KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY DISCOURSES AND LANGUAGE REGULATION: AN ANALYSIS OF POLICY PROCESSES IN ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN CANADA

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the policy processes, social and power relations, and textual practices that have come to regulate English language education and assessment of internationally educated professionals (IEPs) who immigrate to Canada. During migration and settlement processes, IEPs whose first language is not English undergo assessment of their English language abilities before they can begin practicing in their professional field. Within discourses of building a global knowledge economy, where knowledge workers move across national borders and are expected to demonstrate English language proficiency, variation in communicating in English is constructed as a problem. Different ways of speaking English can become a barrier to labour market integration for IEPs. The Canadian government’s policy response to this problem has been the development of a competency-based language framework to regulate and standardize the assessment of immigrants’ English language proficiency. This study analyzes the tensions and struggles involved in standardizing and regulating the English language and its assessment in relation to knowledge economy discourses.

Employing Dorothy E. Smith’s (2005) institutional ethnography, key reports and policy documents (e.g. The Canadian Language Benchmarks) were analyzed. The study then explored the experiences of language experts (the researchers/consultants, teachers, and provincial government administrators) who are responsible for profiling the English language demands of various professions (e.g. nursing, engineering, accounting) for the development and implementation of profession-specific language exams and programs. The study documented competing interests and conflicting worldviews on the purposes
and processes of English language assessment. It also analyzed how textual practices were informed by knowledge economy discourses.

The findings contribute to existing research on foreign credential recognition by demonstrating how the power relations and dominant discourses embedded in policy processes of language assessment significantly contribute to the (non)-recognition of IEPs’ professional knowledge and skills. The study also contributes to the limited research on the CLB by focusing on the labour market integration of IEPs in relation to knowledge economy discourses. Finally, the findings contribute to theoretical and empirical research in which language is understood as a social practice, drawing attention to the problematic of standardizing language and assessment practices in work and professional contexts.
Preface

Ethics Approval:

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Sections of Chapter 2 are published in:

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# Glossary of Terms

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCC</td>
<td>Association of Canadian Community Colleges</td>
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<tr>
<td>APEGGA</td>
<td>Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Chartered Accountant</td>
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<tr>
<td>CanTEST</td>
<td>Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCLB</td>
<td>Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks</td>
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<tr>
<td>CELBAN</td>
<td>Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCPE</td>
<td>Canadian Council of Professional Engineers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGA</td>
<td>Certified General Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIC</td>
<td>The Ministry for Citizenship and Immigration Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIIP</td>
<td>Canadian Immigrant Program: Partners for Newcomers Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLB</td>
<td>Canadian Language Benchmarks</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLB 2000</td>
<td><em>Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: English as a second language – for adults</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMA</td>
<td>Certified Management Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNA</td>
<td>Canadian Nurses Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>English-as-an-Additional Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAP</td>
<td>English-for-Academic Purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELT</td>
<td>English Language Teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English-as-a-Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEGs</td>
<td>International Engineering Graduates</td>
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<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IENs</td>
<td>Internationally Educated Nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEPs</td>
<td>Internationally Educated Professionals</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISOs</td>
<td>Immigrant Service Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRSDC</td>
<td>The Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPN</td>
<td>Licensed Practical Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MELAB</td>
<td>Michigan English Language Assessment Battery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWGLB</td>
<td>National Working Group on Language Benchmarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFP</td>
<td>Requests for Proposals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESL</td>
<td>Teaching English-as-a-Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLU</td>
<td>Target Language Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>Test of English as a Foreign Language</td>
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Acknowledgements

Completing a PhD is like a marathon of the mind. It requires stamina, endurance, and perseverance. It consists of moments similar to a runner’s high and many more moments of fatigue, self-doubt, and pain (in one’s fingers, wrists, heart, and back). While much of the journey is a solitary endeavor, it could not be endured without the support of mentors, family, and friends. I am deeply indebted to all of them.

For me, the passage began through a conversation in 2005 with Dr. Tara Fenwick, who became one of my co-supervisors. I was questioning what I should do with my life, having just completed my master’s degree, to which she replied, “Isn’t it obvious?” Sometimes the road we should follow is more apparent to others than it is to ourselves. Tara has become a mentor who has provided me with opportunities I had never dreamed of. From her I have learned how to navigate that dubious position in research of making sense of the details in relation to larger theoretical and conceptual questions. She has been a strong supporter and through this support, I have been able to change the course of my life’s work.

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I owe much thanks to the thirteen women and men who volunteered their time to participate in the research. Their generosity of time and spirit is much appreciated. I am also deeply indebted to the many internationally educated professionals I had the honour of working with from 2004 – 2006. While a few of them have been able to find employment in their professions, many of them are still searching or have had to settle for other types of employment.

Last, but far from least, I am deeply grateful to my life partner, Kenneth Niguma. Over the course of completing this degree we have endured significant financial and family struggles, but his love, support and encouragement for my work never waned.
Dedication

For Seneca and Amara Gibb,

May you both lead thoughtful lives filled with moments of reflection.

and

For Ken,

For understanding all parts of my self.
1 The Policy Problematic of English Language Assessment in Canada

[I]t’s frustrating for them. I mean I can’t tell you how many highly skilled professionals we’ve talked to in recent years who said had I known how hard it was going to be to enter my field in Canada, I might have made some different choices because you know you talk to the immigration people and you’re getting your visas and all your papers and they say oh yeah, we have lots of engineering positions. No problem. You’ll get a job. Come to Canada and then I come here and you know I’m short in my language ability or I didn’t realize I needed this extra course, but there’s none available for me or I have to move to some other province to get it. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

Economic policy in Canada has intersected over time with immigration policy and this integration arguably is intensified in the policy frame of the ‘knowledge economy’. Common assumptions in knowledge economy policy indicate that economic participation in the 21st century depends on people’s ability to generate knowledge by constructing, controlling, and manipulating texts and symbols (Luke, 1995/1996). Although some Canadian immigration policies have focused on migration for humanitarian purposes, historically Canada’s immigration policies have been developed to ensure Canada’s economic growth (Reitz, 2001; Schugurensky, 2006). If Canada’s economy is to be based on knowledge generation, then the assumption is that expanding Canada’s labour force requires attracting highly educated immigrants given that its population is aging and birth rates are declining (Watt, Krywulak, & Kitagawa, 2008). Canada’s immigration policies have reflected this assumption since 1967 and for the past decade between 225,
000 and 250,000 people migrate to Canada annually (Picot, 2004; Reitz, 2001). If building a knowledge economy requires a labour force capable of sophisticated manipulation of symbols and codified knowledge, it is perhaps not surprising that the English language capability of new immigrants has become a key concern of the Canadian government (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). In previous generations, where industrial and manual labour was central to economic growth, high levels of literacy were less of a concern. In a knowledge economy, however, where the ability to construct and manipulate codified knowledge is central to production, assessment of IEPs’ language competency and proficiency has been proclaimed a policy problem.

Labour market shortages are often cited as the reason Canada needs to attract highly educated and skilled professionals. Projections from professional regulatory bodies give some indication of how dire these shortages will apparently become. The Canadian Nurses Association (2009) stated that in 2007 the equivalent of 11,000 FTE registered nurses were needed to meet health-care demands and that by 2022 there will be a shortage of 60,000 registered nurses. In a similar vein, Engineers Canada (2010) states that shortages of engineers with five or more years of experience will persist to 2018. Canada, however, is in an apparent global competition for highly skilled talent with other immigrant-receiving nations such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia (Watt, et al., 2008). Brown and Tannock (2009) explained that this “global war for

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1 In a special series on immigration published in one of Canada’s national papers, the Globe and Mail, (Friesen, May 4, 2012) reported that researchers predict Canada will need to increase immigration levels to 400,000 per year in order to meet labour market demands. See Our Time to Lead: Why Canada needs a Flood of Immigrants, May 4, 2012.
talent” led to high skilled migration increasing at a rate of two and a half times faster than that of low skilled migration between 1990 and 2000 (p. 382). Indeed, Canada’s immigration system has been designed to participate in this global competition.

For internationally educated professionals (IEPs) who want to participate in the ‘global knowledge economy’, migration to another country usually involves having their professional credentials evaluated and professional knowledge assessed. It also involves the assessment of their knowledge and skill in the host nation’s official language(s). As with many policy processes, the practices, work and social relations of implementing a language education policy are often invisible to not only the majority of the public, but also to the people most affected by the policy. Employing institutional ethnography, a methodology developed by feminist scholar Dorothy Smith (2005), the objective of this thesis is to investigate the power and politics of English language assessment by examining the processes, texts, and social relations that regulate the English language teaching and assessment of internationally educated professionals (IEPs) who immigrate to Canada. After immigrants have landed in Canada, their performance in the English language is often measured according to the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), a competency-based language assessment framework developed by the Canadian federal government and implemented through a range of actors such as English-as-an-Additional Language (EAL) researchers, EAL instructors, and provincial government administrators, who collectively are charged with the responsibility of implementing the CLB framework.

This research is necessary because statistics indicate that only 24 per cent of IEPs are working in their professions (Zietsma, 2010) and that the perceived lack of English
language ability has a detrimental impact on the earnings and employment participation of IEPs (Bannerjee, 2009; Boyd & Cao, 2009; Chiswick, Lee, & Miller, 2006). Through an analysis of relevant policy texts and by drawing on the experiences of relevant actors who are charged with the responsibility of implementing the CLB framework, this thesis aims to make visible the invisible texts and social relations of language assessment that contribute to IEPs’ exclusion from practicing in their professional fields. The thesis also aims to show how these processes of assessment are situated in relation to knowledge economy discourses and the ideological constructions of Canada as a multicultural yet bilingual nation-state. Institutional ethnography is a useful methodology for examining these processes because it seeks to understand not only policy texts, but also how policy is shaped and organized through social relations and everyday experience (Walby, 2005).

1.1 Coming to the Problematic of English Language Assessment

While teaching English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) overseas and English-as-an-Additional Language (EAL) in Canada, I have talked with adult learners from over 30 nationalities differently situated according to gender, class, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Some were learning English as a hobby or for personal development, but the majority of learners were learning English because it was required to better their employment prospects. While listening to each learner’s story of why they were studying English, I began to reflect upon the intersecting historical legacies of colonialism and language teaching. Alastair Pennycook (1998) explains that English language teaching both served and was produced by processes of empire building, yet, he argues, discussion within the EAL field of its relationship within colonialism is limited. I began to wonder how these legacies were influencing current language and employment policies for new
immigrants to Canada. It seemed to me that the CLB was further entrenching binary discourses of ‘native English-speaker’ versus ‘non-native English-speaker,’ harkening back to Canadians colonial period.

Looking back, my inquiry into the problematic of IEPs’ language assessment began informally, and unexpectedly, in 2004. I was teaching in a language education program in a Western Canadian province that assisted immigrants to Canada, most of whom were well-educated professionals, in transitioning to employment or post-secondary institutions for further study in their professional fields. Many of them had master’s degrees, if not PhDs, in addition to professional qualifications, and they often had several years of work experience in their profession (e.g. engineers, nurses, accountants, lawyers, veterinarians, physicians, pharmacists). The program curriculum and means of assessment, like many in Canada, were based on the 12-level CLB framework. During my two-year tenure of teaching in this program, I heard countless stories of immigrants’ struggles in accessing their professions: lack of recognition for both their educational and professional credentials; challenges in sustaining the economic well being of their families while they upgraded their skills; difficulties in meeting the language requirements of the professional licensing bodies; and prohibitive examination fees.

For example, Maaz was very well educated. He held two degrees, one in law and the other in veterinary sciences, and had received all his formal education in the English language in a country steeped in colonial relations with the United Kingdom. He came to Canada believing the Government of Canada recruitment campaigns, which suggested that finding employment in his professional field was likely. Yet, only after he
immigrated to Canada, did he learn of exorbitant professional examination fees.\(^2\) He took a part-time job at a convenience store and an employment counsellor recommended that he take EAL classes before entering a professional program. Granted, he spoke with an accent to the Canadian ear, but in all other ways, his skill in the English language was more elegant and sophisticated than many people born in English-speaking Canada. The number of learners like Maaz who were unable to find employment in their professional fields increasingly troubled me, as did the fact that they were being directed toward EAL courses to improve their ‘flawed’ English under the assumption that improving their language skills would translate into professional employment opportunities. This was the first disjuncture of many that have emerged more fully throughout my inquiry. Campbell (2003) explained that disjuncture occurs when a person’s experience is ‘out of step’ from what is expected in official discourse (p. 17). It seemed to me that most of the experiences of the IEPs I taught were ‘out of step’ with the official discourse that finding employment in one’s professional field in Canada was possible. These experiences became the starting point of my investigation into the problematic of English language assessment. Drawing on Smith’s (1987) conceptualizing of problematic, the lived experiences of people guide the inquiry into the social organization of disjuncture people encounter in the everyday world.

Research in Canada has examined both the personal and systemic challenges that IEPs encounter in having their professional credentials assessed and recognized (Basran & Zong, 1998; Grant & Nadin, 2007; Guo, 2007; Hawthorne, 2007; Slade, 2004, 2008).

\(^2\) Exam and licensing fees for veterinary medicine in Canada are in excess of $7000. See [http://canadianveterinarians.net/Documents/Resources/Files/2306_NEBwebsiteinfoE.pdf](http://canadianveterinarians.net/Documents/Resources/Files/2306_NEBwebsiteinfoE.pdf) for details.
However, immigrants to Canada whose first language is not English or French must also undergo language assessments in an attempt to measure their facility with one of Canada’s two official languages before they can gain licensure within their professional fields. While English language ability is discussed as an issue in this literature, it seemed to me that further investigation into the processes of language assessment was necessary; not only the technical and linguistic aspects of assessment, but also the social and political conditions that constitute the processes of assessment. In particular, I began to question the federal government’s apparent desire to standardize EAL education and regulate teaching and assessment processes through the CLB 2000, a set of prescribed benchmarks outlined in the 186-page document intended for use by teachers, administrators, program planners, assessors, and learners.

While teaching in the program, I also started to regularly read the official website of the CLB (www.language.ca) and observed an increasing proliferation of projects and documents that connected the CLB framework to employment and work-related issues. I attended local workshops and national conferences where the CLB was a common topic of discussion. It was at one of these local workshops in 2007 that my questions about the power and politics of assessing IEPs’ language abilities became apparent to me. A conversation with a community college coordinator alerted me to increasing usage of the

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3 Research and theorizing on language testing tends to be pre-occupied with the testing environment and there has been limited interest in the political processes that sustain language assessment. Notable exceptions include the work of Elana Shohamy (2001, 2006).

4 Examples include: Developing an Occupation-Specific Language Assessment Tool; Relating the Canadian Language Benchmarks to Essential Skills – A Comparative Framework; Work Ready: For Counsellors and HR Professionals; CLB for Study and Work; see www.language.ca for a comprehensive list of publications and projects.
CLB 2000 to profile the language requirements for not only nursing, but also applied programs in engineering and accounting. Profiling involves conducting research on the types of communicative interactions in a specific context and aligning these interactions according to the CLB framework to develop exams and curricula. It seemed to me that in order to gain some understanding of the processes and discourses that constituted the barriers to the professions, moving beyond the experiences of IEPs was necessary. I realized that investigating how the CLB framework was changing the work of language assessment for specific professions might be a worthy point of entry for exploring the institutional order of language assessment in Canada. I found that little was known about the processes and social relations of language profiling and assessment or what role they play in the recognition of IEPs’ professional knowledge.

1.2 Scope of the Study and Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to understand the social and policy constructions of English language assessment, articulated through conceptions of competence in the CLB 2000 and derivative texts, in relation to knowledge economy discourses. Knowledge economy discourses, promoted through transnational organizations such as the OECD and the World Bank, have had significant influence on the development of national social and economic policies with respect to education (Rizvi, 2006). Under knowledge economy discourses, the world’s knowledge workers are expected to work in text-saturated environments and demonstrate sophisticated manipulation of signs and symbols (Luke, 1995/1996). Canadian immigration policy has been designed to attract highly

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5 Profiling is not a word used by the language experts, but one I have decided to use it to describe their textual practices.
skilled and educated knowledge workers. After IEPs enter Canada, however, they struggle to receive recognition for not only their professional credentials, but also recognition of their English language competence. In particular, this study focuses on the policy problematic of standardizing language assessment practices and the recognition of IEPs’ English language competence through textual practices by investigating the work practices of thirteen language experts (consultants, researchers and instructors) and provincial government administrators. These actors have been involved, to varying degrees, in the development of the CLB and its implementation in a range of contexts including language profiling and assessment in the professions. Through textual practices, the language experts and government administrators are expected to activate the CLB 2000 in order to standardize English language assessment for the consistent recognition of IEPs’ language competence. Their daily work practices provide insights into the contradictions and struggles of regulating language and the standardization and recognition of knowledge under knowledge economy discourses. In institutional ethnography, knowledge is understood as emerging from people’s everyday experiences. The investigation involves discovering the organization of work processes across localities that are often invisible (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). The aim of research within using institutional ethnography “is not to test a hypothesis but to examine the way that the social organization is put together such that people experience it as they do” (Campbell, 2006).

A central concept in institutional ethnography is standpoint, the starting point of an inquiry from the position of “any subject who ‘disappears’ in objectified knowledge” (Walby, 2007). The research focuses on the standpoint of the language experts and
government administrators whose experiences provide insights into how the CLB text organizes the work of language profiling and assessment across Canada. Their experiences also help to understand how the social relations of employers, funding agencies and professional licensing bodies mediate entry into Canada’s labour market. In addition, their experiences provide insight into the perception of English language ability in the workplace that sustains understandings of language as a static system that can be measured and quantified. Campbell and Gregor (2002) explained that the knower’s location is not a problem of bias; instead his/her location provides a guiding perspective about the nexus of power and knowledge, and of whose interests are served. Similarly, Bowker and Star (1999) asserted, “if social scientists do not understand people’s definition of a situation, they do not understand it at all” (p. 289). In many respects, the language experts and government administrators cross into the boundaries of workplaces, professional regulatory bodies, educational institutions, and government agencies. Their standpoint provides a view of the boundaries that constitute employment relations. At times, the language experts and government administrators work closely with IEPs who are attempting to enter the professions in Canada. At other times, their activities involve working with employers and professional licensing bodies in profiling the language demands of a profession.

The study, therefore, addresses the following questions:

1) How do the social relations of the language researchers/consultants, instructors, government administrators, employers and professional regulatory bodies constitute the processes associated with language assessment and profiling the language requirements for professions? What are the economic, historical,
political and social relations that sustain the processes? These questions are addressed in Chapter 4.

2) How is English language learning and assessment articulated in the *CLB 2000* and how do these articulations organize the textual practices of the language experts and government administrators? How are knowledge economy discourses reflected in these articulations? These questions are addressed in Chapter 5.

3) What are the institutional discourses that emerge from the processes and social relations of profiling the language requirements for the professions? How are these discourses constituted through knowledge economy discourses? Chapter 6 addresses these questions.

In sum, the research presented in this study shows the changing landscape of English language assessment for the professions in Canada. The processes of language assessment are constituted through a collaboration of institutions and actors. The research also analyzes the disjuncture between the text-mediated knowing of the *CLB 2000* and the knowledge that emerges from the language experts’ experiences of profiling and assessing language.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research is significant for several reasons. First, research on the lack of recognition of IEPs’ professional credentials in Canada has focused on economic disparities (Bannerjee, 2009; Buhr, 2010; Zietsma, 2010), recognition strategies (Lemay, 2007), comparisons with other countries (Hawthorne, 2007; Walker, 2007), and prejudice and professional protectionism (Guo, 2007, 2009). This study contributes to this body of
literature by providing insights into the role that the processes of determining language competence play in the recognition of IEPs’ credentials.

Second, this study adds to existing empirical research on the CLB and the theoretical foundations of language planning and policy. Research on the CLB 2000 has been limited to investigations of conceptualizations of citizenship (Fleming, 2007) and the framework’s narrow conceptualizations of proficiency (Cray & Currie, 2004; Haque & Cray, 2006). While these critiques are valuable, no research has been undertaken to investigate the politics of the framework’s implementation with respect to the assessment of IEPs’ English language skills. By examining the professions in particular, this research contributes to literature on learning in the professions and raises questions for further inquiry into what constitutes skill and knowledge in professional practice.

Theoretically, this research challenges understandings of language as a fixed and static system upon which competence can be accurately measured. The study speaks to language as a social practice embedded in the social and power relations of particular localities and demonstrates that assessing language through a competency-based framework is problematic. It contributes to the body of literature that views language as ecologies of local practice (Canagarajah, 2005b; Pennycook, 2010; Shohamy, 2006). This research, therefore, has practical implications for planning and policy that take into consideration that languages are “living and dynamic organisms resulting from interactions and the effects of a variety of factors” (Shohamy, 2006).

The remainder of this chapter provides a summary of the historical and contextual factors influencing the work of language profiling and assessment in English-speaking Canada. It concludes with an overview of the dissertation.
1.4 Contextual and Historical Factors of English Language Assessment

Understanding the problematic of English language assessment requires some discussion of the historical context of governance in Canada with respect to language relations, immigration, and education. The territory today considered Canada has been inhabited for thousands of years by an indigenous population of Aboriginal and Inuit peoples. Much later, beginning in the 1600s, this territory became increasingly occupied by European colonialists of French and British origins and the indigenous population. In the centuries that followed, this land mass became increasingly populated by migrants from Europe, Africa and Asia. While Canada did not become an officially multicultural state until 1971, I argue that the territory now considered Canada has always been multicultural and multilingual. Over the centuries, the influx of settlers from all parts of Europe, the United States, Central and South America, Asia and Africa displaced much of the indigenous population.

In 1867, the modern state of Canada was formed and today is a constitutional monarchy organized into a federal state, consisting of the federal government, ten provinces and three territories, and currently has a population of 34,482,800 (Statistics Canada, 2011). The federal government consists of three branches: the executive branch includes the governor general (representative of the head of state), the prime minister (head of government), the cabinet, the PM’s office, the privy council office, ministries, and the civil service; the legislative branch includes the House of Commons (lower house) and the Senate (upper house), making up parliament; the judiciary makes up the third separate branch of the federal government and includes the Supreme Court, the Federal Court, the Federal Court of Appeal, and Tax Court. The provinces also have
three branches of government similar to the federal government with the main differences being: the executive branch has a lieutenant governor and premier; the legislative branch has only one house; and the judicial branch’s composition varies from province to province.

As a federal state, the responsibilities of the federal government and each of the provinces and territories is articulated in Canada’s constitution. The federal government, located in Ottawa, is responsible for national concerns such as defence, immigration, citizenship, criminal law, trade and foreign relations, banking and money, transportation, and Indian affairs. Each of the ten provincial and three territorial governments have jurisdiction over property and civil rights, administration of justice, natural resources and the environment, education, health, and welfare.

The three areas of government responsibility of relevance to this study are language, immigration, and education. While language is not listed as either a federal or provincial responsibility, both levels of government have established policies with respect to language at various points in Canadian history. The federal government did not establish official language policy until the 1960s. However, from the time of European contact, English and French “have gained the discursive force and legitimacy of being official languages, not only through a historical dismissal of Aboriginal languages, but also as a result of marginalizing all other minority languages” (Haque & Cray, 2006). The Official Languages Act established in 1967 asserted the legitimacy of the English and French languages within the Canadian state. It recognized the

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6 Examples include the Manitoba Schools Question where instruction of the French language in public schools ceased to be supported by the Manitoba provincial government in the 19th century; and Bill 101 in 1977 which established French as the official language of Quebec.
relationship between language and culture, in particular for French-speaking peoples. Ensuing backlash from non-official language communities resulted in the development of the *Multiculturalism Act* in 1971, which separates linguistic identity from culture for other minority groups in Canada (Haque, 2012; Haque & Cray, 2006). Through these official acts, linguistic minorities have been encouraged to maintain their language of origin as well as learn one of the official languages; however, insufficient funding has been provided for newcomers to acquire one or both of Canada’s official languages (Burnaby, 1998; Haque & Cray, 2006). As will be explained, official bilingualism within a multicultural state has had significant influence on the provision of language education and employment training policy within Canada.

The second area of governance related to this study is immigration. While immigration is considered a federal responsibility, in practice the responsibility tends to be divided between the federal and provincial governments. According to the most recent *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (Government of Canada, 2001), the federal government can enter into an agreement with any of the provinces or territories. These agreements enable the provinces and territories to set the criteria for immigration so that each province or territory can meet its particular socio-economic needs. IEPs wanting to immigrate to Canada have six categories from which to choose to initiate the immigration process. The categories are skilled workers and professionals, Quebec-selected skilled workers, Canadian experience class, investors, entrepreneurs and self-employed people, provincial nominees, and sponsoring your family (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Points are awarded for highest education level attained, language ability in English or French, work experience, age, and adaptability.
Proficiency in English or French has become a more significant category under the 2001 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Language proficiency in the point system now accounts for 36% of a minimum 67 points in contrast to 25% of the minimum score of 60 required under earlier iterations of the Act (Boyd & Cao, 2009). The most relevant categories for IEPs are the “Skilled Workers and Professionals” and “Provincial Nominees” categories, although IEPs sometimes apply through the other categories (Reitz, 2001). To apply under the Skilled Workers and Professionals category, candidates must demonstrate their language proficiency in either English or French, and have a valid offer of employment or have one year of continuous full-time employment in an eligible occupation.

In 1998, the federal government started the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), enabling individual provinces to recruit new immigrants based on occupational categories in order to fulfill provincial labour market demands (CIC, 2011). Criteria for the provincial nominee program are determined by the individual province or territory; therefore, candidates must contact each province or territory directly. Nominees are selected based on their ability to meet the social and economic needs of a particular province (CIC, 2011). While high levels of education, professional credentials, and work experience enable IEPs to migrate to Canada, after crossing the border, these same qualifications are devalued in the Canadian labour market (Picot, 2004; Reitz, 2001, 2005).

While responsibility for education is a provincial jurisdiction, education at the provincial level often refers to public education for primary and secondary students. In the case of adult education, responsibility between the two levels of government is less
clearly defined. Burnaby (1998) explained that the federal government has tended to use the word “training” instead of “education” in order to side-step trespassing on provincial jurisdiction. This study is focused on adult education for immigrants in Canada and therefore, comments will be limited to that specific area of adult education. In what follows, I provide a brief historical overview of federal and provincial governance issues with respect to language education and employment training for immigrants to Canada since World War II. The reason for the focus on governance since the mid-20th century is because prior to this, language education was a minor concern and tended to be administered through churches, non-governmental organizations, and women’s groups (Joshee, 1996).

1.4.1 Language Education for Immigrant Adults: Historical Considerations

Shohamy (2006) noted that language is a dynamic organism that evolves and changes over the course of history, but that is was not until the formation of the nation-state, among other events, that language began to be seen as “a closed and finite system with fixed and well-defined boundaries” (p. 23). Historically, language has been “a significant and constitutive aspect of nation formation” (Haque, 2012). Therefore, in the modern nation-state, language policy directs people to think about language and language competency in particular ways. My study demonstrates how language and language competence are articulated in Canadian policy and understood more broadly in employment contexts. It explores conceptions of who constitutes a legitimate user of the English language in the Canadian state.

Prior to World War II, adult language education for immigrants, provided mainly by women’s groups, schools and churches, was a political enterprise and articulated a
moral duty to naturalize non-English-speaking European immigrants as a nation-building project (Joshee, 1996). Joshee (1996), however, explained that as part of the war effort in 1941, the federal government began to take an active interest in education for immigrants through citizenship education. In 1947, the federal government established the Citizenship Act, giving the government the legal basis to direct citizenship education for immigrants. The provinces were less than receptive as they were interested in language training for immigrants, not citizenship education, and felt the federal government should bear the cost for educating newcomers. A compromise was reached, and language training in English or French was joined with citizenship education (Joshee, 1996). This link remained prevalent until 1966 when responsibility for immigrant integration was split between Manpower and Immigration, which became responsible for economic integration, and the Citizenship Branch, which took responsibility for social and cultural integration. From 1966 until the late 1980s, the federal government provided funds to the provinces in order to provide training under the Occupational Training Act for Adults, including EAL training (Burnaby, 1998). Joshee (1996) explained that over the 1970s and 1980s, language education for immigrants became increasingly tied to the narrow focus of labour force participation and economic liberalism. Education for adult immigrants was established for assimilation and naturalization continuing from Canada’s colonial heritage (Joshee, 1996; Schugurensky, 2006). Joshee (1996) notes, “The language programs that have been developed, whether under the auspices of citizenship or employment, have fallen short of the goal of promoting full and equal participation in the economy” (Joshee, 1996, p. 122). Critiques from researchers, immigrant community groups, and provincial governments have ensued on the inadequacy of Canada’s English
language education policies and programming in providing immigrants with the formal language learning opportunities necessary for economic, political and social participation (Cray & Currie, 2004; Derwing & Thomson, 2005; Haque & Cray, 2006; Joshee, 1996; Joshee & Derwing, 2005).

In the early 1990s, prompted by the above critiques, the Canadian government, in consultation with second language teaching, testing and measurement experts, developing a series of policy documents to guide what was called “English-as-a-Second Language” education and assessment across the country (Derwing & Thomson, 2005). The result was the development of the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 (CLB 2000), a federal initiative that attempts to create an assessment standard of the English and French languages in Canada. 7 The following section discusses in more detail the development of the CLB 2000 while a discussion of the theoretical foundations of the benchmarks will follow in Chapter 2.

1.4.2 The Emergence of the CLB 2000

Language education policy becomes part of a political agenda when political actors perceive a social problem with the use of language in society that requires some form of state intervention (Schmidt, 2006). In the case of Canada, the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 (CLB 2000) was developed to mediate the assessment of immigrants’ English language abilities under the auspices of establishing a standardized and unified approach to language assessment that will assist with immigrants’ civic and labour market integration.

7 The English version of the CLB was released in 2000. A French version of the benchmarks, Niveaux de competence linguistique canadiens, was published in 2006. This dissertation focuses on only the CLB 2000.
For employers, a Canadian English accent constitutes both a material and figurative border in employment contexts (Creese & Kambere, 2003) and low levels of tolerance for linguistic difference, particularly for those of non-European origins, contributes to labour market stratification (Bannerjee, 2009; Scassa, 1994). Hiring and employment decisions supposedly become more difficult because accent and fluency are perceived as a hindrance to effective and efficient communication in the workplace. For Canadian economic and social policymakers concerned about productivity and the global competition for “talent” (Watt, et al., 2008), the problem has been focused on developing policies and programs to standardize and regulate English-as-an-Additional Language (EAL) education to improve IEPs’ labour market integration.

Prior to 1996, no national standardized assessment framework or tool existed for evaluating the English or French proficiency of adult immigrants in Canada. Unlike the public school system where grade levels exist and particular standards and outcomes are established through provincial curricula, levels and outcomes in adult second language education varied among language service providers, both community-based and private. In 1992, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) began to frame this as a problem and funded a project to begin research on establishing a set of national language standards (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005). The following year, The National Working Group on Language Benchmarks (NWGLB) was established by CIC, which eventually led to the first draft of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) being completed in 1996. In the same year, CIC created the not-for-profit agency the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) to oversee the implementation of the CLB and any derivative initiatives. After piloting the CLB across the country, the final
186-page CLB document was published in 2000 (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005). In sum, the *CLB 2000* is a 12-benchmark descriptive scale of communicative competency consisting of a list of performance tasks and outcomes. The framework is intended to establish a national system of English language assessment that describes and measures EAL learners proficiency in “a standard way” (CLB 2000, p. VIII).

The development of the *CLB 2000* represents a significant shift in the federal government’s approach to language education for adults. EAL education in Canada is an unregulated profession. While attempts have been made in some provinces to set standards and oversee the qualifications of instructors, quality of instruction and assessment varies greatly among provinces and even among institutions in any given jurisdiction. In addition, the provision of language education for adults is available from a variety of service providers: not-for-profit immigrant service organizations, for-profit private colleges, public school boards and publicly funded post-secondary institutions such as colleges and universities. Although recognition and implementation of the *Benchmarks* has not been universal nor uniform within Canada, increasingly the document is being used for program development and learner assessment and evaluation across the country, particularly by federally and provincially government-funded programming and increasingly within employment contexts. There have also been some iterations of it being expressed in post-secondary settings for the development of curricula and programs. Since the document was completed, numerous initiatives have been taken to expand the type of contexts in which the CLB is used beyond that of settlement language programs. These include an assessment tool for employment counselors and human resource personnel and documents on using the CLB in the
workplace. Another emerging trend, and the focus of this research, has been the implementation of the CLB framework to develop profession specific exams and programs to assess IEPs’ proficiency in the English language with the goal of assisting professionals to enter their professions in which they have been educated and trained. While this trend is in many respects still in its infancy, examining the processes provides insights into the regulation of language in Canada and the expectations and challenges IEPs encounter in the professions.

1.5 Profiling and Assessing Language for the Professions

In Canada, for internationally educated professionals to gain licensure to practice in their profession, they are required to undergo an English or French language proficiency test in addition to having their professional qualifications assessed by regulating professional bodies. Regulation of professions is a provincial or territorial responsibility. Canada belongs to the Anglo-American tradition of regulation where professions tend to be granted more autonomy and self-regulation than the integrated bureaucratic model of Western Europe (Adams, 2009). Autonomy and self-regulation includes the provinces and territories granting professions with the right to restrict entry to practice by setting education standards in addition to the right to regulate practitioner conduct (Adams, 2009).

Decisions about the recognition of international professional credentials and language abilities are in the hands of the provincial regulatory bodies for each of the three professions discussed in this study (nursing, engineering, accounting). Language proficiency has historically been assessed according to commercially developed language exams for academic contexts. Examples of the exams include: Test of English as a
Foreign Language (TOEFL), Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees (CanTEST), International English Language Testing System (IELTS - Academic Version), or the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB).

According to documents sanctioned by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (2002), these generic exams are inadequate because they do not reflect the language requirements of particular professions. The content of commercially produced exams is academic, covers a range of subjects, and does not mirror the language used for completing the daily work routines within a particular profession (Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2002). Therefore, since the inception of the CLB 2000, there has been an emerging trend to profile the language requirements of specific occupations. The justification for this is that occupation-specific programs and tests are based on a Target Language Use (TLU) analysis of a particular profession, that is, the professional knowledge and workplace contextual factors of the profession are embedded into the test or program content (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2004). The process of occupation-specific profiling also enables the content of the test or program to be validated by the professional community of an occupation and field tested among internationally educated professionals (IEPs) trying to gain accreditation in a particular field. Often included in the implementation of these tests and programs is the chance for IEPs to receive feedback on their language skills, something that does not happen with generic exams.

