeating and considering for those about to engage in teacher research projects.

5.8.1 The Power of the Collaborative Paradigm

Action research in education originated in contexts of collaborative participatory frameworks. Engaging with colleagues, students, and administration, with a view to developing a more coherent set of practices, discourse, and organization, is not possible through individualised approaches. In a sense, this project attempted to have one foot in both camps by having teachers, as individuals, largely steer their action research through their own schedules. Although diary annotations and group meetings kept reminding us what the group issues were and served to keep the encouragement and critique going, the individual responsibility and pathway remained a dominant and somewhat contestable feature of the project. Could we have been more united in our approach? There were different positions on this issue, partly resolved by admitting that we were doing something worthwhile and learning and improving our knowledge and practice.

5.8.2 Open Posing of Problematic Teaching Issues

A problematic theme is much more consistent with collaborative than individual action research in that consensus and negotiation are constantly targeted in the
former but not the latter. It was essential in this project because our teaching circumstances, our different computer literacies, and the limits of technology resources made a single focus across all class levels a practical impossibility. There are ways, I think, in which we could have developed a more focused project given other circumstances, and maybe this would have been more satisfying or beneficial. What stands out, however, is that there are clear signals in our texts of what we learned about our limits, and the limits of multimedia, as components of language teaching.

### 5.8.3 The Need for Data Without Interference

Action research demands a rational approach to data gathering, but data-gathering procedures do not need to mimic normative empiricist research traditions. With regard to the improvement of educational practice and the development of credible educational theory, teachers rightly view laboratory settings typical of normative research with suspicion. This means that practitioners should be encouraged, within the constraints of their teaching environment and timetable, to use those methods that produce evidence sufficient to the individual and the project as a whole.

### 5.8.4 The Import of Developing a Critical Discourse

It is important to let practitioners question definitions and practices, and to address issues that transcend the classroom and enter the world of policy and institution. The reflective annotated journal used in this project attempts to create this critical dimension and help us probe our own professional beliefs and conceptions. But corridor conversations and the text of more than 200 e-mail messages, spanning 12 months of dialogue, raised critical issues about ethics, attitudes, ownership, and research methodologies, to mention only some of the more significant themes. As I commented to a colleague at the conclusion of the project, we would like to think this has made a difference not only to ourselves. Whether it has and how we could know this remain questions we still need to explore.
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Chapter Six: Dissertation Introduction

The dissertation reports on a critical ethnography of curriculum work in ESL. I call the account a critical ethnography because the methods used and my long-term engagement with the research site connect with this tradition of research in education. In particular, I attempt to probe the ideologies of ESL teaching with a view to raising awareness about some of the possible limitations of educational practices. I accept, as Smith (1993) suggests, that conventional critical ethnography has limited potential for empowerment but, like Ellsworth (1989), I am sceptical of ‘imposed’ empowerment and similarly wary of action becoming activism.

I provide a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1983) of the culture(s) of curriculum work in ESL in my workplace from practitioner, management and student perspectives. As an example of practitioner research it ‘interrogates’ (Brown and Dowling, 1998) ESL practice in context. My critical purpose is to situate the practice of curriculum work in ESL by examining what discourses four stakeholder groups take up as they negotiate curriculum work in ESL. The groups are managers, social services practitioners, ESL practitioners, and ESL students.

I follow Smith (1987, 1990) in thinking that the best way to do institutional ethnography is to begin with the workplace in which individuals are situated and to examine the social relations of work that sustain communities and discourses prior to connecting these interactions to larger social and political processes of education. In this chapter I first define critical ethnography as a ‘tradition of inquiry’ (Cresswell 1998) in qualitative research. I then discuss, in turn, how reflexivity, critical pragmatism, and social constructivism are incorporated into this research. In the following chapter, I specifically consider the methods that are consistent with the approach I adopt here.

6.1 Ethnography and participatory critical ethnography

Ethnography is a tradition of inquiry within qualitative research that explores the way culture both sustains and is sustained by community practices (Hammersley and
Atkinson, 1995). Typically, the outcome in writing ‘is a holistic cultural portrait of the social group that incorporates both the views of the actors in the group (emic) and the researcher’s interpretation of views about human social life in a social science perspective (etic)’ (Creswell, 1998, p. 60). Tudor (2003) argues that this emic (ethnographic) perspective is critical to an ‘ecological’ view of the complex social interactions of language teaching and learning, a view which he believes is underrepresented in current ESL curriculum research. Both emic and etic perspectives are explored in the following chapters.

Ethnography is subject to competing definitions, and Hammersley (1994) suggests that the term overlaps with a number of others, including discourse analysis. The overlap with discourse analysis arises because spoken texts generated for ethnographies must be interpreted. He also notes that critical theorists, and feminist and poststructuralist researchers have challenged scientific realism and objectivity in ethnography and argued for more attention to reflexivity, forms of research writing and researcher-researched relationships. Hammersley, therefore, prefers to keep the definition broad and relatively inclusive rather than dividing it into critical and non-critical camps.

Thomas (1993) sees a range of methodological commonalities between conventional and critical ethnography, calling the latter ‘conventional ethnography with a political purpose’ and an agenda for change (p.4). The significance of critical approaches is also explored in this research and has been central to educational research aimed at empowering practitioners to understand the discourse and practices that construct their workplace (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Critical theorists (Fay, 1987) and educational researchers (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, Carr, 1995) point to the need to not only encourage practitioners to participate in action research but also to connect educational work to political purposes and engage practitioners in dialogue with institutional agents (eg. policy makers, managers) outside the classroom. Elliott (1993) suggests that only by engaging with others can we learn how institutions are constituted by, and reconstitute themselves through, social interaction.
Opening up teacher research to dialogue with non-practitioners (eg. managers), who are nevertheless participants in the creation of curriculum work, is another way in which practical action research can extend its horizons and engage more thoroughly with critiquing its own particular discourses (see Elliott, 1993). Huberman (1996), suggests that collaboration between academics and practitioners can be fruitful, and that teacher researchers need to explore their own debts to ‘traditions’ of qualitative inquiry if they are to avoid historical myopeia. Jordan and Yeomans (1995) suggest that prior to taking up (academic) critical theory perspectives, teachers need to explore through action research how to generate ‘really useful knowledge’, i.e. knowledge that furthers the actual aims of individuals within communities of practice. This was one of my motivations for action research described in the electives.

In reviewing the nature of participatory ethnography, Thomas (1993) notes that degrees of distance, involvement and ‘radical’ purpose are possible within ‘critically’ inspired research including action research, ethnography, and participatory research. My simultaneous involvement in the research site as a teacher means I have to negotiate the ethics of distance and proximity with peers and students while doing research on rather than with them. A negotiation of situated ethics was required for this study beyond obtaining ‘official’ consent, a situation highlighted by Usher and Simons (2000), who note ‘the inescapable necessity for making ethical decisions and the difficulty and complexity of such decision-making in situations where recourse cannot be had to indubitable foundations and incontrovertible principles’ (p.3).

Critical ethnography often begins by acknowledging existing injustices in institutional practices (Thomas, 1993). Ethnographers raise awareness about social injustice in schooling (Fox, 1998), education (Delamont, 2000) and explore the role of culture and gender in shaping knowledge and experience (Elliott et al., 2002). ESL practitioners, myself included, make claims about ‘professional’ injustice, particularly in the ways they feel misunderstood or ignored within institutions and society. However, rather than assume the ‘truth’ of these claims I attempt to explore with non-ESL practitioners whether such claims may originate partly within the community of practitioners and the discourses they take up as their own. I think
research dialogue with non-ESL practitioners and public representation of discussions in writing, can help see these problems in perspective, and perhaps bypass a form of ESL teacher pragmatism, which rejects forms of research that do not immediately speak to us about current classroom problems.

I also think, following other scholars (Cherryholmes, 1988, Lather, 1992), that poststructuralist sensitivities to the ‘truth’ of research meta-narratives, such as discourses of ‘empowerment’, can save the critical enterprise from descent into a naïve neo-Marxism. Lather (1991) suggests that post-structuralism helps remind critical researchers that interpretations and critical readings too often disallow alternative, eg. feminist, poststructuralist readings of research (Cherryholmes, 1993) by building on single meta-narratives of oppression and empowerment (Ellsworth, 1989). The recourse I take to critical pragmatism and social constructivism helps, I believe, maintain a sensitivity to other interpretations of practice.

The site of my study is an institution where ‘common sense’ ideologies and practices sustain curriculum work, and one of the aims of critical ethnographers is to critique such ‘common sense’ practices (Grahame, 1995). Unlike action research, which aims directly at transforming institutional practice, critical ethnographers typically attempt to raise awareness rather than instituting change through action. Some workplace researchers have experienced conflicts in attempting to marry the broader perspectives of critical ethnography with action research (Ulichny, 1997), and I agree that simultaneously pursuing both goals as teacher researcher is difficult. Nonetheless, others see happy compromises between academic and practitioner research collaboration (Jordan and Yeomans, 1995).

Ethnography has been discussed as an option for research in ESL (Hornberger, 1994, Holliday, 1994) although Canagarajah (1999) claims that recent presentations of ethnography, ‘operate comfortably within the descriptive tradition, and fail to alert readers to the ideological and discursive complexities of doing research in ‘alien’ communities (Canagarajah, 1999, p.51). While this study lacks the post-colonial dimensions of Canagarajah’s work, the discursive complexities of multicultural sites
of learning are also foregrounded in Chapter Eleven on student experiences of curriculum.

Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995, Wodak and Meyer, 2001) uses some of the same critical that are cited by critical ethnographers. Critical linguists attend to texts and generally view language as constitutive of social practices within institutions. Like them, I also focus in my analysis on certain word meanings in context to uncover the ‘social intentions of language users’ (Morgan, 2002, p. 153). For example, curriculum objects and the language used to describe them always have situated meanings, both in specific dialogues and also within specific cultural models of practice; in ESL one can distinguish, for example, NZ migrant ESL from that of North American ESL models.

Meaning is ‘situated in specific social and cultural practices, and is continually transformed in those practices’ (Gee, 1999, p.63). Therefore, words such as ‘curriculum’, ‘outcome’, etc., have no ‘natural’ allegiances or readings, and belong to those discursive positions in which they are used in (Pêcheux, 1982, p.111). Thus, ‘curriculum’ and ‘learning outcome’ are used by educators in ways that connect to discourses in contrast or ‘meaningful antagonisms’ (Macdonell 1986, p.43-59), i.e., discourses which compete for the space to define the norm. Thus, I see the fact that most practitioner interviewees use ‘curriculum’ to refer to a document as one example of a dominant situated meaning within this NZ ESL workplace. I will alert the reader to some of these sorts of instances where meanings appear to be ‘up for grabs’, so to speak.

In applied linguistics, which also considers curriculum as an object of inquiry, both critical discourse analysis and critical ethnography are viewed with suspicion as too

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3 Gee uses ‘cultural model’ as others use discourse in terms of a current way of talking and acting among specific groups in society with regard to some facet of life, eg. curriculum work,
overtly ideological and subjective (e.g., Braine, 1994). As Pennycook (2001) notes, it may be that current forms of critical textwork in second language research have yet to take on board post-structuralism’s caution about replacing a meta-narrative of empiricist neutrality in quantitative research traditions with another of ideological injustice and domination. I subscribe to a form of critical ethnography and discourse analysis that sees discourse as socially constituted by language and social practices in institutional settings, and in which power/knowledge formations are embedded in curriculum frameworks and practices. The need to consider how Foucauldian approaches to discourse and power influence critical ethnography is not, I should add, a new concern (Pignatelli, 1998).

Thus, I ally myself with critical ethnography as a methodologically eclectic approach to exploring educational ideologies and practice in specific settings and creating an holistic account of institutional culture. Consistent with critical discourse analysis, I take a somewhat closer look at language than is typical in some ethnography in analysing interview and team meeting texts. I signal here a desire to incorporate a post-structural sensitivity to the multiple readings of talk in practice, which has been taken up by critical pragmatists and social constructionists.

### 6.2 Critical reflexivity, rapport and distance in the dissertation

Critical ethnography in education has grown out of the increased awareness within the social sciences of the need for writers to be reflexive in research (Foley, 2002) and to declare their interests and values as intimately tied to research processes (Anderson, 1989). Critical ethnographers also foreground autobiography (reflexivity), community practices, and involve long term researcher engagement in workplaces (Dimitriadis, 2001). Critical ethnographers and educational researchers in general use research space to textualise themselves through (autobiographic) admissions of bias and interests (Prain, 1997). All of these general commitments, values, and processes are elements of this portfolio which I share, and which also inform critical educational inquiry (Carr, 1995) and critical social research (Smyth and Shacklock, 1998).
One of the outcomes of reflexive writing in qualitative educational research is teacher development (Schratz and Walker, 1995). Lu and Horner (1998) add that critical inquiry ‘explores how to politicise experience with the aid of others . . . the ways in which the attempt to represent one’s experience to an ‘other’ opens up critical perspectives toward one’s material being’ (p.262). The critical outcome of this work is my improved understanding of the field I work in. In addition to contributing to educational ethnography, reflexive consideration of practice enhances my understanding of my own teaching practices, and of how I use discourses and practices to locate others.

From another perspective, Morgan (2002) writes that reflexive practice ‘means examining presuppositions resulting from our professional ESL training and our desire to have our work favourably received by colleagues and supervisors’ (p. 150); exploring teacher talk as discourse may achieve this. The desire to be recognised ‘favourably’ as doing the right thing by fellow members of our (discourse) community in ESL is how Gee (1999) describes the strategic function of taking up discourses. In routine institutional settings, we aim for recognition through favourable constructions of ourselves – identities- achieved in social interaction. ‘Every time we telephone a friend, visit our bank manager, take part in a seminar, read a magazine or tell someone we love them, we, and the other people either actively or implicitly involved in that exchange, are in the process of constructing and reconstructing ourselves’ (Burr, 1995, p. 39). I propose that a critical ethnography that examines the identities ESL practitioners construct for themselves and students in relation to curriculum work in ESL, and against/within prevailing discourses, provides a significant interpretative framework for understanding ESL curriculum work.

In multicultural teaching sites such recognition work may bring us into conflict with the discourses our students take up. Morgan characterises the ESL teacher commitment to method approaches (Richards and Rodgers, 1986), eg. communicative language teaching, by curriculum practitioners as the taking up of subject positions within discourses of practice which may conflict with learner positions. He claims that,
we take up a subject position within a discourse regarding our roles and responsibilities as teachers . . . a particular discourse on ESL may, in effect, produce forms of power/knowledge that are especially destabilizing in relation to students’ prior learning experiences and expectations (Morgan, 2002, p. 150).

Curriculum participants are engaged in a complex negotiation of acceptable positions vis-à-vis each other through proposing identities of self and other, consistent with the discourses of practice and of society on offer.

Critical reflexivity, a systematic consideration of researcher-researched relationship is not bypassed by claiming rapport, i.e. a privileged empathy with others that is not theorised. Following Sherif (2001), I consider that the need for rapport and negotiation of acceptable boundaries of research remains a significant issue for critical ethnography because the ethnographer's notions of self intersect with those of the people studied in multiple ways and affects interpretation. Rapport as a methodological trope and relational strategy of the ethnographic habitus⁴ (Springwood and King, 2001) is an insufficient basis in itself to support the ethnographic edifice; it deconstructs into trust, reliability, closeness, relationships.

For example, when I attempted to objectify workplace practice through observation as part of an ethnography of ESL teaching (Melles, 1999), I found that the relationships and distancing required to achieve this disrupted the ‘logic of practice’ (Bourdieu, 1990) I was attempting to describe. That project also taught me how rapport not only deconstructed into trust but also that the negotiation of research aims and practices, including classroom observation, with (colleague) participants required a deliberate examination of claimed relationships. I try to inscribe myself in

⁴ Springwood and King refer to Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, a term used to refer to the historical and learnt dispositions to act, which cannot be reduced to cognitive or other frameworks.
this account in ways that make evident some of these prior constructs, eg. relationships, and I reflect on this distance-proximity issue again in the final chapter.

Distance is also important in achieving a meaningful critical account, and as Geertz (1983) notes, the disciplined outsider (ethnographer) can bring an interpretation to culture that is not immediately apparent. I agree with Jordan and Yeoman’s (1995) claim that the broad ideological picture critical ethnographers can provide is a useful supplement to practitioner perspectives developed through teacher research. Nevertheless, there is a tension between closeness and distance that it is not resolved in this portfolio.

6.3 A critical pragmatist approach

Critical pragmatism is a basis for reading research with an eye for ideological commitments, eg. empiricist, feminist, poststructuralist, in apparently neutral and ‘objective’ research accounts (Cherryholmes, 1993). Uncovering ideological commitments and methodological blind spots does not only use immediate practical consequences as the measure of worth (Wagner, 1993), but requires that we stand back from research texts and consider the world that is presented in such texts and who appears to be excluded.

As I note in Chapter Three, ESL teachers are very good at reading research with an eye to its practical consequences, a practice I believe emerges from the disciplining effect of the profession, such as training backgrounds, time pressures and classroom limits. Teacher researchers sometimes use chalkface proximity to practice to suggest that they are uniquely placed to see the blind spots in current research on ESL teaching, a claim others have disputed. Huberman (1996), however, suggests that the practical time constraints of teaching, the separation from mainstream research processes, and the desire to be engaged in something called research, has lead some forms of teacher research to make excessive claims about the originality and value of the ideas produced. Adelman (1989) also adds that the emphasis on the practical - the solving of immediate practical problems - has replaced a careful consideration of
methodology and is insufficient: ‘action research requires theorizing about what is learnt through research on one’s own teaching’ (Adelman, 1989, p. 180); this is a thought I explored in the electives.

In an exploratory paper on pragmatism and post-structuralism in relation to ESL teacher research (Melles, 2000), I took up Rorty’s (1991) scepticism towards discourses of realism and humanism as valid interpretive frameworks in ESL. I suggested that the ESL teacher’s pragmatism may disguise a dependency on the male academic academy speaking through female practitioner ESL teachers. In particular, I suggested that teacher scepticism or refusal to critically examine research or theory in relation to teaching practice, may help maintain existing female practice-male research binaries. My suggestion bears some similarities to that of Pennycook (1997), who following Cherryholmes (1988), has suggested that a ‘vulgar’ as opposed to a ‘critical’ pragmatism motivates much of the work in ESL. Pennycook argues, for example, against the ‘conformist’ approach taken by EAP teachers that he reads in the work of others (e.g. Allison, 1996), which ignores questioning the ideological conditions of teaching practice and prefers a ‘critical’ applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001) as the theoretical ground of English teaching.

From a critical perspective, curriculum documents, classroom practices, and readings of others, eg. students, management, can no longer be neutral. This is the general approach I take and this dissertation should, therefore, also be seen as an extended example of a pragmatist reading of workplace practice in ESL with the aim of suggesting alternative interpretations of how curriculum work is done that might not appear in common sense practical accounts.

6.4 Social constructivist meanings of discourse/power

Foucault’s much used term ‘discourse’ is a rather complex, sometimes ambiguous, and evolving concept across his writing, as is his notion of knowledge/power as it manifests itself in society (Foucault and Gordon, 1980). It offers no easy platform for developing forms of discourse analysis and is not necessarily associated with critical
ethnography nor all forms of discourse analysis (Hall, 2001). Discourse as socially constitutive language and practice is compatible with social constructivist perspectives on the use of language and practice to construct the world and identities (Burr, 1995).

Discourse concerns language and practice, and ‘defines and produces the objects of our knowledge’ (Hall, 2001, p.72) while simultaneously limiting the ways objects can be talked about. Burr (1995) places the emphasis on the construction of objects in her definition of discourse:

A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events ... this means that, surrounding any one object, event, person, etc., there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the object in question, a different way of representing it to the world’ (p.48)

For example, ESL teaching is constructed from certain forms of practical or theoretical knowledge and actions or behaviours, which teachers evaluate as central or marginal forms of classroom practice. Some practices that are marginalised by teachers may conflict with the discourses of ESL curriculum that management and administration privilege in their desire to produce their version of curriculum work. Curriculum, therefore, is an object of such competing representations.

For example, in the workplace I studied, ESL curriculum documents are imposing physical objects of roughly two hundred pages in which institutional discourses about possible forms of curriculum are inscribed, and to which a large investment of time, energy, and money is dedicated. As my interviews with educators show, the value of the document itself in relation to practice is the subject of competing interpretations, some of which accept and some which challenge the prevailing objective attribution of significance to the document. In a similar teaching context to this study, Angwin (1996) notes also that available institutional discourses of ESL teaching conflict with discourses of the predominantly female workforce in ESL in
Australia. Highlighting such competing representations is one of the aims of my work here.

Power is suffused through structures in institutions: ‘sets of power relations’ bathe the structures and edifices of human life, without power ever amounting to a thing or substance’ (Caputo and Yount, 1993, p. 5). Within curriculum work, relations of power and knowledge are produced in educational settings by institutional arrangements and practices.

They are multiple; they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration - or between a dominating and a dominated class, power relations having specific forms of rationality, forms which are common to them’ (Foucault, 1988, p. 38).

I consider that workplace discourse communities, eg. ESL teachers, *em-body* forms of power, which are plural and relational (Deleuze, 1999, pp. 70-93) and both sustained and reproduced by social relationships.

Legitimate members of the community sustain forms of talk in professional settings. Legitimation is both created by institutional categories, eg. hierarchies and job designations, and professional frameworks, eg. training regimes, and maintained through conventional forms of ongoing social interaction. It also varies according to the different access individuals have to levels of power. For example, Sandra (part-time teacher on probation), Mary (experienced section manager) and I (full-time teacher) were all legitimate members of a local community of ESL practitioners. We nonetheless had different levels of access to power in the institution, and therefore different abilities to modify existing practices, such as the scheduling of classes or the content of team meeting discussions. On some occasions, as I show in the following chapters, we accessed this attributed power to manage curriculum work and to direct others.
Individuals in interviews allude to the use of power by others within the department and beyond to constrain their work. Power is used in ESL curriculum work and emerges from different sources (e.g., management, students, research expertise) and enacted through social relationships. In practice, teachers also use power in their interactions with each other. Finally, students also use culturally mediated forms of power through their different relationships with teachers to achieve their ends. In all these settings, power is productive and helps to produce discourses, such as the humanistic learner-centred approach in language teaching (Stevick, 1990, Tudor, 1996).

Power is not simply a prohibition but is also active and productive... even humanistic discourses, which presuppose the individual as the privileged point of reference in social formations, are the products of power which establishes ‘the individual’ as a subject position to be occupied and make such a position desired’ (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p. 89).

In institutional sites, power and knowledge work together to sustain certain discourses, and limit curriculum choices. For example, if ESL teachers take up the outcomes oriented discourse of competency frameworks, this limits the extent to which they can practice learner-centred pedagogy. In practice, teachers rarely if ever take up uncritically whole curriculum frameworks but rather choose their commitments selectively in different settings to achieve different practical ends consistent with the identities they construct for themselves and others. I identify some of these selective choices in the following chapters.

Morgan (2002) suggests that some of the dissatisfaction he felt about community-based ESL work was due to teachers and students becoming subjects of curriculum frameworks ‘subjects of a discourse, a system of power/knowledge... that normalized particular ways of observing, measuring and ranking behaviours of language students, constructing both successes and failures and the criteria for their definition’ (p. 145). While simultaneously professing to be sensitive to individual needs, teaching and assessment practices can be used by teachers and institutions to maintain control over students’ autonomy. Morgan gives the example of learner
autonomy, a term taken up by ESL teachers but used, in fact, to retain control of students from their own cultural assimilationist position; as Bruce (1995, p. 75) points out ESL teachers are reluctant to relinquish control of curriculum.

Also implicitly evoking the power/knowledge construct, Hogan, Down, and Chadbourne (1998) suggest that while teachers approach their pedagogy from a perspective that is learner-centred, constructivist and developmental, many appear to accept that their own learning will be pre-packaged, quantified and directed by powerful ‘others’ through a discourse of performance management. This discourse is used to control and manage teacher learning within an institution. Mary, Sandra, and I are in different ways also subjects of this powerful discourse, which is managed through probationary processes, performance reviews, and so forth. Thus, power is suffused through ESL curriculum work even if only explicitly evoked occasionally in dialogue and texts.

In the Australian literature, a key notion is negotiation with students about curriculum aims and design (e.g. Nunan, 1988). Learner-centredness has arisen in part through pedagogical moves in language teaching outlined by Tudor (1996), including the focus on learner strategies (e.g. Ellis and Sinclair, 1989). In migrant ESL teaching in Australia, learner-centredness has achieved the status of a particular curriculum framework, which is challenged now by competency frameworks (Sanguinetti, 1995b, Burns et al., 2000). It has been used in ESL to divide good (learner-centred) from bad (teacher-centred) teaching, although the dichotomy is too simplistic, as O’Neill (1991) suggests since both approaches continue to inhabit classrooms and respond to student desires.

I suggest learner-centredness has also arisen as a response to the uncertainty of enrolments and funding in NZ that ESL teachers cannot control, a situation that Cooke and Hunter (1999) allude to. In this respect, being learner-centred is the only possible response to a situation where very little can be predicted about student profiles or even programs. It may also owe its currency to the liberal humanist discourse in second language teaching (Stevick, 1990), which asserts the central role...
of the individual in curriculum processes. Such a positioning is not necessarily, however, consistent with the culturally mediated discourses of practice students bring which can resist individualism and prefer collectives (e.g. Penner, 1995). Learner-centredness has also been taken up within the outcomes discourse of competency frameworks but a conflict of philosophies is apparent when viewed closely (Viskovic, 1999). Thus, word meanings in curriculum work in ESL are embedded in complex discourse histories.

6.5 A modified approach to participatory critical ethnography

As indicated above, I reject the moves of the Texas school (e.g. Carspecken, 1996) to theorise critical ethnography within strict method boundaries. I also do not take up the realist ontology that underpins both conventional and critical ethnography, preferring a social constructivist ‘relativism’ regarding the origin and maintenance of educational objects such as curriculum and competence. I see educational practice invested with ideological commitments and participatory research requiring a close examination of researcher-researched relationships. Critical pragmatism allows for the combination of post-structural sensitivity to meta-narrative, multiple readings, and ideology critique (e.g. Cherryholmes, 1999) that I find useful as a theoretical platform for the form of critical participatory ethnography that I attempt here.

As in traditional ethnography, I aim to develop a holistic picture of curriculum work in ESL but I focus on power, competing accounts of curriculum work, and identities in relation to this work. Through text analysis, I attempt to represent the discourses students and educators take up in interpreting curriculum work. As a form of teacher research the account here takes a practical approach to research methods although it is not limited to the teacher pragmatism that sometimes is evoked in forms of teacher research such as action research. My insider status and participation makes critical reflection and constant awareness of situated viewpoints inextricable features of the writing. In the following chapter, I outline the methods I see consistent with this epistemological commitment.
Chapter Seven: Methods for a critical ethnography

Descriptions of critical ethnography sometimes identify a determinate set of methods and purposes, including observation, and this is particularly true of the ‘Texas’ school Phil Carspecken represents (Carspecken, 1996). Although I employ some of the methods typically used in ethnography, such as interviews and document analysis, my adherence to critical ethnography is more a methodological disposition than a strict method commitment. For example, I do not use observation field notes. The limited use of observation in this study was a practical, theoretical and ethical decision. It was a practical decision because I was fully occupied in teaching the course which is the focus of this study, as well as teaching two other courses. It was a theoretical decision because I came to have doubts about the realist stance and epistemological commitments of observation, which Sullivan et al. (2000) suggest lead to ‘readings’ of practice informed more by inconsistent and undeclared interests of observers. It was also an ethical decision because I had received some negative responses from research participants to peer observation in a previous study (Melles, 1999) in which I had studied the practices and beliefs of six ESL colleagues over a four month teaching period.

I chose to collect data using semi-structured interviews, ‘naturalistic’ team meeting recordings, student journal writing, focus group meetings with students, and documentary analysis. In keeping with the tradition of critical ethnography, the data sources – students, managers, educators – were chosen as those best able to provide ‘insider knowledge’ of the field and those most readily accessible. Multiple data sources were used since a holistic portrait of curriculum culture requires a range of sources which ‘embody cultural meaning’ (Thomas, 1993, p. 38). My choices were also practical because they could be scheduled within the curriculum process without competing with teaching responsibilities in a 16-20 hour contact week. Some data sources served two ends, for example, student journals served both a research and a teaching purpose. As a research tool, I used the journals to help create an account of the student experience of curriculum. As a pedagogical device, they helped students interact with me, receive feedback on their writing, and measure their own progress. Such dual purposes, it seems to me, are common in applied educational research.
In qualitative research validity and reliability are addressed by different criteria to quantitative research. Creswell (1998) notes that the term ‘trustworthiness’ is preferred in qualitative research and achieved by techniques of verification. In his discussion, Cresswell (1998, pp. 201-203) highlights eight verification procedures relevant to quality standards in qualitative research.

**Table 7.1: Verification procedures for qualitative research (Creswell 1998)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Used</th>
<th>How</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prolonged engagement and persistent observation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The study although based on five months of field work is the culmination of four years’ on-site work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The perspective of four stakeholder groups on the curriculum process are integrated in this work although the outcome is not consensus on truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer review or debriefing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Individual interview transcripts were given back to interviewees for comments, addenda, etc., and follow up interviews were also used. I shared my ongoing interpretations with ESL teachers to some extent during the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative case analysis</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying researcher bias</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>I attempt to acknowledge my own ‘biases’ and situate my interpretations in relation to my own practice and interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member checks</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich, thick description</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The aim of the ethnography is to provide this. Clearly, the reader of the study will make the final judgement on whether this is the case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External audits</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cresswell adds that to ensure quality qualitative researchers need to use at least two criteria in any given study. To some extent the multiple voiced account of curriculum culture could be seen as a form of ‘triangulation’, a popular concept in qualitative research, and used in critical ethnography (Thomas, 1993, p.23, Carspecken, 1996).

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5 Creswell (1998) gives details, examples, and references for each; I do not here but refer the reader to his text. Some dimensions seem common sense categories.
However, I share with Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 62) a scepticism of triangulation as a technique to ‘home in’ on a unitary truth, which my social constructivist leanings disallow since ‘consensus achieved through procedural objectivity [eg. triangulation] provides no purchase on reality’ (Eisner, 1992, p. 13).

7.1 Interviews with practitioners

The research interview is a familiar research tool and is sometimes considered a methodology in its own right (Christianson, 1991, Seidman, 1991). Interviews are one method that ethnography and discourse analysis use to produce data, and can be more or less dialogic. Dialogism in interaction, as Bakhtin (1981) notes, is an inherent property of utterances whereby they always respond to some prior and forthcoming utterance from an ‘other’. Some of the particular difficulties in conducting interviews with second language speakers I mention below; here I focus on the interviews with TWP educators.

Mishler (1986) discusses the research interview within the broad tradition of interpretive research as a method for an empathic reconstruction of experience by interviewer and interviewee. He highlights the strategies required by interviewers to allow this narrative to surface. Silverman (1997), I believe, correctly identifies the limits of an ‘emotive’ (empathic) approach to interviewing as too dependent on an unexamined and perhaps misleading dependence on rapport. Silverman (2001, pp. 86-87) suggests that there are three broad approaches to interviewing in social science: positivist approaches, which view interview data as giving access to facts about the world; emotionalist accounts such as offered by Mishler; and constructionist accounts, where interviewer and interviewee are engaged in actively constructing meaning. The constructionist account is closest to the approach to data collection and analysis that I took.

In addition, given that many of the interviewees and participants were women I took on board Oakley’s (1981) advice about the limits of conventional interviewing of women. Oakley suggests that conventional interviewing disrupts the ‘natural’
disposition of female interviewees to avoid constructing interaction around explicit power differentials, eg. researcher/researched, and to use assumed gendered life experience, eg. motherhood, as key frameworks of talk. Attempting to suspend the conventional theoretical superiority of the researcher, I preferred an approach which took note of the inherent dialogic nature of interaction (Bakhtin 1981), dialogism that was consistent with the open texture of semi-structured interviewing (Drever, 1995, Wengraf, 2001). With colleague practitioners, I attempted to create interview conversations, with space for interaction, i.e. interviewer becomes interviewed, that acknowledged our common commitments, eg. parenthood, teaching roles.

I did not undertake a close discourse analysis of transcripts, which could have constituted a whole research report in itself. Rather, I used a broad interpretative approach to document themes that emerged in interviews, an approach that is consistent with the ethnographic tradition (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). I try to situate interviewee responses both in terms of the interviewee and the cultures of practice of the relevant discourse communities, eg. management, ESL, Social Work. A profile of interviewees is given in Chapter Eight. Some of the documents referred to by interviewees, particularly program documents, are included in the appendix.

The majority of those I invited for an interview agreed to participate and signed the relevant consent forms. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and interviewees were given a series of prompts beforehand. For both ESL and non-ESL practitioners, this protocol focused on four broad questions:

- How do you define curriculum (work)?
- What do you understand by competency and its relationship to practice?
- What features of teaching and learning (curriculum) are unique to that field?
- What relationship do you see between curriculum document and practice

However, the particular concerns of individual interviewees about curriculum in their field, i.e. the role of unit standards in Social Work, the role of syllabus for ESL
practitioners, took the interviews in particular directions. This is reflected in the responses analysed in chapter nine.

