BOTTOM-UP EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY-MAKING

THROUGH STORYTELLING:

LANGUAGE POLICY IN PRACTICE AT A CANADIAN INSTITUTE

by

Patricia Sackville

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Abstract

This research focuses on storytelling as bottom-up educational leadership and policy making. The researcher examines language policy in practice at a Canadian post-secondary institute, following an institutional ethnographic approach and using discourse analysis tools. Stories about everyday experiences with English language placement testing, communication course marks reassessments, plagiarism, and prior learning assessment and review (PLAR) of communication skills are collected from 9 students, 6 instructors, 5 program heads, and the researcher herself as an associate dean. The researcher’s own identity negotiation as an insider at the institute is explored through discussion of tensions around the handling of people’s stories and the role of reflexivity in shaping the research. The research links the personal to the institutional while exploring connections between everyday experiences and processes of administration and governance. Exploration of policy moments in participants’ stories uncovers a discourse of control and homogeneity where difference is constructed negatively, several language myths operate as forms of domination, and storylines suppress conflict. Exercises highlighting dilemmas that people face at the institute are presented to enable dialogic politics. It is argued that storytelling proved to be a powerful method for surfacing everyday struggles, and the sharing of stories led to a new awareness for participants. Storytelling proved to be a generative form of talking back to policy and policy making as it repositioned policy review as a bottom-up exercise and captured moments of policy as struggle and change. Dialogic exercises are presented as tools for reconstruction of language practices that are more equitable and humane.
Preface

This research has been approved by UBC’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H09-01951) and The Institute’s Research Ethics Board (2009-14).
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<td>ECA</td>
<td>the institute’s English Competency Assessment</td>
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<td>ELL</td>
<td>English language learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a second language</td>
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<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPP</td>
<td>Language planning and policy or Language policy and planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLAR</td>
<td>Prior learning assessment and recognition</td>
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<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>Test of English as a Foreign Language</td>
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Legend

As one of the storytellers in this research, I present my voice in the form of tales, poetry, journal entries, field notes, and reflections throughout the dissertation. To signal my voice as storyteller, I use single spacing and italics, and differentiate it from narration I use as dissertation writer.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Deirdre Kelly and my committee members Dr. Bonny Norton and Dr. Pierre Walter for supporting my work and for encouraging me to complete it in my own way.

A special thank-you goes out to the students and faculty of the institute for sharing their stories with me and for showing such interest in promoting educational dialogue.
Prelude

The following story illustrates several language policy issues that I encounter in my daily work as an associate dean at a Canadian institute of technology.

Bombing the test

Monday morning, I arrive at the language lab rather surprised because it used to be a classroom, last time I looked, and I remember teaching here. Strange how I remember the lesson that didn’t work and the student who was angry because I was failing him in the final English language course that would provide him entrance into a full-time technology program. Mostly, I remember facing the seemingly impossible task of getting students through the course successfully. Today I am here in a different capacity, as associate dean checking out the on-line oral English assessment used at the institute. The instructor talks me through the set up, and I put on the headphones, adjust the microphone, and get ready to start. It’s pretty impressive technology and the images on the screen are visually appealing.

I listen to a weather report and then easily answer questions about the weather from the report, laughing briefly at the sound of my voice as I speak into the microphone and hear it reflected back at me. Then I am asked to describe the weather in my city, and I stall because I can’t remember. I try to look out the narrow glass slits in the side of the wall that act like windows in this computer lab, but they don’t provide enough information for an accurate report. I laugh again as I realize my time is up, and the computer is going on to the next question. I could have said anything; I wasn’t being tested on the weather. But, I said nothing, only umm and ahh.

I try harder to say something no matter what question I am given. I have to describe the data shown in a pie chart about employment rates, I have to describe the relative position of some shapes, I have to give directions from one part of the campus to another based on a map, and finally I am at the last question: I must introduce the plenary speaker at a conference. First I read about his life history and his accomplishments and try to write some notes on a scrap of paper. Then the information disappears and I have a few minutes to practice what I want to say. The clock starts ticking and I am left to introduce the person. Whew, it’s over. That was really hard. The instructor gives me a CD copy of my test performance for future analysis, but I don’t dare listen to it. Does a tongue-tied, incoherent, native English speaker get enough marks to pass the assessment? Would I be allowed into the institute based on this assessment of my oral English skills?

Frustrated by forms

Back at my office, I plop the CD on top of a pile of papers by the printer. I see an interoffice envelope on my chair, a place where my assistant puts important papers when I’m not in the office. Inside is a request for a marks reassessment for a communication course, complete with PAID stamped in bold red letters. My role is to find an instructor to reassess a major assignment or final exam – an instructor who doesn’t know anything about the student’s original
mark but has the content expertise to evaluate the exam. This person is to be “unbiased”, but everyone knows that the only time a reassessment is done is when someone has a mark around 45%, 50% being a pass. So the reassessment becomes an exercise in “can I understand why this person failed” rather than a fresh judgment. I scan the form and realize the student did not specify what assignment was to be reassessed. I call her and ask that she come to see me.

When I ask her what outcome she wants from the reassessment, she says she wants to pass the course because she needs a pass to be able to progress to the next term along with the other students in her cohort program. Otherwise, she has to take the course again at night school and pay extra or wait a whole year to take it again with the next group of students. I ask her which assignments she wants reassessed and she says all of them. I try to talk her into only requesting reassessment of the assignments she failed, but she insists that another teacher might give her more marks, enough marks to pass the course. I know it is a long shot, but note the various assignments for reassessment and collect copies of them from her. Now I have to sell the idea of reassessing most of the course work to an instructor who is going to insist that the form says “a reassessment is normally a review of a final exam, final practical work assessment or major project”. But what if a course has several smaller assignments, none of them major? The form asks students to identify the “reason for reassessment request” and “desired result”. This student wants to have a second chance at passing the course. How else can she even have a chance, at this point, if most work isn’t reassessed? To me the policy isn’t so cut and dried.

As it turns out, the student’s work is reassessed at a passable level, and, eventually, her grade is changed to “50 Pass”. A few days later, her classmate comes to my office with a form requesting reassessment of her communication assignments. She says that her friend was so lucky and that I am a fair person. She wants to have a chance at passing, too. I think she misunderstands, and I try to explain that I don’t do the reassessment, only organize it. She continues to thank me and leaves a bottle of hand lotion for me. She says she sells beauty products as a part-time job and that it works really well to soften your hands. What have I unleashed?

Forms of frustration

Tuesday morning, first thing I have a meeting with the dean and program heads to discuss budget cuts. At issue is the amount of time program heads are released from teaching in order to perform their program head duties. In order to make up a 50% release-time cut, I propose to spread it over five departments with a 10% cut each. Each program head argues against it, saying that small cuts wouldn’t result in actual savings because it’s difficult to increase their teaching load by 10% given that courses can’t be carved up and shared among faculty. Furthermore, they argue for the value of their work and the difficulty of getting faculty to step up and take on leadership roles. I agree with their points, yet I am forced to make a cut. My alternative is to cut one area by 50%, an area that has the most program head release presently.

Wednesday morning, I discuss ideas with the dean, and she supports the cut. We meet with the affected department and announce the reduction in their program head release, providing the rationale that they have more than other departments. They decide to eliminate the English assessment work they provide for the institute, and I vow to work with the admissions
staff as partners to perform this important work (translated as: have them perform the never-ending minutia of administration while the department maintains academic integrity of the test and the adjudication decisions). Then, the dean and I meet with the relevant management to begin discussions. They are absolutely against stopping the test and want it available on demand so that potential students needing proof of English competency can be processed quickly. We explore ways to make testing cost effective. The simplest way would be to charge more for it, but there is a 2% limit on fee increases and this small increase will not cover costs. We end the meeting with the goal of finding out exactly where in the institute’s financial codes the test tuition goes to see if this revenue can be directed to the sector doing the work.

Thursday morning, I meet with the department to discuss the possibility of challenge exams for students whose English skill level qualifies them to apply for course exemption. We discuss the costs, the required grade to prove competency, and the need for someone to handle the administration. We are left with the question of whether enough people would pass to make the work worth it for faculty. Then someone offers a carrot: this might help reduce class sizes and marking load.

That afternoon, I return the phone message left by a student wanting a decision on her communication prior learning assessment request (PLAR), which has been going on for a month. She had initially met with the program head to discuss her sample documents before agreeing to go ahead with the PLAR process. She paid her $250 but did not pass her first PLAR exam. The program head felt sorry for her and offered her a new exam, which she also did not pass. Then she was given some take-home assignments as a third exam attempt. Only one of the four assignments qualified for a pass, and the program head suggested she revise the other three in a final attempt to get a pass. The student was frustrated and confused and asked that all the work she had done to date be given to a different person to make a final assessment. I agree.

Testing the bomb

Friday morning, I pass by the photocopy room and an instructor rushes out, telling me about the manual she found one of her students using in class. It contained copies of the instructor’s notes and exercises as part of a bound “Handbook” for students in the first year of a program. The student had paid $50 for it; a 2nd year student was selling them; he’d visited one of their other classes and had made a sales pitch. The instructor was quickly photocopying it during class break so I could follow up. She sells her material through the bookstore, and no one had asked her permission to produce a handbook. Is this some new form of plagiarism?

I start by phoning the relevant department manager, thinking he will be surprised. Actually, I am the one who is surprised, because he already knows about it and isn’t concerned. The student had asked the department to endorse the project of assembling all course notes, exercises, and answers into a series of handbooks complete with CD’s. The student’s rationale was that students shared material with each other anyway, and he wanted to do this in a more organized way and make some money at the same time. The department had told him they could not endorse the idea but couldn’t actually stop him. None of the other instructors seemed concerned so that was the end of the issue in his mind. I point out that my instructor was never consulted, her subject being a service course outside of the department. I also point out that the
handbook does not add any value to the course, it might mislead students to thinking it is a cheaper substitute for official course material and texts, it is of questionable accuracy in places where the “author” added explanations, it forces students to spend money unnecessarily, and that students had complained about class time being interrupted for the sale of this material.

I remember previous differences of opinion I’ve had with this department in the past. I refuse to sweep this one under the carpet. After a few phone calls, I have the interest of the copyright director, and we meet. We agree that there is something I can do, as this student has contravened copyright compliance policy as well as policy on retailing of course materials, and my instructor has complained. I’ll meet with the student to discuss the concerns and ask him to stop selling the material. At this time, I’ll provide him with a letter documenting our meeting and his agreement. I will also inform the department of my actions. My role is to educate the student (rather than punish). I am looking forward to educating the other manager.

It’s Friday afternoon and I have survived another week full of language policy issues at the institute, the pervasive and unnoticed, socially hegemonic policy of everyday actions.

(Tales of an Associate Dean, 2010)
Chapter 1: Storytelling from the Bottom Up

Walking down the halls of a Canadian institute of technology (the institute\(^1\)), I remember my first impressions twenty years ago, the day I arrived an hour too early for the job interview. I had to wait in the cafeteria and was surprised when I met my sister’s friend; he wished me luck. The place smelled like “school”, like pencil shavings, notebooks, and office supplies, a smell which still brings an excitement of new adventures. I remember being single then, and that I hadn’t yet met my future mate or had a family. I recall what the place looked like before the newer wings were added, where the trailers used to be, and how I taught a night-school class in a trailer while I was suffering from my second miscarriage. There is some comfort that the trailers are gone now. Every day as I walk in from the back parking lot, I step over the very same large, smooth round stones that my young children used to take home and put in a box of shredded paper, believing they might, just might, be dinosaur eggs and hatch. Twenty years of my life have been lived as an employee of the institute – as a communication instructor and then an associate dean.

Now, I am also a graduate-student doing language policy research that focuses on institute language practices. This dissertation tells my stories as an associate dean and the stories of students, instructors, and program heads, as our everyday experiences meet and reshape language policy in practice. My stories include an open discussion of the research process as I explore tensions associated with my position as an insider-researcher who is an educational leader, tensions around the handling of people’s stories, and tensions around selectivity in producing this research text. This dissertation is my contribution to the conversations about

\(^1\) In order to protect the identity of individuals, I use a pseudonym, “the institute”, rather than the actual name of the institution. The pseudonym is also used for references to institute documents, in both in-text citations and in the list of references.
researcher identity, language policy as practice, and storytelling as bottom-up educational leadership.

I draw inspiration from Smith’s institutional ethnographic approach (2005) to trace the links between the everyday and social relations that organize the work of the institute. This method of inquiry frames research as discovery that is useful for participants in their everyday lives, what Smith refers to as having “no prior interpretative commitment” (Smith 2005, p. 36). Institutional ethnography starts with everyday experiences and maps out the ways in which people’s specific experiences are coordinated to create a larger, social view of the institution, a view larger than that held by any one member. My research links the personal to the institutional, using our stories as an ethnographic tool to explore connections between everyday experiences and processes of administration.

I focus on language policies because of my extensive experience as a communication instructor, first for the institute’s pre-entry English upgrading courses and then for technical communication in two-year diploma programs. During my teaching career, I was nominated by my students for a teaching award, and they highlighted their everyday experience with language practices:

While technical communication is often an exercise of following the accepted formats and procedures necessary to succeed in the workplace, and the field demands certain styles, vocabularies, and inherent language skills, Patricia never lost sight of an idea that one’s English is also to a great extent an extension of a person’s identity. Her continuing mindfulness of this fact allowed the people in her class to learn in an atmosphere of dignity and mutual respect, lowering their guard, and “opening the doors of perception”
I went on to win the award, realizing the power of everyday experiences as a form of language policy inside my classroom and beyond. In my more recent role as an associate dean, I am responsible for managing a group of service departments that provide courses for diploma and degree programs. I feel a responsibility to look beyond the surface of the “problems” that others bring to my attention, including those that involve English language learners (ELL). At the institute, students are often referred to as having “weak” English. These students come to my attention when they “fail to meet the standards”. They become linked with issues such as cheating, plagiarism, grade inflation, squeaking through unfairly, and I become responsible for dealing with the issues. In this research, I explore the policy of everyday actions that result in students being identified in this way. Through storytelling and retelling, I combine views from participants’ lives with those of my life as an insider-researcher in order to share knowledge from the bottom up.

Research purpose and research questions

Research on the everyday context of language policy holds promise for a more complex understanding of how language policies are interpreted and negotiated as well as recognition of storytelling as bottom-up policy making. To look at the realities of everyday experience with language policies at the institute, the study involves collecting stories from students and instructors about their experiences with the following academic conduct policies: language placement testing, communication course marks reassessment, plagiarism cases, and prior learning assessment (PLAR). These particular policies were chosen as they involve moments when English language learners and/or their instructors come in contact with me as an associate.
A second step involves taking the stories to program heads for discussion of constraints and possibilities in everyday life at the institute. A third step involves interviewing myself as an associate dean, to explore the procedures used for dealing with language policy issues. In addition, I review my research journal which documents my experience as an insider-researcher, and I create stories I call “Tales of an Educational Researcher”. The aim of this research is to give people a chance to talk back to policy, recognizing this as a form of language policy making or “bottom-up” language planning, as argued by Norton and Mutonyi (2010).

The questions addressed by this research are the following:

- What do institute language practices reveal about processes of administration and governance?
- What tensions did I have to contend with as an insider-researcher?
- What English language storylines (Søndergaard, 2002) are made available to students, instructors, program heads, and the associate dean?
- How does storytelling function as a generative form of bottom-up policy making and educational leadership?

**Policy in practice**

My research aims to complicate policy discussion around English language learners at the institute. Since institute policy review is often constructed as a revising of policy documents, it is framed at a distance from the people most affected by policy. I argue that important elements are left out of the discussion, namely the social dimensions or the context in which policy is enacted. I argue that the social environment, including everyday experiences, is a form of policy and that it would be useful to unravel the ways policy regulates and normalizes certain behaviours. My
purpose is to complicate policy discussions by bringing to light everyday experiences that may go unnoticed.

I view policy as both text and actions as described by Ball (1994) to capture both words and deeds and to include the everyday actions of those involved in policy enactment. Edelman (1988) pointed out that once a problem comes into discourse, it comes into existence, and drawing from Foucault, Edelman argues that discourse has a powerful hegemony over people as it gives certain people power over others. Edelman (1988) identified “problems” as political constructions of ideologies and pointed out that there is a diversity of meanings inherent in every problem. Furthermore, policy “solutions” often maintain the same conditions that give rise to the problem in that they preserve power relations and the institutions that generate the consciousness and behaviour that constructed the problem. In this way, paradoxically, there is a benefit to keeping a problem. For example, referring to a student’s English skills as “weak” defines their skills as a problem and creates the opposite, “standard English” (I explore this point in depth in Chapter 3). This sets up the work of native English speakers as superior to the work of English language learners and “solutions” to the “problem” will further idealize the native speaker. If policy is seen as a social process, Levinson and Sutton (2001) ask the following:

What would educational policy studies look like if they [the studies] reconceptualized the notion of policy itself as a complex social practice, an on-going process of normative cultural production constituted by diverse actors across diverse social and institutional contexts? (p. 1)

My work answers this call for further research to explicate policy in practice.
Language policy and planning

The field of study that language policy is part of is commonly referred to as language planning and policy (LPP) and sometimes language policy and planning, with policy in a superordinate role (McCarty, 2011). Hornberger (2006) referred to the debate about which activity supersedes the other as highlighting the inextricable relation between language planning and language policy. The field is characterized by a grass-roots nature, as people both carry out and make language policy in everyday social practices, and a core concern of the field is the role of education in structuring social and linguistic inequalities (McCarty, 2011).

Norton and Mutonyi (2010) in their case study research on African youth talking back to HIV/AIDS research argued for the conception of “bottom-up” language planning. They identified work that adopts a situated approach to address issues around language planning and policy-related inequities: Hornberger and Vaish (2008) focused on multilingual language policy and school linguistic practices in India, Singapore, and South Africa; King (2004) studied policy and local planning of enrichment bilingual education in South America; Ramanthan (2005) conducted a grounded exploration of English and vernacular medium education in India; and Shohamy (2007) focused on hidden agendas and new approaches to language policy. In addition, in a special issue of TESOL, Ramanathan and Morgan (2007) called for a redirection of LPP inquiry toward situated policy enactments and identified three main themes of research in the field: the enhanced status and implications of locality in policy research; practitioner agency and ethical issues involved; and the effect of globalization on policy enactments. Furthermore, Johnson (2009) identified a lack of empirical data to test the rich collection of theoretical conceptualizations of language policy, as well as a lack of methodological guidance for doing research on language policy interpretation and appropriation. Clearly, research in the field has
made the connection between everyday experiences and language policy, showing that language practices at the grassroots level have policy implications and language policy references the way people make sense of their daily lives and plan for the future.