A second trend in profiling specific occupations has been to conduct field research on the language requirements of an occupation, again using the CLB framework as a guide, to inform the curricula of bridging programs, college-level applied programs,
or employer-sponsored workplace language programs. Bridging programs and college-level programs provide training in both professional competencies and the language competencies that are necessary for internationally educated professionals to receive licensure in their profession. Employer-sponsored programs are designed to assist IEPs with improving their communication skills and understanding of the socio-cultural context of Canadian workplaces.

The trend toward profiling the language requirements of specific occupations has been coordinated by the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB), national professional associations, provincial professional regulatory bodies, and ministries in both the federal government and provincial governments (e.g. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Human Resource and Skills Development Canada). The occupations targeted for profiling tend to be those in which significant labour shortages currently exist or are predicted. Given that the trend of profiling the language requirements for occupations is in its infancy in Canada, each profession is at different stages in the development of tests and programs. Focusing on three professions is therefore empirically useful because the different stages provide insights into the nuances and negotiations that occur during the various stages of development. In addition, for each profession at least three of the language experts interviewed have been involved to varying degrees in either the development of programs or exams for that profession. This has facilitated an analysis of differing perspectives on the practices and contextual factors for each profession. Furthermore, focusing on three professions has allowed for analytic comparison of differences and similarities. Before detailing each stage in the profiling
process, some background information on the development of tests and programs for each profession is necessary.

*Nursing*

Nursing was the first profession to undergo language profiling, beginning in 2000, the same year that the *CLB 2000* was officially released. At the time, it was projected that Canada would face a nursing labour shortage of 113,000 nurses by 2011 (Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2002). One solution recommended for resolving this nursing shortage was the recruitment of internationally educated nurses (IENs). In light of these projections, in 2000 the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) was provided with funding from the Ontario Government to conduct a feasibility study in which more than fifty nursing stakeholder organizations in Canada were surveyed to determine if interest in developing an occupation-specific language exam for nursing existed (Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2002). According to subsequent reports published on the project, ninety-two percent of those surveyed responded that a nursing-specific language exam was a worthy project (Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2002). Based on these results, the CCLB proceeded with a three-phase development plan. Phase 1 involved profiling the language requirements for nursing (see Phase 1 report, *Benchmarking the Nursing Profession across Canada* (2002) for details), Phase 2 centred on developing a nursing-specific language assessment tool or more specifically the CELBAN – Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (see Phase 2 report, *The Development of CELBAN: A Nursing-Specific Language Assessment Tool* (2003)), and Phase 3 involved implementing the CELBAN across various provincial jurisdictions (see Phase 3 report,
Implementation of CELBAN (2004). As of 2011, all provincial nursing associations require IENs to take either the CELBAN or IELTS to demonstrate their English language proficiency. An additional component of the CELBAN has been the development of the Institutional CELBAN, a course based on the CELBAN that is offered through various community colleges in some Canadian provinces. The intent of the Institutional CELBAN is to assist IENs in preparing to take the CELBAN exam.

Engineering

In the case of engineering, initiatives to profile the language requirements for the profession emerged from recommendations made in a larger project, From Consideration to Integration (FC2I) (Canadian Council of Professional Engineers, 2004), a three-phase endeavor to integrate international engineering graduates (IEGs) into the engineering profession in Canada “without compromising public safety or lowering professional standards” (Lemay, 2007). The Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (CCPE, also known as Engineers Canada) led the FC2I initiative with assistance from federal and provincial governments, provincial regulatory bodies, employers, immigrant service organizations, educators, engineers, and IEGs (Lemay, 2007). Seventeen recommendations were made for improving the integration processes for IEGs, one of which was profiling the language requirements of the engineering profession for the development of an engineering-specific language exam and curricula for engineering-specific English language courses (Lemay, 2007). Engineers Canada and the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta (APEGGA), one of the provincial professional associations for engineering, approached the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks to propose profiling the engineering profession. Work
of profiling the language requirements for engineering began in 2008 (Engineers Canada, 2008). Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Alberta Government provided funding for the project (Lemay, 2007). While I was conducting my research interviews, the engineering project was in the stage of collecting language samples to determine the minimum level of English competency. The minimum level of proficiency deemed necessary for the engineering profession is CLB 8 (high-intermediate proficiency). At the time of writing this dissertation, Engineers Canada was in the process of securing funding to develop and implement an engineering-specific language assessment (Engineers Canada, n.d.).

While developing and implementing a nation-wide language assessment for engineering is still in the early stages, much work has already been done on profiling the language requirements for engineering. As early as 2005, language experts were profiling the language demands for the engineering profession with the goal of developing college and university-level applied programs and employer-sponsored workplace language programs. The language experts interviewed in this study explain that their institutions had wanted to profile specific occupations since the early 2000s, but the cost was often prohibitive. However, in 2005, monies for such initiatives became available through the federal government’s Enhanced Language Training program, which will be described in more detail below.

Discussions during my research interviews, therefore, referred to both the development of an occupation-specific language assessment for engineering and the development and implementation of occupation-specific programs for engineering.

Accounting
In Canada, there are three accounting designations: Chartered Accountant (CA); Certified Management Accountant (CMA), and; Certified General Accountant (CGA). The language requirements within accounting generally tend to be less stringent than nursing and engineering and there is currently no movement toward developing a national English language assessment in any of the three designations. However, the licensing exams for all three designations are conducted in English, therefore, internationally educated accountants must demonstrate a level of proficiency that enables them to successfully pass the exam. Recommendations on proficiency level are offered on provincial association websites. For example, in Alberta, the CMA designation recommends that candidates have a minimum level of CLB 7. Even though the professional associations are not taking any active steps currently to develop language exams specific for accountancy, according to participants in my study, there is a general recognition that language proficiency poses challenges for internationally educated accountants. Therefore, some immigrant service organizations and post-secondary institutions across the country have developed bridging programs for internationally educated accounting graduates to assist them with preparing to write the provincial accountancy exams for each of the designations as well as to prepare for the practical experience portion often required to receive licensure. Discussion of accountancy during my research interviews referred to the development and implementation of some of these accountancy-bridging programs.

Even though nursing, engineering and accounting have taken slightly different steps and approaches to assessing the language proficiency of their internationally
educated professionals, the stages for profiling the language requirements for an occupation generally follow a similar path.

1.5.1 The Processes of Profiling

*Phase 1 Securing financial resources*

Before the actual work of profiling the language of a profession begins, financial considerations need to be taken into account. In all cases examined in this study, funding was provided through a complex web of federal government, provincial government and institutional funds. In some cases, project funding was coordinated through the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB). The CCLB receives funds to conduct occupation-specific profiling projects through combined funding from federal government ministries, such as Citizen and Immigration Canada or Human Resource and Skills Development Canada, and the various provincial governments. The CCLB vets Requests for Proposals (RFP) and chooses which organization or institution will conduct the profiling research and development. In other cases, funding is allocated through the Enhanced Language Training program, a federal government initiative that began in 2003-2004 and combines funding from provincial governments and vets proposals for projects to develop occupation-specific language programs and assessments. Projects must target internationally educated professionals or tradespeople who demonstrate an English language proficiency level between CLB 7 to 10 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008). For example, the development of CELBAN was coordinated through the CCLB and the Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia, and Manitoba provincial governments, and the Ontario Division of Citizenship and Immigration Canada provided funding at various stages of development. In the case of developing occupation-specific programs
for engineering, funding was accessed through a combination of provincial government funds and the Enhanced Language Training program. In the case of the accounting project, funds were allocated through provincial governments and supplemented by institutional funds in the organizations where the language researchers worked.

**Phase 2 Conducting the Research**

After financial support has been secured, the second phase of language profiling involves the language experts working with the stakeholders to identify worksites where the research will be conducted. Working with stakeholders also involves forming an advisory committee that includes some or all of the following stakeholders: professional body representatives, provincial government ministers, professionals working in the field, language instructors and researchers, members of the CCLB, employers and human resource personnel, and IEPs working in the field.

Interviews are conducted with stakeholders such as management, human resource personnel, union representatives for unionized professions, professional association representatives, and IEPs who are already employed in the field. This stage also involves the language experts entering the work sites and conducting “job shadowing,” or following employees identified by managers and HR personnel and documenting their communication as they go about completing their daily work tasks. Job shadowing often involves the language experts working in several job sites so that they can access a range of occupation-specific contexts. Types of language samples the language experts observed included explaining, asking for information, clarifying information, giving instructions and responding to questions. They also took into consideration who the
employee had to communicate with, the type of task undertaken and the language and social skills needed to complete the interaction. For example, in the case of nursing, the level of formality was dependent on whether a nurse was speaking with a patient or a doctor.

Phase 3 Development of Profession-specific Language Exams and Programs

After the work of collecting language samples and recording all the communication exchanges of the professionals, the third stage the consultants undertook was analysis. Analysis involved determining the types of communication tasks that were necessary for working as a nurse, engineer, or accountant and the frequency at which each task occurred. This stage also included consulting with the CLB 2000 framework to determine the type of skill (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and level of competency (e.g. CLB 8.) that was needed to complete each task.

The language experts synthesized all the data they gathered to either develop curricula for bridging programs, college-level applied programs, or employer-sponsored language programs or a profession-specific language assessment test. At this stage, the process of profiling for a test diverges from the process of benchmarking for a program. Profiling for a profession-specific language exam is referred to as high-stakes; that is, taking the test can have a significant impact on a test-taker’s career prospects and whether or not they will receive licensure in a profession. Therefore, the exam needs to be piloted, statistically validated and revised accordingly. In the case of the CELBAN, it was piloted and statistical analysis of test validity was conducted. The test was then revised. The completed version includes guidebooks for administrators, invigilators, and
speaking assessors (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2004). In the case of benchmarking for a program, statistical analysis was not crucial. Instead, the language researchers were concerned with collecting authentic language samples that could be converted into tasks and activities for use in the classroom. In all cases, they referred to the CLB framework to determine the level of proficiency needed to complete the authentic tasks.

1.6 Layout of the Dissertation

This chapter has articulated the problematic of English language assessment for IEPs in Canada and discussed the relevant contextual factors of the research. The following chapter provides a literature review of education policy in relation to knowledge economy discourses, language planning and policy, and the theoretical foundations of competency-based education. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical foundations of institutional ethnography and details the methods undertaken to conduct the research. Chapter 4 is the first of three empirical chapters. It examines the power and social relations of the institutions that organize and sustain the work of language profiling and assessment in the professions. Chapter 5 focuses on the CLB 2000 text and analyzes the ways that it organizes and coordinates the language experts and provincial government administrators’ work. While the CLB 2000 significantly contributes to organizing the work of language profiling and assessment, the expectations of employers, professional regulatory bodies, and funding agencies are also contributors to profiling and assessment. Chapter 6 explores the tensions and challenges that language experts and government administrators encounter in mediating these expectations. Chapter 7 articulates a discussion of the findings in relation to literature on the knowledge
economy, language education and policy, conceptions of language in the Canadian state and offers suggestions for further research and policy development.
2 The Knowledge Economy and Language Education Policy

In Chapter 1, I noted that Canada’s immigration and economic policies have intensified under the policy frame of the knowledge economy, which assumes that a nation’s economic sustainability rests on people’s abilities to generate knowledge and manipulate text. In this chapter, I elaborate on these ideas by considering the CLB in relation to literature on the knowledge economy, language education policy, and competency-based approaches to education.

In the first section, I examine some of the discourses of the knowledge economy in relation to Canadian immigration and education policy. While existing literature has been helpful for understanding human capital formation in relation to immigration (e.g. Reitz, 2001), it has not considered the daily work and textual practices in which decisions about and the assessment of immigrants’ English language knowledge and skill are made. Therefore, I also consider the influence these discourses have had on workplaces with respect to the standardization and recognition of knowledge through textual practices.

The second section examines literature on language education policy. In particular, I discuss how an emerging body of scholarship in language education policy challenges understandings of language as a closed and fixed system with historical roots in the nation-state. Instead language is conceptualized as a dynamic social practice embedded in particular localities. Such a view challenges language education policies such as the CLB that attempt to standardize language competence. Understanding the textual practices of language profiling and assessment requires an exploration of a final body of literature, that is, the theoretical foundations on which the CLB 2000 is based. Therefore,
the final section of the chapter examines the debates on competency-based education in relation to work contexts and language learning.

2.1 The Knowledge Economy, Education Policy, and Knowledge Workers

The conceptual origins of the knowledge economy are attributed to management consultant Peter Drucker, who in 1959 coined the terms knowledge work, knowledge worker, and knowledge industries (Kenway, Bullen, Fahey, & Robb, 2006; Peters, 2006). Drucker predicted that modern economies would see the rise of the knowledge worker who would possess high-level informational processing skills. Meanwhile the ascendance of the knowledge worker would signal the demise of the blue-collar manual labourer. Subsequent scholars such as Fritz Malchup and Daniel Bell developed Drucker’s ideas further in the 1960s and 1970s to theorize the importance that education, knowledge as a form of capital, information and communication technologies (ICT), and universities would all have on the economic and societal development of modern nation-states (Hargreaves, 2003; Jessop, 2008; Kenway, et al., 2006). The literature indicates that theorizing on the knowledge economy remained in the academic realm until the late 1970s, at which time national governments began integrating some of these theories into economic and social policy as a response to economic turmoil (Kenway, et al., 2006).

The knowledge economy has become an influential set of discourses over the past twenty years in national education policy development, promoted most notably by organizations such as the OECD and the World Bank (Farrell & Fenwick, 2007b; Ozga & Jones, 2006; Rizvi, 2006; Robertson, 2006, 2008). The OECD (1996; 1997; 2012), through the proliferation of documents and statements, in particular has taken on the role as semi-autonomous educational think-tank (Istance, 1996). As Hamilton (2007) noted,
“International agencies not only function as policy drivers by putting pressure on national governments to act, but they may also suggest appropriate levers” (p. 253). OECD documents promote discourses such as the balance between knowledge and labour and capital has been tipped toward knowledge, the long-term economic growth of nation-states will depend on knowledge generation, knowledge is increasingly codified and transmitted through technology, education will be critical in economic growth, and education systems will need to respond to the demands of the knowledge economy (OECD, 1996; (Robertson, 2005). Nation-states are encouraged to implement tools and levers that standardize and measure knowledge generation.

Scholars, however, have emphasized that disconnect exists between the rhetoric of the knowledge economy and the reality of national economies (Field, 2007; Kuhn, 2007; Schugurensky, 2007). Economies still require manual labour and, as Schugurensky (2007) has argued, many occupations in the so-called knowledge economy are low-skilled service sectors jobs or they involve routine data transmission. Kenway et al. (2006) noted that knowledge economy discourses have come to dominate the policy lexicon and “assumed the status of truth” (p. 4). This lexicon is governed by concepts such as knowledge production, intellectual property, national innovation, high-skills, knowledge transfer, and knowledge management (Fenwick, 2010; Jessop, 2008). While it is debatable whether Canada is indeed a knowledge economy (Schugurensky, 2007), despite the Canadian government’s inclusion of the lexicon in its training and employment policies (Fenwick, 2010; Gibb & Walker, 2011), the discourses that attempt to summon a knowledge economy into existence do, nonetheless, have material effects for workers and learners (Kenway et al., 2006). As Farrell and Fenwick (2007a)
emphasized, it is essential “to retain a clear focus on the actual experiences of actual
workers. People are not patterns: they are idiosyncratic actors” (p. 3). In a similar vein,
Hamilton (2007) has articulated the necessity of tracing how agency is exerted at the
various levels of policy processes. This involves asking questions about who is and is not
invited to the policy table and whose interests are marginalized (Hamilton, 2007).
Focusing on the experiences of policy actors is essential for analyzing the connections
between the discourses of the knowledge economy and English language education
policy in Canada, and the effects these policy discourses have on the experiences of the
language experts, government administrators, and IEPs who are the focus on this
research.

Under knowledge economy discourses, high levels of education have become
screening tools not only for access to employment, but also for immigration (Reitz,
they do so in the context of an increasingly dense web of transnational networks” (p. 3).
Using the OECD as an example, Mahon and McBride (2008) contend that such
organizations purvey ideas, and “ideas play an important role in contemporary
transnational governance” (p. 3), including ideas about building globalized knowledge
economies. Indeed, Canada, among other OECD nations, has declared its intent to
become a knowledge-based economy (see, e.g. Government of Canada, 2002a, 2002b).
Immigration is viewed as one means for fostering the development of Canada’s
knowledge economy through the current point system. Points are awarded for education,
work experience, age, language competence in English or French, employment arranged
in Canada prior to arrival, and the educational qualifications of the applicant’s spouse
Applicants who demonstrate completion of graduate education, more than four years of work experience, good English or French language facility, and fall between the ages of 21 and 49 will receive high scores. While historically Canada’s immigration policies have been developed to ensure economic growth (Reitz, 2001), the integration of Canada’s economic and immigration policies have arguably deepened under the influence of knowledge economy discourses as Canada competes for the world’s knowledge workers.

Of particular importance to this study is the discourse that the citizens of knowledge economies will be what Reich (1992) called symbolic analysts who will “work in media-, text-, and symbol-saturated environments” (Luke, 1995/1996) where information is easily and quickly dispersed. As Farrell (2006) demonstrated, knowledge workers are now involved in processes of textualizing knowledge. Textualizing practices involve codifying workplace practices and interpreting, translating and recontextualizing information produced elsewhere into existing practices. In knowledge economies, the movement of information requires standardizing knowledge through textual practices (Farrell, 2006). Through processes of textual practice, “what people do to make and use texts, individually and together,” knowledge workers must standardize knowledge across localities (Farrell, 2006, p. 20). Importantly, however, Farrell (2006) noted, “No matter how hard they try to be, regulatory frameworks, quality manuals and standard operating procedures are not comprehensive; they cannot account for local exigencies” (p. 10). This is what Farrell (2006) called “common knowledge,” knowledge that is generated in communities and is not necessarily codified or recognized. It is the knowledge that is enacted and generated through daily work activities. Knowledge is also enacted,
embodied and mediated by local values (Farrell & Fenwick, 2007a). The locality of knowledge makes its standardization challenging in knowledge economies. Knowledge that falls outside the standard often does not receive recognition. Knowledge economy discourses often obscure some forms of knowledge, contributing to labour market stratification during processes of migration (Brine, 2006; Kofman, 2004).

In sum, understanding the knowledge economy as a set of discourses moves analysis beyond rhetoric to an investigation of the material effects. This is a useful lens for situating this study. These discourses have effects for knowledge workers who migrate to other countries and are expected to work in text-saturated environments, including having a capacity to work and communicate in the nation’s dominant language(s). In addition to having their educational qualifications and professional credentials assessed, IEPs must undergo assessment of their abilities to communicate in the dominant language. The language experts interviewed in this study, for their part, are the “knowledge workers” of language profiling, and their work involves the assessment of other knowledge workers (i.e. IEPs). Undertaking textual practices involves translating and transforming the CLB 2000 text in relation to work practices in the professions. Focusing on the actual experiences of these knowledge workers facilitates an analysis of the struggles and tensions involved in standardizing language assessment practices and the recognition of IEPs’ English language abilities.

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8 By material, I am referring to D. Smith (1987) who asserts that discourses affect and coordinate social activity. They have an affect on people’s actual activities and influence what happens. In the case of this study, for example, knowledge economy discourses influence the coordination of immigration policy and the categories of workers who migrate to Canada.
2.2 Education and Language Education Policy

Policies are often developed to address an identified social or economic problem such as the integration of immigrants into a nation’s labour market. How problems are identified is dependent on a perception of reality (what are unrealized needs and values), a desire for a particular state of affairs (what aspects of society require improvement), and the discrepancy between the perception of reality and achieving the desired state of affairs (Pal, 2006). State intervention for resolving an identified problem involves a state acting directly through the establishment of a state agency or corporation, or indirectly through information, expenditures, or regulation (Pal, 2006). State intervention also involves policy design and takes shape through the development of instruments and tools. Policy instruments and tools fall under three broad categories: information-based instruments, expenditure-based instruments, and regulatory-based instruments (Pal, 2006). While it can be argued that the CLB 2000 initiative employs elements of expenditure and regulatory-based instruments, it is mainly an information-based tool. Examples of information-based instruments include reports, pamphlets, training, advertisements, and booklets. The main document of the CLB initiative is the 186-page CLB 2000 text that outlines the purposes and goals of the initiative along with detailed descriptions of the competencies and performance outcomes for each of the twelve CLB

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9 Regulatory-based tools focus on a government’s “capacity to command and prohibit” (Pal, 2006, p. 154). These instruments include permissions, licenses, and recognition. While I argue that the Canadian government is attempting to regulate the field of EAL education, it cannot do so with regulation-based tools because EAL teaching tends to be an unregulated field and governance over issues of education fall to the provinces. Therefore, the federal government cannot directly regulate the field through regulation-based instruments without trespassing into provincial jurisdiction. Hence, I argue that the CLB is an information-based tool.
levels. This canon document is supplemented by a plethora of other documents and websites (see Appendix E).

The intent of information-based tools is to change how people act through the transfer of information and knowledge. Pal (2006) explained that while information-based tools are seen as less coercive than other policy instruments because there is no obligation to act or penalty involved, a paradox is embedded in information-based tools. “As benign as they might appear, the most powerful way to change behavior is to change the knowledge, beliefs, and values upon which [an information-based tool] is based” (p. 150). Ball (1993/2006) noted that policy texts intervene in practice and rather than simply changing power relations, they enter into existing relations. Indeed, the CLB 2000 initiative is designed to standardize the knowledge and actions of people directly and indirectly involved in the assessment of immigrants and IEPs’ language competence.

Policies, however, articulated through policy texts, are not static entities, but fluid polysemic texts. While texts are open to interpretation, they are not open to a plurality of meaning in which the activator can make any meaning that they like from the text. Hall (1990/2007) explained that texts have dominant or preferred meanings in which “the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs” (p. 483). Policy texts are part of discourse in that they define problems, provide evidence and argumentation, and generate particular forms of knowledge (Arnott & Ozga, 2010): “Policy actors use discourse to foreground certain key ideas and thus restrict or reduce the significance of other competing ways of seeing or thinking about a policy issue” (p. 339). As Ball (1993/2006) noted, policy discourses regulate what is said and thought, but also who speaks, when, where and with what authority. Through processes of
development, implementation and interpretation, policy texts are on a constant course of meaning negotiation and these processes are dependent upon various material and discursive conditions of the political, socio-cultural, economic, and historical contexts. While the implementation of education policy is often conceived as evolving over time in a rational progression, of policy actors conveying message of change to teachers and educators, such a view of policy is sanitized and fails to recognize the power struggles and conflicts embedded in policy processes (Gillborn, 2005). Within current iterations of globalization, where policy discourse travels between supranational organizations and nation-states (Ozga & Jones, 2006), educational policies in particular are currently “the focus of considerable controversy and overt public contestation” (Olssen, Codd, & O’Neill, 2004).

As Tollefson (1995) contended, language education policy is “an outcome of power struggles and an arena for those struggles” (p.2). Historically, language planning and policy has taken an apolitical approach to language and it has seldom accounted for how power shapes language policy texts and the social relations of linguistic exchanges (Pennycook, 2001). There is, however, a growing body of literature and research that considers the power and politics of language education and policy. The research is situated in localities across continents and focuses on a range of issues such as: national identity (Blommaert, 2006), minority rights and indigenous languages (de Souza, 2008; May, 2006), education for linguistic minorities (Mermann-Jozwiak & Sullivan, 2005; Paulston & Heidemann, 2006) and the politics of language testing (Shohamy, 2001). While the contexts and issues differ, two perspectives form a common thread throughout this research. First, it problematizes conceptions of language as a fixed and static code
(Ricento, 2006a). Second, this body of research is interested in the material and discursive role of language “in the production, exercise, and contestation of power at all levels of society, and the effects of power on language practices” (Ricento, 2006b).

Challenging the idea of language as a fixed code disrupts most of 20th century thinking within applied linguistics and across society broadly. It involves seeing language as open and dynamic “made of hybrids and endless varieties resulting from language being creative, expressive, interactive, contact-and dialogue-based, debated, mediated and negotiated” (Shohamy, 2006). Language is not thought of as a system with underlying structures and fixed rules and regulations that govern its use (Pennycook, 2001). Scholars writing from this perspective see language as a social and local practice, in this way challenging ideas of language as a standardized homogenizing system (Canagarajah, 2005a, 2005b; Pennycook, 2001, 2010). In the case of the English language, these scholars do not talk of English as one system, but view it in terms of “global Englishes” (Pennycook, 2007). Canagarajah (2005b) argued that such a view of English involves a disciplinary shift towards a practice of localizing knowledge. It involves acknowledging the historical contexts in which English has been used and that gave rise to variations in codes, accents, and expressions. Bhatt (2005) noted that the transformation of English in postcolonial contexts “has resulted in the emergence of many new Englishes, each peculiar to its own locality and its own culture” (p. 25). From this standpoint, language is a social practice that constitutes and is constituted by social activity. Pennycook (2010) explained:

A focus on language practices moves the focus from language as an autonomous system that pre-exists use, and competence as an internal capacity that accounts for language production, towards an understanding of language as a product of the embodied social practices that bring it about (p. 9).
Valuing local knowledge and local language practices also acknowledges different ways of being and communicating that arise from historical and social circumstances. Pennycook (2001) argued that difference in English language teaching is often thought of in terms of deterministic understandings of culture fixity. “Cultural fixity is part of a long history of colonial othering that has rendered cultures of others fixed, traditional, exotic, and strange” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 145).

Viewing language as a local, social practice challenges modernist understandings of language and its attachment to the nation-state. As Shohamy (2006) discussed, nation-states are currently experiencing significant changes with respect to fluid national identities and recognition for the existence of diverse groups (e.g. indigenous groups, immigrants, transnational groups). These realities have implications for language education policy because they challenge ideologies of languages as homogeneous entities confined to the nation-state. Shohamy (2006) argued further that tensions and debates over the use of language “fall in the midst of battles of those seeking to maintain the ‘order’ of the nation-state and national languages versus those attempting to change it toward local, global, hybrids and regional languages” (p. 39).

As Scheurich (1994) commented, education policy problems are often targeted toward addressing perceived issues with respect to an identified group. Policies also construct categories for classifying and organizing various subjectivities (Luke, 1995/1996). “These categories are not so much real qualities of the world but are products of particular cultural and historical ways of thinking” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 107). Indeed, remnants of Canada’s colonial history, which divided and divides citizens and immigrants along categorical lines of gender, race, class, and language, continue to
The act of classifying enters into most aspects of life and range from standardized to ad hoc forms of classification. Education generally and EAL education particularly have not been immune to creating categories by which to classify learners. Willinsky (1998) argued that these systems of classification stem from “five centuries of studying, classifying, and ordering humanity within an imperial context [which] gave rise to peculiar and powerful ideas about race, culture, and nation what were, in effect, conceptual instruments that the West used both to divide up and educate the world” (pp. 2-3). Classifying learners according to language ability has been supported historically through the conceptual frameworks of theoretical linguistics and the sub-disciplines of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics (Parakarma, 1995). Broadly, the categories have been labeled “native speaker” and “non-native speaker” historically. However, attempts by various governments and states to ensure accountability and regulation in the spending of public funds for language education are producing new categories and systems of classification.10 In a Canadian context, the CLB “describe a clear hierarchy, or progressive continuum of knowledge and skill that underlie language proficiency” and enable learning to be clearly demonstrated on the continuum (CLB 2000, p. viii). In essence, the CLB 2000 is a system of classification

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10 For example, the European Union has created the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and in Australia the Australian Certificate of Spoken and Written English has become the standard.
based on language competence. Learners’ abilities are measured and assessed according to the four categories of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Each skill is assessed independently of the other skills and learners’ abilities are plotted and categorized according to the 1 to 12 scale. The construction of standards, however, raises questions about who makes them, for what purposes, and how they are enforced (Bowker & Star, 1999; Popkewitz, 2004). Scales are based on standards that make categories of people visible and while scales construct particular identities, they also make people into objects (Nespor, 2004; Popkewitz, 2004).

The CLB 2000 articulates a perspective of language as a fixed system bounded within the borders of the nation-state. It attempts to standardize English language assessment during a time when global migration brings people to Canada who have ways of speaking English that are embedded in local and cultural practices from which they emigrate. The CLB 2000, therefore, sits at the crux of the tensions and debates between views of the English language as a fixed system attached to particular nation-states and language as dynamic social practice that is constituted in particular localities.

In sum, this section has considered the literature on language education policy and the classification of language learners. These systems of classification are tied to understandings of languages as fixed entities bounded within nation-states. This section also presented alternate ways of conceptualizing language as dynamic processes embedded in particular social localities. Ideas about education policy are also not bound to nation-states and are increasingly developed in relations of transnational governance.

The knowledge economy is a set of particular discourses that has been influential to both

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11 Levels 1 to 4 are considered basic proficiency, levels 5 to 8 are intermediate proficiency, and levels 9 to 12 are advanced proficiency.
the development of immigration and economic policy. This section concluded by examining some of the assumptions articulated on developing knowledge economies with respect to language education policy. While this section has considered education policy broadly, the next section examines the literature on competency-based education in order to gain an understanding of the theoretical foundations upon which the CLB 2000 is based.

2.3 Competency-Based Approaches to Learning and Language

In this section, I discuss the literature on competency-based approaches to learning given that this approach is the theoretical foundation on which the CLB 2000 is based. While competency-based approaches have been popular for both vocational and language education, they have nevertheless had a controversial history (Jones, 1999). Critiques of competency-based approaches to learning and assessment abound for their apolitical conceptualization of the social context in which learning occurs and their limited theorization of learning and knowledge. As early as 1987, thirteen years before the CLB 2000 came into existence, Auerbach (1987) cautioned against developing competency-based standards for adult language education because it attempts to establish predictable outcomes and “reduces language learning to a mechanistic, behavioural task which separates language from thought and from the creation of meaning” (p. 585).

According to Peruniak (1998), competence-based initiatives began gaining currency in Canada in the early 1990s because they held the promise of precision in assessing learning outcomes and ensured accountability during times of fiscal restraint. Looking to the literature, several conceptions of competence exist and each stems from
different theoretical traditions. Peruniak (1998) explained that competence seems straightforward, but beneath its serene surface, there is a quicksand of competing approaches, murky technological jargon and a glutinous host of personal and contextual factors. . . . Competence-based learning is a means for determining competence. In the end it consists of a system of procedures for that determination. The system sets parameters on factors such as the identification of tasks, how these tasks are categorized, and the criteria and devices to be used during assessment (p. 315).

While scholars employ different terms to categorize the varying conceptions of competence, overlap and similarities exist among the categories. For the remainder of this discussion, I focus on the conceptions of competence that are most relevant to the CLB 2000. I also examine the literature from both vocational training and language education for two reasons. First, the vocational training literature on competence is more extensive than that of language education and therefore provides a wider perspective on the debates and issues with respect to competency-based education generally. Second, this study focuses on understandings of language competence that emerge in relation to specific professions and the workplace. Therefore, some information on how competency is conceptualized in relation to work tasks is necessary.

2.3.1 Articulations of Competence in the CLB 2000

The Preface of the CLB 2000 explains that the development of the benchmarks is “revolutionary” and will resolve the problem of standardization by establishing a “common language” for describing language ability (p. V). Competency-based learning

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12 Gonczi (1999) divides the theoretical traditions of competence into two broad categories, the philosophical and the psychological. Hager (1995) explained that three categories exist. The first is based on behaviour, the second on attributes and the third is an integrated approach that combines the first and the second. Peruniak (1998) discussed four divisions, the behavioural, functional, humanist, and constructivist.
is the foundation of that common language and it will establish “a national standard for planning second language curricula for a variety of contexts, and a common ‘yardstick’ for assessing the outcomes” (p. VIII). A common language, in turn, will facilitate the establishment of a “portable” credential; therefore, alleviating immigrants’ frustrations in being re-assessed every time they apply for a job, apply for admittance to an educational institution, or apply to receive a license from a professional regulatory body (p. VIII).

Each of the twelve benchmarks in the CLB 2000 lists communicative tasks and performance outcomes for each of the four language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and users of the document are expected to describe and assess the communicative proficiency of EAL learners based on these lists. “Task-based proficiency descriptions in the CLB have a clear language competence focus to ensure that it is language proficiency, not non-linguistic skills, that are being primarily described” (p. VIII, emphasis in original). “Competency statements stress what the learner can do” (p. VIII, emphasis in original). The focus is on an individual’s application of knowledge and skills through the demonstration of performance outcomes or competencies (p. VIII). A CLB competency is defined as “a general statement of intended outcome of learning” and is “directly observable and measurable performance outcomes” (p. X). As a national framework, the benchmarks “describe a clear hierarchy, or progressive continuum of knowledge and skill that underlie language proficiency” and enable learning to be clearly demonstrated on the continuum (p. VIII).

Emphasis on doing and measurable performance reflect the behavioural approach to competency. Competence is demonstrated through discrete behaviours associated with the completion of particular tasks. Successful performance of tasks, usually determined
through direct observation, task-based proficiency assessment tests, evaluation portfolios, or classroom-based evaluation techniques including checklists of outcomes or anecdotal reports, determine competency (CLB 2000, p. IX). Biemans et al. (2004) explained that in the 1970s, the initial stages of the competency movement, professional tasks were dissected into components, leading to lists of fragmented behaviours itemized for assessment purposes. According to Hague and Cray (2006), a problematic of the CLB 2000 is that it lists discrete language tasks learners are expected to perform for both initial assessments and summative evaluations. The weakness of this approach is that it presents a reductionist view of learning (Hager, 1995). In work contexts, an occupation is reduced to a number of smaller and smaller tasks ignoring the larger holistic integration of the multiple elements involved in any profession, not to mention the agency and capacity for reflection demonstrated by the worker (Biemans, et al., 2004). It also ignores group processes and their effects on performance while also omitting the role of judgment in performance assessment (Hager, 1995; Jones, 1999). According to Hager (1995), “by viewing competence as the capacity to successfully perform a series of discrete observable tasks, assessment boils down to an observer simply ticking off a checklist of the discrete tasks” (pp. 142-143). Indeed, such checklists exist for teachers and assessors working in CLB-based programs.

James (2002) expands on this critique of competency to explain that some competency-based education programs focus on conformity. Performing a task involves following rules rather than demonstrating understanding and differences in performance are not acknowledged (James, 2002). In the case of language learning, the concept of competency assumes that a standard language exists. This notion of standard language,
however, is arbitrarily based on cultural and social norms (Cameron, 1998; Pennycook, 2001). When this standard is articulated and adhered to, it reduces the possibility for acknowledging and accepting the variances that exist in language. The *CLB 2000* attempts to acknowledge linguistic variance by explaining that proficiency should not be judged by the abstract norm of the “educated native speaker” because even within the norm, there is a range of proficiency (p. X). “Therefore the mastery criterion is to be pragmatically established by a sampling of performance of competent language users in accomplishing a range of communicatively and cognitively demanding tasks in a variety of specified contexts” (p. X).