7.2 Student focus groups, journals, and interviews

In the combined Certificate English/ELW program that I focus on, there was a shifting population of between seventeen to twenty students. Seven students agreed to participate in my research, and three are selected as case studies in Chapter Eleven. I used several techniques to collect data on students’ experiences, including interviews in homes, bi-weekly focus groups, and journal writing. In my interpretation of their experiences, I have drawn selectively from each of these sources.

In practice, the research texts served three purposes. They constituted an additional source of information on student and programme progress alongside the standard administration evaluations, which I was able to use in team meetings to inform others of individual progress. I also used these methods to ‘build bridges’ (Germaine and Rea-Dickins, 1998) between myself and students, since they constituted an additional channel of communication between us. Finally, they also served a pedagogical purpose by providing students with feedback on their progress and their writing.

7.2.1 Interviews

I interviewed participants in their homes at the beginning and end of the study. As their teacher, I was aware that students would be guarded about their responses to my questions. Notwithstanding, I wanted to establish, through the interviews and other forms of text production, a relationship with students that complemented our classroom relationship. The home-based interviews also afforded me an opportunity to physically situate students in their family environment; at each interview I took brief notes on the setting of the interview. A brief profile of the students is given in the table below. Further details are given in Chapter Eleven. The three names marked with an asterisk are the cases on whom I focus.
Table 7.2: Student interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Brief profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill*</td>
<td>Taiwanese GP, married to Teresa. Recently arrived in NZ. Joins Certificate English class and then transfers to ELW program later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Taiwanese pharmacist, married to Bill. Joins Certificate English class and then transfers to ELW program later. Mother of two children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol*</td>
<td>Korean housewife and former early childhood educator. Married with two children in school. Previously studied at TWP. In Certificate English program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Korean housewife, married with two children. Close friend of Carol. Previously studied at TWP. In Certificate English program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillippa</td>
<td>Thai woman married to older NZ man with two children from a former marriage. Formerly worked as a secretary in Thailand. Moved into ELW program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aroha</td>
<td>Younger woman from Fiji. Previously studied at TWP. Works at Burger King and lives with large family of working parents and brothers and sisters studying. Moves to ELW program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah*</td>
<td>Korean woman married with one daughter in final year of school. Previously studied at TWP. Has had several failed businesses in NZ and looking to study catering.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews were audio-recorded and I also took brief written notes of contextual matters. In the final interview I asked students to reflect on their progress over the semester and what they had achieved. I use extracts from the interviews and other texts to locate these individuals within the class and the curriculum process. I scheduled fortnightly focus group meetings to gather student impressions on their progress and concerns.

### 7.2.2 Focus group interviews

Although the research methodology literature includes advice on specific techniques for constructing and managing focus groups in education (Vaughn et al., 1996), conducting focus groups with second language learners of limited language

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6 The term ‘housewife’ is used by participants themselves, their community, eg. Korean students, and also ESL teachers.
Dissertation Chapter Seven: Methods

proficiency as a complement to other tools in ethnography, and in program evaluation has received little attention. In addition, since I used repeat group interviews with the aim of ascertaining student reflections on their progress rather the designation ‘focus group’ is perhaps misleading since this is often a single interview with the specific purpose of elucidating group thinking on a single issue. In the interviews I raised questions about classroom teaching, and this meeting provided a useful forum for clarifying student resistance to teaching, and an opportunity for negotiating mutual understandings of practice. I felt the group setting was particularly appropriate for the students since it seemed to reduce the power difference between myself and the students. In addition, the students took advantage of the group to to clarify the meanings and intentions of their fellow students.

Some students were absent for these meetings, and contributions were limited by their language proficiency. I, therefore, spent some time rephrasing and clarifying comments form some students. In some sessions I formed two different groups, interviewing each group for thirty minutes. At other times, I interviewed all those present in one single group, especially when some participants were absent. Interviews provided an opportunity to substantiate some of the social relationships and allegiances I suspected students used in their curriculum work. Certain individuals, for example, Leah, on several occasions played the role of interpreter for Carol and Barbara. Leah also challenged Carol to be more open about her concerns with the program. On a number of occasions, the women in the interview encouraged each other to explain their fears and agendas in ways that would have been impossible for me to achieve.

7.2.3 Student Journals

The purpose of the journal was to give students an opportunity to reflect on learning within and beyond the classroom and be given ongoing feedback on their writing, purposes which fit with the long-standing tradition of using diaries in language education (Peyton and Staton, 1991). Diaries have also been used in language teaching classroom research as a source of insight on the so-called affective dimensions of the learning process, eg. anxiety, self-esteem, motivation, (Allwright
and Bailey, 1991, pp. 169-193), and for hearing (hidden) students voices in the classroom (Bailey and Nunan, 1996). Generally speaking, students wrote in journals twice a week and I invited them to reflect on both classroom learning and social experiences.

Both research and pedagogical purposes were served by the journals and other texts gathered here. Given the purposes, audience and proficiencies of the students this genre (student journals) has some of the characteristics of a personal diary but also addresses a public ‘other’; the ESL teacher. Some students were unclear about where to draw the public/personal line in writing, and drew the line at different places. Some entries refer to the classroom community and others to relationships created in a setting where gender and culture empathies are not necessarily shared (Arnold and Brown, 1999). Classrooms and other sites for second language learning are contexts for re/creating cultural models of society and choosing new subject positions through language.

7.3 Recording team conversations: naturalistic data of curriculum

I have already examined the function of team teaching in the ESL unit in the portfolio. Team meetings are an institutional genre, that is, a contextualised use of language that conforms to accepted conventions. The team meeting, like other types of professional meeting (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997), has specific aims, such as informing others of progress in teaching. In teaching institutions, multiple meeting genres are common, eg. program committee meetings, departmental staff meetings, assessment and evaluation meetings, etc. Such genres sustain institutions (Christie and Martin, 1997) and as habitual forms of dialogue or monologue help to socially construct organisations (Campbell, 2000). These repetitive structures help to produce and reproduce existing practices of curriculum work. They are both disciplinary frameworks, like curriculum documents, used to oversee (surveille) teaching and also productive of curriculum work.
Meeting conversations have many of the linguistic characteristics of face-to-face conversational speech (Brown and Yule, 1983). Speakers overlap each other in turn-taking, hesitate, make false starts, employ spoken conversational grammar structures, and repeat information (Cameron, 2001). Teachers take turns and generally cooperate to create coherent texts. Topics within a single meeting are offered, taken up, and negotiated and it is possible to see linguistic traces of when and where topics change. Themes also are maintained over the course of a number of team meetings. Word meanings, in texts, depend on use and as such are situated. Unlike the primarily social purposes of conversation in team meetings there is a focus on the specific teaching goals and people, which can include the exchange of impressions about students.

I recorded and analysed extracts from seventeen meetings, in which I was a participant, during the first half of the year 2000. Meetings lasted anywhere from 30-60 minutes and not all meetings were fully attended or took place due to teacher illness or other circumstances. In weeks 11 to 20, Peter joined Sandra, Mary and me to take on some responsibility for teaching the intermediate group.

7.4 A reflexive situated critical ethnography

In Chapter Nine I use interviews with ten practitioners and managers in the department of Community and Continuing Education at TWP, recorded in 2000, together with references to curriculum documents, to examine discursive constructions of curriculum work. I focus on the specific curriculum understandings and practices of ESL practitioners that distinguish them as a particular community within the Polytechnic. Chapter Ten is based on recorded team meetings, and traces the development of a combined workplace and general English program during the first semester of 2000. During the first term, three teachers (Mary, Sandra, and I) met weekly to discuss the development of the course and the progress of the students. Here I explore how curriculum work in ESL gets done through the discourses of practice teachers take up and the identities they construct for themselves and others to accomplish this.
Chapter Eleven focuses on student experiences of curriculum. Using interviews with individual students, student journals, and focus group interviews, I examine the experience of three students through the semester. I focus on the ways students account for their curriculum experience, and how their accounts coincide with or deviate from those of ESL teachers. Chapter Twelve draws some conclusions about the subject positions taken up in discourses of curriculum work in ESL in my workplace and the different cultures of understanding and practice that managers and students propose as constituting this discursive space. I also draw some conclusions about the practical benefits and limits of critical ethnography for educational inquiry in relation to other forms of teacher research.

Prior to the data analysis I provide a brief account of the human and institutional boundaries of the research. This more fully expounds the brief portraits included in this chapter.
Chapter Eight: Situating Research Boundaries

Culture has multiple possible meanings (Duranti, 1997, pp. 23-50), and is produced within communities that through their actions construct and reproduce both community itself and its practices. Critical ethnographers see their task as also describing culture (Thomas, 1993, pp. 12-13). Here the focus is both cultures of practice (teachers and educators) and cultures of learning (students) in an institution. The account of culture is produced here by data sources, such as documents, interviews, which I take to embody this culture.

I begin by situating my account in terms of the ESL programs referred to, the key dramatis personae, and the narrative context on which the multiple perspectives of Chapters Nine to Eleven depend. This is followed by a description of the community of the ESL teaching profession in NZ. Then I briefly situate the competency framework that provides the central rationale for vocational teaching in the NZ Polytechnic and secondary education sector in NZ. Finally I briefly overview some of the Australasian literature on the migrant cultures the students in Chapter Eleven represent. These three ‘boundaries’ – NZ ESL teaching culture, competency-based assessment, and migrant cultures - relate respectively to the focus of Chapters Nine, Ten, and Eleven.

8.1 Situating ESL ethnography: combining programs and situating dramatis personae

I locate the combined ESL program described below in relation to the curriculum culture of the department. This culture I unpack through interviews with key educators of the Community and Continuing Education Department, and through their and my reference to curriculum documents and approaches, eg. competency, which construct the ESL environment. Five non-ESL practitioners and administrators with roles as teachers and managers of Social Work and Human Services, as well as five ESL practitioner colleagues explain their position relative to the curriculum frameworks of the institution. All interviewees were known to me and to each other through the teaching, departmental, and administrative roles they played. They all
were willing to explore with me the meanings and practices they attributed to teaching and learning work within the institution.

The two departmental managers – Marama and Helen – revealed sensitivities to institutional (management) and concerns about the discursive practices of teaching, assessment and learning. Both, in addition, addressed the cultural specificity of curriculum practices from a Maori (indigenous NZ) and Pakeha (European heritage) position. The three practitioners from the Social Work and Human Services unit – Marianne, Leanne, and Graham – also took up the cultural and ethical appropriateness of competency-based assessment in teaching practice, taking different overall positions on this question. During the course of this portfolio I worked alongside and under this group of five educators and managers.

I refer to three ESL teachers and three students in a combined program of Certificate English Intermediate and English for Living and Working (ELW). Mary, Sandra, and I taught together through the semester; we were joined in the second ten weeks by Peter, a teacher in training. As I outline in Chapter Ten, this particular combination of teachers provides an unusually rich combination of degrees of departmental seniority, teaching and research expertise, and also gender balance. Power, expertise, and gender come, I believe, to play a role in creating some of the possibilities and outcomes of the team meetings and curriculum outcomes. First term meetings, in particular, refer to teachers juggling activities and trying to deal with a mixed group of students, seven of whom had originally indicated they wanted to enrol in the ELW workplace focused course; this group was integrated into the Certificate English Intermediate course because enrolments were too low.

Mary puts the incident into the context of conflicting discourses of management (‘people on high’) and ESL teachers (‘we’),
It was to do with pressures on high and all that because our EFTS\(^7\) looked as though they were going to be really, really low . . . but we are still being questioned by the people on high who think our whole system of having two twenty week blocks is totally crazy . . . but we cannot predict EFTS for the whole year . . . it’s totally different because we have a population which is totally different in all sorts of ways from your average Kiwi student . . . (Mary)

During the first week of semester both groups were taught together. By week 2, Mary had instituted six separate classroom hours with the small group of ELW students by diverting some hours with an elementary class she was teaching, while for six hours she taught the group together. Both groups then worked on different tasks for three hours separately in the SAC (self-access centre). This effectively meant that, despite the fact the ELW class had been officially closed we would manage to have them work separately for nine contact hours of the total twenty and be able to offer the students the certificate and program they had originally applied for. Although it was not my intention to focus on such a complex teaching situation, the scheduling difficulties and the origin of the combined class itself points to some of the ideological investments in curriculum work in ESL. I focus mainly on those occasions in team meeting conversations where we negotiate appropriate activities for the combined group.

Seven students agreed to participate in the study of the student experience. These seven students represented a range of ethnicities: Korean, Taiwanese, and Thai. Photos of the students are provided in the appendices, and below (section 8.5) I give some background to the experiences of Korean and Taiwanese ESL migrants as pertinent to understanding their stories. The photos are used to help the reader better situate my account and are not analysed as such. Bill from Taiwan was the only male. Within the confines of this dissertation, I chose to focus on three of the students, while including some reference to Teresa’s voice. The choice of students, I felt, helped underscore the conflict experienced with the Korean ESL group (Carol),

\(^7\) EFTS = Equivalent Full-Time Student, a measure used to calculate enrolment weighting.
and the contrasting experience of those outside (Bill) and within (Leah) the Korean group. Limiting this section to mainly three students also helps do sufficient justice to the complexities of their individual accounts.

8.2 Community Boundaries and ESL teaching

Like Morgan (2002), I see community ‘as both the condition and the outcome of what takes place in the classroom’ (Morgan, 2002, p. 149). Curriculum work in ESL, both depends on an existing sense of community, eg. ‘we’ ESL practitioners, and one which is constructed by social interaction, eg. the classroom community. Some individuals claim multiple membership in communities, for example practitioners who are simultaneously managers. In institutions, Scollon and Scollon (2001) suggest that the conflict for the ESL teacher community comes through having to decide between allegiance to a corporate institutional discourse and a professional discourse. Although the principle of conflicting allegiance is useful, Scollon’s description might foreclose the possibility of multiple memberships and allegiances, and seems too all-encompassing to cope with the different discursive practices in any single site.

According to Gee (1996), communities are groups that regularly interact with each other to achieve common goals for which members are accountable. Such a definition is appropriate for the ESL teacher community in this study. Community, like power, is a relational notion, i.e. depends on dialogue, social interaction, and social networks among people to sustain it (Hudson, 1996, pp. 230-243). Within single educational sites a number of communities coexist and interact, eg. teachers, students, administrators. In educational ethnography (Hammersley and Nias, 1999) bounded sites are used (eg. schools, classrooms), and culture is revealed in verbal and non-verbal behaviours across communities within the site (eg. teachers, learners, management).

Within communities, speaking is an act of identification ‘because it provides observable clues which other people can use in order to work out how the speaker
sees their place among the various social types that are relevant to speech’ (Hudson, 1996). For ESL students, speech marks their place on the margins of native speaker communities. Speech in teaching communities is a strategy for professional recognition, or ‘socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting, and interacting, in the “right” places and at the “right” times with the “right” objects (associations that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network”’)’ (Gee, 1999, p. 17). Thus locating oneself and being located within boundaries of communities – at the centre or periphery – is an outcome of social interaction.

At the same time as speech acts to identify, curriculum work in ESL begins already bounded by social and institutional structures. ESL units in NZ operate on the margins of the institution, as a ‘service’ (Walker, 1998), while at the same time being defined by mainstream institutional policy and language embodied in curriculum document writing practices and understandings. For the ESL section at the Polytechnic, in common with other ESL institutions in NZ, being on the margins includes being located off the main campus, teaching service rather than mainstream subjects, and participating only peripherally in the research culture and other ‘status’ processes of the Polytechnic. In ESL we can find evidence of conversations or controversy about the central objects of curriculum in ESL, including debate about ‘values and ways of thinking connected to the debate; and the “symbolic” value of objects and institutions that are what we might call non-verbal participants in the conversation’ (Gee, 1999, pp. 34-35). Approaches to competency-based teaching and the purpose of curriculum in ESL are good examples of how these conversations play out.

Margins are also created for ESL by society and institutions. For example, curriculum documents for general and workplace English programs claim, in keeping with institutional policy for documentation, that English certificates are relevant for employment. However, Chile and Brown (1999) call the retraining and employment of recent migrants through ESL courses a myth, due in part to the conflicting discourses of NZQA (New Zealand Qualifications Authority) and other bodies like WINZ (Work and Income New Zealand), which provide funding for courses and
maintain the fragility of the ESL sector. Cooke and Hunter (1999) also relate the poor management of ESL learners in NZ to conflicting discourses of government about the value of migrants to society and the uncertain funding and teaching arrangements in ESL centres, which depend on government subsidy. Walker (1999) also suggests that ESL fragility arises as a product of an ill-defined identity and status within organisational structures and a poor understanding of the nature of ESL work. This leads to ‘some disparity - and, perhaps confusion - surrounding the role and nature of TESOL as well as questions about its status within the tertiary framework’ (Walker, 1999); Pennington (1994) reports a similar situation for ESL centres in the US.

8.3 Competency frameworks in NZ ESL – inscribing boundaries

Curriculum policy in institutions also can be seen as a surveillance mechanism, a notion which emerges from Foucault’s work on disciplinary power and prisons (eg. Foucault, 1995). Some interviewees and some practitioners evoke it explicitly or implicitly as the effect of curriculum structures and frameworks, eg. moderation and assessment. The disciplinary gaze of normalized frameworks in society, including educational standards, works to regulate behaviour and beliefs, ‘not through overt oppression but through a set of standards and values associated with normality which are set into play by a network of ostensibly beneficent and scientific forms of knowledge’ (McNay, 1994, p. 95).

For example, program approval through NZQA approval oversees (surveillance) practice and confers official status on programmes. These quality assurance processes are seen to be separate from teaching methodology, which, according to NZQA, is not dictated to by assessment frameworks. Some of these quality assurance processes, eg. moderation, accreditation, as both social services and ESL reveal, disguise other practices. Sundar (1999) notes that mechanisms within standards-based assessment in NZ polytechnics such as re-assessment (or ‘resits’ as they are sometimes called) encourage students to exploit the system: ‘Students do not take the first assessment seriously, hoping re-sits will enable them to complete requirements
I use curriculum work to highlight the active construction of pedagogy in particular contexts. Studies of second language curriculum work discuss how methodologies, such as communicative language teaching (Yalden, 1987), learner-centredness (Nunan, 1988), and other methodological frameworks (Johnson, 1989), can be used to design ESL curriculum. In addition, studies which have considered the migrant ESL curriculum in Australia (Brindley, 1989a, Brindley, 1984, Burton, 1991) and have considered educational policy and practice, eg. competencies and migrant ESL, provide some comparable contexts to understanding migrant ESL in NZ. More recent qualitative research on teacher decision making in ESL (Woods, 1996) has helped contextualise these methodological theories in practice, suggesting how teachers actually work.

During the 1990s the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) under NZQA took firm shape and competency-based approaches and unit standards then became the underlying rationale for polytechnic and secondary education course development. The model for a unitary national qualifications framework was imported principally from the UK (Philips, 2000) and embodied a strong commitment to market liberalism and public choice (Roberts, 1998). The coexistence on the national register of unit standards based programs and courses which ignore competencies has been seen as a major flaw in this recent history by those directly involved (APNZ, 1997, Irwin, 1997) because it negates the possibility of comparable national standards; external moderation is the means whereby standards are supposed to be maintained. So, NZQA practice through the framework (NQF) itself appears to divide rather than unite institutions, an idea which is explored by interviewees in Chapter Nine of this dissertation.

Vocational institutions, such as TWP, contribute to the dispersion of curriculum quality by subcategorising its own programs as centre and periphery. For example, courses such as those in Social Work consist of a set of unit standards combined with
a number of other units of work, which together constitute a national qualification, registered on the NQF. These are described in TWP policy language, and interviewees use these terms, as part of the ‘new world’; those programmes that do not embrace unit standards and the NQF are termed old world. Some programmes such as in Social Work, eg. the Diploma in Counselling, are in the main not unit standards-based, because competencies are rejected by many other institutions, which also teach these programs, especially universities.

A minority of ESL programs in vocational centres employ unit standards, while the majority – university language centres excluded - register their qualifications on the NQF as nationally accredited, and even employ the competency-based language of the ‘new world’ in their curriculum documents. Even with criticism of its effects (Beevers, 1993, Moore, 1996), this fragmentation, which extends into other domains such as Social Work, is quite different from the statewide application of ESL competency-based models in Australia, (eg Baylis et al., 1994, Bryant, 1995, Burns and De Silva Joyce, 2000). ESL units in Polytechnics find themselves on the institutional periphery because they do not use unit standards, but are simultaneously defined by competency-based language and practices. For example, in the case of the ELW program, referred to in the following chapter, the legacy of this (competency) influence is embodied in a curriculum document, which includes unit standards but does not use them.

Some critique of government policies and frameworks as they affected polytechnics have appeared (Codd, 1993, Codd, 1995, Meldrum, 1999), including the way they deploy apparatuses of power/knowledge formations, such as quality assurance processes, as a form of teacher surveillance (French, 1999) and their general negative effect on educational practice (Viskovic, 1999). As the underlying unit of assessment and ultimately teaching, the unit standard has affected Polytechnic teachers of competency-based programmes in NZ (Sundar, 1999). Flagg (1999) from my own institution reports on how NZQA unit standards ‘artificially cut up knowledge’ and decontextualise this knowledge. Reintegrating this knowledge into authentic tasks fragments knowledge and distorts practice in teaching. Fragmentation of knowledge is a criticism levelled at the effect of standards that relate to how performance criteria
and elements decompose complex forms of knowing and behaving. Sanguinetti (1995a, pp. 21-22) also notes how competency-based frameworks for ESL within the CGEA (Certificate in General Educational Achievement) in Victoria also experienced produce fragmentation.

The move to normalize competency-based curriculum frameworks as the most rational choice for curriculum development has been achieved in NZ through a market oriented foregrounding of agency theory and public choice theory According to Meldrum (1999), agency and public choice theory in curriculum policy highlight the active individual choosing educational packages as a rational consumer. French (1999) adds that the disciplinary force of documents is evident ‘via the surveillance, examination and judgement inherent in both the document approval and auditing processes associated with the cumbersome external approval requirements that have accompanied the industry of quality assurance’ (p.4). These processes are invoked by interviewees in the following chapter. Interviews with practitioners about planning, teaching and assessment using competency-based unit standards in ESL and in Social Work, helped me situate a range of approaches to the effect of competencies and the distinctiveness of ESL in relation to mainstream vocational subjects. I suggest in this dissertation that it is difficult to accurately situate curriculum work in ESL without understanding the institutional boundaries set by competency-based frameworks; this si the task of Chapter Nine.

8.4 Curriculum work and gender in ESL

I believe engaging with gender in my day to day practice and attempting to constructively examine curriculum work in my ESL workplace has given me a greater understanding of alternative forms of knowing and practice, understandings which I attempt now to use in my interactions with and writing about others. However, while gender is referred to in the following chapters in so far as participants evoke it, I feel unable to give the issue the informed and sustained treatment that Angwin (1996) and others (Sanguinetti, 1993) have provided. Here I acknowledge it briefly.
Angwin (1996) has suggested that the current loose confederation of discourses that construct ESL teaching are inadequate to represent the predominantly female workforce and the environment of work because, as Burns (1999, pp. 13-14) notes, women’s ways of knowing and practicing have not traditionally been considered in approaches to research within the academy/practice and theory/practice divides. Pennycook (1994, p. 303) suggests the male/female divide also separates out the academy (male applied linguists) and practitioners (female teachers), and that this divide, revealed in the discourses of the academy and the classroom, needs to be superseded if a program of critical linguistics and politicised research can emerge. This has also been Harvey’s (1999) argument regarding the ESL field in NZ. Thus, there is recognition that the ESL workforce, while overwhelmingly female, is represented only in particular ways in the discourses that construct the field.

Participants evoke different male and female understandings in this study. As a male in a predominantly female department, I suspected that I was excluded from conversations going on in the ESL section although gender was rarely mentioned per se, as a matter within curriculum work. In fact, a number of interviewees evoke the gendered nature of the ESL workplace and its consequences for practice. My original assumption about miscommunication was essentialist, i.e. I viewed women’s language as (mysteriously) bound to biological bodies and opposed to male language and my own talk. This is a view popularised as the culture/sex gap by linguists like Tannen (1994) but challenged by constructivist accounts of language, power and gender such as those outlined by Weatherall (2002). I believe the social constructionist tenet that ‘gender is not a stable and enduring feature of the individual which is reliably and transparently reflected in language use . . . Speech style may be one form of behaviour that can be used to resist or challenge conventional sex stereotypes’ (Weatherall, 2002, p. 95) fits far better with my own experience and experiences within practice and research.

8.5 Cultures of learning: relevance to curriculum work in ESL

Culture is at the heart of ESL curriculum work, and not only, as Gee (1999) suggests, as different discourses of practice available within a single society, but also across
different ethnic groups. The juxtaposition of Chapter Ten documenting ESL teacher constructions of the ‘other’ and Chapter Eleven, student accounts of curriculum work, throws this cross-cultural tension into relief. Although the notion of culture demands complex definitions (Hinkel, 1999), language teachers have long talked about the need for raising the awareness of students about the cultural peculiarities of the target culture, (eg. Valdes, 1986), as an extra dimension of language learning (Damen, 1987) with the ultimate aim of helping students achieve intercultural competency (Byram and Fleming, 1998). Kramsch (1993), for example, talks about finding a third place which ‘grows up in the interstices between the cultures the learner grew up with and the new cultures’ (Kramsch, 1993, p.236). Intercultural understanding and practice, the third place, then, develops out of cultural encounters through verbal and non-verbal communication inside and outside the classroom. In the texts ESL students position themselves at different points in this intercultural space through their linguistic and social encounters, and the discourses of learning that they take up in describing curriculum work.

Cooke and Hunter highlight the alienation ESL migrant (students) in NZ (and Canada) can feel when they move into culturally different forms of educational thinking on curriculum. ‘In structural terms, the ‘outsider’ comes into an educational framework that is usually long-established, operating by sets of over-arching values and conventions evolved over time by a dominant culture’ (Cooke and Hunter, 1999). Cook depicts cultural ‘conflict’ emerging within two bounded communities – ESL student and educators. In fact, within ESL communities of practice in NZ, conflict also arises about, for example, the place of competencies in curriculum, (Wette, 1998). Morgan (2002) also proposes that conflict arises through culturally different expectations of teaching and learning, where ESL teachers adopt classroom practices and methods, in conflict with existing cultural practices, eg. communicative language teaching in China (Anderson, 1993); cultural resistance is documented in Chapter Ten.

Some suggestions have been made for the cultural constructs students bring to the negotiation of curriculum work; some of these constructs help position the response of the three students – two Korean and one Taiwanese - in this chapter. Both Leah
and Carol are learning language and attempting to bridge a cultural divide they construct and which is constructed for them by society. Korean migrants can learn to bridge the divide by using their intercultural competence to manage social situations (Elliott et al., 2002, and see Huan (2000) for Australia in particular). Helping students bridge these divides and managing health care, education, and other institutional settings is one of the agendas for teachers as inter-cultural mediators, a role several interviewees mention.

In Australia, Korean students appear to experience difficulties with language, styles of teaching and learning, and relationships with peers and teachers, because they operate with different cultural norms (Choi, 1997), although not everyone evaluates these norms negatively in terms of their effect on learning (Cronin, 1995). Practices that do seem to interfere with learning, and which are invoked in this study exist. For example, Kim (1997) argues that Korean students approach reading by looking for vocabulary and grammar meaning out of context, practices that originate in Korean education, and an obstacle to some students in this study. Cox (1996) adds that Korean ESL students often self-evaluate their progress negatively and need encouragement to positively evaluate their progress in listening skills, a task Mary, one of the teacher participants in this research, uses to ‘empower’ the Korean students. Oliver (1998) also notes that although Korean (and Japanese) students in Australia are aware of differences between Korean and English in the rules of informal spoken interaction, they find it difficult to use this awareness; students referred to in this study also note this difficulty.

Notwithstanding, the Korean community also shows a high degree of consensus in its practices, including resistance to teaching. It has been suggested that there is a much closer consensus among the Korean community of the common values articulating education, household and work than among their Australian counterparts (Lee, 1991). Yon (1992) suggests that ‘father separation’ among Korean students, a frequent phenomenon in NZ, leads to problems for Korean students adjusting to tertiary study. In this study, the physical absence of husbands is part of the isolation of several of the Korean women, and increases the burden on mothers to manage the education of their children.
Another tension emerges from language use. Cosgrove’s study of language maintenance and shift in a Korean community in Sydney suggests that language maintenance in the home is common while there is a shift to English in the workplace (Cosgrove, 1992). The study by Starks and Youn (1998) for the Korean community in Auckland sees shifts in language maintenance across different generations. The shifting relationships between generations, eg. parents and children, and across relationships, eg. mother and father, is evoked by several students. In some cases they lead to tensions as children make greater progress than their parents in language and social acquisition. This generational tension is evoked in different ways by student participants, who are all parents.

Bill (and Teresa), profiled in Chapter Eleven, are professionals from Taiwan who have migrated in part for their children’s education. Although I focus principally on Bill’s texts, Teresa’s responses are often embedded in his texts and she is present with him in all the interview settings here. Chu (2000) notes that Taiwanese settling in Australia appreciate a less competitive education system for their children and a perceived better standard of law and order in Australia compared to urban Taiwan. Popular perceptions of Asian motives for migration vary. Migrants (males principally) often return home on cyclical visits for business, which has led to Taiwanese being called pejoratively astronauts (Beal and Sos, 1999). In Australia, some early reports suggest that Taiwanese and Hong Kongese in Australia have abused the migration scheme to set up absentee ownership of business and parental absence has also affected children left in the country (Coughlan, 1992). Perhaps, not surprisingly, student reports of discrimination against Taiwanese students, were quick to follow, as Johnson (Johnson, 1992) documents.

Schak (1999) suggests the specific challenges for Taiwanese business migrants fall into four areas: language proficiency, culture shock, difficult entry into the Australian business scene and cultural, accommodating to different cultural practices of communication. Thus, language and cultural issues, as well as attitudes to integration affect the success with which individuals integrate into society. Chiang et
al. (2000), in a study of three major urban centres - Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney - find that employment levels among Taiwanese are lower than any other Asian group, that migration leads to downward social mobility, although men are more successful than women. Downward social mobility arises through a lack of recognition of overseas qualifications, poor knowledge of language and culture, and also institutional discrimination against Taiwanese.

Beal and Sos (1999) also suggest that Taiwanese are challenged to commit to their new society and retain their cultural identity. Chen (2000) adds that when local Taiwanese communities are formed in Melbourne this involves individuals in a difficult negotiation of their origins as deterritorialised nationals within Australian multiculturalism, and their attitudes to cultural integration. Relocated within social and educational cultures that are only partly transparent and responding to these cultures with degrees of understanding and enthusiasm make the respective experiences of students vary. On the other hand, we know very little about the learning challenges to Taiwanese migrant learners in Australasia. A small body of work has focused on phonological problems of ELICOS students (Mongard and Tyrer, 1994), different styles of cooperation between Taiwanese and Australian students in school classrooms, and how the different pedagogies required to teach Taiwanese students in Australian schools are negatively evaluated by educators themselves (Dooley, 2001).

Thus, language learning and teaching is implicated in a complex sociocultural negotiation of discourses by students. Students bring with them experiences of learning and living which can conflict with dominant discourses of education and ESL. Situated within a particular program of ESL learning, the experiences of students in negotiating these discourses and finding acceptable positions for themselves within society and the classroom community is complex, and can differ from the identities constructed for them not only by society and institution but also by ESL teachers.
Chapter Nine: Curriculum cultures

In this chapter, I examine the different discourses practitioners and managers in the community and continuing education department take up in defining curriculum work. Specifically, I look at how practitioners in the Social Services section and the ESL section, together with two managers, position themselves in relation to curriculum work in response to dialogic semi-structured interviews. My aim in this chapter is to develop both a description of the existing curriculum discourses within the department, and the specifics of the discourses that ESL practitioners take up.

The term ‘taking up discourses’ can imply we have existing descriptions of these. Here I am simultaneously proposing interpretations of responses, and attempting to situate these responses through my interpretations of the social and historical circumstances of professional practices. I think it is worth signalling here that interpretations of interview responses are based on a research setting (the interview), where practice itself is not engaged, but is ticking over in a way similar to how Wittgenstein (1958) suggests philosophy sometimes engages with linguistic questions when language is not actually being used.

Interviewees do take up ways in which curriculum frameworks and processes discipline practitioners to stay in line with powerful institutional discourses of curriculum. For example, interviewees provide accounts of how accountability is constructed through curriculum work by curriculum documents and processes of writing. Several interviewees also explicitly and implicitly suggest that curriculum structures are technologies of surveillance, disciplining individuals to adopt certain forms of practice. The interviews in this study were conducted as semi-structured dialogic conversations around a series of open-ended questions focusing on: understandings of curriculum, competency, ESL practice, and institutional frameworks. I have placed in the appendices extracts from documents referred to, including departmental structures, curriculum document extracts, and example unit standards. I leave interviewees to evoke these documents and structures in their interviews or I refer to them to clarify responses or give background.
9.1 ESL interviewees

Five ESL practitioners agreed to be interviewed on their views of curriculum work and they are referred to by pseudonyms in the following sections. Following a brief outline below, their responses are examined under sections headed with their names.