McCarty (2011) identifies ethnography as a situated and systemic way of looking into the different layers of language policy that intersect and conjoin – national, institutional, intergroup, and interpersonal. McCarty describes the field of LPP as being primarily about “how people themselves actively create, contest, and mediate LPP at multiple levels – micro [face-to-face interactions], meso [local communities of practice], and macro [nation states and larger global forces]” (p. 285). McCarty also identifies the ethnographer’s job as attending to the “fine-grained detail of each layer and its positioning within an organic whole” (p. 17). As an insider-researcher in a Canadian institute of technology, I have taken on this task as I unravel language policy in practice.

Identity and storytelling

Also of relevance to my work is the concept of identity that calls for rich descriptions of informants’ lives (Norton, 2000). In more recent work, Norton and Early (2011) also argue for the value of story and the researchers’ voice in educational research. In response, I draw on Norton’s definition of identity as “how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2000, p. 5), to explore my role as an insider-researcher in an educational leadership position. In my “Tales of an Educational Researcher”, I explore tensions I face when writing up “knowledge” in my research dissertation. From the theoretical framework of “identity”, I explore tensions around who owns a story, what comes from it, and how my history plays out in the stories I tell and in the ways I retell them.
My policy research builds on the underlying theories, concepts and controversies presented in the literature by focusing on storytelling from the bottom-up in one post-secondary institution. I explore how language practices mediate relations of ruling and make certain storylines available to people in the institution. Smith (1990) uses the term “relations of ruling” to refer to social relations (beyond the individual) that provide organization, control and initiative, for example, the institutions that organize our everyday lives like bureaucracy, administration, management, professional organizations, and the media as well as discourses that coordinate multiple sites of ruling. It is through these power relations that policy texts are created and naturalized. I research the processes that shape my own work and explore my experience as an insider-researcher using storytelling as a form of identity construction and negotiation. My research provides an opportunity for people to talk back to policy and uncovers moments of agency and leadership. My work contributes to existing LPP research by focusing on everyday policy in practice in a Canadian higher education context.

**Higher education policy context**

The current climate of the post-secondary education system in Canada suggests that research on language policy and everyday lives is timely. At the federal level, Canadian education is being marketed internationally, with China being a key market, and higher education institutions are being directed to ensure positive educational experiences for international students in Canada. English language policy and practices are particularly relevant as educational institutions are being directed to pay more attention to English language training (Council of the Federation Secretariat, 2011).

In the province where the institute is located, the relevance of language policy research is underscored by recent changes to the higher education system which have increased competition
among post-secondary institutions. A recent shift doubled the number of universities in the province overnight through reclassification of existing institutions (Metcalf, 2009). Currently there are three types of higher education institutions: universities, colleges, and institutes, while previously there was an additional type called “university-colleges”. This recent change as well as a shrinking demographic of school-age children in Canada (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2007) and broader student movement among the province’s post-secondary institutions (Provincial CAT, 2009) have led to greater competition among institutions for college-age students. Immigrants to the province and international students are two key groups that institutions are competing for to make up the projected shortfall (Institute, 2011a).

The institute

Located in an urban center in western Canada, the institute is spread across six campuses, and the average age of buildings is more than 30 years. The institute attracts approximately 17,000 full-time students and 28,000 part-time students, and programming is designed to meet the changing needs of the labour market and is kept in line with industry standards. Approximately 400 programs are offered in the areas of health, business, engineering and trades and result in certificates, advanced certificates, diplomas, and bachelor degrees. About 66% of the student body is male, and the median age of a full-time student is 22 years, while the median age of part-time students is higher at 31 years. While the institute’s mandate is to serve the province, about 10% of students are international. The institute’s president has identified the profound impact of international and interprovincial migration for demographic growth and expansion of the labour force in the province, and in response is planning to address the needs of

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2 Metcalfe (2009) provides a detailed description of policy shifts in the provincial higher education system, citing the Macdonald report of 1962, which influenced the creation of the system, and the Plant report of 2007, which influenced the recent redesign. Although the provincial government’s rationale for the change was to increase access to higher education, Metcalf argues that institution type may reinforce spatial inequalities.
the increasing number of immigrants to the institute’s urban territory and their multi-lingual language profile (fewer than 20% have English as their mother tongue). The institute is planning for an increasingly more ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse student body and has identified international students as a growing constituency (Institute, 2011a).

Therefore, supporting the English language learning needs of students will become increasingly important and research on language policy, increasingly relevant. According to the institute’s strategic plan, the provincial government expects greater accountability from post-secondary institutions through key performance indicators that measure the extent to which institutions are achieving goals outlined in their Service Plans (Institute, 2009a). Thus, the institute is more focused on the student experience, and feedback on language policy can inform the discussion in meaningful ways.

The institute’s students have various styles of English and complex identities as language learners. Most of the institute’s students are recruited domestically and have completed high school locally. Some are recent immigrants with extensive work experience in other countries who have taken the institute’s preparatory courses in order to meet entrance requirements, including English. An increasing number are international students (Institute, 2010a). To be accepted into a program, students must have Grade 12 English or equivalent, with a mark determined by each particular program. In the classroom, levels of English proficiency vary, and instructors struggle with meeting the needs of diverse groups of students. Much energy has gone into designing in-house tests to determine the level of English skill that is needed to succeed in institute programs, with the belief that a “good” test will predict success and “weed out” those who are not ready for study in the institute’s applied programs. The institute does not test the English language proficiency of all incoming students, but English testing is an option for

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3 The number of international students doubled from 422 in 2009 to 946 in 2010 (Institute, 2010a).
students who need to prove they have the equivalent of Grade 12 English in order to meet the entry requirements for a particular program. Also, some programs test their students during the first week of classes in order to identify those who may need English language support.

The institute prides itself in shaping curriculum to meet employer needs (Institute, 2010b), and good communication skills have been identified as one of the top priorities by employers when hiring (Hamilton, 2005). But at the institute, there is often competition for limited time to cover important technical content as well as more academic subjects like communication. Diploma programs focus on quick acquisition of technical skills in two years, half the time of university programs, and English skills are not seen as technical content. Furthermore, the subject of communication is part of a service department whose instructors teach in programs outside of their department. This sense of being outside the program area is conveyed to me every Fall on student orientation day when program instructors wear their department T shirts, presenting a picture of unity and authority that communication instructors are not part of. In service departments, the joke is that instructors should wear aprons to convey their service status.

The classroom

When students arrive in the classrooms, they are quickly identified as having English as a native language or as a “second language” (ESL) based on the types of “errors” they make in English, regardless of how they might identify themselves. The way students speak and the style of their written English separates native from non-native English users, and the term “ESL” is commonly used. The ESL categorization becomes a de facto language policy, which defines students’ linguistic ability and serves a regulatory function, setting up standard English as the norm while world Englishes become “other” and less desirable. The term ESL is linked with the
notion of a deficit in language ability and overlooks the multi-lingual nature of many people’s lives in this part of western Canada⁴.

Structure of the dissertation

In Chapter 1, I have argued that language policies can be seen as “living dynamic forces that find their viability and articulation in the most local of spaces” (Ramanathan, 2005, p. 89), and that it would be valuable to study how language policies get translated into actual practice. Taking a view of policy as texts and discourses (Ball, 1994) and heeding Lingard’s (2003) argument that non-policy texts can act in the capacity of policy to create or uphold particular discourses, I have presented an overview of my situated approach to research, which focuses on the ways that students, instructors, and administrators at the institute interpret and negotiate English language policy. I have argued that this research provides the chance for stakeholders to talk back to policy and thus provides insight into how language policy shapes everyday lives at the institute. In addition, I have explained my interest in exploring my own identity as an insider-researcher, using personal narrative to tell the research story from the bottom up. In the subsequent chapters, I address the four research questions, address issues of validity, and offer suggestions for further research. I conclude with a final story in the form of an afterword.

In Chapter 2, I describe the way I adopted an institutional ethnographic approach as a methodology for the study and explain who I interviewed and how I structured the interviews. Finally, I discuss the soundness of the research.

In Chapters 3, I address research question one: What do institute language practices reveal about processes of administration and governance? Drawing from official policy statements and email messages that represent policy in practice, I connect everyday language

⁴ For a discussion of research on multilingualism and language acquisition, see Norton and Toohey, 2011, including Canagarajah’s (2007) challenge to the monolingualist assumptions underlying much of second language acquisition theory, and Block’s (2003) critique of the term “second” language.
practices with processes of administration and governance by using discourse analysis to explore relations of language and power. I uncover a discourse of homogeneity and control where difference is constructed negatively, and I argue that there is an unequal distribution of academic social goods like academic integrity and language proficiency at the institute.

In Chapter 4, I address research question two: What tensions did I have to contend with as an insider-researcher? First, I explain how I used storytelling to generate data, how I made sense of it, and how I organized it. Then, I address research question two by exploring how I negotiated and constructed my identity as an insider-researcher, and highlighting tensions around the ethical considerations I faced when retelling the stories and writing up this dissertation. Specifically, I focus on tensions around who owns a story, what comes from it, and how my history plays out in the stories I tell, highlighting the important role I play as a stakeholder with considerable power, influence, and investment.

In Chapter 5, I continue to address research question one: What do institute language practices reveal about processes of administration and governance? Drawing primarily from the storytelling data that I generated rather than on the documents I collected – official policy statements and email messages – I expand on the discussion of institute administrative and governance processes from Chapter 3. In Chapter 5, I argue that storytelling data reveal particular language myths that operate as forms of domination and control, shaping administrative processes.

In Chapter 6, I address research question three: What English language storylines are made available to students, instructors, program heads, and the associate dean? Through interview data, I explore the English language storylines made available at the institute and their role in suppression of conflict in policy moments. To capture the possible tensions between an
individual and society, I explore how subjects are portrayed as being romantic, tragic, ironic, and comedic (Frye, 1957), and how these storylines work to suppress conflict and mask social and economic power differences.

In Chapter 7, I address research question four: How does storytelling function as a generative form of bottom-up policy making and educational leadership? I argue that storytelling as used in my research served (however provisionally) to restore the balance of power by providing the opportunity to talk back to policy. I argue that alternative storylines were exposed, and they challenged the language myths in operation. Through the development of dialogic, language-policy exercises, I take storytelling into the future as a form of bottom-up language planning at the institute. Finally, I explore issues of validity and offer suggestions for further research.

Following the final chapter, I include a reflective story, my final “Tales of an Associate Dean”, as an afterword. In an appendix, I offer additional dialogic exercises beyond the scope of this research, but inspired by it. Both of these final additions reveal that the story never ends, and that reflexivity is key, not only to the methodology I used as an insider-researcher, but also in my role as an educational leader at the institute. The dialogue will continue for me as part of my everyday experience with policy as practice.
Chapter 2: Talking Back to Policy: Methodology and Methods

In Chapter 2, I explain the methodology and methods used in my work. First, I describe the way I used storytelling and an institutional ethnographic approach as methodologies for the study, focusing on the epistemological framing of what I did. Then I describe the specifics of who I interviewed and how I structured the interviews. Finally, I discuss the soundness of the research.

Exploring policy moments

My methodology is influenced by two qualitative research approaches: narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005), yet I also position my work as action-oriented research (Herr & Anderson, 2005) because I approach it as an insider-researcher who is a practitioner in the research setting. During the research process, I collected stories from students and instructors, reworked them to share with program heads, and told my own stories of my experience as an associate dean and an insider-researcher. Through my dissertation, I retell the stories in order to feed them back into my local setting as well as make them more public through the academy. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) referred to the complexity of narrative as people are engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving their stories, and the researcher becomes part of the process. The research becomes a shared narrative that is constructed and reconstructed through the process of inquiry. Narrative inquiry is also described as a form of collaboration between participant and researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), since both the participants’ and the researcher’s voices are heard. I explore what this means for my research. Furthermore, Canagarajah (1996) noted that narratives capture local knowledge from the bottom-up and, as a research reporting format, can lead to exploration of how the researcher’s subjectivity both influences and is influenced by the research activity.
Accordingly, I use the stories to construct two narratives, one about the institution as I map out the language practices of interest to my study, and a second narrative about myself as a recounting of my methodology and the tensions I had to deal with as an insider-researcher trying to make a difference. As a result, my work has the potential to affect both local knowledge at the institute and public knowledge for other settings or researchers. Rather than focusing only on the individual (one of the criticisms leveled at narrative inquiry, according to Marshall and Rossman, 1999), I link individual experiences to the social realm through an approach recommended by Smith (1987), by identifying an area of everyday practice to be explored and following the texts (including discourses) that mediate that practice.

Key features of Smith’s (2005) institutional ethnographic approach that influence my work are using people’s standpoint as the takeoff point for research – its “problematic”, looking at how people’s doings are coordinated, and recognizing language as integral to investigation of the social. I begin in the material conditions of people’s everyday lives rather than in theory (a key difference to a case study approach in which the focus would be a case within a conceptual frame), and I discover how people unintentionally participate in institutional relations to exclude those they attempt to support. I begin with people’s stories about our everyday experience at the institute with four academic conduct policies that shape the experience of English language learners in particular, since interactions with these policies bring students to my office on a regular basis, and dealing with them makes up much of my work as an associate dean. The four policies are language placement testing, communication course marks reassessment, plagiarism cases, and prior learning assessment [PLAR]. I collect stories about these four language policy issues from students, instructors, program heads, and myself as an associate dean, and I explore the coordination of the policy moments or cues (Smith, 1987) revealed in the stories. Smith uses
the term “mapping” to describe how institutional ethnography documents the coordination of people’s work. The metaphor captures the intent of the approach in that institutional ethnography does not impose theory on everyday experience (similar to maps not being read independently of the terrain they represent). Furthermore, texts in institutions are dialogic in that they require a reader who uses the text to navigate through the everyday world or social terrain (like a map reader navigates through physical terrain). The language in texts (as well as the institutional discourses associated with them) provides a trail for the institutional ethnographer to investigate ruling relations from a given angle. In this research, I gather and retell stories and explore policy texts to map out the coordination of everyday language practices at the institute, and I explore moments of conflict and resistance as extra-local operations of power. Institutional ethnography strives to make visible the connections between the everyday and relations of ruling in an accessible and useable format for participants, and I start from the standpoint of different people’s experience, move the stories from the local institution to global relations of ruling, and argue that storytelling is a form of bottom-up policy planning.

**Storytelling**

According to Murphy (2010), “a great story draws listeners in by showing, not telling, the course of events. Telling is just the dry communication of facts and figures, and even an extraordinary tale will be boring if that’s all you give” (p. 112).

When I was designing my research, I began with the notion of a good story as being something that draws readers in, and I reflected on my experience of listening to and telling stories in educational workshops. In the past, I had taken part in a two-day workshop on teamwork, and in groups of three, we had told each other a story about our best teamwork experience. I let the other two go first, because I was filled with doubt that I had an interesting
experience to share. Their stories were good and so were their teamwork experiences, while I could only think of teamwork-gone-wrong stories. When it was my turn, I told about an experience I thought wasn’t too bad and found that as I spoke the story out loud, I remembered the positive aspects and the experience became something I actually felt nostalgic about, and the other group members thought it sounded great. Then we went off to separate corners of the room to write up one other person’s story as if we were that person. I really enjoyed “being” my partner, the coordinator who had worked in a medical clinic where everyone was committed to treating the “whole person” rather than their separate parts. I used alliteration to emphasize this approach, referring to the eye doctor from England, the anesthetist from Asia, and the brain surgeon from Burnaby all coming together that day to see the patient. I even added a detail about the coordinator coming in early to make the coffee at the start of the day. When I shared the story with my partner to check for accuracy, he said that I had captured the exact spirit of teamwork that he was describing even though my details were fictitious. He added that the coordinator making the coffee was exactly in the spirit of the clinic. People saved their stories in an electronic file so that the workshop leader could compile them into a booklet for the next day’s session. During day two, we each read through the booklet and picked a story that stood out for us and were put into groups of six to discuss that story with the group. We were to identify the qualities of good teams that were apparent in the stories we had selected. I picked the story I had written and, since it was short, read it aloud to the group. They laughed at the alliteration, seemed to enjoy hearing the story, and we had a fruitful discussion about teamwork. This story-sharing experience stood out for me as productive method of using stories to promote discussion.
**Storytelling process used in this research**

The workshop procedure inspired me as I was planning my research because in my experience, it had the potential to promote discussion and generate new knowledge. I came up with an adaptation of the process as shown in Figure 1, collecting stories from two groups and taking the stories to a third group for discussion.

![Storytelling Process Used in Methodology](image)

**Figure 1: Storytelling Process Used in Methodology**

I decided to ask student and instructor groups to share a story about their experience with one of the language policy issues and then to get each story teller to transcribe another person’s story in order to produce a booklet of stories for the program head discussion phase of my research. Unlike in the workshop, I asked people to use third person form, “he”, “she”, or “the person” rather than using “I”. I believed this would allow for a more respectful and authentic representation of each story and clearly signal that the writer was retelling someone else’s story. I wanted to show respect for the story teller’s voice as well as set up the conditions for participants to listen well to each other. From my experience as a language instructor, I knew that
storytelling and retelling was a valuable part of language learning, and I believed that a language-learning focus might be necessary to motivate participation in case I had to use communication class time to conduct the interviews. I wanted to put the stories together into a booklet and believed asking program heads to discuss one story that stood out for them would allow discussion to flow as it did in my workshop experience, but I realized the importance of getting good stories in the booklet to prompt discussion. In my workshop experience, the leader kept telling us that everyone has a best teamwork story to tell because the experience is best relative to their other experiences, no matter how negative. I realized the importance of phrasing the question in my research to make it easy for participants to tell me a story and decided to include the word “experience”, asking for a story about their experience with a language policy issue. I also realized I would have to recruit only from among students who would likely have had some experience with the policies at the institute.

In addition to the storytelling exercise described above, I planned to interview individuals whose stories stood out for me in order to understand how they came to make the decisions they did. Using an idea from Smith (2005), I planned to use a form or document associated with the language policy issue and to discuss the chain of actions around processing the document. Once I heard the student and instructor stories, I realized that they had little connection to a particular form or document that they had to work through. I realized that forms were more the work of an administrator like me, so I began to think about forms that I had dealt with and the students with whom I had interacted in the process. I decided to interview myself using a “think aloud” approach to capture my thinking as I worked through the process of completing the form to deal with a policy issue. Bowles (2010) referred to “think-alouds” as verbal reports that are done while completing a task. Using an interview script submitted as part of the ethical review for my
research, I asked myself the following questions to uncover my thinking as I helped move a language policy through the institute: What did you do at each point in the process? How could the process be organized differently to prevent the trouble you experienced? If you could change the form, how would you change it? Is there something that would make this process easier to deal with? I taped and transcribed my answers as I thought aloud about particular experiences I had dealt with.