Judgment, however, on what constitutes competence is highly variable, as I will discuss in Chapter 6. Mulcahy (2000) explained that understandings of competence are highly contingent on context. In her study of various enterprises, Mulcahy (2000) found that while definitions of competence varied even within a single workplace. While the *CLB 2000* attempts to recognize the variation within a norm, it does not take into consideration the role of the assessor. As Peruniak (1998) articulated, competency-based models rarely “recognize the important of the beliefs and values of the assessors” and ultimately “assessments still rest on norms and the arbitrariness of human judgment” (pp. 320-1).

Even though the *CLB 2000* attempts to acknowledge that a (limited) range of performance exists, as I will discuss in chapter 6, there is still an expectation that speakers will speak a variety that resembles standard Canadian English. That standard, however, is contested. Listing descriptions of language through competencies to be performed assumes a normative and static view of language. It assumes that language is
objective and value-free and silences the politics of how knowledge is constituted in particular localities (McNamara, 2001; Pennycook, 2001, 2010). Describing lists of competencies attempts to mediate the judgment of the assessors and the local constitution of language. Mediating judgment, however, is fraught with tensions and power hierarchies.

Assessing language, particularly the English language, is also fraught given the varieties that emerged through the United Kingdom’s colonial history. This has meant that English has taken on variations and forms situated in particular contexts. While some have argued that one variety is no less legitimate than any other variety, some varieties carry more social and economic capital than others (Pennycook, 2007).

Despite the cautions against competency-based approaches to education, why have they continued to be seen as viable solutions to educational problems? Peruniak (1998) and Gonczi (1999) offer a few suggestions. First, competency makes the complexity of learning simple by offering clearly defined outcomes and procedures for assessment. Second, “deep anxieties” have emerged from an increasingly competitive global market (Gonczi, 1999, p. 181). Specified learning outcomes are seen as means for addressing these anxieties and for responding to labour market conditions (Gonczi, 1999; Peruniak, 1998). Third, competency standards attempt to hold assessors and instructors accountable for meeting learning outcomes (Peruniak, 1998). Finally, recent conceptualizations of competency have attempted to bridge the dichotomies between knowing that (knowledge and theory) and knowing how (doing, skills, and practice) (Gonczi, 1999).
Indeed, as Chapter 4 illustrates, the language consultants and instructors discuss accountability as one of the reasons for the emergence of the *CLB 2000*. However, the extent to which accountability is maintained is dependent on a host of factors ranging from commitment by the provincial government in supporting CLB initiatives to the administrative capacities of individual institutions. Chapters 5 and 6 also demonstrate that assessing language is complex. Moreover, as the experiences of the language consultants and instructors demonstrate, a competency-based framework does not reduce or eliminate the complexity of language and communication. While the framework potentially simplifies assessment and hiring decisions for professional bodies and employers, the cultural and social nuances of communication persist.

### 2.3.2 Theoretical Foundations of the *CLB 2000*

One of the complexities that stems from assessing language competence is the theoretical foundation on which the *CLB 2000* is based. The framework is for: “describing and measuring, in a standard way, the communicative proficiency of ESL learners; recognizing ESL learners’ achievement in language learning anywhere in Canada and ensuring portability of their ESL credentials; and assisting in the development of programs, curricula and materials that relate to a consistent set of competency descriptors for all ESL learners in Canada” (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005). The *CLB 2000* framework is a “fusion” of a language-testing model of communicative proficiency developed by Bachman and Palmer (1996) and a pedagogical model of communicative competence developed by Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell (1995) (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2002). This fusion seems to be an attempt to account for the testing and assessment function and the pedagogical function the *CLB 2000* is expected
to fulfill: the development of assessment tools for specific contexts such as the professions and the development of curricula for language programs.

How are knowledge, skill, and competence conceptualized in these two models? From the outset, it is important to note that the Bachman and Palmer (1996) model is designed for the purposes of testing language ability. Testing, under this model, involves developing inferences about language ability based on performance. The Bachman and Palmer model distinguishes itself from other models of language testing in that tests aim for developing tasks based on authentic language use, that is, developing activities that use language as it is spoken and written in real-life contexts. Rather than assessing a learner’s general knowledge about language in decontextualized settings, Bachman and Palmer’s model views language as embedded within a particular situation while also recognizing that even within a particular situation variance in language use will exist.

The goal of language assessment, then, is to determine a learner’s ability within a target language use domain (TLU) or “a set of specific language use tasks that the test taker is likely to encounter outside of the test itself, and to which we want our inferences about language ability to generalize” (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 44).

Attempting to assess language that takes into consideration the context of language use also means that learners will need to have some knowledge of that particular context, or what Bachman and Palmer (1996) call topical knowledge. They explain that this can present a dilemma for both test developers and test takers. Language use is embedded in and directed by an understanding of the context. How, then, can language ability be distinguished from topical knowledge? To illustrate, Bachman and Palmer (1996) give the example of a learner describing photosynthesis. A learner correctly uses the
grammatical structure, vocabulary, textual structures and so on to describe photosynthesis, but the content knowledge about the process of photosynthesis is incorrect. What kind of inferences should be made about the learner’s language ability? This dilemma is particularly relevant to this research study of professions. Internationally educated professionals are being assessed on both their language ability and their professional knowledge. Bachman and Palmer (1996) propose three options for dealing with this scenario. The first option is to remove topical knowledge from the language task so that the focus is strictly on language ability. This, however, defeats the purpose of developing task-based assessment. This problem could be remedied by including information that the test takers are expected to know or by providing the test takers with several scenarios based on different topical information and allow the test takers to have a choice on which scenarios they want to be tested (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The second option is to include topical knowledge in the language task. Bachman and Palmer (1996) contend that this scenario makes it difficult to distinguish language ability from topical knowledge and test scores cannot be accurately attributed to each area of knowledge. The third option, and the one Bachman and Palmer (1996) advocate, is to define language ability and topical knowledge as separate constructs. They explain, however, that this option tends to be less practical as “it requires development of either two separate sets of test tasks, with separate scoring criteria, or two separate sets of rating scales, focusing on language ability and topical knowledge” (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 126). As chapter 5 illustrates, distinguishing topical knowledge from linguistic knowledge is problematic for the language researchers who profile the language requirements for the professions.
While Bachman and Palmer’s model is designed for the development of language tests, Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell (1995) build on the Bachman and Palmer model for application in teaching contexts. Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell (1995), however, use different terminology even though many of the foundational concepts between the two models are the same. Their justification is that “there has been no serious endeavour to generate detailed content specifications for CLT [communicative language teaching] that relate directly to an articulated model of communicative competence” (Celce-Murcia, et al., 1995, p. 5). Even though Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) proposed a model for pedagogical purposes, they did so with some caution. They explained that they are aware of the impossibility in creating a comprehensive catalogue about all that is relevant to language teaching. Nonetheless, they explained that practically it is worthwhile for informing language teaching, curricula design, and language testing. Their model attempts to take what was known about language use and organize it for classroom teaching practice while at the same time acknowledging that what is known “is still fragmentary” (Celce-Murcia, et al., 1995, p. 29). Nonetheless, they explained that the model provides practitioners with a checklist, but emphasized, “any theoretical model of communicative competence is relative rather than absolute” (p. 30). They suggested to readers that their model will need to be adapted depending on the communicative needs of the learners.

How is the fusion of these two models articulated in the CLB 2000 framework? How are the various elements of each model fused together and become the CLB framework? In a similar vein to both models, the CLB is designed for task-based learning where the expectation is that the language to be used or assessed is based on
real-life scenarios. Proficiency is also described as the ability to use language competence or knowledge. So, while the CLB framework is a fusion of various elements of these two models, it includes other components that seem necessary in order for the framework to achieve the goal of establishing a standardized system of EAL learning and assessment. The fusion of the two models is applied to a twelve benchmark descriptive scale.

*The infusions of skills*

As mentioned, the Bachman and Palmer model is designed for the development of tests on specific topical knowledge and the Celce-Murcia et al. model is meant for use in classroom teaching. The CLB, however, is expected to facilitate both assessment and pedagogy in a range of contexts. It is designed to establish a system of assessment that is nation-wide. While competence in both the Bachman and Palmer and Celce-Murcia et al. models refer to knowledge about language, the CLB framework refers to competence not only as knowledge but *skill* as well. Added to the fusion are the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Assessing language ability according to skill is a way of conceptualizing language that neither the Bachman and Palmer nor Celce-Murcia models seem to advocate because separating language into four skills reduces the holistic approach to language, that is, it should be task-based, situated within a context. Bachman and Palmer (1996) explain their understanding of skill:

> [l]anguage ‘skills’ are not part of language ability, but consist of specific activities or tasks in which language is used purposefully. We would therefore include only the relevant components of language ability in the construct definition, and specify the ‘skill’ elements as characteristics of the tasks in which language ability is demonstrated (p. 130).
The CLB framework is a scale divided into twelve benchmarks and each benchmark is further divided into the four skill areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Embedded under each skill area are the tasks and performance outcomes. Bachman and Palmer (1996) explained that it is inadequate to conceive of language according to skill for two reasons. First, it classifies divergent language use tasks under a single skill. They explain that the four skills are categorized according to channel (audio, visual) and mode (receptive, productive). To demonstrate the problematic of conceiving language use by skill, Bachman and Palmer (1996) give the example of engaging in a face-to-face conversation and listening to a radio broadcast. Both become classified under listening skills, however, a face-to-face conversation involves speaking as well. Both speaking and listening are required for successful communication to occur. They cannot be measured separately according to Bachman and Palmer (1996). They explained that in such divisions, language use becomes decontextualized from how it is actually used. “We do not just ‘read’; we read about something specific, for some particular purpose, in a particular setting. That is, language use takes place, or is realized, in the performance of specific situated language use tasks” (p. 75). So, while the CLB 2000 directs users of the framework to consider contextual factors when they develop assessments, they are still required to separate and assess separate skills.

Given the problematic of dividing language according to skill, why then is CLB 2000 designed for the division of skills? Neither the CLB 2000 nor the Theoretical Framework provided any definitive explanation, however, the final purpose of the CLB framework, assigning a benchmark number, provides some clues. Benchmark numbers are descriptors of “what a learner can do at the time of performance assessment (for
placement) or evaluation (exit determination)” (CLB 2000, p. IX). As Chapter 6 demonstrates, numbers are expected to demonstrate objectivity and ease the complexity of decision-making with respect to IEPs’ language competence.

Much has been written on the elusive task of defining skill and determining measurability. In his critique of human capital theory, Brown (2001) explained that skill is difficult to define and measure. He further articulated, “the obsession with measurable outcomes has led [human capital approaches] to ignore the process of skill formation” (p. 25, emphasis in original). Indeed, in Chapter 6, I discuss the disjuncture the language experts encounter; in trying to meet the expectations of employers and funding bodies by supplying a number, the process of language learning becomes peripheral. Their discussions allude to Brown’s (2001) argument that “it is no longer helpful to think of skills as an appendage to the person who possesses them. Skill acquisition is not a technical formality. The embodiment of what it means to be skilled including cognitive, emotional, and cultural facets, also leads to a better understanding of how these are socially constructed” (p. 16).

In sum, for information to move smoothly between localities and be transformed into standardized knowledge and practices, common frameworks are necessary. Competency-based approaches to education are one means that attempts to standardize the knowledge and performance outcomes that learners are expected to exhibit. However, such frameworks are often conceptualized in such a way that skills are divided into discrete and measurable tasks, problematically disembodying learners from the contexts in which they work and learn.
2.4 Summary of Chapter

In this thesis, the knowledge economy is understood as a set of internationally-derived discourses, influencing the direction of national policy formation. While Schugurensky (2007) questions the existence of a knowledge economy in Canada, knowledge economy discourses have material effects. They have influenced Canada’s immigration policies such that highly educated and skilled knowledge workers are recruited through a point system. They have also influenced the work practices of knowledge workers such as language experts who are expected to standardize knowledge through textual practices so that immigrants’ knowledge of the English language can be assessed. The processes of standardizing knowledge, however, also raise questions about the recognition of knowledge in workplaces (Farrell & Fenwick, 2007b). Knowledge that is tacit and embodied is difficult to codify and standardize. Knowledge that falls outside the standard often does not receive recognition.

Discourses on the knowledge economy have also influenced education policies. Following the discussion of the knowledge economy, I considered the literature on language education policy. This section articulated the ways that education policies construct categories of learners generally and more specifically with respect to language abilities. An emerging field within language education conceives of languages not as fixed and static systems, but as constituted through social practices that are locally situated and negotiated among communities. This perspective is informative for conceptualizing the struggles and tensions that emerge when English language skills are assessed according to national policy articulations.
Finally, in juxtaposition to the theoretical perspective that languages are social practices, the chapter considered the theoretical foundations of competency-based education frameworks and their connection to knowledge economy discourses. Such frameworks create hierarchies of skill against which workers’ performance is measured and categorized. Competence is constructed as a static and fixed set of skills that can be standardized and assessed accurately rather than a dynamic set of embodied and socially embedded processes.

The discussion in this chapter foreshadows an analysis of the political terrain, elaborated on in Chapter 4, from which the CLB emerged and is currently expanding. Who participates in the regulation of language assessment and profiling? What are the power relations among the participants? This chapter also sets the stage for problematizing, not only the division of skill discussed in Chapter 5, but also how some forms of knowledge are legitimized to the exclusion of other forms, discussed in Chapter 6.
3 Methodology

While discourse analysis of policy texts analyzes official scripts and prescribed solutions to a social problem, it does not illuminate the everyday work of the people responsible for implementing a policy. Institutional ethnography, however, through the concept of standpoint situates people’s everyday lives and experiences as the starting point of inquiry into the social context (Smith, 2005). Investigation into a social problem involves analyzing people’s experiences, and the organization of their work practices, in relation to texts. Rather than focusing on people’s interpretations of the text, as in the hermeneutic tradition, institutional ethnography is interested in investigating how a text organizes and co-ordinates people’s practices and work activities across various locations (DeVault, 2008a; Smith, 2005). Institutional ethnography is interested in how official texts such as policies mediate people’s actions.

In this chapter I elaborate on the key concepts of institutional ethnography as they pertain to my study. While I discuss the stages of the research process, I also articulate my conceptualization of these key concepts: standpoint, texts, social and ruling relations, in connection to the problematic under investigation. Phase one details the process of identifying the disjuncture, problematic and standpoint. In many respects, this process started long before my formal research began. As I articulated in Chapter 1, gaining awareness of the problematic arose from my personal experiences and observations (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Rankin & Campbell, 2006; Smith, 1987). In this section I also discuss institutional ethnography’s theoretical conceptions of texts and social relations. Phase two discusses my process of entering the field formally. I explain the process of recruiting participants as well as the ease and challenge of interviewing research
participants as I endeavored to understand how the *CLB 2000* was organizing their work practices. During the interviews the social relations of their work became evident. The information the research participants provided served to emphasize that it took much more than the policy text to sustain language education and assessment of internationally educated professionals (IEPs). I discuss the process of analysis and writing in the third phase. This process was, and continues to be, personally challenging as I strive to represent the participants’ experiences fairly while still maintaining my sights on understanding the institutional order. The final section articulates some of my concluding reflections on conducting this study.

3.1 Key Concepts: Texts and Social Relations

Institutional ethnography is concerned with understanding how texts coordinate and organize people’s experiences and activities across locations. Smith (2005) explained that the local and daily aspects of our lives are increasingly organized and regulated through institutions such as governments and corporations and one method for regulating people’s activities is through the proliferation of texts. It is important to note here how “institution” is conceptualized in institutional ethnography.

[Institution] points to clusters of text-mediated relations organized around specific ruling functions, such as education or health care. Institution, in this usage, does not refer to a particular type of organization; rather, it is meant to inform a project of empirical inquiry, directing the researcher’s attention to coordinated and intersecting work processes taking place in multiple sites (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 17).
This understanding of institution enables the researcher to move beyond the walls of one organization or agency. Therefore, in the case of English language assessment in Canada, it enables the researcher to look at the processes of assessment in more than one educational institution. It also facilitates an inquiry into other locales where discourses on language assessment circulate such as provincial governments or the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks.

The relationship between the daily aspects of life and these institutions constitute Smith’s notion of ruling relations. Ruling relations are “that extraordinary yet ordinary complex of relations that are textually mediated, that connect us across space and time and organize our everyday lives” (Smith, 2005). Ruling occurs when local knowledge that emerges from people’s work practice is subordinated to textually discursive knowledge such as that articulated in official texts. According to Smith (2005), texts are an element of social relations and contribute to the formation of institutional realities. Investigating people’s standpoint and the ways that official texts organize their work activities form a methodology for understanding how institutional realities emerge.

Campbell and Gregor (2002) asserted that professional relationships in human services such as education and health care have become increasingly text-mediated through forms, records and reports. They further explained that the textual mediation of our professional relationships is “a commonplace and normally unquestioned occurrence” (p. 36). Information in texts often represents official discourses or ways of viewing the world. In the case of this study, the CLB 2000 is the main text designed to mediate the language experts and government administrators’ understandings of English language assessment. As I explained in chapter 2, the CLB 2000 contains particular constructs on
how language should be assessed and measured. When a reader activates the information in a text such as the *CLB 2000*, the discourses articulated in the text become a significant source for knowledge generation. Such knowledge forms the basis for legitimated text-mediated knowing, to the exclusion of other practice-based, arguably less valued, forms of knowing.

Texts also mediate relationships and contribute to organizing ruling relations through people’s activation of texts (Smith, 1999). Smith (2005) asserted that the subject positions assigned to readers within a text are formed intertextually; texts at one level inform the contents and subject positions in other texts contributing to the formation of institutional realities. Smith (2005) explained, however, that the subject positions within texts are often disconnected from the embodied and local realities of the readers and listeners. Texts and text-mediated practices categorize and differentiate people, reflecting organizational interests, which are ruling interests (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). As I explain in chapters 5 and 6, the language experts activate the *CLB 2000* text to profile the language requirements for the professions. While the information in the text becomes a perspective for understanding and measuring IEPs’ language competency for the language experts, they also encounter disjuncture between the experiential knowledge of their teaching and assessment practices and the discourses promoted in the CLB text.

An important point to understanding how intertextuality contributes to ruling relations is the replicability of texts. Smith (2005) explained:

It is the replicability of texts that sub structs the ruling relations: replicability is a condition of their existence. The capacity to coordinate people’s doings translocally depends on the ability of the texts, as a material thing, to turn up in identical form wherever the reader, hearer, or watcher may be in her or his bodily being. And when we are addressing institutions, as we are for the most part in institutional ethnography, we must be particularly aware of the role of texts in the
generalization of social organization that we take for granted when we use the term (p. 166).

The *CLB 2000* fulfills replicability in at least two ways. First, it is meant to standardize and regulate the practices of English language teaching and assessment across Canada. While it is questionable as to how consistent it has been in achieving standardization broadly within in Canada, it nonetheless is influencing conceptions of English language assessment and teaching. Second, the *CLB 2000* has become the dominant document for all CLB initiatives. It is the foundation on which all derivative documents are developed. Therefore, while the knowledge content of nursing, engineering and accounting differ significantly; the conceptions of English language competency articulated in the *CLB 2000* are the lens through which language proficiency for working in those professions is understood.

As Smith (2005) explained, the physical and material existence of the text organizes the reading of the text to some degree. However, she also explained that texts are not static entities. Texts are activated through a text-reader conversation that takes place in real time and local settings. By trying to understand how people activate texts across contexts enables an exploration beyond the local to the wider institutional order (Smith, 2005). Texts constitute people’s activities in the activated text-reader conversation (Smith, 2005). Through the text-reader conversation, institutional discourses attempt to regulate people’s activities. Investigating the language experts’ work with the *CLB 2000* in three different professions in varying locations provides insights into the institutional order of English language assessment in Canada.

According to Smith (2005), the text exerts substantial control through the structure of its words and sentences, which activate the readers’ responses. In this sense,
the reader is the text’s agent (Smith, 2005). The reader cannot avoid being the text’s agent; however, agreement with the text is not automatic. The reader can resist, disagree or reject the text’s agenda, nonetheless institutional texts are designed in such a way as to coordinate and regulate people’s activities within institutional settings (Smith, 2005). In institutional ethnography, an important transfer occurs when knowing moves from the first-hand knowing of the subject to text-mediated knowing. The institutional ethnographer explores ruling practices and associated text-based discourses. As I explain in chapters 5 and 6, the language experts and government administrators do exhibit moments of resistance to and disagreement with the text and attempt to promote alternate discourses. Nonetheless, outright rejection of the text is not possible if they want to retain their work in assessment. They are continually drawn into the language and institutional talk of the CLB.

Institutional ethnography focuses on how discourse becomes an organizer of experience while keeping the subject or knower at the centre of analysis (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Campbell and Gregor (2002) explained that Smith is interested in understanding how people participate in discursive activity. Discursive activity is not done to people, but through their everyday lives, people participate in discourse. Smith (2005) asserted that to understand discursive activity, the ethnographer has to explore how institutional texts are designed, and how they organize and regulate social relations and people’s work. Rather than seeing texts as inert objects, Smith (2005) saw them as documents in action because they are located in the local and temporal world of people’s lives and coordinate people’s activities in the organization of ruling relations. Texts are not separate from context, but contribute to organizing the context of the institutional
order. The reader activates the text by becoming the text’s agent, and then he/she responds to the text through his/her action. It is then possible to see the reader-activated text as participating in the organizing of a definite sequence of action within the context of the institution.

3.2 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are framed differently in institutional ethnography compared with other methodologies in sociology (Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) explained that historically, “sociology was not designed for exploring the institutional relations and organization from the standpoint of people” (p. 28). She argued that the focus of sociological research has been to establish an objective account of the truth. Instead, institutional ethnography is concerned with understanding the range of perspectives and power relations that constitute a social problem. Institutional ethnography “proposes to enlarge the scope of what becomes visible from that site [of the social problem], mapping the relations that connect one local site to another” (Smith, 2005, p. 29). Institutional ethnography seeks to map a variety of perspectives, understanding them in relation to the texts that organize people’s daily work activities.

Ideally, the institutional ethnographer would enfold both agents (producers) and subjects (users) of the texts into the data dialogue (Walby, 2005). Because the map making is based on more than one individual account, the ethnography includes a range of differences in experience and engagement with text. The ethnographer uses information from one participant to check information from other participants to provide for a range of views on the problematic (Smith, 2005). A process of comparing perspectives with the key texts that organize experiences contributes to the development
of the map. The map expands as more information is gathered in a process of work-textwork (Walby, 2005). The ethnographer is in a continual dialogue with participants about their work and experiences that shifts to examining texts and then shifts again to work and experience as more information emerges for understanding the problematic. The institutional ethnographer provides an account of how local knowledge is constructed and connected to sites beyond the experiential setting (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Each stage of the research sets the path for the next stage in conjunction with the reflexive judgment of the ethnographer in mapping so that knowledge can be accessible from various positions within the map.

3.3 Entering the Field

Emergent inquiry is a central component of institutional ethnography and therefore makes planning the research project challenging. DeVault and McCoy (2006) explained that “the process of inquiry is rather like grabbing a ball of string, finding the thread, and then pulling it out; that is why it is difficult to specify in advance exactly what the research will consist of” (p. 20). Therefore, before I began interviewing participants, I attended two key events in 2009 that assisted me in identifying threads to explore with participants.

The first was a two-day meeting as part of the national consultations for the revisions to the CLB 2000. The consultations were held by the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks and were intended to gather the ideas of various stakeholders on the current state of the benchmarks and possibilities for further development of the framework. At the meeting I attended in a city located in Western Canada, between 25 and 30 participants attended each day. Participants included representatives from sector
councils, university and college administrators, executive directors of immigrant service organizations, representatives from the provincial government, and language instructors from various institutions. While my field notes from this event are only referred to minimally in the thesis, attending the meeting alerted me to the range of stakeholders who had an interest in the CLB. It was also apparent from this meeting that while most of the participants seemed to perceive the CLB as a valid framework, how well it was working and the future purposes of the policy were contested.

The second event was the Teaching English-as-a-Second Language (TESL) Canada conference in October 2009 held in Banff, Alberta. Two sessions at this conference were particularly noteworthy. One was a workshop held by the Language Team for the ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) titled Toward an Enhanced Language Assessment System. The purpose of the session was to articulate CIC’s vision for language assessment and to receive feedback from the audience on that vision. In my field notes I commented, “the room is packed. All the chairs are taken and people are standing along the back wall and sitting on the floor along the sides of the room. There could be a hundred people here.” Evidently conference participants were interested to hear CIC’s plans. Over the course of an hour-and-a-half, the director for the language team articulated the vision for language assessment in Canada. It would consist of two parts: a progress assessment in the form of portfolios based on the CLB and an outcomes assessment in the form of a CLB-based language milestone test. CIC is “seeking to expand standardization because practices among teachers vary and are not standardized” (field notes, October 2, 2009). After the presentation, the audience was divided into small groups to discuss the vision followed by a final debriefing with
representatives from each group reporting on the discussions. In a similar vein to the consultation meeting in January, this workshop indicated the contested terrain of the CLB framework. Participants raised concerns about training to develop portfolios, teaching to the test, challenges in achieving consistency in assessment, and the establishment of another hurdle for EAL learners to jump over.

I also attended a half-day symposium at this conference where consultants and researchers from across Canada presented their work on the development and implementation of occupation-specific language assessment tests and programs. The symposium included presentations on profiling the language requirements for the food processing industry, machine operating in manufacturing industries, medical laboratory technicians, engineering, nursing, and applied college programs. Pharmacy and accounting were also mentioned as professions where exploratory work in profiling was emerging. It was evident that the trend toward profiling occupations was becoming more prevalent. By attending this symposium I was also able to see that the process of profiling was generally similar for all the occupations and that the researchers and consultants encountered similar challenges. I was, therefore, able to explore some of these challenges in interviews with the participants. It was also evident that the unifying element in all the profiling work was the *CLB 2000* text. As Smith (2005; 2006) explained, texts coordinate and standardize work practices across various locations. “Replicable and replicated texts are essential to the standardizing of work activities of all kinds across time and translocally. It is the constancy of the text that provides for standardization” (Smith, 2005, p. 166). While profiling was happening in different parts of Canada and in a range of occupations, in this symposium it became evident that the
CLB 2000 was the unifying text. However, as I discuss in chapters 5 and 6, attempts to standardize work practices are not without challenges, tensions, and contestation.

While the symposium was the most pertinent to my study, the other two events were informative in that they gave me some insights into the politics of the field. Even though the CLB framework was changing the landscape of English language assessment in Canada, resistance and conflicting perspectives on the purposes and effectiveness was evident. Along with the connections I had made while teaching IEPs, these events also enabled me to identify some of the actors involved in language assessment in Canada who could potentially participate in the research.

3.3.1 Recruitment of Participants – February to October 2010

I sent twenty research invitations to language experts located in five provinces (see Appendix A). Eleven participants, located in eight institutions and agencies, from three provinces agreed to be interviewed. The differing locales enabled me to investigate how the CLB text coordinated and organized participants’ work activities in different contexts. Even though I had identified the experiences of the language experts as an entry point for the inquiry, I wanted to expand the investigation. Institutional ethnography seeks to understand the coordination of people’s activities through the web of social relations and the ways people’s participation contributes to the existence of the institutional order (Smith, 2005). To understand these relations, I wanted to include interviews with current or former government administrators or officials, employees and board members of the CCLB, and members of professional regulatory bodies who had been involved in the profiling projects for their prospective professions. In this case, I sent out fifteen invitations and received only four replies. One reply was from a member
of the nursing profession who initially agreed to be interviewed, but later declined because of scheduling issues. I also received a reply from an assessor for the nursing profession who declined to be interviewed citing unspecified “ethical issues” with the CELBAN that she did not feel comfortable discussing. From the remaining thirteen invitations, two provincial government administrators agreed to be interviewed.

Even though I had identified the experiences of the language experts as a place to begin the inquiry, entering the field by recruiting participants was simultaneously easy and challenging. Most of the participants who agreed to be interviewed were eager to participate. They wanted to discuss their experiences and share the knowledge they had gained from working with the CLB. Although I could not reveal whom the other participants were, they were curious to hear about other experiences. A few participants, however, approached the project cautiously. They wanted to know details about the methodology and who would have access to the completed thesis. Although I had been an EAL instructor and had worked in programs designed according to the CLB framework, in some senses I was an outsider to many of the participants. They identified with me as a language instructor, but I had not been intimately involved in the processes of profiling for the professions. To ease their concerns I provided more detailed information about my methodology to the participants who requested it. I also ensured that they would receive a copy of the interview transcripts and could make any changes as they saw fit.

Their caution is understandable. As my observations from the consultations and workshops I attended indicate, the CLB is a contested territory. In addition, those currently involved in profiling the language requirements for occupations form a small,
albeit expanding, cadre. Citing the institutions or even the provinces in which they work could hinder their anonymity. Therefore, in order to respect their anonymity, I have not specified the institutions or the provinces in which they work.

3.3.2 The Participants

In the end, I interviewed thirteen participants located in three Canadian provinces. Eleven of the participants were language experts and two were provincial government administrators. They are examples of the front-line workers who are charged with the responsibility of implementing the CLB 2000. While I will refer to the participants as either language experts or government administrators, they all have adopted various roles. The range and depth of their experiences provide insights into the contours of the English language assessment landscape in Canada. Their experience in the field of language education ranged from four years to thirty years. Since the early 1990s, when consultations on developing benchmarks began, the various positions the participants have held include instructor, language consultant, program administrator, provincial government administrator, language researcher, and board member for the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks. The one role, however, that they have all undertaken is that of English language instructor.

Rather than giving the participants pseudonyms, I have chosen to identify the participants according to their position in the institutional order (e.g. Language researcher, program administrator). My reason for this is not only to protect their anonymity, but also to maintain the focus of my analysis on the institutional work processes. DeVault and McCoy (2006) explained that the goal of institutional ethnography is not to articulate categorical descriptions of individualized experience, but
for analyses to trace how people working in different locales are “drawn into a common set of organizational processes” (p. 32). The aim is to avoid what McCoy (2006) called “unintended analytical drift,” that is, where the “analytic focus shifts from the institution to the informants” (p. 109). Indicating their positions provides some indication of their standpoint and how they came to participate in the processes of language assessment and profiling the language requirements for the professions.

Language experts – These participants have educational backgrounds in either education or applied linguistics. They hold certificates, diplomas, or degrees in English Language Teaching (ELT). Eight of the participants were working or had worked as consultants and researchers for developing occupation-specific language exams and/or profiling the language demands for applied and bridging programs. Five of them were or had been employed by community colleges, two by universities, and one by an immigrant service agency at the time of interviewing. While my interest was in the work they had done or were doing with respect to nursing, engineering, and accounting, collectively their experiences with profiling the language requirements for programs including occupations such as hospitality, tourism, construction, and computer technology. The focus of the interviews was on their role as consultants and researchers, nonetheless they have many responsibilities and take on multiple roles including instructor, program administrator, assessor, grant and report writer, and member of advisory committees for profession-specific language exam and program development. Three of the eleven participants were working solely as language instructors in programs designed to assist with transition to employment or professional bridging programs at the time of the interviews. Two were
employed at community colleges and the other one was working at an immigrant service organization. Three of the eleven participants had been involved in the initial consultation processes to develop the CLB in the 1990s and seven of them had participated in the 2009 national consultations for revising the *CLB 2000*.

*Government administrators* – At the time of interviewing, two participants were working for two different provincial governments in departments that are responsible for labour market integration of immigrants. The departments they worked in are responsible for supporting the implementation of the *CLB 2000* in various types of programs at the provincial level. Their work, however, was specifically focused on supporting language programs for workplace and employment integration using the CLB framework. Some of their responsibilities included training teachers for employment-related language programs, coordinating language programs with employers, and supporting community colleges in the development of profession-specific language exams and programs.

3.3 Interviewing: The Work of Texts and Social Relations

Interviewing participants at multiple institutions in three provinces meant that I could not conduct all of the interviews in person. Therefore, seven of the thirteen participants were interviewed by telephone while I was able to interview six of the participants in person. Three of the in-person interviews occurred in the participants’ workplaces. In these spaces I was able to glimpse the rhythm of their daily work (e.g. interruptions by colleagues and students). The other three participants I interviewed were not comfortable with meeting in their place of work and requested that we meet in coffee shops. They indicated that they would be able to express themselves more freely if we
met outside their work context. Five of the participants I talked with by phone were at work during the interviews. Even though I could not see what their offices looked like, I did hear indications of their work context (e.g. walking to the bookshelf to get a copy of the document we were discussing, the “ping” of emails arriving, the office door opening and closing). Two of the participants asked to be contacted at their homes. While telephone interviews are probably not considered ideal for an ethnographic study, they do have some advantages. I found that I could listen more intently to the participants’ descriptions because I was not distracted by the visual cues of an unfamiliar environment. I also found that I was able to take more notes than I would in a face-to-face interview and this enabled me to articulate follow-up questions more smoothly.

Each interview was approximately 1 to 1.5 hours long. All the interviews were transcribed and participants were provided with copies of the transcripts for verification. Five of the participants provided comments of clarification on the transcripts or by email and I was able to conduct 20-to 30-minute follow-up interviews with three of the participants to clarify questions I had.

Broadly, the interview questions can be divided into three categories. First, I wanted to learn more about each participants particular work context and how they, and their institutions where they worked, had become involved in the work of developing profession-specific language programs and exams. Second, I wanted to explore how the CLB 2000 text had changed their practices of language teaching and shaped their work of profiling language for occupations. As it turns out, some of the participants’ work was influenced by the circumstances of the particular province in which they worked, and required some exploration of these particular locales. Third, interviews also involved
discussions on the social relations of their work, that is, how they were drawn into working with employers, professional licensing bodies, and funding bodies.

Collectively, the experiences of the language experts and the government administrators bring multiple perspectives on the terrain of English language assessment in Canada. The purpose of interviewing in institutional ethnography “is not to generalize about the group of people interviewed, but to find and describe social processes that have generalizing effects. Thus interviewees located somewhat differently are understood to be subject, in various ways, to discursive and organizational processes that shape their activities” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 18). Therefore, while my interviews included general questions that were asked of all the participants about how they use the CLB 2000, for example. I wanted to understand how the processes of language profiling and assessment were similarly constituted across the eight institutions and agencies in which the language experts worked. At the same time, some of the questions emerged from the specificities of each interviewee’s work or provincial context. For example, language experts working in immigrant service organizations encountered different kinds of financial constraints compared with language experts working in community colleges. In a sense, interviews with some participants informed the questions asked of participants in subsequent interviews because I wanted to understand how activities were similarly and differently organized across multiple sites.