Olivia taught on the English for the Workplace program, a government sponsored program (through SKILLS NZ) for refugees and long-term unemployed. The National Certificate in Employment Skills, which she taught, until recently used unit standards from a variety of fields outside ESL, eg. the field of communications. More recently the programme replaced some of these non-ESL units with ESL unit standards. Olivia has a background in primary, secondary, and remedial education in Australia as well as being a registered teacher in NZ. She also appears in the teacher interview chapter of the elective section regarding the research/practice binary. Her relatively long experience in working at TWP, her participation in an action research project, and her experience with unit standards, I felt, made her contribution particularly important to understanding workplace cultures of practice.

Christine, whom I interviewed briefly, was completing her DipSLT and teaches with Olivia on TOPs and also on general English programmes. We had worked together briefly on some ESL programmes. At the end of our interview, Olivia had suggested I talk to Christine to get another perspective about TOPS English, and she took up some of the same discourses Olivia had used. Christine’s allegiance to student needs is also clear and framed in the same student-teacher dependency and teacher insider knowledge that Olivia uses.

Jacqueline, whom I interview twice, was one of the longest serving and most respected teachers in the department. She had general teacher training and a Diploma in SLT. She co-ordinated the TESOL certificate and diploma, and had become a staff member at TWP in 1986 following experience and training as a high school and EFL teacher. Jaqueline and I had taught foreign languages at High School before transferring to ESL, and because foreign language teaching works within a national
language curriculum framework individual teachers only design courses within these frameworks. Jacqueline had coordinated an action research project in 1996-1997 and had begun an MPhil degree in linguistics; both areas of research that I also knew about. In my final year at TWP, Jacqueline moved to the Department of Education and gave up her position as an ESL teacher. Her experience of writing TESOL documents to competency assessment, her in-depth understanding of the history of the section, and her personal investment in research helped constitute a background of mutual understanding and value that facilitated our conversations.

Mary, had completed the DipSLT in 1994 and had begun working as a part-time tutor at TWP between 1987-1994 before moving to more permanent proportional and full-time work from that time until the present. She was both a programme coordinator and section manager within the ESL section. She had participated in the action research project coordinated by Jacqueline in 1996-97 and also was involved in several of my research projects including an action research project on computers in the ESL syllabus in 1999. Mary’s views on the research/practice relationship are included among the elective chapters. Mary had been responsible for writing the Certificate English document and the ELW document and her role in this made it essential to get her views. She had recently begun a coursework MEd degree. I interviewed Mary together with Sandra.

The last ESL interviewee, Sandra, had joined the department more recently and had been working part-time for the last three years. She had completed the CertTESOL taught at TWP and was in the process of completing her DipSLT at the local university. Sandra participated in the action research project included in the portfolio, and we had taught together on a number of programs.

**9.1.1 Olivia: creating dependencies and coping with competencies**

Olivia begins by stressing how curriculum writing processes and frameworks were intrusive burdens on her time; how these processes lead to conflicts of interest for her; and how teaching (refugee) students means assessing student needs beyond the
framework of any prescription in the curriculum document. Her experience of curriculum work, including document writing, she describes overall as a difficult compromise of three commitments: personal ESL teaching philosophies, demands of the funding body, and administrative requirements.

Olivia sees a clear distinction between syllabus and curriculum; the first specifying content and sequence of curriculum, and providing clear boundaries for ESL teachers to work with. She believes the TWP curriculum documents embody ‘a combination of curriculum and syllabus’, an unfortunate confusion that leads to teachers like herself ‘being totally locked in’ to an inflexible program ‘which hangs like a lead weight around one’s neck’. Unlike other interviewees, she finds writing curriculum documents in neutral layman’s terms means writers have ‘to rephrase it all the time until you actually lose any sort of meaning’, and she compares the curriculum revision process using institutional quality assurance processes to rewriting the Bible in simple language, ‘You know there was a spiritual meaning to people and it was taken away and it was replaced by simple words which lost its meaning, and that’s what I see happening to curriculum documents’.

The unit standards she uses (included in the appendix) have credit values and time allocations for which she claims ‘I can’t see any rationale’, and which in practice she often ignores partly because she is very sceptical about whether national standards are, in fact, uniformly standard. This scepticism she bases on the inconsistencies she sees in using and moderating unit standards she teaches to ESL students with significant sociolinguistic weaknesses while her daughter is also being assessed with the same standards in high school. She sees an evident contradiction in both her students and her daughter being judged competent for a standard where their language proficiencies are so different, ‘The levels I expect students to reach and am pleased when they reach is probably nowhere near Kiwi expectations, so is it really a standard, a uniform standard?’, she asks.

Olivia disagrees that teaching methodology is not dictated by competency assessment, a notion NZQA encourages. Olivia rejects this idea because ‘the
(teaching) process is also specified in terms of how you’re going to produce those outcomes’. In contrast, Olivia believes that a good curriculum document should be a reflection of current teacher practice, and she refers to a recent opportunity to rewrite a program document which helped bring the document in line with her current teaching practice. Mary also hints at this practice within ESL to evaluate good curriculum documents in terms of their reflection of current practice. Olivia strongly believes that useful curriculum documents can only be written by those ‘directly working with the students’ and those ‘in touch with the reality of students’. Thus, she rejects the practice of contracting outsiders to write curriculum documents, or purchasing curriculum from other institutions, which other interviewees refer to.

Olivia calls morally responsible teaching allegiance to student needs, ‘You teach what you know the students need’, rather than allegiance to curriculum frameworks. She describes the two competing allegiances as accountability to the document or to students. Accountability to the document is bureaucratic, ‘It somehow justifies the program . . . the funding issues and things like that’, while student accountability is moral. This potential conflict of allegiance leads to dilemmas, and she admits that ignoring the competencies and standards specified in the document lead to her experiencing a sense of guilt, of not having ‘lived up to the expectations of the curriculum’, and she gives some specific examples of how this happened. In general, allegiance to students leads to ‘subversion and encourages people to find ways . . . to circumvent the restrictions of the document itself and hope they don’t get caught’. This reference to her own strategies of maintaining personal integrity and ethics against imposed accountability is taken up by several other practitioners. Olivia volunteers that ‘If you read something and it goes totally against your grain you can always re-read it to match your reality or justify it in someway’.

In referring to students, Olivia connects student dependency on teachers with an image of teaching as morally responsible teaching and nurture, because ESL is ‘almost a nurturing sort of area of teaching . . . you’re responsible for ensuring that it’s of use to people you’re delivering it to because they can’t look after themselves’. Teaching ESL, therefore, particularly to refugees, is about students learning language to ‘function in a society and live up to their potential’. As such, curriculum should
not, she argues, be limited by prescriptive competency statements because refugees ‘have so many issues outside of educational ones’. Student potential and the issues they face are dependent on the informed interpretation of the ESL teacher. Negotiating curriculum with students is difficult because, as students, they ‘really don’t know all the answers because they are students of the subject’. Thus, Olivia constructs the ESL migrant student fundamentally dependent on teacher guidance.

Several other interviewees (Marama, Jacqueline, Mary) mention Olivia’s work and especially her frustrations with unit standards. Through her focus on learner needs, and her ability to know what these needs are she creates a space for dependency because the teacher controls curriculum processes. Olivia also uses this dependent positioning of her students to resist institutional curriculum processes and frameworks, and justify strategies of resistance. She experiences the document writing and assessment process, including the use of neutral language as accountability to bodies and communities she does not identify with, and the insistence on a neutral bureaucratic language distances the practitioner from what could be a personally meaningful statement of practice. The different allegiances she espouses to students and the obligations she feels to institutions create dilemmas that she resolves through recourse to moral and ethical principles underpinned by her religious beliefs, and direct strategies of resistance.

9.1.2 Christine: an accidental encounter with learner needs

Christine characterises the curriculum document as a ‘very broad guideline’, preferring to see ESL programs in general as topic based, focusing on ‘everyday life in New Zealand’. Student needs or interests that emerge in the classroom always take precedence over the document, and she gives the example of helping a student deal with speeding fines. Christine developed the idea of subversion mentioned by Olivia by referring to ‘manipulating’ the document to meet these needs. Christine suggests that her approach to both TOPS and general Certificate English (one of the programs mentioned in the following chapter) is the same: ‘manipulate the document to fit the needs of the students’.
Although only brief, Christine’s perspective as a relative newcomer to the field and the section was important. Together with Sandra’s comments examined below, they demonstrate resistance to institutional frameworks in curriculum documents, and how other principles like learner needs and the teacher-student relationships are more important. This suggests a clear resistance by ESL teachers to be confined by what they consider external inflexible prescriptions. Manipulation in the case of TOPS English implies some form of ‘official’ deceit and subterfuge because there is accountability to government funding, and NZQA moderation of unit standards. With other ESL programs not accountable to unit standards, manipulation involves a more general taking up of a discourse of needs-based ESL teaching within which teacher-student identities are constructed by a dependency relationship in which the power to know and act is retained by the teacher. This discourse of needs-based ESL created through dependency, nurturing and certain forms of teacher-student power recurs throughout this portfolio.

9.1.3 Jacqueline: profiling TESOL, ESOL and institutional history

In her interviews, Jacqueline refers to curriculum processes in ESL prior to document writing and also compares her experience of writing documents for TESOL with ESL. She also suggests particular differences between curriculum work prior to document writing might explain some of the difficulties I experience in understanding the practice of others.

Like other ESL teachers, Jacqueline clearly distinguishes curriculum from syllabus, but also provides a broad definition of curriculum, independent of the curriculum document. Syllabus, she refers to as a sequencing of content, and is dependent on curriculum. ‘I can’t work from a syllabus if I haven’t got a curriculum beforehand’. She proposes that seeing this curriculum-syllabus relationship is part of professional practice because ‘It should also be possible to track back from any teaching syllabus (to) how that fits into your curriculum’. She acknowledges that in foreign language teaching, an area we both have experience in, curriculum planning is often left to a national body, and for ESL teachers from this background, and there were a number
in the department, the shift from syllabus to the broader guidelines of curriculum could, therefore, be difficult.

Jacqueline suggests that a structural syllabus is her preferred base ‘because we’re talking about a system that is discrete and is enclosed and finite’. Curriculum documents for ESL reinforce this base by making structures an essential organisational strand of the program for each level. In our second interview she went further to argue that this structural base ‘is the only thing we have’ that ESL teachers (‘we’) can depend on. Her preference for a structural syllabus she attributed to her background in foreign language teaching, where this guides national curriculum statements, textbooks, and teaching processes. While noting that with higher level students grammar structures may be less important than other skills, this base remained important.

She acknowledges that ESL programs work with a framework of several streams running simultaneously, eg. structures, functions, topics, which are included in the document. In her view the different strands of the curriculum that are used perhaps contribute to a lack of visible coherence,

‘I think that often when you look through, for example, the Certificate English programs and look at the structures, which have been selected for each level, there are a lot that have been missed out . . . there are gaps there, it’s not actually as coherent as it perhaps could be’.

The outline of topics, structures, skills which program team leaders distribute and use as the practical framework\(^8\) can also lead to a fragmented and incoherent outcome,

‘I think what happens in out classes often with the bits of paper that we’re given . . . sometimes, you know, one teacher might say, oh I really just wanted to talk about the news or I want a functional approach . . . and then what falls through the gaps and lands on the floor?’

\(^8\) This, for example, is the practice Sandra (and most teacher in the ESL unit) uses in the following chapter, where she copies the pages from the curriculum document to use as the basis for teaching.
Referring to the common practice in the ESL section of copying the set of pages in the curriculum document which outline only these frameworks, she suggests this is ‘not coherent’ or adequate for newcomers to work from; this is the practice Sandra employs in the following chapter to ensure the curriculum is covered. Such an approach, Jacqueline argues, leads to newcomers to a program with no ‘contact with the original thinking . . . re-interpreting it in their own ways’.

Jacqueline considers that the writing of curriculum documents is where institutional accountability is currently placed although she believes that accountability should be developed by opportunities for mutual understanding among ESL teachers about the nature of curriculum work in ESL. She points out that not only is accountability invested in curriculum writing rather than teaching methodology but also that administrative concerns about securing enrolments left little time for anything else. ESL managers are often preoccupied with obtaining and retaining students, and trying to get programmes to ‘fit in with enrolment systems of the Polytech, which don’t suit our students’ than attempting to create conditions for improved curriculum work.

While other interviewees positively evaluate eclectic approaches to curriculum among ESL teachers, Jacqueline believes that different teacher practices and valuing of curriculum documents is a ‘hugely important’ area that needs attention. She suggests that increased staff numbers have also contributed to the lack of unity and shared curriculum knowledge among staff because communication and shared awareness is now more difficult. Shared teacher awareness in the past, she argues, helped create common aims and processes for curriculum work. Too little time is currently allocated to this, which only happens where teachers ‘are really experienced and have a lot of experience with similar groups, similar courses, processes of negotiating with syllabus, sitting down thinking carefully’. This level of planning involves choosing among existing conventions,
'a particular program will have some general ways of operating, maybe several general ways of operating, but for any particular group of students, a particular way or combination of ways will be picked (by teachers)'

Below this, in her view underutilised, group level of planning is still another level of classroom ‘fine tuning for particular teachers, particular students’, an individual approach created by conditions noted above and that seems to dominate in ESL practice.

While it is important that documents could be read by non-ESL practitioners, the idea that one could teach from the document, an assumption sometimes made, is a mistake because ‘there’s got to be another level of planning in order for the classroom course to be satisfactory’. However, Jacqueline is uncertain whether this other level of teacher methodology planning is currently in place, noting, however, that curriculum documents should not include methodology, and include content in only a ‘sketchy’ fashion to avoid teachers being bound to principles and practices that are difficult to change officially; her assessment of this point is quite different to that of Olivia.

Jacqueline contrasts her experience of writing TESOL documents, from which one can read off methodology in a sense, and ESOL, where one can not, ‘the actual methodology involved in teaching teachers is nothing like the methodology that’s built up and has grown over the years and is involved in teaching ESOL’. Although she has no personal experience of writing documents incorporating unit standards (experiences both Mary and Olivia refer to), Jacqueline sees learning outcomes and performance outcomes as part of the general competency approach to document writing for the DipTESOL program. The learning outcomes approach, she believes, has helped focus on ‘what it is that we’re looking for here?’ rather than teachers thinking only in terms of teacher objectives. Lacking specific experience in working with unit standards, her doubts about the role of curriculum documents on practice are not the same as those of Olivia or Christine although she is less dismissive on the
Jacqueline suggests that in her own past, in a period prior to document writing, the guidance, leadership, and discussion she sees less evidence of now was where all energies were channelled and where mentoring of inexperienced staff took place. This past she adds was ‘very much more satisfying than it is today’. In our second interview, Jacqueline describes in detail how she was involved in document writing and programme development prior to NZQA accreditation of ESL programs becoming a major issue, ‘at a time when ESOL programmes were being developed in a particular context . . . driven by particular needs of people in the community’. At this time also foreign languages were taught as a service to other departments such as tourism and office technology and so there was more integration with curriculum processes in the institution. Processes of document writing have brought the ESL section into line with the institution while at the same time isolating ESL. The former location of the ESL unit on campus, and links and associations between departments, which were encouraged in a period of non-accountability to the NQF, created a form of integration that is now challenged by curriculum processes that encourage separation.

Jacqueline is aware of the paradox in that ESL programs are only defined in broad outline even though they have met the ‘rigorous’ institutional guidelines. She highlights the potential conflict between heavy investment in document writing, the quality of curriculum, and institutional approval processes,

‘Some of the documents we’ve got in this department for ESOL are so broad that they could be nothing really, you could do just about anything with them and they’ve got through the processes in terms of what the institution requires’.

While Jacqueline believes there is a commitment in the ESL section to constructing the curriculum as teachers go along, the changes and decisions that are made are ‘not always looked at carefully enough and I don’t think careful decisions are always made’. This ongoing ‘eclectic’ approach - to the particular group being taught, she
suggests, cannot be written into a document. However, ‘there needs to be more
description of it, more agreement about what we’re doing or it can be a bit ad hoc’.

This description and public appraisal of practice requires guidance to work,

‘I think what needs to be in place to make it work . . . is very careful guidance
and leadership in terms of fleshing our all aspects of any course’.

Both leadership and public scrutiny of decisions - justifying what and why - as part
of teaching she suggests is often absent.

‘What is important is to know what you’re doing and why. And to scrutinize that all the time
and say, look I did it this way, this time because, and it’s a level of thinking I think, which
often isn’t there’.

The now common practice in the ESL section of employing part-timers such as
Peter, a situation created by insecurity in the institution which Mary outlines
elsewhere sometimes with little training and experience, she thinks is not conducive
to good practice. ‘If someone from outside comes in and doesn’t have that
background they’re kind of swimming around a bit I think’. She points out that a
particular danger for new teachers without this experience of group planning, is
‘we’ve got people who pick up a textbook . . . where the thinking behind it is not
necessarily visible’ and the textbook substitutes for careful planning.

Individual student input, while in principle useful, had limited practical use since
courses are designed with groups in mind, and, therefore, alway requires ESL
specialist interpretation. On the other hand, teachers can and do respond in the
classroom to needs and interests that learners express. This characterisation of
courses as group oriented, and the foregrounding of teacher expertise and knowledge
in relation to student negotiation may help substantiate a discourse of ESL teaching
where control and power remains with the teacher. Jacqueline and other ESL
teachers suggest that such a situation is co-produced by the sociolinguistic
inadequacies of the migrant student, who often invests the ESL teacher with
authority and expertise. The matter of teacher control and power, therefore, is seen as a moral decision rather than a question of the teacher encouraging dependency.

Jacqueline contrasts current document writing processes with her own prior experience of a greater team commitment to a middle level of curriculum interpretation and planning. Jacqueline acknowledges a number of potential dangers to team teaching, regarding coherent practice, where there is not systematic space for mutual understanding and consensus on practice. Jacqueline suggests that current staffing practices, themselves a product of bureaucratic restrictions on predicting student numbers and staffing, also contribute to the lack of consensus and efficient teaching processes. The use of textbooks as curriculum, underspecified curriculum frameworks, and processes of individual interpretation lead to incoherent practices that Jacqueline suggests were less visible in the past. Jacqueline also recognises that although curriculum documents legitimise a number of different approaches to teaching ESL, individual teachers may take up this opportunity in ways that do not lead to a consistent outcome for students. This has a bearing on the strong purchase the discourse of needs-based teaching has within the section because it is precisely this (sanctioned) availability of a space to invest with teacher power and control that creates dependencies and sustains a culture of nurture. This culture of nurture, Helen (below) suggests emerges from a gendered female workplace.

One of the motivations for Jacqueline leading ESL teachers in an action research project was to refocus attention on common understandings. She also suggests that team meetings and other processes of planning and evaluating the curriculum need to be systematic, and guided by recognition of expertise and its role in teaching. In the following chapter, I examine the extent to which such processes are in place.

9.1.4 Mary: the view of a section manager

Like Jacqueline, Mary had a long albeit less intense experience of working in the ESL section and, as it turned out, a healthy scepticism of institutional and political aspects of curriculum work in ESL. Mary has rather strong views on the
dehumanisation of education she saw being perpetrated by the right wing National Government and NZQA, which also affected her children’s schooling. Mary begins by pointing out that curriculum - ‘an overarching term including everything that you do’ - and syllabus - ‘talking about a particular class or a particular part of a course’ - are quite distinct terms for her. This was not the case, however, in the second language literature of North America, which she read as a teacher in training.

Mary suggests that ESL teachers not document writers take priority in re-presenting curriculum, ‘They’re the one’s who make it come alive’. The document, as a rough outline, always needs to be interpreted and changed to meet groups of students, and ‘if the document doesn’t fit what they are doing then the document has to be changed’. This talk of changing the document is somewhat in conflict with Mary acknowledging that administrative processes make actual document modifications difficult if not impossible. Established ‘traditions’ of interpreting ESL programs in the ESL unit take precedence over document frameworks. Mary notes that inconsistencies between document and practice, which exist to varying degrees for all ESL courses, only become significant when programs are audited or external moderation takes place. External moderation, which is worked out on the basis of a mutual arrangement between respective ESL teaching institutions, can of course fail to raise issues where similar cultures of practice and interpretation exist in the respective ESL centres that moderate each other.

Curriculum documents built on unit standards and NZQA accreditation processes, she believed, look very product oriented,

‘How you get there (curriculum outcome) is totally irrelevant as far as they’re concerned, it’s just as long as you have something to show them at the end of it and the unit standards approach lends itself that way also’.

Mary, referring to practices in other institutions, points out how such an approach leads to a breakdown in teaching quality and fraud with teachers ‘doing the test for students’ to get outcomes. Competency-based curriculum also leaves no space for professional judgement. Mary gives the example of an institution where, she claims,
teachers have no ESL qualifications but can deliver the same results as trained ESL teachers as an example of how ‘quality control’ is interpreted through outcomes not processes. ‘I mean they (NZQA) go on and on about quality control, but actually in practice . . . they haven’t made any room for it’. Because competencies make no specific claims about the quality or processes of teaching, this leaves the door open for any one teaching a subject. Mary also offers an example from a recent experience where another staff member at TWP suggested general staff without TESOL training could teach international students as well as trained staff, and it would be cheaper. To remedy this situation, Mary argues that methodology, eg. communicative language teaching, be specified in some way in curriculum as a real measure of teaching quality that needs to be addressed.

Mary suggests that different approaches to teaching are essential to maintaining a healthy atmosphere in the teaching section, while at the same time ‘you’ve got to be able to make compromises . . . to reach some sort of synthesis’. Diversity in teaching style, she suggests benefits students. However, she acknowledged that principled differences among ESL staff regarding assessment and teaching practices did lead to conflict. She gave the example of a teacher coordinator, familiar to us both, who ‘had a different understanding of what assessment was to everybody else’ and this created difficulties. When this teacher left and a new body of teachers was in charge of the program, although they continued to use mixed assessment - marks and competency - she believed they had a shared view of the relative value of both formats. In the following chapter, I show how mixed assessment practices do not necessarily lead to open conflict among teachers but do lead to covert difficulties.

Mary is quite emphatic (‘yes it does, sure, absolutely’) when I ask whether ESL curriculum was different from other subjects. Focusing on unit standards, she compares ESL to plumbing, an example chosen to illustrate adult vocational training typical of TWP. She notes how assessment for such fields relates directly to observable performance of a sequence of tasks, like changing a washer in a tap, ‘you can outline that process and you can give that person an assessment on how to change a tap and they can either do it or they can’t do it’. Mary rejects such behaviour oriented understandings of standards for ESL teaching and learning.
Because such understandings predominate in the institution, however, she argues that it is difficult to argue for other forms of assessment and teaching based on the significance of the cognitive and social principles of language learning.

She illustrates how such forms of assessment are inadequate for language by recounting an anecdote about a (university) lecture she attended where a unit standard for Maori language is discussed. She reports laughing during the discussion and indicating why she found such descriptions amusing and quite incompatible with the nature of the student and language acquisition, noting that,

‘language doesn’t work like that because language is a cumulative process and every learner does it at different rates and every learner comes with a different set of experiences . . . And every learner has a different learning style . . . and they have a different end point in view as well’.

The highly individual nature of language learning, Mary suggests, make competencies an incompatible option for curriculum in ESL.

In fact, it seems, that such a belief is widespread among teachers in the section, and one source for the needs-based discourse of ESL teaching. It addresses a fundamental humanistic premise of education about the rights of the individual to realise their potential in specific ways. It also helps support the argument that no framework can address group ESL needs and creates a space for teacher-student dependency, because if one adopts this humanistic discourse of the ESL student, then teachers intervene on behalf of the student to make learning possible.

Mary uses this, to her, obvious fact about individual difference and process in language learning to signal the absurdity of outcome-oriented specifications. This fundamental difference between language learning and other skills has consequences for the way ESL did not fit into institutional systems like program regulations,

‘Because the criteria of accepting our students, acceptance criteria and finishing criteria for our Certificate English programs aren’t the same as mid-wifery for example . . . its something that we come up against again and again with the Polytech, is that we don’t fit’
Not only did ESL not fit the profile for other courses, but Mary also highlighted how teaching ESL to migrants is quite distinct from other kinds of English teaching, eg. EFL, or foreign language teaching based on discrete functions and situational vocabulary. Not only, as Jacqueline points out, do other forms of language teaching not have to deal with curriculum, as in adult ESL, but these other forms of language teaching are inadequate for permanent residents, ‘who are trying to live in a country, trying to find a job or trying to do further study or trying to look after their children’.

Mary recounts in two separate e-mails to me how the ELW curriculum document came to incorporate unit standards, in response to pressures at the time to write curriculum in these terms, ‘That was when Unit Standards were first coming in and we felt we should show willingness to use them, especially since it was strongly suggested that they would become compulsory, so we really should get practised in using them’. As it emerged they did not become compulsory for many ESL programs but remain in the document, although only partly refer to current assessment processes. In general, Mary suggests that

‘I have felt for a long time, that the process for curriculum development and change is too cumbersome, too detailed, too fraught with safeguards, which actually work against maintaining flexibility in programmes’.

Mary believes, however, that the recent ESL standards on the framework did justify the language level approaches taken in the department, ‘I think there is some consensus about what constitutes elementary . . . intermediate, pre-intermediate, upper intermediate’.

Taking up Mary’s suggestion about the inappropriateness of unit standards for language learning, I added that the segmentation of learning by standards became much more difficult at higher levels. Statements like ‘produce coherent discourse’, for example, Mary and I agreed, are impossible to quantify. (Many of our explanations and the dialogue between Mary and myself were for the benefit of Sandra who was struggling with understanding the issues). Mary volunteered that
when she wrote the Certificate English documents she attempted to develop performance criteria ‘and I got to about two or three hundred performance criteria’. However, when she showed these to colleagues they could not agree and this lead to the content oriented document they currently had, which ‘actually leaves all of that open’. Helen, in her interview below, also refers to how confused she felt about ESL approaches to this document as HOD viewing this program writing process.

As a result of her experience, Mary is aware that some think the existing document is too ill-defined, ‘actually too vague and too open’. At the same time, the looseness of the curriculum document is an intentional strategy to avoid having to make official changes, a lengthy bureaucratic process, to a fixed curriculum, ‘If your document is reasonably loose then you do leave yourself some professional leeway to make the changes that you need as you go along’. She believes, nonetheless, that it is important to have some framework as a consistent reference point for teachers, ‘It gives you something you can go back to, so there’s some sort of continuity with what you’re offering’. And it also gives a clear outline for moderation and a ‘credible’ public face ‘they give professional credibility to your courses’.

For Mary the flexibility of interpreting programs and especially assessments, is a key issue for new staff who can misinterpret assessments, ‘who see the assessment sheet and say . . . it says we’ve got to do this . . . they will gear the whole course towards one assessment day’. This is a tension that emerges in the following chapter where I specifically suggest to Mary (and Sandra) that the assessments in the curriculum document be used for the Certificate English program. Mary rejects this interpretation of the document, preferring another approach and making assessments out of class work, rather than summative tasks specified in the document. Such an approach is ‘a reflection of what students had done in the class, and that what they had done in the class could build towards the assessment’. In the following chapter, I explore the coherence of this recent practice.

However, Mary notes that this principle of the document bearing a loose relationship to practice, an issue several teachers refer to, can lead to a severe dislocation between
the two. Mary gives the example of the PFTS program document written in 1993 by Jacqueline. The NZQA approved document, ‘nationally accredited and they get a national certificate’, no longer bore any relationship to practice and this was embarrassing to Mary, ‘It’s got things in it which are not what we do anymore because we’ve just changed them’. Where Mary refers to the PFTS program as a national certificate she does not mean a nationally recognised certificate that guarantees entry to university, because there are no nationally recognised certificates in ESL in this sense.

Like other EAP programs, the PFTS program, competes unfavourably, because only the latter guarantees entry, with the internationally recognised IELTS exam, which allows entry to university in NZ. The lack of change to the curriculum document in the case of PFTS she put down to human factors - teachers having different views about priorities in the program (mentioned above) - and institutional factors ‘which actually don’t serve the development or interests of the program . . . don’t serve the interests of the students’. Mary then repeats an underlying principle that several ESL teachers refer to: a good curriculum document in ESL reflects current practice, practice defined by teachers themselves, who create an environment of ‘nurture’ for students.

When Sandra admits that she has little experience and understanding of curriculum processes, Mary suggests that ESL teachers within the section do isolate themselves from the political and social environments of teaching,

‘There’s a tendency for classroom teachers . . . to see themselves as classroom teachers and unrelated to national trends of things that may be happening outside their classroom or even sometimes outside their institution. Or even sometimes within their institution but outside of their little square’

Mary suggests that as a part-timer she was uncomfortable with this isolation and wanted ‘to see everything as part of a whole, part of a framework and how it relates to other things’. This lack of representation for part-timers and their powerlessness remains a key issue for Mary.
Overall, Mary characterizes the flexibility in interpreting the ESL curriculum document as an ESL strategy against institutional systems but also a reflection of the nature of language teaching and student needs. She foregrounds a variety of institutional processes that marginalise the ESL section and suggests that other non-ESL staff do not understand the nature of the field. While she has a principled disagreement with the behavioural orientation of unit standards for second language acquisition she attempts to find ways in which they might relate to teaching. Stressing the fact that current practice and ESL teachers alone know what is needed, highlights again the potential circularity of ESL teaching because it excludes the possibility of external criteria, eg. standards and competencies, defining curriculum. It also excludes the possibility of developing the kind of curriculum planning that Jacqueline suggests characterises best practice, and denies the possibility of nationally validated standards.

Mary’s use of the word ‘aims’ to characterize the similarities between the ELW document and teaching practice is quite specific. It means that some topics addressed in the unit standards, eg. CV writing, are also addressed in program practice although others, eg. occupational health and safety, the employment contracts act, are not addressed at all, and have become, in practice, obsolete. Because unit standards always specify detailed performance criteria, numbers of hours, and elements, current teaching and assessment practices cannot be said, in this sense, to correspond to this approach. At the same time the ‘performance criteria approach’ that also is embedded in the standards, she finds inappropriate for general English but perhaps relevant to ELW. Mary makes the important point that good curriculum writing in ESL is about translating current practice into documentation.

9.1.5 Sandra: the practical approach, disengagement from politics

With no background or training in general education, Sandra admits ‘I’ve never seen a curriculum (document) outside of an ESOL one. I never worked in a high school’. This makes it difficult for her to comment on the meaning of curriculum, syllabus, and institutional policy; nor had she seen unit standards. Sandra also asserts she has
never been in a team where different opinions about teaching was a problem and so
was unable to put different curriculum understandings in context. As it emerges in
the interview, she positions all her experience in the ‘immediate context of teaching’,
a context which excludes any broader understanding of the social and political
environment within which curriculum operates, and a context devoid of conflict or
competing discourses. Sandra suggests that her focus on the classroom and her
relationship with learners was a result of the kind of practical person she was, ‘I’m
just a sort of person that stays focused like this’.

Sandra positions the curriculum document as a line of demarcation between ESL
teachers and male management, heads of department, and NZQA, ‘And it’s just a
very broad overview to keep those guys happy so they know generally what we’re
doing and to give us an outline of what we’re supposed to be covering too’. Syllabus,
on the other hand, belonged to ESL teachers, ‘That’s just how we organise and
interpret what’s in the curriculum and how we put it into place according to our
student needs and all that’. Sandra admits she is, in fact, unsure about what
curriculum is - ‘I’m learning as I’m sitting here’ - but her comments suggest it
specifies outcomes and leaves the means and process to teacher choice. Such an
approach is the best way of keeping ‘those guys’ out ‘we don’t want them interfering
with what we do in the classroom, do we?’ Sandra adds that the guidelines of topics,
functions and structures contained in the document were a useful base for teachers
new to a program,

‘I’ve found them useful when I’ve been given a new level to teach . . . I’ve stuck to those
(guidelines) quite a lot at the beginning . . . you need something quite tight when you’re
new’.

Sandra here refers to the ‘bits of paper’ Jacqueline identifies above as the source of
curriculum for newcomers. At the same time Sandra suggests that more senior
teachers, including Mary, make it clear that the curriculum document is not
something she had to ‘stick to’. In practice, Sandra claims she slowly relinquishes the
hold the document has over her teaching, but she does so under the advice of other
ESL teachers.
Like Christine, and to a lesser extent some of the other ESL teachers, Sandra places learner needs at the centre of curriculum, ‘you’ve just got to implement it according to the learner needs . . . I would feel quite free to leave that written document if it really didn’t suit the needs of the students’. As Sandra demonstrates in the following chapter, her definition of learner needs relies heavily on her assessment of grammar proficiency rather than relating to some form of social need. She also claims the documents and the culture of interpreting documents in the department made it possible to work in this way.