**Participants**

I now explain specifically how I gathered language policy stories from each group of participants.

**Students**

My interest is in students who have experienced language practices and policies at the institute, and this means that they would likely have been at the institute for at least a term. Since I did not have an easy way to identify students with this experience and did not want to ask students to identify themselves as English language learners or by using the ESL label, I recruited students by approaching instructors who taught second-year courses in programs that typically test incoming students to identify those who require English language support courses. On my behalf, a colleague visited several classes to announce my research and handed out a flyer so that students could contact me. The flyer described the opportunity for students to talk to other students about their experience with a language placement test they wrote, with a communication course marks reassessment request they may have undertaken, with accusations of not putting ideas in their own words in their writing, or a prior learning assessment request they may have undertaken for a communication course at the institute. I worked with the nine students who agreed to participate, gave them a consent form to sign and asked them to describe one
experience to each other in groups of three. Using laptops, each student in the group then wrote down another student’s story in the third person without using real names and then shared it with the person to ensure accuracy. Stories were collected electronically. The consent form included the possibility of being interviewed at a later date for more detail about their story. The student recruitment flyer is shown in Appendix A.  

*Summary of student stories*

I collected stories from nine students. They primarily focused on their experience with English assessment at the institute. Table 1 briefly summarizes the focus of the stories which will be discussed further in the analysis chapters 5 and 6.

**Table 1: Summary of Student Stories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacek had a C but needed C+ in English so had to write test for admission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel prepared for the English test by talking to a friend who failed three times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto found assessment in communication course focuses too much on grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamid took multiple English placement tests in high school and at the institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faduma took multiple English placement tests at various places and after admission, still had to study more English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raj passed English assessment but still found communication course level too high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashkhhan failed English test; no chance to study for it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parm passed English test, gained admission, found communication course too tough on grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily, an international student, took multiple English tests to gain admission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Instructors*

Instructors were recruited through a flyer (see Appendix B) sent to the thirty instructors in two English-related departments asking if they would like to share an experience with other instructors regarding one of the four policy issues. I could not attend department meetings to talk about my research to instructors because I attend these meetings as their Associate Dean and that

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5 I have made specific information in the posters generic to protect the identity of people and the institution.

6 I use pseudonyms for all participants.
would compromise their free choice to participate. Again, my colleague on leave did the recruiting. She emailed the flyer with my introductory remarks plus her own comments to instructors, and the same day, I got the first three replies. After waiting a week, I scheduled a group for the first three instructors and by then had three more replies so scheduled the second group. The six instructors were given a consent form to sign which included the future possibility of being interviewed for more detail about their story. They were asked to tell their stories to each other, to record another instructor’s story in third person on a laptop, and to share with the person to ensure accuracy. I had planned to hold student groups first and then instructor groups, approaching the task hierarchically, from the bottom up. But, it was easier to schedule the instructor groups first and then the two student groups. This order proved to be better in the end because the instructors who had taken part in a group interview then helped recruit student participants by talking to their own classes about my work.

*Summary of instructor stories*

I collected stories from six instructors. Four primarily focused on their experience with plagiarism, while two of them focused on English testing and a support course. Table 2 briefly summarizes the focus of the stories which will be discussed further in the analysis in Chapters 5 and 6.

**Table 2: Summary of Instructor Stories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plagiarism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob’s story about students cheating in an exam by copying prewritten essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie’s story about the productive way plagiarism is dealt with by a particular program at the institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma’s story about a student who gets outside help making her writing almost perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona’s story about students handing in very similar assignments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus of Story

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy’s story about a student’s eventual success even though he failed the English admissions test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danita’s story about her experience teaching an English support course to students who failed a placement test</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After I had collected all the student and instructor stories, I put them together into a booklet in preparation for the program head group interviews.

Program heads

Program heads at the institute split their time between administering a department and teaching courses in arts and sciences, and I am the manager to a group of twelve program heads of five academic departments. The group meets several times per term with me to discuss educational issues related to policy, curriculum, student success, program accountability, and institutional requirements. They are program heads of service departments and not responsible for the technology programs that students are enrolled in. One program head from each of the five academic areas in my portfolio were recruited through an email sent on my behalf by my colleague on leave and the recruitment flyer (see Appendix C) was included in the email. They were given the consent form which included the possibility of a future interview for more detail about their story. I gave each person a copy of the booklet ahead of time and asked them to pick one or two stories that stood out for them. When the group met, each program head discussed the story they had selected, and a general discussion followed about their role in these types of policy issues as well as what they learned from the story in terms of institute practices. The discussion focused on the two main topics from the stories of plagiarism and English assessment. I took notes during the session, identifying each speaker with their initials and later shared the transcript with each program head as a form of member checking. I allowed them to change the
wording or cross out any wording they did not want me to use, and they each signed the transcript to signal their acceptance. I discuss the program head group interview data in the subsequent analysis chapters.

**Associate dean**

I interviewed myself, as associate dean, focusing on the documents (forms and policy texts) associated with the procedures for dealing with two of the policy issues, communication course marks reassessment and prior learning assessment of communication skills. I chose these two policy issues since they had not come up in either student or instructor stories and I did have experience with these issues. I told about my experience by focusing on the chain of actions around processing the documents (i.e., what I did at each point in the process). As well, I described how the process could be organized differently to prevent the trouble I experienced (i.e.: Why does the form ask this? If you could change this form, how would you change it? Is there something that would make this process easier to deal with?). In the interview, I described my experience processing the policy issues as an associate dean. I “talked” my way through the standard institute forms I am required to fill out and the reports I am required to write when dealing with academic misconduct issues. I focused on what I do while “working up the messiness of an everyday circumstance so that it fits the categories and protocols of a professional regime” (DeVault & McCoy, 2001, p. 760) and asked myself how it is that I say what I do about these students. Table 3 shows the focus of the associate dean’s interview.
Table 3: Summary of Associate Dean Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Issue</th>
<th>Focus of Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. marks reassessment</td>
<td>Explanation of marks reassessment process and dealing with students whose first language isn’t English wanting their communication course work reassessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. prior learning assessment (PLAR)</td>
<td>Story about Maria whose PLAR was taking too long</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the policy issues in the stories will be presented in the analysis sections in Chapters 5 and 6.

**Issues of validity - Soundness of research and ethical considerations**

With its emphasis on storytelling, my work is greatly influence and shaped by who I am. The following story illustrates my nascent awareness of the multiple identities I bring to the research process.

*Writing a dissertation: Tales of an educational researcher*

_I am humbly approaching the steps that snake their way up Everest, stone steps cracked with time and speckled with tiny plants holding them together. In the centre of the first step sits a cross-legged man whom I greet with a bow and Namaste, palms pressed together in front of my heart. I am seeking permission to climb. Slowly, he nods and says in three years. And then, that I will escort two kids. He pulls gently on a large braided rope, with an incredibly ornate knot on the end, and I am dismissed. I am suddenly at a crosswalk and the traffic light is green. I start to cross but turn back to call my son and daughter who are missing the light. I notice the lid is coming off the milk bottle they are trying to carry, milk is spilling on the sidewalk and everything is dissolving._

_I had this dream a few months before I was to present my comprehensive exam for my doctoral program. The dream was partly inspiring, partly intimidating, and entirely unforgettable. The imagery is not particularly surprising – writing a dissertation is like climbing a mountain, the dissertation committee is like a guru granting admission into the academy, creating new_
knowledge is like weaving strands together to form ornate, new knots, but the prominence of my identity as a mother surprises me. I would have consciously chosen myself as associate dean to escort up a mountain, a self that is potentially fruitful and dangerous as an insider in my research. I had thought of my mothering self as someone I should set aside while I climb.

I am painfully aware of the difficulty of trying to carve out space and time in my busy life to work on my dissertation – to deeply engage in the act of writing as a method of inquiry. I have been envisioning this as an act of separating myself off from my life so that I could think and articulate my thoughts. Perhaps the dream provides an alternative metaphor of taking everyone with me because in a very important way, I am inseparable from my context, and this is the source of knowledge creation. I position myself as an insider-researcher who is driven by both practice and theory. And this dissertation must respectfully relate private experiences when using them to generate insights for public issues. I want to create knowledge by linking the everyday to larger social relations (moving stories from the local to the global, beginning in the standpoint of people), yet I am also socialized in the language of theory as an outsider. My dissertation is a form of collaboration, both with other insiders and with the academy as we jointly create knowledge. And I maintain accountability to the academy and the people whose stories I tell.

Validity in qualitative research addresses whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, or the readers, and several terms encompassed by the concept of validity have been proposed, for example, “trustworthiness”, “authenticity” and “credibility” (Creswell, 2003). Lincoln and Guba also proposed “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In recognition of the contested nature of criteria of soundness, I have selected terminology suggested by Herr and Anderson (2005), because it best fits with the action-oriented goals of my work. In Table 4
below, I have linked my particular research goals with the types of validity proposed by Herr and Anderson: dialogic, process, outcome, catalytic, and democratic. I also explain how I am defining each type of validity, and I explore the implications they have for my research.

Table 4: Goals of the Study Linked to Validity Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of My Research</th>
<th>Criteria for Validity</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generation of new knowledge (doctoral requirement)</td>
<td>Dialogic and process validity</td>
<td>“Goodness” monitored through peer review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Problems are framed and discussed to permit ongoing learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of research knowledge into people’s everyday knowledge (to bring “the beyond-their-experience into the scope of ordinary knowledge” (Smith, 2005, p. 221)</td>
<td>Outcome validity</td>
<td>Successful outcome of the action research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery of opportunities for agency</td>
<td>Catalytic validity</td>
<td>“research process re-orient, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (Lather, 1991, p.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance to local setting; rings true; enables connection; promotes insight</td>
<td>Democratic validity</td>
<td>Research done in collaboration/ multiple perspectives and material interests taken into account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound and appropriate research methodology</td>
<td>Process validity</td>
<td>Research problems are framed and discussed to promote ongoing learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Authority of the scholarly voice; brings data together in conversation; connection between autobiography and history apparent (Bullough &amp; Pinnegar, 2001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dialogic validity

The worthiness of my topic and contribution of my research have been justified in Chapter 1, in which I argued that research on the everyday context of language policy fills a gap identified in the literature. And, as part of a doctoral degree, the soundness of my work has been monitored through review with my committee (my future peers from the academy). But the quality of my work is also monitored through dialogue with people at the institute, the research site. By collecting stories from the bottom-up and feeding them back into the research process, I enable a dialogue among stakeholders, carry that dialogue to my committee, and write up the essence of that dialogue in my dissertation. This process facilitates both a local and more public dialogue between the research participants, the institute and the academy. Finally, I have strived to interconnect the various components of my analysis to catch and hold readers’ attention, and promote dialogue in a meaningful, coherent way.

Outcome validity

The research process brought insight for participants, and I argue that storytelling is a form of bottom-up policy making which is enabling action-oriented outcomes for my research. The process is bringing beyond-our-experience knowledge about language practices into our awareness, which is leading to a process of reframing problems in a more complex way, and leading to a new set of questions in a process of sustained inquiry. In addition, my findings might resonate with people at other post-secondary institutions by illustrating the complex interactions between people’s everyday experiences and policy. This may enable broader discussion beyond the research site. Furthermore, dialogic exercises (see Chapter 7) have been developed and will be used in future to promote further discussion at the institute.
Catalytic validity

As part of an action-oriented outcome, I wanted my research to capture everyday experience as a form of policy, to promote more complex policy dialogue at the institute, and to enable us to treat students more respectfully. The catalytic potential of the research process is measured by the degree to which it “reorients, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (Lather, 1991, p.68). I believe the research process is having a transformative effect on participants: the sharing of stories in a public forum transformed private trials into a more coordinated view of the institute and energized participants with hope. Many participants stayed and talked to me about the research after their session was formally over, and this contributed to a dialogue of possibility, as indicated when a student made the following comment: “it’s interesting to ask students what they think” (Student interview group 2). As an educational leader, I am also taking in this energy and being transformed by it, believing that the stories hold important clues to understanding the institute and being able to transform language practices as a result. The research initiated a process of exploration that will continue through my role as an educational leader.

Democratic validity

Democratic validity refers to the degree to which the constructs and products of the research are relevant to the participating group. While focusing on language practices at the institute, I have explored the institute from a social justice perspective, uncovering ways in which English language learners are framed. I have collected stories from the bottom up and put them into dialogue with emails and other policy texts. I set up a democratic process so that people talked to each other, rather than me, so that I could be a listener. As part of the research process, I have told my own stories. In one sense, writing up the dissertation is removed from the
participants, but I argue that it brings their stories into dialogue with the academy, and this shapes me on a practical level in my work as an educational leader. Part of ensuring the trustworthiness of my findings is to demonstrate that my interpretations of the data are credible or ring true to those who provided the data. In addition to member checking done as part of the research process, my intention is to take the dialogic exercises presented in Chapter 7 to groups at the institute as part of my work as an associate dean. This work as an educational leader will provide another opportunity for dialogue and a deeper understanding of language practices with the potential to reshape our language practices at the institute.

In addition, this research has shown respect for participants by listening to their stories and safely sharing them with program heads, which provided an opportunity to talk back to policy, and potentially reshape the culture of the institute. An ethical review at both the sponsoring university and the site of the research (the institute) approved my approach with its voluntary participation, clearly identified purpose and procedures, as well as the right for participants to ask questions, obtain a copy of the results in a condensed form and to have privacy respected. An initial concern was expressed about a perception of coercion because of my role as associate dean with authority at the institute. In response, I asked a colleague to recruit participants for me. Furthermore, as associate dean, I discuss educational processes with faculty and colleagues on a regular basis, and my study has been one of many opportunities for the kind of discussions that make up our daily work. A second concern was for the protection of privacy, so I have made only general reference to the “institute”, departments, and programs, and I have used pseudonyms for people, rather than naming them. Stories as well as excerpts from actual policy texts, including everyday emails and actions, have been edited to remove any specific information that would allow the reader to identify people or the institution.
My study is characterized by sincerity through a deliberate focus on myself as an insider-researcher as showcased in my journals and tales. However, as Walby (2007) warns, reflexivity can only partly decrease the objectification of participants, given that the institutional ethnographer retains a high degree of authority over representations of the subject. In Chapter 4, I explore tensions around the ownership and control of stories, identifying the dissertation as primarily my story, as I am an important stakeholder in the research.

Process validity

The research process has been reviewed and approved by both the institution granting my doctoral degree and the institute, the research site. Triangulation of data was created through collection of multiple views (students, instructors, program heads, associate dean, policy texts) and through a variety of methods (interviews, document and email analysis). Furthermore, the research process allowed for ongoing learning as individuals shared stories with each other and through the discussions. I followed a process that allowed generated data to be fed back into the research, by rewriting the essence of student and instructor stories to create the booklet for the program head discussion and by interrogating my research journals. The research process will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4 on working with the data.

In Chapter 2, I have explained how I used storytelling and an institutional ethnographic approach as methodologies. I have explained how I collected stories from students and instructors, created a booklet of them, and took them to program heads for discussion. I have also explained my approach to interviewing myself using a think-aloud process. Finally, I have explored issues of validity in my approach to qualitative research.

In Chapter 3, I address research question one (What do institute language practices reveal about processes of administration and governance?), connecting everyday language practices
with processes of administration and governance at the institute, and using discourse analysis to explore relations of language and power in policy texts and emails. I uncover a discourse of homogeneity and control where difference is constructed negatively, and I argue that there is an unequal distribution of academic social goods like academic integrity and language proficiency at the institute.
Chapter 3: Institute Language Practices and Discourse of Control

In this chapter, I answer research question one: What do institute language practices reveal about processes of administration and governance? I explore everyday language practices to determine what they reveal about Smith’s relations of ruling. Specifically, I examine the language used in publicly-available, institute policy texts. I then contrast this with language used in everyday emails within the institute. This contrast highlights moments when people’s discourse meets policy texts and reveals relations of language and power at the institute. A key part of Smith’s (2005) institutional ethnographic approach to research is the foregrounding of language as integral to investigation of the social since institutional relations are text-mediated. People actively engage with texts to do their work. Discourse in texts and in everyday work activities reveal underlying beliefs and assumptions about the social realm. Therefore, in my work, I investigate taken-for-granted beliefs about language as revealed through policy texts and everyday discourse about language policy issues at the institute. In this chapter, I explore discourse associated with the two language policy issues that were the focus of student and instructor stories: plagiarism and language testing. In order to protect privacy, I have removed names of programs, courses, people, and other information that would make it easy to identify the institute or its staff and students.

Discourse mediates practice

For analysis, I use Gee’s (2011) discourse analysis tools as a method for connecting everyday experience to the social realm, uncovering relations of ruling, and revealing opportunities for agency. Gee focuses on seeing “what is old and taken for granted as if it were brand new” (p. 8). Like Smith, he has a political aim as revealed in the following:
By making what is natural to us – what we usually take for granted – new and strange, we can begin consciously to think about all the knowledge, assumptions, and inferences we bring to any communication. And sometimes we will even see aspects of our taken-for-granted cultural knowledge and assumptions – or those of others – that we want to question because we conclude they are doing harm to ourselves or others in terms of things like equity, fairness, and humane treatment of people. (p. 8)

I argue that there is an unequal distribution of academic social goods like academic integrity and language proficiency at the institute. Specifically, I use Gee’s (2011) Connections Building Tool, Politics Building Tool, and Sign Systems and Knowledge Building Tool because they lend themselves to an analysis of how language builds a certain point of view and how it privileges or de-privileges certain languages and different ways of knowing or believing. I use these discourse analysis tools to examine how words and grammar are used to connect, disconnect, or ignore connections between and among things, and to examine how words and grammatical devices are used to build what count as “social goods”, to distribute or withhold them, and to build a viewpoint on how social goods are or should be distributed in society. The term “social goods” is used to mean “anything a social group or society takes as a good worth having” (p. 118), and the term “politics” is used to mean “any situation where the distribution of social goods is at stake” (p. 118). I also present analysis using Gee’s (2011) Sign Systems and Knowledge Building Tool to examine how words and grammar are used to privilege or de-privilege specific sign systems (languages, dialects etc.) and different ways of knowing and believing, or claims to knowledge and belief.

Additional analytical tools I use are Janks’ (2005) explication of John Thompson’s modes of operation of ideology, and Saukko’s (2003) social dichotomies in cultural text. I use these
tools to deconstruct policy texts and to analyze binaries that underpin them, revealing cultural subordination.