While the participants were eager to talk about their experiences, interviewing did pose some challenges. Most of the participants have been immersed in the field of English language assessment in Canada for several years. They were teaching and consulting when the buzz of the benchmarks began in the 1990s and their work has been
affected by the *CLB 2000* inception in the early 2000s. Therefore, they have become submerged in the discourses and institutional talk of the CLB over the last decade.

DeVault and McCoy (2006) explained that interviewing frontline workers is challenging because they “have been trained to use the very concepts and categories that institutional ethnographers wish to unpack, and they are accustomed to speaking from within a ruling discourse” (p. 28). In order to unpack some of these discourses, I made a concerted effort during the interviews to not only ask participants about how they go about their work, but also to discuss the challenges and tensions they encounter with the processes, texts, and social relations that constitute language teaching and assessment. I also asked participants to discuss changes they would like to see in design and implementation of the CLB. The workshops and symposiums I attended before I began interviews gave me some indication that language assessment in Canada is a contested terrain. The interviews provided an opportunity to explore the depths of contestation.

3.4 Analysis and Writing the Social

Analysis in institutional ethnography begins in the experiences of the participants and proceeds through continual and intersecting dialogues (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Smith, 2005). Understanding social organization through people’s experiences and relevant texts requires examining the language and discourses of the texts and how these organize people’s actions. DeVault (2008b) explained that the researcher must insist “on grounding the organizing effects of discursive regimes in the activities of people who take up and use texts. . . .[and is] concerned with people’s lives and how texts are used in those lives” (p. 295). Therefore, analysis involves what Smith (2005) called continual intersecting dialogues or the text-reader conversation. The first conversation occurs
during the interviewing stage when the researcher attempts to understand how the
interviewee reads and interprets the text, and in turn how this reading organizes activity
(Smith, 2005).

I would argue that, in many respects, my analysis of language assessment in
Canada began in 2004 when I was teaching IEPs and began asking questions about the
problematic of language assessment. However, as Campbell and Gregor (2002)
explained, the intent of institutional ethnography is to identify and trace “the social
relations that extend beyond the boundaries of any one informant’s experiences” (p. 90).
Therefore, examining the social organization of activities and knowledge involves an
ongoing analysis of the researcher’s observations, field notes, the interview transcripts,
and relevant texts. In my estimation, analysis in institutional ethnography evokes a sense
of movement. Analysis in institutional ethnography is anything but linear and does not
involve developing codes and placing chunks of data into themes (Campbell & Gregor,
2002). Instead, it involves a continual dialogue with data and continuous writing to make
sense of how activities and events occur. As Campbell and Gregor (2002) explained, the
researcher has to “be prepared to write and rewrite” (p. 93).

To illustrate, I took notes and formulated questions while I was attending
workshops and symposium. I also read the relevant CLB texts and websites, again
making notes and asking questions. These notes and questions served as the basis for
articulating my interview questions. After each interview, I wrote notes and questions
and sometimes referred back to the CLB texts. In some cases, I would investigate
additional documents or policies a participant had mentioned during the interviews if they
were available to me. These notes and questions often informed follow-up exchanges I
would have with a participant or they informed some of the questions I would ask subsequent interviewees.

3.4.1 Mapping the Institutional Order

A second level of analysis occurs when the researcher engages in a second dialogue with interview transcripts and field notes. McCoy (2006) described this level of analysis as similar to doing another interview, but it involves an interview with the data to examine how people talk about their experiences. This can involve generating a specific list of questions (see below a and b) that guides analysis. These questions enable the researcher to consider how work is similarly and differently constituted across sites. In particular, by asking questions of the interview data and the texts, the researcher pays attention to the institutional or ruling discourses taken up by the participants. McCoy (2006) stressed that the analytic interest in investigating how people participate in institutional discourse is not to slot participants into a typology that assesses their knowledge of or resistance to institutional talk. Instead, “the analytic interest lies in discovering how the discourse operates in people’s lives and what difference it makes for people to participate or not to participate in the discourse in various ways” (McCoy, 2006, p. 121).

In addition to examining how participants were taking up institutional talk, I traced their oppositional talk, that is, the way they described their experiences to resist the institutional discourses of language assessment expressed in the CLB text and by other actors involved in the profiling processes. McCoy (2006) explained that oppositional talk does not explicitly mean in opposition to, but indicates “differences between the institutional discourse and the forms of knowing and being the speaker feels to be
preferable; it does not necessarily imply ignorance of the dominant discourse (p. 120).

Therefore, in my analysis I listened for how the participants talked about the challenges they encountered in their work. For example, how was the text-mediated knowing different from the knowing the participants encountered in their daily work practices? How was their understanding of communication in the workplace different from the employers and professional licensing bodies they worked with?

Following is a list of questions I asked during the analysis stage:

a. Analytical questions about the policy texts:

1) How is the policy problem articulated in the text? Who is involved in addressing the problem? How are their roles and responsibilities articulated?

2) What are the words and phrases used to articulate language competency and proficiency? How are knowledge and skill described with respect to language competency? To what extent do these articulations resonate with the discourses of the knowledge economy? Are there traces of gendered, racialized, and classed discourses?

3) How are social relations articulated in the documents? How are the relations between the state, immigrants, language education experts, professional bodies and employers described? How is the reader guided to make decisions about the competency of a learner’s language capability?

4) How do Benchmarks (numerical representations of competency) construct a system of classification?

b. Analytic questions for the research interviews
1) How do the participants articulate the policy problem? What phrases and expressions do they use to articulate the problematic?

2) How do the participants and their institutions come to be involved in the process of developing profession-specific language programs and assessment tools? How do they interpret the CLB texts and make decisions about which knowledge (e.g. linguistic, professional) and skill (e.g. speaking, reading, etc., skill for completing activities specific to the occupation) to include in the programs and assessment tests? Which knowledge and skill do they exclude? How do they make these decisions? What do they need to know in order to develop profession-specific language programs and assessment tools? What other information or documents do they need in order to develop the programs and assessment tools?

3) How do the research participants talk about immigrants’ language competency? What are the words and phrases they use to describe language competency and proficiency? How do they describe the relationship between the benchmarks (the numerical representations) and competency? How do they describe knowledge and skill with respect to language competency?

4) How do the participants take up institutional talk, that is, the official discourses (the shared professional, managerial, or authoritative ways of knowing – measuring, naming, describing) found in the documents? Is there oppositional talk? What form does it take?
5) Which discourses are replicable in the text and actions of the actors? How do these discourse become replicable? What are the oppositional discourses? How do they emerge and replicate?

Analysis, however, does not end with examining the discourses and work of the participants. The researcher has a responsibility to map the sequences of work and texts (Turner, 2006) or as Rankin and Campbell (2006) explained, “to ‘join the dots’ and advance analysis” (p. 182). Joining the dots is a project of empirical inquiry in which the researcher attempts to explain the social organization of knowledge and to show how work processes in multiple sites are coordinated and intersecting (DeVault & McCoy, 2006). Smith (2005) explained that the work of carrying out an institutional ethnography is a “sometimes difficult enterprise,” but after its completion it can be a resource that participants can integrate into their daily practices. My hope is that by presenting aspects of this study to the research participants that knowledge of the institutional discourses and the disjuncture they encounter between text-mediated knowing and their knowing in practice can open conversations for articulating alternate conceptions of English language learning and assessment.

3.5 Summary of Chapter

Institutional ethnography is an effective methodology for examining the policy processes, social relations, and textual practices of profiling and assessing the language demands for the professions. It enables the researcher to understand a problematic from the standpoint of people who encounter struggles and tensions in their work practices. Experience, however, is not the analytical endpoint. Through an analysis of key texts, the researcher is able to explore how texts regulate, organize and coordinate people’s work
practices. It demonstrates how people’s practice-based knowledge is subjugated to text-mediated knowing. By investigating people’s textual practices, the researcher can expand the web of analysis to also consider the power and social relations as well as the institutional and oppositional discourses that organize work practices. Assembling a map of how work is organized can serve as an informative tool for workers to transform their work practices. The next chapter begins assembling the map by examining the key institutions that sustain the regulation of language profiling and assessment in the professions.
4 Sustaining the Regulation of Language Assessment: Institutions and Social Relations

"One person's infrastructure may be another's barrier" (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 34).

The practices of English language profiling and assessment in the professions in Canada are organized and regulated through the social relations of disparate groups. This chapter examines four of the institutions involved in the coordination of language profiling and assessment. While there are likely others, these were the four that figured most prominently in the research. Even though the CLB 2000 is the text that bridges these institutions together, the practices of language profiling and assessment are constituted through the collaboration of people working in these four organizations across various work sites. These institutions provide funding, personnel, and leadership for the implementation of the CLB and therefore, they are necessary components for sustaining the work of language profiling and assessment. No single institution is responsible for the work of language assessment and they are all drawn into the work of assessment in different ways. They take on different roles and some are more dominant than others in the processes. Together, though, the combined work of these institutions constitutes a kind of infrastructure in which the work of language profiling and assessment occurs.

While the collaboration among these institutions is by no means uniform, by working together they form a network that sustains the processes of language profiling and assessment for the professions. As Bowker and Star (1999) explained, it is impossible to map completely the countless relationships that sustain a network or
infrastructure, but “it is possible to get at least a gestalt sense of the issues involved” (p. 283). The chapter provides a sense of how organizations and people work together to sustain the processes of language assessment in the professions.

In the following sections, I examine each institution’s role in constituting the processes of language assessment. I do so by examining how the institutions participate in the work of implementing the CLB for profiling language in the professions and by considering the social relations of the institution. In addition to examining the experiences of the language experts and government administrators, I also analyze various reports, mission statements, and government documents to explore how the practices of language profiling and assessment are codified through text into institutional practice through these institutions.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, the organization responsible for maintaining the integrity of the benchmarks. While the Centre’s mandate stipulates that it oversee the promotion of the benchmarks, its status as a non-profit organization and the project-by-project funding that sustains it, prevent it from mandating the consistent and cohesive implementation of the benchmarks across the country. Therefore, it requires the support of various levels of government and educational institutions to carry out its mandate. The second section discusses the role of provincial governments in supplying financial resources and support for implementing the CLB. Not all provincial governments, however, support the implementation of the CLB equally. Some provide funding for CLB-related projects such as profiling the language demands for the professions, while others mandate that provincial EAL teacher associations provide instructors with
professional development workshops in using the *CLB 2000*. The extent to which each province embraces the CLB is often based on the levels of immigration in a given province. The extent to which the provinces support the CLB varies; therefore, even though use of the CLB is becoming widespread, it is not implemented coherently across the country.

The third section examines community colleges and immigrant services organizations where the actual work of profiling the language demands for the professions occurs. These organizations are drawn into the work of profiling by key members of their instructional and administrative staff. These organizations were involved in the early development of the CLB framework in the 1990s and, through their involvement, they established the institutional capacity to develop profession-specific exams and programs. These institutions and the language experts they employ figure prominently in the daily work of language profiling and assessment for the professions. Finally, the chapter considers the involvement of professional regulatory bodies. While these groups have been involved in the processes of developing language exams and programs, there is no legal obligation mandating that they use or promote the exams and programs.

4.1 The Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB)

The CCLB is the organization mandated with the responsibility for promoting the *CLB 2000* as the national framework for all aspects of language education for immigrant adults in Canada. While it plays a key role in the organization of language assessment, its influence is limited by factors such as its status as a non-profit organization and its
funding arrangements with the provincial and federal governments. In many respects, the CCLB takes on a coordinating role rather than its mandated role as a leader.

The history of the CCLB dates back to the 1990s. During the consultation and development processes of the *CLB 2000* that occurred from 1992 to 1996, the National Working Group on Language Benchmarks determined that an agency outside government was needed to oversee further development and implementation of the *CLB 2000* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005). In 1998 the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) was established as a non-profit organization based in Ottawa, Ontario. An executive director leads the Centre and the staff has grown from six in 2001 to fourteen in 2012, including project managers, financial and administrative support (www.language.ca). The Centre is overseen by a board of directors (thirteen members as of 2012) and consists of provincial government representatives, regional ESL field expert members, members of the national ESL organization (TESL Canada), and Francophone and refugee community representatives. The Centre is sustained financially through both project-by-project funding and in-kind contributions from the federal government (the Ministries of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Human Resource and Skills Development Canada) and various provincial governments (e.g. Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia).

The language experts explain that the CCLB “wants to be perceived as the go-to organization” for all initiatives related to the Canadian Language Benchmarks.

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13 I could not find any documentation indicating how the board is chosen. The language experts who had sat on the board, however, indicated that the EAL teachers’ association for the province in which they worked nominated them. In my review of the Annual Reports, I noted that some of the provincial government members were directors or managers of provincial government departments that oversee portfolios related to labour, employment, and immigration.
(Community college instructor, former CCLB board member). Indeed, its vision and mission statements say as much:

Canadian Language Benchmarks and Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens will be the national standards for describing, measuring and recognizing English and French language proficiency of adult immigrants and prospective immigrants for living and working in Canada (www.language.ca).

The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks provides the leadership and expertise to preserve the integrity, promote the use and support application of the Canadian Language Benchmarks and Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens as practical, fair and reliable national standards of English and French language proficiency in educational, training, community and workplace settings (www.language.ca).

The Centre works to fulfill its mission by coordinating a range of projects and initiatives, in addition to partnering with provincial governments, sector councils, professional associations, and educational institutions (see Appendix E for a list of CCLB initiatives). With respect to occupation-specific profiling, the CCLB organizes the development of profession-specific language exams and coordinates opportunities for the language experts to share their expertise as in the case of the symposium I attended in Banff.

Language researchers and consultants from across Canada were brought together to share their knowledge and experiences of profiling occupations such as nursing, food processing, computer operations in manufacturing, medical laboratory technicians, and engineering (field notes, October 1, 2009). In addition, with funding from the governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Manitoba, the CCLB has published a document outlining the processes involved in profiling the language demands for a profession or occupation (Developing an Occupation-Specific Language Assessment Tool Using the Canadian Language Benchmarks: A Guide for Trades and Professional Organizations, (2004). The purpose of this document is to assist other professional and
occupational groups with the processes and steps involved in undertaking projects to profile the language demands of any given professional or occupational group. The symposium and document publication are just two examples of how the CCLB coordinates the work of language profiling and assessment.

The Centre’s mandate is to provide leadership on CLB related initiatives in addition to promotion of and support for the implementation of the benchmarks. It is expected to bring together disparate groups who encounter similar challenges in making judgments about language competency and provide them with guidance about how to make those judgments. While the Centre does have a significant position in the language assessment network, overseeing all CLB-related initiatives is challenging if not impossible. First, the development of the CLB is a federal initiative that traverses into provincial territory. Even though issues of immigration fall under federal jurisdiction, oversight of education and the professions is under provincial jurisdiction. Therefore, as a not-for-profit agency the CCLB does not have the authority to regulate how the provinces organize language education and professional groups. Similarly, provincial professional groups are arms-length regulatory bodies that decide the criteria by which to assess and regulate professionals. So, while national organizations such as Canadian Nurses Association and Engineers Canada recommend that the provincial professional bodies use the CCLB developed exams, each provincial body decides whether they will use the exams to assess IEPs applying for professional licensure in that particular province.

A second challenge for the Centre is that its’ tenuous funding arrangements make it difficult for the Centre to maintain a coherent coordinating function across the country.
Several provincial governments provide funding to the CCLB for the development of national projects such as the *Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nursing (CELBAN)*. However, these same provincial governments have also provided funding for language education initiatives related to employment training generally and the professions specifically that remain within the borders of a given province, as in the case of the accounting and engineering program projects examined in this study. While the criteria stipulates that projects be developed following the CLB framework, these projects are not coordinated by the CCLB. As a result, CLB projects are being developed across the country at the provincial or local level, but as the language experts and government administrators explain, there is no mandate stating that the CCLB be informed that CLB-related projects are being undertaken. One of the language experts who have worked on engineering and accounting projects explains:

*I think it’s very difficult for [the CCLB] to keep track of all the work that’s happening in the provinces because the funding is so different. In some cases its shared provincial and federal funding. In some cases the Centre has a role and in other cases they don’t, so one of my recommendations in the consultation we did was that there be a very clear purposeful role for the Centre as a clearing house and there be mechanisms to support that.* [Language researcher/consultant, community college instructor]

All the language experts echo the above sentiment. They want the CCLB to serve as a national repository where information about all CLB-related projects is housed so that the language experts can learn from initiatives happening solely at the provincial or municipal level. From the language experts’ perspective, this would promote “best practices” in using the benchmarks. According to the report generated from the 2009 National Consultations, it appears that the language experts’ request has been heard. Of the 43 recommendations, an on-line repository to house research, applications, and tools
is deemed “urgent” (Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2010). So, while the CCLB has played a significant role in organizing some of the profession-specific language projects in addition to a range of other workplace, literacy, and settlement projects (see Appendix E for a list), its status as a not-for-profit and the funding mechanisms that sustain it make it challenging for it to oversee all CLB-related initiatives.

Consequently, funding for assessment and programming is provided through a complex web of federal government, provincial government and institutional funds. In some cases, project funding is coordinated through the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB). The CCLB receives funds to conduct occupation-specific profiling projects through combined funding from federal government ministries, such as Citizen and Immigration Canada or Human Resource and Social Development Canada, and the various provincial governments (www.language.ca). The CCLB vets Requests for Proposals (RFP) and chooses which organization or institution will conduct the profiling research and development. In other cases, funding is allocated through the Enhanced Language Training program, a federal government initiative that began in 2003-2004 and combines funding from provincial governments and vets proposals for projects to develop occupation-specific language programs. Projects must target internationally educated professionals or tradespeople who demonstrate an English language proficiency level between CLB 7 to 10 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008). So while these projects are mandated to use the CLB 2000 document, they are often not coordinated through the CCLB.
To illustrate, the development of CELBAN was coordinated through the CCLB and the Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia, and Manitoba provincial governments, and the Ontario Division of Citizenship and Immigration Canada provided funding at various stages of development (Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2003). In the case of developing occupation-specific programs for engineering discussed in this study, funding was accessed through a combination of provincial government funds and the Enhanced Language Training program. The accounting project discussed in the participant interviews was a joint-funding initiative between two provincial governments.

In sum, while the CCLB plays a significant role in coordinating some CLB-related initiatives, it does not have the financial resources or jurisdictional authority to oversee all projects nor ensure the consistent implementation of the framework across the country. Therefore, sustaining the work of language profiling and assessment requires additional actors and agencies, as I explain in the following sections.

4.2 The Provincial Governments

In addition to providing funding for CLB-related projects, provincial governments have taken on influential roles that contribute to sustaining the work of language assessment. While their degree of influence varies from province to province, collectively they wield substantial sway over the direction of the CLB. Some provincial governments embraced implementation of the CLB at the time of its release while others have been slower to incorporate it at the provincial level. In this section, I examine the influence provincial governments have had in coordinating the use of the CLB framework through an analysis of related documents and by drawing on the standpoint of language experts and government administrators working in two provinces. The kinds of
activities that the provinces undertake include professional development for instructors, providing information on the CLB framework to employers and professional bodies, and involvement on the CLB board of executive directors. The experiences of the language experts and government administrators in these two provinces demonstrate how the practices of language assessment are differently constituted across sites.

As I explained in Chapter 1, the provinces have had a more pronounced influence over Canada’s immigration policies over the last few decades. The language experts and government administrators explain that the focus on recruiting highly educated professionals has led to more pressure on provincial governments to provide English language programming for employment integration. Historically, English language programming for new immigrants was provided through the federal government (Joshee, 1996). In the late 1980s, the provincial governments expressed dissatisfaction with these programs, eventually leading to the development of the CLB framework (Derwing & Thomson, 2005). A scan of the Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba provincial websites indicates that provinces have become involved in providing a variety of language services mainly targeted at employers. These services range from: information about courses in specialized language training for specific occupations; language and diversity assessment toolkits for employers; coordination of provincial-employer sponsored workplace language training programs; and workplace mentoring programs that include language training. One of the provincial government

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14 Ontario see [http://www.search.gov.on.ca/FSS/ProcessSearch.do](http://www.search.gov.on.ca/FSS/ProcessSearch.do)
British Columbia see [http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/search/results.page?q=language+programs+for+employers](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/search/results.page?q=language+programs+for+employers)
administrators explains how the pressure for the provision of language services in the provinces has emerged:

There’s been a huge increase in immigration to [this province], then there are a lot of organizations, professional associations that kind of thing, often wondering what to do with applicants whose first language isn’t English, so sometimes people come to our office asking for advice or information on how they should be assessing those applicants or those clients, so we get a whole myriad of questions, but the other thing is that and we have funded benchmarking projects before where different occupations have been benchmarked and our office has been asked to be in those projects and we’ve been asked to fund them or lend expertise from this office in benchmarking. [Provincial government administrator, former instructor]

The influx of immigrants into the provinces has led some provinces to establish language services to meet the demands of employers. Immigrants and their language abilities are perceived as problems requiring some kind of remediation or intervention strategy. These provinces draw on the CLB framework to assist employers in making judgments about the language demands of particular occupations. The language experts and government administrators concede that employers and professional regulatory bodies are not interested in knowing the details on the workings of the CLB framework. However, by working with employers and professional regulatory bodies to develop programs and assessments based on the CLB framework, the provinces play a significant role in promoting the benchmarks as a lens through which to understand language competence.

In addition to providing language services, the provincial governments have also undertaken a supporting role in the provision of teacher training in using the CLB.

Alberta see http://alberta.ca/home/googlesearch/searchpage.aspx?q=language+training+programs+for+employers
Saskatchewan see http://www.aeei.gov.sk.ca/immigration
Manitoba see http://www.gov.mb.ca/immigration/programs/employers.html
Participants indicate that mandatory teacher education on using the CLB framework for all EAL instructors in the province contributes to the coherent implementation at the provincial level. The discourses on language assessment articulated in the CLB have become pervasive at the provincial level. The following language expert who works as a researcher on CLB projects and as a teacher educator explains:

*It’s been thoroughly implemented in [our province]. It really has, so everything is CLB related. All interactions come back to so what benchmark are we working in. I mean the language of the benchmarks is very prevalent.* [Language researcher, EAL teacher educator]

Coordinated and mandated professional development between the provincial government and the provincial EAL teacher associations has led to provincial-wide implementation of the CLB framework as this provincial government administrator discusses:

*Early on, even when I was a teacher I guess, when the benchmarks first started to be introduced and used, then the [government] office started organizing and delivering professional development on what they were and how to use [the benchmarks] in the class and so that’s just always continued. We have, of course, the professional associations here, they have a conference every year and that will have a real variety but our office also runs a PD event every year.* [Provincial government administrator, former instructor]

Participants explain that the CLB was imposed “from the top down,” but that EAL instructors directed the push for provincial-wide education and training initially. They explain that when it was clear that the CLB framework was not a passing fad, a committee of instructors was formed in the province to advocate for funding and support as the following researcher for CLB profession-specific language profiling explains:

*They lobbied with our provincial funder, our government funder, for all things ESL in the province and we had mandatory in servicing of all the ESL teachers working in the post-secondary area. We had a series of workshops and professional development sessions where we all went through the process of becoming familiar with the [CLB] document and how we could use it.* [Language researcher/consultant, community college instructor]
By funding CLB initiatives at the provincial and federal level, promoting the CLB framework to employers and occupational groups, and providing support for instructors, provincial governments significantly contribute to sustaining the CLB 2000 as a valid means of language assessment. The degree to which the provinces embrace the CLB framework and the extent to which they are willing to invest resources, contributes to expanding the contexts in which the CLB is used.

While the examples stated above describe a province that has embraced the CLB as a guide for the provision of language services, the degree of support, however, varies from province to province. Other participants in this study indicate that their provincial government offers various language programs and provincially sponsored programs mandate the use of the CLB for assessment and curricula development. However, overall the province has had a less coherent approach in supporting provincial-wide implementation of the CLB framework. While individual institutions invest in educating their instructors on using the benchmarks and articulate programs according to the framework, provincial-wide use of and training on the CLB is not mandated. The participants explain that the province is currently in a state of flux in its provision of services to immigrants, including language programming. One of the provincial government administrators explains that the government is:

*Looking at the big picture and trying to figure out where all the pieces of [settlement] fit and [immigration services] is completely getting an overhaul.*

[Provincial government administrator, former instructor]

The language experts and government administrator explain that the goal of the province is to streamline the settlement and employment integration system, including the
establishment of language assessment centres where new immigrants will be tested and assigned a CLB score for their language abilities.

Even though the implementation of the CLB at the provincial level is not uniform, the information gathered about these two provinces demonstrates that the provincial governments facilitate the proliferation of the CLB framework. They contribute to funding CCLB initiatives, promote the CLB by working with employers and professional and occupational bodies, and invest in teacher professional development.

The final area of influence the provincial governments have is through their positions on the executive board of the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks. Participants explain that the board is a multi-stakeholder working board whose purpose is to guide and direct the implementation of the CLB. While the composition of the board has varied over the last decade, provincial government representatives have sat on the board every year in addition to regional ESL field experts, TESL Canada members, members from various organizations representing immigrants and refugees, Francophone community representatives, and representatives from the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (http://www.language.ca). The language experts who have acted as ESL field experts on the board explain that while the board is supposed to function as a multi-stakeholder board, representing a range of concerns and issues, the interests of the provincial governments tend to trump the interests of the ESL field experts and other groups representing immigrants and refugees. While participants explain that the provincial representatives are “very passionate” about their work in the field of immigration, they also explain that it is difficult to bring forward ideas for initiatives not directly related to employment such as supporting intergenerational language programs.
for immigrant parents and their children. Participants speak of being “marginalized” if they brought forward concerns related to pedagogy and they perceive the government representatives as “controlling” the board. From the participants’ standpoint, government representatives are able to direct the kinds of projects and initiatives the CCLB undertake because they provide the funding. The focus is on supporting projects related to employment and assessment rather than pedagogy. One of the participants who is a former member of the CCLB board describes the experience as:

*For a long time I felt like a voice in the wilderness and it was all about the funders. They would have their separate meetings and things like that and so the board needs restructuring. That was one of the recommendations that we came up with.* (referring to the national consultations) [Community college language instructor, former CCLB board member]

In an examination of the board’s composition over the last decade as indicated in annual reports (www.language.ca), the number of provincial government and field expert representatives in the first half of the 2000s was more or less similar (i.e. six to seven of each). There was a shift in the composition of the board in the latter half of the 2000s with the number of provincial government representatives on the working board declining to four. However, an additional three provincial government representatives sit on the board as observer members. While the ESL field experts are by no means a minority and the number of provincial representatives has been reduced, their experiences seem to indicate that governments are driving the agenda of the CLB.

The language experts also explain that the composition of the board is problematic because the professional integrity of the benchmarks is compromised. The following participant who has been involved in CLB-related initiatives since the development stages in the 1990s explains:
How do you keep a centre going if you need people working to maintain it but they’re only being funded by projects and that’s just not at all sustainable and then to have it overseen by it’s funders, by the individual funding bodies, that doesn’t make sense either because they need to be removed from that level of governance. They shouldn’t be in a position to influence the direction of the benchmarks. . . . That’s damaging to the reputation of the Centre, but also of the actual output, the document itself begins to be suspected for having political direction rather than professional direction. [Community college program director, former instructor, participant in initial development of benchmarks]

Even though participants discuss employment integration of immigrants as a key concern, they also express frustration and concern that the democratic governance of the board is compromised, marginalizing other issues related to immigration, language learning, and pedagogy. From the standpoint of the language experts, the professional integrity of the benchmarks is jeopardized when government bodies regulate the types of projects to be undertaken. These comments indicate that political motives, rather than professional ones, drive the Centre and the direction of the CLB.

Examining the relations provincial governments have with employers, language experts, and the CCLB board of directors provides a gestalt sense of the influence provincial governments have over directing the implementation of the CLB. However, as the following section explains, the work of profiling also requires the support of community colleges and immigrant service organizations.

4.3 Community Colleges and Immigrant Service Organizations

While various levels of government provide funding for profession-specific language profiling and the CCLB is expected to take on a coordinating role, albeit limited, the actual work of language profiling and assessment requires the commitment and infrastructure of community colleges and immigrant service organizations. In this section, I consider how these organizations are drawn into the work of profiling,
programming and language assessment for the professions. First, they have an
institutional history of using the CLB framework. Members of each organization’s
administration and teaching staff were involved in the consultation processes to develop
the CLB in the 1990s. These members advocated for the implementation of the CLB at
the organizational level. Second, advocates of the CLB were able to secure the financial
support and commitment from senior institutional administrators. Committees were
formed to profile the language demands of applied programs and support was provided to
train EAL instructors on implementing the CLB framework into teaching and assessment
practices. While implementation at the organizational level was not without challenges,
the processes provided these organizations with the capacity to undertake provincial and
national profiling projects.

Historically, community colleges have been viewed as the institutions that
alleviate social inequality by providing non-traditional students and marginalized groups
with access to post-secondary education and employment opportunities (Tambureno,
2010). Community colleges are also the educational institutions that serve as the link
between skills training, employers, and employment. As the Association of Canadian
Community Colleges (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, n.d.) explains:

Colleges are the advanced skills educators of choice. Aligned with the needs of
employers, and operating on the leading edge of skills identification, economic
trends, and market shifts, colleges solicit business and industry input into
curriculum development through Program Advisory Committees. They support
business growth and sustainability by supplying graduates with advanced skills,
re-skilling displaced employees, offering customized education, and providing
applied research and development support. They increase the access of the
disadvantaged to post-secondary education and facilitate credential recognition
for immigrants.
The ACCC website states that community colleges are forming partnerships with government and industry to serve the integration of skilled immigrants into the Canadian economy. For example, in 2006 ACCC formed a partnership with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to create the Canadian Immigrant Program: Partners for Newcomers Success (CIIP). Through the establishment of project offices in China, the Philippines, and India, the goal of the program is to assist new immigrants with the assessment of their skills pre-migration and provide advice on programs and services post-migration.

Project Offices based in Guangzhou, Manila and New Delhi provide guidance, which enables clients to prepare an Individual Integration Plan outlining a series of preparatory steps to enhance their employability. CIIP counsellors are also assisting clients in implementing their personal plans by identifying appropriate sources of continuing assistance in Canada while ACCC promotes access to programs and services in Canada – including institutional programs such as language and skills testing and upgrading, credential assessment and recognition, settlement assistance, licensing and accreditation, and employment-related services (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, 2007).

In consideration of these contextual factors, it is perhaps not surprising that community colleges have become key actors in the processes of profiling the language demands for the professions and have been implementing the CLB framework into their applied and professional programs.

To a lesser extent than community colleges, immigrant service organizations (ISOs) have also become involved in profiling projects. The language experts explain that as not-for-profit organizations, ISOs are looking for opportunities to offer services and secure project funding. Their economic stability, however, is much more tenuous than community colleges. One way to secure funding is to become involved in employment-related initiatives such as developing profession-specific bridging programs.
For example, ISOs might work with technical colleges or institutes that do not have EAL language services. The ISOs will profile the language demands required for the occupation and develop the language courses for the program while the technical institute provides the occupation-specific skills training.

Participants from both the community colleges and ISOs explain that their institutions have a history of using the CLB framework that was initiated before the official CLB document was released in 2000. Senior members of the administrative or instructional staff were involved in the initial consultation and development processes of the CLB 2000 in the 1990s. These staff members were instrumental in promoting the CLB framework in their institutions and initiated implementation of the benchmarks into program curricula. One of the language experts who has been working in community colleges for the last twenty years explains:

One of our colleagues here, a more senior member of the department was involved in the National Working Group on Language Benchmarks in the early ‘90s. He would fly off to Ottawa and come back with all these interesting stories about what they were working on. [Language researcher/consultant, community college instructor]

These institutions that had personnel involved in the initial consultations became some of the first in Canada to implement the CLB 2000 into their EAL curricula and applied programs.

Participants explain that advisory committees were established in the early 2000s to oversee the implementation of the framework in the organizations and to train EAL instructors in teaching from a competency-based communicative approach. Implementation, however, did not occur without some resistance. For many EAL instructors, the CLB presented an entirely new way of teaching that was unfamiliar to
them. The language experts explain that instructors, particularly those teaching in English – for – Academic Purposes (EAP) programs, were used to teaching from a grammar-based curriculum that focused on knowledge of the English language. Using the CLB framework requires viewing language as a series of tasks that learners perform. One participant who sat on one of these advisory committees at a community college explains the changes as follows:

There was a challenge of tweaking our assessment system because people had been doing a different kind of assessment strategy for years and years and years. They were averse to change. It’s like turning an ocean liner on a dime in the middle of the ocean and we were asking them to think about it in a completely different way and they didn’t like it . . . . They didn’t want to look at anything new. They thought it was a bandwagon, that it would go away if they just waited long enough. [Community college language instructor, former CCLB board member]

For instructors already teaching in applied and workplace English programs, the change was less dramatic. They explain that the competency-based approach naturally fit with existing teaching and assessment practices. One of the participants who has worked on developing bridging programs for engineering and nursing explains:

We did benchmark, I’m guessing off the top of my head, about 15 applied programs, so we did do that. We did implement the CLB in various degrees in our different ESL departments, some much more than others of course and we have had resistance in some areas, particularly in the kind of English-for-Academic Purposes department, but in our department [Workplace English], we’ve implemented them reasonably successfully in some ways and I think that’s because of the kind of teaching we do. I mean there are many many reasons, but one of them is because the kind of teaching we do is often task based and there’s kind of a fit that works quite well. [Language researcher/consultant, community college instructor, participant in initial development of benchmarks]

While the language experts and government administrators indicate that some resistance still exists, that a few instructors have not fully embraced the competency-based approach, over the years these institutions have developed the institutional capacity for
developing curricula and profiling the language demands of applied programs such as engineering technology and accounting.

The research participants explain that developing the capacity as an institution to profile has enabled their institutions to become involved in larger scale provincial and national projects:

As an organization our college has been instrumental in a lot of benchmark initiatives in the province and so there was a real interest in continuing our involvement in a national project. Also the chair of our specific department had been able to access some funding to do sort of little projects for certain occupations. Like we had benchmarked college programs for several years. He felt this [profession-specific language assessment] was kind of a natural extension on that kind of research. [Language researcher/consultant, community college instructor]

Leadership and leveraging the financial resources are key components for implementing the CLB framework and for conducting the work of profiling occupations. In addition, the commitment of instructors to become experts in using the CLB framework is essential. From a personal perspective, participants explain that they are interested in being involved in benchmarking projects for various reasons. For some participants, their positions as directors or chairs of departments and centres requires that they develop their expertise so that they can form partnerships and take on projects on behalf of the organization, increasing the organization’s share of the market in the provision of language services. The following participant who has worked on the development of accounting and engineering bridging programs for an immigrant service organization explains:

Accounting and engineering are both major areas where there are lots of immigrants who are qualified in those particular areas and there is certainly demand, which may fluctuate, but there is basically demand in the Canadian economy for people with those skills. We are constantly looking at other areas
where we can serve people. A possibility is certainly something like a health-care aide program is something that we're actively considering. [Language researcher/consultant, immigrant service organization]

For other participants, working in profiling projects is an opportunity to work with the CLB document in a different capacity from that of general EAL instruction. These language experts explain that they have a background in medical sciences, workplace training, or testing and measurement and they have an interest in applying their skill and knowledge to the process of profiling occupations. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, a few participants acknowledge that these kinds of projects provide an opportunity to supplement the income they receive as instructors.