Thus, the curriculum document and the processes of curriculum writing and approval, which are largely hidden from Sandra, belong to the institution and the (male) body of management. Sandra sees herself in a community (‘us’) of practitioners who share her view of the autonomy of ESL teachers to define curriculum in terms of their own relationship with learners. Sandra sees this division of responsibilities preserving the community of ESL practitioners as autonomous insiders, the curriculum document serving as a rhetorical barrier to interference by ‘outsiders’, ie. management. Syllabus design and interpretation of learner needs is owned by ESL teachers and is possible because of the freedom with which the curriculum document in ESL, unbounded by unit standards, allows ESL teachers like Sandra to work in ways they think best (‘according to our student needs and all that’).

As I show in the following chapter, and elsewhere in this portfolio, this interpretation of students needs by ESL teachers, and the empathy that underpins it, is not as unproblematic as it seems, nor as consensual as Sandra suggests. Sandra’s limited knowledge and experience of broader institutional processes and curriculum writing make it difficult for her to understand and respond to some of the questions in the interview. Sandra’s imagined community of ESL teachers sharing her view of the boundaries of ESL practice is not yet challenged although a number of interviewees, eg. Helen, Jacqueline, myself, do not share her values. She positions herself as ‘just a teacher’ and strongly influenced by the culture within the ESL section of building
programs around learner needs. Sandra, like Christine, is an important representative of ESL teachers within the department who have not yet developed an awareness of the systems within which they work and are defined.

### 9.2 Talking to five non-ESL educators

To help position the responses of the ESL teachers in perspective I also spoke to five non-ESL practitioners, some of whom had a close relationship, knowledge or influence over ESL curriculum writing and practice. Graham taught on the Diploma of Counselling, Leanne and Marianne both worked in the area of disabilities and also human services (In the appendix, the National Certificate in Social Services is a ‘typical’ example document). Their insights together with those of Marama and Helen provide an alternative conception of curriculum work against which ESL was measured, through its relationship to the department and the institution.

Helen, the former HOD, and now involved in program development within the faculty of social sciences, had a long experience of working for and with the ESL section. Helen had appointed me to the ESL section and had a Masters in Education, which addressed critical and poststructuralist frameworks to critique vocational practice. She took a keen interest in my research and writing. She enrolled in a paper on language acquisition, taught some ESL classes, and generally tried to develop an understanding of the particular curriculum discourses and practices ESL teachers espoused.

Marama, had recently become acting HOD for the department from section manager in Social Services. She had recently completed a Bachelor of Education. Her husband worked in the department as the technician and both were from local Maori communities. She was one of the founding members of the department when it was called the transition department and in her responses she laments some of the changes that have taken place from that time. In her position as HOD, and with her knowledge of the past, her perspective on the practices and understandings of ESL teachers was both pertinent and influential.
Marianne teaches in the disabilities field within Social Services; she is sight impaired. She had a relatively long experience of working in the department and a good grasp of effects of the recent shift into NZQA competency frameworks. Like Leanne, she has no background (training and experience) in general teaching, and has not developed her own experience-based curriculum language. Consequently, she takes up terms like ‘provider’, ‘outcome’, ‘delivery’, which are used in NZQA/NQF speech, as ‘natural’ and uncontested descriptions for curriculum work. Leanne also worked in the areas of disabilities and social services. She had studied psychology at university and volunteered at the start of the interview that she had no preconceptions about curriculum until she looked up the term on the internet.

Graham, the final interviewee, teaches in the counselling field within Social Services, is a relatively recent recruit to TWP, and held a position as section manager. He teaches programs that incorporate unit standards, and together with his school teaching background, general interest in workplace research, and ‘maleness’, makes for an easy informed interviewee. He suggests that the interview was a useful exercise in reflecting on his teaching and position relative to curriculum work in Social Services.

9.2.1 Helen: education theory and experience used to find a way

Helen is dismayed that curriculum documents could play so little a part in defining ESL practice, which I suggested, in line with some of the responses above, was the case in ESL. Her new position as academic program adviser conflicted directly with this,

‘I’ve come into that (position) with the assumption having been made already that curriculum documents will do that and that the quality of the curriculum document will have a direct link to the quality of the teaching and learning going on in the classroom’.

Helen also notes how competency-based curriculum and accountability has made curriculum work into a subject for litigation when she discusses how students can
respond to the accountability written into the curriculum document through competencies and standards as an opportunity to move curriculum to the courts,

‘So that people . . . instead of discussing or debating it, they’ll actually say, I’m going to get a lawyer and I’m going to get on the Consumer Guarantees Act, I want my money back, that sort of thing’

Reflecting on her long experience as head of ESL and Social Services, she notes that the structures that articulated the Certificate English document, were difficult to create, due in part to the ESL personalities involved. In addition, difficulties with document writing seemed also the product of ESL teachers being unable to agree on the basis for curriculum work,

‘Like people couldn’t agree on . . . were we going to describe it in terms of language acquisition, or were we going to describe it in terms of learning outcomes, or were we going to describe it in terms of what I thought then was a more communicative approach, which was topics’.

Helen feels that given individual differences among learners (an issue that Mary and others raise in their interviews) ESL teachers should not impose a single structural syllabus and pathway on students, which some appear ESL teachers seem to privilege. She could not understand why ESL teachers would insist on students following through a cumulative process of acquisition of language structures dictated by level specific structures inscribed in the curriculum document.

Although she feels professionally committed to the encouraging the idea that curriculum documents have a benign effect on teacher autonomy, Helen recognizes the surveillance effect on teachers of quality assurance processes in relation to curriculum accreditation and practice,

‘Yes, but nevertheless I do think there's become this much greater surveillance and it has stemmed from things like NZQA, and this kind of whole idea of quality has taken away a significant part of teachers autonomy around what they do in the classroom’.
Helen also notes that while NZQA argue that assessment frameworks, eg. unit standards, do not officially dictate methodology, this is not actually true in practice,

‘But that's very interesting because that was always what was said about unit standards that they were an assessment tool and that they did not dictate the delivery, the resources, the learning and teaching methods that went on in the class. But, then they ended up doing that, didn't they?’.

Helen disagrees with the current TWP management approach to education as commodity, an approach she did not feel she shared with the CEO. She gives the example of curriculum packages purchased from other institutions, a practice she does not agree with.

Helen notes how ESL certificates, unlike other qualifications at TWP, are not directly linked to employment ‘and there’s certainly not a direct relationship between those qualifications and a job is there? You can’t trade it in for a job’. When I suggested this related to the sense of fragility and isolation of the ESL section, she agreed,

‘Certainly it's a kind of uncomfortable position in the Polytech because so much of what we do here is directly tied to vocational employment related education. And its much more difficult to make a case for ESOL when you talk about if people feel that ESOL is fragile and is not you know not seen as equal in this institution’.

Helen also suggests that the feeling of marginality, a feeling evoked in corridors among ESL teachers and by other faculties, eg. Nursing, is both common and a product of some ill-defined effect of the institution,

‘Everybody thinks their voice is peripheral, (which) is a very fascinating phenomenon. I wonder what this institution does to do that . . . I don’t think ESOL is actually as misunderstood as they think they are but I do think the nature of ESOL work is much more, you know, ups and downs’.

Helen identifies the ‘ESL teaching as nurture’ metaphor as an outcome of the maternalism in the ESL section, reinforced by a dependency relationship between
teacher and student, which could sometimes evade the responsibility of clearly identifying learning experiences relevant to the student,

‘I think ESOL teachers still maintain a kind of paternalistic sense about their teaching or maternalistic, because they're mostly women aren't they? Which is that . . . the teacher does know best how that learner will acquire English. And that there's that kind of sense, leave it in my hands and I will...I'm not very comfortable with that . . . The teacher does have some responsibility to actually set up some kind of situation in the course or in their classroom, which enables a student to gain that experience’.

This lack of open negotiation about program aims and processes is co-produced by the boundaries set by curriculum documents, and beliefs among ESL teachers of the inability of students to set their own agendas. Helen, finds this approach puzzling,

‘It's not a very negotiated curriculum is it? I wonder how much the ESOL teachers think . . . that you need to ask the learners what they need . . . They assume you don't know what you're doing’.

In response to my question about whether she felt that ESL work was partly structured by gendered (female) understandings, Helen noted that I entered a workplace where gendered ways of practicing ESL existed, and my engagement in research as an avenue for professional development and promotion challenged this,

‘And one of the things maybe that we all had more difficulty understanding was what impact, and maybe wasn't well handled by me and others, (would have on the unit) by bringing a man into an all woman team would have. I think that's really been quite a significant thing too, don't you? And often women's careers are obviously much more dictated by other things that are happening and staying in a place for a long time is your actually only choice’

Whether or not it is a correct reading, ESL teachers highlight their difference and the incompatibility of competencies with language learning. Such an approach suggests that a shared curriculum culture across the Polytechnic, which Helen alludes to when describing the effect of culture on curriculum, does not exist,

‘The culture of the department I think has an impact on curriculum too . . . And probably the Faculty of Social Science (within which Social Work and ESL are situated) would be the most homogenous kind of shared understanding of curriculum’.
It does not seem to me that this shared understanding of curriculum is adequate to describe ESL knowledge and practices in the CCE department. On the one hand, ESL teacher themselves distinguish their work from other mainstream subjects. On the other hand, ESL practitioners differ from their colleagues in the department in relation to how the curriculum document and the competency frameworks and institutional bodies they represent as objects of discourse are viewed as surveillance mechanisms of disciplinary power. Helen is uncertain about the rationale and justice of processes within the ESL section although, at the same time, aware of the ways the institution itself and its representatives may distort good practice.

9.2.2 Marama: coping with management and practitioner discourses

Marama suggests the move into the new world of competencies has had an effect on staff creativity, arguing also that the change to competency-based models has affected her sense of the purpose of the department as a whole. In addition, she believes the contracting out of curriculum writing, mentioned by several interviewees, has affected staff creativity, curriculum ownership by staff, autonomy, and has helped sustain a corporate discourse of curriculum,

‘I think the environment has changed . . . we've gone into a more corporate, business-like management. Staff have lost that creativity in terms of developing curriculum and when I looked at who actually creates this it's not necessarily the staff any more’.

Marama, uses the word ‘creativity’ later to refer to how staff ‘creatively’ ignore unit standard specifications about the number of assessments required for a unit standard because each module does not have strict quality control processes, i.e. moderation. Creativity thus is connected with professional autonomy which is used both to respond to student needs and resist competency structures.

While expressing some reservations about the effect of unit standards on teaching, the relationship between the Polytechnic new world and business or corporate interests is also cast by Marama, in a positive light,
'I find it quite positive in the sense that the students will get what they're here to get. They paid for this, they want this unit and they're going to be assessed against it, plus we've also got moderation guidelines to meet so if we don't do one then we miss out with the students as well as with the moderation cluster group'.

Thus, there appears to be some contradiction in Marama’s recognition that, on the one hand, moderation does not guarantee quality curriculum outcomes, and, on the other, that it does. In addition, the potentially litigious outcome of curriculum work Helen refers to above, is ignored as Marama focuses on the financial obligations of curriculum accountability.

Marama notes how teachers respond in different ways to the introduction of new systems, especially those that challenge their control, routine and relationships with students. While explicitly refusing to ‘play by the rules’, eg. teach to unit standards, may be impossible, there are other more subtle forms of resistance. Marama documents two extremes in approaches to competencies and unit standards, while noting also their general benefit to teaching,

‘Well, we had some staff who didn't want do that (assess with unit standards) at all. That probably just taught, well this is the way I did it last year, this is the way I’m going to operate it but still assess it. And the students got the units . . . You've got other staff who have gone strictly to the unit standards’

Marama also describes the change from TWP programs prior to unit standards-based teaching as a shift that staff were not ready for. The new system intervened to deconstruct existing programs and modules according to NQZA logic. Marama's language about this disruption presents it in some ways as a necessary development that had to take place,

‘Social Services is probably a classic example of where they had their own TWP program and then when unit standards came along, we had to incorporate the unit standards within the existing program . . . So the whole thing is competency-based, so with that created a whole can of worms because staff weren't ready to teach unit standards’
Lengthy bureaucratic processes to change curriculum documents, minor and major changes, are one of the disciplinary processes institutions use to control curriculum. They help ensure that curriculum remain fixed. Other curriculum evaluation processes, purportedly looking for input for changes from students, self-regulate their lack of effect by their very nature. For example, student evaluations at the end of courses cannot be used to make even minor changes to documents, as Marama notes, ‘because those changes might have only been suitable for that particular group’. Thus there are mechanisms within the accreditation process, which avoid taking up student feedback and maintain control of both students and teachers.

As head of the ESL section, it is important that Marama understands the culture of those she works with. When I ask whether syllabus, a key term for ESL practitioners, has any particular meaning for her in relation to curriculum, she bypasses the possible relevance of the term,

‘I don't think so because I think in either/or you've got a body that wants some information to be passed on and the body states what they are . . . So, either the institution, or the Department of Education, or the Ministry. . . so I don't see that as different at all . . . Social Services has certain levels, ESOL has certain levels’, and the possibility that ESL teachers would make this decision.

Marama does not understand the distinctive nature of the ESOL curriculum, and the importance of the sequential acquisition of language structures, nor does she see it as relevant for curriculum work. For Marama, with a background in social services, there is no value to a term, which had specific relevance to ESL teachers because curriculum is set by external bodies. Given the way ESL teachers foreground the particular relationships they form with students, and their ability to define curriculum on the basis of expert knowledge of learner needs, rather than curriculum frameworks set by ‘bodies’, understanding must be compromised.

Marama also notes her own frustration, as manager, in hearing Olivia claim that ESL students would never make the unit standards grade, ‘I hear comments about out students are never going to meet that level . . . I hear that and yet I don’t think that
we should be hearing that’. Marama both expresses her dissatisfaction at this defeatist attitude but also recognizes that it comes from ‘a curriculum being forced by an outsider’, where it does not work. This imposed curriculum, also in her view, leads to Olivia losing ownership of the program. So, Marama seems to take up a somewhat confusing position on curriculum work in a competency-based world.

At the same time, Marama appears to recognise that Olivia is meeting standards set by a body that ignores ESL needs. Marama argues that while general English courses seem to meet the individual needs of students, in TOPS ESOL teachers appear to be ‘really meeting the needs of SKILLS NZ . . . because they’re output-based’. This particular reflection and other reflections by Marama on the past and curriculum work in social services lead on to further comments about the loss of professional identity she felt practitioners, ESL and others, in the department had experienced.

Marama suggests that document writing and the language of the document are factors which may help constitute division among practitioners. Familiarity with the language of the document may set up a situation where document writers, who are sometimes also practitioners, and practitioners do not speak the same language,

‘So there's also that language barrier as well as trying to get across to them that this is what this means. A course means this, a program means this, a learning outcome means this’.

Thus, document writing processes and the language of curriculum can be seen not only as necessary objective and politically neutral processes but rather can also be read as helping to fragment staff. ESL and Social Work staff do not read the document as only fulfilling this role nor do they view it as a politically neutral object. Throughout her responses, Marama produces a very ambiguous response to competency-based teaching, which may reflect the fact that she is still struggling to manage the discourses of management, and position this relative to her more established practitioner understandings.
9.2.3 Marianne: curriculum in social services

The past (non-competency) and present (competency-based) curriculum regimes at TWP are referred to as the old and new world in Polytechnic documents; such a distinction is evaluative and helps isolate ESL (old world) from mainstream programs (new world). The relationship between the old world and the new world is most obvious to those who have lived in both worlds like Marianne and can see the difference. Marianne suggests that ‘old world’ approaches to curriculum were more holistic than current checklist-oriented practices of standards-based assessment in disabilities programs.

Marianne gives the example of journals to show the particular effect on teaching practices of unit standards. Journals in the 'old world', were a way of keeping in touch with students, as they continue to be in ESL. In the new world, learning outcomes require quantifiable measurable statements, while journal texts, are intrinsically qualitative and reflective. The need for objective unbiased measures, coupled with the fact that some students disliked journals, led Marianne to redesign the ‘journal’ component as a list of bullet point statements, a move she recognizes as reducing her marking time. This abandoning of old world journaling, replaces a broader form of communication between student and teachers with a structure of efficiency, a change to teaching and perhaps the student-teacher relationship induced by the new framework.

Marianne is also aware that an assessment reading of methodology has come to be dominate curriculum, marginalising teaching practice,

‘Because at the end of the day it's not just the assessment methodology that's important, it's the methodology under which you deliver that I believe is equally important but somewhere along the lines we seem to have got lost in the how will it be delivered and under what conditions’.

Official discourses of curriculum promote allegiance to official language, and processes of document writing also demand teacher allegiance. Practitioners, who discipline themselves to its processes, respond to the high symbolic value accorded
to curriculum documents by the institution. This, she notes, is especially for those who are contracted from outside the field to write documents, who are simultaneously disciplined by moderation to become,

‘more hung up on the assessment guides and the NZQA requirements because they see it as their framework and their guide and because the thing called moderation's hanging over them and the programme as a whole’

Moderation is represented as a strict quality assurance process, as it appears in official descriptions guaranteeing compatible national approaches to curriculum and internal institutional consistency. However, in practice it involves a range of informal to formal procedures which constitute an additional administrative burden for teachers and teacher managers. Some of those practices are the subject of the following chapter, where, in addition, the loose relationship between curriculum document and practice in ESL has implications for the quality of moderation.

Marianne recognizes a dependent relationship between assessment and teaching practice in competency-based curriculum, implying that curriculum content could be deduced by reading from the assessment, ‘How to teach it, how to assess it, or the framework within which you must work so like for example they'll talk about the computer unit must be one at level two⁹ sort of thing’. As Marianne notes, documents themselves help create the possibility for different curriculum interpretations although the intention of national standards and moderation is to avoid such variant readings. Marianne sees the detailed specification of assessment objectives as working for variation and conflict because it allows some individuals to insist on reading them literally,

‘That's the interesting thing I find in curriculum documents, there can be a variance in interpretation of what should happen when, and more interestingly enough because of NZQA unit standards . . . some people have the view where things have to be taken literally’

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⁹ Levels refer to NQF level designations which range from level 1 to level 9. Levels 1 and 2 are also taught at secondary school.
In addition to curriculum documents reinforcing teacher accountability, Marianne points out also how administrative systems also help discipline curriculum work,

‘But what becomes a problem is further up the chain how does it get put on the MIS (administrative system), how does it get dealt with for APL (Accrediting Prior Learning), how do you justify the need to assess that in a different way’

In addition to the purchase of curriculum by institutions mentioned above, Marianne notes how an enterprise discourse enters into the nationally standardised curriculum process by promoting beliefs about who delivers the best curriculum package. As she points out, commercially appealing resources that support the new world are competitively marketed by some institutions to attract students and persuade compliance with the existing framework.

Thus, Marianne is aware of the disciplinary effects of the ‘new world’ curriculum structures and the corporatisation of curriculum practice. At the same time her use of ‘commercialised’ curriculum terms as her own, including words like ‘delivery, client, package’, a vocabulary encouraged by NZQA/NQF, with no explicit recognition of the possible ideological content of such terms seems to indicate how successful the dominant model has become. I suggest this may also be the case for other vocational practitioners whose ability to critique the system they serve may have been linguistically high-jacked by market stakeholders.

9.2.4 Leanne: the morals and ethics of curriculum in social services

Reinforcing the practical flexibility in internal and external moderation, Leanne describes moderation as informal sharing,

‘We have a form of external moderation, which is really just the national tutors sharing problems, sharing issues with curriculum and things like that, and what improvements have we made and supporting each other with resources and things. And we also do a bit of moderation of student samples, passing student samples around (to) each other for (checking) are we assessing to a similar standard’.
Conflicts, she notes, can also arise between the two different curriculum cultures, that of the NQF and the local teaching culture. Leanne, for example, mentions how incorporating a unit on sexual abuse in a disabilities program lead to conflict because while Leanne sees sexual abuse as vital she believes it cannot be assessed on moral grounds and is legally and ethically dangerous. Leanne gives several examples of conflict between her and other practitioners about teaching and the value of the curriculum frameworks. In particular, she positions herself as far more in touch with students needs and wants than those of her co-workers who strongly abide by existing systems.

Leanne is somewhat ambivalent about the ultimate advantages of the new world systems. On the one hand, the ‘checklist’ competencies approach is not a good reflection of workplace reality; on the other hand, it helps define for teachers what course content ‘must’ be, thereby reducing uncertainty for teachers who can work ‘backwards from the assessment’. She also points out that although quality assurance processes can be experienced as disciplinary structures, auditing processes can also resolve teacher conflict. Leanne notes, for example, a dispute between her and another tutor who would not acknowledge the need to change her curriculum but was required to because of official feedback processes,

‘The quality assurance processes that, our diploma programme has gone through an internal review and within that internal review, the students said their feedback, so it got picked up there, and that was at a level higher than me. Also what was good, was the tutor in our tutor forum when we meet, said oh, her module needs to be developed, it’s out of date’

Like Marianne, Leanne finds it difficult to situate her response to curriculum in terms other than those given her by the system she delivers. She is, nonetheless, aware of discrepancies between the morals and ethics of teaching and the requirements of official frameworks. She remains somewhat ambivalent about new world processes and effects, noting that they may both obstruct and facilitate curriculum understandings.
9.2.5 Graham: counselling and competencies

The curriculum is the site for professional agencies, external moderators, industry training organisations (ITO), Quality Assurance Committees (QAC), government agencies such as the Ministry of Education, and many other stakeholders to intervene at different points; these appear to be the ‘bodies’ Marama refers to above. This relationship with agencies and other stakeholders affects curriculum work and are invested in different locations in the curriculum. For example, competency-based programs at TWP usually incorporate both nationally accredited unit standards and institutional TWP units. For Graham, Polytechnic units are the place where aspects of the program that are important to local staff and to the national association (New Zealand Association of Counsellors) are located.

For Graham, the introduction of unit standards and the revision of programmes on the basis of the competency framework has been a positive exercise in curriculum review, although it has had the greatest impact in the area of assessment. Not everyone within Social Services or ESL shares his view, he claims. The ‘difficulties’ the social services section have experienced in adapting to the new frameworks have come about through having to adopt assessment practices that match the unit standards approach. Graham acknowledges also that because the majority - roughly twenty-five out of thirty - providers of counselling, eg. universities, choose to ignore unit standards; the framework also sets up division within fields.

Resistance to competencies and unit standards is not only an approach ESL teachers alone take. Practitioners in social work respond to the rigidity of the processes of competency-based curriculum practice by circumventing them. One of the reasons this is possible is that the very mechanisms that are used to guarantee accountability (quality assurance processes) cannot actually be implemented rigidly. Graham, for example, points to how staff circumvent the need to meet number of hours assigned to unit standards,

‘In order to fit them into our programme, sometimes we’ve said, yes, we know, you say we should take a hundred hours to do this. We’re doing ten hours in this module or fifty hours whatever, but we’re imputing the rest to the rest of the program because it’s an integrative program’
Graham also provides a number of other observations on the curriculum processes in Social Services which I do not include here of reasons of space. He is aware of some of the divisive effects of competency-based frameworks but at the same time appreciates their pedagogical value in focusing teachers on learners. In particular, he positions the curriculum as a site of negotiation among a number of stakeholders, with different interests that need to be represented, a situation that is less visible in ESL.

9.3 Summary and conclusions

The implementation of more disciplined approaches to curriculum writing and teaching through adhesion to NZQA and NQF frameworks and language has represented a challenge to the department as a whole. Practitioners and managers note the effects on teacher creativity and autonomy, and also document how practitioners avoid or resist competency-based teaching and standards. There are also concerns about the extent to which the curriculum has been commodified through purchased curriculum, an issue Sanguinetti (1996) in a related context has explored.

Helen, who has a first-hand understanding of the history of practices in the ESL section, recognises that curriculum work in ESL is different to other work in the department but not always productively so. She is disappointed that curriculum documents are undervalued in relation to practice and, in general, is uncertain about the quality of some practices in the ESL section. Helen also suggests that gender may play a role in the distinctive maternalistic and dependency oriented view of ESL privileged in the ESL section, and the resistance by teachers to industry bodies fixing curriculum goals. Marama, on the other hand, appears to prefer that external bodies such as industry define what curriculum goals are, an approach which many ESL teachers oppose in principle because only current practice can define curriculum. Somewhat in conflict with this position, Marama reminisces on lost creativity among practitioners and partially shares their disquiet about the relevance of standards and curriculum processes. Marama’s divided loyalties may be an indication of her recent
Marama also sees the strategies teachers adopt to both manage curriculum and avoid unit standards, while she is less aware of how ESL teachers resist competency-based curriculum in their (ESL teacher) adhesion to syllabus. There are commonalities across the department especially where practitioners need to work with unit standards. Thus, for Olivia, the weight of the document is a reflection of bureaucratic accountability processes, and Leanne and Marianne from social services share to some extent this view. Some ESL teachers, in addition, like Sandra, have little experience to draw on and also construct a practitioner identity for themselves, which precludes considering how curriculum frameworks influence their practice. ESL teachers like Olivia, who have experience of both document writing and unit standards, are rather scathing about the value of such documents and their effect on practice, preferring that spontaneous practical student needs define curriculum. Helen suggests that this reading of student needs may be motivated by the maternalism discourse of teaching as nurture among ESL teachers. As emerges in the interviews, the term students needs, like learner-centredness, relates to a range of readings by practitioners of students behaviours and talk.

The distinction between syllabus and curriculum and the uniqueness of ESL teaching is neither shared nor necessarily well understood by other Polytechnic educators in positions of power. Like Olivia, Mary and most other teachers regard the nature of second language acquisition, and therefore curriculum work, in ESL as quite distinct from curriculum in other mainstream subjects. This difference is partly reflected in the ongoing significance of the syllabus/curriculum binary, especially for Sandra who elevates it to the status of a barrier between ESL and management/institution. For Olivia, in contrast, conscience, morals and personal ethics are the most profound measures of curriculum success.

Jacqueline with her long history in the department and her extensive experience of working on ESL and TESOL programmes adopts a ‘pragmatic’ (Allison, 1996) view
of curriculum documents as neutral institutionalised reflections of curriculum with no ideological weight (Benesch, 1993). Not everyone shares Jacqueline’s view, although Mary also sees the document as a useful albeit limited guide functioning as, among other things, an indicator of the professional quality of programmes. For Jacqueline also there is a level of ESL planning and understanding that represents the accumulated wisdom of experience of teaching on program over time and one that is reaffirmed each time a particular program is run. This culture and tradition is linked to the curriculum document but cannot be accurately represented by it.

ESL teacher interpretation of learner needs is used, together with prior histories of teaching, to construct an alternative teaching and assessment framework to the official curriculum document. Within the ESL unit such practices of interpretation are both routine and positively evaluated as forms of learner-centred (Tudor, 1996) and negotiated curriculum (Clarke, 1991). Non-ESL managers like Helen, in the previous chapter interview, challenge this practice and the value attributed to it. Other ESL interviewees also question whether ESL teaching practices do in fact produce coherent learning outcomes, and whether learner needs and negotiation is an adequate description for the routine practice of prioritising teacher perceptions about student agendas and proficiencies.

The appropriateness of unit standards to ESL and second language teaching is also the subject of much debate among teachers. Jacqueline, for example, notes that neither unit standards nor any other assessment framework need affect professional freedom to teach. Mary, on the other hand sees unit standards and competencies as fundamentally at odds with the nature of language learning; some teachers like Sandra claim no disposition to know and judge. Others, like Olivia, with experience of unit standards, do not necessarily see competencies as incompatible with second language acquisition but do see documents as accountability to values and content that are not always directly significant for students. Olivia and Christine view learner needs as a much more useful criteria for teaching and note that these are redefined with every new group.
ESL practitioners also see particular frameworks, e.g. syllabus, as relevant to locating curriculum work in relation to themselves. Curriculum work always gets done, so to speak, and ESL teachers cope with the multiple challenges to producing a coherent curriculum. While flexibility in curriculum work is maintained by allowing alternative interpretations in and for practice, it seems striking in these interviews how substantially different attitudes are expressed regarding the value of curriculum frameworks in a small ‘close-knit’ department, a state of affairs I suggest may explain the isolation ESL teachers feel from the body of the institution. Concerns are also raised among ESL teachers about the degree of communication and understanding within the body of practitioners and ways in which this also may contribute to a ‘self-imposed’ isolation.

I believe these interviews illustrate the extent to which curriculum work in ESL is not simply the product of pragmatic decision making in the light of (cognitive) principles that ESL teachers find in their teaching background and experiences (Woods, 1996, Nunan, 1993, e.g. Bailey, 1996, Shavelson and Stern, 1981). Rather teaching decisions emerge in educational contexts of practice that are defined by the multiple discursive practices, i.e. practices whose ‘rationale’ is tied to socially and professionally acceptable discourses within which practitioners can locate and acceptable teaching identity. Although others have begun to address this (Smoke, 1998, e.g. Morgan, 2002), more research is needed about the politicised, i.e. ideological, contexts of adult ESL teaching in community contexts. Critical ethnographies (e.g. Stringer, 1997) are particularly apt for local community oriented research to discover such ideological underpinnings for curriculum work.

This juxtaposition of teacher conceptions of learner-centredness against competencies is sometimes highlighted in the literature (Auerbach, 1986, Burns and De Silva Joyce, 2000, Sanguinetti, 1995a). The social reproduction effected by competency-based models (Beevers, 1993), and the political and ideological history of introducing unit standards in ESL have also been discussed (Moore, 1996); Little is know about the effects of standards on NZ ESL teachers (Wette, 1998). By setting ESL understandings in the broader context of the institution through this interview based chapter, I believe I have helped to better contextually locate ESL teacher
responses to competency-based teaching. These responses are informed by institutional, personal and professional discourses in conflict.

In the following chapter, I explore how such discourses are mobilised in practice through team meeting conversations.
Chapter Ten: Doing curriculum

Discourses of practice are constructed out of the practice-based knowledge teachers build over time, and shaped by teacher purposes and values (Elbaz, 1983). In this chapter, I illustrate how teacher conversations can reveal how such discourses inform practice choices. Because I engage in discourse analysis and pay attention to meanings in texts, this chapter is somewhat closer to examples of critical discourse analysis of workplace practices. Despite the fact these conversations are structured in time across a semester, I view teacher talk in this chapter as evidence of the relatively stable discourses and practices individuals take up.

In the elective chapters, I have discussed the significance of team teaching. In this chapter, I analyse team conversations where accounts of practice are negotiated. Curriculum choices by practitioners are responses to complex, culturally situated, interpretations of teaching and desires to be ‘recognized’ (Gee, 1999) as belonging to a community of adult ESL practitioners (Morgan, 2002). In this chapter, the resistance of a group of Korean students to teacher practices, helps foreground competing versions of curriculum and is a prelude to chapter eleven student case studies. This resistance forms an essential part of the negotiation with all students of an acceptable curriculum while it introduces tensions of culture and ideology to the sometimes conflicting teacher discourses taken up in managing the program.

On the one hand, I suggest these conversations can be seen as different versions of learner-centredness being proposed, versions whose particular character correspond to particular teacher identities. I also propose that the responses of Mary, Sandra, and myself may be seen as answers to three questions. For Sandra, are teachers through their curriculum choices, eg. methods, complicit in creating limits for curriculum work that does a disservice to the actual needs of their students? For Mary, what is the curriculum outcome of negotiating with both management and ESL practitioner discourses? For myself, is compromise with the positions students and teachers adopt a more useful approach than challenging others in curriculum work?
The chapter is divided into five main sections. The first section of the chapter examines the planning meeting where Mary, Sandra, and I come together to discuss the projected curriculum for the coming semester. At this stage, issues already arise regarding student agendas, assessment practices, and general frameworks for interpreting the curriculum document. The following sections foreground particular practitioner interpretations and practices as they are proposed by teachers. Under each section I provide excerpts and analysis from meeting conversations, which seem to illustrate the ways practitioners take up different discourses of practice to account for the subjects and objects of their work.

Peter, a novice inexperienced teacher, joins us during the second ten weeks. Although Peter’s contributions, practices and interpretations illustrate some of the significant challenges facing novice practitioners acculturating to the workplace, for reasons of space Peter’s work is not examined. However, Peter’s presence highlights the ongoing difficulty the ESL unit has in recruiting experienced, qualified staff, and his contributions to the team meetings are important because they illustrate how a novice ESL teacher is inducted into local curriculum practices.

### 10.1 Setting the scene and defining aims and assessment practices

Views of the value of the curriculum document in relation to practice vary among Polytechnic practitioners. However, some commonalities of interpretation within the ESL practitioner community seem to exist. Three examples of ESL community practices, raised in the previous chapter, are the importance of learner needs; the autonomy of ESL teaching, mediated by syllabus, in relation to other institutional practices; and resistance to the dominant competency-based institutional philosophy embedded in programs. These three themes emerge in this chapter, along with other practices practitioners take up in constructing curriculum.
10.1.1 Difficulties of catering for multiple interests and curriculum frameworks

During the first week of the program, despite their different curriculum goals, and owing to administrative obstacles to sustaining two separate programs – ELW (English for Living and Working) and Certificate English (Intermediate) - students are taught together. After this period, students are combined in a single class for some of the twenty class hours allocated to each group, as outlined above.