I have used Thompson’s (1984; 1990) five modes of operation of ideology (discussed in Janks, 2005) to focus on relations of language and power through reification, legitimation, dissimulation, unification, and fragmentation. The policy texts and discourse are examined for language that operates toward these modes of ideology, which are explained in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Thompson's (1984, 1990) Modes of Operation of Ideology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideological Mode</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reification</td>
<td>States of affairs presented as natural, outside of time (history), space, and social processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimation</td>
<td>Represents something as legitimate and therefore worthy of support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimulation</td>
<td>Relationships of domination are concealed, denied, obscured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unification</td>
<td>Form of unity which establishes a collective identity irrespective of difficulties and divisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmentation</td>
<td>Separates people into different groups often to divide and rule.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, I have used Saukko’s (2003) notion of deconstruction not only to analyze binaries that underpin a text and reveal social issues and inequalities, but to foster “dialogic politics” (p. 152) to tackle cultural subordination revealed by my analysis (taken up in Chapter 7).

I found that policy texts are premised on a discourse of control and homogeneity. Students are constructed as needing to be kept under institute control in terms of who is admitted, what rewards (i.e., grades) are given out, and who gets to graduate. Policy texts are premised on a discourse of homogeneity in which difference is constructed negatively. Students are constructed in terms of their similarity to native-English speakers, and “other” languages are constructed as differences and barriers to admission and progression through the institute.
I argue that an unequal distribution of academic social goods works to buttress social inequalities in the broader social context. For example, academic integrity and language proficiency are associated with power, and they confer authority on holders of these social goods. Authority constructs the opposite, lack of authority, and sets up difference negatively, resulting in non-English speaking students artificially being associated with deficiencies like lack of credibility, lack of language proficiency, lack of employable skills. Furthermore, as a dominant language in the world, English tends to reinforce inequality since it is projected as the language of positive features like modernity and science and technology at the cost of other languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008). Therefore, the unequal distribution of academic social goods from the standpoint of the institute can be mapped onto larger relations of ruling in the environs from which the institute draws its staff and students. Everyday policy discourse at the institute provides a view of the extra-local operation of power.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the academic integrity issue, plagiarism. I analyze a policy text on academic conduct and then follow with analysis of an email related to plagiarism – a moment when people’s talk meets the institutional policy text. The second section focuses on language proficiency. First, I analyze the institute’s English language entrance requirements for admission, and then I analyze an “everyday” email on language proficiency of students.

**Academic integrity policy as the operation of power**

The institute has an academic integrity and appeals policy that sets expectations around academic conduct, and three areas are specified: academic work, research, and scholarship. This policy governs the treatment of plagiarism.
Plagiarism policy texts

I now present and then deconstruct two excerpts from the institute’s plagiarism policy.

Excerpt 1: Policy Statement
Academic Conduct Policy

The institute supports and encourages integrity and ethical conduct in the areas of academic work, research, and scholarship. The institute expects students to conduct themselves accordingly.

Academic integrity is expected and required in any and all settings, whether at any of the institute’s locations or at off-site locations such as practicum and co-op sites, workplace settings, or at home.

The institute investigates suspected incidences of academic misconduct under this policy, and will apply penalties when reasonably justified. Penalties for academic misconduct incidents range up to and including suspension from the institute.

The institute prefers early intervention in matters of unacceptable conduct. Ignorance of the policies of this institution does not constitute a defense against charges of breaching such policies.

Students have the right to appeal decisions on academic matters which affect them. (Academic Integrity and Appeals, Policy No.: 5104, p. 1)

In the opening statement of Excerpt 1, only students are identified as the subjects in sentences like “students are expected to conduct themselves accordingly”. There is no mention of faculty or staff of the institute, yet they are involved in all three areas in which academic conduct is deemed to be important. This omission suggests that only students need to be informed about expectations and possible punishments. Perhaps an assumption is that academic and ethical accountability are inherent in the institute’s ongoing relationship with its employees and do not need to be stated in academic policy. But, policy texts (like collective agreements) that deal with staff working conditions emphasize rights like academic “ownership” of material and academic “freedom” rather than obligations (Institute, 2007).
In the second paragraph of Excerpt 1, the text goes into detail about the various settings that make up the institute and emphasizes the expectations of ethical conduct “in any and all settings”, even the home. Students are presented as being under the institute’s scrutiny everywhere. This wording evokes images of a total institution (Goffman, 1961) in the sense that students are a group of people under bureaucratic control, whereas, by omission, faculty and staff are not presented in this way. By remaining silent on who might be accountable for their own academic conduct other than students, the text builds a certain viewpoint that students lack professionalism and are likely to cheat as a result. It seems “natural” that students would need to be informed in a policy document, because this then gives the institute the right, and for faculty and staff the obligation, to punish. It is interesting that the first sentence in the text uses gentle, positive words like “supports” and “encourages” in reference to ethical conduct. However, these positive words enhance the threat of punishment, which isn’t mentioned until the third paragraph, and they reinforce the view that students will deserve punishment for infractions, since the institute “supports” and “encourages” the right behaviour.

Excerpt 2: Policy Statement
Appeals and Decision Reviews

The institute provides informal and formal mechanisms whereby a student may arrange for a review of decisions that affect their academic standing at the institute. All levels of formal review will follow the principles of natural justice and are to be preceded by an appropriate investigative and decision-making process.

The institute has a strong preference for disputes to be resolved at the appropriate level and as close to their source as possible with a minimum of formality, and in a way that a neutral observer would find reasonable. Referral and consultation with the appropriate resource groups is strongly recommended. These groups include: Counselling, Disability, Harassment and Discrimination, Medical, Safety and Security, etc.
(Academic Integrity and Appeals, Policy No.: 5104, p.4)
In Excerpt 2, the appeal procedure uses the word “appropriate” several times, as if the meaning is obvious. This word masks the power differential between students and employees in the institution, because the “appropriate” process, level, and resource group depends on one’s point of view. The wording includes the preference for disputes to be resolved “as close to their source as possible with a minimum of formality, and in a way that a neutral observer would find reasonable”, and this also masks the power differential between students and employees at the institute. Is there such thing as a neutral observer, and “neutral” according to whom? Would this person be able to challenge the status quo in the name of being “reasonable”? The notion of neutrality masks that all academic appeals involve people who work for the institute and have an obligation under policy to enforce the institute’s academic conduct standards.

It is clear in policy that the onus is on the student to appeal. The language in Excerpt 2 presents the institute as a “provider” of appeal and decision review mechanisms that the student “may” arrange. The somewhat benevolent role of the institute is contrasted with the more tenuous role of the student who “may” stand up for individual rights. The various resource groups mentioned at the end of the section evoke the image of a troubled student who needs help from officials. The appellant is connected with counseling, disability, harassment and discrimination, medical, and security personnel in a “strongly recommended” way. These officials’ principal function at the institute is not connected with academic integrity, yet they are pointed out as being relevant when a student is considering an academic appeal.

Using terminology suggested by Gee (2011), Thompson (in Janks, 2005), and Saukko (2003), if “academic integrity” is seen as a social good (something worth having in an educational context), the graphic below (Figure 2) displays the unequal distribution of this social good in relation to the plagiarism issue. The policy language makes connections between
students and accountability but remains silent on faculty and staff accountability. Academic integrity is set up as a social good, and the policy is built on the assumption that students lack this, thereby withholding or gradually doling out this social good as they pay tuition fees and eventually graduate. In contrast, this social good is distributed to faculty when they enter the institute as they have the right to academic freedom (i.e., ownership and control over academic material) as outlined in their collective agreements. This suggests a binary between the possible identities of students and faculty, where faculty are like members of a club and students are temporary visitors who need rules to keep them in line.

**Figure 2: Unequal Distribution of Academic Integrity as a Social Good**

I next examine a moment when the policy text meets people’s everyday experience at the institute to explore how everyday language about plagiarism occurs against a backdrop of unequal accountability generated at the institute level in policy documents.
Policy of everyday actions: Student-produced handbook

The email below addresses the issue of a second-year student selling his course notes to first-year students. The email was sent to the faculty involved with the program. Wording makes the notes sound like a legitimate resource, makes copying sound like a natural part of student life, conceals relations of domination, and connects and disconnects certain people for ideological purposes. The situation was brought to my attention as associate dean responsible for one of the courses when an instructor complained about course material being used without permission, and the email was forwarded to me as part of the complaint about the way it was being handled.

Excerpt 3: Email from a manager to course instructor, forwarded to the associate dean
Subject: Student-Produced Handbook

Currently, there is a handbook of notes that has been produced for the first year program and is being offered for sale to students in that program. Our understanding is that there will also be a second book produced for the second term. The handbook also includes a DVD that we believe demonstrates problem solving techniques used by the producer of the handbook.

The program has not endorsed this material and does not encourage its purchase. The program heads have given the material a cursory review and there does not appear to be any infringement of copyright. If you have concerns, there is a copy in my office that can be reviewed.

The appearance of this material serves as a reminder that material that we produce can not only can [sic] end up in the public domain but can be disseminated widely in a variety of ways. For example, there are students who routinely take digital photographs of assignments and exams. Please ensure that your course is structured so that access to material from previous years does not unduly provide an advantage. It may be worthwhile to remind your students that the prescribed reading, good attendance, and completion of assigned and recommended problem sets are more likely to lead to success than copying material from an unknown source.

(institute email, Oct., 2009)

The email opens with a description of the course notes, sounding like a scientific definition, and devotes a whole paragraph up front to making the notes sound like a legitimate
resource (legitimation). The use of passive voice in the first line in statements like, “handbook ... has been produced; is being offered for sale” makes the book sound useful and valuable. Similarly, the statement, “The appearance of this material” in the last paragraph makes the notes sound like an official corpus of academic material available in the world. Both are examples of reification, because the handbook is presented as de-contextualized and the “producer” is not identified. The problematic issues of plagiarized material being sold outside of the bookstore are diminished by the statement in the last paragraph, “there are students who routinely take digital photographs...” which makes it sound like cheating is a natural part of student life and that nothing needs to be done. The issues of plagiarism and sale of unauthorized material are obscured.

The statement, “The program has not endorsed this material and does not encourage its purchase”, hides the fact that the program staff could do something about it and that all material has to be authorized for sale through the institute’s bookstore. The statement absolves the program staff of responsibility while hiding that their previous inaction was a form of endorsement. Similarly, “The appearance of this material”, hides that they knew about it previously, as the student had presented the idea to them before he made any sales, and it hides that an instructor let the student visit classes at the beginning of term to sell the notes. Both passages show the operation of dissimulation to conceal relations of domination and diminish the responsibility of those in power.

The passage, “The program heads have given the material a cursory review...” groups these people as authorities, and they are contrasted with the authority of “you” who might have concerns in the next sentence. The fragmentation of the individual instructor from the faculty group carries on in the statement “If you have concerns”, which sounds like the authorities have
already made a decision and if you have concerns, you are not part of their elite. Both unification (uniting people) and fragmentation (splitting people off from one another) are used for ideological purposes and obscure responsibility. The switch to “we” in the third paragraph (“material we produce”) makes it sound like everyone is part of the faculty group and all share responsibility for whatever happens to their material. The pronoun changes to “you” in the rest of the paragraph, which suggests individual responsibility in statements like “please ensure that your course” and “remind your students”. It sounds like faculty are on their own and it is up to them to prevent cheating. Again, the language shows a grouping of people in one section and a splitting off of people in another section and further obscures responsibility.

The table below (Table 6) summarizes the modes of operation of ideology in the email.

**Table 6: Thompson's (1984, 1990) Modes of Operation of Ideology Applied to Email on Student Produced Handbook**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideological Mode</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Email - <em>Student Produced Handbook</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reification</td>
<td>States of affairs presented as natural, outside of time (history), space, and social processes.</td>
<td>The handbook seems to have appeared on its own and students are presented as engaging in all kinds of naughty, but harmless behavior like taking pictures of course material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimation</td>
<td>Represents something as legitimate and therefore worthy of support.</td>
<td>The handbook is described scientifically and problematic issues are masked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimulation</td>
<td>Relationships of domination are concealed, denied, obscured.</td>
<td>Inaction of faculty and staff is downplayed and their implicit endorsement is obscured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unification</td>
<td>Form of unity which establishes a collective identity irrespective of difficulties and divisions.</td>
<td>Group is presented as an authority which discourages pursuit of the issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmentation</td>
<td>Separates people into different groups often to divide and rule.</td>
<td>Shift to “you” sets off and isolates those who might want to pursue the issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In summary, the email reveals academic integrity as a complex social issue where identification of certain behaviour as a problem (i.e., plagiarism) is not straightforward. The scenario appears to be that the student sought permission and was allowed to engage in a project that later was identified as problematic by others outside the initial group. (I introduced this story in the prelude at the beginning of the dissertation.) Language in the email connects students to cheating in a natural way while masking faculty culpability in the issue and suggests an inequality in status and accountability between the two groups of people. The email appears to serve a face-saving function for faculty while withholding the social goods of professionalism and academic integrity from students.  

Both the academic integrity policy text and the email example illustrate the operation of power, wherein faculty enter the institute with credibility and professionalism, but students have to earn it through good behavior. Graduation acts as a rite of passage during which academic integrity is conferred on students. In the next examples of a policy text and email, the issue of language proficiency is discussed. The discourse in these examples showcases the dominance of English in the world and its association with positive features of its native speakers.

**Language proficiency discourse as the operation of power**

In-house English language testing is an option for students who need to prove English language proficiency for admission into an institute program. All applicants are categorized by country where they received their prior education. If that country has English as the primary language and a student has at least two years of education in non-ESL courses, then the student is considered to have met the institute’s English speaking and listening requirements. The student

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7 The student-produced handbook situation was resolved when I met with the student to stop selling the material because of copyright and bookstore proprietary issues. Upon the advice of a policy expert from the library, I gave a letter outlining the policy infraction to the student and the program area manager. The student agreed to stop selling the material after telling me that sales were not very good, “anyway”. 

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would still need to meet the English reading and writing requirements for the program. Students who don’t have Grade 12 English with the required mark for program admission can write the institute’s English Competency Assessment (ECA). Students with prior education from countries where English is not the primary language need to demonstrate proficiency in all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). They can do so through various in-house tests, upgrading programs at the institute, or external testing options (i.e., TOEFL, IELTS).

For its ECA test, the institute uses a computer-based assessment, which focuses on reading comprehension, sentence skills, and written composition and allows ninety minutes for the first two parts and one hour for the written composition. The reading comprehension and sentence skills parts are made up of standard questions from Accuplacer™, and the written composition questions were created in house at the institute. Students pay a fee to write the ECA and receive their test result in a format similar to that shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Sample Test Result for English Competency Assessment (ECA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Item</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Skills</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Score</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ECA test result is very brief, but in the sample above (Table 7), the message is clear that this student did not pass the test and was placed in an English upgrading course. The final score of “U” stands for “unsatisfactory” and is based on the rule that the lowest score in the three parts counts as the final score.
The public face of the institute is revealed in the following policy excerpt on English entrance requirements. On the institute web page, English is portrayed as a social good, and this analysis is explored further with the subsequent deconstruction of an email from the everyday at the institute. For both examples, I use Gee’s (2011) sign systems and knowledge building tool to analyze the policy texts, because of its focus on language as a social good, as revealed in the following quote from Gee:

Mastery, use and maintenance of languages, dialects, sign systems, and ways of knowing the world are, for the people who own them, social goods. Thus, when we use language to build them up or tear them down, we are engaged in politics in the sense of building viewpoints on the distribution of social goods in society. Language is a particularly important social good that people negotiate and contest in the world. (pp. 136-137)

With this tool, I examine how the policy texts use language to construe English as better than “other” languages and privileged in the institute and the envisioned workplaces of graduates. I explore how the texts use language to build this viewpoint on English competency in the world as a social good.

*English language entrance requirements*

Excerpt 1 below from the institute web page describes the admissions policy regarding English competency in a factual way.

**Excerpt 1: Policy Statement**

**English Language Proficiency Requirements**

In order to be successful in the institute’s applied learning environment, applicants must demonstrate a suitable level of English in all four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. At the institute, entrance requirements are program specific. However, please see below for general English language requirements that apply to all applicants.
Applicants are placed into either the Section A (see below) or Section B (see page 3) category, depending on the country/countries in which they received their secondary and/or post-secondary education.

Section A: Applicants whose previous education is in English and meets [sic] BOTH of the following criteria:
1. Location of educational institution(s): a country/countries listed in the table below (countries where English is the primary language and where provincial high school grade 12 equivalency has been established by the institute).
2. Length of study: at least two years of secondary and/or post-secondary education in non ESL/EAL courses.

Section B: Applicants whose previous education is from a country not listed in the table on page 1 (or who do not meet ALL of the Section A criteria).

(i institute web page, 2011)

At the level of ideology, the English language is privileged. The need for English competency is presented as a fact, and a cause/effect link is made to the institute’s applied learning environment. Reference to the “four language skills” further reifies the need for only English competency. Overlooked are both language diversity and the possibility that other languages might play a key role for communication and learning in a multi-lingual context. The emphasis on “applied learning environment” and the linking of the four language skills with “success” makes the reasoning sound legitimate while overlooking the possibility that not all four skills are equally important. For example, written English might play a lesser role than spoken English in a hands-on learning environment. The institute has a reputation for producing job-ready graduates, and it could be argued that success in the world of work is linked to multi-lingual abilities and that these should be recognized and nurtured in the classroom.

Relations of domination inherent in an English-only focus are obscured by emphasizing the supportive role of the admissions policy in ensuring student “success” while minimizing the value of “other” languages. The English requirements are described as applying to “all applicants” and then applicants are categorized according to country of education. The policy
unites and then fragments applicants according to categories while minimizing the difficulties the
categories pose for non-native English speakers. The table below (Table 8) outlines the ways that

**Table 8: Modes of Operation of Ideology Applied to English Language Proficiency Requirements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideological Mode</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>English Language Proficiency Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reification</td>
<td>States of affairs presented as natural, outside of time (history), space, and social processes.</td>
<td>The need for English language proficiency is presented as a fact of life, not as an effect of human actions. Applied learning environment is linked with four English skills as if it’s natural that these would be required and that only English is used in that environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimation</td>
<td>Represents something as legitimate and therefore worthy of support.</td>
<td>Uniqueness of the institute’s learning environment is presented as a fact, but other educational institutions may describe their programs in this way as well. “In order to be successful” legitimizes the need for English and sets up the institute as a humanitarian agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissimulation</td>
<td>Relationships of domination are concealed, denied, obscured.</td>
<td>English is set up as the only language proficiency that is useful. This conceals and denies the multi-lingual reality of the social context, human diversity (students and staff), and obscures the domination inherent in keeping English in this role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Mode</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>\textit{English Language Proficiency Requirements}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unification</td>
<td>Form of unity which establishes a collective identity irrespective of difficulties and divisions.</td>
<td>English language requirements apply to “all applicants” unifying them while minimizing the hardship that the requirements place on many. Real social, political, and economic inequalities between people who apply to the institute are hidden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmentation</td>
<td>Separates people into different groups often to divide and rule.</td>
<td>Applicants are different: Categorizing students into group A and B controls the learning environment to keep English as the dominant language while putting the onus on students for their own “success” by meeting the English requirements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to the carefully factual and inclusive information in public policy statements, the following email from the everyday openly presents non-native English speakers as “language-challenged”, cancelling out their language fluency in a foreign language.