Despite the interest to implement the CLB and to develop the institutional capacity to expand the range of projects they undertake, including profiling occupations, these organizations are not without financial constraints and challenges. First, while monies can be secured for the initial development, sustaining and maintaining the implementation of profession-specific language programs and assessments falls onto the shoulders of the institutions where the language experts are employed. Funding provided by the provincial governments or through the federal Enhanced Language Training program often do not allocate monies for implementation and maintenance of programs and assessment tools. Continuous funding is necessary to maintain the administration of the profession-specific tests and programs. Maintenance, therefore, requires the support and commitment of senior administrators in the institution or agency to leverage the necessary funds. One participant whose work involves the assessment of internationally educated nurses explains:

[The assessment tool] is supposed to be cost recovery [laughter], but with a lot of projects we're always scraping the bottom of the barrel. Our college, because
they have a lot of support for this kind of work, is helping to keep it afloat in some ways, but these kinds of assessment tools really need to be cost-recovery. They’re not profit making at all. The price, although it may seem high, compared to some of the other tools, you know you sort of get what you pay for and what they get in terms of a record, a transcript, a results sheet, individual feedback on their writing and speaking productive skills, so they get a lot for their fee, so then those are the fees that are then broken down to pay the cost of maintaining it.
[Language researcher/consultant, community college instructor]

So, while integrating IEPs into the Canadian labour market by offering language services is a supposed goal of the Canadian and provincial governments, governments rely on service providers such as colleges and immigrant service organizations to leverage the funds that ensure the maintenance and sustainability of programming and testing. As one of the language researchers at a community college explains, this can mean that many of the programs are “always just hanging on by a thread.”

Given the cost-recovery nature of the programs and assessment tools, costs for implementation are offset by the IEPs who access them. This often means that the programs have only a limited number of spaces and demand can sometimes outweigh supply. The language experts explain that IEPs can apply for funding to help pay for the cost of the programs, however, in some cases the IEPs’ are not eligible. As one language expert working at an immigrant service organization explains:

There’s a question of funding. We only have funding for so many places and you know sometimes people who would benefit from the program, because of the financial criteria are not necessarily eligible. If they’re in transitional jobs making twenty dollars an hour, the government considers it not a good idea for them to quit their job and do this program, and so there are access issues.
[Language researcher/consultant immigrant service organization]

Twenty dollars an hour is above the minimum wage in Canada, but it is not the equivalent salary that most Canadian engineering, nursing, or accounting professionals
Participants explain that if IEPs are not provided with adequate support and funding to integrate into their profession

*they just flounder for years and years because they don’t have the money to pay for their own programs and they can’t work, or they’re working and can’t upgrade their English. [Language researcher/consultant, community college instructor]*

These examples reinforce recent statistics that recent immigrants with university degrees earn less than half the income of Canadian-born earners with the same level of education (Statistics Canada, 2003, 2005, 2006).

In sum, community colleges, and to a lesser extent immigrant service organizations, are key actors in constituting the boundaries of language profiling and assessment. Development of their institutional capacity in using the CLB framework enables them to undertake profiling projects at the provincial and national level. In this sense, these organizations have an economic stake in supporting the CLB as a legitimate framework because it enables them not only to expand on the types of programs and services that they offer, but also to increase the pool of funding sources through prospective students and clients. Maintaining programs and assessments, however, also come with financial challenges that have repercussions for IEPs trying to re-enter their professions in Canada.

4.4 Professional Regulatory Bodies

Professional regulatory bodies have played a minor role in the development of profession-specific language programs offered in community colleges and immigrant service organizations. Regulatory bodies, however, have been key actors in the development of profession-specific language exams. Current and looming labour
shortages have made the integration of IEPs a pressing concern for professional regulatory bodies as I explained in Chapter 1. Research participants and reports state that interest in the development of profession-specific language exams emerged through negotiations between national professional regulatory bodies, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and the CCLB. For example, the Phase 1 report, *Benchmarking the English Language Demands of the Nursing Profession Across Canada* (2002), generated on the development of an exam for nursing states:

A growing shortage of nursing professionals in Canada is projected in the next ten years. Internationally-educated nurses entering the profession in Canada could ease this projected shortage. However, one of the issues involved in licensing these nurses is language competence and how it is measured. Stakeholders have indicated the need for a nursing-specific assessment tool to facilitate integration of nurses into the profession. Based on this need, the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) has initiated a two-phase project (p. iii).

The language experts involved in the development of bridging programs for nursing explain further that stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with commercially developed generic language exams.  

*In fact [nursing professionals] kind of initiated the discussions, I believe, back in 2000. There was some number of stakeholders within the nursing context and labour and immigration came to the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks and asked if they would take on a feasibility study to determine if there was a need for something like this. Nursing regulators and other stakeholders had identified that the tests that were currently used were general academic proficiency type tests like TOEFL, IELTS and so on for internationally educated nurses to demonstrate their English ability and yet they recognized that they weren’t specific to the field of nursing, so they had some concerns that those weren’t the most appropriate tests. So, all these questions had been asked in the field, you know, what else could we do? Could some other test be developed?*  

[Language researcher/consultant, community college instructor]

In addition to the Phase 1 report, two subsequent reports articulate in detail the stakeholders and processes that eventually led to the development of the CELBAN. The Phase 2 report, *The Development of CELBAN (The Canadian English Language*
Benchmark Assessment for Nurses: A Nursing-Specific Language Assessment Tool (2003), details the methodology and stages of development, determination of skill level, and recommendations for maintaining the validity and quality of the exam. The Phase 3 report, Implementation of the CELBAN (2004), outlines the process of establishing testing sites across Canada.

In the case of engineering, in 2003 the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (now Engineers Canada) launched a three-phase project focused on facilitating “the timely licensure and employment of international engineering graduates without compromising public safety or lowering licensure standards” (Engineers Canada, 2008). One of the seventeen recommendations listed in the Phase 3 report is to “develop and set a language standard to ensure IEGs [international engineering graduates] have the appropriate level of English or French proficiency to navigate through the licensing process” (Canadian Council of Professional Engineers, 2004). While the test for engineering is still in the process of development, participants explain that engineering stakeholders seem “very keen” on the development of such an engineering-specific language test as long as it reflects the kinds of interactions engineers have in the workplace. One participant explains how an engineering-specific language exam would be different from existing language tests:

Does this [test] resemble a task that somebody does in their everyday life as an engineer. Couldn’t we have some scenarios and dialogues based on what people do as engineers rather than a general text about the importance of engineering in society. Certainly if you have a test, if it really mirrors the workplace, then I think that that’s an important development. . . . I don’t know if the engineers themselves necessarily have a very in-depth understanding of language or language testing, so I think it’s very much if they’re presented with something that very much has the appearance of engineering, that’s a step forward from where we are now which is academic lectures about biology, you know, the American
It is important to note that the directive for the development of profession-specific language exams comes from the national associations for nursing and engineering. As I explained in Chapter 1, while most professions in Canada are self-regulating, oversight of the professions is a provincial jurisdiction. Therefore, national associations such as the Canadian Nurses Association and Engineers Canada cannot mandate that the provincial professional regulatory bodies use the exams. Nonetheless, the national associations attempt to advocate that provincial regulatory bodies use the exams. One of the language experts sitting on the advisory committee for the project to develop an engineering-specific language exam explains:

_Revolution or whatever. [Language researcher/consultant, immigrant service organization]_

_I think [Engineers Canada] are taking a very pragmatic sort of attitude to the test. I think they’re very keen for this test to be developed. You know, there’s the whole political structure of Engineers Canada, which is that regulation of engineers is a provincial matter and so Engineers Canada has no legislative power to impose a test. What they’re doing is that they’re getting this test developed and they’re encouraging the local bodies such as APEGGA [Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta] to accept it and basically the local bodies are proving receptive to that and I think the model that they’re following is that we will take this test and we will accept it as evidence of language ability. [Language researcher/consultant immigrant service organization]_

Reports from Engineers Canada (2008) confirm that APEGGA was invited to sit on the advisory committee that determined the CLB levels for the engineering test. APEGGA has the second largest proportion of engineers in English-speaking Canada and its numbers are increasing whereas in Ontario, which has the largest proportion of engineers, the numbers are declining. As the language experts explain, convincing the largest of the provincial professional regulatory bodies to support test development will likely influence other provincial bodies to implement the test.
Participants, however, also emphasize that the development of profession-specific exams is an evolutionary process that will continue for some time.

_We will also continue to accept other tests and then over time there may well be an evolution where once the quality of the engineering test is fully established, once multiple versions are available, once it’s available in a sufficient number of testing centres to be universally accessible, then we may consider making that the only acceptable test, so it’s an evolutionary process._ [Language researcher/consultant immigrant service organization]

This evolutionary process is also reflected in the case of the CELBAN. In 2005 the Canadian Nurses Association released a report outlining recommendations for achieving better coherency among the disparate provincial nursing regulatory bodies. One of the recommendations was to “accelerate CELBAN’S recognition, implementation and accessibility nationally and internationally” (Jeans, Hadley, Green, & Da Prat, 2005). In my field notes for July 2, 2010, I noted that several of the provincial associations for registered nurses listed the CELBAN in addition to IELTS, TOEFL, and MELAB as acceptable tests for demonstrating English language proficiency. As of March 2012, however, only CELBAN and IELTS were listed as acceptable tests for Registered Nurses in all of the nine English-speaking provinces with the exception of Newfoundland and Ontario, which still accept TOEFL (computer-based exam).

The “evolutionary” process is also evident in recent changes to the CELBAN scores required by the professional regulatory bodies. According to the CELBAN: _Information for Candidates_ (Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2004/2011), nurses entering the profession need the following scores: speaking CLB level 8, listening CLB level 9, reading CLB level 8, and writing CLB level 7. These scores were determined during the initial development of the CELBAN in 2005. The information guide, however, also provides a caveat that states: “Nursing licensing bodies determine
the CLB levels that candidates are required to achieve to meet the language requirements required for registration purposes. This information is posted on their websites” (Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2004/2011). Indeed, all nine of the professional regulatory bodies for registered nurses in the English-speaking provinces indicate that the minimum levels accepted for listening have changed from CLB level 9 to CLB level 10. The Association for Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador indicates that this change was implemented in August of 2011 (http://www.arnnl.ca/pg.php?r=53).

Professional regulatory bodies contribute to the processes of language assessment by collaborating with the CCLB to develop profession-specific language exams. While the provincial regulatory bodies are arms-length to the provincial governments and can mandate the criteria for entry into practice, coherency with respect to language assessment is emerging under the leadership of the national associations. While I was unable to locate any statistics that indicated whether profession-specific language exams are improving the entry rates of IEPs into their professions, the recent change to increase the listening score on the nursing exam provides some indication that the barrier of language assessment is most likely becoming increasingly difficult for IEPs to permeate.

4.5 Summary of Chapter

Following Bowker and Star’s (1999) admonition to focus on a ‘gestalt sense’ given the impossibility of tracing all the relations creating a particular infrastructure, this chapter provides a gestalt sense of the main institutions involved in constituting the processes of language profiling and assessment for the professions in Canada. While there are likely other institutions, these are the ones that emerged as the most influential during the research. The Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks takes on a
coordinating role in the implementation of the CLB generally and in the initiation of occupation-specific projects. However, the complex funding arrangements and the division of responsibility between the federal government and provincial governments mean the CCLB does not have the capacity to oversee all CLB related projects. Therefore, implementation of the CLB is also dependent on other institutions such as the provincial governments. From the standpoint of the research participants, it appears that provincial governments have significant sway through the provision of funding for CLB initiatives, the promotion of the CLB to employers, support for teachers’ professional development at the provincial level, and governance on the CCLB executive board. Still, as the research participants’ discussions indicate, the influence of the provincial governments is not uniform across the country. Some provinces are more influential than others in directing the implementation of the CLB.

Community colleges and immigrant service organizations are the third group of institutions that sustain the boundaries of language assessment. It is within these institutions that the actual work of profiling and language assessment occurs. They serve as a link between ‘non-traditional’ students and employment, and increasingly they are being drawn into the work of IEPs’ credential recognition, language assessment and programming particularly. While they are expanding the range of services that they offer to newcomers, providing these services hold financial challenges for both the institutions and IEPs trying to gain entry into their professions.

Finally, the chapter discussed the role of professional regulatory bodies. These organizations have become involved in profession-specific language profiling and assessment, seeking ways to evaluate IEPs’ language skills while maintaining
professional standards. Even though participants’ experiences indicate that all the organizations discussed in this chapter appear to be working toward a more coherent system of assessment, ultimately the professional regulatory bodies will decide which skills and assessments are deemed valid. In the following chapter, I examine the process of profiling and assessment more closely by analyzing how the CLB text and the social relations of profiling influence the work of the language experts and government administrators. So, while the roles and influence of all these institutions are markedly different, nonetheless, collectively they form a kind of infrastructure that IEPs must navigate if they are to gain entry into their professions.
5 Text-mediated Knowing and Language Regulation

“As the understanding of these processes became more processual, less focused on cultural and semiotic products and more on cultural and semiotic processes, the dynamic term ‘poiesis,’ making, seemed for a time more appropriate that the static term ‘poetics.’ But that very focus on the dynamics of the processes of cultural making also foregrounded the need for histories, histories of the making of texts and the subjects who, in negotiation with textual processes, made and were made themselves (Threadgold, 1997, p. 3).

Work in knowledge economies often involves people working in text-saturated environments. Our daily lives, work practices, and ways of knowing are increasingly regulated by texts (Smith, 1999; Smith, 2005). Knowledge workers are expected to codify tacit knowledge and work practices, but they are also expected to translate, transform and re-contextualize standardized forms of knowledge, integrating it into their local work practices (Farrell, 2006; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1996). “Knowledge is not transmitted by texts, it is made and transformed in and with texts” (Farrell, 2006, p. 2). In the previous chapter, I examined how the regulation of language assessment is constituted through the social and power relations of particular institutions. In this chapter, I focus on the work of using texts; I examine how activating the CLB 2000 text organizes andcoordinates the work activities of the language experts and government administrators. How does the CLB 2000 inform the research participants’ understandings of language competence? What struggles and disjuncture do they encounter in interpreting the text and organizing their work practices? While the CLB 2000 regulates the language experts’ textual practices, this chapter demonstrates that regulation happens through a dynamic of acquiescence and resistance.

In the first section, I examine the metaphor of “revolution” articulated in the introduction of the CLB document in relation to the oppositional discourses that the
language experts and government administrators articulate with respect to the CLB framework. The metaphors they use indicate a spectrum of praise for and critique of the framework and provide insights into disjuncture they encounter when they develop program curricula and profession-specific language exams. Despite the difficulties most of them encounter in using the document, they nonetheless have hope that it will improve opportunities for IEPs to enter their professional fields. The fact that the assessment of language happens at all is taken-for-granted and goes unquestioned. In the second section, I look more closely at how the CLB document organizes their work of language profiling and assessment. In particular, I examine how the document directs their understanding of knowledge and skill, and how the disjuncture between text-mediated knowing and practice-based knowing occurs. The CLB 2000 guides the language experts to delineate linguistic skills from professional competence, but they also sometimes struggle with using the CLB 2000 to inform their work practices. Through the process of transforming tacit knowledge into codified knowledge, it becomes decontextualized. The final section examines the justifications that are given for the CLB framework. Amid the differences and struggles exists an overarching discourse of professionalism that sustains the CLB as a valid text. This section examines how the CLB is constructed as a means for unifying the EAL profession, and therefore, justifies its usage despite its flaws.

5.1 Dominant and Oppositional Discourses

As I explained in Chapter 2, the development of language education policy is a field of struggle that arises from the perception that social problems with respect to language exist. The CLB is the Canadian state’s attempt to resolve the problem of inconsistency in language assessment. In fact, the opening pages of the CLB 2000 frame
its development as a “movement” and “revolution” that will lead to the coherency and consistency of language teaching and assessment across Canada (p. V). While participants view the goal of consistency and coherency as “beautiful,” the extent to which they think the CLB can achieve these outcomes is contested terrain. In this section, I explore how participants understand the “revolutionary” discourse. A multitude of metaphors emerged from my interviews with participants, giving insights into how the CLB 2000 is influencing the EAL field. Hatch and Yanow (2008) asserted that the use of metaphors is a way of “seeing, thinking, and learning” during the research process (p. 24). “Metaphors are framing devices, bringing certain things into focus and hiding others” (Hatch & Yanow, 2008, p. 36). Examining the metaphors the language experts articulate provides one means for understanding the contested terrain of language policy in Canada. Participants articulated multiple metaphors as they described how the CLB organizes their work practices. While some of these metaphors indicated embracement of the revolutionary discourse, others clearly indicated opposition.

Broadly, a spectrum of perspectives is evident in the participants’ discussions on the extent to which the CLB framework is revolutionary and will resolve the problems of inconsistency and non-standardization of language teaching and assessment. “Revolution” usually marks a fundamental change in political or social life. It also involves a seizure of power by a populous, however, based on the discourses articulated, the CLB seems to be the antithesis of a revolution. While the Canadian government rallied support from the EAL community during the development of the CLB, it was, as one of the language experts explains, a “top-down” initiative. The language experts and government administrators who agree that the CLB is “revolutionizing” the EAL field
make use of institutional discourses that construct the CLB as the means for resolving the inconsistencies in language assessment. These participants explain that using the document helped them to make sense of their teaching and assessment practices because the framework provided guidance and direction in planning courses and developing assessment tools.

*It was an epiphany for me certainly in terms of how I was teaching and all of a sudden it all fit together. Instead of being more difficult, instead of I’ve got to learn a whole new system, I don’t want to do this, it was all of sudden easier. Oh, now I get it. I’ve got to do this unit on health and safety.* [Community college instructor, former CCLB board member]

Participants explain that the benchmarks provide them with a common language that they can use when communicating with instructors in their own institutions or at other institutions. Commonly used terms such as “beginner” or “low intermediate,” which were used in the field prior to the development of the benchmarks, were vague, non-standardized, and took on different meanings depending on the practices of a particular institution. The task descriptors and outcomes of the CLB, however, direct all users of the document to focus their teaching and assessment practices in similar ways.

More emphatic discourses of revolution are taken up when participants focus on the history of the lack of standardization within the EAL field. Describing the field as “floundering” and lacking in credibility prior to standardization, the following participant, who was involved in the initial consultations to develop the CLB in the 1990s, frames the development of the CLB as fundamental to unifying the field.

*It was like the Messiah. [laughter] Yeah, that’s funny isn’t it. No, but seriously, it really saved the day I think because we couldn’t have kept on going like that. It made no sense and so I think it really did more than just revolutionize, it saved us from further embarrassment of non-standardization of our field.* [Community college program director, former instructor]
Historically, professionalization of a field has often been established through the control of common and standardized bodies of knowledge (Abbott, 1988). For participants iterating saviour discourses, the CLB articulates a body of knowledge and common, specialized terminology that legitimizes their work as professionals. As I explain in section 5.3 of this chapter, having a set of standards becomes particularly important in working with other professional groups.

In contrast to “revolutionary” and “Messianic” discourses, oppositional discourses are also expressed. While there is broad agreement that the development of a national set of standards is “impressive,” this research indicates that there are also concerns about the “assimilationist” effects standards can have on the language experts in their teaching and assessment practices. These concerns suggest that, rather than providing users of the document with liberation, the CLB confines and regulates teaching and assessment practices. It presents a narrow view of language acquisition that some participants find problematic. One participant who has worked as a researcher on CLB projects and as a teacher educator explains it this way:

*The CLB tends to be very prescriptive and I think that’s problematic when you’re looking at adult learners who I believe need to have ownership of the learning process as opposed to being told that these are the tasks you need. . . It’s very assimilationist, really, when you think about that. And again, I think that [the CLB] diminishes professional autonomy. Like why do we all need to be speaking the same language. Is that even desirable are relevant questions that need to be asked. [Language researcher/consultant, EAL teacher educator]*

Not only does the CLB diminish professional autonomy, it diminishes acceptance of differences in communication and variations in language. This participant also stresses that the focus on occupation-specific language programming can limit opportunities for
educated and skilled professionals because programs tend to be short-term, focusing on addressing immediate communication problems.

There seems to be this emphasis on pumping people out into jobs as quickly as possible rather than working with different sectors to help facilitate longer-term language development of people. And in industry specific language training, there is a history of that in [this province] with [Company ABC] for example. They used to have an EAL person there specifically to assist their employees, but of course the goal was to assist the employees in mastering the language they needed to work at [Company ABC], not to advance to a better paying job. [Language researcher/consultant, EAL teacher educator]

From the perspective of these oppositional or alternate discourses, curricula and assessment should not be prescribed, but emergent and negotiated between instructors and learners, facilitating transitions into better quality work.

At a broader societal level, the document can be seen as an ideological tool of the nation-state that is implemented to change understandings of language acquisition and assessment practices. The CLB promotes the notion that communication in the English language can be standardized, as this language expert explains:

It’s a lobby to sell a document to make believe that it would change the views of second language acquisition . . . . It’s a utopia. It’s ambitious to try to have a standardized language to be used across the nation. It’s like a dream. I have a dream. What do I think? I think the goals are not well developed. They’re described, but the how to get to the goals do not facilitate the implementation of the document to achieve the goals. They are a utopia, I think. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

Standardized language and a standardized method for assessing that language constructs a sense of unity and sameness. However, framing the CLB as an ideological tool in this way demonstrates a sense of disconnect among participants: the day-to-day reality of their work tells them that state imposed standardization of language use and assessment is nothing but a dream. These comments also allude to the element of irony that exists in
posing the CLB framework as a revolutionary movement. Rather than liberating the field of EAL with broader understandings of Canada as a multilingual state where linguistic differences are accepted, the CLB constructs language as something that can be standardized and measured. It reinforces the ideological construct that Canada is an officially bilingual and multicultural nation, but that it is not an officially multilingual nation state.

Yet another discourse used to describe the CLB is that of an “evolution” or a “work in progress.” Within this framing, the CLB is considered a “flawed” document, but nonetheless, it has enabled disparate groups to come together to start a dialogue on the challenges of communicating across differences in organizations and workplaces. Rather than restricting their professional practice, the CLB has become a tool that facilitates communication with other professional groups. One language expert who has worked in engineering and nursing bridging programs explains:

I would describe that document as a system trying, not perfect by any means, a flawed document but trying to describe language from very low proficiency to high in way that we can try to come to some common understanding; that we can use it to talk to people who are not applied linguists, for example; that we can talk to people in the workplace about language and so on. And hopefully, I’m not so convinced, we could use those levels to help transfer students into programs or into the workplace. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

According to this rationale, the CLB holds a practical application of assisting IEPs in entering their professional fields, although expressions of doubt on the extent to which this is possible are still expressed. Nonetheless, the CLB has instigated conversations among the language experts, employers, government officials, and professional regulatory bodies and it is through these conversations that most of the research
participants hold hope that the benchmarks will begin to break down the walls that surround the professions and enable IEPs to find employment in their professions. However, as I discuss in the following section, conceptual and material conditions of the CLB and the social relations of the workplace pose struggles for the language experts and their ability to change understandings of communicative competence.

In sum, this section has discussed the range of metaphors that participants articulate with respect to the changes occurring in the EAL field in Canada. These metaphors express the extent to which the participants take up the institutional discourses of the CLB as revolutionizing the EAL field in Canada. My analysis demonstrates how interpretations of texts are polysemic (Barthes, 1986/2007; Stuart Hall, 1990/2007). This does not mean that texts are open to a plurality of meaning in which the activator can make any meaning that they like from the text. Texts guide people toward particular information and people’s activation of the text coordinates their work activities across localities (Smith, 2005). As Hall (1990/2007) explained, a domain of preferred meanings exist which guide readers to interpret text and act in particular ways. These preferred meanings, however, are not uniform or static. As Smith (1999) stated “while the ruling relations are an organization of power, it is misleading to reduce them to relations of domination or hegemony, or to view them as monolithic or manipulated” (p. 79). The relations form “a complex field of coordinated activities” (Smith, 1999, p. 79). While the preferred meanings often represent dominant, institutional, or ideological constructs, the possibility for oppositional or alternate constructions exist (Stuart Hall, 1990/2007; McCoy, 2006). Oppositional in this sense does not necessarily mean “opposed to,” but acknowledges differences in the institutional discourse (McCoy, 2006). Metaphors are a
way of broadening understandings of differences (Hatch & Yanow, 2008). The
metaphors discussed here illuminate the contested terrain that the CLB encompasses.
Yet, despite these differences and critiques, the language experts and government
administrators cannot step outside the complex field of coordinated activities. The \textit{CLB 2000} constitutes text-mediated knowing that directs their understanding of language
ability toward particular constructions of competency with the intent of establishing a
standardized system of language assessment. In the following section, I examine how the
CLB text influences the decisions the language experts make with respect to knowledge
and skill during the profiling and assessment processes.

5.2 Determining and Delineating Language Skill and Knowledge in the Professions

Even though the participants use oppositional metaphors to articulate the
influence the CLB has had on the field of EAL education in Canada, the language
experts’ work is nonetheless organized and coordinated through the competency-based
model articulated in the CLB document. In this section, I examine how the language
experts interpret and use the document to go about their work of profiling and
assessment. In particular, this section discusses how they make decisions about
knowledge and skill during their work processes.

For the past two decades, scholars have written about the elusive and challenging
task of defining competence and measuring skills (Brown, et al., 2001; Peruniak, 1998).
Yet, the language experts are expected to define the language competence of IEPs by
delineating language proficiency from non-linguistic knowledge and skill. Through the
coop-eration of professional regulatory bodies and employers, the language experts enter
workplaces to conduct their research for profiling the language demands of a particular
profession. This involves conducting interviews with managers, Human Resource personnel, and employees. The processes of working with employers and professional regulatory bodies to gather authentic examples of communicative tasks are meant to acknowledge the importance of context in which such exchanges occur. The research process also includes job shadowing where the language experts observe and note the communication skills IEPs might need during a typical workday. One participant describes the process of making decisions about skills for the development of curricula for an engineering program this way:

*How we determine [skills] is by watching people’s interactions in the workplace, looking at the task they are trying to get done and then looking at all the different components that led to successful accomplishment of that task . . .. We used the CLB in a number of ways. Obviously in the first one we’re benchmarking the language demands of the engineering profession. What we’re doing is taking those language samples, identifying the tasks, job tasks, we called them job activities or something and then correlating those to benchmark descriptors within speaking, listening, reading and writing. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]*

Participants articulate similar types of descriptions for the nursing and accounting professions as well. Through their textual practices, the language experts must ensure that language tasks are organized to align with the CLB to maintain the standards articulated in the benchmarks. The opening pages of the *CLB 2000* clearly state that the goal of the framework is to establish coherency and consistency by “describing and measuring, in a standard way” immigrants’ language and communication abilities across Canada (p. VIII). The focus is on what language users can do with the English language rather than their professional knowledge of a particular content area. The *CLB 2000* states:
Task-based proficiency descriptions in the CLB have a clear language competence to ensure that it is *language proficiency*, not non-linguistic skills, that are being primarily described . . . [The benchmarks] describe a clear hierarchy, or progressive continuum of knowledge and skill that underlie language proficiency (p. VIII, emphasis in original).

While the language experts are expected to determine the language skills and level of skill that IEPs will need to communicate successfully in the workplace, they are also expected to separate language skills from the topical knowledge and skill of each profession.

In interviews, I asked participants to explain and show (in the face-to-face interviews) how the CLB guides their work as they make decisions about delineating skills during the profiling process. Participants explain that they have to be able to define the kinds of communicative interactions professionals might have in a range of contexts. Communication tasks are specific to a particular profession, but they must be general enough to account for the diversity of contexts a professional may find him/herself working in. In the case of profiling for the nursing profession, the passage below describes how the language experts have to design assessments and curricula that are broad enough to encompass all the various contexts that a nurse may find him or herself working in. The focus, as indicated in the CLB document, is on language skill and knowledge and not on the topical knowledge required to demonstrate profession-specific competence.

> *We have tried not to let the actual field specific competencies influence us . . .. Whether they are giving instruction in a context that’s appropriate for an RN (Registered Nurse) versus an LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse), whether that context is in a public nurse context in a home or in ER (emergency room) or somewhere else basically that is still the same language skill. That’s what we continue to focus on and tried to pull out of that consideration what the content of the circumstance was, what competency they needed in terms of you know they*
were giving instructions on medications or something versus some other content, but that was a professional competency, not a language competency. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

During the assessment of internationally educated nurses, the language experts try to focus on the accuracy of IEPs’ communication and bracket the inaccuracy of profession-specific knowledge. Participants explain that profiling is conducted in workplaces so that context can be taken into consideration during the development of assessment tests and curricula. However, during the assessment process emphasis is placed on the form of communication rather than the content as this participant explains:

In fact in the CELBAN (the nursing language exam) speaking component the very first thing we say to the candidates is when we’re assessing them is we are assessing your language ability speaking and not your medical knowledge, so do not be concerned if you make a mistake in medical information. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

The CLB guides the language experts to separate form from function. The accuracy of how something is communicated takes precedence over the content of what is communicated.

Additionally, in their use of the CLB document to determine IEPs’ language skill level, the language experts categorize individual skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing) according to different benchmark levels. Language tasks are parsed into small, manageable and measurable pieces. The language experts view such strategies as a means of supporting IEPs’ language learning. The following quote describes one example of how the parsing of skill occurs and how IEPs come to be categorized based on their ability to use language according to the CLB framework.

What we found there is that typically an entry level professional is going to need to be at a CLB 9 and that we were working with students working at 7 and 8 and
that they wouldn’t get to a 9 through our particular curriculum. They might get partially to a 9, but not completely, so we tried to take this professional development approach so that people could continue their language development beyond the classroom. We also tried to heavily scaffold really specific difficult tasks. We called it siloing, but the idea that people at these higher benchmarks levels can reach up to the higher level benchmark task even though they might not be at a 9 overall. If the learning activities are structured appropriately, they can successfully do this CLB 9 level task, so that benchmarking was quite important actually to guide our structuring of the curriculum. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

Separating professional competence from language competence and the parsing of linguistic skills into manageable tasks becomes a strategy to support IEPs as they go through assessment processes. The competency model of the CLB, which articulates competence as a series of discrete skills and tasks, directs users of the document to separate form from function. Parsing communication into specific language skills and delineating them from the content of a particular topic decontextualizes communication. Day-to-day communication in the workplace, however, is highly contextualized, unpredictable and unstructured. Even though the language experts view the delineation of skill as a strategy to support IEPs’ learning, communicative exchanges are problematically removed from the social context of the workplace. Yet these judgments about IEPs’ language abilities are one component that used by employers and professional regulatory bodies to determine whether they have sufficient communication skills for integrating into the workplace. Pennycook (2001) has argued in such approaches to language learning “skills are seen as autonomous, asocial, and decontextualized cognitive processes” (p. 76).

The experiences of the language experts, however, also indicate that such delineation of skill is problematic. While the CLB guides the language experts to view communication as a set of discrete skills, they also recognize that language use is
embedded within the context and social relations of a particular workplace. A disjuncture occurs for the language experts between the articulation of language competence as something that can be decontextualized from the topical knowledge of a profession and their experiences of observing communication in their daily practice of profiling and teaching. Professionals’ communication is embedded in the relations of workplace and one component of a professional’s practice is the ability to communicate one’s professional knowledge. Participants explain that IEPs tend to have “superlative technical skills,” and IEPs’ ability to express their professional expertise cannot be removed from the social expectations and relations of the workplace. In a discussion of conducting field research for an engineering program, one participant explains:

_You can follow the technical thread through. It’s not inconsequential by any means, but without being able to pop over to someone’s desk to get their bit of information, without being able to have appropriate email conversation, without being able to respond appropriately when a supervisor or higher-level person comes to check in with you, without a way to work through problems, that technical stream is not going to be adequate. We saw it time and time again._ **The way that people work is very much through their personal relationships.**

[Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor, emphasis added]

The language people use to communicate cannot be removed from the social and power relations of context in which communicative exchanges happen. Participants also emphasize that assessment involves understanding the cultural nuances of both a profession and a particular workplace. Furthermore, the language used in communication is difficult to standardize given the particularities of a social context. To illustrate, one participant explains this point during the process of profiling the language demands for the accounting profession.
A lot of interactions in the workplace are remarkably complex and they’re remarkably cryptic, that real communication as opposed to what you find in textbooks is remarkably context driven and it’s remarkably cryptic. People don’t have a nice neat dialogue . . . . You know, all the background knowledge is assumed. And that can be quite difficult for somebody who is struggling with the language, you know something that appears to be a relatively modest CLB level, actually when you analyze it and pick it apart, is actually quite sophisticated because you’re coming to it as a native-speaker of the language, you’re coming to it with all kinds of strategies for putting the information together. You know, you may have five different strategies that you’re using. Understanding the words is only one of them. Knowing the context, guessing from what people say because the communication process is not really question and answer. [Language researcher/consultant, Immigrant service organization]

The language people use to communicate is dependent on the topic, the environment, and one’s relationship with others. While the CLB 2000 constructs language competence along a hierarchy that is supposed to be discernable from topical knowledge such as in the professions, the perspective of the language experts provides insight into the problematic of delineating skills and knowledge. Emphasizing this point, another participant explains why a competency-based approach to language learning and assessment is problematic.

The term competency in particular, is a term I find quite problematic because when you talk about competencies it tends to reduce important areas of knowledge and learning to checklists of things that need to be covered, and again I think that potentially reduces the complexity of what language learners need to know and be able to do. [Language researcher/consultant, Teacher educator]

This section has demonstrated some of the ways in which the CLB 2000 mediates the language experts’ understandings of IEPs’ abilities to communicate in the English language. Through the processes of profiling, they try to take the context of a communicative exchange into consideration. However, they are also expected to measure those exchanges and this requires the language experts to use the CLB document to delineate and parse communicative exchanges into measurable tasks so that they can
be categorized along the hierarchy. In many respects, this textual practice transforms the activities into decontextualized exchanges. At the same time, they recognize that language use is socially embedded and complex. As Campbell and Gregor (2002) asserted, “The text-mediation of any professional relationship is a commonplace and normally unquestioned occurrence. Human service provision in routinely organized through records, forms, and reports” (p. 36). While most of the language experts do not necessarily question the demand to document and delineate language skill from professional competence, their experiences do indicate that such practices decontextualize communication from the social relations of the workplace.