During this first week of teaching Mary, Sandra, and I use teaching activities in an attempt to observe and evaluate students. Sandra, in particular, is encouraged to use a textbook grammar test for upper intermediate students to examine the combined group proficiencies and goals. Since several students had already been interviewed for enrolment in the workplace program based on language proficiency, Sandra finds this need for a new diagnostic strange although ongoing reassessment of student needs is a common learner-centred practice in adult ESL (e.g. Brindley, 1989b, Tudor, 1996). The results of this analysis lead to a separation of the students into two groups.

During the complex manoeuvrings of the semester, it is initially necessary to find a common assessment framework for some of the language work that both groups are required to submit. By the end of week two, it was decided, after some discussion, to assess Certificate English and the language module of the ELW program (see appendix), one of the frameworks in the curriculum document, as a collection of formative classroom activities called a portfolio. The portfolio approach was a recent innovation in assessment, and meant that students could collect and use the products of any classroom activities as the basis for their assessment. Sandra and I had used a similar approach for part of the assessment of a previous Certificate class we taught together.

IN our planning meeting, Mary, with Sandra’s support, encourages the idea of moving away from summative assessment tasks because students in the past seemed anxious about them. In addition, some of the topics in the ‘official’ curriculum and
assessment seemed inappropriate for this group (see appendix). Also, because one group had an interest in exploring workplace English, and this group was combined with the general intermediate group, the question of including or excluding a workplace focus also became an issue. As the program develops it emerges that a group of Korean women view topics that engage with NZ society, eg. current news in the media, as irrelevant to their personal aims, which they identify at one point as developing their conversation. Activities that require they engage with the world outside the immediate home environment, eg any activities I used which focused on the workplace, this group views as irrelevant. Mary’s attempt to teach the language of media (newspapers, and television), for example, also leads to student resistance.

10.1.2 Evaluating the document and setting the scene

In the planning discussion about appropriate assessment tasks, I unpack the assessments in the curriculum document into competencies and suggest we use them as an assessment guide and curriculum framework. The competencies I create out of the assessments are specific to the tasks and are not transferable in the normal sense of competencies. Mary, referring to the curriculum document as a guide, which can be ‘bent and moulded’, suggests that there is no need to follow the assessments in the curriculum document assiduously, since they are simply representative of a set of underlying aims for the program,

We’re still doing all these things (assessments in the document), you’re just doing it in a different way. . . I think probably this is the important thing; that these are the competencies in there that they need to be able to reach by the end of the semester. Probably how we get them there isn’t that important

Despite my reservations about this interpretation, I agree to use the portfolio approach because this emerges as the preferred model, one which avoids committing to a fixed assessment framework, which is how the competency model is viewed. In her response, Mary uses the terms ‘skills’ and ‘competencies’ as synonyms although she is aware that the competency-based approach and unit standards assess performance of specific tasks in specific settings. Her use of skills for competencies may relate to the ambiguities in the four learning ‘outcomes’ included in the
Two language learning outcomes and two skills learning outcomes are included in the curriculum document for Certificate English. These outcomes bear little resemblance to performance outcomes in competency-based assessment but refer back to intermediate language proficiency and generic skills, which are sufficiently generic that, as Jacqueline suggests in the previous chapter, one could teach anything at all. They do not specify text types, situations or particular skills required to perform linguistically. It is only the assessments that give any concrete detail about such elements, and because these are to be ignored this leaves ESL practitioners with the flexibility and license to produce a curriculum that coincides with their classroom practices.

The ELW curriculum document incorporates unit standards but they are not used in practice. Learning outcomes and assessment for the language module of this program, which have no corresponding unit standards but TWP units, are described in workplace terms. This language module will become the focus for the combined group class assessment I am especially responsible for while Mary continues to work on the ‘skills and competencies’ related to the unit standards in the document. However, the assessment task and the outcomes specified in the ELW document are not used in practice as a basis for the combined group assessment. For example, according to the curriculum document, teaching the language module of that program is based on upper-intermediate textbook resources but as becomes apparent in this program, level specifications do not work well for this combined group.

Debates about the meaning and application of competency continue to be threaded through team conversations. While Mary has a sound understanding of the nature of competencies and unit standards, Sandra does not. Sandra, who admits a limited understanding of curriculum frameworks, struggles to understand competencies as an assessment approach; Peter, on the other hand seems to adapt more easily to the idea. Sandra confuses competency with other normative grading measures throughout the program. Sandra cannot yet see how one could specify aims and performance for a task beforehand, preferring to leave such decisions to the moment of marking,
Really you want to set the criteria as you’re marking because then the thoughts come to you about what matters, but you need to give the students the criteria before; I needed to tell them what I’m looking for. So you’re kind of stuck (Sandra)

The different values we initially assign to the document, the different understandings of the nature of competency as a framework for assessment, and the limits of disposable time to clarify this, compromise the possibilities for effective (internal) moderation. For example, in weeks nine and eighteen, when Mary asks to moderate some of the tasks it becomes apparent that at least three different grading systems are being used by teachers – percentages (Sandra), competency (Gavin, and Peter to some extent), and achievement levels (Mary) – at different times and sometimes in combination. A common documented practice in the ESL unit is to use three achievement levels: good - fair - poor, (poor entails resubmit) to assess work, which is the approach Mary has in mind when she reports on teaching. Administrative systems also record program results as pass, fail, or did not complete, a system that does not coincide with the mixed grading, achievement, and competency practices of teachers.

Such ambiguities of levels, outcomes, and assessment, leave space for a range of interpretations of assessment to be used by teachers, and, as a result, compromise the possibility of efficient moderation. In non-ESL courses, unit standards help maintain a level of moderation quality. In the ESL section, variable interpretations are seen as fundamental to the eclecticism and autonomy of the ESL teacher to interpret each group differently. In addition, the portfolio approach, deemed a more appropriate forms of assessment than official frameworks, creates its own complications because it creates an additional ‘innovative’ assessment space which creates additional room for individual interpretation.

Given also that we are forced to follow up on several students to ‘extract’ work, the changed assessment does not, as Sandra and Mary propose, make it easier for students to submit work. Despite incompatible criteria, the difficulty in gathering student work, and problems with consistently maintaining the process, Sandra
believes that spreading the load over the semester makes the process ‘much less stressful on us and the students’. Acknowledging my doubts about the process, Mary suggests that moderation will provide an answer to the question of whether the portfolio is a useful model. However, because moderation is compromised this seems unlikely.

Thus, in planning the prospective curriculum, multiple student agendas created through combining two programs; different practices of interpreting the curriculum document; and different understandings among ESL teachers about the nature and process of assessment compromise the possibility of a coherent program. While management and administration contribute to the uncertainty of ESL teaching, this practitioner eclecticism is implicitly maintained as the existing cultural model of practice in teams. Greater individual teacher autonomy and responsibility for curriculum in other ESL programs, eg. ELW, avoids some of the conflicts in team teaching but defers the evaluation of quality of curriculum work, which becomes an exercise in teacher self-evaluation.

10.2 Sandra: developing a pedagogy

In the previous chapter, Sandra positions herself as a teacher who places an emphasis on student needs and her personal relationship with students. Despite her professed aim of privileging personal relationships with students, in the classroom community her practices of teaching and assessment tend to prefer fixed frameworks, eg. tests, textbooks, and non-integrated tasks (see below), that focus on teaching to the group rather than individuals. She attributes these preferences in teaching to her ‘black and white’ pragmatic outlook, and while Sandra seems open to considering alternative practices, her privileging of pre-determined frameworks of practice makes it difficult for her to adjust to other approaches to curriculum work that depend less on the assumed legitimacy of her particular interpretation of classroom community.
10.2.1 Foregrounding training experiences

As a teacher in training and under probation, Sandra is both anxious about and appreciative of professional observation. Sandra believes in the need for accountability and challenge, which she links to observation and discussion with team teachers:

They always make me terribly nervous, people coming in and watching. But they are good for you really, aren’t they? In a way, we need somebody to be answerable to. Like those grammar things I was going to do off Murphy (Murphy 1994). If you and [teacher name] hadn’t have noticed I would have ploughed on in there. And it’s made me stop and think about that class more and where their needs are. (Sandra)

Sandra evokes needs in referring to taking a different approach to grammar teaching that is not so form-focused and de-contextualised, one of the many meanings she attributes to needs. In deference to Mary (as section manager, appraiser, former trainer) and responding to my somewhat aggressive insistence, Sandra is reluctant to share her thoughts on teaching options with me. I use these interventions to provoke reflection on curriculum work. Sandra also often refers to recent teacher training experiences with Mary and reading of teaching literature in justifying her teaching choices. For example, Sandra ‘recognizes’ Mary in responding to a suggestion that students need to be challenged by work slightly beyond them,

I know when we were doing our teaching practice paper you (Mary) said the first lesson you’ve got to give them something that’s slightly harder than what they can do otherwise they’ll go out beginning to grumble straight away (Sandra)

Sandra also uses training experiences to challenge Mary and my work. For example, when she takes up the complaint of students that Mary and I demand students learn excessive amounts of vocabulary, she alludes to a more powerful body of evidence than Mary or I to reinforce her version of events.

We must just watch like vocab. Like when you’re doing new, they (ESL literature) say only to teach seven new words in a lesson. (Sandra)
During a later team meeting, Mary notes how the intermediate students are not being encouraged to develop their spoken accuracy, because ‘we’ (although Sandra is her intended audience) do not insist that they publicly reformulate an accurate response. When I suggest that students need to be challenged to produce accurate language, Sandra with some slight uncertainty again takes up the training literature in responding, ‘Introducing new structures should always have an accuracy section in it, shouldn’t it?’

Thus, it is important to see Sandra’s verbal and non-verbal responses to curriculum choices as emerging from her recent training as an ESL practitioner. She situates her own practices, and critique of other practices, in a literature she is still coming to grips with but one which she also uses to question others on their practices. Thus, citing facts from legitimated professional knowledge is a powerful resource for achieving ones ends.

**10.2.2 Evoking learner needs and relationships**

‘Learner needs’, a term Sandra uses often to explain the motivation for her curriculum choices, also has specific meanings, which relate to the classroom-based practices she privileges. The frequency with which Sandra uses the term may also relate to the importance the term has in teacher training literature, eg. Tarone and Yule (1989). Neither Mary, Peter nor I ever explicitly refer to learner needs in meetings, although we are sensitive to the needs of individual students.

When Sandra uses this term it often refers to her assessment of the grammar mistakes students have made in tests, her default form of assessment. The test-based definition is evident in this example from team meeting 18:

> What are their ongoing needs? Because I’ve just done this reading and writing assessment with them and it’s very noticeable with them how short and simple their sentences still are . . . there’s no conjunctions and there’s no linking in their writing. I don’t know about their speech, probably is the same. (Sandra)
Learner needs, therefore, are proficiency weaknesses that emerge from practices of group assessment she privileges, eg. tests and assessments. Sandra also complains in week 16 that she finds it difficult to work simultaneously with three classes (programs) and not be able to use similar tasks, eg. the IELTS test, for all three groups. Thus, there seems to be a contradiction in Sandra’s claim that she bases her classroom work on individual learner needs while basing her interpretation of learner needs on group proficiency tests; this approach to learner needs seems to arise from her avowed preference for discrete forms of assessment.

We all use groups and categories, eg male, female, Korean, to interpret and explain curriculum responses. Sandra seems more disposed, however, to locate individuals into groups that correspond to her world. Referring to a male Taiwanese student, who is a doctor, for example, she refers to her preference for ‘brainy’ people,

I like teaching those types of people, they’re so nice to teach, aren’t they? Brainy people . . .
Mm, anybody brainy, they’re lovely, they ask such good questions and think them through well, don’t they?

She also interprets relationships to students through ‘categorical’ behaviours. For example, she describes her relationship to another male student in the class as that of a mother to a naughty child:

He’s really funny, that’s how he makes his mark. He says funny things and he’s naughty, mischievous, cheeky. He just tried once (to misbehave in class) because he knows I know him . . . He has to have a slot you know to be able to do it . . . He sent me a Christmas card from Korea. (Sandra)

Sandra also uses the same term ‘naughty’ to describe the behaviour of one of the female Korean students who, using the dominance of the group within the class, insults a new student (Cambodian male) by playing on the fact that part of his name sounds like ‘sucks’. While Peter, Mary and myself suggest that this behaviour may not be simply innocuous mischief, Sandra seems keen to fit ‘alternative’ behaviours into existing images of relationships with students.
Thus, unlike Mary, who interprets the behaviour of individuals according to their stages of acculturation (see below), Sandra seems to interpret student behaviours according to personal relationships she forms with individuals and categories of her world. I feel uncomfortable with this approach and note that both Mary and Peter refuse to take such categories up as taken-for-granted. Perhaps Sandra’s approach reflects the maternalism and culture of nurture that Helen regards as part of the ESL unit, i.e. a desire that ‘others’ (students) correspond to existing patterns in the world. Sandra also shows a similar desire for stable reference points and structures in her choice of resources.

10.2.3 Textbook as curriculum framework

As team leader, Sandra depends on individual teachers maintaining a sequential topic framework, outlined in the curriculum document. She also depends on individual teachers not duplicating activities and reserving the textbooks they will exclusively use during the course. On the one hand, this is a common sense strategy to avoid teaching duplication. On the other, exclusive use of textbooks takes on another value in view of Sandra’s dependency on textbooks as curriculum framework. Sandra is, therefore, frustrated in week 16 when she learns that Mary has completed a unit of a textbook she believes she had signalled as hers to teach formal and informal language.

Some students in the class appreciate the stability of working through a textbook systematically but within the ESL unit this is not encouraged. Mary and I try to encourage Sandra away from textbook dependency. Sandra seems keen to structure her teaching from day one in a textbook (Gairns, Redman et al. 1996), although she does not wish to discuss it in the first team meeting. I, rather directly, then Mary, more subtly, try to steer her away from doing this. Mary uses an inclusive ‘we’ and hedges her remarks to make her point:

Sandra    I’ll just do ten minutes mingling and then I’ll do something a bit, maybe I’ll start ‘True to Life’, chapter one, so they can see what they’re starting on or something

Mary      So we’re going to work through that book, are we?
Sandra: Oh no, I’m only going to do the first three units and then I’ve picked bits out. I’ll talk to you [Mary] about it in a minute . . .

Gavin: Yes, be careful with that. Are you going to take it (textbook) in and sort of hand it out or something?

Sandra: Yes

Gavin: I wouldn’t.

Mary: I’d almost feel like what’s, starting on the book on the first day. I know it’s good to have something to give them but I wonder if it would be better to have something that’s photocopied, a photocopy sheet . . .

Sandra’s dependence on the textbook, which she is simultaneously using for other classes also, is apparent when she declares, as a result, that her initial curriculum planning has been ruined. When Mary apologises, Sandra, not to be deterred, returns to the subject of the textbook - ‘my book’ again later. Mary ultimately relents, suggesting activities are photocopied.

By week three, Sandra volunteers that she has been using the textbook and little else, and now acknowledges that she ‘needs to’ move on to something else. This ‘need’ is a realization which is created as much as anything by Mary and my reaction to her practice. Acknowledging ‘empathically’ my use of textbooks, I suggest how other activities can complement texts,

Sandra: I’m still in True to Life, I haven’t got off the textbook much really yet. I’ve used a bit of my own material but it’s not, I need to get off it.

Gavin: Yeah, well I’ve been using, like I did today, I’ve been using the AMES work thing and Headway Australasia (Bradley, Dyer et al. 1996) for the balance of you know. And things the students have brought in, songs in the, and you know Friday particularly, you know, games and other stuff that comes up you know, current . . .

Despite encouragement to do so, Sandra seems unwilling to invest time in developing her own tasks and remains dependent herself to authoritative texts. For
example, she suggests that working on a topic, eg. informal English, is only possible if there is a discrete unit in a textbook with activities addressing the issue.

Sandra: Has Headway Australasia got a unit on it?

Mary: Headway Australasia’s got some

Sandra: A unit, an actual unit on it or not . . . I might not do formal and informal English at all. I think I might cross that out completely because everybody’s overlapping a lot with what people have done, I think.

She provides a telling comment about her attitude to texts in one of the final team meetings (18). In response to a suggestion about adapting a text for an exercise on vocabulary extension for students, Sandra finds such an approach, ‘a bit airy fairy. It’s easier to get a chapter out of a book and just work your way through isn’t it?’ Sandra’s description of her ‘syllabus’, i.e. ongoing collection of tasks and activities, also foregrounds textbook units or chapters rather than topics, functions, or grammar structures she is teaching. In her use of the audio lab, Sandra also copies lessons verbatim from a textbook and gives these to students as a ‘straight’ single shot pronunciation lesson. Mary suggests this is a poor use of context, is a non-integrative approach, and more directly challenges Sandra’s ‘black and white’ pragmatism,

Mary: I don't actually approach the language lab like that . . . it would be something which relates back to what I've been doing in the class.

Sandra: No. mine’s just a straight pronunciation lesson, not connected with . . .

Mary: Well I think even pronunciation can be connected with something that you’ve been doing . . . I was going to talk to them about /ð/ /p/ today and I didn’t . . . Pronunciation is not something that you learn and then have in there and go away like a packed suitcase.

In the follow-on to this conversation, and rejecting this one shot - ‘I’ve done it’ - approach to pronunciation, both Mary and I give examples of how intonation exercises could arise out of classroom texts, which Sandra suggests she will try to take up in her practice. But there seem to be consistent signals throughout the study
that Sandra’s pragmatism is resistant to change, a conclusion she reinforces by linking her curriculum choices to her ‘essential’ personality.

### 10.2.4 Grammar structures and levels as a basis for curriculum

Sandra finds grammar test results significant for defining student proficiencies and agendas. Similar to her dependence on textbooks, she seems keen to ‘locate’ students in proficiency terms. In the first week, she uses a grammar test from a textbook (Soars and Soars, 1998) to identify student language levels. Later in the first term, she also uses the IELTS test with the permanent resident students to measure their listening skills, although the test is not intended for these students, as Mary reminds her, and does not fit with the Certificate English course nor ELW. Sandra herself has little experience with the nature and purpose of the test. Student reaction is negative and Sandra returns to her textbook.

We all spend much of the first term revising grammar structures in the elementary and pre-intermediate syllabi. In week six, Sandra notices that both Mary and I are using a lot of intermediate level texts and this concerns her. In response, Mary suggests alternative criteria are more important for establishing homogeneity for class work,

Sandra: You’re using quite a lot of intermediate material both of you, I notice
Mary: Yeah. I have no problems with that
Sandra: You’ve actually dropped them from upper-intermediate to intermediate
Mary: I have absolutely no problems with them as an intermediate, as a homogenous group, you get to know whether a group as a group works together or not

Sandra’s concern with establishing levels relates to her approach to grammar. Although she appears disposed to consider alternative teaching methods, I question Sandra’s use of a grammar textbook in class as too form focused. Sandra, referring to a conversation with another senior ESL teacher, suggests her enthusiasm for grammar is part of her particular style and practical ‘black and white’ view of the
world. However, the issue I raise is not whether to teach grammar, which Mary and I also do, but how to teach it,

So, different people have different styles and I know I like teaching grammar. It's just one of my things. I'm a black and white framed person. But yes, you were right, they're just a whole page of boring old sentences (Sandra)

Sandra takes up this 'black and white' framing device to explain her approaches to other elements of curriculum work, such as why she prefers percentages or grades to competencies or achievement levels. For example, she suggests that other assessment approaches are more ill-defined (week 9), and also that she makes all her classroom tasks 'black and white’, in contrast to other ESL teachers (week 18), including Mary and me. Sandra suggests her success as a teacher arises through a careful limitation of topics and structures students have to manage, and, some of the Korean students clearly prefer her style. Her ability to mobilise the resistance of the Korean students in her favour is another resource to strengthen her position. Sandra implies generally that she sets up activities in unambiguous ways so that students are never challenged too much, and she sees her approach in positive terms as practical, realistic, and concrete.

In a discussion about teaching modal verbs, I suggest that teaching completion of fixed phrases, eg. *I could*, which Sandra describes, is too simplistic to teach students grammar in use. I propose that Sandra considers modality in a broader sense and Sandra, referring to another senior teacher, draws the ‘black and white’ line on grammar, if meaning is not clear cut,

Gavin Those fixed phrase things, you can teach them but

Sandra Yes [teacher name: section manager] is always into those things that to me are too abstract to teach. She likes teaching those. I don’t, they’re not black and white enough for me.

Gavin It’s not so much that, it’s that they’re extremely complex . . .

Sandra seems motivated to teach relatively fixed grammar forms not only because they are concrete for students but also because they are bounded and discrete, and
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correspond to her view of the relationship between language form and use. Sandra’s response suggests to me that ‘black and white’ implies that form and use relationships should be structured by fixed knowable rules.

I find some of Mary’s responses to Sandra’s work, also shows similar concern for placing limits on the scope of language use. Sandra’s approach to grammar correction seems to mirror this. While my strategy in student journals is to signal errors and allow the student to attempt to self-correct, a strategy that Mary also seems to adopt, Sandra admits she supplies the correct answer when students make a mistake because corrections are ‘so hard for them to work out’ (week 16). In fact, Sandra’s approach is reinforced by the curriculum document framework.

The structural syllabus, albeit incomplete, in the curriculum document provides no contexts for grammar forms such as passive or past perfect. Jacqueline, in the previous chapter, has suggested some weaknesses in this approach. In reporting on her teaching, Sandra lists sequences of structures as completed ‘done’, an approach which strikes me as lacking context, and a consequence of her limited pedagogy of grammar teaching; Mary also seems concerned,

Sandra: Specific things I’ve done, I’ve done quite a lot on comparatives and superlatives, had a week on them

Gavin: What’s the context you’re using for that?

Sandra: It was really started off with, in the unit in the book . . . and putting the little modifiers in front, the first

Gavin: No. I mean what’re they comparing?

Sandra: Ways that people speak . . . it’s not very authentic really. And then we got onto other things as well. And then we’ve just done uncountable and countable work today and then I’m going to do verb plus infinitive or -ing

Paradoxically, at the same time as she foregrounds grammar as part of her particular concrete style, Sandra is far more uncertain about definitions of grammar form, eg.
past participle, and meaning. On a number of occasions she uses team meetings to ask Mary and I to clarify form and meaning (but not use), such as passive, which she is teaching to students. For example, in a discussion about the use of past perfect after I wish in week 19, Sandra finds it difficult to grasp the point I try to make that her deliberations about form in isolation will not help her understand use or explain this adequately to students. In week 18, she resists Mary’s and my attempt to be pragmatic about the lack of fixed rules for the tag form aren’t I?:

Sandra  Why do we say aren’t?

Gavin  Oh don’t ask, it’s just

Mary  Am’t I is stupid, how can you say that? . . . It’s just one of those things that don’t fit in English . . . it’s one of those things where it’s just the way it’s done, I hate saying that but sometimes you have no choice.

Although our response temporarily deflects the conversation at this point, Sandra regularly returns to the issue of clarifying form and meaning. Her tendency to limit grammar and contexts for use, although a concern for Mary and me, is legitimated by the positive ‘empowering’ response of some of the students in class to her approach.

10.2.5 Creating dependencies and maintaining control

Sandra appears to not be aware that student preferences for certain forms of teaching and assessment that are ‘comfortable’ for her and the students can create teacher-student dependencies. Some students do not challenge and even prefer approaches, for example form-focused instruction, which adapt to or match their existing (cultural) models of learning. Competency-based assessment which demands students engage with the world outside the classroom conflicts with the idea that learning should end when the classroom door closes, a notion that the Korean group, in particular, adhere to. Sandra’s inability to come to terms theoretically and in practice with competencies and her subsequent reliance on familiar conventional form-focused teaching reinforces the reluctance of students to engage with community. In team meetings, it is also striking that Peter, a novice teacher, seems much more open to understanding and using different forms of teaching and
assessment, eg. competency-based assessment, than Sandra. Perhaps this is a result of his trainee openness to models of practice.

In a number of team conversations Sandra seems to find it difficult to understand forms of assessment that are not graded and conducted under classroom test conditions, as the example below illustrates. In the meeting of week 17, when Peter describes a self-directed competency-oriented telephone assessment, which I source for him from an Australian TAFE text, Sandra is initially puzzled about how students can do assessment outside of class and be phoning people in the community. Although she can see the benefit to the development of student confidence her initial response fits with her ongoing insistence on classroom-based assessment.

Sandra: How will you assess them if they’re doing it at home?
Peter: Well, they’ve got to ask over the phone to other people and then they fill out a self-assessment thing
Sandra: So they’re asking other people in class?
Peter: No, they’re ringing things like the zoo and places like that with questions
Sandra: Oh, that’s good, help their confidence
Peter: It was in Gavin’s book. Yeah I hope so

Most of the assessment tasks for ELW, which Mary coordinates, require engagement with the community and some of the tasks that I offer to the combined group, eg. interviewing a neighbour about workplace practices, also do so. Such tasks always come with a framework, eg. questions to ask, self-assessment forms to fill in, limiting the task and contexts and are chosen to be relevant to ‘authentic’ students social reality or needs. For example, a task I give students such as talking to neighbours about their work experiences is designed to give students an opportunity to ‘use’ language in a familiar yet authentic native speaker context. Sandra seems to have difficulty understanding both authenticity and the practice of creating assessment frameworks that are not graded in percentages.
For example, in week 17, when Sandra suggests she is developing a writing test for students. Mary and I propose ways of framing the assessment, such as giving a word limit, and providing students with support or ‘scaffolding’, eg. dictionaries, to make it more manageable and more authentic. This conflicts with Sandra’s conception of a test, which neither Mary nor I share.

Mary But, on the other hand, how realistic an exercise is it to get them to write without using a dictionary? When in their experience are they actually going to have to do that or need to do that?

Sandra The thing is what sort of writing test is it when they’ve got a piece of paper here with all the phrases written on it?

Mary I think it’s a brilliant writing test because you’ve got the bits, the phrases and the words whatever, you’ve still got to put it together . . .

Authenticity, i.e. appropriateness to student social needs, is also at issue with the textbook tasks Sandra proposes. Later in the first term, Mary and I challenge both authenticity and meaning when Sandra proposes to deal with informal letters within a textbook exercise.

Sandra Okay, I’m going to get them into writing formal and informal letters . . .

Mary Yes, the trouble with informal letters

Gavin Is what do you mean?

Mary And how often is it when our students write an informal letter . . .

Thus, Sandra’s approach to classroom activities seems to reinforce the control she retains over class content and processes. Re-visioning assessment as tasks outside the classroom, reconsidering classroom tasks as integrated with other activities, and considering the reality and social needs of students as key elements in assessment are still not part of Sandra’s routine practices. Her existing practices seem to coincide with the discrete approach she takes to other curriculum elements like grammar, an approach she rationalises as part of her ‘pragmatic’ persona.
10.2.6 Using delegated power to intervene

As illustrated above, Sandra is not averse to using the ESL literature to challenge the practice of others, and combines this with the power delegated to her by the disgruntled Korean sub-group. Sandra is also the designated team leader for the combined class, which requires she maintain an administrative record of work done and make sure assessment ‘discipline’ is maintained. While this latter role does not challenge Mary’s authority as section manager it does give some potential for directing others and producing conflict.

As team leader, Sandra spends a significant part of the team meeting ensuring that individuals are working on similar topics and collecting assessments. However, her desire for order and sequence of topics is not shared. In trying to ensure continuity, she is frustrated when Mary and I continue with our own topics and activities. For example, when in week five Sandra suggests we move onto education, Mary and I point to the need to complete existing activities we are doing rather than moving lock step into another area. Mary, at one point, simply abandons the team topic to pursue her own goals.

I don’t know whether to do education at all. I mean there’s only so much you can do on it and this commercial stuff (her current topic) kind of goes on a bit. Well, I think it does . . . and that’s got passive as well . . . so I wouldn’t mind continuing on with that (Mary)

When Mary moves on to Health in week eight, without consulting Sandra, this also disorients her:

But that is in fact our topic next term so she’s jumping there ahead of us . . . which is going to muddle us a bit . . . It’s a bit of a shame really. (Sandra)

At the same time as her attempt to instil order is frustrated students use Sandra to bring their curriculum resistance to the team meeting. She is placed in the position of being mediator for the Korean group, who demand that the general English class be made homogenous in terms of student proficiency levels and aims. In response, Sandra uses the ESL literature to challenge the heavy vocabulary demands Mary and
I are making on students, and uses student comment to challenge my work and Mary’s (newspaper vocabulary)

Sandra  They said two (things), the newspapers they brought up earlier. At that point I talked to them about newspapers saying that all intermediate students find newspapers hard but it is part of what we do with all intermediate students. And then the other thing they said was the vocabulary is too hard, we’re just writing down vocabulary all the time, and it’s too much to learn.

Mary  Well you know yesterday we didn’t write down anything . . . so yesterday we actually didn’t do that . . .

Sandra  That was just one day, wasn’t it? I think it just hit them today they had three hours with me, they saw the difference in level . . .

Despite Mary and my comments to the contrary, Sandra seems also quite convinced that the different levels of proficiency in the class, and the idea that stronger students dominate the class is also true. These are arguments she takes up on behalf of some students who resist the existing arrangements. Even after the combined group is largely separated, Sandra refers again to this idea of domination in week 18 suggesting that both Mary and I should nominate quiet individuals in class. Both Mary and I resist the accuracy of this interpretation, Mary adding that student silence while others speak is not necessarily unproductive time but part of a learning acquisition stage.

10.2.7 Reflecting on the course and her positioning

Sandra’s use of stable frameworks and structure, eg. textbooks, tests, etc., as the basis of her teaching to groups compromises the possibilities she has to define her relationship to learners in terms other than language proficiency and needs. Her adoption of the student position causes some conflict with Mary and I attempting to maintain a combined program. In our final course review meeting, Sarah again takes up the completion of course tasks as the key measure of individual student progress, identifying two students as not having progressed on the basis that ‘they’re the ones who are incomplete’, i.e. did not submit enough material. Mary, on the other hand,
locates the difficult progress of a male student as a personal conflict between high proficiency and confidence. Although Sandra later contributes similar insights, these responses illustrate two different approaches to measuring curriculum work that are not necessarily complementary.

Sandra reveals that the opportunity to have extended critical discussions about the nature of curriculum work in team meetings, a format sustained by the research agenda, made this experience very worthwhile for her.

I think one of the big reasons that we worked well as a team was because we had a jolly good long team meeting every week because we sat and discussed, we talked things through, you know, this (project) obviously made us do that (Sandra)

Sandra volunteers that of the three teams she participated in during the semester, the team in this case study was by far the most cohesive. She adds that the arrangement whereby she did not have to deal with the stresses of teaching the combined class, showed a ‘sensitivity’ and concern for where she and others ‘were at’. On the other hand, she is critical of the meeting focus, ‘because we were just talking about the outward practical things, not the real pedagogical’. Sandra’s interpretation of ‘real pedagogical’ issues I found strange since it refers again to grammar needs. She refers to a specific issue - complex sentences - students couldn’t manage, which was discussed in the team meeting 18, as an example of learner needs that were not addressed in sufficient detail, arguing that ‘I don’t think we really knuckled that down and decided what we should do about it, and who’s going to do it, and how are we going to do it.’

Sandra presupposes in her comment on complex sentences that this structure itself, rather than its use, is the key issue. Sandra’s general form-focused approach to grammar structures such as complex sentences, was an approach that neither Mary nor myself were entirely comfortable with. In fact, there was a lengthy discussion of this issue and detailed suggestions and explanations were made to Sandra. It seems clear from this response and from her reactions during team meetings that she did not consider attempts to encourage her to clarify her tasks, aims and outcomes, as part of
this deeper pedagogical approach. In addition, a substantial part of team meeting time was spent discussing impressions of the ways individuals were responding to teaching and what their needs were, which Sandra also excludes from this ‘deeper’ approach.

In response to a question about gender as a key element of working with the Korean women in the course, Sandra suggests that adopting the perspective of the female students is both easy and essential,

I think it’s easy, I think you’ve got to have, it’s empathy isn’t it? You’ve got to step out of your own shoes and step into their shoes and try and look at life through their eyes, haven’t you? (Sandra)

Sandra succeeds in achieving this empathy in terms of positive students response to her approaches to teaching although I suggest it may carry a hidden cost she is not aware of:

10.3 Mary between discourses of management and ESL

Mary’s membership of teacher and management discourse communities leads at times to conflict which she must resolve. A close examination of some of the texts of practice she provides, make it possible to foreground the conflicts and compromises she must take.

10.3.1 Conflict and compromise

In her interview Mary describes the complexity of managing heterogenous class groupings as the outcome of institutional processes beyond her control, such as enrolment limitations. However, as ESL section manager and course coordinator, she must represent this commonly experienced situation as part of the ‘normal’ routine for teachers. This is illustrated in the example that follows.
During the first week, Sandra wants to keep the students with workplace agendas, already identified in placement interviews, separate from the others. Mary, however, argues for dealing with students as a combined group with, as yet, ill-defined agendas, suggesting that discovering these agendas is common ‘real’ practice.