\textit{Policy of everyday actions: “Language-challenged” students}

Excerpt 2: Email
Subject: Language-Challenged Students ect (sic)

For your Dean's Council meeting today, a sampling of input 'from the trenches'...

What 1st Year Set Reps\textsuperscript{8} Say...
- the issues related to second-language students are "massive"
- these students want to help team members with school work, they're not lazy; they just are not capable

\textsuperscript{8} Set Reps are representatives from each cohort of students in a particular program (a Set). Their role is to bring forward student concerns to faculty, program administrators, and the Student Association.
- there are ESL students who cannot write a proper sentence; some cannot hold a conversation but achieve 65-70 in communications courses
- language-challenged students get leniency in Comm courses, but non-language students get no leniency in Math—a big double standard
- there needs to be some sort of evaluation or proficiency test administered by the institute
- The institute is accepting these students as a means to address the deficit

What Faculty Say...
- marginal first year students prevent really good students from joining the program in year two
- we need to get away from just filling seats and focus on getting the right candidates who will do well in the workplace, spread the word of mouth, and build the institute’s reputation in the marketplace
- our major recruitment tool is word of mouth from employers and graduates. Lowering quality will jeopardize the positive character of the word-of-mouth endorsements our programming receives, which in turn will further lower year 1 numbers
  (institute email, May, 2010)

Using Gee’s (2011) Sign System Tool, I address the following questions to deconstruct the email (Excerpt 2).

- How does the language in the excerpt build a view of English in relation to international students? What is that view?
- Skill with language learning is seen as an important 21st century skill in a global world. This is not said in the excerpt. How does this change the way a reader might respond?
- Is the word “English” sometimes left out and just “language skills” referred to? If language skills are a prerequisite to learning, then wouldn’t that be an argument for instruction in the student’s native language while learning English?

In the email, “issues” are framed in the context of “second-language students” who are presented as lacking basic communication skills, while the word “English” is absent from the email. The students are presented as if they don’t have fluency in any language, and the parallel is drawn to students who lack numeracy skills in a math class. The email indirectly refers to international students when making reference to accepting these students to “address the deficit”,

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since international students pay higher tuition fees. International students are presented as “lowering quality”, “preventing good students from joining the program” and ruining the institute’s reputation. The fact that there are successful international students is obscured as is the importance of language learning in a global market place. The absence of the word “English” suggests that English is the only language that exists in this context, and therefore it does not need to be stated. This omission ignores the diversity of students and staff at the institute and obscures the possibility of this diversity as a resource for meeting the institute’s mandate for internationalizing the curriculum. Students are identified by their lack of fluency, but it sounds like they lack language ability altogether and denies the rich educational and workplace experience that many students bring to their studies at the institute. The linking of “second-language students” to “lowering quality” of education and ”jeopardizing word-of-mouth endorsements” suggests that the only endorsements that count are those stated in English. Endorsements of the institute’s programs (especially international endorsements) might actually increase if instruction was in students’ native language while they were learning English or if the multi-lingual environment was exploited as a learning tool, especially suited to applied programs like those offered at the institute.

The English-only discourse at the institute reveals a culturally constructed view that English is the only language that counts and this justifies discrimination and the exclusion of certain people from full citizenship. In this sense, the institute creates a disabling culture with respect to ESL students and non-native English speakers at the institute. Skutnabb-Kangas (2008) uses the term “linguicism” to capture this type of linguistically-argued racism which reproduces an unequal division of power and resources on the basis of language. And an important finding in the language policy literature is that official policy texts may be “trumped
by the power of dominant language ideologies” (McCarty, 2011, p. 281), like those revealed in everyday emails at the institute.

The email documents some of the difficulties that Category B students (those from countries where English is not the medium of instruction) face at the institute, even when they have proven their English competency and are admitted into a program. It captures the policy of everyday actions regarding English language learners at the institute and suggests that there is an unequal distribution of language proficiency as a social good as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

![Figure 3: Unequal Distribution of Language Proficiency as a Social Good](image)

In this chapter, I have used deconstruction as a tool to unravel policy texts and everyday experiences at the institute in order to map out what is happening at an institutional level and link it to social inequalities shaping the context. I have suggested that there is an unequal distribution of social goods like academic integrity and English language proficiency. This analysis has illustrated the ways that official policy texts may be contrasted with everyday discourse and has
raised questions about the wider implications of an English-only discourse in terms of who has the right to study or work at public institutions, what entrance requirements might look like if English was not framed as the norm, and how we might reconfigure our language policy and practices if English proficiency was not set up in opposition to “other” languages. Saukko (2003) warned that deconstruction alone can end up reinforcing dichotomies and suggests that dialogic politics bring different inequalities and grievances into dialogue with one another to result in a more complex understanding of the social world. This is a topic I take up later in Chapter 7, which covers restoring balance by promoting dialogue.

In Chapter 3, I have addressed the first research question: What do institute language practices reveal about processes of administration and governance? I have uncovered a discourse of control and homogeneity where difference is constructed negatively.

In Chapter 4, I address research question two, exploring my position as an insider-researcher in a leadership role and discussing the tensions I had to contend with while my researcher identity was negotiated. I present my stories as an insider-researcher to explain how I used storytelling to generate data, and how I made sense of and organized the data. Finally, I highlight tensions around the ethical considerations I faced when retelling the stories and writing up the dissertation, and how this shaped the decisions I made as a researcher as well as shaping me.
Chapter 4: Tensions Faced by an Insider Researcher: Working with Data

In Chapter 3, I analyzed official policy texts at the institute plus various email messages that represented policies in practice. These data were readily available for collection and analysis. In Chapter 4, I reflect on the data that I generated and co-constructed with my participants for the specific purpose of my study through interviewing various policy actors. The reflections in Chapter 4 are important background to the more in-depth analysis of the generated, storytelling data that follows in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

In Chapter 4, I address research question two: What tensions did I have to contend with as an insider-researcher? First I explore the research process in regards to generating, organizing, and analyzing data. Then I present and analyze my stories, “Tales of an Educational Researcher”, to reveal and discuss tensions that I faced in the research process.

I had anticipated a linear research process, which would involve collecting data and then coding, categorizing, analyzing and interpreting the data in order to create knowledge. But in retrospect, generating and interpreting the data took place in a recursive manner at the same time that I was gathering it. I gathered student and instructor stories; then, realizing they were more of the frame of a story, I reworked them to create the booklet for the program-head group discussion. I transcribed the program-head discussion as well as the interview with myself as an associate dean, identified themes in them and then searched through my work journals for stories that related to the themes.

Generating, organizing, and analyzing data

As part of the data generating and analysis process, I was inspired by LeCompte & Schensul (1999), as well as Wolcott (1994; 2001) on working with qualitative and ethnographic
data. First I read the stories as factual accounts and prepared tables to summarize the events they portrayed. Table 9 shows my description of story data.

### Table 9: Description of Story Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storyteller</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacek (Student 1)</td>
<td>Wants admission – only a C in English 12</td>
<td>Writes English test – great hardship in time and money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel (Student 2)</td>
<td>Wants to study electrical engineering</td>
<td>Consults friend who took English test three times and passes first attempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto (Student 3)</td>
<td>Born in Canada but loses lots of marks due to grammar</td>
<td>Observes difficulty faced by International students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamid (Student 4)</td>
<td>Taking a technical communication course</td>
<td>Observes native English speakers getting much higher marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faduma (Student 5)</td>
<td>Taking pre-entry English course to try for admission into a program</td>
<td>Worked strategically to develop English for admission; took tests, different institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raj (Student 6)</td>
<td>Got advanced standing in English 12 over five years ago</td>
<td>Wrote English assessment and passed but communication course difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashkhan (Student 7)</td>
<td>Finds himself studying English yet again in a degree program</td>
<td>Graduated with a diploma but didn’t find communication helpful on the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parm (Student 8)</td>
<td>Comes to the institute because could take English test right away</td>
<td>Gets into engineering program but finds communication course hard – no spare time to study in the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily (Student 9)</td>
<td>Passed on-line communication course</td>
<td>Took International English, then failed English assessment, went to a different institution and passed, got into original program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy (Instructor 1)</td>
<td>Student fails English assessment but program head asks that he be allowed in the course</td>
<td>Accepts student in course in spite of failure and helps him work hard enough to pass the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob (Instructor 2)</td>
<td>Caught students cheating in exam due to desperation</td>
<td>Tries hard to pass people but wonders how students get into his degree course with such low level skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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9 I use pseudonyms for storytellers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storyteller</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connie (Instructor 3)</td>
<td>Likes the process engineering dept. uses for dealing with alleged plagiarism</td>
<td>Dreams about better support for students - courses that encourage attitude change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danita (Instructor 4)</td>
<td>Students who fail a diagnostic are streamed into a support course</td>
<td>Teaches a mandatory support course – but it’s hard to help them improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma (Instructor 5)</td>
<td>Student gets someone to help her rewrite an assignment - cries when confronted by instructor</td>
<td>Instructor tries to get her to admit this is cheating – feels manipulated by tears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona (Instructor 6)</td>
<td>Instructor suspects two assignments have similar content but already returned one can’t identify student</td>
<td>Instructor uses electronic means to discover who and confronts students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then I re-read the stories to understand how language policy worked at the institute (analysis of data). I identified themes and then extracted points from the stories, linking them to the themes. I discuss these themes in the analysis section in subsequent chapters.

The data generating process was fraught with unexpected twists and turns, and I documented my experience through field notes which took on the form of confessional tales I called “Tales of an Educational Researcher”. I argue that these stories from my field notes are another type of data that can be described as transgressive data (St. Pierre, 1997) or data that transgress binaries between researcher and researched, method and data, and so on. I believe these non-traditional data reveal important influences on both the research process and on my thinking as an insider-researcher. My dreams, emotions, and sensual experiences are part of the process of inquiry and influenced knowledge creation. When writing “Tales of an Educational Researcher”, I was influenced by LeCompte and Schensul (1999) on the use of impressionistic accounts of ethnographic data; by Polkinghorne (1995) on the use of emplotted narrative; and by Richardson (1995) on exploring reflexivity by creating narrative about the writing process. My
“Tales of an Educational Researcher” document one form of dialogue that took place in the group interviews and a secondary dialogue that took place through analysis of the data, highlighting my complex identity as a researcher and my struggle to control the research and meaning. The tales reveal important tensions for insider-researchers to consider when using narrative inquiry, tensions around who owns a story and what will come of it, and how the researcher’s history plays out in the struggle to do the work justice, both socially and academically.

**Tales of an educational researcher**

Following is a series of tales that capture the challenges I faced as an insider-researcher at the institute. The tales focus on challenges I faced in recruiting participants, running the group interviews, and collecting and working with story data. I arrange the tales according to each group of participants: students, instructors, program heads, the associate dean. Each tale is presented in single-spaced format and followed by a discussion of tensions revealed in the tales.

**Students**

**Finding students: Tales of an educational researcher (September 2009)**

*I was quite worried about finding students to participate in my educational research. At the institute, people are busy: students travel in cohorts with set timetables of about 30-35 hours of classes a week and have 1-2 hours of daily homework per course. Why would anyone want to spend two more hours working with me? Would $50.00 be one reason – a nice, new, crisp, fifty-dollar bill in an envelope with their name on it? The opportunity to “talk back to policy” might be another. I hear back-talk all day long, hallway opinions about the troublesome way things are done here. I knew that people had something to say and wanted to give them the opportunity to speak. I designed an informative flyer with a provocative question about “who English belongs to” and felt quite excited about students sharing their experiences with language policy with each other in small groups.*

*How was I to distribute the flyers to students? I couldn’t give a short talk at student orientation since I needed 2nd year students who had experience with language policies and there is no orientation for returning students. I couldn’t distribute the flyers – someone else had to do it – a third party. But I could set the stage for recruitment and that’s what I did. Luckily, one of my close colleagues agreed to help me out and since she was on leave from teaching that term, *
she had the time to help and there was no potential for her to be influencing her own students to participate – what’s known as perception of coercion.

As an associate dean and a former communication instructor, I knew where to find the students who were likely to have had experience with language policies that is those who had needed to write the English competency test, who had failed a communication course and asked for a marks reassessment, who had been accused of plagiarism, or who had asked for a prior learning assessment (PLAR) of their communication/writing skills. I knew the programs that had larger numbers of these students, so I went to the timetabling database and retrieved the set timetable for 2nd year students in these programs, looked for a lecture where all students in a program would be in class together, found the name of the instructor teaching the class, and was set to go. For two of the programs, I found a communication class and knew it would be easy to get agreement from my former teaching mates. I conveyed the time, place, and other details to my colleague and worked out with her which week she was available, what to focus on in her short talk about my study and the need to give out the flyers so students knew how to contact me. At the same time, I emailed each of the instructors asking their permission for my colleague to give the presentation. During this process, another colleague who taught an English-type course offered to help recruit students since many talked about their experiences in class. The instructor took flyers and talked to the class. I was feeling quite excited by this point but pressured because this had taken a whole month and I didn’t even have any participants yet.

During the presentations, the next week many students had asked for flyers and the instructors had shown genuine interest in the work, talked it up to the class, and reminded students of the $50.00. Great, but after two weeks, not a single student had contacted me. I chastised myself for thinking busy students would take the time to phone me or email me. Why had I made it so difficult for them to take part? I asked my colleague to go back to the classes with a sign-up sheet and to record the names of interested students. Helping me was quite time-consuming, I feared.

Slowly the sign-up sheets made their way back to me through inter-office mail or in person and I started emailing students with an introductory greeting thanking them for their interest and asking them to identify two times in the next two weeks when they could meet at the institute for a group interview. I imagined holding one group with nine students who would form groups of three and the whole thing would be done in two hours. I emailed 14 students and with a couple of people changing their minds or not answering, I had 11 students agreeing to come. Finding a common time proved to be difficult so I jumped at the chance to form even a single group. It turned out to be on a Friday night, not what I’d planned but a time that worked for most.

Student group interviews (October 2009)

Interview group one. It is a dark and stormy Friday night in late October and I am about to hold the first interview group for students. I don’t usually work at night so pushing the cartload of laptops down the hall to a classroom brings back memories of my former teaching nights when I was a contract instructor. I am reminded about how physically demanding this equipment is, what with having to allow enough time for pick up from the equipment office and
then having to negotiate the elevator and narrow doorways to push the equipment to the classroom without bumping into the many students making their way through the halls to their night-school classes. The same old sticker on the cart warns to push rather than pull the equipment to protect your back.

I set up each laptop, log in, and make the room ready for the arrival of the nine students who will sit in groups of three to share their stories and then move to the rows at the back of the room to write them up. Then I wait.

I remember this part of teaching night-school too, waiting for students whose whole life does not revolve around your course, and that they come when they can. Four students enter the room and sit down. I welcome them and tell them I’ll wait for the rest to arrive and then will explain the procedure. I stare at the clock as the minutes tick by and worry about starting late. I decide to go ahead even though there are only four in the room and start explaining the consent form they need to sign. One more student walks in so I repeat the instructions. While everyone is reading and signing the form, another student walks in so I repeat the instructions again. This really feels like I am teaching a class, dealing with the logistics of group work when people keep coming late. I put together one group of three and ask the fourth and fifth persons to wait until one more student comes. Once the first triad starts to work and no other student arrives, I abandon my plan and ask the two students to work as partners instead. They determine who will share a story first and start into it while I sit and worry that only five out of the nine have shown up.

Then I’m dealing with more logistics as the triad is finished and want to start typing up stories on laptops while the partners are also just finishing up and a sixth student walks in the room apologizing for getting lost. I make sure the laptops are working and ask the partners if they would mind if the new student joins their group which means one of them has to be prepared to retell their story so the new person can type it up – but suddenly I remember he has to sign the consent form. They agree and begin; I feel like things are getting out of control; a seventh student walks in just when everyone has finished telling their story. By then, one of the original group of three has finished typing and has vetted the story with the teller, so I ask if she would be willing to work with the new person and she agrees. I am surprised when he reads her his story from a hand-written version he has brought with him. But, I don’t say anything.

I have become the teacher I used to be dealing with a varied group of learners – varied in the way they work, the amount of time they take, the number of assurances they need to complete the task, and in the way they affect me. My reverie is interrupted when one student says he’s worried that his story won’t be of interest to me as it doesn’t fit neatly into the policy categories – I encourage him to share whatever story he wants and not to worry about how it fits; another student asks if she should put her name on the story she’s typing – I say no but that I am making a note of who is typing whose story so I could follow up if necessary; a third student asks if she can put her name on her own story and I assure everyone that the stories are confidential so no names will be used – she insists that she wants to put her name on it as she wants the institute to know about her story and I explain the confidentiality requirements of the research ethics boards who have authorized my research.
I run through all the requirements in my mind, checking my list several times to make sure I have each person’s story in an electronic folder as well as in my email inbox, that I have each person sign the receipt before giving them their $50.00 cash, that I am monitoring what everyone else in the room is doing so I can keep them on task and explain the process as needed. I am exhausted but try to take field notes as often as I can, worrying that I am missing key details about this experience and will never be able to capture them.

Once students collect their $50.00 they stay and talk to me about my work. Are they being polite because they think it’s rude to take my money and just leave? One student asks if I will conduct this study in the high schools because many high school students have stories to tell about language policy – I respond with the standard line “it would be interesting but is beyond the scope of this research” and he says I should do it and informs me that his high school keeps statistics on ESL students and he can get them for me if I want; I feel like a traitor, as if I’m not really interested in the topic as he sees it. Slowly students finish up and start to leave. After receiving his $50.00, the last student starts telling me how his international credentials were not given full credit and he was forced to study more than he should have been. He asks if I could please do some research on that topic. He says he has a friend who has a story I should hear and he’ll ask his friend to contact me. He thanks me and says goodbye.