5.3 Professionalism and Professional Unification

Despite the recognition that language use is embedded in complex social contexts and that delineating language skills according to a competency-based model can be problematic, the CLB nonetheless maintains a certain degree of validity for the language experts. In this section, I explore how this validity is sustained through an appeal for professionalization of the field despite the oppositional talk and disjuncture discussed in the previous two sections. Not only are they required to use the CLB document because the web of institutions and governments promote its use as I discussed in Chapter 4, but an appeal to professionalization of the field also sustains the use of the document. The development of standards expressed in the CLB document enables the language experts to justify their expertise and legitimacy as a profession, particularly when they work with other professional groups. While the existence of the CLB enables them to present EAL education as a unified field based on common standards, they also struggle with the external regulation that the CLB imposes on their professional practice.
Evetts (2009) has explained that two ideal types of professionalism are evident in knowledge-based occupations. The first is organizational professionalism, which manifests from a discourse of control. The characteristics of organizational professionalism include standardizing work procedures and practices and accountability and externalize forms of regulation. In contrast, the second type is occupational professionalism, where authority rather than control is the dominant discourse. This discourse is constructed within professional groups and “is based on practitioner autonomy, discretionary judgment, assessment” (Evetts, 2009, p. 248). Professional institutions and associations monitor professional codes of conduct. Evetts (2009) emphasized that while these two forms are ideal and extreme models, most cases would exhibit characteristics of each model. Following, I examine the tension between these two types of professionalism. The language experts simultaneously applaud the move toward unifying the EAL field through the benchmarks and at the same time resist the regulation of their professional practice.

*Professional Unity and Legitimacy*

Participants explain the CLB framework has been an important development for unifying the field of EAL education in Canada. They explain that prior to the CLB’s development, the field lacked unity and standardization. Historically, standardization of knowledge has been important for establishing the professions (Abbott, 1988). As the following participant asserts, a lack of standards has compromised the professionalism of the field in Canada. A set of standards articulated in the CLB, however, is a means for establishing the credibility of the EAL field.
[The CLB] definitely gave the EAL field a whole new focus and security and again what I mentioned earlier about floundering around, that’s really what it felt like. Everyone was just doing their own thing and you know you’re trying to promote this as a professional field without having any common terminology, without having real common language for such a critical part of it. [Community college program director, former instructor]

Another participant explains that the goal of the CLB in unifying the field is “desirable” and “beautiful” because without a “systematic framework, [assessment] is always hodge-podge” [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]. This desire for professional legitimacy, however, must be understood within its historical context. The informal and non-formal teaching of the English language to speakers of other languages has been in existence since colonial contact. Historically, English language teaching in Canada was a voluntary activity first carried out by missionaries and later by church groups and women’s societies until World War II (Joshee, 1996). As one participant explains, the field as a profession is “relatively young” and has largely been unregulated. The requirement that instructors have credentials or qualifications is a relatively recent requirement and the type and level of qualifications demanded depends on the institution where the language experts work. While a master’s degree in applied linguistics or Teaching English-as-a-Second Language is generally required, there are no set standards on minimum qualifications, as they exist in most professions. It could be argued that the field still suffers from the public perception that any speaker of the English language can teach it. In the context of this history, the development of set standards articulated in frameworks such as the CLB is perceived to help establish the EAL field in Canada as a legitimate and credible profession. Historically, professions partly sustained their
legitimacy through the “power and prestige” of academic and specialized knowledge (Abbott, 1988, p. 54).

The appeal of professionalism is also evident during the work of profiling. It establishes the EAL field as a credible one with other professional groups. The work of profiling requires the language experts to work with other long established professions such as nursing, engineering, and accounting. During the language profiling process, the language experts work with employers and other professional groups on advisory committees. A set of standards such as the CLB functions as a communication tool for the language experts when they work with other professional groups or employers as this participant explains:

*I mean we still have criticisms and we still need more assessment tools and more material and things like that, but I think as a kind of very broad way of describing language and language competency, for us it’s quite useful. You know whenever I deal with people in industry or in workplaces, of course people who aren’t language teachers have a hard time talking about what is it that they really want someone to be able to do with language and so to be able to have a tool where we can kind of talk about it and use it as a checklist is a helpful thing.* [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

The language experts are expected to provide expertise to other professionals and the CLB assists in establishing a foundation of expertise despite its flaws. When other professional groups raise concerns about how the language assessments will be conducted, the CLB assists the language experts in asserting their authority and expertise. The following quote illustrates this point.

*We were very strong all the way through the development and implementation stage that these assessments are delivered by language experts, not by nurses because that was one thing that came up early on. The nursing stakeholders said well, why wouldn’t a nurse be determining that and we’re saying this is not your nursing competence.* [Language researcher/consultant, community college instructor]
The language experts view the assessment of language competence distinct from the assessment of professional competence, as articulated in the CLB text, therefore necessitating a specific type of expertise. So, while their experiences indicate challenges in using the competency-based approach articulated in the CLB framework to delineate language competence from professional competence, the CLB nonetheless enables them to assert their expertise and legitimacy as professionals.

While the CLB is a means for unifying and establishing the field as a credible profession, it is also a means for the federal and provincial governments to regulate the field. One of the purposes of the CLB is to standardize the work of language assessment across the country and to ensure accountability as this government administrator explains:

_You know the only reason we need assessment is because we have to prove that we’re doing something. We have to prove that the funding dollars are being used._

[Government administrator, former instructor]

There are indications that regulation of the field will continue to expand. Not only are occupation-specific language exams being developed, but also the federal government has plans to develop CLB-based Language Milestone tests for levels 4 and 8. During the workshop facilitated by the Language Team from the ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada that I attended at the 2009 TESL Canada Conference, members of the language team explained the government’s vision of developing “standardized, made-in-Canada tests based on the CLB” (field notes, October 2, 2009). The purpose of such tests are to provide reliable data to support outcomes analysis, motivate students, and provide proof of language proficiency required for employment, post-secondary study, and the granting of immigration status (field notes, October 2, 2009).
Even though the participants actively use the CLB framework to guide their work in profiling for the professions, they also express caution with respect to the burgeoning trend of assessment through standardized tests. They explain that they “need to value [their] own work as professionals” who are capable of providing accurate assessments through their teaching practice [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]. A few of the participants also raise concerns about the long-term effects the CLB will have on the profession as this quote demonstrates:

*When something gains such widespread credibility, you stop questioning. It just becomes what we do and what we say without really having that self-reflective component . . .. I think that when you’re implementing any kind of framework in a language classroom, or any educational setting for that matter that teachers need to feel that they have ownership to make decisions about what best suits their students needs and I think sometimes when there’s a lot of pre-mandated content and language tasks, language structures, etc. to be addressed I think that teachers sometimes do not always recognize that they have autonomy or power in their own classrooms.* [Language researcher/consultant, Teacher educator]

While the language experts assert their identity as professionals and indicate that professionalism should be generated through EAL practitioners and researchers, generally the EAL field exhibits the characteristics of organizational professionalism. Even though practitioners from the EAL field were involved in consultations to develop the *CLB 2000*, the direction the CLB takes is highly influenced by the federal and provincial governments as discussed in Chapter 4. It is designed to standardize the work procedures of language instructors and assessors and ensure they are accountable in their work practices. Despite the challenges in using the document, it maintains a degree of validity because of the unifying effect it is starting to have in the field as this participant explains:
Even if it were to happen that we left the CLBs on the sidelines for the European Framework, the effect of uniting and informing the TESL community, the ESL community that there should be a common language and common framework that we all operate from, I think it's been huge in terms of creating unity and common goals and common understanding. [Community college program director, former instructor, participant in initial development of benchmarks]

5.4 Summary of Chapter

This chapter has analyzed how the *CLB 2000* organizes the work of the language experts in profiling and assessing the language demands for the professions. It examines how the language experts transform knowledge through textual practices. It begins by exploring the metaphors they use to describe the development and implementation of the *CLB 2000*. These metaphors speak to the ideological and political construction of the English language in Canada. The *CLB 2000* is constructed as “revolutionary,” standardizing assessment practices and “saving the field from a lack of standardization.” Language is perceived as a means for creating unity and coherence in the nation-state. Conversely, other metaphors articulated indicate that this quest for unity through language is “assimilationist” and “utopic.” It is a “dream” to assume that language and its assessment can be controlled. The metaphors illustrate the political terrain that the CLB inhabits and demonstrates where points of acquiescence and resistance exist in relation to the increasing regulation of the field.

The chapter then proceeds to examine more closely how the CLB organizes the language experts’ daily work practices. How do they make decisions about which knowledge and skill to assess? How does the *CLB 2000* guide their work? While the language experts at times indicate that they matter-of-factly delineate and separate linguistic skills from non-linguistic skills, they also indicate the challenges of doing so.
Their experiences indicate that trying to parse skills into measurable tasks can be a strategy for supporting IEPs in their language learning, but these textual practices can also decontextualize communicative exchanges. Professionals’ work practices involve a weaving together of their technical and communicative knowledge and skills. These work practices are also highly influenced by the social relations of the workplace. Social relations have an impact on how knowledge is produced and assessed. Yet, despite the challenges of working with what the language experts sometimes call a “flawed document,” they broadly support the existence of the CLB. The final section of the chapter illustrates that despite the flaws, the CLB represents a body of knowledge from which they can demonstrate their expertise in front of other professional groups. At the same time, trouble over the external regulation of the field by the federal government is expressed. They assert that pre-mandated frameworks such as the CLB can disempower teachers from valuing their own knowledge and skills as professionals.
6 Workplace Stratification and Language Assessment

"Power is multiplicitous, overlain, interactive and complex, policy texts *enter* rather than simply change power relations. Hence again the complexity of the relationship between policy intentions, texts, interpretations and reactions" (Ball, 1993/2006, p. 47 emphasis in original).

This chapter broadens the scope of the research beyond the institutions and the textual practices to examine the discourses that regulate the practices of language profiling and assessment. It explores the social relations of language profiling and assessment for the professions and the dominant discourses articulated through these relations. As Campbell and Gregor (2002) explained, social relations do not just happen to people. “People participate in social relations, often unknowingly, as they act competently and knowledgeably to concert and coordinate their own actions with professional standards or family expectations or organizational rules” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 31). The previous two chapters examined how the regulation of English language assessment is constituted through the collaboration of institutions and the textual practices of interpreting the CLB policy text. This chapter examines the challenges and tensions the language experts encounter as they negotiate the expectations of employers, professional regulatory bodies, and government funding bodies.

The first section explores assumptions and discourses articulated about the measurability of English language competence. Work in knowledge economies not only involves making judgments about the relevant knowledge and skills required for participation in a particular occupation, it often involves measuring knowledge and skill in quantitative terms (Brown et al., 2001). While the benchmark numbers are meant to capture what IEPs can do with the English language, expectations about what the
numbers represent and do is contested. Emerging from the language experts’ discussions is a disjuncture in worldviews. Employers, professional regulatory bodies, and funding bodies want objective evidence that IEPs have reached a certain level of competence in their language abilities. Numbers are expected to demonstrate that communication problems in the workplace have been resolved and they assist in making decisions about hiring and professional licensing. Viewing benchmark levels as an objective source of evidence, however, do not always sit comfortably with the language experts. For the language experts language learning is a process and while a benchmark number offers an approximation of linguistic abilities, measuring language is a subjective process.

In addition to providing various stakeholders with a numerical representation of language competence, determining IEPs’ “cultural fit” for the Canadian workplace is a second expectation placed on the language experts. When conflict or misunderstandings arise in the workplace, IEPs’ English language abilities often are blamed as the problem for miscommunication. Through bridging and workplace language programs, the language experts are expected to resolve communication problems by “fixing” IEPs communication skills. The language experts’ perspectives, however, indicate that challenges in the workplace are much broader and more complex than IEPs’ grammar and pronunciation skills. The language experts’ discussions provide insights into the discourses that constitute fitting into the Canadian workplace.

6. 1 The Politics of Numbers

Early on in my fieldwork, while attending the TESL Canada conference in Banff, “employers want a number” was a phrase mentioned a few times in the sessions that I attended. For example, in the symposium on “Identifying the CLB for Occupations and
Training,” a representative from the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks stated, “employers want a number because they don’t want to consider the variables in language learning” (field notes, October 1, 2009). Then, in the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) workshop “Toward an Enhanced Language Assessment System,” the presenters outlined CIC’s plans to implement portfolio assessment at the lower levels of the benchmarks (i.e. CLB 4), but standardized language testing for the higher benchmark levels (i.e. CLB 8) (field notes, October 2, 2009). During the question and answer period after the presentation, strong reactions to the implementation of tests were voiced from the audience. Audience members queried why Canada was focused on developing standardized tests when other jurisdictions, such as the European Union, were opting for portfolio assessment over standardized tests. The CIC representative responded that during European consultations many actors in fact expressed their preference for a test. Audience members also queried whether the push for standardized testing was coming from industry. While the CIC representative did not directly answer the question, he did comment that CIC was aware of the challenges with standardized tests particularly the administration of them. In my field notes I noted, “the tension between the teachers in the audience and the CIC representative was palpable” (October 2, 2009).

Admittedly, when I began interviewing the language experts a few months later, I had forgotten about these comments on employers wanting a number. They re-surfaced again, however, in the interviews I conducted when I asked the language experts to discuss how the CLB 2000 organized their work practices. Their discussions invariably shifted from talking about how the CLB 2000 text influenced their teaching and
assessment practices to the social relations of supplying employers, funding bodies, and professional regulatory bodies with a quantitative representation of IEPs’ language abilities. In this section, I explore the tensions and conflicts that emerge during the processes of quantifying IEPs’ language skills. What are the motivations behind the benchmark numbers? What are the numbers expected to do? Emerging from the language experts’ experiences are conflicting agendas between product and process. Employers and professional regulatory bodies are focused on outcomes and view numbers as evidence of objective assessment, which assists them in making hiring and licensing decisions in addition to averting accusations of discrimination. For funding bodies, numbers demonstrate accountability for programming. From the language experts’ viewpoint, however, numbers represent an approximation of language competence. For them, the process of language learning, rather than the outcome represented in numerical format, is a priority.

It must be noted that the kinds of quantification that happen through the CLB text and the social relations of profiling are not unique to the modern Canadian context. European nations began using numbers to categorize colonial populations in the eighteenth century (Appadurai, 1996). Using colonial India as a case study, Appadurai (1996) explained that colonial elites used numbers as instruments not only to control the indigenous population, but also to create new realities and subjectivities. He demonstrated that numbers create categories of classification, permit comparisons, establish a common language for sharing information, and create boundaries. As Bowker and Star (1999) explained, assigning people to categories has become “a ubiquitous part of work in the modern, bureaucratic state” (p. 285). Numbers also speak to relations of
power in modern democratic states (Rose, 1999). Questions arise about who is involved in calculating numbers and the methods and techniques used in quantification. In this section I draw on the experiences of the language experts and government administrators to examine how numbers regulate the practices of English language profiling and assessment in the Canadian state.

**Numbers as an Indicator of Objectivity**

The *CLB 2000* document describes the benchmarks as “statements (descriptions) of communicative competence and performance tasks in which the learner demonstrates application of knowledge (competence) and skill” so that users of the document can describe and measure, “in a standard way,” English language users communicative proficiency (*CLB 2000*, p. VIII). The *CLB 2000* directs users of the document to view communication as a measurable performance based on the application of IEPs’ knowledge of the English language. The benchmark levels articulated in the *CLB 2000* organize people’s understanding of language ability by assigning numbers to the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Benchmark numbers are descriptors of “what a learner can do at the time of performance assessment (for placement) or evaluation (exit determination)” (*CLB 2000*, p. IX). The language experts are expected to measure IEPs’ language competence in order to provide employers, funding agencies and regulatory bodies with numerical values that indicate professionals’ level of communicative competence.

The language experts’ explain that in the professions employment-related training is often viewed as a measurable performance that should demonstrate tangible results. The language experts suggest that this perspective influences understandings of language
learning as a measurable outcome in the professions. In the following quote, one of the language experts who has worked with professionals in the engineering and nursing professions describes her/his understanding of how the assessment of knowledge and skill is viewed:

*I think that a lot of the training in workplaces is, [employers and regulatory bodies] kind of want, again this is my impression, that they want to be able to measure it and it’s, I often think it’s something like safety training. You know this is where engineering companies have put a lot of energy into. Safety in the workplace, they can measure whatever training or campaign they have for safety and they can measure it at the end with reduced accidents or something like that. So, I think there’s a mindset that’s a little bit like that when they go into this idea of having language training that they can offer some training and then measure it somehow in some way like maybe the managers can report that there are fewer incidents of miscommunication or something like that.* [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

Similarly, in the development of the CELBAN (the nursing language exam), stakeholders such as nurses, employers, and nursing regulatory bodies who participated in the initial development indicated the importance of evidence in measuring language competency. The following is a passage from the report, *Benchmarking the English Language Demands of the Nursing Profession across Canada* (CCLB, July 2002):

> Many participants mentioned the importance of having some process to ensure that nurses who were registered could communicate in the workplace. It is important to maintain standards, and there is a need for evidence of competency. For employers, it is important that all employees have the ability to communicate. Public perception and public safety were also mentioned as important issues. It is essential to take responsibility for safe, ethical care. Language skills have to meet professional standards. (p. 16)

From this viewpoint, profession-specific language exams must provide evidence that demonstrates IEPs are competent users of the English language within a professional context. In her discussion of language tests, Shohamy (2001) explained that numbers
hold a powerful place in public perception because they are a symbol of objectivity and truth. While the CLB 2000 articulates language competence as a measurable performance, the language experts explain that employers and professional regulatory bodies also expect evidence that language competence has been accurately measured.

In addition, the language experts explain that employers and regulatory bodies “want a number” because it assists them in making licensing and hiring decisions. The language experts suggest that a number is expected to represent an objective discernment of ability. As I described in Chapter 1, a minimum level for each of the four linguistic skills has been established for nursing, engineering, and accounting. This provides professional regulatory bodies with evidence of an IEPs’ language competence and assists the bodies in making licensing decisions. For employers, the perceived objectivity of the benchmark number assists them in making judgments when hiring IEPs. In the following passage a government administrator who works closely with employers and professional regulatory bodies explains why numbers are perceived as important in making employment decisions. While employers and regulatory bodies are not necessarily interested in learning about the theoretical underpinnings of the CLB framework, they are interested in having a tool that will assist them in making decisions about the abilities of IEPs whose first language is not English. The government administrator explains:

_They’re interested in knowing what their employees can do, yeah, or in being able to figure out what people can do before they hire them. They’re usually not interested in the whole package of the benchmarks. I’d say at times for sure they’re interested in numbers. They like to have numbers, but we’re always cautionary about that because like I said, we’ve seen cases where low-stakes tests are used inappropriately because they just love the fact that there’s a number_
attached to it, like they can look at the number and make a judgment right there.

[Government administrator, former instructor]

In another example, the following language expert, who has worked on profiling projects in the engineering and accounting professions, explains that a numerical representation of IEPs’ English language competence eases the challenges employers encounter during the hiring process. She/he articulates that employers do not know how to make judgments about IEPs’ language skills and therefore, they want to have a means that enables them to make judgments easily.

[Employers] just want to reduce their workload, their problems. They don’t want to have to deal with difficult human resources issues. They want a nice working setting. They don’t want to have difficult decisions to make when it comes to choosing a candidate. [Language consultant/researcher, Community college instructor]

A numerical representation of competence is expected to demonstrate IEPs’ English language competency and simplify the complexity of making employment-related decisions. The language experts explain that when employers communicate with IEPs who speak English with an accent, they are uncertain about how to assess the person’s English language abilities. A measurement of IEPs’ abilities eases making judgments because the number is expected to represent what IEPs’ can and cannot do with the English language.

Beneath the discourse of measurability and objectivity, however, lie additional reasons for language assessment tools and programs. The language experts explain that employers and professional regulatory bodies struggle with making decisions about accents and ways of communicating with which they are unfamiliar. As the following language expert discusses, employers and professional regulatory bodies are not only
concerned about issues of public safety and maintaining professional standards, they fear accusations of discrimination. When employers and professional regulatory bodies do not know how to communicate with IEPs from different cultural backgrounds, a standardized system of measurement that objectively demonstrates IEPs’ abilities to communicate will enable them to avoid accusations of discrimination. She/he explains:

_They are very worried about people accusing them of discrimination and so it almost freezes them. Now I’m giving you the worst case scenario, but these [comments] came up more than one time, so they just think, this in terms of giving feedback and of course we know that the internationally educated professionals desperately need feedback, but people are very afraid to give it to them for fear of discrimination, being accused of discrimination or racism or something. So quite a few people talked about that._ [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

Given that 75 per cent of immigrants to Canada are people of colour (Statistics Canada, 2008), both language and race intersect as markers of distinction (Dei, 2006). Moreover, Haque (2012) argued, “Language provides a convenient basis for racial differentiation because, even as the universal nature of language is claimed, the deterministic and immutable origins of separate languages provide the basis for dividing and hierarchializing groups of people along cultural and racialized lines” (p. 15). A numerical representation of IEPs’ English abilities gives the appearance of objectivity and is expected to ease decision-making when employers and professional regulatory bodies have to assess the skill level of people who speak a global form of English. If IEPs’ language skills can be objectively measured, then accusations of discrimination can be averted. The desirability for objectivity also enables anyone who has to make judgments about IEPs’ skills to avoid difficult conversations about not only what constitutes language skill and its assessment, but it also averts discussions about the underbelly of race relations in Canada.
Numbers as an Indicator of Accountability

Benchmark numbers are not only expected to demonstrate a particular level of competence, they are also expected to indicate that funding dollars are used appropriately. In professional bridging programs that prepare IEPs to take both the language and professional exams, a higher benchmark number demonstrates an improvement in skill and is perceived to have ensured program success and accountability. The language experts’ discussions indicate that consideration of employers’ and funders’ expectations influence the design and teaching practices of their programs. They are aware of having to prove that they are being accountable by demonstrating that IEPs are progressively achieving higher benchmark levels. At the higher levels of the benchmarks (e.g. CLB 7 and above), however, the language experts indicate movement up the scale becomes more challenging because learners have reached a maximum proficiency level. This does not mean that IEPs language abilities will not improve, but more time is required than most programs offer. For example, in a discussion of an engineering bridging program, one of the language experts comments:

_We don’t necessarily undertake to move them from benchmark 6 to benchmark 8. I think in a three-month communication program that would be rather ambitious. Based on our benchmarking report, we estimate something like 350 hours of classroom instruction would be required to move a person one benchmark. I think it varies by level. The higher your level, the harder it is to move a benchmark. I think that was the conclusion. So, in this period of three months, we aim to move people one benchmark. That’s the outcome that the funders look for and that’s what we’re aiming at._ [Language researcher/consultant, Immigrant service organization]

An increase in benchmark levels is not only expected to signify IEPs improvement in their language abilities, it also demonstrates that programs are meeting their goals and remaining accountable to funding agencies.
Supplying a number as an outcome that is expected to demonstrate both IEPs’ improvement and justification for programming, however, does not always sit comfortably with the language experts. From their viewpoint, language learning is a process and ideally assessments should reflect the process. They emphasize the importance of the local context in which communication happens. While they assert that the CLB framework assists in providing an approximation of language skill, it is not an absolute or immutable indicator of language competence. In the following passage, one of the language experts who has been working on the development of bridging programs and assessment tools for accounting and engineering explains that tests will give a two-thirds approximation of competence:

_In general I would say something like two-thirds of your ability to communicate is probably accounted for by general language proficiency. You know, that is, and I base that statement on a variety of studies of testing, testing is my background, where you correlate different language measures together and there’s a general view that general underlying language proficiency accounts for about two-thirds of the score variance or about two-thirds of the agreement between different tests. There seems to be this core language proficiency and then other things why tests don’t match each other exactly is because of differences in methodology and in content and in these different things._ [Language researcher/consultant, Immigrant service organization]

The language experts’ discussions point to the subjectivity of language and the methods used in its assessment. They are, therefore, cautious about employers’ and professional regulatory bodies fixation on numbers. In the following passage, one of the language experts who is multilingual explains that language performance is dependent on the context in which the interaction happens and the relationship between the speakers. She/he demonstrates her/his point using our interview as an example:

_The intention behind [the CLB] was to have something flexible enough, a one-size-fit all kind of framework that you could just adapt to your needs. But then, the other side of it is that you loose in the standardization. How can you_
standardize something that can be used according to idiosyncrasies and people’s will . . .. The context in which you are using language is very important, so I think most benchmarks I’ve looked at disregard it. So, I cannot perform, we’re having an interview here and that, my performance and your performance will vary according to the subject, the situation, how many people are watching us, the channel. One of your options, over the phone, makes it a little bit more difficult for me, cause I need those aids. So that’s what I think. I’m biased. I think [the CLB] lacks context. [Language researcher, Community college instructor]

Even though during the development of language exams great pains are taken to validate the exam, it cannot predict every kind of communicative exchange an IEP might encounter in the workplace. While the language experts assert that the CLB framework assists in providing an approximation of language skill, it is not absolute or immutable indicator of language competence. They are, therefore, cautious about employers’ and professional regulatory bodies fixation on numbers.

Their discussions also indicate that with the current focus on learning outcomes, represented in the form of a benchmark number, focus on the process of learning moves to the periphery. The language experts discuss the struggles of offering assessment that captures a wider range of skills and abilities developed in the learning process in bridging and workplace programs. In the following passage, one of the language experts describes developing curricula for engineering and accounting bridging programs. She/he explains that the development team wanted to have an ongoing process of assessment throughout the program rather than one summative assessment at the end of the program. In the following passage, she/he describes the tensions that can emerge with respect to how assessments should be undertaken:

*Each task would have its own series of assessments that would go with it to indicate successful completion, which funders don’t like. They want the raw number at the end to feel that this was a successful program at the end, but that doesn’t always fit with best teaching practices. . . . I feel the more assessment can*
be integrated in the relevant tasks, the more meaningful it is for the learner. I am personally quite opposed to the burgeoning growth of broad level assessment as gatekeeping . . . . Employers are saying, “Great if we can have an assessment for accounting to show that this person is meeting an adequate language level”, you know I’m not sure you’re going to get much more information from a specific accounting language test than you are from other assessments that are already out there to be quite frank . . . . I just see how assessments that are tied to what students are learning in the class, and if what students are learning in their classes are relevant and immediately applicable to their workplace, then that’s a much more useful process for the student. I guess the trick there or difficulty there is communicating that successful completion to employers. You know, they’re not going to know what that means necessarily, so looking for ways to report student achievement in outcomes in terms of that being recognized. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

The conflict is that the process is important for language experts, but for employers, funding bodies and professional regulatory bodies the outcome of an assessment, represented in the form of a number, takes precedence over the process. The participants talk about their unease of reducing language learning to a number and having to demonstrate movement between levels in order to ensure the continuous provision of funding. A few discuss representing and communicating skill through a number as going against best teaching practices. Participants are concerned about the processes of learning and expressed that particularly in bridging and workplace programs, communicating the results of assessment should be based on representing the process of improvement rather than competency outcomes at the time of assessment. Even though participants are compelled to represent the learning of IEPs through benchmark numbers, they also strive to broaden and deepen assessment so that it focuses on the processes of learning and not merely measuring the outcomes.

New Forms of Self and Unintended Consequences

While the benchmark numbers are expected to demonstrate competency, simplify employment-related decision making, and ensure accountability, numbers as a form of
text-mediated knowing also has unintended consequences. In the following passage, one of the language experts discusses how they organize portfolio assessment for an accounting program. The goal is to educate IEPs’ in understanding the CLB framework so that they will be able to take some responsibility for their own learning. Through this process, however, IEPs’ subjectivities as English language users are categorized into the confines of the framework.

It’s based on a portfolio and the idea of the portfolio is that students self-assess themselves, so that they become aware of their Canadian Language Benchmark level and what it actually means and we’ve been developing some material to help them understand that because it’s, I have to say the, I mean any language framework is not necessarily immediately obvious and transparent to a person who is not a linguist. And so there’s a whole education process to teach the students what it means when we say that you’re CLB 6. What can you do when your 6. What do you need to do to be 7. And the whole idea is that they look at the goals for the next level. They set learning goals for themselves. They monitor their progress against those goals. They collect evidence of achievement in a dossier in their portfolio. [Language researcher/consultant, Immigrant service organization]

The passage demonstrates how new understandings of self are generated by categorizing language ability according to benchmark numbers. Drawing on Ian Hackings concept of “dynamic nominalism,” Appadurai (1996) argued that from categorizing subjects and assigning quantitative values emerged “the creation of new kinds of self by officially enforced labeling activities” (p. 125). Through the process of categorizing new immigrants according to benchmarks numbers, language competency is viewed as individual acquisitive skills, removed from the social relations of communicative interactions.

Furthermore, now that the CLB has been in circulation for more than a decade, information about the CLB is becoming more widely known. Information is easily
accessible through the Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) website where the general public can find all CLB-related documents such as “Can Do” checklists, assessment manuals, and Human Resource assessment kits (www.language.ca). Even though these resources exist, they are not always used appropriately. The language experts explain that employers of professions and occupations for which language exams and programs have not been developed make independent decisions about minimum levels required for employment even though research and consultations have not been conducted. The result is employment decisions about language ability are being made based on very little information as the following government administrator explains:

People say, oh well I was applying at so-and-so and they told me I have to have a benchmark 8 or something and in all these cases we know that the employer hasn’t had their occupation benchmarked, so in those cases we know that they’ve come up with that number somehow you know based on general observation . . .. The cases where we see employers asking for benchmarks, then we deal with that in all kinds of ways. In a lot of cases like I said when we speak to them about it, we find that they know very little about benchmarks, but they’ve grabbed a number based on a small amount of information that they’ve heard or hearsay and that they’re using those numbers. And what they’re interested in isn’t having a whole understanding of the benchmarks framework. They’re just interested in is there a test and is there a number at the end of it, what number should we look for. . . . They’re starting from no knowledge at all and so actually what we’ve found is that a little bit of knowledge has been detrimental because people latch onto a little bit that they know and start extrapolating from there in unpredictable ways. [Government administrator, former instructor]

As employers struggle to make judgments about immigrants’ language abilities, numbers are perceived to be an easy solution for dealing with differences that emerge from the globalism of English. The benchmark numbers are not only expected to represent a particular level of skill and knowledge, they are also expected to simplify the complexity of employment relations.
In sum, this section demonstrates some of the ways in which the CLB numbers mediate understandings of English language competence. As Appadurai (1996) asserted, numbers have a pedagogical function. In the case of the CLB numbers, they teach users of the document that language learning is a measurable performance. Not only does the CLB text articulate language competence as a measurable performance, but also by investigating the social relations of profiling, I have attempted to show that the expectations of employers, professional regulatory bodies, and funding bodies also influence the processes and understandings of language competence and assessment. The language experts’ experiences speak to fundamental differences about language learning. For the language experts, language learning is a fluid process and dependent on the context in which it occurs. For other stakeholders, though, language learning is focused on the achievement of static and measurable outcomes. CLB numbers are expected to convey objectivity to help ease the challenges that employers and professional regulatory bodies encounter in assessing IEPs who speak variations of English. As Rose (1999) explained, “Numbers are part of the techniques of objectivity that establish what it is for a decision to be ‘disinterested’” (p. 199). Objectivity depoliticizes language in Canadian workplaces.

6.2 Cultural Competence as an Indicator of Employment Fit

In addition to providing employers, funding agencies, and professional regulatory bodies with benchmark numbers to demonstrate IEPs’ English language competence and ensure accountability in programming, the language experts are also expected to identify IEPs suitability for the Canadian workplace. In a similar fashion to the term “numbers,”
“cultural competence” and “intercultural competence” were expressions that consistently emerged during the interviews. The language experts’ discussions indicate that a prevailing discourse of “employment fit” is tied to cultural competence and underlies the implementation of the CLB 2000 and the trend toward profiling and assessing the language demands in the professions. In this section, I examine how the discourses of cultural competence and employment fit contribute to the organization of language profiling and assessment. I demonstrate that cultural competence is a social construct that creates stratification in the workplace.