Mary: But I think you’d spend at least the first part of day one finding out exactly who they were, what they were, where they felt, what they felt they wanted.

Sandra: But I thought you knew that already through the interviews and . . . ?

Gavin: Well, but it’s still not enough. I mean people behave in interviews in certain sorts of ways. It just gives you an indicator depending on what you’ve got to offer, in fact, as well. I mean it’s all about compromise in some sense.

Mary: Yes, but I think we’d probably need to start off by just doing a real thing where you’re finding out who everybody is and what they think they want because you may find that some of the other people in class also actually have a work focus . . .

Her response here can be contrasted with her response in a later interview where, in answer to my question about the adequacy of ESL placement interviews, she claims they are very efficient and accurate, an idea which Sandra appeals to above. In the text above Mary places a much lower value on the placement test and interview, and although she does not take up my suggestion that ESL placement is in fact a pragmatic compromise of demand and offer, this is in effect what the contrasting texts (her own and Sandra’s) suggest.

The literature of ESL practice and the discourse of migrant ESL teaching provide a location from where Mary can argue that discovering learner agendas is routine, and she can ignore acknowledging compromise. Thus, where Mary discusses difficulties in non-practice settings like an interview, she attributes the causes to institutional practices and forces beyond her control,

One is to do with processes of implementing new programs and program change and situations into which we have been trapped. And the other one is to do with when students arrive and how many students we are allowed to take on and the size of the class we have to cope with and the number of rooms available (Mary)
In practice, when faced with mixed groups, she rationalises heterogeneity as part of the normal discourse of ESL practice.

Another example of compromise comes from her reflections on competency and standards. In her interview, Mary is quite definite about how such approaches are inadequate forms of assessment for language acquisition. In team meeting 18, she again expresses her reservation about competencies, which, she argues, eliminate the possibility of distinguishing between adequate and excellent performance, a distinction that it not recognised either by competency or existing administrative records of results as pass and fail, with no intermediate possibilities or merit criteria. In response to a team meeting discussion about the use of competency-based assessment tasks from Australian TAFE sources, however, she takes the opposite position in describing to Sandra how competencies are beneficial both in terms of teacher accountability and communicating clearly to students what they can do:

I mean in some ways it makes you more accountable, which is why I like it. I feel more comfortable with it because I think it’s giving a much realer idea to the students of what it is they can or can’t do . . . (Mary)

Mary’s different response should, I think, be seen in the light of her concern about other forms of teaching and assessment, eg. tests, that Sandra seems to privilege. Mary deploys some quite different strategies for managing curriculum work, which are more or less compatible with those of other teachers and student approaches to learning.

10.3.2 Understanding and managing resistance

A key theme in Mary’s teacher discourse is the significance of student motivation over language proficiency (Sandra’s key criterion). Mary’s prioritising of motivation seems to be both the product of her teacher pedagogy and also produced by a need, as manager, to maintain such a position. The alternative, to accept that there are
proficiency distinctions that make (heterogenous) class work impossible, is administratively unworkable.

In week two, to manage student resistance and support her position she tells students and Sandra, who both use proficiency to resist class groupings, how well all students perform on class tasks,

The Korean ladies coming up with pre-intermediate were quite worried about having higher level people in the class. I just told them not to worry, that actually when we watched the video the day before they have been the ones who were answering the best and the quickest.

(Mary)

This observation Mary presents as factually true although it serves a number of purposes. Among them, it aims to pacify the resisting students, and in the long term aims to convince the dissenting group that there are no grounds for dividing the class. To encourage students to accept this, Mary also uses public acknowledgement of their performance. Knowing, for example, that some of the Korean women had prepared for a lesson in SAC, Mary intentionally nominates them in class knowing they will produce the right answer. This complicit arrangement she believes may encourage them to cope not only with their insecurities but also with the combined class levels and aims:

I kept nominating them and asking them things and yeah. And every time I asked one of them they all burst into giggles, it was really funny. But I mean that could be quite useful to us because . . . if they’ve got a sort of feeling . . . we can be as good, we can compete, right, then they’re going to be trying to do more difficult things and cope with more (Mary)

In response to the ongoing criticism of the combined levels, Mary also uses past experience to suggest that the challenge to her teaching by some students and the desire to split the class is a repetition of history. The administrative or management subtext for her is that it is financially impossible to accede to these demands:

Well they’re going to say this anyway because they’re feeling that they didn’t like being split up last time when they were split between the international and permanent residents. So they’re going to say it and when they stop saying that they’re going to say that the class is too big . . . we can’t afford to split it into two. (Mary)
Mary proposes that a desire to reduce risk and workload rather than any specific curriculum challenge is at the root of student resistance, which has historical roots in culturally specific behaviour in prior courses. In so doing, she sees contradictions between their performance on tasks and their claims that these tasks are too difficult. These illustrations are especially for the benefit of Sandra, who is convinced about the claims for the need for change and challenges some of Mary’s and my tasks.

But I think they do have a lot of history and I think there’s a lot of things in here about wanting to be comfortable, we’ve had this with Korean women so many times, it’s too hard, I can’t . . . (Mary)

Mary also notes how student complaints about workload and task difficulty conflict. For example, Mary resists Sandra’s claim that lessons should not include more than seven new words. It appears that students make this judgement because they record every unknown word and its translation in extensive word lists they compile. Mary and I comment to Sandra on the inefficiency of such a strategy. Mary also notes that accepting this student claim reveals a misunderstanding (by students and perhaps Sandra) of the role of (passive) vocabulary in understanding newspaper text, and contradicts students’ own aims,

A large number of them, including the Korean women, said they wanted to be able to read the newspaper. So they’ve got to learn how to pull out the main points and not worry about the other stuff . . . if they don’t do it they ain’t ever going to be able to read the newspaper, right. (Mary)

Mary develops this comment in week 6 when referring to purposes of reading practice,

One of the things that we want to get them away from is reading everything in so much detail and picking out every word. They’ve got to be able to look at a newspaper article and decide what it’s about by reading the headline, by reading the first sentence (Mary)

Both Mary and I include specific tasks to encourage this approach. Thus, Mary sees resistance by students as patently at odds with some of their prior claims but also a
product of culturally specific practices among Koreans. She resists Sandra’s interpretation of these processes and also uses her own strategies to achieve her teaching ends.

10.3.3 Stages of acculturation: an explanatory theory for resistance

Having convened a meeting with the HOD in week 5 to substantiate student dissatisfaction with the course, it becomes apparent that some in the combined class desire separation. In the meeting, Mary notes how students often place ESL teachers in delicate intermediary positions, positions which she believes should not be used to make precipitous curriculum decisions; a strategy which Sandra seems to favour. She suggests that students use their access to teachers as a way of identifying the source of their learning problems,

I think we pick up a lot of the ways they are feeling about being here . . . and it all gets thrown back as saying you (ESL teachers) are the cause of this . . . because it’s easy to pin it . . . And I’ve often felt that we are a very useful butt for everybody’s problems in a way and I think we have to be quite careful . . . we have to respond appropriately . . . But I don’t think that now we need to be changing our teaching style every two minutes . . . And all we can do is lose . . . and actually we’ve got to where . . . whatever we do in this situation we’ve lost, it doesn’t matter what we do. (Mary)

Mary believes that student demands not only originate from their powerlessness in NZ society, as language speakers, but also their ‘doormat’ role in the Korean family. Accepting their demands, leads them to resent teachers, authority figures, an idea which both Sandra and I take up to some extent,

These Korean women have a very, how do you put it, not a weak way of being strong but it’s almost a kind of inverted snobbery . . . I really, really don’t have to take responsibility . . . I’m not capable, am I, but you (the teacher) are . . . But at the same time they will probably feel quite resentful of us for allowing them to do that because this is not what Korean women do . . . it’s a very messy situation. (Mary)

Mary also locates this resistance in terms of stages of acculturation. This theory about stages in the acculturation process she bases on personal experience,
I’ve taught a lot of people from Korea, and a lot of women from Korea. And I’ve seen the stages that they go through . . . (referring to a particular student). Somewhere along the line she’s going to stay her and function here. There’s got to be a mind switch, which goes off . . .

(Mary/week 5)

Some of the insights I gain from student journals, examined in the following chapter, seem to document interpretations of incidents within this process. Acculturation includes students being able to manage in public spaces like the Post Office, which feeds into curriculum decisions. In response to a suggestion to Peter and Sandra about taking up such social survival topics, Mary notes in week 16 how student interest in these topics is partly based on fear and exposure,

I’ve seen the tellers, the women behind the counter working with a second language person, and they’ll be there for ages . . . you can see why they’re [students] interested in this because once you get into it’s really very involved and it’s so public . . . it’s actually crippling . . .

(Mary)

In Mary’s view, the resistance we are experiencing currently from some of the Korean women can be explained by the position they have reached in the acculturation continuum, evidence for which is not always immediately visible. For example, when I suggest (week 18) that there is little tangible evidence of the progress in language proficiency of the Korean students, Mary highlights how the shift in stages of acculturation do not correspond necessarily to visible linguistic results,

I think something’s happened to some of them. And I think it doesn’t happen quite in the direct way . . . (student name) she has definitely made a shift in how she sees herself as a language learner . . . she’s much more proactive than she was and I think it’s not something where the progress is measurable or smooth . . . and how they make the jump from that is purely or often to do with how they’ve seen themselves and in having a change in how they see themselves . . .

Mary uses this personal theory about acculturation to explain student behaviour and resist claims that her practices are inappropriate because responses to the latter emerge from positions students are in on this continuum. Mary suggests it can be seen through behaviour or revealed in conversation but may not be tied directly to
language proficiency. She also uses this theory again in the final evaluation meeting, referred to below.

10.3.4 Grammar in contexts

Mary clarifies the ‘natural’ and ‘actual’ aims and contexts of her grammar teaching compatible with my own. In the example below, and in others she provides, her clarification of her purposes is also for the benefit of Sandra, whose approach is the subject of discussion,

Mary I was just looking for any examples of passive, right? And because it doesn’t come up much in conversation it didn’t really seem relevant to take an exercise and try and pretend we use it in that way so I wanted to find something where the passive was used naturally, and the way that it is actually used . . .

Gavin I’ve said to them up front of class, this is something you need to understand . . . and how to use, sorry understand, but you don’t need to learn to use it

Mary’s focus on context, and her use of formal grammar exercises to clarify functional points such as the use of passive, ‘because you don’t want to show the subject and two because in certain circumstances is makes it a shorter more succinct sentence’, I also find familiar although it seems too ‘abstract’ for Sandra.

While Mary and I question Sandra’s choice of grammar textbook and activities, we both share a general approach to grammar teaching. For example, Mary and I both value a particular grammar book highly, i.e. Swan (1995), and Mary uses grammar textbooks (eg. Rinvolucr 1984) to reinforce a grammar point such as the use of tag questions through form-focused practice in a communicative scenario, an approach I take. The exercises she choses from noticing some students having difficulty in using tags in another class session, rather than, as Sandra seems to prefer, the issue being prescribed in the curriculum document or textbook. In response to a discussion with Peter and Sandra about tense (and aspect) in week 19, Mary subtly suggests that ESL teachers need to be aware that the way they teach tense can conform to existing student perceptions that are unhelpful for learning,
But I think one of the problems too is tenses and the way we teach tenses ... students soon
hook onto this thing that tenses are about boxes of time and past tense means past time ... (tense) are used to talk about different ways of considering your personal time ... (students)
are trying to box it because it’s easy, because that’s how they’ve been taught, they’ve always
been taught grammar in this kind of really boxed kind of diagrammatic straight up and down
way ... (Mary)

The implication of this comment is that teachers should not be complicit in
reinforcing an overly form focused approach to grammar, an approach that both
Mary and I feel we foster and perhaps Sandra need to take on board.

10.3.5 Mary the administrator and manager

Mary brings her authority as section manager into the team meetings when
assessment is discussed. She insists, for example, on one occasion that Sandra create
an opportunity for a student to resubmit work when Sandra is reluctant to do so. Her
position as manager is also crucial in managing the curriculum crisis and
rescheduling classes. She stresses the need for a consistent teacher approach to
student resistance, a consensus threatened by some of Sandra’s practices,

Bear in mind also that we actually don't have a choice. We have to have a party line, and we
have to, as a group, stick to it (Mary).

As ESL manager, Mary is also aware of how to exploit the potentially negative
consequences of regrouping students with a new teacher to discourage them from
dividing up. Following the meeting with the HOD, Mary explains, for example, how
the offer to split the combined group, can be presented to students in such a way as to
discourage them from taking it up.

It will mean you (students) will have to have a new teacher. The new teacher will not know
anything about you, the new teacher is inexperienced, the new teacher has not taught this sort
of class before, a whole list of things as to why this would be different with the new teacher
(Mary)
Both Mary and I know that splitting the group would contradict statements made regarding the similarities between students, as far as language proficiency was concerned. Such a move would also compromise professional ‘face’ in several ways, and Mary takes some pains in trying to persuade Sandra how important this is:

If we go ahead and split them again it looks as though we are backing down. It looks as though we don’t really believe things we have been telling them. It looks as though we are ill prepared, we’re on the back foot, and the likelihood is that they will then come back and say well look there’s something wrong with this system (Mary).

To support her position, Mary adds that two students - one Korean and the other Taiwanese - have said that splitting the class is not a good idea, and would reflect badly on teacher authority and direction. Because Sandra seems to place great weight on student comment this is partly to convince her also.

Contrary to Mary’s and my hopes, by week seven, the Korean students argue for a complete split of both groups. As a compromise Peter, a novice teacher, is contracted in to teach the Certificate group, replacing me for three hours, and a new schedule is timetabled to be taken up after the term break (weeks 11-20). Mary insists that accepting student demands neither fitted with TWP policy nor really focused on the main issue. Their agenda for restructuring the class lay elsewhere and ultimately no solution, she thought, would satisfy everyone,

There’s actually a whole lot of issues here outside of the fact of whether they are or are not in the correct level of class I think they are (Mary).

Failing a course in ESL is extremely rare and no official obstacle to enrolment in a succeeding level; some students also repeat levels more than once. Referring to one sporadic attendee, Mary points out how students can still ‘graduate’ with a certificate if they fail at one level, even where they already have the certificate in question,

Mary Well, that’s right, I did say to her that if she, well I had to say to all of them that if they don’t get the ELW certificate they can still get the intermediate one provided they do everything that’s necessary for the Intermediate she may come out with the Intermediate
Mary is aware of how such perhaps counterintuitive strategies need to be used to maintain enrolments. As section manager, she uses other strategies to ensure that enrolments will remain sufficient in the future.

When I began to take a more direct part in the ELW assessment for the other modules, Mary and I began discussing this in team meetings. Mary also begins to share the ways in which she adapts assessments away from existing curriculum formats. In week 10, Mary gives me a rundown on the progress with assessments to date, for module two of the ELW program. These conversations bring the two of us - Mary and I - together working with a small group of students without the added pressure of dealing with the other issues of pedagogy, student dissatisfaction, and the sheer ‘communicative’ weight of managing a conversation among four people with different levels of training, experience, and attitudes. In addition, Mary and I take separate rather than shared responsibility for assessments, which follow a pattern already established by prior practice.

Because Mary and I share certain values about teaching based on similar training and experience, these conversations are much more consensual than other conversations. I do not examine them here because they largely exclude Sandra and Peter and are only minimally represented in the transcripts.

**10.4 Researcher, teacher, and expert discourses for Gavin**

I am both ESL teacher and educational researcher. My research interests and the presence of the tape recorder - what Mary calls my ‘hidden agenda’ – are part of my researcher discourse. One particular teaching agenda I have is to challenge student
cultural assumptions about the teaching and learning process; not all students appreciate this and Sandra has doubts about its function in teaching.

10.4.1 Using experience and expert knowledge

My use of linguistics to clarify terms like tense and aspect, my interventions to clarify what others are doing, and my researcher status all form part of the ‘expert’ identity I project within the group, especially towards Sandra and Peter. In my experience, concern for theoretical detail and confronting teachers to clarify what they are doing are not part of normal team meeting practice. Because Mary actually enjoys official senior status as section manager, she responds to some of these challenges by attempting to regain control.

My concern for detail, Sandra’s preference for generalizing, and Mary’s pragmatism are apparent in the extract below from week three, which occurs when Mary and Sandra talk about teaching slang; I intervene to clarify,

Mary
And there’s a whole lot of New Zealand colloquial phrases if you like or idiomatic phrases and bits of vocabulary which the students often find very useful . . .

Sandra
I must remember that you’ve done that because I usually do it when I get to my formal and informal letter

Gavin
Although your register focus is a bit different to slang and colloquialism, isn’t it?

Sandra
I just do it all together, though I start off . . .

Gavin
Yeah I know but that’s, it’s my understanding it’s a formal or informal letter or whatever you call it, which has to do with register is different from what Mary’s doing

Sandra
But usually I do the whole thing in together . . . I put the slang and colloquialism with the informal when we’re looking at informal

Mary
I’m really looking at spoken language not written language though I guess an informal letter is spoken language written down isn’t it . . . I haven’t mentioned the word register yet

Gavin
Yeah, no. I’m using it as a teacher term not a
Mary steps in to take control of the discussion when I challenge Sandra. Mary intervenes again later when I challenge Sandra to explain what she means by an autobiography focusing on form, the appropriateness of the adapted textbook model and outcomes.

10.4.2 Challenging and being challenged

I am feeling the pressure of teaching to both groups - ELW and Certificate English and the growing resistance of some Korean students to some of my activities. I am also uncertain about the ways in which assessment is being co-ordinated. This together with the other pressures leads me to give unusually lengthy explanations to the others of tasks in class. In team meeting three, I give a very long involved description of how I am doing in-class assessments as a way of persuading others that my pedagogy is appropriate,

I picked up one and I said okay, so this is me talking, going from top to bottom, this is what I would say . . . so now I’m, practice in groups, they did, then actually as they were practicing in groups I walked around, monitored and grabbed, there were eighteen there, so it’s six times three, and I monitored four individuals, I just went and said so tell me something . . . and we came to the end of that and I said okay, and I wrote up on the board three things, I can interview a native speaker about their job, I can take notes and, about that interview . . . then I can explain to somebody else the information that I got making few mistakes . . .

(Gavin)

There are several examples of this kind of lengthy explanation of classroom processes, including throughout the team meetings. By week two the pressure for change from the Korean students is also beginning to affect my teaching. The resistance within the group has lead to more teacher talk on my part. I am trying to pitch work at an accessible - pre-intermediate - level, because this seems to be the point of contention. Giving a explicit rationale to students for class work is how I cope initially with the challenge,
At every point where an activity closed, I was making a longer spiel than I usually do about the purpose of what we were doing and why it was important . . . because some people were groaning a little bit, [Gavin]

Even when my hours with the combined group are reduced to three in the second term, I still find my teacher talk excessive. I discuss this with the others in week 18,

Gavin: How do you find, just a question, how do you find it when you’re with a single group. Do you find yourself talking a lot, yourself as a teacher talking a lot.

Peter: Perhaps

Gavin: I’m not just pointing at you. I’m thinking of them and their effect on you.

Mary: You think they make you talk? What you mean the Korean women . . .

Gavin: Definitely . . . because they don’t want to take on board any independent stuff . . .

Mary: I actually find that I push it all on them

Gavin: Well so do I, I mean I try . . .

Peter: I can see what you mean with that class. You end up kind of

Gavin: Sitting there

Mary: Explaining stuff

Mary and Sandra claim they do not have the same experience although both admit they haven’t really monitored their teacher talk as I have. I suggest the (Korean) students are simply unwilling to negotiate in a communicative task to reach agreement.

Tasks usually have some element of negotiation and some element of ambiguity, that’s the nature of a communicative task. That group and only that group, and within that a subsection [Korean women] don’t want to deal with that in my mind.

I respond to their challenge with my own. For example, I challenge the authority students, especially Koreans, invest in textbooks regarding grammar definitions.
Mary suggests a less confrontational approach while Sandra misinterprets the sense of ‘wrong’ I am using as over-simplistic or misinformed as meaning typographic mistakes.

Gavin: Agentless passives you need to do with them. And suddenly text find their textbook explanation is rather useless or misinformed

Mary: Yes but it can’t be you see because it’s in the book and the book’s always right

Gavin: I do say things like, say the book’s wrong. I do that in front of the class. I love doing that. So your book explanation is wrong, you see, this is how it actually works

Mary: I think probably not wrong but over-simplistic might be . . .

Gavin: I like saying wrong, sounds good yeah

Sandra: You sometimes get wrong things in books, wrong sentences or something, don’t you?

Mary: And you often get wrong, or explanations of grammar points, which can be misinterpreted very, very easily

I also take the opportunities in discussion tasks to ‘confront’ students with alternative views on matters like home birth, home schooling and education, problems for urban Maori, and cultural assumptions in both home and NZ contexts. Some of these topics bring sensitive issues to the fore in the class. Referring to a discussion about education and schooling in week 18, I note, for example, how a discussion about school and staffing cuts in a school scenario discussion lead into critical cultural issues,

I left them with some stuff to look at and we came back to that . . . which was very close to the bone about cuts in school and staffing . . . and they had to think about the situation and make a group decision . . . the third option was sack inefficient teachers . . . [Korean female student name] immediately picked up on those options as being related to what had happened to them this year . . . and that lead onto a general discussion about the role, status of teachers in New Zealand.

The same discussion produces another opportunity to challenge students to consider their relationship with teachers from something other than an authority and dependency relationship, which is a potential challenge for some Asian students;
Sandra is somewhat aghast at this, in her view, aggressive approach. I believe the discussions have value for students beyond the classroom and feel somewhat vindicated when a Korean student had used the discussion to communicate with her daughter about her experiences at school; this home-based relevance of teaching is something I always find powerful.

Gavin So then I explained to them why western-based teachers, we find this very funny that everything that we say you copy down . . . I said to them I could be writing rubbish here and so don’t believe what you read and don’t trust teachers and then

Sandra What are you teaching them! . . .

Gavin What was nice about this set too was that [Korean female student name] went home and said she talked with her daughter about the list of questions . . . she found it very useful to talk to her daughter about all these things

10.4.3 Developing strategies of coping and understanding

By week four, I am still struggling to find ways of keeping the Korean group happy and satisfy other individuals in the class when both groups worked together. Two Taiwanese students ask to see me privately in week five to relate the different opinions among students about adapting to the Korean group:

What they said to me was that they loved the first week of my teaching . . . it was varied and challenging and it was about summarising and . . . they were really happy and content and satisfied . . . now they feel that my teaching is flat and not so challenging and (they asked if) is it because you now have to adapt to the other people . . . one of their suggestions is no don’t split the class, you are the English expert teacher, we follow you, that’s Taiwan.

Within the combined group, therefore, there are different cultural models of the role of the teacher in learning. I try several strategies to bridge the gap between us: I observe Mary teaching to see whether there are any approaches she is using with the group that I can use, I speak directly with students. My third strategy is to move away from tasks that had a workplace focus and put in some ‘fun’ elements while trying to maintain the language level and content appropriate. One disaffected student suggests I shift the focus to conversation and away from requiring students to respond to questions they have insufficient vocabulary for. Mary suggests that this
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response is ‘typical’ but not something I can use to modify wholeheartedly my teaching,

Gavin  I had a quick chat with (student name) no not (student name) (student name), end of class, same thing again, she says to me . . . and like she was trying to reflect . . . the group view that she could understand the question but couldn’t answer because the vocab wasn’t there. Didn’t want to answer because if she said something, she might make a mistake and that was embarrassing.

Mary  Yeah fairly typical (for female Korean students to not want to take risks)

Gavin  So, you know in what she said, representing I think maybe four people or trying to represent four or five people, is more conversation like last year at level three, where you get to just talk to each other and talk to the teacher. Now . . . I either respond to that by making my sessions like that or not.

Mary  I think you can do a bit of a mixture. A bit of that and a bit of more formalised stuff as well.

During week 5, on the instigation of the students, the HOD Marama attended a meeting to try to sort out students’ complaints. I felt it was important to hear these complaints and attended the meeting; I then reported back to Mary and Sandra.

Effectively there was a group who said quite clearly . . . that there were two levels in the class, that there were two separate goals, and therefore it was unworkable . . . that the goal for level three was conversation . . . and that to achieve that goal also, one comment was, you needed small numbers not 16 or 18 . . . because of the mixture, teachers are not teaching appropriately, your classes (Sandra) are too easy, ours are too hard.

Both Sandra and Mary were disturbed to learn that this comment had been made about their classes, although I pointed out that it was an evaluation that was being used to prove a point, ie. the classes needed separating,

Sandra  They asked me this morning if I would please do questions, be questions and do questions, I mean that’s sort of like elementary level, that’s what they want me to do with them next week [(so how could my lessons be too easy?)]

Gavin  You can’t take this at face value. What you need to do is unpack what they’re saying . . . and what they’re saying is . . . we perceive there’s a level difference or the idea will serve us at the moment, and therefore we want it to be split
The suggestion that some students use the power they are given to re-negotiate the curriculum through the meeting with the HOD, is also developed by Mary, who explores this as a student strategy. By week seven students have argued successfully for a change to the timetable which includes my moving across for five hours of my eight with the combined group to teach the ELW group. This leaves me with only three hours with the combined class and relieves some of the pressure I am feeling. This is scheduled to start after the term break in the second ten week period. I suggest a note of caution to Sandra on reading into student complaint and being a ‘mouthpiece’ for groups. Mary, in support, adds insights from her own experience,

Gavin And you have to be careful, what little I’ve learnt in the past couple of years is that when you say that some representative came to you and said it’s too hard or something, how many people is she actually speaking for? Or how many people imposing her view on . . .

Sandra Exactly

Mary They always say they’re speaking for the class. They always say we all think but actually they don’t.

As it emerges it is an influential sub-group who argue for change, and the representativeness of the challenge of some is also explored in the following chapter, where Carol reveals some of the complex sources of this resistance.

### 10.4.4 New timetable, focus and grammar in context

When Peter replaces me for five hours in the intermediate timetable this relieves the pressure I am feeling from the student challenge and gives me scope - I have three hours with the combined group - to find a text and activities that work for both groups without having to worry about getting the right balance in assessments. I mention a particular textbook discovery in week 12 and how this gives purpose and structure to my lessons including grammar,

I have done the family really, all of this week. That’s because I’ve rediscovered a wonderful book, which I used a long time, years ago, called Discussions at Work, intermediate . . .
of the reasons I did it . . . I started it with ELW, the issue because they’re working at the moment on presentations about cultural differences . . . So I brought it in there.

I then used the transcript as a source for teaching about overlapping speech in way I had described to Sandra much earlier in term one as my approach to grammar. That is, I did not approach grammar by looking at structures in the programme document and try to teach those, which seemed to me was Sandra’s approach,

> It’s an amazing little piece of transcript, really good that cassette because it’s real authentic stuff. Native speed, overlapping speech, people talking at the same time and full of all that good stuff . . . plus the overlap and we went back and listened for those . . . and we practiced a little bit about putting them in . . . to show your agreement without stopping the conversation. . . it’s been tough with these two [groups] to find the right thing (Gavin/week 12)

As a follow up, I resist Sandra’s pressure (and subtexts) to nominate an isolated structure I will look at,

Gavin  I’m staying off grammar except where it pops up.
Sandra  Comes in naturally, yeah.
Gavin  So, I’m going to pursue that one.
Sandra  Grammar is sort of good for them to get accurate (so why don’t you do it?) . . . It gives them a structure, doesn’t it? to pin on, make all these sentences off.
Gavin  They definitely need it . . . I just don’t want to do it [deal with single structures] personally at the moment.

My response here relates to that positioning of grammar in pedagogy as a resource for meaning.

### 10.5 Summary and conclusions

I incorporate data from the final team meeting in this section since the voices of my co-teachers are as important as mine in interpreting this chapter. Including their data
also helps displace my authority as the authoritative voice of interpretation of this dissertation. The evaluation of the course in the final team meeting highlights some of the similarities to previous experiences and the unique responses of students to some activities,

Yes I think they were very typical, very typical Korean group, both sections of them. The ELW group were a perfect ELW class, even though they were much more like the first one we had and . . . to some extent the second. But even though they actually didn’t have a direct work focus, except perhaps for [student name] . . . they had the attitude that worked with exactly what the course was offering. So, they fitted the brief perfectly. They were easy, very easy, and the other group was a typical Korean intermediate class (Mary)

In referring to the ELW students, Mary highlights the fact that in her view more important than fitting the official program profile, i.e. having a workplace focus, students need a specific attitude, which she explains,

Mary   It is a matter of where they are in terms of their language level and in terms of their acculturation, if you like, and where they see themselves fitting into the country

Gavin   So in a sense they’ve got sufficient experience and they’ve had sufficient opportunity to encounter the kinds of things which are the highlights, if you like, of the ELW . . . ?

Mary   So they’ve started to realise how much they don’t know but be able to say where it is that they don’t know it

As she admits, neither the previous ELW course, nor this one, (nor the following group) had students who fit the course profile. This routinely unusual state of affairs provided fertile ground in this study to negotiate curriculum views. Taking up Jacqueline’s comment about the need for discussion, negotiation, recording, and critique of teaching mentioned in the previous chapter, the project created a space for this to happen, a space which is felt to be democratic and open. As Sandra out it the ESL section in general was one where ‘you don’t often feel those invisible tensions between people at all’.
In two interviews, one staged shortly after this case study and another several months later shortly before my departure to Australia, together with Mary and Sandra I reflected on this study and curriculum work in ESL in general,

One of the things that we have as a section, if you like, always prided ourselves on, is the level of collegial communication. People are actually able to talk about things and communicate together, projects like this actually help (Mary)

For Sandra, Mary, and myself, the opportunity to negotiate teaching and discuss pedagogy was a positive outcome of the project. Mary thought it was a practice that should be regularly applied to all teams although with the number of part-timers and the difficulties they had in attending meetings it probably was not feasible. She appreciated Sandra’s desire for a ‘deeper approach to curriculum’ that we had begun with the team meeting but it remained unclear what Sandra meant. Mary added that ongoing evaluation of teaching in relation to curriculum document remained important, ‘Can we see ourselves building along with what we think, what we’ve said in the course outline we’re going to do, or are there some things which are going to shift us off from that.’

I have suggested that through a close examination of texts of practice, pedagogical tensions may in fact exist even though they are managed in a consensual, perhaps gendered, non-confrontational atmosphere. I also suggest that such tensions are produced by delegations of authority and approaches to practice, which sustain each other. In addition, I propose that teaching practices based on negative evaluations of the significance of the curriculum document create spaces not only for teacher-student autonomy but also for conflicting assessment practices. According to respondents in the previous chapter, subterfuge and manipulation of official documents is a strategy for managing curriculum and sustaining practitioner autonomy against institutional imposition. In unit standards-based models this has serious consequences for institutional and practitioner accountability. In less-structured curriculum frameworks (ESL), accountability is limited to teacher self-evaluation buttressed by positive dispositions of students towards the teacher and each other within the classroom community. Team teaching makes some of this accountability publicly examinable.
While collaborative action research provides an environment for this reflection, these occasions are not routine elements of practice. Mary’s comments and those of Sandra brought to mind those of Jacqueline in the previous chapter about the potential for developing curriculum work in ESL and practice ‘And to scrutinize that all the time . . . and it’s a level of thinking, which often isn’t there’ (Jacqueline). The examples above, demonstrate I believe significant difference in the discourse and practices of ESL teaching take up by three practitioners managing a challenging program.

Despite the general positive assessment of the outcome, the analysis illustrates some significant differences among ESL teachers as to the pedagogies that are appropriate to ESL students. In addition, teachers attribute group and individual identities to students, which are constructed in a manner that can make student talk and behaviour to the discursive construction of practice the ESL teacher takes up as his/her own.

Teachers make sense of curriculum work by positioning student behaviours relative to the discourses of practice they themselves take up. This interpretive act - making sense of curriculum work - I have suggested, is displayed in team meeting conversations. ESL Teachers also use their own theories of culture, to account for student behaviours in relation to curriculum work. Mary, for example, uses the concept of stages of acculturation to locate the response of students resisting her (and my) teaching activities. She brings this theory in at a point where an account is needed to cope with a request by students to substantially disrupt teaching processes, which as manager she must deal with.

Team meetings are also conducted on a premise of collaborative collegiality reinforced perhaps by gendered sensitivity to the mobilisation of power by those with more access to it. Sandra and Mary acknowledged the contribution that close attention to detail in the team meetings produced for the curriculum outcomes. On the other hand, I have suggested above how individuals, myself included, use resources of power sustained by gender, profession, and institution, to achieve particular ends. For example, I use research expertise and the associated linguistic metalanguage to challenge others; Sandra uses teacher-student (gendered) empathy
to reinforce the ‘truth’ of her accounts of practice; Mary occasionally leverages debates with her managerial status. Thus, within a notionally neutral encounter we (ESL teachers) access power in specific ways for our ends.