Once the room is empty, I put my head down on the desk and sigh, remembering the complexity of interactions with a classroom full of students, the messy and rich reality that one can never fully anticipate as an instructor. I feel like I have barely survived. OK, I have heard from seven out of nine students and I’ll need to schedule another focus group for the remaining two who did not attend – maybe even three if that student’s friend shows up. No big deal. I am pumped about my research but it’s time to assemble the consent forms and other research documents, make sure I don’t leave anything behind, and put all the equipment back on the cart. I take one last look at the room before I begin the physically demanding journey back to the office and hear the echoes of each person’s story. I feel honoured that they cared to share them with me.

Interview group two. It’s two weeks later and I am sitting in room 301 with laptops set up waiting for two students and possibly a third – the friend of the student from the first interview group – to show up. It is another rainy, dark night and once again I am at work later than normal. One student comes so I give him the consent form to sign and we wait silently for another ten minutes when the second student arrives. She signs the consent form and I decide to start even though “the friend” hasn’t come yet. I doubt he will come since I wasn’t able to contact him directly and the student who referred him came very late to his own focus group.

I listen as the two stories unfold in the telling. Interestingly, the first student tells a quick story about his experience with each of the four policy issues on the recruitment flyer which he holds in front of him as he speaks. I’m kind of puzzled by this but happy that he seems to have a lot to say. The second student doesn’t say much and her story is done quite quickly. Then the two go off to separate ends of the room to type each other’s story, the first student finishing very quickly and the second labouring over every word, humming and hawing audibly and checking her electronic translation dictionary. Then they trade seats and read the write-up of their story, changing it in places for clarity. Again, the first student is done quickly while the second seems
to take forever and I wonder what she is doing. When they are both satisfied, they submit the work to an electronic folder and email it to me as backup. I check to make sure it is in both places and thank them.

As I am giving them the $50.00 and they are signing the receipt, the first student tells me the research is very interesting. They leave and I begin to clean up. A few minutes later, there is a knock on the door and one student has returned as she forgot her umbrella and bag under the table. She thanks me and says she is excited about the research because it is interesting to ask students what they think. I thank her.

Tensions in the tales

Two points of tension stand out in the tales about dealing with the student group of participants: ownership of the research process and access to and the use of people’s stories. In the tales, I talk about the research process getting out of control because it is not following the chronology I had planned. Students can be seen to be taking ownership of the research process by arriving when it is convenient for them (what I called “late”), by not showing up at all, by bringing a written version of their story to read to a partner, by asking me to follow up with high schools, and by offering to bring in a friend who might have an interesting story. After the payment, students seemed to want to talk further and I was surprised that they did not leave right away. At one point, I refer to feeling like a traitor when I don’t intend to follow up with a student’s high school as it is outside my research project. I feel tension around keeping things under control, as if it is my primary responsibility as a researcher. Furthermore, payment for participation in the research can also be seen as one way I try to own or control the research process. In the context of the institute, with its educational aim of preparing people for the world of work, I believe in payment for work done. I chose to pay participants for their time as an acknowledgement of the work I was requiring from them, and within a work paradigm, payment also set up an obligation for them to perform that work. When I refer to people being busy at the
institute, I highlight the underlying belief that I need to pay them for their time, and reveal the workplace-like character of the institute.

Tensions around access to and use of people’s stories can be seen in my description of trying to find students to participate. I expressed confusion and even frustration that many students took a flyer but did not sign up for an interview, and the students who eventually participated came forward because of the influence of their instructors. Even though the institute is publicly funded, its classrooms are relatively private places that even an insider-researcher has to navigate her way through to gain access. Once in the classroom, I refer to feeling like an instructor, yet trying to control the work as a researcher, as if they are two identities in tension. Like an instructor, I adapted to students, for example, adjusting the research process when they arrived “late”, when they told stories about more than one policy issue, and when one came with a written story. Like an instructor, I was allowing students to take ownership of the process in order to build a relationship and nurture learning. At the same time, I was anxious about the effect this might have on the research which I saw as something that needed to be kept separate and pure. My tension grew when students stayed and talked to me at the end, but once I had paid them, I relaxed as to me the payment signaled the end of the research work and freed me up to relate to students. Giving participants money acknowledged the movement of their story from the private to a more public realm. I had begun with the desire to collect “good” stories, thinking they would generate fruitful and interesting analysis. I thought I was giving participants something valuable in the form of a safe opportunity for telling stories to a wider, potentially more powerful audience, assuming students did not already have opportunities to speak “up”. But I see that it is almost impossible for me to step outside of an evaluative role, as I referred to stories as seeming too short in some cases and too long in others. Students were resisting my
efforts to fit their experience into neat categories as can be seen when one student expressed doubt that his story would be of interest, since it didn’t fit the policy categories, when another student told a story about all of the policy issues instead of one, and when a student wanted to have her name included. Did I also believe that since I had bought the stories, they were now mine to retell?

Instructors

Following is the tale I recorded in my field notes about exactly what happened during the instructor group interviews.

Instructor group interviews: Tales of an educational researcher (October 2009)

Instructor group one. The first instructor group is made up of Amy, a long-time colleague who praised the work I did for my Masters’ degree as it was part of a larger study she was doing for the Ministry of Advanced Education at that time; Bob a newer colleague who has a language education degree; and Connie, a colleague who drops by my office regularly to chat about language, writing, literature, movies and other cultural topics.

Amy starts by telling a story about English placement testing to Connie who takes notes, clarifying verbally every so often and taking the blame for being slow. Amy concludes by summarizing the main themes in the story: the transactional nature of communication, the lack of connection between assessment in class and expectations in the workplace, and the life-altering impact that policy can have on students.

Connie then tells a story to Bob about plagiarism and many students’ lack of skill in English. At the end, Connie highlights the main point from the students’ point of view – they officially accept that their degree indicates a level of competence in English, yet in practical terms they see a multicultural educational environment with a variety of competency levels, and they see that some students resort to plagiarism in order to survive. Then Connie adds the instructor point of view – wondering how struggling students reached the third-year, university-level course; if they got there by plagiarizing then they are taking the place of a more worthy student. The ending is a statement identified by Connie as “irony”: “as an instructor, I do my best not to fail anyone if possible”.

Bob then tells a story about plagiarism to Amy. He describes how it is dealt with in a respectful way by one particular program through an investigative meeting. Bob describes the focus as “tell us how you got to that place that you thought this was your only option?”, and concludes by identifying several policy issues his story relates to: entrance requirements for the program, support for developing academic writing skills, and helping students see the connection between plagiarism at school and workplace ethics in their field.
At the end of the telling, each person types up the other’s story on a laptop and then checks the other’s version of their own story while I sit pleased as punch with the quality of their contributions. As I sit there, taking notes in my log book, I begin to wonder what I’ll do with their work since they have already drawn conclusions for me. I notice that their stories start out being a student’s story but then turn into an instructor’s response to a student’s story. After this, I will put stories together into a booklet for program heads to read and they’ll discuss the stories that stand out for them and most likely start telling their reactions to the stories – which will be their stories. Will my research then be my story - a sort of story of a story of a story? Will the dissertation be a story about me?

Instructor group two. The second instructor focus group includes two people who are office mates and a third instructor. Only two of the instructors arrive on time, and I go ahead and get started while waiting for the third to make the trek from her class to the interview room.

Danita starts by asking who should go first and wanting me to clarify what I mean by a story. I clarify that whatever people care to share about their experience with any of the four language policy issues would be a story. Danita wants time to think of a story and Emma offers to go first. Danita interrupts disagreeing with the process I had outlined and wants to type the story as it is being told rather than waiting until all the stories have been told and then going off to a work station to write. I agree as I don’t want to lose momentum. Emma tells a story about a student’s plagiarism and Danita interrupts asking for things to be repeated and asking how to spell words. Emma is visibly upset but perseveres as if to placate Danita.

Then it is Danita’s turn to tell a story to Emma who adopts the same method of typing while the story unfolds. Part way through, Fiona enters the room and sits down to listen. Danita often looks at me as if I am the audience for the story and I feel uncomfortable because I think she wants me to provide reassurance that this counts as a story, so I look down and take field notes. Danita finishes and asks whether that counts as a story, and I nod, adding a thank you for the contribution.

Now it is Fiona’s turn to tell a story and I ask Emma to be the recorder for this one. If everyone had been present at the start of the group, each person would only have to record one story but since Fiona is late, Emma has to record two stories. I prefer not to ask Danita to do a second one. Fiona’s story is really short and more like an outline - who, what, where, when, why, how and after about two minutes, a “conclusion” is given about the story illustrating Fiona’s “Colombo routine”.

Emma types it up quickly, I ask each person to review the write up of their story and make any changes to ensure they are comfortable with it, save it electronically, and we finish.

The other two leave right away, but Emma stays behind and expresses being “horrified” at the way Danita wrote up her story, so I suggest she revise it herself at home, saying, “I’ll email it to you later once I’m back at the office.” Emma seems relieved, and I catch myself starting to complain about how Danita kept interrupting the interview process.

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10 This reference is to the TV character Lieutenant Columbo who was a rumpled looking but skilled detective.
Back at my office, I read over the instructor stories and am scared. Their actions sound so arbitrary at best and often cruel and petty. These people are my respected colleagues and I really want to make sense of their behaviour. Why might this behaviour make sense given the circumstances? I put everything away and decide to wait until after the Christmas break. With a fresh mind, I’ll look at my data and figure out what to do. Step 1, data collection, done.

Tensions in the tales

Tales about dealing with the instructor group reveal further tensions around ownership of stories and what becomes of them during the research, as well as the role my relationships with participants played, as I was an important stakeholder in the research process.

It was relatively easy to recruit instructors because I had been a former colleague, and it was with instructors’ help that students from their classes came forward to participate in the research. In instructor group one, where I thought I was “collecting” data, I was also creating data through participating, as my thinking about research was changing, and I was questioning my role as the writer of the research report. I was wondering whose story my research would be telling, and I thought it might be primarily my own story. Tensions around ownership and handling of stories arose again in instructor group two, first when Danita asked what I meant by a story, and then later when she asked if the experience she had just described counted as a story. At the end, the issues arose again when Emma complained about the way her story had been written up by Danita, and I offered to let Emma rewrite it at home. This signaled my awareness that I was both affecting and being affected by the research, and that I was an important stakeholder in the research process.

After the student and instructor group interviews were completed, the next step was to prepare a booklet of their stories and present them to program heads for discussion. Based on intuition that told me the process of writing had gotten in the way of the storytelling, I experimented with rewriting the stories to capture the vitality I had heard, and I reflected on this
practice in my research journal. The next tale highlights the deepening of tensions around ownership and handling of stories.

Reviewing the data: Tales of an educational researcher (October 2009)

The written stories don’t sound like the ones I heard during the group interviews. In writing, the stories are dry versions of the facts, whereas when students were talking to each other, the stories were engaging and drew in listeners, including me. I panic, thinking this proves I have no idea what I am doing. I really thought the stories would speak for themselves, at least to me. This dissertation is going to be harder than I thought. I have the data, but now what? I read them over and over and the question I am dreading gets louder and louder, beating to the rhythm of my accelerating heart: so what? I fear I should have taped the stories as they were being brought to life through dialogue.

The students sat there politely listening to me tell them that they were not going to be marked on their writing and that grammar didn’t matter. I told them I wanted to hear about their experiences with language policy; that is what mattered. They knew me as an associate dean and I wonder if any of them knew that I was a communication instructor before and for much longer than I’ve been an associate dean. I might have been sitting in this very classroom with them, and they would be writing for me, their instructor, tasked with the responsibility of judging their work and potentially affecting their mobility through the institute. Yet, here I am now ready to judge the retelling of their stories, and I feel guilty. I vow to make this research work help them, even if in some small way.

After reading the stories several times, I wonder what I will do with them, and I’m confused by my choice to have them write up each other’s stories. Why did I think having them write up each other’s stories would work just because it worked for me when I took part in a workshop on leadership? I should have asked them to write their own story. Would that have made the written product more vibrant? Actually, one student brought notes and after telling his story, gave them to the writer who copied them as he wrote up the story. Would their writing have been any better if they’d written their own story? Maybe I was expecting too much from them. Some of the instructor stories weren’t any more alive. Maybe that is part of my job as a researcher – to bring the stories to life – to bring the issues to life. How can I learn to listen to the stories I had collected, no matter the writing style?

In reviewing the written version of the stories, I realized that before me was the framework for the story, and that the framework was the data that I had collected. As I read over the students’ stories, I was reminded of the work of psychologist R. D. Laing. In his book Knots (1970) he presented his patients through poetry-like creations, using repetition to emphasize how they became trapped by their thinking and actions. I wanted to use this technique and try
rewriting the student stories because I thought it might capture the spirit of what I heard them explain to each other. Inspired by the idea of writing an impressionistic account (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), I took the framework for each story and rewrote the essence into versions to share with program heads. I decided to write using “I” in order to ensure that the student’s gender would not be revealed. The booklet of rewritten stories is presented in Appendix D.

I argue that reworking the stories in this way is part of a bottom-up storytelling process, and that its success depends on the writing skill of the researcher since the rewritten stories are fed back into the research process. The booklet of stories needed to promote discussion in the program head group interview, and I believed it was necessary to rework the story frames I had collected. This way of generating data involved analysis since it brought about my realization that it was not students’ thinking or actions that might possibly trap them, it is institutional processes. I wanted the program head discussion to focus on the stories in the context of institutional processes and, therefore reworking the stories helped me map out social processes. The following example shows the obstacles that an international student described, and in a subsequent chapter, I reveal how students do not present themselves as trapped but rather as persevering and overcoming institutional obstacles.

Rewrite of student story # 2: International student.

I must pass this English test or I can’t study electrical engineering.
I must pass this English test or study English for 8 months.
I must study to pass this English test but there is no sample to study.
I must talk to my friend who has failed this test three times to see if she can help me study.
If I pass the test, I get to study English for only half a year instead of 8 months.
When I study English they will teach me how to write; they don’t cover listening or speaking.
I need to listen and speak in order to learn engineering but when I study English, they will cover writing.
I am not good at English tests but I must pass this test or I can’t study electrical engineering.
I want to be a good engineer so I must study hard to pass this English test but there is nothing to study.
I handled the instructor stories similarly, by rewriting the essence of the story into an impressionistic account (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). For example, as I read one of the instructor stories, the phrase “crocodile tears” came to mind, so I followed through with the image and found it had the following meaning:

The allusion is to the ancient notion that crocodiles weep while devouring their prey.

Crocodiles do indeed have lachrymal glands and produce tears to lubricate the eyes as humans do. They don’t cry though. Whatever emotion they experience when finding and devouring prey we can be certain it isn’t remorse.

(www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/104860.html)

First I present the rewritten story, and then in the tale from my field notes, I reflect on the decision to rewrite it from the framework given by the instructor.

Rewrite of instructor story # 5: Plagiarism: Those crocodile tears.

It was a rainy, dark night in a writing class for students who were making up a course they had failed. As usual, I gave an in-class assignment so that I could be certain that students did the writing themselves. And I marked it against the highest standards since this was repeat material for the students. To be fair, after I returned the work, I offered students the chance to rewrite it at home. I gave the them the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and even the opportunity to pass the assignment, but they had to submit both versions of their work so I could track the changes.

The woman in question, made such dramatic changes to her work that I puzzled over what could have happened. The revision contained five paragraphs when the original only had two; the revision was flawless when the original was riddled with grammar and sentence errors. I asked the woman to meet with me after class. I asked her to explain the difference and she praised my absolutely wonderful teaching that had allowed her to improve her writing skills dramatically after a single lesson. I have to admit, I was flattered—but only for a moment. When I asked her to elaborate on the revision process she had followed, out popped a flicker of an admission—someone had gone over it for her to help with grammar—only the minor stuff. I suggested that this help meant that the writing was not hers alone and she disagreed.

I tried to educate her on institute policy on plagiarism and the need to credit all sources and I knew I was on firm ground here. Then I added in a gentle reference to cheating, and I quickly followed it with the offer to give extra help to this woman. Before I even had time to finish breathing out my sigh of relief, her tears started and she told me she had quit her job to
concentrate on this course which she absolutely had to pass. Thinking as quickly as I could for a solution, I suggested she write me a memo explaining why asking someone to correct your writing and then handing it in as your own was an unfair academic practice. (I believe I used simpler words at the time but carefully avoided the word “wrong”).

She left my office that night and never returned to class. I emailed her to see what was happening and I could practically hear the tears and sniffling as she told me how bad I had made her feel, how she wasn’t sleeping properly, that her whole life was ruined, and she was not coming back. But she did return to one more class when she realized she couldn’t get a full refund – that’s the institute rule and nothing to do with me. She sat in class and glared at me the whole time. I tried to talk to her after but the tears came back as she said we had different definitions of cheating, and that I was being really unfair. She refused to do any more work and walked away before I could say anything more.

Strangely, even though she dropped the course, she came to two more classes but wouldn’t do any work. Whenever I looked at her, her eyes would get all red as she glared at me. I explained she was welcome to audit the course but she disappeared. I felt so manipulated as if I could alter standards of education just to suit her needs.

Reflections on rewriting instructor story # 5

Where did I get the phrase crocodile tears? It was not in the original, but when I read over the story, it came to mind. I was trying very hard to understand why my respected colleague would ask the student to write the memo about why her behaviour was wrong. It seemed overly punitive to me, so I was trying to put myself in my colleague’s place, a place where this action could be seen as a remedy. The most salient feature of my colleague’s story was her belief that the tears were not genuine – thus the term crocodile tears came to mind. If the instructor believed that the tears were not genuine, then I could understand that she might feel manipulated by the student. I could then understand the instructor’s desire for the student to demonstrate her understanding of the issue. I could see that the instructor might accept the memo as a kind of apology.

As I rewrote the story, I treated the incident as a piece of detective work and chose a style that sounded a bit mysterious and suspenseful – “the rainy, dark night”, as well as a bit like a police statement – noting the facts to avoid taking sides.

After I rewrote the story, I showed it to my colleague as a form of member checking. She claimed it was “certainly more dramatic.” I asked if she liked the crocodile tears, and interestingly, after saying “yes”, she talked at length about the experience and how upset and manipulated she had felt. This seemed to me to be an endorsement of my rewrite as it got her focused back on the event and how it had affected her personally and professionally; my rewrite brought the event back to life for the instructor.
Tensions in the tales

Tensions around the ownership and handling of stories rose once again in the tales about reviewing the data and the subsequent decision to “rewrite” stories. The purpose of collecting the stories was to present them in a readable format that would promote discussion for the program heads. Since the stories were written by someone other than the storyteller, I saw them as containing the frame of the original story. They were not a transcript, and I viewed them as no longer the storyteller’s story; they were in a sense already one person removed. When the storyteller reviewed the story for accuracy, he or she was giving permission for the other person’s rendition of the story to be put forward. In this sense, the original stories had already been rewritten. Furthermore, one person had used track changes when reviewing the story, and I needed a more readable version so that the deleted wording was not on the page. At first I tried to simply include the revised wording, but then I noticed all the references to specific courses and programs. A second problem was that the writers used “he” or “she” to identify each other by gender and sometimes by native language (i.e., a French speaker), and I was worried that the program heads might recognize people. To protect privacy and ensure confidentiality, I decided that I could not present the stories as they were to program heads. I decided to rewrite them using “I”.