During their work of profiling and developing profession-specific language tests or bridging programs, the language experts explain that employers and professional regulatory bodies often identify IEPs’ language ability as a problem in the workplace. Emerging from the language experts discussions are conflicts with respect to the extent that language is indeed the problem. Employers and professional regulatory bodies want evidence that IEPs can use the English language competently. When problems arise in the workplace, personnel often assume that IEPs’ language abilities are the cause of the problems. However, the language experts assert that attributing workplace problems to language is simplistic. Based on their observations, they argue that problems arise from a lack of understanding about cultural nuances and different ways of being and communicating. Employers’ willingness to understand the complexity of and differences in communicating influences how the language experts conduct their profiling and assessment work. In some cases, employers are open to understanding communication problems at a deeper level. The following language expert who has worked on the development of engineering and nursing bridging programs explains:
Usually my first point of entry is usually HR, someone is human resources . . . and depending on that person in HR, if they really understand the depth of the challenge around diversity and creating a workplace where there’s training on both sides, then they’re open to that discussion. But sometimes the HR person themselves sees it just as an issue for the immigrants and then I think it’s often well, if they upgrade their language, then they’ll be able to integrate . . . It’s much more complex than that and the workplace is much more, the interpersonal relationships and the way people function, it’s just so complicated. You know I’ve now done workplace training in a variety of companies probably to less success than the one I’m originally describing to you as part of the project, and it’s because with the project we had a lot of discussion around [the challenges of diversity] and the woman who sat on our advisory committee, she really started to get a good understanding of the challenges. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

However, other employers are not open to discussions of difference and tend to view language ability as a problem of the IEP that needs to be “fixed.” They want simple solutions when communication problems arise as this language expert explains:

The person in HR, again I’m not pointing fingers, I don’t think had a very deep understanding of that workplace and some of the challenges. I didn’t have very much access to him. My feeling in that situation was much more like, “we’ve got a problem here, we think it’s a language issue, just come in and do some language training and fix the problem.” That was very definitely the sense I had of it. And for me it was frustrating because I wanted to have a relationship where we worked or collaborated together to really understand the nature of what was going on in the workplace and I couldn’t do that and I don’t think this person even really saw it in the same way that I did. So, it ended up, I’m sure if you had the luxury of talking to him, I think he’d say well that was a failure. It didn’t work. We had twelve weeks, paid for it and no one seems to speak any better. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

Viewing language as a problem requiring fixing minimizes the complexities of communicative interactions in the workplace. Communication is often perceived as the cause of problems in the workplace and IEPs’ language abilities are blamed for incidences of miscommunication. The language experts, however, explain that challenges in the workplace are often broader than the demonstration of language ability. Challenges often stem from knowledge of not only workplace culture, but broader
cultural expectations as well. The language experts discuss that they are often expected to act as cultural informants and assessors who will resolve communication problems. They are expected to determine IEPs’ level of fit or improve IEPs’ ability to assimilate. As one of the government administrators explains judgments about a person’s suitability for the workplace is sometimes based on a hasty assessment of the person’s English language ability. Perceptions about English language ability influence decisions with respect to whether an IEP will be suitable for the workplace, as this government administrator explains:

*What we found is often [employers’] perception of someone’s English was based on a very short interaction and hearing an accent and so saying, oh we only like to hire people who speak English and then our coordinator here who does English at Work [programming] asking a lot more about how do you know they speak English or what makes you think they don’t speak English. We’re seeing a lot of situations where you have a sense that someone walks in with an application form and the person at the front desk hears an accent and the application form goes into the not suitable pile because their perception is that their communication won’t be good. [Government administrator, former instructor]*

Accent, as a marker of difference, is the basis upon which judgments about suitability are sometimes made. While the language experts see their role as educating IEPs about the cultural nuances of the Canadian workplace and educating employers about the complexity of communicative difference, judgments about fit are also made intuitively as this language expert who has worked on accounting and engineering projects explains:

*What can happen is employers often identify the problem as a language issue, but when we look at it, we see that it’s not necessarily language, it’s more cultural differences that are coming into play and so then our job is to somehow teach [those cultural differences] explicitly. It’s a tough one because employers seem to have this intuitive feel for a hire. I’ve heard them talk about that. “Oh yeah, they’ll fit into the team.” [Language consultant/researcher, Community college instructor]*
Perceptions about fit, however, are not static and fluctuate depending on broader societal circumstances. The determination of IEPs’ fit changes with the state of the economy. When the economy is “booming” and jobs are plentiful, IEPs will be hired for their technical skills even if they are perceived to be culturally different. When there is a surplus of labour, IEPs encounter more difficulties in finding employment in their professions as this language expert who works with internationally educated engineers and accountants explains:

If there’s a lot of demand for workers, people who are not necessarily an obvious cultural fit will be considered. I think the tendency is if there are plenty of applicants, many companies tend to go with somebody who is comfortable and familiar. I really think that is an issue. A lot of the problem is communicating and bridging this culture gap. [Language researcher/consultant, Immigrant service organization]

In addition to the state of the economy, acceptance of difference can depend on the size of the organization. One of the language experts who has worked with both large multinational engineering firms and small local firms explains that larger firms tend to be more open to IEPs from different cultural backgrounds because they have the resources and personnel to implement diversity strategies and training. However, as the following language expert further explains, smaller enterprises tend to focus on hiring IEPs who appear familiar:

You know, we have people who are extremely well qualified and experienced and getting them to sell themselves in a way that appeals to Canadian employers is an issue. I think the issue, you know, I think there is an issue of fit. There are a number of issues around that. I think that in a lot of the economy consists of small and medium enterprises. I think the large large companies, you know, have large well-organized human resource departments. I think they have people who are aware of the contribution that immigrants can make to companies. They’re aware of how they may need to modify their recruitment processes, so that they can attract and hire immigrants. The issue is with the small and medium enterprises and I think those are companies that are more likely to default to
Employers and professional regulatory bodies’ understanding of the communication processes with IEPs depends on the particular culture of the workplace and the profession. The language experts explain that some employers are committed to improving the working conditions for IEPs and to developing a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in communicating across differences. Other employers are looking for employees who will easily integrate into the existing workplace culture.

6.3 The Politics of Cultural Competence

Measuring IEPs’ language ability and determining fit is not so easy. What constitutes fit in the Canadian workplace? Who is the familiar IEP, fitting easily into the Canadian workplace? How do conceptions of cultural competence and fit contribute to stratification in the workplace? In this section, I explore articulations of cultural competence and some of the strategies the language experts employ to mediate discourses of employment fit. Their discussions show that the assessment of language competence is a social practice embedded in the power relations of the workplace.

The language experts’ experiences indicate that tensions in the workplace are much broader than the demonstration of language ability. While the benchmarks are designed to measure language ability and employers and professional regulatory bodies want evidence of English language competence, the language experts talk at length about their unease of reducing language learning to a measurable performance. They explain that representing language ability in the form of a CLB number does not capture the nuances, complexity and intangible aspects of language learning. The following
language expert who has worked on engineering and nursing bridging projects illustrates this point:

Language takes time, really takes time to learn and especially when we’re talking about people already at a high level, sort of CLB 7 and above, that the kinds of improvements you’re going to see are really very limited and so it was a hard discussion to kind of say, because [employers] were very results oriented and wanted to see real tangible proof. Like, “can you give them another test and tell me how much better they do on this test,” that kind of thing. Difficult to demonstrate and I think some of the benefits in the long run were less tangible. Things like increased confidence and self-reporting that they spoke up in meetings more often than they had before and reports from HR (Human Resources) that they were participating in company activities more than they had before. And just from the perspective of a teacher, some of the benefits were not what we originally expected. Some classes became almost like a discussion around diversity and intercultural communication in the workplace and really almost using me as a bit of a cultural informant I guess you’d call it. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

Participants explain that the social and cultural aspects of language learning for the workplace are difficult to measure because each workplace and profession has a particular culture. They indicate that IEPs they have worked with, particularly at the higher levels of the benchmarks, might not demonstrate significant improvement in the four skill areas (reading, listening, writing, and speaking). However, these same IEPs demonstrate significant growth in confidence and develop an understanding of the socio-cultural expectations of their work environments. Learning to navigate the social relations and hierarchies of the workplace is an integral part of employment integration. In some cases, participants explain that IEPs feeling supported by their employers through language training programs is the most significant outcome for the IEPs.

In another example, the following language expert talks about how differences manifest in the workplace. She/he describes a situation at an engineering firm where she/he was teaching in a workplace language program. The wife of the firm’s vice
president had passed away and the IEPs working at the firm were unsure of what to do. Should they send a card? How do they sign the card? Should they attend the funeral? What would be the repercussions if they did not attend the funeral? She/he explains further:

*When I hear from employers that [IEPs] don’t fit in, I think, okay you know what do you mean by not fit in. And often it is around this social interaction-type stuff that I was just describing. It seems not very significant on the surface, but I think it’s in those unusual situations sometimes that the lack of what I would call socio-cultural competence on the part of the new immigrant, but also a kind of a lack of understanding different types of intercultural communication and ways of being on the part of the employer, so I don’t see it as the immigrant doesn’t fit. I see it as both ways, but ultimately when someone is saying that they don’t fit, they’re acknowledging that there’s some kind of communication intercultural challenge, but they can’t describe it. They don’t have the words to describe it.* [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

The language experts attribute the challenges of fit to a lack of cultural competence, not only on the part of IEPs, but also for employers and professional regulatory bodies. In the following passage, one of the language experts, who has had experience working in international contexts, explains that different experiences can be a source of strength for organizations, but they are often perceived as a hindrance:

*A lot of companies are looking for somebody who will meet their immediate needs who will work easily with the people who are already in the company. In some respects because some people are not thinking in big picture terms, they’re not necessarily seeing some of the advantages an immigrant can bring to their organization because of their breadth of experience. In fact, it’s probably unwise to assume that things are necessarily done in the optimum or perfect way in Canada. In fact, people having experience of doing things in different ways can bring a tremendous influx of ideas and creativity into companies. I don’t know if people are necessarily thinking in those terms, which is unfortunate.* [Language researcher/consultant, Immigrant service organization]

The language experts assert that more education and training in the workplace is needed for all Canadians. The language experts’ discussions also demonstrate, though, that cultural competence can be a discourse of discrimination. In the following passage one
of the language experts, who works with internationally educated engineers and nurses, explains that even IEPs who come from countries where English is a dominant language encounter struggles in the workplace:

[Canadian immigrants’] English levels have risen. They’re higher than they used to be, so I think that’s probably very important. I think there’s a lot of pressure from the labour market to make sure that we have people who have higher levels of English, but it’s not just language and I think that’s what I’m grappling with. It’s something more than that and because we see people even from countries where you know English is, you know like India for example or the Philippines. I work a lot with nurses from the Philippines and they’re spoken is English is really quite fluent, again I’m generalizing, but really quite fluent on the surface. But the reading and critical thinking and the understanding of the role of the nurse or the actual role of a nurse is really very different. Incredibly different. So we’re really barely touching the surface by saying it’s language. [Language researcher/consultant, Community college instructor]

These comments illustrate that understanding of professional practice and communication during one’s professional practices intimately connected to socio-cultural contexts.

While this language expert attributes the differences to culture, other language experts’ comments point to language as a marker of discrimination. Even though the language experts’ work tends to focus on assisting IEPs with understanding issues of hierarchies and status in the Canadian workplace, they assert that employers and professional regulatory bodies also need to take some responsibility for learning about and working with social and cultural differences. An inability, and even fear, to understand difference has repercussions for IEPs as the following language expert explains:

In our work we’re starting to feel that if we can address those kinds of scenarios and situations early on for the employee, that will help, but I think many of us also feel that that’s fifty per cent of the equation and that there’s also employer training that needs to happen as well around dealing with diversity and the feedback we get from employers is they’re kind of afraid to. They don’t want to have accusations of discrimination. It’s something that they don’t necessarily feel skilled to do, so then internationally educated professionals get kind of side-lined. They’re often the first to be laid off. They’re used for their technical skills, but
In sum, this section has discussed how IEPs’ language abilities are attributed to communication problems in the workplace. Language becomes a factor for determining whether IEPs’ will fit into the Canadian workplace. The language experts’ experiences, however, indicate that integration is much more complex than the demonstration of language ability. They attribute challenges in the workplace to a breakdown in cultural competence for both employers and IEPs. To talk only about cultural competence, however, overshadows the power and politics of language. Language and its assessment are contributing factors to stratification in the workplace.

6.4 Summary of Chapter

This chapter demonstrates how regulation does not happen only through texts, but through the expectations and social relations of different groups. It explores the social relations that the language experts and government administrators have with employers and professional regulatory bodies. What do these groups expect from the CLB 2000 and from the language experts? First, this chapter examined how numbers become a significant organizer and regulator of the language experts’ work. Quantifying IEPs’ language competence is expected to demonstrate that standards exist and have been objectively measured. Numbers construct a perception of accuracy and truth with respect to the assessment of IEPs’ language abilities. This objective measurement is meant to ease hiring decisions for employers and licensing decisions for professional regulatory bodies. This viewpoint speaks to language as a fixed system rather than one in which language is seen as dynamic and fluid practice negotiated between communities. The
experiences of the language experts and government administrators indicate that standardizing and measuring language is a political endeavor embedded in the power relations of the nation-state.

The second expectation of language profiling and assessment practices is that they will help to determine IEPs’ fit or suitability for the Canadian workplace. The language experts, through the assessment of language competence, are expected to be mediators in determining whether IEPs demonstrate the cultural competence that is required to fit into the workplace. Cultural competence as an indicator of employment fit is a discourse of discrimination that contributes to stratification in the workplace. The discussion in this chapter speaks to static and homogeneous perceptions of Canadian workplace culture. If the cultural qualities of the workplace could simply be articulated, the all IEPs would have to do is demonstrate these characteristics, “fit” into the workplace, and the problems of difference could be resolved. However, the language experts and government administrators’ experiences illustrate that determining what constitutes cultural competence and fit is political, reflecting the power relations of Canadian workplaces. The language experts’ experiences indicate that when difference is encountered, it is perceived as a problem. Language is blamed as the problem, and while communication challenges exist, the problematic is an inability to understand or accept different professional practices and ways of communicating.
7 Discussion of Findings and Recommendations

Employing institutional ethnography, this research has articulated an empirical map of the processes, institutions, texts, textual practices, power and social relations that constitute language profiling and assessment of IEPs’ English language skills. Through an analysis of the CLB 2000, government and organizational reports, and the experiences of the language experts and provincial government administrators responsible for developing and overseeing profession-specific language tools, programs and initiatives, this research makes three significant contributions.

First, it contributes to existing empirical studies discussing the challenges of credential recognition that IEPs encounter in Canada. These studies have examined the economic disparities (Bannerjee, 2009; Buhr, 2010; Zietsma, 2010), recognition strategies (Lemay, 2007), comparisons with other countries (Hawthorne, 2007; Walker, 2007), and prejudice and professional protectionism (Guo, 2007, 2009). While language competence has been noted as a contributing factor in the lack of recognition, little empirical or theoretical study has been undertaken. This research study is unique in that the focus is on the English language and the processes and assessment practices through which it is assessed. It complements and expands upon these existing studies to consider the role of language as it intersects with professional competence. It speaks to the social construction of both language and professional competence and the non-recognition of knowledge. This research also attempts to make connections between the regulation of language and the discourses of the knowledge economy.
Second, this study adds to existing empirical research on the CLB and the theoretical foundations of language planning and policy. Existing research on the CLB has focused on issues of citizenship (Fleming, 2007), discourse analysis with respect to employment and skills policies (Gibb, 2008), and the framework’s narrow conceptualization of proficiency (Cray & Currie, 2004; Haque & Cray, 2006). While these critiques are valuable, they tend to focus on issues of general settlement rather than the policy processes of implementation or the labour market integration of internationally educated professionals. This study adds to these studies by mapping the power and social relations that continue to sustain competency-based frameworks such as the CLB as valid texts in assessment practices.

Third, this research contributes both theoretical and empirical research that considers languages as a social practice. Theoretically, existing research disrupts modernist conceptions of languages as bounded systems tied to nation-states and instead examines how languages emerge from local social conditions and are negotiated among communities of language users. Much of this research, however, has focused on popular culture, indigenous communities, and public schooling situated in contexts other than Canada. This study is unique in that it has considered the social construction of language in professional and work communities. This research speaks to the challenges of trying to standardize language and language assessment practices for the English language.

7.1 The Knowledge Economy and Language Regulation

In this research, the knowledge economy is understood as a set of discourses that have informed national policy development in which a highly educated and skilled workforce is deemed essential for economic sustainability. While it is debatable whether
Canada can indeed be classified as a knowledge economy (Schugurensky, 2007), knowledge economy discourses have nonetheless influenced economic and social policy. This research speaks to two problems of knowledge in knowledge economies – the recognition of knowledge and the standardization of knowledge.

The experiences of the IEPs illuminate some of the contradictions found in the Canadian government’s development of policy based on knowledge economy discourses. Canadian immigration policy is designed to attract highly skilled and educated knowledge workers and within knowledge economy discourses, knowledge workers are expected to exhibit sophisticated manipulation of signs, symbols and text (Luke, 1995/1996). IEPs who migrate to Canada are selected based on their status as 21st century knowledge workers. After they cross the Canadian border, however, they struggle to receive recognition for their credentials, to gain licensure to practice, and find employment in their fields. While recognition of their professional credentials is part of the struggle, this study demonstrates that the assessment of IEPs’ professional knowledge and competence are not the only determining factors in labour market integration. The assessment of their English language competence also contributes to the struggle.

Unlike the professions, however, EAL teaching and assessment in Canada has historically been an unregulated field. One mechanism that governments employ if they want to regulate a field or a sector of the economy is through the development of texts (DeVault, 2008a; Smith, 2005). Beginning in the 1990s, the Canadian federal government took steps to develop a standardized framework to regulate EAL teaching and assessment. Why have immigrants’ English language competence emerged as a social problem in the past twenty years? Canada has received immigrants for decades
who have not spoken English as their first language, so why is there such a focus now on measuring immigrants’ English language proficiency? These questions speak to broader issues of global migration and what it means to know in knowledge economies. As Farrell and Fenwick (2007a) stated, “recognition of knowledge emerges as a clear problem in determining exactly what knowledge is required in the workplaces of a global economy” (p. 6). In the Canadian context, not only is the recognition of IEPs’ professional knowledge and credentials constructed as a problem, but their knowledge and use of the English language is also constituted as problematic. For knowledge of the English language to be recognized, common processes of assessing language knowledge must be standardized. In a field such as EAL, which historically has not adhered to a standard body of knowledge or standard assessment practices, regulation is required to establish standardization. This research contributes to understandings of how standardization occurs through policy processes intent on building a knowledge economy.

Study findings illustrate that standardizing language competence so that it may be recognized is political. This standardizing is subject to the social histories and power relations of not only a particular nation-state, but also the local contexts in which communicative interactions occur. Findings demonstrate that regulation occurs not only through the proliferation of policy texts, but also through social relations and institutional discourses. The experiences of the language experts and government administrators provide insights into the textual practices and social and power relations that sustain the processes of assessing IEPs’ English language competence. Their experiences demonstrate that understandings of professional competence and language competence
are not universal, but instead are subject to national and local socio-cultural constructions of what constitutes knowledge.

In the following three sections, I discuss the research findings in relation to the three research questions of this study, and elaborate on their contribution to relevant literature. The sections speak to the social relations of key institutions that sustain the processes of language profiling and assessment, the textual practices that the language experts undertake and, the institutional discourses that organize the work of language assessment.

7.2 Regulation through Institutions

The first set of research questions in this study is: How are the processes of language assessment and profiling the language requirements for professions constituted through the social relations of the language researchers, instructors, government administrators, employers, and professional regulatory bodies? What are the economic, historical and social relations that sustain the processes? An inquiry into these two questions provided insights into the organization and power dynamics of language profiling and assessment across key institutions. The first finding provides a map of key institutions and the reasons they are drawn into the processes of language profiling and assessment and how their involvement contributes to the regulation of language in the professions. Despite the different reasons for their involvement and the power dynamics among them, these institutions collectively create a kind of infrastructure for language assessment. The second finding considers how these institutions participate in the infrastructure despite the tensions and differences.
7.2.1 Regulation is Dispersed across Institutions

This finding demonstrates the web of social and institutional relations that contribute to processes of language assessment and profiling in the professions. It broadens the scope of analysis beyond the interactions between assessors and immigrant professionals to make the invisible network of institutions that sustain the assessment of IEPs’ language skills visible. McNamara (2001) argued that during the processes of language assessment, the focus is often on the performance of the learner and not the social construction of the performance environment. This research demonstrates how the web of social and institutional relations, beyond the relationship between the assessor and the IEP, contribute to constituting the performance environment.

Leading up to the time when immigrant professionals have their English language skills assessed is a history of policy processes, social relations and textual practices that contribute to the processes of assessment. Starting in the 1990s, governments have stepped away from the direct provision of some services, requiring that new mechanisms and tools be developed (Pal, 2006). The experiences of the language experts and government administrators provide insights into the kinds of institutions and the power relations among those institutions that sustain the processes of language assessment in the professions. Findings of this research demonstrate how institutions are drawn into the regulation of language assessment. Even though each institution has different reasons and interests, they nonetheless converge to sustain the processes of language profiling and assessment. In addition, research results show how regulation of these processes is a
collective effort dispersed across these institutions. This collective effort, however, also consists of tensions and conflicts over the purposes of the CLB.

While the language experts perform the actual work of language profiling and assessment by activating the *CLB 2000* text, this work also requires the coordination and support of four key institutions. These institutions provide the infrastructure and funding through which the work happens and illustrate that regulation happens translocally at the local, provincial, and national levels. This research indicates that regulation is not centrally located in one institution, but it is dispersed across institutions.

The Centre for the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) oversees and coordinates CLB-related projects, including some related to the development of profession-specific language assessment. Its mandate is to maintain the integrity of the benchmarks and to provide leadership in the implementation of the benchmarks. The CCLB, however, is a not-for-profit organization and, as such, it cannot mandate which organizations or governments use the document nor can it regulate how the document is being used in all contexts. As findings about government administrators in the study illustrated, the benchmarks are sometimes used inappropriately to make hasty decisions about immigrants’ language abilities. In addition, the CCLB’s financial sustainability is dependent upon project-by-project funding. As a not-for-profit agency, the language experts expect that the CCLB should be independent of any government influence. However, the language experts indicate the CCLB’s reliance on both provincial and federal government funding often means governments influence the direction of initiatives, compromising the professional integrity of the benchmarks.
Provincial governments have been influential actors in the increasing regulation of the EAL field through the provision of funding, supporting teachers’ professional development in using the CLB 2000, and in their involvement in the governance of the CCLB executive board. In fact, they seem to have been significant actors in probing the federal government to make changes to the provision of language education in the 1990s (Derwing & Thomson, 2005). Concerned about labour shortages and the integration of IEPs into the labour market, provincial governments have been key actors in the provision of funding for profession-specific language initiatives. In addition, their involvement on the CCLB executive board means that they also have significant sway over the kinds of initiatives the CCLB undertakes, according to the language experts who have been field expert members of the board. These initiatives are sometimes incongruent with the pedagogical concerns that the language experts identify. While the CLB is a federal initiative, this research demonstrates that the support of provincial governments is fundamental to the expanding field of EAL regulation.

The day-to-day work of language profiling and assessment would not be possible without the infrastructure and leadership of community colleges and immigrant service organizations, and the language experts that they employ. Historically, community colleges have provided educational opportunities to marginalized groups and served as a link between skills training, employers, and employment (Tambureno, 2010). It is perhaps no surprise, then, that these institutions have been interested in offering language education and employment training to IEPs who are struggling to gain entry into the Canadian labour market. Immigrant service organizations are not-for-profit agencies that provide newcomers to Canada with necessary services and information for settlement in
Canadian society. As concerns over the labour market integration of immigrants has become more pronounced, both of these organizations have looked to expand the kinds of services they offer.

The expansion of services for both community colleges and immigrant service organizations has included undertaking initiatives related to the CLB such as profession-specific language profiling. Through the leadership of key personnel who were involved in the early development of the CLB, these institutions began implementing the benchmarks into the curricula of their EAL and applied programs. Through this process, these institutions developed the expertise and capacity to undertake larger projects such as developing profession-specific language bridging programs and assessment tools. The language experts indicate expansion into these types of services contributes to the financial sustainability of these institutions.

While it is necessary for these organizations to remain financially viable in a competitive educational services marketplace, financial challenges nonetheless exist. Various levels of government provide funding for the development of curricula and assessment tools; however, the financial responsibility for implementation and the sustainability of these services fall on the institutions. As the language experts explain, this sometimes means services are “hanging by a thread” or they are offered on a cost recovery basis. Furthermore, not all IEPs can afford or access these services given the costs. Even though community colleges and immigrant service organization have an interest in encouraging the regulation of language by supporting and undertaking CLB initiatives such as profession-specific profiling and assessment, sustaining these initiatives are not without challenges.
The final institutions involved in the processes of language profiling and assessment are the provincial professional regulatory bodies. These organizations have become involved in profession-specific language profiling and assessment, seeking ways to evaluate IEPs’ language competence while maintaining professional standards. Their involvement in profession-specific language profiling has included selecting representatives from professional regulatory bodies to sit on advisory committees during the development of profession-specific language exams. Various reports generated by organizations such as the Canadian Nurses’ Association and Engineers Canada indicate that the integration of IEPs is an important strategy for addressing labour shortages. IEPs’ English language competence has been a concern for these professions and existing academic exams (e.g. TOEFL, IELTS) have been deemed inadequate for accurately assessing the language demands of a specific profession. Under the coordination of the CCLB, these professions have become involved in offering their expertise to develop profession-specific language exams. The language experts indicate that profession-specific language exams gaining widespread acceptance in all provinces is an evolutionary process. The longer the exams exist, the more they are validated, and as more versions are developed, the more likely the provincial professional regulatory bodies will accept the exams as valid representations of language competence. Ultimately, though, each provincial professional regulatory body has the authority to decide which language exams will be deemed acceptable. They also reserve the right to determine the minimum level of CLB deemed acceptable for each of the four linguistic skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing), even though these minimum levels differ from those recommended by the language experts. In this respect, the provincial
professional regulatory bodies are the final gatekeepers regulating IEPs’ language competence for licensing purposes.

Research findings illustrate how implementation of a federal initiative that crosses into the jurisdictional boundaries of the provinces requires coordinating people and resources across institutions. Pal (2006) explained that industrialized countries such as Canada have jumped on the New Public Management “bandwagon,” that is, government is decentralized and responsibility for the provision of services is devolved to other government jurisdictions or third parties (p. 201). Rather than regulate English language assessment and programming directly, the federal government has developed the CLB as an information-based policy tool to generate a competency-based understanding of the English language and its assessment. The CLB’s development, however, has also required coordinating various institutions to carry out the actual work of implementation. The federal government regulates indirectly through the not-for-profit agency, the CCLB, created to oversee and implement CLB-related initiatives, but it alone cannot carry out initiatives such as profession-specific language profiling and assessment, requiring funding from the provincial government and assistance from other agencies. The provision of language assessment and programs are outsourced to other agencies, but as the language experts’ discussions illuminate, sustaining these services becomes the responsibility of the agencies and institutions. This responsibility involves stitching together enough funds to ensure that the services stay afloat and passing some of the financial burden onto the shoulders of the IEPs who often need the services in order to gain entry into their professions.
The development of the CLB, however, involves more than just developing a common body of knowledge to standardize the field. It reflects what Laforest and Phillips (2007) explained was an “explosion” in the establishment of accountability measures that began in Canada in the 1990s (p. 81). By creating a document that attempts to standardize assessment practices across the country and establishes set learning outcomes, it ensures that anyone involved in language education and assessment is accountable for the provision of services and adherence to the standard. As the language experts explained, they must provide evidence, represented as CLB levels, that IEPs are progressively moving up the hierarchy of benchmarks to ensure funding provisions remain stable. The development of the CLB also enables the federal government to regulate areas that remain provincial jurisdiction such as the language assessment of immigrant professionals. As Laforest and Phillips (2007) noted, requiring different jurisdictions to produce evidence that outcomes have been met, the federal government “can achieve accountability through the back door that it cannot through the front door” (p. 82).

7.2.2 Convergence Despite Differing Interests

Work in knowledge economies often involves the coordination of people’s work practices across disparate localities (Farrell, 2006). In a federal nation such as Canada, where policy terrains overlap and competing interests exist, the replicability of policy texts is complex and contingent upon the coordination among institutions and actors. This becomes particularly evident when the federal government develops a policy that traverses into provincial jurisdiction such as education or regulation of the professions. For a policy text such as the CLB to regulate, provincial and local institutions, whose
leaders and administrators subscribe to the purposes and goals of the policy, must become involved in implementation. Regulation requires some degree of unity by finding points where differing interests can converge toward a common goal. This reflects Mahon, Andrew, and Johnson’s (2007) observations that rescaling is underway where policy analysis requires shifting focus from solely the nation-state to the dynamic relationships between global actors, nation-states, and local social actors.

This finding illustrates how groups and actors converge to participate in the regulation of language assessment and programming despite differing interests. It illustrates the dynamic relationships between the various actors involved in the processes of language profiling and assessment at the local, provincial, and national level. It provides a map of the institutions involved and the power relations that sustain the practices of assessing IEPs’ English language competence. Central to the evolving regulation of EAL education in Canada and the trend of developing profession-specific language programs and tests is the CLB 2000 text. Policy texts such as the CLB 2000 can be an effective means for regulating and standardizing work practices given their replicability. The activation of a policy text, however, also requires that most actors involved in its’ implementation subscribe to the goals of the policy. Without widespread belief in the validity and legitimacy of the policy, achieving the outcomes of the policy will not be possible. Research findings here show that actors have different reasons for becoming involved in language profiling and assessment. Professional regulatory bodies are concerned about maintaining professional standards and ensuring that those granted licensure are able to demonstrate and uphold those professional standards. Provincial governments are concerned about labour market integration and addressing labour
shortages. Community colleges and immigrant service organizations want to ensure that they maintain funding so that they remain viable in the provisions of services.

While the experiences of the language experts illustrate how text-mediated knowing occurs for language assessment in Canada, what is particularly interesting to note from the study findings is that not everyone who participates in the regulation of language in the professions uses or has an intimate knowledge of the CLB texts. Representatives from the professional regulatory bodies were involved in the processes of developing profession-specific language exams such as the CELBAN and the current development of the engineering exam. However, the representatives from these bodies do not need to understand the theoretical foundations of the CLB. This work is left for the language experts. Similarly, provincial government representatives who sit on the CCLB board of executives do not need to use the CLB in their work of overseeing the administration of language programming. In addition, as the language experts indicate employers do not want to have a detailed understanding of the CLB. All these groups are interested in the outcome that the text and textual practices produce and not the contents of the text. This demonstrates that regulation can occur without all actors even understanding the contents of the text. Regulation occurs through a common belief that the text, when activated by people such as the language experts, will organize language assessment to meet expectations.

This common belief is established through the CLB numbers. Numbers are perceived to provide an objective and accurate indication of IEPs’ language competence. The CLB numbers will assist in hiring and professional licensing decisions. Shohamy (2001) explained that numbers hold a powerful place in public perception:
The language of numbers is considered to be a symbol of objectivity, scientism and rationalism – all features which provide those who are affected by them with an illusion of truth, trust, legitimacy and status. The power of numbers also lies in the perception of the public that they are objective and therefore represent some ‘truth’, with a strong implication that they are not open for discussion and challenge (pp. 21-22).

As Appadurai (1996) has articulated, numbers have a pedagogical function; they instruct people to understand concepts from a particular viewpoint. Numbers articulated in the CLB text and through the expectations of the various actors construct an understanding of language as something that can be measured and standardized.

For the language experts, though, the “truth” of numbers displays shades of gray. While they attempt to measure IEPs’ language abilities accurately to provide funding bodies, employers, and professional regulatory bodies with the numerical evidence they require, having the language experts subscribe to the goals and outcomes of the CLB requires more than a belief in numbers.

The processes of consultation in the development of the CLB and the appeals to professionalism that the benchmarks provide are part of discourses of deliberative democracy which governments undertake as a form of civic engagement (Laforest & Phillips, 2007; Pal, 2006). According to the Preface to the CLB 2000, in 1992 the ministry that would become Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) began consultations with experts in second language teaching and assessment, expanding the
circle of consultations in 1993 to include members from post-secondary institutions, provincial governments, immigrant service organizations, school boards, and independent consultants (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005). The intent of this national consultation process was to include various stakeholders in the development of a national framework that would assist in standardizing adult EAL education and assessment across Canada.

In 2009, the CCLB undertook national consultations again to collect feedback from a range of stakeholders on the aspects of the CLB that are valued and the ones that should be changed. The language experts and government administrators indicate that their involvement in both the initial consultation in the 1990s and the more recent one offered them an opportunity to express their views. In particular, they were pleased, but cautiously optimistic, that of the forty-three recommendations made, the ones of greatest concern for them would be met (e.g. the establishment of a national repository of CLB initiatives). While these consultation processes do not diminish the criticisms they express toward the CLB, they do see them as opportunities to advocate for pedagogical and assessment practices in which their professional knowledge is valued. Their discussions of participating on the CCLB board, however, indicate that beyond the public spotlight, pedagogical issues that do not involve labour market attachment tend to be marginalized.

While consultation processes in policymaking can be appealing because they give the appearance of upholding democratic practices, they often reproduce societal power relations (Gale, 2001; Scheurich, 1994). Laforest and Phillips (2007) explained that Canadian governments began experimenting with citizen participation in policy making in the 1970s, and while Canadian citizens have become more involved in policy
processes, this does not mean they exhibit greater influence on policy decisions. As Pal (2006) explained, generally consultation processes are designed to gather information and ensure the smooth implementation and maintenance of programs. These processes are not about negotiating the values of particular groups nor are they about determining the direction policy should take; these decisions are often determined before consultations begin (Pal, 2006). In the case of language education, McNamara (2001) argued that consultations with teachers are often used to validate frameworks “to ensure their political acceptability,” but hide the managerial and regulatory functions of such policies (p. 341).

These findings also speak to the Canadian state’s intervention in matters of language regulation. While the Official Languages Act (1969) was part of Canada’s nation-building project and solidified English and French as Canada’s languages in the public realm, the development of the CLB in many respects is a continuation of this nation-building project. As Haque (2012) explained, the Official Languages Act demarcates the boundaries of who does and does not belong based on language. The development of the CLB entrenches these demarcations further by expanding language regulation into workplaces. The demonstration of language ability, as determined through the textual practices of the CLB, contributes to delineating who will be deemed a suitable “fit” for the Canadian workplace.

These findings illustrate how disparate groups converge to participate in the regulation of language assessment practices. While not all groups and actors need to have an intimated understandings of a policy texts content or the theoretical
underpinnings, they do require a level of trust that the text when activated will fulfill the interests and goals of each group.

7.3 Language Regulation through Texts and Textual Practices

The second research question of this study is: How is English language learning and assessment articulated in the CLB 2000 and how do these articulations organize the work of the language experts? Regulation in knowledge economies not only requires the coordination of institutions and resources. It also requires coordinating the movement of standardized forms of knowledge across localities (Farrell, 2006; Smith, 2005). One of the ways governments attempt to regulate and standardize knowledge is through policy texts. Texts, as material entities, facilitate the coordination of people’s consciousness and work activities translocally (Smith, 2005). Findings show how the language experts transform knowledge as they use the CLB text and the tensions and struggles that emerge and; the language experts’ responses to the regulation of their work practices through the CLB 2000.

7.3.1 Transforming Knowledge through Textual Practices

The experiences of the language experts speak to the challenges of standardizing knowledge in modern economies. This finding demonstrates that one of the ways the federal and provincial governments have attempted to regulate and standardize assessment practices in the EAL field is through the CLB 2000 text. Regulating how immigrants’ language skills are assessed across disparate sites requires a standard body of knowledge. Ensuring that the assessment of an internationally educated engineer’s English language competence in Toronto is the same as the assessment of another engineer’s English language competence in Calgary requires assessors in both these
locations to understand the performance of language in similar ways. The **CLB 2000** attempts to articulate language performance based on a common body of knowledge that makes particular suppositions about language, knowledge, and skill. It is meant to establish a “national standard” and “a common yardstick for assessing outcomes.”

In practice, the language experts use the **CLB 2000** to organize curricula and assessments into manageable language tasks. In the **CLB 2000**, language tasks are articulated along a twelve-level scale of “successive levels of achievement” based on a model of communicative competency. Each level of the benchmarks is divided into the four linguistic skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Through the processes of profiling the language demands for a profession, the language experts observe professionals in workplaces and document the forms of language and kinds of communication that professionals use in their daily work practices. This process of textualizing the forms of communication that professionals use in their daily practices involves delineating the four linguistic skills from professional competence and transforming them into measurable outcomes. For each skill example tasks and performance descriptors, conditions, and indicators are described. Users of the document are directed to focus on “what the learner can do” with each of the four skills. The CLB text mediates understandings of the four skills as discrete and separate from one another rather than in relation to one another. These work practices are transformed into tasks and articulated according to the benchmark levels of the **CLB 2000** and serve as the basis for creating curricula and profession-specific language tests. During the development of curricula and assessment, focus is supposed to be on language proficiency and “not non-linguistic skills.” EAL learners are expected to demonstrate their “application of
language knowledge (competence) and skill” (p. VIII). The language experts go through a cycle of transforming tacit knowledge that is constructed through particular work practices in particular localities. They transform this knowledge, aligning it with the CLB levels so that it can be standardized and replicated, with some degree of accuracy, in the teaching and assessment of IEPs across sites.