In the following chapter I explore the curriculum experiences of three students as a necessary other perspective on the constructed ESL curriculum.
Chapter Eleven: Experiencing Curriculum

The complex encounters with culture and language that students experience emerge in curriculum conversations, here represented in journals, classroom conversations, and interviews. They partly mirror but often exceed the images and identities we ESL teachers attribute them. Students engage ESL teachers in their lives and demand in subtle and not so subtle ways that their needs are negotiated with. This teacher-student interaction, which runs in parallel to and alongside classroom interaction, is here made very palpable and visible in ways even classroom interaction conceals.

In this chapter, three students narrate their locations within society and the classroom through interview, focus group, and journal writing. I select these three students from the seven cases I collected because the quality and completeness of their responses foreground the student experience within the classroom community. I also foreground ways in which their representations of themselves within the curriculum process, coincide with and differ from teacher constructions. I suggest that while it is possible to see teacher-student negotiation of identities in ESL at work through close (discourses) analysis of classroom texts (Love and Suherdi, 1996), negotiation can also be represented through accounts such as this which consider a semester long relationship of mutual (student-teacher) interpretation constructed out of multiple extended texts.

As part of work within the tradition of critical ethnography, I believe critical tales (Barone, 1992) of this kind are an appropriate contribution to the holistic representation and interpretation of curriculum work in ESL. This students focus is also a complement to the two perspectives on curriculum work in ESL in the previous chapters, what Eisner (1991, p.110) has called ‘structural corroboration’ of an interpretation. As a consequence, student narratives here are interspersed with teacher interpretations of people and events referred to.

Carol, a representative of the Korean group resisting current teaching practices, reveals some of the complex negotiation of social place that migrant students must
accomplish through language. Carol is aware of language and cultural needs she has that she nonetheless avoids taking up. Bill, from Taiwan, engages in very different ways with acculturation, and the challenge of teaching and assessment, revealing a profound disagreement with forms of curriculum compromise their Korean peers demand. Finally, Leah, a Korean language learner with a longer engagement with NZ society and its sometimes mystifying cultural practices, represents another perspective on the acculturation process within the Korean community, through the identities she must manage at home and work.

11.1 Carol’s search for an intercultural third place

Mary’s suggests that Carol and some of her peers are facing a difficult transition to NZ society compounded by their own cultural preconceptions and social and moral responsibilities. Carol has a turbulent semester of ESL learning compounded by her difficulties in coping with her identities as mother, Korean woman, church member, and language learner. These identities and the responsibilities they carry are constructed for her by the different communities within which she is located. Early in the semester, she suggests in her journal that language learning has lead to a time of crisis for her, ‘I studied for one month . . . I learned lots of print, grammar, etc. but I can’t satisfied myself. I worry about of my all life’ (3/3/00).

In our focus group meeting at this time she reiterates this frustration, and insists after some encouragement from classroom peers that she has inefficient strategies for learning, a problem she alone must resolve. At this stage she deflects any responsibility for her frustrations from approaches to teaching incompatible with her aims, ‘Teacher no, teacher no problem no, just my problem, you understand?’ (3/03/00). However, she soon decides to re-locate her conflict in forms of teaching and curriculum processes and goals she claims are the cause of her difficulties. Both Mary and I interpret this shift of responsibility as a conscious strategy of coping, common to Korean students like Carol. In particular, Mary notes how the ESL unit is one of the few locations in society within which Korean female students have a voice, access to power, and are listened to, which they use for their complaints to be taken into consideration as part of institutional accountability to achieve their ends.
At the same time, using their access to power conflicts with passivity expected of Korean women. Aggressively arguing for their case against authority figures such as ESL teachers puts these Korean women into a position of conflict regarding respect for teachers, expressing disagreement,

These Korean women have a very, how do you put it, not a weak way of being strong but its almost a kind of inverted snobbery. A kind of a, I’m really, really bad, I’m really, really useless, I really, really can’t do anything . . . but I’m really going to put all the blame on you. And I really, really don’t have to take responsibility for any of it . . . because I’m not capable but you are . . . But at the same time they will probably feel quite resentful of us for allowing them to do that because this is not what Korean women do . . . (Mary/week 5)

Carol not only redirects responsibility to the institution but also actively resists, together with some of her peers, activities Mary and I in particular use. The conflicting personal outcome of this resistance, as Mary suggests, is hard to balance with teacher respect. Carol, for example, notes that public challenges to teacher face have limits. For example, when I lend some class materials to view at home, and another Korean student in class suggests light-heartedly that I am showing favouritism, Carol apologizes,

I would like to apologize you that (student name) has got joke at your English lesson. At that time I was embarrassed and sorry. I appreciated that you lended a video tape . . . And I expect my ability to be improved with watching the video. (14/3/00)

Carol takes a primary role in resisting the combined program and demanding change. She insists in several contexts, eg. a meeting with the HOD in week five, and in her journal, that class numbers need to be reduced and levels split although. The division along proficiency lines being a contentious issue among the teachers (Mary, Sandra, and I). Later in the semester, she will admit that a smaller more ‘comfortable’ class setting with few students is not necessarily conducive to being challenged to develop speaking skills because students rely on teacher familiarity with their language for understanding.
As the semester and teacher-student relationships develop Carol becomes more forthright in her stated opposition to teacher work. Towards the end of the program, Carol ‘reveals’ that speaking ‘honestly’ she and her peers prefer Sandra’s lessons to both Mary and mine because of the degree of challenge,

> Just my opinion, Sandra time, we like, Sandra time, sorry Gavin but I can’t tell lie, yes, my character, I can’t tell lie, we, our class like Sandra lesson time because easy, easier than you and Mary . . . (2/6/00)

The reference to ‘we’ is an allusion to the subgroup of perhaps five Korean women with whom Carol regularly sits and converses with; it does not, for example, include Leah. This group underscore their resistance and unity as a group by working together, and reinforcing the respective claims of other members throughout the semester.

Carol does, nonetheless, attempt to find value in the challenges I provide in my teaching. For example, in a reflection on the first ten weeks, while alluding to difficulties she claims to experience in my classes (and Mary’s), she is also careful to acknowledge the positive overall effect of my pedagogy.

> Thank you so much for your lesson and the journal. Sometimes I didn’t understand your lesson but I interested in (enjoyed) your lesson. Frequently you gave me a lot of encouragement so I learned lots of new things from your lesson. Especially I think my writing is improved through the journal (6/4/00)

Carol also comes to locate her dissatisfaction in the incompatible goals of the program and her goals, goals which shift through the semester. She claims, for example, that class activities do not focus on everyday speaking or ‘conversation’. When I ask her to clarify, it appears that she views the classroom sessions as an opportunity to engage in conversations with a native speaker, i.e. the teacher, because she has little opportunity to do so outside the program. Enrolling in School, she suggests on another occasion, is a way of overcoming isolation at home, and having no opportunity to speak.
In response to this, I introduce discussion topics to develop speaking abilities during the second term around specific issues such as education, and bring in volunteers from the community for some of these conversations. However, Carol and her companions are not happy with discussion topics like education, and the workplace, which she views as irrelevant to her aims. In contrast, a repetitive focus on ‘everyday’ topics, such as banking, repeated three times in the semester, with relatively simple language practice exercises she claims help her improve her language, and she is generally pleased, therefore, with Peter’s approach in the second term of the semester, ‘Peter time is easy yes, practice exercise is easy yes.’

Carol resists by mobilising the power she has as spokesperson for a disaffected group. Resisting Mary’s moves to keep students together in a combined class, Carol claims that class activities exclude the group of lower proficiency students she alleges to represent. These students, she claims, are excluded from activities by their poor proficiency, and dominated by ‘stronger’ students like Bill and Leah. Carol points out how she feels students like Leah and Bill dominate opportunities to speak in class and that this had also, she believed, limited her progress. She also labels my style of teaching too ‘deep’, ie. complicated, for her and her peer group.

In fact, as I report to Mary in team meeting 4, Carol herself identifies loss of face and fear of taking risks as one of the ‘real’ hidden issues for her frustration.

I was doing a bit of nominating and asking them in class about their answers to something. And she was saying, and like she was trying to reflect I think the group view, that she could understand the question but couldn’t answer because the vocab wasn’t there; didn’t want to answer because if she said something she might make a mistake and that was embarrassing (Gavin/week 4)

Carols’ reflection on the incident foregrounds the emotional value she attaches to a correct response in class

Gavin asked some questions to us. Even though already I know, I couldn’t explain about it because I will be shamed when I talk to wrong answer and immediately I couldn’t think pertinent words (journal 2/3/00)
Carol, also links vocabulary limits and listening when describing difficulties in interviewing a neighbour about their job, ‘But I couldn’t understand his vocabulary and pronunciation because I have got lots of new words (that I don’t know) and his pronunciation is not clear to me’ (17/02/00). Although Carol wishes to increase her vocabulary and learn to be successfully in everyday situations she is not prepared to engage with the conversational language that is required nor, as Mary reports, strategies of reading to cope with the newspaper. She suggests that overcoming the speaking difficulty will only happen through learning ‘easy vocabulary’ that she can use (1/6/00) but the speaking situations she finds herself in seem to demand more complex vocabulary than she is prepared to engage in.

Carol also resists my attempts to teach recognition of informal expressions for apologising based on an ESL oriented video and text prepared from soap opera extracts, linking her refusal with an approach to vocabulary learning that excludes multiple meaning.

Today I learned about apologies. I think it is very important to me. But in conversation, the informal expression is more difficult than formal expression. Also literal translation easier than translate freely. I don’t know lots of idioms and slang words. Please don’t teach me (us) too many unnecessary words.

She also criticises together with some of her peer group, the work Mary does on understanding the language of media, TV and newspaper news, which a number of students claim overburdens them with vocabulary; Mary alludes to this in the previous chapter. In an early focus interview (17/3/00) she suggests that she used to frequently watch TV in Korea but now rarely watches and is excluded by language. Reflecting on newspaper reading, a topic Mary suggested the Korean students had marked as a priority, Carol points out that she almost never read the newspaper, could still not read it, and had no use for it since, as she somewhat embarrassingly pointed out, she got the news from a Korean language Internet site. Carol fluctuates between attributing her lack of interest in the news to the content being irrelevant to her interests and the language being too difficult.
Carol uses another strategy to defend her resistance also, alluding to class activities, which she suggests have excluded the group she represents. She refers, for example, to the dialogue with a policewoman who visits the class, which Mary arranges, as incomprehensible to the lower level students she identifies with. Carol also refers to a video on language learning I use as incomprehensible, and the topic - language learning (education) - as irrelevant to her interests. However, other students in the ESL class, including some of her peers and also participants in the focus group meetings do not always share her interpretation. Consequently, as the semester proceeds, Carol is ready to admit that her representation of the experience of others, her imagined community, is smaller – numbering perhaps five Korean female students - than she claims; she admits in the final focus meeting that her opinion about the class preference for Sandra is not shared by everyone.

Carol creates contexts of exclusion that fit with her redirection of frustrations to curriculum work itself. This produces conflict and pressure for ESL teachers, some of which is reflected in the previous chapter. Mary suggests that no compromise is possible because the source of Carol’s frustrations are actually located in socio-cultural challenges she appears unable to take up. I also appear unable to find a compromise to meet her complaints, and the resistance to my teaching I find difficult to cope with. Sandra, meanwhile, enjoys the approval of Carol and her (identified) peer group, supporting their calls for change. Such is the difficult context of curriculum negotiation we are faced with.

Carol does acknowledge other sources of her frustration. Carol acknowledges that her understanding of social practices make it difficult to find a ‘third’ place to locate herself in relation to her two cultures (Korea and NZ). When I invite students to our house mid-semester, while she is surprised that we would invite guests when the house is in disorder (undergoing renovations), she recognizes that her own custom of maintaining honour may be less important than other aims, such as building social relationships.

But one thing I found difference between Korea and NZ custom except for special case such as funeral, accident, etc., when my house is mess we don’t invite anybody . . . we think
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important prestige and honour (do you understand?) but this (Korean) custom is no good. I like natural custom in NZ. (13/4/00)

She reports in her journal and in conversation somewhat conflicting experiences of language use in social situations, some of which reflect on past successes. Her work as a volunteer childcare educator, which she had training and experience for in Korea, brings her in contact with children, educational issues, and parents in the community. For example, she refers in her journal and conversations to her past role as a volunteer at a childcare centre in another small town, and the ways in which she benefited from this experience.

At that time I couldn’t speak English at all but all of you taught me English and gave me a lot of encouragement and love . . . I learned a lot of things from this pre-school. It was different from the Korean pre-school . . . I’ll never forget each of you . . . (16/3/00)

At the same time, Carol refers to her current difficulties in being understood among children in the day care centre she currently volunteers in as a result of her poor linguistic proficiency. She is also disposed to see these difficulties as the result of cultural exclusion. For example, she believes that a child who cries when she sees Carol does so because she is Asian. She is, consequently, relieved when the child smiles at her eventually after she perseveres. This response is the incident Mary uses to suggest Carol is moving towards intercultural competence.

In some cases, the local community constructs identities for Carol and her family as ‘other’ that exclude. For example, Carol reports hearing a group of young kiwi males make racial slurs about her family, as they eat dinner together at a local restaurant. She sees this exclusion as directed at her family and her children, a location where one of her prime identities as wife and mother is defined.

Kiwi youth group came . . . saying what my family could not hear with small sound . . . It was sound yellow, Asian, discrimination. But we still had dinner as if that event had not happened. I wish my boys would not be hurt by them (16/02/00)
Consistent with a particular construction of her as wife, Carol’s dependence on and 
deferral to her husband to deal with social encounters where language is crucial, eg. 
telephoning, creates other opportunities for personal frustration. For example, Carol 
attributes error to herself when a salesman visits the house because she is unable to 
derfer to her husband.

Because when I talked company clerk I didn’t understand very well what he said. I wanted 
company clerk talk with my husband first . . . seller came to my house . . . I think it was my 
misunderstanding . . . I was upset. (27/02/00)

Even when Carol persists in clarifying misunderstanding, against her husband’s 
wishes, she is not ready to evaluate her perseverance in trying to understand as an 
achievement. Carol alludes to this when describing a planned birthday party where 
arrangements did not seem right.

My husband appointed at Burger King three days ago. I found that appointment contract was 
different to truth. We asked manager for true. He explained about that with detail. But I 
couldn’t understand it. My husband said ‘doesn’t matter’ but my opinion was different. I 
asked again and again until understanding that true. At that time I felt heavy mind for myself 
because I couldn’t make myself understood . . . (23/3/00)

When she arranges a dinner with students and another ESL teacher, she is also 
embarrassed when unable to explain in English how to cook and produce origami 
when friends visit her at home:

If I explain origami in my language I’ll (do it) very well. I felt frustrated and irritated with 
myself because I couldn’t explain. I hope someday I can explain my cooking methods and 
origami (27/02/00)

Carol alludes continually to occasions where her lack of confidence and likelihood of 
feeling brings embarrassment and shame. She identifies social occasions and 
situations that require she manage interaction through language but she is unwilling 
to risk activities that aim to develop these abilities, some of which may threaten 
existing security she feels in some social settings. For example, she reports her 
frustration when meeting a former acquaintance from her previous volunteer 
position, and being unable to communicate effectively with her and her daughter. As
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a solution her two boys suggest using English in the home. Given the linguistic and cultural security she enjoys at home using Korean, she is unwilling to take this step. Notwithstanding, the family is also a potential source of tension for her, not only through her responsibilities as mother or her husbands slightly guarded antagonism to her attempts at learning English. In our initial interview, her husband is irritated by her lack of progress and reproaches her for confusing Korean and English grammar rules.

The generational divide, language proficiency, and family responsibilities produce tensions for Carol. Carol seems to take primary responsibility for the children’s schooling and this brings with it tension as her children’s language proficiency exceeds hers. Her responsibilities for schooling her children and the diverging proficiencies of her and her son lead to conflict, for which she could find no solution.

Today I taught my elder boy about math. But I couldn’t explain math terms in English because I didn’t know math terms in English. So I explained math with Korean language but my son didn’t understand my explanation. My son didn’t know math terms of Korea either. We felt stuff in mind . . . What to do? (9/2/00)

In a later journal entry towards the end of semester she also refers to a being unable to help her son answer general knowledge questions for school because of her poor English. Carol reveals how this tension at home affects her ability, and she envies the partnership Bill and Teresa have as a couple in the classroom (there is also one other couple), and the mutual support they offer each other in class and in the home. This relationship she refers to as a ‘good situation’ compared to her own. The ‘envy’ with which she views others, she also translates to the proficiency of others, she regards as higher level (level four), Envy, envy, envy. Level four classmate speaking well. It’s grammar I don’t know. I understand but I’m speaking first time . . . (14/4/00)

Carol recognises that language learnt in class that is not used she quickly forgets. For example, although she suggests that Sandra’s approach to teaching verb structures by having students memorise them had been a good class (2/6/00 focus), the payoff in terms of learning had not been great because she never used the words. She also
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refers to a grammar session with Sandra on using tenses, which remained unclear for her. She attempts to use these in the journal although her examples are inaccurate.

I learned about past perfect or past perfect continuous 4 days ago in Sandra lesson time. But exactly [how to use it] I don’t know. So this journal used past perfect or past perfect continuous but exactly I don’t know. Tense is very difficult every time (1/5/00)

It is responses like these which suggest to me that the focus on grammar form that Sandra uses, which is discussed in the previous chapter, is not adequate for Carol and her peers.

Carol’s strategy of using the idea of certain students dominating class activities, her revelation that she fears loss of face and the consequences of risk, and her sometimes conflicting relationships at home and in the classroom community, disguise a deeper conflict consistent with Mary’s proposal about the source of Carol’s frustrations. Carol excludes, and is partly excluded by language and society, and the responsibilities attached to the identities she is attributed in the family, Korean community, and society. She is supported by a group of peers, Korean women in a similar situation to her, who take up her resistance and also make it their own. This brings enormous pressure to bear on we teachers managing the curriculum. At the same time, other students such as Bill and Teresa are responding quite differently; their story follows.

11.2 Bill

In the following section I focus on the experience of Bill from Taiwan although I refer at times to his wife Teresa. Teresa is present with Bill in interviews at home and focus groups with students, she works alongside him in the classroom also. Teresa’s relative silence, therefore, is due to the fact her data is not the focus although her presence with Bill requires acknowledgement, and much of what Bill says depends on her interaction with him.
I met Bill and his wife Teresa in their home during the second week of semester. Bill had worked as a surgeon in Taiwan, and Teresa as a pharmacist. They had two children at school, and Bill was able to return to Taiwan and earn money there to support their NZ settlement. Like other foreign trained specialists there was little likelihood Bill could work in NZ in the foreseeable future, and towards the end of the semester Bill begins exploring volunteer work as a way of continuing to develop his language, and investigate job opportunities. Both Bill and Teresa were also very happy with the less pressured school environment for their two children than in Taiwan, and appreciated the ESL services, including home tutors, they had enjoyed to date. In our final team meeting, Mary suggests that despite difficulties they face that Bill and Teresa have a strong commitment to making their move to NZ work,

They are determined to make what they can of the situation that they have put themselves in. And they are not going to let the potential difficulties overcome the decision that they’ve made to be here, right. They could be turning around and saying, really I think we ought to be back in Taiwan because that’s what a lot of people in a similar position to them have done. [Mary final meeting]

Bill and Teresa are not part of the Korean group within the class, nor the local community that define practices and behaviours among the Korean women. Mary, Sandra, and I describe him in slightly different terms with respect to the class group overall. Sandra refers to Bill as ‘brainy’ and assumes he must be a fluent speaker. This also leads her to assume not only that he is easy to teach but that Bill and certain others in the group inhibit the Korean women from speaking, a claim Carol and others make. Mary and I choose to depict him as thoughtful rather than inherently intelligent, while Mary, in particular, rejects the ‘shrinking violet’ depiction the Korean women use, which Sandra takes up.

In interviews, both Bill and Teresa express clear views about the need for teachers, not students, to establish curriculum guidelines. In the first weeks of semester they are happy with the varied mode of class activities, eg. song, TV news, journal writing, and approaches to teaching, their children remarking on how similar some of the activities, eg. journal writing, are to their own school activities. Recognising some of the emerging tensions in the combined group and the resistance of some
students to existing activities, Bill resists moves to compromise. Using food
metaphors, he rejects proposals to limit topics and activities ‘experienced’ teachers
have decided on, but acknowledges the need for discussion,

I think an experienced teacher should decide what he/she wants to give students. An English
course is a complete program. Sometimes we can take a rest to eat snack but, basically, we
must eat main meal completely. And what teacher wants to give you is main meal. Besides
(=On the other hand), I am interested in the thought of other classmates and the thought of
teachers (week 2)

Bill rejects the idea that the class could be divided along proficiency lines. He also
rejects the idea that the combined group should ‘slow down’ to account for what he
saw as difficulties for some students with poorly specified aims, such as the
relevance of workplace topics to developing conversation abilities. In particular, Bill
rejects this idea as artificially restricting the possible range of conversation topics
one might have,

I don’t think there are two levels in our class. I don’t suppose (=believe) some
subjects shouldn’t be taught in our class either. When I study English
everything is interesting. When I talk to someone about something we might
discuss anything. Also, working is part of living. Why must we keep this
subject away (8/3/00).

Bill and Teresa did not initially signal a desire to join the workplace ELW program
having enrolled in the intermediate class after attending part-time ESL classes. They
chose to join in the ELW program when the curriculum crisis emerges. As
discussions continue through the first term Bill increasingly expresses his
disagreement with the processes of adapting class work to accommodate the Korean
complaints. During the final weeks of class, Bill seems to take seriously the idea of
working as a volunteer as a way into the employment market, seeing the opportunity
to train and work as a challenge that will help him keep developing English once
school has finished,

I have learned how to learn English by myself . . . But I also think sometimes I need some
stress to push me to keep going . . . I supposed I could take part in local voluntary work . . . I
like challenges, I think that is an opportunity for me (14/6/00).
In one of his final journal entries, Bill characterises learning in general, and language learning in particular, as a cumulative self-directed process, in which the teacher plays a facilitating role, one which requires substantial independence from students,

> We couldn’t learn all things from teachers. The teacher teaches you methods, gives you ideas, then you learn by yourself. In the process of your life, most of your time, you learn new things from previous knowledge.

A small number of students, including Bill, Teresa, and Leah, took a similar independent view on language learning. I found this approach extremely compatible with my own approach to teaching, and difficult to reconcile with those in Carol’s group who are very dependent on teacher input and direction. In line with this independent learning focus, in our focus group meeting at the end of term one, Bill suggests his progress has been in terms of learning strategies to diagnose his weaknesses and how to cope better with language use in the real world.

I agree to meet Bill and Teresa in week 5 to discuss their reaction to my simplifying tasks in the classroom to meet the complaints of some of the female Korean students that my lessons were too difficult. I suggest to them both that I could not use their ‘expert’ model of teacher to force the group to follow my lead and also explained that according to institutional principles of accountability to students, through democratic compromise, the class had to be adapted,

> Bill and Teresa wanted to talk to me after class today . . . what they said to me was they loved the first weeks of my teaching . . . because it was varied and challenging . . . and they’d never seen this before and they were really happy and content and satisfied and wanted lots of that and now they feel that my teaching is flat and not so challenging, and is it because you have to adapt .

The decision they make to take up separate classroom hours within the ELW program, especially in term 2, is partly a response to their frustration with compromise. The compromise for Bill is not merely an issue of proficiency levels, rather his approach to learning and the opportunities for learning created by the journal, group conversations, and interviews, is quite distinct to that of many of his
class peers. For example, Bill uses his journal and group interviews, to ask advice about learning strategies and materials, for example, how to effectively use tape recordings (23/3/00). In week 2, he notes also that he was accustomed to listening to the teacher but still was challenged by taped voices, and both he and Teresa ask for specific advice on what the causes might be. He and Teresa also use teacher dialogue to examine ideas he has about the nature of language learning, suggesting, for example, in a term 2 group interview (19/5/00) that reading books can lead to knowledge of sentence grammar, which can then be used in speaking.

Bill also uses the (focus) group conversations to give his evaluation of teaching activities, both positive and negative, and suggest alternative activities or topics. Some of these evaluations refer to other teachers. For example, along with Teresa, Aroha, and Philippa, Bill suggests that the courthouse visit and a class conducted by Mary on the language of the courthouse had left students somewhat confused because the language and processes used in the courtroom visit had been too difficult to understand, and the classroom sessions on vocabulary were not clear. However, Bill and other participating students generally interpret the additional channels of communication, eg. journals, as an opportunity for dialogue with me.

For example, in an early (week 2) student conversation, Bill suggests that more group discussion would be useful because he had already grown accustomed to teacher language and voice, and group discussion represented a challenge to his ability to respond spontaneously and manage different pronunciation. In a journal entry, he asks me to clarify the role of conjunctions in a class session focusing on contextualised use,

I don’t really understand in what situation I can use it. Could you teach us something about conjunctions? I feel each time when you explain a word in its proper situation, I learn more things from that (3/4/00)

At the end of term one, Bill also suggests that I reduce the focus on learning idiomatic NZ language in my sessions. When classes were rescheduled in the second term and my hours were reduced to three with the combined group I decided to use
this time to focus on discussion topics that also incorporated listening, grammar and vocabulary exercises. This was partly to meet the demand from the Korean group that classes focus on conversation. Bill adopts a wait-and-see attitude to the benefits of this new focus, ‘I feel some change have taken (place) in our class. We have more group discussion. Is it good or bad? I don’t know at the moment but we will know one or two weeks later. (27/4/00)’

As lessons progress, I try to pace topics in discussion over two weeks rather than one so that the less confident (Korean) students can cope with the discussion tasks and exercises, because Carol and others seem to prefer repetition. I also bring local community volunteers into the classroom to work with students in discussion, so that I shift to monitoring groups and they can be exposed to different accents, and authentic speakers. Bill finds the change of pace unsatisfactory, and is keen to keep the topics changing, suggesting that his current focus in language learning is quantity not quality,

At the moment I prefer quantity to quality. I like to learn more topics because each topic is so interesting, and I think more about it after explanation by teacher. Therefore, if we have a topic a week, we can discuss it on Tuesday’s conversation lesson . . . we keep the issue hot and not boring (16/5/00)

Part of Bill’s enthusiasm for changing topics is that this provides an opportunity to learn new vocabulary, an essential challenge to progress. Ultimately I decide to follow his suggestion since several other students appear to be in a similar position to Bill, and able to cope with this pace although Carols’ group is not happy. I propose to students also to write about the discussion topics, such as whether charity begins at home in their journals to reinforce class practice, and give a focus to topics they write about. Bill’s reflections on classroom tasks and their relationship to real world language use were frequent and illuminating as a teacher to the uptake of the aims and objectives of classroom work. Early on he reflects on the usefulness of stress and intonation, the purpose of language, noting that students often forget to consider its significance:
Today we learned about stress and intonation. I think it’s very important for language because language is a communication tool. If you speak in flat, dull, voice, nobody is interested in listening and we always ignoring it (week one).

While Carol and certain others fear, avoid, or reject engaging with society, Bill and Teresa also see, as Leah also does, how class activities and assessments in the community can help them bridge cultural gaps in their knowledge. These are also opportunities to examine their linguistic proficiency in real settings. For example, students from the Social Work department interview Bill and several other students about their understanding of cultural differences between Taiwan and NZ, as part of a regular exchange between the ESL and Social Work units. Bill felt prepared for the experience since I had interviewed him the day before but also challenged in the interview because he had limited knowledge of NZ culture and lacked the ‘academic’ vocabulary required, ‘It’s hard to say the word about history and culture. I think it’s difficult to talk about academic research because there are too many proper nouns (16/2/00)’. In his reflection in week nine on class learning he suggests that the topics in class had bridged some of this cultural gap both in the combined class and ELW, ‘We’ve learned NZ’s culture, two cultural traditions. We’ve learned working, shopping, wedding and home-schooling in NZ’s style. We have learned living in NZ.’

Bill and Teresa’s interpretation of class activities, their reflections on the purposes of activities, and their direct and ongoing contribution to curriculum evaluation help maintain a positive atmosphere in the class group overall, and contrast with approaches by Carol and her peers in several ways, some of which I document below. For example, in response to claims by some students, for example, including Carol, that making mistakes in language learning was embarrassing, a source of unnecessary stress, and perhaps an indicator of poor teacher design of activities, Bill found listening to others useful input, and learning from mistakes essential,

Making mistakes is part of learning a language. During the class I listened to classmate’s speaking. I tried to determine if it was correct or not. Otherwise (= I ask myself), can I say a better sentence? Sometimes I could and sometimes I couldn’t. So everyone will teach you something if you listen, even a wrong sentence too. (22/2/00)
In a conversation during week two, Bill and Teresa also challenge Barbara, one of Carol’s peer group, who remarks that she had no interest talking to neighbours or people on the street and preferred to talk in the classroom only. Conflicting desires by students for engagement with society creates some of the pressures teachers face. Referring to the visit by a policewoman to discuss managing a car accident, which Carol suggests is too linguistically challenging for her peer group, Bill suggests that the topic was easy to understand since it directly concerned the listeners, and several other students also report enthusiastically on this visit in their journals for similar reasons. Bill, in general, locates successful learning in teacher planning activities that match actual student social needs and background,

> It was not difficult to understand what she said. I think that’s because we know her topics in advance. Also all she said concerned ourselves . . . If everything concerns yourself you will be very interested in doing it. You will practice again and again, then you will know it very well. (16/3/00)

This link between personal experience and language learning he also calls ‘a good method’, and in his comments on the same visit during the focus group (17/3/00) he also attributes his success in understanding to the fact that Mary had taught relevant vocabulary in class, and that he had read about the topic in the newspaper. The classroom experience comes in handy when he reports (8/6/00) on having a car accident some months later. Although he places vocabulary first he recognizes his pronunciation problems and appreciates the focus on, for example, linking sounds together, which has implications both for speaking and listening that Mary includes in one of her lessons (27/3/00). In contrast to Carol’s general despair and inability to prioritise, Bill is aware of the power of one word to affect understanding and the need for long-term commitment,

> I think the great obstacle is vocabulary. There are too many words, colloquialisms and slang. When I listened to someone speaking I usually missed the point due to misunderstanding one word. I know to learn vocabulary needs accumulation over a long period. (29/2/00)

The importance of vocabulary, he acknowledges on a number of occasions. In response to a session I give in class on multiple meanings of words and the limits this
imposes on strategies of learning, a session Carol’s group finds overwhelming, Bill notes that learning to use vocabulary - a ‘boring but compulsory job’ – is not achievable by writing down copious words and translations,

When we use a dictionary, we must learn many things not just to find its [the word in question] meanings (=translations). Even if we find it’s meaning, there are many meanings, not only one. No wonder it’s enough to learn five words a day. (22/3/00)

This ‘dictionary’ session I organise in response to what appeared to Mary and I as an inefficient strategy among Korean learners of writing enormous (translated) word lists of all words encountered in class, and then complaining about being overburdened by vocabulary. Bill also takes up with enthusiasm an explanation of the function of passive I teach in class, in line with Mary’s general contextual approach to grammar but different from Sandra’s more discrete form-based approach. Bill notes how he can use this information for noticing language use and understanding newspapers,

This morning Gavin taught us how to write an essay. That was wonderful, what he said I have never listened before. I felt like seeing the light suddenly. Now I know I must keep the same topic with some sentences together then change the voice and then change the topic. It is interesting, now when I read a newspaper I try to put a circle on the same topic. I find it’s useful to understand the meaning. (23/2/00)

Family tensions, which structure Carol’s curriculum experiences, are not apparent in Bill’s narrative. In interaction with his children, Bill draws conclusions about how language structures his relationships, and tests his conclusion by addressing me, ‘This evening I read book with my children. I found out they preferred listening than reading. I don’t know it’s good thing or not? (9/2/00)’

During the second term, I suggests students use class discussion topics as prompts for their journals. Bill, like several other students (but not Carol), took the opportunity to use the discussion topics and questions posed, revealing, for example, his firm beliefs about the importance of family for individuals,

I think family is just like a fortress. You feel safe in it. No matter how many humiliations you suffer outside you feel comfortable in your family. You can trust everyone in your family and
you support each other . . . members of a family don’t need to live in the same area but it is important to keep in touch with family frequently (3/5/00)

In his reflections on moral/ethical discussion topics during term two, Bill reveals a definite position on the role of parents in guiding children to make correct moral decisions as well as the state playing a role in using the rule of law to manage community affairs (11/5/00). Bill also takes a definite stance on a number of other issues or dilemmas posed. Bill constantly reinforces his language through reading books, newspapers, and magazines, and refers to these in his journals. In response to a class session I organise on understanding headings and body texts of newspapers articles, Bill both acknowledges his own difficulties and identifies a strategy to overcome this, ‘I must read more newspapers and discuss them with someone (2/3/00)’

When I visited Bill and Teresa again at the end of the program both Bill and Teresa acknowledged how difficult it had been to ‘cater for every student’. Reflecting on the desire of the Korean group to limit class activities to conversation, Bill reiterated that language outside simple conversational routines, such as legal and workplace language, was crucial to being able to function in the community

Yeah, that's my, I mean, yes, because in our country we live our country a long time. So, we learn the everything from we are very young. But now we are new here so everything we must learn not just talk to people we must learn about the different culture and different legal system

Both Bill and Teresa found the journal a worthwhile context for improving grammar and writing and commented that they now saw connections between grammar and vocabulary that they had not seen before; this was one of my particular aims. They remained convinced that extensive reading was essential to improving writing because the former provided models to reinforce the latter. Through developing communication strategies, they felt better able to deal with native speakers.