Program heads

The following tale describes challenges with the research process for the program head group interview, once again revealing tensions around storytelling.

Program head group interview: Tales of an educational researcher (March, 2010)

The challenge is finding a common time to meet but even more challenging is determining a good time to send out the invitation, one that doesn’t coincide with the layoff notices coming up in the next week. As an educational researcher who is an “insider” at the institute, I am the messenger for both good and bad. I invite people to talk back freely to
educational policy one day and I serve layoff notice according to legislated steps dictated by Labour Relations the next. How am I to balance these two roles?

I am drowning in technical logistics, trying to set up the program head group interview, ready to give up and I am not even in the room with these people yet. I want someone from each of the five academic areas that make up my associate dean portfolio, but their participation must be voluntary. Feb. 9th, my colleague who is acting as recruiter for my research sends out my initial email invitation. Feb. 15th, only two people volunteer and I have to extend the deadline. March 1st, I have paper versions of the email put in mailboxes. March 2nd, I wish I had asked people to reply with “no” if they didn’t want to participate so I could move on and find someone else, but who would that be? I think of a couple of program heads outside my area in similar scientific disciplines to the ones I want covered, two people who are neighbours and easy to approach. March 4th, I reach my goal as all five program heads from my areas have volunteered.

March 23rd, we meet in room 301 with the Edirol Recorder that the audio-visual staff member has assured me is easy to use and has tested with me speaking and pressing the buttons – my voice sounds hollow but it’s there. I’m kind of surprised how big the recorder is – the size of a paperback novel – when I’ve seen recorders that look like small cigarette lighters. Am I really in an institute of technology? I proceed to the room, set up the recorder trying to get the cables out of the way, and wait - wondering if everyone will come, how late people are going to be, and what I am supposed to do while waiting for the last person. I take notes and try to stay out of the way.

Once Arnold, Bill, Caroline, Dennis, and Emily show up, I explain the task, we test the recorder, and I invite someone to start talking about the story that stands out for them. Arnold starts with his usual cryptic comments, and they leave everyone wondering how to respond. I can see they are all trying hard to be good participants in my research, to help me out and slowly each person adds a short comment. Is this the way a discussion unfolds? I write down everything I can so that my anxiety doesn’t disturb them. Bill turns to me and asks if the recorder is working since the red light seems to have turned off. We try to replay it but can’t hear anything, so I reset it. I try to act casual and tell them to keep going as I’ll take notes but inside I’m fuming, remembering the many experiences of technological malfunction in so called “smart classrooms” when I was an instructor. I write down everything I can and switch from noisy, scratchy pencil, to messy, smeary pen – back and forth trying to figure out which one is better. I glance at the recorder sitting in the middle of the table and notice that the light is out but the numbers are clicking away slowly so something is moving, but is it recording?

Then I get caught up in the discussion and find myself nodding in response as I record, one ear listening as a researcher trying to get the details down, and the other as an associate dean wanting to take part in this rich discussion. I do so in my mind, adding my silent comments and realize how deeply these colleagues think about the everyday details that make up my workload, how they each have seized this opportunity for dialogue and that they are finding it meaningful. Do I feel left out? Partly, but there is something more happening – some shift in my thinking about what an associate dean does – what I do in this job. I am more than a spokesperson at tables that these people don’t get invited to, I am different than an interloper who takes their concerns one way and upper leadership’s response back the other way, but I am
not sure I have the language to describe who I am right now, in this different place where the dialogue is the goal.

Bill asks me if they have given me something useful, if I have gotten what I wanted, and I try not to show my discomfort as he talks directly to me as researcher. But he has kept me on task and the two hours is coming to an end. I turn off the tape, arrange the envelopes with each person’s $50.00, and ask them to sign a sheet indicating that they have been paid. As everyone is exiting the room, Caroline says with a smile, “I sure don’t know how you’re going to turn this into a dissertation”. I chuckle and agree, noticing how easily I move into that space of total insecurity as a doctoral student, and feel sick.

I return to my office with Dennis who is trying to be helpful, and we try to download the file off the recorder onto my desktop computer. We manage to download the file but there is no sound. I take the device home and try there knowing that I can safely reveal my technological ignorance to my family, and they will be helpful. At home, we manage to download the file but again there is no sound in spite of our using the latest versions of several types of software we found on the web. So, I take the device back to the audio/visual office and ask for their help. They notice that the USB port has broken off the device and fallen inside. They don’t have a card reader that will work, and suggest I go to the media office – in the library. I go there twice the next day with my laptop in tow but there is a note on the door “back at 10:30-11:45” even though I am within that time frame for both visits. I return the next day – Friday – and the note says “Gone for the day”. I start to accept that there is no recording of the focus group and vow to transcribe my notes.

The transcription is pretty straight forward and I produce seven pages of dialogue, which I copy for each of the participants and package with the student and instructor stories in plastic folders for their review. I ask them to make any changes they want to their comments, crossing out what they don’t want me to include and rewording any parts to better reflect what they want to be on the record. Finally, they are to sign the transcript to indicate their agreement with me using it as part of my research – without identifying them personally. This is all completed in a few days, and several people mention how impressed they are with the thoroughness of my notes.

I put the research away relieved that I have managed to get through the program head group interviews, but one day in the lunch room a colleague who is heating up her lunch in the microwave tells me she has heard about the difficulties I had with the audio tape, and that the media people have a second office outside the library, under the cafeteria. I think about going there just to be certain about the status of the recording, but before I can even complete the thought, an AV attendant has overheard and says, “Oh that office hasn’t been staffed in months”, so I decide to leave well enough alone.

Tensions in the tales

Throughout the tales about the program head group interview, I am exploring my identity and trying to deal with the tension I feel among the many roles I play in the institution. In the
opening, I described a difficult balancing act of being a manager responsible for issuing layoff notices one week and being a researcher recruiting volunteers for group interviews the next. I try to separate the roles but cannot. In the tale, I express frustration with the audio equipment and recall my role as an instructor in an institute of technology where equipment often failed, and these reflections are presented as almost interrupting the research process. My changing sense of self is also captured when I refer to the competing demands of listening as an educational leader and recording as a researcher. I describe being in a new space where dialogue, rather than measurable results, is the goal. I describe the complex identity of being a researcher who needs to record every word by hand due to technological breakdown, and an educational leader exploring breakdown as a metaphor for larger institutional policies and processes. The research process is changing the way I think, as I begin to link my everyday experiences to a larger social context. Leadership identity issues resurface in subsequent tales and will be explored further in the next section on the associate dean interview.

Associate dean

Following is a tale about the process of interviewing myself, and the tensions that arose as a result of being an insider-researcher.

Associate dean interview: Tales of an educational researcher (November 2010)

I take comfort in the promotional blurb written on the box of my new recording device:

“Because technology and life are integrated. The WS Series of digital voice recorders was designed to fit easily into your life. No cables to fumble with, just plug in and go – all our super-high quality recordings instantly synched to your computer. Anywhere you go, the Olympus WS series gives you the quality, connectivity and flexibility that you deserve.”

Armed with the new digital recorder I just bought, I decide to interview myself, wondering if I am allowed to do so. This will partly serve as a test of the interview protocol in case I want to interview others, and of my new digital voice recorder. Besides it will be easy to arrange. I will
talk my way through a form associated with a policy issue; for example, a marks reassessment form that I have to sign, or a statement of policy regarding plagiarism that I have to act on.

Story One – Marks Reassessment. As I begin the interview, I pretend I am two different people, an interviewer and an interviewee, and strangely when I listen back to the tape, my voice sounds different for each role. The interviewer is matter of fact and organized; the interviewee talks a mile a minute, and goes on and on in great detail without any prompting as if her voice had finally been freed. It sounds like no one has ever asked me what I think, and I am eager to tell my experience with the policy issue. It is like I have never given myself permission to speak candidly, but I was careful to look at both sides and not give any easy answers, like I was burdened with bureaucratic details and couldn’t easily reveal my thoughts. After a while I get quite reflective and at times whisper or laugh my thoughts to life. I tell myself things I want to do to be the kind of leader I feel I should be – to be free to express multiple identities, depending on the context.

Story Two – Processing a PLAR. This story comes much more quickly than the first one, and I focus on problem solving – again telling myself to allow opportunities for informal, public dialogue with instructors and program heads, to mingle in the halls, to become a colleague, to allow opportunities for solving policy issues at the lowest level possible so that I can avoid the formal processes that clearly frustrate me.

Tensions in the tales

A strong theme that arises repeatedly in the associate dean’s interview is the negotiation and construction of my identity as an insider-researcher. I refer to being two different people, the researcher and the researched, even adopting different tones of voice as I play out each role. I refer to one part of my identity being freed and also allowing my multiple identities to come to life. The act of interviewing myself leads me to think differently about my everyday experiences and the role I play in them. Not only do I start to suggest ways to improve the processes, I also appear to be renegotiating who I am as an insider-researcher. While initially, I try to present a unified identity as a researcher who is separate from the material being researched (“I pretend I am two different people”), I switch to a language of possibility showing that I am beginning to think differently, thinking about multiplicity of identities, and that the research process itself is having this effect on me. As a graduate student doing research, I struggle to speak with the confidence of a scholar, and it is through engagement with personal narratives that I have begun
to listen to myself differently. I have become aware of an unfolding/refolding of my identity (St. Pierre, 1997, citing Deleuze) in the process. Each of the tales identifies moments when this unfolding/refolding of identity is taking place, for example, when I mention the timing of the recruitment of faculty and program heads needing to be balanced with lay off notification duties; when my sensual experience of being in the classroom triggered my memory of being an instructor; when my emotional reaction to the stories partly provoked me to experiment with rewriting them; and the resurfacing of tensions when I shared my interview notes with program heads for member checking.

In Chapter 4, I have addressed question two: What tensions did I have to contend with as an insider-researcher. I have argued that I had to negotiate and re-negotiate my identity as an insider-researcher as I collected, organized, and analyzed the data in a recursive fashion. I have discussed the multiplicity of identities I became aware of as I conducted the research.

In Chapter 5, I return to question one to further address what institute language practices reveal about processes of administration and governance. This time I draw primarily from the storytelling data I generated rather than the documents I collected—official policy statements and email messages that represent policy in practice—and analyzed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 5, I present four language myths that appear to be operating at the level of ideology and influencing the everyday practice of policy at the institute. While I was reviewing the story data, I mapped out social processes related to the language themes (how plagiarism comes into existence as a problem; how English language skills are assessed for admission). I also tried to establish links between policy moments revealed so far with theoretical issues in language education literature (i.e. standard English as a fiction from Gee, 2011). This led to the identification of various language myths in operation at the institute (the myth of standard English, the myth of the
English test, the myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat, and the myth of weak English), and I explore the ways in which they act as a de facto language policy.
Chapter 5: Institute Language Myths as Forms of Domination

Tower of Babel

Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there...But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built...And the Lord said “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do”...”Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. (Genesis 11; 1-9)

In Chapter 3, through an analysis of official and unofficial policy texts, I uncovered a discourse of homogeneity and control where difference is constructed negatively, and I argued that there is an unequal distribution of academic social goods like academic integrity and language proficiency at the institute. I continue this line of reasoning in Chapter 5, drawing from the stories collected in group interviews to argue that particular language myths operating as forms of domination and control reveal more about processes of administration and governance at the institute.

Myths can be understood as traditional stories explaining how the world and people came to be in their present form (Kirk, 1970; 1984). As can be seen in the vignette above, the Bible provides a mythical explanation for how multiple languages developed in the world, and like all myths, this story is powerful because it supports and validates a certain social order which frames multiple languages as a source of confusion. For Smith (1990), social order is regulated by institutions of administration, management and professional authority as well as by intellectual and cultural discourses. Power relations that come into view in everyday experiences are abstracted forms of these institutions. Everyday experiences are mediated by texts and discourses that organize what happens, and these are fundamental to the capacity to reproduce
the same power relations in an indefinite variety of local contexts. Thus, myths can be said to
underpin the texts and discourses that shape institute processes of administration and
governance, and it would be useful to look at the mythology around language practices at the
institute.

Campbell (1988) outlines four functions of myths as mystical (experiencing the awe of
the universe), cosmological (explaining the shape of the universe), sociological (validating a
certain social order), and pedagogical (dictating how to live life under any circumstances). By
looking at how language myths operate at the institute, I don’t intend to judge or validate certain
points of view, nor do I suggest that the myths are false. Rather, my intention is to explore what
the institute’s language practices (including the influence of myths) reveal about its processes of
administration and governance. Exploration of traditional stories at the institute might help
explain how current practices came about, what might be operating below the surface, or how
these particular practices came to the surface and not others. For the purpose of this research, I
define the different functions of myth in the context of everyday actions at the institute. By
systematically looking at the four mythical functions, my analysis moves back and forth between
general societal contexts and particular moments at the institute. I apply the functions by looking
at the data (comments and behaviours from the stories), identifying everyday actions (including
talk) at the institute, and locating them in a wider social context.

For the mystical function (experiencing the awe of the universe), I understand the
universe to be society (the communities from which students come) with its societal forces (like
technological change, increased immigration, economic shifts in power). For the cosmological
function (explaining the shape of the universe), I focus on the universe as the culture of the
institute and shaping of the universe to be social power, what counts as important social capital
in the institute. For the sociological function (validating a certain social order), I understand social order as the everyday actions at the institute and validation of them through a reference point in the world. For the pedagogical function (dictating how to live life under any circumstances), I understand pedagogy to mean the rituals for teaching and learning of English at the institute.

During group interviews at the institute, students, instructors, and program heads referred to everyday perceptions and practices that follow from seemingly true accounts of the past that have led to the present. Operating below the surface of their stories were common beliefs about language and language learning, which I am calling myths: the myth of standard English, the myth of the English test, the myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat, and the myth of weak English. These myths might help explain how the institute’s customs and taboos around the English language were established and reconstitute themselves through everyday social interactions. In the following section, I first describe the broader context beyond the institute, and then, I look at the operation of each myth within the institute.

**Institute environs**

With its vision of being “integral to the economic, social and environmental prosperity” of the province (Institute, 2010b), the institute draws students from a province that has been defined by its immense size and the remoteness of many communities relative to a densely populated urban centre (Metcalf, 2009). This urban/rural divide and the resulting spatial inequalities are partly influenced by industry-specific resource locations, for example, forestry in northern regions and technology-based industries in the cities. Metcalf notes that Canada has been described as a “settler society”, and that its colonial legacy is revealed in the location of the province’s urban centers. The urban centers are port cities that had former colonial importance,
yet they continue to be centers of political, social, and economic power, and today, their location also has trade and tourism value. The institute draws students primarily from a province with 74% of its population with English as a mother tongue and home language. Of the non-English population, almost 50% are Chinese language users compared to 80% of Canada’s non-English population being French language users (Provincial STATS, 2003). What might this context mean for language practices in post-secondary educational institutions like the institute?

In a recent report to encourage marketing of Canadian post-secondary education internationally, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) linked international education, with immigration, economic recovery, economic development, and competitiveness for provinces and territories. International students were described as contributing to the quality of education experiences of all students in Canada, creating jobs in education services, spending money on tuition, accommodations, and discretionary spending, and generating government revenue. The report identified 45% of Canada’s international students as being from Asia and 22.7% being from China, and Canada is portrayed as a country that offers a “high level of comfort with cultural diversity” (Council of the Federation Secretariat, 2011, p. 17). Yet, social stratification in Canada is shaped by differential treatment based on factors such as race, gender and immigrant seniority. For example, the greatest mismatch between level of education and type of employment was found for recent immigrant women from South or Southeast Asia with a mother tongue other than English or French (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004). Similarly, Hum and Simpson (1998) found wage differentials for visible minority immigrants but not for native born visible minorities (except for Black men). They found that language fluency in English or French did not significantly change the economic disadvantages for recent immigrants, suggesting that “language fluency is but one aspect of the wider phenomenon of cultural adaptation” (p. 35).
Even when employed, immigrant workers face unequal opportunities for job-related training compared to Canadian-born workers (Park, 2011). The number of recent immigrants holding low-education jobs stayed the same between 1991 and 2001, but increased for those with an education in health or the social sciences (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004), suggesting that their credentials were not recognized in Canada. More recent work (Houle & Yssaad, 2010) similarly found that factors like gender, age, and country of origin influenced recognition of work experience and credentials. For example, women and older immigrants were less likely to have their work experience recognized, and Indian work experience was more likely to be recognized than Chinese work experience. In addition, location has been found to be an influence in economic integration of immigrants, where immigrants in larger urban centres have a larger income disadvantage compared to those who settle outside the urban centres, even taking into consideration differences in education and ability in an official language (Bernard, 2008). Also, regional differences were found as new immigrants living in the western provinces (Alberta and British Columbia) had a lower probability of credential recognition compared to those living in Ontario (Houle & Yssaad, 2010).

Given that Canadian society is composed of systems of inequality and domination like those described above, everyday interactions are likely to express and reproduce these power relations. Bourdieu’s concept of “capital” has been used by linguists to capture social inequality, and specifically the concept of “linguistic capital” has been used to capture inequality in societally-valued language varieties like standard forms of speech used by dominant social groups (Menard-Warwick, 2005). Given that institute graduates from 2008-2010 enjoyed a job placement rate of approximately 82% (Institute, 2011b) and given that communities in the area
have diverse language profiles, there is the possibility that some of the institute’s graduates use languages in addition to English in the workplace. What does this suggest about the relation of English proficiency to finding employment? Additionally, of the institute’s international students in 2008, fewer had English as their first language compared to international students at other post-secondary institutions in the province, yet more of the institute’s employed international students worked off campus compared to those employed at other post-secondary institutions (Institute, 2009b). This suggests that the workplace reception of institute students who are English language learners is also favourable, and perhaps that proficiency in a language other than English or in addition to English is important for institute graduates. How might the disadvantaging of recent immigrants in Canadian society shape everyday language practices at the institute, where students compete for admission, graduation, and eventually employment? How might institute language myths reinforce social inequalities in Canadian society? I look at each myth separately, but in reality they work together and depend on each other. For example, the myth of standard English gives rise to its counterpart, the myth of weak English, and the myth of the English test creates the conditions for the myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat.