Even as the language experts matter-of-factly align communicative tasks according to the performance outcomes of the *CLB 2000*, their observations and work practices provide informative insights into what language is doing and how communication is happening in workplaces. In undertaking this work of profiling and assessment, the language experts also encounter a disjuncture through their experiences of observing workplace practices and teaching and assessing IEPs. Their practice of conducting observations in workplaces, talking with employers and professional regulatory bodies, and teaching IEPs indicate that disconnect is happening. As the language experts’ discussions indicate, “it’s more than just language,” “that the way people work is very much through their personal relationships,” or “interactions in the workplace are remarkably complex and they’re remarkably cryptic.”

Through the process of transforming knowledge generated in the workplace into measurable tasks, the communicative interaction is removed from the context in which it originally happened. It is no longer an exchange between two specific people in a particular locality. It can no longer reflect the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the environment in which it occurred. It must be transformed into an exchange that can be generalized across localities, whether a nurse is working in an intensive care unit or a care home for the elderly. The language experts’ experiences indicate the language of
textbooks and trying to standardize language according to prescribed outcomes does not reflect what language is doing in the workplace. Language is a human activity that is organized around shared practical understandings in particular localities (Pennycook, 2010). Skill is not an appendage to a person, but an embodiment of cognitive, emotional and cultural features (Brown, et al., 2001). The textual practice of transforming language according to a standard poses challenges because the nuances of the locality disappear.

The experiences of the language experts, however, indicate that these nuances are crucial for integrating into the workplace. Knowing when to pop over to someone’s desk, knowing what to do when the wife of the firm’s vice-president dies can be essential for IEPs in their work practices.

The CLB 2000 is a Canadian example of a policy initiative that attempts to establish a body of knowledge so that practices in the assessment of IEPs’ English language competence can be standardized. No framework, however, can account for the locality of language. This reflects Farrell’s (2006) observation, “No matter how hard they try to be, regulatory frameworks, quality manuals and standard operating procedures are not comprehensive; they cannot account for local exigencies” (p. 10). Even though the language experts take great pains to consider the context of workplaces, to scaffold difficult tasks in the classroom, and to provide IEPs with strategies for negotiating cultural differences, they are unable to fully mediate the power relations of Canadian workplaces. The language experts’ observations indicate that language is not “applied” as the CLB 2000 articulates, but produced and generated between specific people in particular localities through a complex, and sometimes cryptic, web of relationships, materials, and emotions.
Tracing the sequence of text-based work makes visible the power of texts in the organization of people’s daily work practices (Turner, 2006). As Farrell (2006) explained, most workers in the knowledge economy are involved in processes of textualizing knowledge, that is, making and using texts to transform knowledge. The language experts are the knowledge workers of language profiling and assessment and while the CLB 2000 regulates their practices, their observations can be a starting point for developing nuanced understandings of language as a social practice.

7.3.2 Acquiescence and Resistance

This finding speaks to the tensions and contradictions that the language experts and government administrators experience, and how they negotiate those contradictions. While people’s work practices are increasingly regulated by texts in knowledge economies, texts do not regulate absolutely. As McCoy (2006) emphasized, oppositional discourses exist. This research finding illustrates that the language experts and government administrators are aware of the regulatory functions. Moreover, the language experts simultaneously express resistance and acquiescence toward the CLB.

The metaphors the language experts used in response to my question about the CLB being a revolution, as articulated in the CLB 2000, provide insights into the dynamics of resistance and acquiescence. The expressions of the CLB as “flawed,” “assimilationist,” “utopic,” and “evolutionary” indicate that power relations are asymmetrical and implementation has not been smooth. They are aware that the benchmarks can be prescriptive, articulating a narrow understanding of language that simplifies its complexities. They also acknowledge it can diminish their professional judgment and autonomy, particularly when they are required to supply employers with a
number to demonstrate IEPs’ competency. They express possibilities for better teaching and assessment practices that reflect the complexity and processes of language learning. They also express that it is utopic to think that both language and assessment practices can be standardized.

While these discourses speak to the contested terrain of the CLB and the textual practices suggest struggles and flaws with the CLB in practice, they value the CLB for strategic reasons. First, practically, it assists in the coordination of assessment and teaching practices across localities. It has opened the door within the field for discussions about teaching and assessment practices. Disagreement and incongruence, however, still exist. Not all provinces and institutions have embraced the CLB with equal enthusiasm. Second, the existence of the CLB appeals to a sense of professional unity; that the field of EAL education has a body of knowledge from which professional standards can be established. Under messianic discourses, the field is no longer floundering from a lack of standardization. This enables the language experts to articulate their expertise while working with other professional groups. Finally, the CLB has provided a conduit through which they can start to have conversations with groups such as employers and professional regulatory bodies, who have no knowledge of applied linguistics, to develop more nuanced understandings of language and culture so that IEPs can gain licensure and find employment in their professional fields.

These findings in this section speak to the tensions that occur when policy texts attempt to regulate people’s work practices. The findings also illustrate the contradictions of trying to standardize knowledge. While generalities are made about the kinds of communicative interactions that IEPs will encounter in the workplace, the
nuances of communicative interactions are specific to particular contexts, and these nuances cannot be standardized and regulated.

7.4 Language Regulation and Institutional Discourses

This section addresses the third research question: What are the institutional discourses that emerge from the textual practices and social relations of profiling the language requirements from the professions? One of the intents in the development of the CLB was to establish a standardized body of knowledge with respect to English language assessment to facilitate regulation of the EAL field. Standardized bodies of knowledge often reflect the dominant values and norms of a particular community or society. Therefore, assessment practices based on a standardized system often mean that particular knowledge and skills will be valued and receive recognition. Opposite to recognition, however, is non-recognition. Values, norms, bodies of knowledge, and ways of being not reflected in the standardized system are less likely to receive recognition. In this section, I discuss the findings in relation to the following questions: How do the institutional discourses contribute to the regulation of language and its assessment? What do these institutional discourses tell us about the values, norms, knowledge, and ways of being that are or are not recognized during the assessment of IEPs’ English language skills?

7.4.1 (Non)recognition and the Language of Numbers

This finding illustrates that regulation not only happens through institutions, texts and textual practices, it also occurs through the expectations and social relations of different groups. This research has demonstrated that supplying funding bodies, employers, and professional regulatory bodies with numbers, as a representation of IEPs’
language competence, is a significant organizer of the language experts and government administrators’ work. Numbers are a way for the language experts to communicate levels of competence to these groups and to demonstrate that they are accountable in their assessment practices. It was indicated early on in the research that, “employers want a number because they do not want to consider variability in language learning.” The language experts and government administrators’ observations suggest that employers and regulatory bodies want numbers because a quantitative representation of skill level eases the challenges of making hiring and professional licensing decisions. The language of numbers is perceived to represent objectivity and knowing which number to look for enables making judgments about IEPs’ language competence quickly and efficiently. Numbers can also avert accusations of discrimination when language is understood as a skill that can be objectively measured.

Language, however, is variable and subjective. The language experts and government administrators’ experiences illustrate that the ways people communicate are tied to their relationships. Their English language use is intimately connected to not only the nation from which they emigrated, but also the particular community in which they used English. English, as a colonial language became intimately tied to local social and cultural histories of the communities in which it was used. As Canagarajah (2005a) has argued, these histories have given rise to variations. These variations have continued to expand in the late 20th century and early 21st century as English is used (and mixed) through popular culture and to conduct international business and trade. The idea that a standard form of English exists, therefore, is problematic. Variations in the English language have emerged from the local histories and social conditions of colonialism.
(Bhatt, 2005). People come to Canada speaking variations of all the global Englishes and research and theorizing on global Englishes indicates that English (and other languages) is a dynamic organism consisting of localized variations and hybridities (Canagarajah, 2005b; Pennycook, 2010; Shohamy, 2006).

This has implications for understanding communication in professional communities. When language experts talk about nurses who come from countries such as the Philippines and India and who are fluent, but have different understandings of what it means to be a nurse, this illustrates that professional knowledge and language competence merge as a social practice that cannot be separated from people’s embodied experiences and histories of social and cultural ways of being. The language experts and government administrators’ observations demonstrate that language is not a cognitive skill based on a fixed linguistic system. It is a social practice embedded in a particular community that is negotiated among language users.

When language, however, is understood as a fixed and standardized system that can be objectively measured and represented in the form of a number, decision-making can be easier. On the surface, the line between which forms of English should be recognized and which should not be recognized can be clearly drawn. Perhaps it should not be surprising that the general public should view language as a cognitive skill based on a fixed and static system. This viewpoint of language has dominated most of 20th century theories about language. The CLB 2000 attempts to move beyond such conceptions of language by conceding that judgment about ability should not be made on the “abstract traditional norm of the educated native speaker,” and that “a range” of performance exists” (p. XI). However, in practice, the discourse about numbers
demonstrates that views on language as measurable systems persist. If a Canadian standard of the English language is constructed, then IEPs’ language performance can be measured against it. Meanwhile, variations of the English language and different understandings of professional practice receive little recognition.

The language experts’ experiences also speak to the social construction of language competence. As Pennycook (2010) argued, understanding that language is social and socially constructed should not be the end point of analysis, but a starting point for analyzing the political and material consequences of language use. In the case of this study, language is one factor used to make decisions about who will or will not fit into the Canadian workplace. As I discuss in the following section, these decisions are based on underlying rules and norms about what an English speaker should sound like in a Canadian context.

7.4.2 (Non)Recognition and Cultural Politics

This finding illustrates that the CLB 2000 is not only expected to be a tool for objectively measuring English language competence. In fact, demonstration of English language competence is expected to be an indicator of IEPs’ level of cultural competence, providing evidence of their suitability for fitting into the Canadian workplace. Language is often blamed as the problem for misunderstandings or conflicts in the workplace. The language experts and government administrators’ experiences illustrate that language is often perceived as a problem, but with adequate cognitive intervention, it can be “fixed.” ‘Repairing’ IEPs’ language skills is expected to resolve miscommunication in the workplace. As findings demonstrate, when knowledge workers such as IEPs traverse national borders and bring with them different traditions of knowledge and ways of
communicating, the assessment of communication becomes contentious. As the language experts remarked, what exactly constitutes fit? While language competence is often blamed as the problem for misunderstandings or conflicts in the workplace, the experiences of the language experts indicate that problems are related to low levels of acceptance for different ways of knowing and being.

The struggle of assessing cultural competence and employment fit speaks to the convergence of the global and the local. IEPs come to Canada from across the globe speaking variations of English that are unfamiliar or different from the Canadian English accent. These differences have emerged from the local histories and social practices of colonialism and globalization. Differences are perceived as a problem to social and economic integration when IEPs cross the border into Canada even though they had to demonstrate their proficiency in English to gain admittance through the immigration point system.

Findings of this study indicate that language, when associated with cultural competence, is perceived as a static and bounded system tied to the nation-state and cultural fixity. Fitting into English-speaking Canada means knowing and performing a particular variation of the English language. When IEPs migrate to Canada with different understandings and expressions of what it means to be a nurse, an engineer, or an accountant, these differences are perceived as problems that need to be resolved. As the language experts explain, it is often easier for employers to default into choosing people who are familiar or resemble the “comfortably fitting Canadian.”

While articulations of English language competence in the CLB 2000 regulate the work of language profiling and assessment, so do the institutional discourses of cultural
competence and employment fit. The language experts and government administrators’ experiences speak to the social construction of cultural competence. Social constructions of cultural competence can maintain dominant understandings of who will or will not fit into the workplace. The concept can also keep people on the margins of the labour market. Such conceptions of competence can cause a disjuncture, however, if language and culture are understood as social practices in which all members of a community are responsible for communicative interactions. As the language experts indicated in their comments, communication is a two-way process and responsibility for communication and understanding cultural differences in the workplace is not solely the responsibility of IEPs. Both employers and IEPs are responsible for working across the communication and cultural divide.

The concept of competence, when tied to culture, assumes an inherent capacity related to performance (Pennycook, 2007). The concept of competence assumes that one group is measured against the standards, norms, and expectations of another group and leaves little space for different ways of communicating and different forms of knowledge to be recognized. Cultural politics is a more useful concept than cultural competence because it acknowledges power relations of gender, race, class, and language exists within and among communities (Pennycook, 2001). As Pennycook (2010) argued:

The notion of discrete, bounded languages becomes very dubious, since languages are always mixed, hybrid and drawing on multiple resources. We might therefore suggest that languages, like subjects, are always a work in progress (indeed subjects and languages are mutually constitutive), and that we cannot therefore
understand language without taking particular language practices in particular locations into account (p. 129)

The concept of cultural competence, however, maintains language as an apolitical system. Cultural politics facilitates theorizing and praxis that addresses the histories of power relations of language as it intersects with other subjectivities. This approach is a very different way of understanding the English language in Canada. Such an approach would recognize not only the diversity of languages in Canada, but also the different ways of speaking, reading, and writing the English language so that IEPs whose variations of English might integrate into the locality of a particular workplace. Understanding the English language as a local social practice challenges the idea of seeing Canadian English as a system that can be standardized and measured.

The findings in this section speak to the institutional discourses of numbers, cultural competence, and employment fit that regulate the assessment of IEPs’ English language capabilities. Assessment of language competence is not only about determining IEPs’ abilities to communicate in the workplace, it is also about determining whether they exhibit the cultural competence needed to fit into the Canadian workplace. Farrell and Fenwick (2007b) explained that earlier conceptions of the knowledge-based economy focused on technical knowledge, but emphasis is now placed on viewing knowledge as social production. This includes an emphasis on soft-skills, communication, and literacy (Farrell & Fenwick, 2007b). As this study has shown, when knowledge workers traverse national borders and bring with them different traditions of knowledge and ways of communicating, the assessment of communication and soft-skills is political. Canadian
English is constructed as a standard and variations of the English language receive little recognition.

7.5 Reflections on the Process and Limitations of Institutional Ethnography

One of the limitations, and indeed critiques, of institutional ethnography is that it can be difficult for the researcher to establish parameters of the research project. What exactly are the boundaries of institutional order when so many actors, texts, technologies, and discourses, both historical and current, influence the existence of the institutional order? How does the researcher set the boundaries of the research when the methodology is an ever-expanding mode of inquiry? After the first few interviews with the language experts, I hoped to expand the web of inquiry beyond the experiences of the language experts. I thought that understanding the regulation of language assessment in the professions could also be informed by interviews with representatives from governments and professional regulatory bodies. As DeVault and McCoy (2006) explained, institutional ethnographies are emergent inquiries and therefore, they are seldom fully planned in advance. They further iterate, “the process of inquiry is rather like grabbing a ball of string, finding a thread, and then pulling it out; that is why it is difficult to specify in advance exactly what the research will consist of” (p. 20). While most institutional ethnographies tend to focus on one standpoint (Smith, 2006), my hope was to push the parameters of the research to include a few different standpoints to understand how different strands of language regulation intersect and diverge. I thought that this could provide a more complex and nuanced understanding of how language regulation happens.

I discovered, however, that including multiple standpoints proved challenging and ambitious. Recruiting the language experts was relatively easy. Even though I did not
personally know most of the participants, I had a professional affiliation that in some senses made me an insider. However, when I wanted to expand the terrain of inquiry beyond the language experts to include government administrators or professional licensing body representatives, I encountered challenges in recruiting participants. Even though these potential participants had either been involved in the profiling processes or their associations were using the assessments developed, they were beyond the inner circle of those who intimately work with the CLB framework.

Another limitation of institutional ethnography is the assumption that texts are accessible to the researcher. While I had access to the CLB generated documents, public reports and websites such as the ones containing information on professional regulatory bodies or the one created for the administration of the CELBAN, I did not have access to documents such as the CELBAN exams or curricula because they are under lock and key. Therefore, the web had to be limited to an analysis of the interviews and the documents that I did have access to.

While including additional standpoints and texts may have expanded the web of inquiry, I realized that the language experts and government administrators provided informative insights that other groups would likely not have had. Given that the language experts and government administrators work with the CLB text, IEPs, employers, professional regulatory body representatives, and government administrators, I came to realize that their standpoint provides a broad inquiry into how language regulation happens. Even though no inquiry into an institution is ever complete, the standpoint of the language experts makes visible the expectations of various actors, the textual practices, and dominant discourses that form the institution of language assessment in the
professions. Indeed, DeVault and McCoy (2006) asserted that it is not the objective of institutional ethnography to map an institution in its entirety. They explained that the aim is “to explore particular corners or strands within a specific institutional complex, in ways that make visible their points of connection with other sties and courses of action” (p. 17). The language experts provide insights beyond official scripts and discourses. Their experiences speak to the daily work of language assessment with all its challenges, tensions, and expectations, which can serve as a powerful basis for challenging common conceptions of language as a system external to people’s daily activities. Mapping how language regulation happens is a starting point for a deeper understanding of language as a local social practice and its intersection with other practices such as those in the professions.

Institutional ethnography, unlike other methodologies, claims not to import or impose a theory on the problematic (Smith, 2005). Walby (2007) explains that this is a blind spot within institutional ethnography. He argues that like all social science methodologies, institutional ethnography “is theoretically driven” (Walby, 2007, p. 1013, emphasis original). In addition, by starting with people’s experiences, institutional ethnography claims to preserve the presence of the subject. However, the act of analysis in social science research necessarily creates categories and subjectivities (Walby, 2007). Walby (2007) explains that institutional ethnography is not immune to the social relations of research; the researcher engaging in institutional ethnography does not transcend objectification and still maintains some authority over how research participants will be represented. Given that institutional ethnography assumes daily life is problematic and subject to power relations, conflict is an inherent aspect of the methodology. Therefore,
this research focused on the tensions and struggles of the language experts and
government administrators. It assumed that language is political. At the same time, I
wanted to illustrate how the language experts and government administrators are not
mere subjects of power, but that they are active agents who resist dominant discourses
through the production of counter discourses. As Walby (2007) explained, researcher
reflexivity can assist in reducing objectification, but objectification cannot be removed
from the research process. Regardless of our research methods and forms of analysis,
researchers are engaged in creating discourses. The research presented in this thesis
remains my interpretation and understanding of how language regulation happens.

Employing the feminist notion of situated knowledges includes a reflexive
engagement of the knowledge of the researcher to include how her knowledge and
experiences are contributing to the construction of a discourse. Therefore, researching
within institutional ethnography requires reflexively considering all perspectives
presented and remaining conscious of “the murmur of things and voices that circulate
through and from the farthest corners of the culture” (Threadgold, 2000). While I saw
my own experiences of working with the CLB as problematic and a continuation of a
colonial mind-set, I tried to stay attuned to the aspects of the framework that the language
experts and government administrators found beneficial such as the development of the
CLB was opening up a dialogue about language in the workplace. Even though much of
the discussion on language remains troubling, the language experts and government
administrators’ experiences deepened my own understanding of how people find ways to
resist and work around the aspects of policy that are problematic.
Finally, there is the risk that research can further entrench existing discourses. This research study was about examining how English language assessment in Canada is regulated through policy texts constituted, and therefore possess possibilities for alternate ways of understanding language and its assessment to counter this regulation. However, similar to any research, there is the risk that conceiving alternate ways of thinking could more firmly entrench the existing regulation. This is particularly relevant, as the current federal government has recently released statements about “nation-building” by centralizing immigrant settlement services.15 If national unity is perceived to be built on homogeneity and common language(s), harking back to earlier moments in Canadian history, then further regulation to ensure differences are minimized, rather than accepted, is a possibility.

7.5.1 Policy Implications

The goal of institutional ethnography is “to reorganize the social relations of knowledge of the social” so that people can draw upon this knowledge to enact change (Smith, 2005, p. 29). The experiences of the language experts and government administrators provide informative insights into language policy implementation, the problems of assessing language, the cultural politics of workplaces, and knowledge economy discourses. In particular, these experiences draw attention to the problematic of recognition and standardization of knowledge. How can this research inform language policy development for the professions in Canada? At the centre of these implications, is the articulation of counter discourses that disrupt notions of languages as bounded and

fixed systems. As Pennycook (2010) noted, reconceptualizing language as a social practice is not about building another system, but about developing ways of thinking otherwise.

First, language can no longer be conceptualized as four discrete linguistic skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing) that are performed separately from one another and can be measured according to a universal standard of competence. Communicative interactions do not happen through the performance of these discrete skills in a controlled environment. Language is a social activity consisting of variation and it is negotiated within and among communities of language users. However, when language is understood as a standardized system, it leaves little space for recognition of variation or how language changes as it is negotiated among users.

Second, this research also has implications for understandings of citizenship under increasingly global flows of migration. When language is conceived of as a system tied to the nation-state and that it can be standardized, the assumption is that to participate as a Canadian citizen involves speaking in a particular variation of English and acting in a way that indicates one’s ‘fit’ into the Canadian workplace. If language, however, is conceived of as a social practice that is negotiated among language users in a community, broadening conceptions of citizenship as a participatory practice become possible. Responsibility for communication becomes negotiated and distributed among all members of a community and opens spaces for understanding and accepting variations in language. Citizenship, as practiced through language, becomes an emergent identity rather than an identity that is prescribed and predetermined through standardized conceptions of language. As Welton (1998) has argued, it is through community
associations such as clubs, community groups, and workplaces that we learn to be citizens. It is in these spaces that people can learn to communicate across linguistic and cultural differences, particularly if language is understood as a negotiated practice and not a fixed and static system.

Third, the experiences of the language experts and government administrators demonstrate the local and social constitution of knowledge, therefore disrupting knowledge economy discourses that position knowledge as something that can be generalized, standardized, and regulated. As Canagarajah (2005) explained, such a view of knowledge has been valued and involves a level of “abstraction that filters out the variability of experience in diverse contexts” (pp. 4-5). As this research has demonstrated, variability it a condition that employers and professional regulatory bodies want to avoid. Variability, however, is an inherent aspect of workplace and policy practices and it has become increasingly visible through global migration flows. People’s work practices are inextricably mediated by the local generation of knowledge. Rather than developing policies that at best placate and at worst silence the local generation of knowledge, practices for policy development that genuinely give recognition to the local are necessary.

Therefore, resources need to be allocated for assisting the language experts in further developing their research and understanding of language as a social practice that gives recognition to variation. The language experts’ research could be used for understanding what is actually happening with language in the workplace rather than measuring activity according to a prescribed standard. What strategies do people use during communicative interactions? When does interactions break down? Why? How
do communities of professionals negotiate meaning and work through conflict and differences? As Canagarajah (2007) has noted, monolinguals have often not developed the pragmatic strategies that multilingual people have for communicating through difference. Understanding and developing the capacity to use such strategies could help monolinguals to learn about working in communities where variations in English exist.

Such an approach, however, also involves shifting responsibility for communicative interactions from IEPs to everyone involved in communicative interactions in the workplaces. Based on the current point system, where English and French language abilities have been awarded higher proportions of points in recent years, IEPs arrive in Canada with considerable knowledge and capabilities in the English language. For many, though, their ways of communicating may differ from the expectations of Canadians. Rather than developing more screening tools for employers and professional regulatory bodies, programs need to be initiated to support employers in developing hiring and workplace practices that recognize variation in languages. Such programs would involve all employees in developing strategies for communicating with speakers from different backgrounds. Funds that are currently directed toward developing assessment tools could be re-funneled into assisting small to medium-sized enterprises in offering such programs.

These communicative strategies could also be integrated into the existing curricula of professional programs in nursing, engineering, and accounting in Canadian universities. Learning to be a professional could include learning how to communicate with people who speak variations of the English language. Developing such strategies is not only practical for communicating with other professionals, but also for interactions
with future patients and clients. Higher education institutions such as community colleges could move beyond providing language services that reproduce discourses of ‘fit’ and ‘cultural competence.’ They hold the potential to change current understandings of language and its assessment from an objectively measurable system to conceptions of language as a locally embedded social practice. Through their work with employers and regulatory bodies, these institutions could provide an education that values and recognizes variation in the English language. Not only do they hold the potential for changing collective understandings of language in which it is viewed as a social practice, they provide the possibility for further research that investigates the ways in which language as a social practice informs professional practice.

7.5.2 Further Research

This research has focused exclusively on the experiences of language experts and government administrators responsible for profiling and assessment the English language in the professions. While these groups have provided informative and insightful understandings into the power and politics of the policy processes and textual practices, more research is required to expand the web. Little is known about how provincial professional regulatory bodies are using the results from the profession-specific language exams. For example, why did all of the provincial regulatory bodies for nursing decide to increase the CLB level for listening? To what extent are these exams and programs assisting IEPs to enter the professions? This second question was one that I asked the language experts, but they were unable to answer. They indicated, though, that they would be very interested in finding out. They want to know to what extent their work is or (is not) assisting IEPs to enter their professional fields.
In addition, more research in the professions is required for understanding how language practices constitute professional practices. What kinds of strategies do migrant professionals develop to negotiate their practice in new environments? How do communities of practitioners where speakers communicate in several variations of English negotiate differences and conflict?

Even though research from the perspective of language ecologies has been conducted on sites of popular culture, in community settings, and public school systems, more research is needed for understanding how people negotiate variations in the English language in workplaces. How are variations in English perceived in the workplace and how is this influencing employment relations? How do these variations intersect with other subjectivities such as race and gender?

While this research has focused exclusively on language and the knowledge economy in the Canadian context, it serves as a basis for further comparative research between Canada and other Anglo-American nations with high levels of immigration. Further research could be conducted to investigate how language regulation, standardization, and accountability measure through frameworks similar to the CLB have been established in other nations. Such research would further inform an understanding of language education policy in Canada in relation to global policy trends. Comparative research could also inform conceptions of language more broadly with respect to global migration flows and how social inequity is reproduced or resisted through changing notions of language.
7.6 Conclusion

DeVault (2008b) has argued that investigating the realities of people’s textual practices and social relations in relation to the global economy “help[s] to bring people’s real lives back into the picture” (p. 291). This research has attempted to show the links between global knowledge economy discourses in relation to the regulation of the language experts and government administrators’ local work practices. This research has also provided a map that connects these daily work practices in relation to the processes, policy texts, textual practices, and power relations that shape everyday experiences. It demonstrates how the web of relations that constitute the assessment practices of the English language can serve as a barrier to IEPs’ labour market integration in Canada. Within the web, however, there are also threads of insights into the social practices of language that could serve as a foundation for developing policies and practices that could recognize the local and social construction of knowledge under the discourses of a globalized knowledge economy and redistribute the responsibility for communication to all members of workplaces and communities.
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Appendix A: Letter of Invitation to Participate in Research

Dear [participant’s name],

If you have been involved in the development and/or implementation of the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 (CLB 2000) or the development and implementation of language assessment tools for the professions using the CLB 2000, you are invited to participate in an interview examining the development and implementation processes of assessment tools for English-as-an-Additional Language (EAL) for employment.

The purpose of the interview is to explore your experiences of being involved in the development and/or implementation of EAL assessment tools for immigrants in workplace settings. The intent of the interview also is to understand the challenges and opportunities experienced in the process, and supports that are required for developing assessment tools. The research is intended to inform the EAL community and employers in order to provide important information about integrating new immigrants into Canadian workplaces.

The interview will be conducted by Tara Gibb, a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia under the supervision of Dr. Pierre Walter, the principal investigator of the study.

Please read the attached consent form carefully. If you are willing to be contacted for an interview to talk further about your experiences, please contact Tara Gibb at taragibb@interchange.ubc.ca. In your email please include your daytime phone number.

Sincerely,

Tara Gibb
Co-investigator
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Phone: xxx-xxxx
Email: xxx

Dr. Pierre Walter
Principal Investigator
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Phone: xxx-xxxx
Email: xxx
Appendix B: Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Department of Educational Studies
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604) 822-5374
Fax: (604) 822-4244
www.edst.educ.ubc.ca

Interview Consent Form
Regulating Employment Participation of Immigrants in Canada: The Role of Adult Additional Language Education Policy

PhD Candidate: Tara Gibb
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Phone: xxx-xxxx
Email: xxx

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Pierre Walter
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Phone: xxx-xxxx
Email: xxx

Purpose:

If you have been involved in the development and/or implementation of the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000 (CLB 2000) or the development and implementation of language assessment tools for the professions using the CLB 2000, you are invited to participate in an interview examining the development and implementation processes of assessment tools for English-as-an-Additional Language (EAL) for employment.

The purpose of the interview is to explore your experiences of being involved in the development and/or implementation of EAL assessment tools for immigrants in workplace settings. The intent of the interview also is to understand the challenges and opportunities experienced in the process, and supports that are required for developing
and/or implementing assessment tools. The results are for both academic and practical purposes. The results will be published as a thesis and in scholarly articles and presentations. In addition, results will be disseminated to the EAL community and employers in order to provide important information about integrating new immigrants into Canadian workplaces.

The research will be conducted by Tara Gibb, a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia under the supervision of Dr. Pierre Walter, the principal investigator of the study.

**Study procedures:**

If you volunteer to participate in the interview, you will be contacted by Tara Gibb to partake in one 60-minute telephone or face-to-face interview at your convenience. You may also be invited to participate in a brief (about 30-minutes) follow-up conversation. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. You will receive a copy of the transcript and have the opportunity to change, delete or add anything you wish.

**Confidentiality:**

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified by code number and kept in locked filing cabinets and password secured computer files. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports on the completed study. Your identity will be disguised with a pseudonym in any information used from your interview.

**Potential risks and benefits:**

No foreseeable harm and no risks should come to you because of your participation in this research.

Your participation in the interview will assist the broader EAL community in enhancing its programming for integrating immigrants into Canadian workplaces and contribute to furthering scholarly knowledge about developing and implementing language assessment protocol.

You have the following rights in this research:

- To not participate;
- To withdraw from the project at any time without prejudice to pre-existing entitlements, and to continuing and meaningful opportunities for deciding whether or not to continue to participate;
- To opt out without penalty and any collected data withdrawn from the database and not included in the study;
- To privacy and confidentiality;
- To safeguards for security of data (data are to be kept for a minimum of 5 years following completion of research);
- To disclosure of the presence of any apparent or actual conflict of interest on the
part of the researcher(s) (In this project, there is no conflict of interest for the researchers).

Contact for information about the study:

If you have any questions or desire further information with regard to this project, you may contact Tara Gibb or Dr. Pierre Walter at the email addresses and phone numbers listed above.

Contact for consent about the rights of the research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the University of British Columbia Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or by e-mail at RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Consent:

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant
Appendix C: Interview Guide

Background and General Questions about the CLB:

1. Could you provide some background information about your position and role in your workplace?

2. How did you become involved in working with the CLB 2000? How has working with a competency-based approach influenced your practice?

3. The introduction to the CLB 2000 refers to the development of the benchmarks as a “revolution.” How have the benchmarks been received by the EAL community?

4. Were you involved in the initial consultations on the CLB in the 1990s? What was the impetus for developing the CLB 2000? What problem(s) is the document meant to address? How effective do you think it has been in addressing the problem(s)?

5. The CCLB held national consultations again in 2010. Were you involved in these consultations? What changes would you like to see made to the CLB and the processes of its administration?

Questions Related to the CLB and the Professions:

1. How did you and your institution become involved in developing occupation-specific assessment tools or bridging programs for accounting/engineering/nursing? Why did you become involved? Why did the institution you work for become involved?

2. Could you explain the process for developing an occupation-specific assessment test for accounting/engineering/nursing?

3. How does the CLB 2000 inform your work with the professions? How do you determine which skills to assess (language and occupation-specific)? How do you determine the kinds of knowledge that need to be assessed (linguistic, occupation-specific, etc.)? How do you decide what target language needs to be assessed? How do you determine competency and proficiency for that occupation?

4. How were employers and professional regulatory bodies involved in the process? What problems did they want the tools and programs to resolve?
5. What kinds of challenges did you encounter in developing and implementing the assessment tools and programs? What supports do you require for the development and implementation?

6. What do you think the role of the provincial and the federal governments and the CCLB should be with respect to language education and assessment of immigrants, especially in the area of employment?
Appendix D: Guidelines for Participant Validation of Transcripts

Dear [],

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me in [month] about your experiences of working with the CLB 2000 and developing occupation-specific programs and assessments. Your insights and experiences have been most helpful for the research project in understanding how the CLB is being implemented in different locations in Canada. Your insights have been so valuable that I would like to do a short 20-minute follow-up telephone conversation with you if you have time. The follow-up conversation is intended to clarify and deepen my understanding of some of your experiences with respect to some of preliminary findings of the study.

The transcript of your interview is attached. It is 'raw', meaning that it reflects oral language. Oral language sometimes looks strange in written form because we speak much differently than we write - using vocal dynamics, half phrases, repetition, etc. If I were to quote a sentence or two directly from your transcript, I would normally use your exact words but do some minor copy-editing to eliminate any repetition, ums and ahs, or specific identifiers you or I may have used.

Don’t worry if the transcript does not at present reflect the written standards that you use to express yourself. Please do not edit it for grammar, punctuation, etc. This would take too much of your time and is not necessary. However, if you see passages containing material that you want deleted, or if you wish to make additions, by all means do so directly on the transcript using track changes, then send it back to me. If you are satisfied with the transcript as it is, there is no need to return it to me. I want to reiterate that your name and all identifiers that could possibly link you personally to the information you have provided in the interview will be kept confidential in any materials or findings produced from this study.

If you have the time for a follow-up conversation, please let me know and we can arrange it for a day in [month] that is convenient for you.

Thank you again for your time.

Sincerely,

Tara Gibb
The University of British Columbia
Appendix E: Examples of Documents and Projects Related to the CLB

• The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners
• The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: A Guide to Implementation
• The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: Theoretical Framework
• The Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: Additional Sample Task Ideas
• Developing an Occupation-Specific Language Assessment Tool
• The Canadian Language Benchmarks Literacy Placement Tool – Volume 1
• The Canadian Language Benchmarks Literacy Placement Tool (LPT) – Volume 2
• Summative Assessment Manual – SAM (Volume 1 & 2)
• Integrating Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment into your ESL Classroom
• Relation the Canadian Language Benchmarks to Essential Skills – A Comparative Framework
• Canadian Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN)
• New Writing Test for the Workplace Language Assessment (WLA) Tool
• The Canadian Language Benchmarks Online Self-Assessment Project
• Canadian Language Benchmarking of the Red Seal Exams
• Expanded Training for Employment Counsellors in the use of the Workplace Assessment Screening Tool Implementation and Promotion of Work Ready