Because I know I can understand what he (kiwi friends) said. Maybe I don't hear every word he said but I can understand, I can guess his meaning, I can talk with her with him or with her. Yes, I can, like we must go to the bank or insurance company and apply something yeah.
Both Bill and Teresa described their learning as built out of stages, and that following the English course, they were now at a new stage, and ready for new challenges, including developing their reading. Learning included learning to see the relevance of issues that might at first appear irrelevant, and Bill noted that initially he could not see the point in discussing legal language in class but gradually came to see the relevance of this to his overall needs in living in NZ.

Bill and Teresa had some inside knowledge on the resistance of the Korean women to some of the activities in class and their own goals. They speculated that, like women in Taiwan, some of the students had created routines for themselves that meant they could not see beyond certain boundaries. Also, the fact that the female Korean students knew they were probably in NZ for a long period also meant that they felt little compunction to learn English quickly, something Teresa clarified.

I think just not important at the moment. I think maybe in the future they will feel important. Then they will want to learn. Maybe because I think different country is different thinking, because maybe the time, because we just live, we just moved to here in just a short time. I think if you live for a long time you think you can do everything so you don't need to learn the more language or some you can do you can live in New Zealand easy so you don't need.

Both Bill and Teresa had clear strategies for how they were going to continue learning and developing English in the future as well as look into voluntary work and retraining.

11.3 Leah: cultural mediator

Leah and I had met previously as she was in a course I taught the semester before. She explains in her initial interview that she comes to TWP as an ESL student after finding the language in a ‘mainstream’ catering course too difficult. After two failed business ventures and substantial loss of funds through a misguided real estate purchase, her family moves to Hamilton and she opens a café. Her journal entry on a
news clipping about a woman who defrauds a NZ bank (12/6/00) is poignant because she has suffered a similar experience, ‘Her picture was good appearing and smiled. Always fraud people are good looking. So many people be cheated easily’ (12/6/00 journal).

A café venture is also unsuccessful, and her husband refuses to work with her since ‘inside’ work, i.e. shop work, he deems unfit for Korean men. After two and a half years she leaves the café, although she retains an investment in the business and enrols in English to prepare for further study in catering. The tension with her husband is evident in her conversations. For example, her husband, who will soon return to Korea, insists she study English due to the burden her own ambitions bring to the family,

An other thing is my husband wants me to do language again because my girl is in 7 form this year in Hamilton Girls High School. If I studied a catering course, I would need a lot of help from her. So, he thought I would take a lot of time from her. (10/2/00 journal)

Her experience of the court system in NZ in trying to unsuccessfully resolve the legal details of their misguided real estate purchase, emerge later in the semester, when I take the ELW group to the community law office. She dominates the conversation with references to her experiences in talking with the lawyer on duty. Both her career aims in catering and her family responsibilities she quotes first in her journal.

In our initial interview and throughout the course, Leah offers to interpret the behaviours of her Korean peers for me. Leah takes this role as (cultural) mediator for Korean members of the class, such as Carol, in focus group conversations, balancing this with advice to these students about the need to clarify their aims and modify their approach to learning. Carol also tries to encourage Carol to reveal what the obstacle is to learning in the second focus group meeting, which Carol reluctantly offers to do finally. When she speaks as a member of this community she uses we to indicate solidarity and relationship. At other times she distances herself from this group and relates to her classmates in ELW. Carol and Barbara use her as an interpreter in focus group meetings. There is some tension between Leah and her
Korean peers, however, and she rarely sits together with this group, preferring often to work with Phillipa from Thailand, and Bill and Teresa from Taiwan; Carol sees Leah as one of the students who dominate opportunities to speak also.

Notwithstanding, when group conversation moves into commenting on class topics and procedures, Leah takes up a position as representing her community, referring to common goals among students. For example, she notes that ‘our class is Mum and Dad’ and that parents want to know about the schooling of their children, including strategies for achieving high grades in internally assessed subjects, and how to ‘politely’ address teachers with questions. Especially during the bi-weekly focus groups, she takes a role as spokesperson for the Korean group who resist, pointing out, for example, that some students dislike the speed with which I speak, and the fact that I do not limit topics to the familiar, eg. family, and the home. Leah also points out to me that some of the Korean students are challenged by my teaching, which she regularly refers to as ‘academic style’, and some feel that I do not give them sufficient eye contact, preferring, they suggest, to focus on one or two individuals. Some of these evaluative comments, e.g distributing eye contact, I attempt to address, others, eg. limiting topics, I resist for pedagogical reasons.

Like Carol, Leah notes how her children have developed proficiency in English through local schooling so that she is no longer able to contribute to their education, as was the case previously in Korea. Leah suggests she has good strategies for telling ESL teachers what she wants, and is accustomed to the more active role of children in schools in asking questions of teachers. Leah, like a number of the Korean female students including Carol and Barbara finds considerable moral and spiritual support in attending church. Leah frequently mentions her religious commitment to church and it seems to fulfil a need for purpose and companionship she does not get from her husband. This religious commitment features often in her texts, and is embedded in her early experiences as a migrant in NZ.

Leah points out in her interview how a move to a small town north of Auckland was crucial to her developing her English. There were few Koreans in the community and
she joined the Baptist Church, both of these situations helped her develop English.
Within this church, an elderly woman, a retired dentist, in the town tutored her in
English and encouraged her so that after six months she felt she was making progress
in understanding the Bible, progress her pastor noted,

> Our Church having a pray time for two weeks. This is special pray time for youth people.
> We’re going to camp a week after next. We’re usually go to the church on Sunday afternoon
> at 2.00 and on Wednesday evening at 7.30. Some people go to the church every early in the
> morning at 5.30 for pray. This special pray time for every church members. I take some
> youth people to the church. So I get up very early in the morning. I’m always happy and
> thanks to God. [week 9 journal]

In her next journal entry Leah reports on the success of the camp and invests many of
her journal entries with a spiritual edge, linking a discussion topic on the family with
God’s guidance,

> God made the family because God loves us. God let us know how much he loves people and
> also he let us know he loves us more than our parents. (2/5/00 journal)

At the same time she also questions the morality of death in relation to her religious
convictions,

> Sometimes I ask question myself why young children dies finished their short life. Some
> people who were very nice, honest, needed and pure died early. But some people who were
> bad acting and not so good people had a long life. It is unfair I thought. (14/5/00 journal)

Leah’s religious affiliations and commitments provide a spiritual support and a
framework for interpreting experience, which she also includes in our face-to-face
dialogues. Local church groups seemed to be a fundamental part of the lives of many
of the Korean women, including Carol, and several quote the guiding influence of the
local (male) pastor in their lives. Leah also notes the moral obligations she feels to
teach her children to be charitable to others through giving money to beggars, by
sharing her food with neighbours, which her children take - and by belonging to a
missionary program. In contrast to Bill, Leah believes most people are good at heart,
especially Christians, who know God is watching constantly. This moral dimension
to the lives of these women is an unexplored but, I believe, important factor in understanding Korean migrant acculturation.

During the first ten weeks, Leah occasionally uses the journal to ask for advice on language learning. It is her observation about confusion forming and using passive during self-study, I use as input into my lesson focus on this. She refers to learning tense using the textbook which Sandra favours, and the form focus of the text does leaves her confused; this information I use also to question Sandra’s approach,

Today I studied about tense. It was confusing me, especially past participle and passive. When active sentence changed to passive sentence. I didn’t know how can I changed and when can I used past participle. Could you explain for me please. (14/2/00 journal)

Leah is particularly enthusiastic about practical situation-based learning, and enjoys both the visits by community representatives, class sessions which focus on practical scenarios, and field trip visits to key community institutions, like the law office, and the courts, which form a central part of the ELW program. She evaluates these activities as successful on a number of occasions because they duplicate scenarios she has experienced in real life. For example, she finds Mary’s lesson on paying for goods practical and useful since none of the processes were unfamiliar. The importance of successful class tasks repeating previous experience, she also points out in her comment on the visit of a police woman, the visit Carol uses to suggest some students are excluded. Leah attributes her success to the fact that she had already attended a similar meeting in a previous program,

Today a policewoman came to our class. She explained about home security and involved car crash. I understood 90% because we had a same meeting last year. Tracey, who is the policewoman, spoke slowly and clearly so we most understood what she said . . . we had very useful time . . . Thank you Tracey and our teachers. [16/3/00 journal]

The visit to the community law court, I organise, is also deemed a success (16/2/00 journal), because the lawyer on duty speaks slowly, there is an opportunity for students to speak, and also because the issue of legal advice is important to her, given her past experiences in business. Choice of a relevant topic and careful speech by the
Dissertation Chapter Eleven: Experiencing Curriculum

visitor are also the reasons Leah gives for the success of the visit by a spokesperson from the immigration department in the final week of her journal.

Some of the activities, particularly within the ELW program involve students in interview simulations or scenarios, or listening to speakers from the community, where they have the opportunity to practice speaking and, in journals, reflect on their comprehension. Leah is pleased when in week two an interview with a Social Services student goes well and she is able to answer all the questions, while she is stumped initially by the word discrimination. Not to be deterred she uses a communication strategy to find the meaning, and positively evaluates her success, ‘Just I didn’t know discrimination. What does it means? I asked her, she explained about it. So I can answered this question too. (week two journal)’

Both Leah and Bill report successfully using communication strategies to overcome misunderstandings. These reports contrast with those of Carol and some of her peers, eg. Barbara, who not only despair at their failed communication but also negatively evaluate their attempts to repair such communication. This fundamental division, as it emerges, between those who are disposed to use strategies to achieve understanding and those who are not, and claim they cannot, is a critical tension in the program, which is never resolved. This disposition to take risks, she reveals in her reflection on practicing a job interview with ELW classmates. The job interview makes her think of the immediate future and her own need for courage.

This time I’m thinking about next semester. What do I want to study? I’m question myself if I go to the catering course, it’ll be successful or not. I’m little bit afraid. I’m always try brave enough myself. (5/4/00 journal)

While in general Leah and other students respond positively to class activities, on occasion they reveal some of the complex negotiations and difficulties students face in class work that ESL teachers seem unaware of. For example, in a focus group meeting early in term 2, a number of students report on the interview results. In her reflection, Leah suggests that although, like others, she wrote down the questions and answers for the interview and tried to memorise them, and answer automatically, she
forgot to do this in the situation. She laments the lack of time to practice and her own evaluation in a journal entry,

I didn’t have much time for practice because I have to do something for my family every day. So I don’t think the mock interview was good. I felt sad when I finished the mock interview. I did two times but still not good enough. I expected my English improve every day . . . Now I think just stopped (English improvement) for a moment. (4/5/00)

Thus, despite Mary’s encouraging evaluation of the video simulations, Leah suggest that generally students were disappointed with their results - ‘I want forget yesterday’ – and were sceptical of Mary’s positive evaluation, and would have preferred more detailed critique of student error. These (and other) student accounts of class activities reinforce the notion that curriculum work is always constructed relative to a particular perspective, a truth that is only apparent when multiple accounts are juxtaposed.

Many of Leah’s entries in her journal report on class activities without evaluation or reflection, she prefers to use the journal to practice tasks for assignments for grammar feedback. For example, she uses the journal to draft entries for her speakers’ journal which is one of her tasks for the ELW program. Within these (draft) texts, she also locates some of her own discourses and identities. In a comment on a newspaper article about the deportation of a foreign student she elaborates on discourse of the Asian family and the breakdown of relationships with parents,

I often heard similar situation many overseas student have some problems. They are many of them teenagers so they want to be free for their life. They didn’t listen from elder people. They are smoking, drinking and fighting each other often. They avoid parents eyes already so parents can’t control for them. They are lonely and feel empty because they live alone or live another family (8/3/00 journal)

In our final interview Leah recalls her experiences of learning ESL at the Polytechnic. She describes her success in the ELW class as achieved by her motivation to work and desire to prepare for this through study. She also looks forward to her future and the catering course she hopes to do. Although she points to
having developed greater cultural awareness Leah raises the fact that cultural differences still affect her especially when meeting Kiwis. She gives the example of Church members who are friendly in Church but do not acknowledge her on the street, of ESL teachers at the Polytech who also behave like this, and also relates an incident where her concern for the health of a friend she met on the street was deemed too personal,

I thought he got a red eye and I big worry because he’s a friend of mine so I’m worry about her so that time I said what’s wrong with your eyes and are you going to doctor or something like that and at that time her daughter beside her and she like little bit upset (the daughter?) her daughter upset to me because maybe too much worry about her mother so she didn’t like me what I say [the daughter] yeah that’s why I’m very surprised because in Korea if I said my mum and I feel is very comfort you know but in New Zealand is maybe different because too much worry about my mother like her feeling is like that so that time I was very confused (about the reaction of the girl?) yes and sometimes which way is right?

She also reiterates some of the dissent and problems in the class, which have been described elsewhere. She appreciates the function of the journal as an opportunity to use and reinforce English learnt in the classroom, while she also suggests that other students did not appreciate having to concentrate on language use,

I think very useful program because if we don’t write something then we just hear the teacher what teacher taught us in the class but we forgot very easily but when we write we have to think have to think first and then write still make mistake but it doesn’t matter . . . but some people don’t like writing journal . . . journal is different I people all the time thinking about grammar and in English is more difficult because word order is very big different between Korean and in New Zealand so they have to think about grammar all the time and how can I first sentence is how can I start and how can I close the journal that is very difficult. (Leah final interview)

Leah suggests that most of her expectations for the class were met and one of the key differences she notes herself is a shift in seeing the relevance of topics and processes beyond conversation,

Yes that’s good my memory so when I study at Polytech one and half years its very good and I progress a lot my English before I just conversation its alright because I was work at café [that was enough] yeah that’s enough and I can say something to customer, and customer say to me and I can understood and its going alright
The contention by her Korean peers such as Carol that conversation is precisely what they require marks the goal of resisting group as quote distinct to Leah. Leah, however, develops her ability to converse through workplace conversations, and the evident social isolation of her Korean peers, partly self-imposed, suggests that the Korean women may also have underestimated the need for social interaction and risk. Mary and I have some success in reinforcing this need with certain students, especially those who choose eventually to join in the ELW activities that require engagement with the community. With Carol and especially with some of her peers, such engagement is ruled out as either irrelevant or linguistically and socially impossible.

11.4 Summary and Conclusions

Bill, Carol, and Leah have responsibilities within a range of communities outside the classroom - local, family, neighbourhoods, first language based, church, school, etc., for through which language provides access or obstruction. I have suggested that while their experiences are essentially particular and unique, the experiences of these three students captures some of the challenges facing all students within the classroom community. I should add that many of the students who were enrolled in the program either ignored the class controversies or remained silent where opportunities were available to make their feelings known. Mary, Sandra, and I evaluate our management of this group as the successful negotiation of a number of personal, pedagogical, administrative, and cultural challenges. This was a class community fragmented by a variety of positions taken up by students, teachers, and administration.

Despite the fact she continues to resist engaging with NZ culture inside and outside the classroom, Mary sees evidence for change in reports of experiences Carol puts in her journal,

> I think it’s a stage . . . Carol is almost beginning to (change). She sets up a huge number of barriers. But with that little thing in her journal about the child in Matamata, who she thought
Mary suggests that such reports among students in this study are strategically used to create a context for dividing the class. Mary, Sandra and I all comment on the impression we have of Carol as a forthright, confident speaker in class (week 4), although Mary notes that Carol is prepared to use weakness in speaking to achieve other ends,

That’s like Carol talking to me and suddenly not being able to understand a word that I was saying and turning to me and saying my English is very bad, I don’t understand, I know damn well that she could understand absolutely everything . . . but it’s a kind of a blanket that goes down when you have a particular aim or end in view (Mary/meeting 5)

Through Mary, in particular, we ESL teachers attempt to rationalise the resistance of Carol and some of her peers in terms of acculturation. In her journals and conversations is evidence of the cultural compromise Mary suggests she is moving towards. However, the role of language, culture, society, and identity in providing the pathway and boundaries for this process are complex.

The accounts these students provide illustrate the complex relationships ESL students construct with practitioners. These relationships are structured around interpretations of pedagogy and attributions of identities to teachers that can lead to conflict. The negotiation of curriculum in ESL is both the process and outcome of reaching interim compromises with students on objectives and classroom practices. Our (teacher) constructions of learners and interpretations of their behaviours correspond to the discourses we privilege about learners and learning. Our particular accounts of practice can contribute to teacher conflict and compromise curriculum coherence. At the same time, as the previous chapter has indicated, ESL practitioners are also engaged in attempts to achieve a practical compromise of interpretations of pedagogy and curriculum aims. Teacher-teacher and teacher-learner encounters mobilise different resources of power, eg. culture and gender empathies, within and beyond the classroom. ESL practice is thoroughly ideological in this sense.
In the following chapter, I draw general conclusions about the dissertation, commenting both on methodology and results.
Chapter Twelve: Dissertation Conclusions

In the previous three chapters, I have attempted to construct a situated account of curriculum work in ESL. This workplace account explores curriculum work as the product of discourses within communities of practice in a NZ Polytechnic, which simultaneously construct limits and possibilities for curriculum work. I acknowledge that although it might have been easier to explore curriculum work from the perspective of a single community, e.g. ESL practitioners, or to have explored negotiation of curriculum discourse through close analysis of selected classroom transcripts, as in Love and Suherdi (1996). However, I felt that an accurate portrayal of the complexity of curriculum work required a broader representation of the communities of practice involved in socially constructing curriculum work.

12.1 Summarising this account

I began by locating the different discourses and practices of curriculum work, which ESL practitioners and their colleagues in the Department of Community and Continuing Education take up in locating their work in the institution. I noted how the existing division of curriculum work into new and old world by the competency-based discourse and unit standards framework in the institution is taken up with varying degrees of commitment by practitioners and managers alike in the fields of ESL and Social Work. All practitioners acknowledge that the focus on learner outcomes that competencies encourage can be a stimulus to better curriculum work although the socially constituted institutional frameworks and practices affect the extent to which this is possible. In particular, discourses and practice in the ESL unit, situated on the periphery of mainstream institutional processes contribute to certain forms of isolation that practitioners experience.

Distinctive discourses among ESL practitioners help sustain this experience of isolation. For example, I note how a discourse of learner needs and practices that encourage teacher-student dependencies seemed common among practitioners in the ESL unit. Some proposals were made by interviewees and practitioners to suggest that these dependencies emerge not only from a situated reading of the needs of migrant learners but also have their origins in gendered understandings of practice.
among a largely female body of practitioners. In addition, ESL practitioners use the structural framework of syllabus to distinguish their work from mainstream colleagues, distancing their classroom-based work often from the purportedly rigid guidelines within curriculum documents.

Unlike their colleagues in Social Work and departmental managers, ESL practitioners largely resist accountability to unit standards and the competency-based approach, citing incompatibilities between such approaches and the inherently unpredictable outcomes of learning for migrant learners. In some cases this is an explicit rejection of unit standards, as Olivia and Christine suggest in teacher interviews; in other cases it is a principled opposition to performance-based assessment, as Mary outlines; and in some cases, opposition may stem simply from ignorance or self-imposed limitations on the scope of curriculum, as Sandra illustrates in her interview and team teaching account. In all cases, ESL teachers express a desire to retain autonomy to decide the form and nature of curriculum according to workable personal definitions. I have suggested that this desire for autonomy has roots in pragmatic readings of complex and multiple teaching and learning needs. Despite its complex origins, I also suggest that this autonomy does not necessarily contribute to the most productive curriculum outcomes. As Morgan (2002) suggests, familiar discourses of ESL practice may disguise ideological distortion. The suspicion I had that familiar discourses of ESL practice do not exhaust the possibilities for curriculum, and perhaps propose misleading representations of curriculum work was a key practical motivation for this project. Interviewees like Helen and Jacqueline with a sufficiently broad background of understanding the histories of the ESL unit, helped suggest that some of my intuitions were shared.

In the following Chapter 10, I examined curriculum work through team teaching conversations. One of the strengths of this account, and this chapter in particular, is the integration of perspectives on curriculum work in ESL proposed by interviewees in the previous chapter. In particular, I ground my reading of team teaching practices in the cultures of practice proposed in the interviewee dialogues. Our responses to the growing resistance of a body of Korean students, threw into relief some
significant differences in the discourse of ESL practice that individuals deployed, and foregrounded the politics of practice. A claim I make in this chapter is that the practice of accommodating teaching practices to certain readings of student needs, which Sandra demonstrates, did not necessarily produce the best outcome for students.

Such different accounts of practice and the power differentials exploited by teachers in negotiating curriculum work with students and each other exhibit some of the tensions within the practitioner eclecticism encouraged within the ESL unit. Several interviewees suggested that my suspicion that eclecticism could influence the quality of curriculum outcomes was an important dimension. In particular, Jacqueline, Helen, and Mary, to a lesser extent, suggested that unless carefully managed, eclecticism could lead to practitioner conflict, and lack of coherence and quality in curriculum. Jacqueline proposes, for example, that practitioner consensus below the level of the curriculum document and above the level of classroom practice is not apparent. She argues this was true in the past, seem to be compromised by substantive differences among practitioners regarding relevant understandings of practice.

One key source of teacher eclecticism emerges from the identities attributed to others before and because of situated curriculum practice. Students attribute identities to teachers as a function of cultural expectations and in some cases allow those identities to be renegotiated as a product of classroom interaction (Duff, 1997). Some of the students referred to in this study exhibited greater and lesser degrees of openness to this kind of negotiation. With ESL teachers, in some cases, this attribution of identities to students takes relatively explicit form, as in the case of Mary’s theory of acculturation. In other cases, identities are attributed as a product of pedagogical choices, as in Sandra’s approaches to teaching through discrete form-oriented methods, which by their very nature attribute certain identities to learners.

In my narrative representation of the experience of others through critical ethnography I attempted to follow Lu and Horner’s (1998, p. 262) suggestion to
investigate how my subject position mediated how I interpreted and presented the experience of others, and also how research processes and outcomes are ‘a cross-cultural product formed through the interaction between informant and researcher’ (Lu and Horner, 1998, p. 262). In particular, although I attempted in teaching to compromise with learner demands, my decision to confront learners with culture and pedagogical practices that some claimed made them feel uncomfortable also implies certain constructions of the other. In addition, the challenges I mounted to the practices of others in team meetings, and the very act of researching my workplace practices produced certain created conflicts with existing discursive practices. The seven students who participated in the research project, also took up the opportunities to create different relationships with me through the research and teaching channels, eg. journals, interview, group meetings, I created, and position me in certain ways.

ESL teachers, perhaps as a function of experience and exposure to different ethnic groups, rationalise the behaviours of students in accordance with their pedagogy. Chapter Eleven, which explores the experience of three students within the ELW/Intermediate combined program highlights the extent to which the identities we ESL teachers attribute to learners, the theories we use to rationalise their behaviours, and the readings we make of their curriculum experience never fully interprets their curriculum experience and, in particular, their needs. Processes for systematically gauging learner needs in ESL exist (Brindley, 1984), and some are used in the ESL unit described here but with far less scope for negotiated curriculum than have been described in the literature, e.g. (eg. Breen and Littlejohn, 2000, Parkinson and O'Sullivan, 1990). As part of a learner-centred approach, the term ‘learner needs’, which ESL teachers in this workplace use, seems to name a strategy to maintain learner dependency and retain teacher autonomy. Learner needs as a situated understanding of the socio-cultural and linguistic proficiencies required for successful community encounters by individual ESL learners always exceed the possible negotiated result implemented in the instructed second language classroom (Ellis, 1990).
12.2 Critical ethnography and empowerment

As a holistic account of ESL practice with an eye on ideological constraints I have suggested that the dissertation fits with the tradition of critical ethnography although it departs from the strict methodological guidelines of the Texas school represented by Carspecken (e.g., Carspecken, 1996, Carspecken and Apple, 1992); it looks similar to broader definitions of this approach as in Thomas (1993). One of the reasons I have departed from the more conventional approaches to ethnography and critical ethnography in educational research is that I do not take up the realist epistemology such approaches require, preferring the ‘relativism’ (Guba, 1990) of social constructionism and critical pragmatism.

I follow Jordan and Yeomans (1995) in seeing critical ethnography as a better alternative than conventional ethnography for encouraging pedagogical change although I am uncertain whether their proposal to combine action research and critical ethnography is feasible. The culture of action research that has developed within the ESL unit at TWP has provided an important avenue for teachers to develop closer links between research and practice. I suggest that although ethnographic approaches to ESL practice exist, no similar situated insider account of comparable scope exists of ESL curriculum work in NZ. It also differs from existing critical work in ESL in being less ideologically committed than the work of critically inspired ethnographers such as Canagarajah (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999) or critical applied linguistics such as Pennycook (1998). These scholars and others seem convinced that linguistic imperialism and colonialism are invested in teaching processes, and can be uncovered through critical analysis. I believe such a claim is possible and perhaps relevant to research and teaching, but not sufficient for my purposes here.

I take up social constructionism in relation to the value of discourses in constructing not rather than representing the objects of professional realities (Burr, 1995), acknowledging that for educational practice (and practitioner research) knowledge ‘is socially constructed through interaction and experience in a culture and is context-dependent, rather than independent and generalizable’ (Jacobson, 1998, p. 126).
Critical pragmatism I use to remain open to the various possible narratives (Cherryholmes, 1993) of ideological work achieved through ESL curriculum. I also find such ‘relativist’ approaches more accommodating to the reflexivity of this project.

With an explicit acknowledgement of my own involvement in the research site, I prefer to ‘read’ curriculum practices, and cultures of learning and teaching, as ideologically invested in terms of three resources: a reading of the literature on culture and ideology in ESL practice, my vantage point as a (critical) teacher researcher, and the explicit juxtaposition of research texts in this portfolio. Each of these research strategies contributes forms of justification for the account I have produced here. I have noted above that some may read the three perspectives on curriculum in ESL in the chapters above as a form of triangulation. I have noted, however, it was never my intention to produce a ‘triangulated’ reading of the truth of educational practice. My intention has been to impress the reader that the production of curriculum in ESL is neither the implementation of a plan, nor the realization of cognitive schema or decision principles, but a complex social negotiation of identities and discourses in practice.

I agree with Morgan (2002) that in ESL with a community orientation, as in migrant programs, teachers and students need to consider how pedagogies of teaching and learning ‘can be used to position individuals and groups’ (p. 149). For ESL teachers this is important to move beyond the pragmatism we practice. I believe critical ethnography, a move away from the activism and practicality of action research, helps explore linkages between academic and practitioner thinking on the research/practice divide. As Demetrion (2000) proposes, ‘academic research ultimately has its origins in practice, [and] there are linkages worth exploring that could add richness for practitioners’ (2000, p. 128).

Bowes (1996) notes that the negotiation of power in the research process in feminist sociology and action research is under theorised. Given the different power and access people have with respect to institutions, Goodburn (1998) is sceptical of the
possibilities for ‘enacting a highly democratic and empowering research process’ (1998, p. 122) in educational settings. I share her scepticism but also her view that empowerment is ‘oversimplified’ in the few accounts we have. Appeals to the metanarrative of emancipation and the will to power simplify the opposition between traditional and emancipatory research (Humphries, 1997). I used critical ethnography to avoid this simplification by taking up a less ‘radical’ form of workplace research than action research. Ellsworth (1989) notes, in addition, that on a feminist reading empowerment in teacher research allows a paternalistic control of research processes to remain in place. These unexamined ‘readings’ of teacher research, and my concern with the potential dangers of empowerment motivated me to move away from action research in this project.

12.3 Tensions and the ecology of curriculum in ESL

I have attempted to represent in its complexity the multiples voices, discourses, and practices that determine the forms of curriculum work, which are produced in workplace settings such as those described here. The majority of the teachers in the ESL unit, and some from within the department, have at some point spoken in this portfolio. I have suggested that curriculum work in ESL stands on the margins of institutional practices of curriculum work, and the isolation ESL practitioners feel is partly created by their own discourses and practices.

As a description of language teaching, in the focus on a local setting, the exploration of cultures of learning, and the overall dynamics of the teaching-learning situation, this account fits with the so-called ecological perspective on language teaching and learning (Tudor, 2003). Culture is central to ethnography and is also central to the ecological perspective on language teaching curriculum planning and curriculum work requires the recognition of the culturally mediated discourses and practices ESL students bring to learning. This account, I hope, contributes to understanding how ESL curriculum is produced (not implemented) in a complex interconnected ecological system.
Critical ethnography seems a particularly appropriate tradition of inquiry for investigating the ideological construction of curriculum in ESL. It expands on action research traditions by moving research conversations and perspectives outside the ESL classroom and into the institution. I believe it offers considerable scope for those working in the ESL field who wish to understand the origins of practice and the various discourses that are taken up in constructing the ESL workplace. Multiple perspectives, those of students, ESL teachers, managers, broadens the possibility for understanding practice as discursively constituted and sustained. Such accounts as this may also suggest the need for more open dialogue about the limits that the pragmatism of ESL teachers and institutions impose on practice in the absence of a wider-ranging critical pragmatism. This is a critical direction I hope to pursue in the future.

I hope to pursue in the future.
Chapter Thirteen: Portfolio Review and Conclusions

In this final chapter, I review the work included in the portfolio as a whole as a collection of teacher research situated in a specific workplace and produced with aims of the professional doctorate to develop professional knowledge and practice. I subdivide this section into three parts: a review of the portfolio projects and writing as a whole, conclusions I draw about workplace research in the light of these studies, and future directions I envisage form my own research and teaching practices as a result of these studies.

13.1 Portfolio writing and representation of curriculum work in ESL

Through the twelve previous chapters, I have attempted to explore appropriate research methodologies for representing, understanding, and changing workplace practices in an ESL unit in a NZ Polytechnic. These projects were completed over a four year period in which I was employed as an ESL teacher within the unit and as an Academic Staff Member of the Department of Community and Continuing Education of that Polytechnic. I also explored other forms of ESL classroom research (Allwright and Bailey, 1991), which has come to be read as synonymous with action research in ESL, eg. (Hopkins, 2002), on the basis that action research in ESL has come largely to mean individual classroom-base problem solving. Classroom research, however, as Allwright and Bailey outline, does not necessarily involve the processes and aims typical of action research. My other classroom projects, less qualitative and critical than the work presented here (Melles, 1998a, Melles, 1998b), provided an opportunity to see examine these boundaries. My decision to use critical ethnography as the framework for the dissertation project, rather than the other forms of research practice and writing included in the elective research section, was motivated by some of the limits I saw to gaining an understanding of curriculum work in ESL. I feel that the approach taken in the dissertation afforded an opportunity to do this.
13.2 Conclusions about workplace research

All of the work generated in this portfolio, with the exception of the dissertation, has benefited from peer review by colleagues included in the projects. In some cases practitioner peers have expressed differences about the way in which their contributions have been interpreted, and while I have not generally revised reports to include these comments I have considered in general what such statements may suggest about my own interpretive practices. I believe the six month ethnography I completed in 1998 (Melles, 1998c), with the participation of six ESL practitioners, of whom four reappear in this portfolio, served as an important research apprenticeship to the eventual product of this portfolio.

Working through the morals and ethics of interpreting the work of colleagues in ESL teaching in that project helped me begin to reformulate the methodologies I used in the projects recorded here. In particular, I learned much about the ways in which rapport deconstructed into trust, responsibility, and respect for long term relationships. I also benefited from the critical examination of interpretations – both positive and negative – which colleagues provided in that project. In this portfolio, I have occasionally taken up suggestions by peers, research participants, and research subjects to include, exclude, and modify research interpretations although I do not believe this has lead to overall compromise in terms of research coverage and quality.

13.3 Future directions and new fields

Having left the NZ ESL field and the environment of vocational teaching and moved to an Australian University where I now teach English for Academic Purposes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels has also entailed working within an environment where research is a conventional part of academic cultures. This has meant no longer needing to justify research as an additional somewhat debatable task on top of teaching, although ESL continues to fight for its place in the center not the margins of practice. Traditions of research in universities also tend to privilege normative paradigms and products, and despite the fact that qualitative research has a clear mandate within faculty research programs there is still a strong tendency to
demand quantification within qualitative projects, and also limit exploration of alternative forms of research writing. Professional doctorate programs, while they exist, remain both relatively unknown, underrepresented, and perhaps underrated in comparison to the more traditional PhD. Forms of research such as action research have an extremely low profile in this sector.

I have begun to produce forms of curriculum-based research that rely on qualitative methods such as interview, and also examine curriculum design and implementation processes. I believe one the close analysis of curriculum during the years 1997-2001 at TWP, and especially the social dynamics of curriculum work, helped provide me a background from which my current work can proceed. I remain convinced that research-based teaching is a key dimension in my own pedagogy, and will define the kinds of research I accomplish in the immediate and distant future. This especially includes research oriented to discovering the kinds of factors, which influence quality curriculum outcomes for language learners, and generates new knowledge about the discourses and identities practitioners take up in their educational work.
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