The myth of standard English

I explore the myth of standard English, first by explaining it, and then by illustrating its operation through stories I collected. At the institute, standard English is used as a benchmark for judging students’ competence in English. The more similar the work is to the type of English known colloquially as standard, then the more competent the student is judged to be with English. Standard English has become the standard for judging English language competency in

11 One nearby city has 59% of the population with a mother tongue other than English with 38% having Chinese as a mother tongue (City of Richmond, 2011).
general. However, according to scholars (see Gee, 2011), standard English is only a special
dialect – no more and no less correct than other dialects. But it carries great social prestige
worldwide, and at the institute, prestige takes the form of passing grades. Gee (2011) presents the
following historical account of the rise of standard English, and the present day economic
parallel is obvious:

Standard English has its origins in the power of a fourteenth century merchant class in
London, people who spoke an East Midland dialect. Because of their growing economic
clout, their dialect spread for public business across the country. It became the basis of
so-called “Received Pronunciation” (“RP”) in England, and eventually gave rise to
Standard English in the United States. (p. 2)

Gee (2011) describes standard English as a fiction, because everyone uses it in different ways
and brings to it different linguistic influences, and as a result, it is constantly changing. Gee cites
Chomsky’s theories on language acquisition, noting that all varieties of language acquired by
humans as native languages are equal since they all fit the basic pattern or design dictated by our
human biological capacity for language. The prominence of one dialect over another, therefore,
is not due to inherent language differences but to social and economic power differences.

Standard English has taken on mythical proportions at the institute and, as such, functions
in the following ways: it reifies a past before immigration and student language diversity,
linking these with a more harmonious and superior learning environment (mythical function); it
supports English as the dominant language, because it is the reference point for “other”
languages (cosmological function); it justifies English as the language of business and the
economy worldwide (sociological function); and it shapes our understanding of effective
teaching and learning of English, justifying the rituals we have come to use (pedagogical
function). Simply stated, the myth of standard English creates the imperative to learn the English of the educated and those in power in order to gain linguistic capital. For speakers of “other” languages at the institute, learning this type of English is synonymous with learning “English” and is believed to be the main requirement for finding a job and being successful in the workplace. The goal of the institute’s programs is to prepare job-ready students, and the myth of standard English makes it seem that standard English is the only language in the workplace. The myth also masks other social barriers to economic opportunity for immigrants in Canadian society, like those outlined earlier in this chapter.

*Stories of everyday life at the institute*

Standard English and the grammar of power are themes that came up in many of the student and instructor stories. Students expressed surprise at the level of difficulty of English assessment (including entrance or placement tests and Communication course work). They talked about losing a lot of marks for something called “grammar” and the need for “adjustment” in communication courses so that those who have different kinds of English have a fair chance of passing or of being treated equally to those students whose first language is English. Those born in Canada also referred to Communication assessments as being hard and losing marks due to grammar “errors”. Instructors and program heads spoke about a dissonance between the students they were expecting and those they are faced with in the classroom. The skills they believe students need in order to be successful in a course often do not match the abilities of the students they are faced with teaching.

The myth of standard English is operating here by shaping expectations: students want fairness in terms of the way their language skills are assessed and don’t seem to know what the standards are or how they are applied. The English that was good enough to get them where they
are in life doesn’t seem to be good enough to help them pass institute assessments. Instructors and program heads seemed to crave a common starting point so that students have a standard proficiency in English before appearing in the classroom. The stories reveal a tension between a romanticized view of a common standard (or a common language) and the social adjustment that is taking place in response to increasingly multilingual classrooms (dealing with the babel referred to in the opening Biblical excerpt).

**The myth of the English test**

*The English Assessment: “U”*

**Student:**

I couldn’t understand my result because it only said “U - unsatisfactory”. The meaning is not clear yet it is obvious:

You = unsatisfactory.
I didn’t pass.
I’m not allowed into the program.
On this page, it is the only word with meaning.
Yet it has none.
Singling me out for special treatment?
Is there a place where I am not a U?
At the local college, I am a C.

**Faculty:**

(The student does not have Love Potion #9.
Most students are quiet, they don’t stand out and often you don’t see how much they’ve changed.
An entrance level is not just one test result or mark – it’s hard to measure.
C – it’s not any indication of ability with language – it’s pretty low.)

As if it is a game in which both roles are of equal importance....

*Voice of an educational researcher: P. Sackville; 2011*

In the field of assessment, the term “high-stakes” is used to describe assessment for which much is at stake for the student (Cumming, 2002 refers to normatively-oriented tests, especially those that are administered across a variety of contexts internationally). After
reviewing the story data, I was inspired to write the poem above. It seemed to me that all English tests are high stakes, because they are used as gate-keeping devices, or even more generally, that the English language always involves high stakes. There was a focus on English assessment in every story that I collected. Whether it was about experience with tests, course work, cheating and plagiarism, or PLAR, each story described English assessment. Tests are standard tools used by the institute to provide a snapshot of someone’s ability, but operating below the surface is what I call the myth of the English test, the belief that the test score represents the person’s ability with English. The myth functions by reifying the English test so that a person’s test score comes to represent them and their ability with language (mystical function); by explaining the shape of life at the institute where English is the medium of instruction but passing English assessments seems to be more difficult than passing content courses (cosmological function); by validating a certain social order that puts standard English ahead of “other” languages (sociological function); and by influencing beliefs about teaching and learning English (pedagogical function).

*Stories of everyday life at the institute*

During interviews, students spoke in detail about the many tests they had taken, the many times their English was “scored” and revealed an obstacle course of situations in which they had to prove, again and again, their English ability not only to gain admission to the institute but also to graduate. The graphic below (Figure 4) captures the obstacle course students described and reveals the power of the English testing myth – that English needs constant monitoring and that testing is the way to do this. Students described their perseverance when shopping around for an English test that would facilitate admission. Students also described their difficulties with
English assessment in communication courses and how it did not match their experience with English used at work.

Figure 4: Operation of the Myth of the English Test from Student Interviews
Also addressing the theme of assessment, instructors and program heads spoke about the need to ensure that students were doing their own work, and the need for the right assessment conditions both for admissions and graduation. Their descriptions of the multiple views on testing are shown in the graphic below (Figure 5): English testing is useful for determining whether students are ready for the course work and protects students from potential failure; English testing can set students back but is a wake-up call that they need to work on their English before they can study in the institute’s programs; the test score may contradict experience with English in the workplace. The shared space in the middle of the graphic is empty but reserved for something called “English competence”, the kind of English needed to pass Communication courses at the institute. The shared space is dependent on assessment and reveals operation of the myth of the English test.

**Figure 5: Operation of the Myth of the English Test from Instructor and Program Head Interviews**
The myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat

“When I went home and described how I had caught the students, my spouse called me Columbo.” (Instructor Interview)

One instructor referred to being like “Columbo” going after students who find new ways to cheat. Lieutenant Columbo, the TV character, went after the rich and elite, and perhaps the instructor felt that students who are skilled with the latest technologies are in the same category. They discover new ways to cheat and instructors have to use their Columbo-type thinking to uncover them.

Cheating and plagiarism are classified by the institute as types of academic misconduct, and policy (Institute, #5104) describes a set of procedures for dealing with cases and includes a statement of preference for early intervention in matters of unacceptable conduct. In the interviews, instructors and program heads framed their concerns around cheating and plagiarism, almost to the exclusion of other language policy issues.

Stories of everyday life at the institute

A thread runs through the Instructor interviews: ESL students struggle with English and resort to cheating out of desperation. This reveals that the myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat is operating at the level of ideology. As shown in Table 10 below, instructors spoke about students who got someone else to correct their writing errors or who copied from each other, from the work of students who had taken the course previously, or from written work they had hidden in an exam session. Instructors spoke about the pressure to be vigilant and the need for Columbo-like detective work. Two students referred to cheating as an aside to their main story of English testing (comments shown in smaller font in the middle of the table). They referred to classmates who got caught copying from the work of students who had already taken
the course. Their comments also reveal operation of the myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat.

**Table 10: Operation of the Myth that ESL Students are More Likely to Cheat: Key Comments from Interviews**

<table>
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<th>Comment</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We all seem to agree that getting a degree means you should have good command of the language of instruction but people feel the need to resort to plagiarism and cheating to survive those demands.</td>
<td>I wonder about the credentials people used to get into their program and how they earned them if they cannot meet the requirements of classes here.</td>
<td>The student made such dramatic changes to the work that I puzzled over what could have happened. The student admitted that someone had gone over it to help with grammar.</td>
<td>I explained to them that it was okay to collaborate but that the content and organization was too similar and a form of plagiarism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program didn’t schedule enough time for studying English so some of my classmates copied from previous year’s work but got caught (Student Interview).</td>
<td>I see that a lot of students copy from assignments of students who have already taken the course (Student Interview).</td>
<td>If the student admits to copying and blames it on lack of time or stress, we explain that it is precisely then that you need to be ethical.</td>
<td>I felt so manipulated as if I should alter the standards of education just to suit the student.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The stories show a conflation of ESL students with cheating, and I have called this the myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat. The myth functions in the following ways: there is a fascination with the wide and various ways that students find to cheat, resulting in instructors taking on fictional qualities of detectives, and ESL students are catchable because dramatic changes in their work are fairly obvious, although their methods are not (mystical function); the notion of an ESL student is reified and non-native English speakers are viewed as desperate victims of the institute’s weak entrance requirements (cosmological function); students are classified primarily by English language knowledge or lack of it and a certain social order is supported and maintained – native English speaker and other (sociological function); justification is created for further study of English as well as the rules of academic conduct.
before the student can take part fully in the community or be let back into the community (pedagogical function).

**The myth of weak English**

The three myths outlined previously work together to create the possibility of a language weakness – if you don’t have a certain level of skill with standard English or you don’t perform well on various English tests or if you are caught cheating on a writing assignment, then your English is likely to be viewed as weak. Furthermore, once your English is deemed to be weak, you are perceived to be more likely to cheat in order to meet the English demands of your program. The interplay of the four myths is captured in the graphic below (Figure 6); however, once the concept of weak English is established, movement occurs in the opposite direction as well as reinforcing the other myths.

![Figure 6: Operation of Three Myths to Create the Myth of Weak English](image)

The myth of weak English functions in the following ways: sets up English as an awe-inspiring language, since there are many ways to express ideas in English but only some meet the
standard (mystical function); influencing the institute culture by defining correct English as the use of a standard form of English (cosmological function); supporting a certain social order by viewing deviation from the standard form of English as a weakness (sociological function), giving rise to the detective role of language instructors to make sure students are doing the work themselves and are ready to be passed (pedagogical function).

Stories of everyday life at the institute

After speaking to me briefly, the invigilator was surprised that a native English speaker had to take the speaking and listening test. He shrugged and said it was policy; if C+ is the entrance requirement and you only have a C, you have to take the test. (Comment from a student born in Canada undergoing an English entrance test.)

During interviews, several students began their story with “I was born in Canada” or “English is my first language” and then described the various English tests they took to gain admission into the institute and to keep proving their English skills. The vignette above reveals the power of the myth of weak English. Once the label is given (in the form of a low grade), it is difficult to shake it off. The students prefaced their stories with their nationality as Canadians growing up in an English-speaking environment and explained the repercussions of not doing well on English assessments, whether in high school or during their transition to post-secondary. Their stories raise issues of who English belongs to and whose English it is that is being tested. Both issues reveal the interplay of the various language myths (of standard English, of the English test, of a weakness in English). Several students mentioned waiting a couple of years as new immigrants before they “studied” English, reinforcing the myth of the English test (English needs to be taught and tested in academic institutions). Others reinforced the myth through statements that passing one test would give them the right to study English for a shorter period of
time and allow them entry into a technology program sooner. Several students referred to
needing to focus on “weak areas” of their English in order to pass Communication courses, and
their choice of words also supports the myth of weak English.

Instructors and program heads referred to helping students improve their English, usually
with the phrase “extra help” or in a “support course”. They described students from other
countries as feeling challenged by the demands of English and “doing what I can to help”.
Instructors and program heads presented a growing desperation in being able to help students
succeed in their courses and the negative effect that students with “weak” English skills have on
the rest of the class. Once again, the stories revealed a social adjustment taking place in the
multi-lingual classrooms at the institute (referred to earlier as dealing with the babel).

This chapter has explored the language myths in operation at the institute, arguing that
they act as forms of domination against ESL students, and that they reveal the character of
institute processes of administration and governance. The myths are explored further in the next
chapter and linked to the discursive inclusion and exclusion practices that bring them to life in
the storylines that are the focus of Chapter 6.
Chapter 6: English Language Storylines: Suppression of Conflict in Policy Moments

The program head sends me an electronic form that requires my approval to change the name of the English course. It has been called “Speaking and Listening for EAL Students” but students are confused and ask what “EAL” means so the department wants to change it to “ESL”. “EAL” is more accurate for our multi-lingual students, but the students are confused, so I agree to the change. (AD journal, 2011)

In Chapter 6, I address research question three: What English language storylines are made available to students, instructors, program heads, and the associate dean? I explore the English language storylines made available at the institute and their role in suppression of conflict in policy moments. To capture the possible tensions between an individual and society, I explore how subjects are portrayed as being romantic, tragic, ironic, and comedic (from Bullough & Pinnegar’s, 2001 use of Frye’s literary forms), and how these storylines work with the myths (from Chapter 5) to suppress conflict and mask social and economic power differences. I first draw on data from the associate dean’s interview and then draw on story data from the group interviews. A storyline is “a condensed version of a naturalized and conventional cultural narrative, one that is often used as the explanatory framework of one’s own and others’ practices and sequences of action” (Sondergaard, 2002, p. 191). In simple terms, it is the story we tell ourselves to explain or interpret a course of events. A storyline creates subject positions which are spoken into existence through what Sondergaard refers to as “discursive in – and exclusion” practices. A storyline becomes so conventional that the subject positions seem natural. For example, at the institute, the category “ESL student” seems natural for capturing anyone who uses non-standard English, and people come to expect that the term will be used. The vignette at the beginning of this chapter shows the confusion caused by substituting a
different term. In addition, I take note of Norton’s (2000) statement that identity both constructs and is constructed by language. By investigating the discourse associated with particular language practices at the institute, I reveal ways in which discourse in storylines influences identity construction of English language learners.

**Discursive inclusion and exclusion practices**

From Sondergaard’s approach to interpretation, key questions for understanding the ways in which phenomena are manifested as natural are the following: Through which discursive processes do they emerge and in what kinds of contexts? What conditions do these practices impose on particular individuals for understanding themselves and others? How do they take up discursive practices as their own and how do they negate them?

Depending on who is telling the story, the subject may be portrayed in various ways. Frye (1957) identified four heroic forms which capture the possible tensions between an individual and society: romantic, tragic, ironic and comedic (cited in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). The romantic hero is a person who is more capable than society and who resolves conflicts by being victorious on a quest. The tragic hero is isolated from society, and something more powerful than the individual leads to this isolation. The ironic hero faces a problem and may remain trapped without a romantic or tragic end. The comedic hero uses the forces of society toward a transformational end.

**Discursive processes and contexts**

At the institute, the category “ESL student” is spoken into existence in the context of adjudication of English competence. The “ESL” student is constructed, and it seems natural that adjudicators involved in prior learning assessment (PLAR), Communication course marks reassessments, English placement tests, and plagiarism cases, would need to be aware of and pay
special attention to “ESL” students. Once spoken into existence, the “ESL” student comes under greater scrutiny, especially as his or her performance approaches the pass mark. PLAR is a policy I look at in depth in this chapter, through data from the interview with myself as associate dean. First I lay out a PLAR story described in the interview, and then I follow with analysis of the discursive inclusion and exclusion practices.

A student, Maria\textsuperscript{12}, contacted me about a PLAR that was taking many months and still there was no decision. Maria had a collection of work that the program head had requested as she was trying to get credit for a technical writing course. Maria had submitted workplace documents written as part of her job in an administrative position, but the program head kept asking her to do more and more writing. Maria was getting really frustrated because she needed an answer to the PLAR request. When I followed up, I heard that the program head really wanted to give Maria credit for the course, but her writing was “borderline”. The writing had been done with other people at work, so the program head had trouble assessing Maria’s individual writing ability. Each additional task Maria did produced writing that was still only “borderline” and the program head kept giving her additional tasks in the hopes that eventually Maria would be able to “pass”.

The tables below (Table 11 & 12) identify discourses used in the story and showcase moments when the ESL identifier is operating (inclusion) and when it is not operating (exclusion). Each section contains a quote from the interview and an interpretation to demonstrate inclusion and exclusion of the identifier. As indicated in the tables, these moments are supported by myths (identified and analyzed in the previous chapter) and heroic forms that are in operation. The inclusive and exclusive effects of these discursive processes are more pronounced when the operation of myths and heroic forms are added into the analysis. For

\textsuperscript{12} I am using a pseudonym.
example, the myth of the English test is operating so that the PLAR is not only a review of the student’s workplace writing to see if the business communication course objectives have been met. For this “ESL” student, the PLAR is also a test of her English competency. In the story, the program head seems to view the student as tragic (isolated from society by lack of English competence) and prolongs the process to give the student an opportunity to move away from the tragic role. In contrast, the student seems to present a more ironic role, having to jump through many hoops but still not getting an answer to the PLAR request. The myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat is revealed in the comment that the writing samples don’t reflect the student’s ability because they were written with other people at work. Normal collaboration at work is seen to be an unfair advantage for “ESL” students. The myths of standard English and weak English shape the adjudicator’s expectations for what counts as English competency.

The adjudicator wants to make absolutely sure of the “ESL” student’s ability to work alone without any help and gives multiple writing tasks to this end. The focus seems to be on the student’s “ESL” identity and shows that the ESL identifier is in operation (inclusion). However, when Maria approaches the associate dean for a decision, Maria switches the focus to the work, asking if she can get credit for the workplace writing she submitted. The switch excludes the ESL identifier and focuses on the Maria’s workplace writing experience. As the interview progresses, the associate dean’s comments show a questioning of accepted practices and a movement away from the ESL identifier.
Table 11: ESL Identifier Inclusion in PLAR Story from Associate Dean (AD) Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moments of ESL Identifier Inclusion</th>
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| 1. “The program head kept telling the student to do something else, and something else, and something else, and something else. And the student was really frustrated.” (AD)  
Interpretation: Student has to prove writing competency multiple times to try and satisfy the PLAR—focus on the ESL student proving that English skills are strong enough  
Myth in operation: Myth of the English test—the PLAR for ESL students is an English test—the ESL student becomes the test score  
Heroic form in operation: The adjudicator sees student as tragic and prolongs the PLAR process to help student move away from tragic role. |
| 2. “The sample reports were written with other people so the program head had difficulty assessing the writing.” (AD)  
Interpretation: Focus on the student being ESL which means any collaborative work is unfair  
Myth in operation: Myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat (rather than collaborate as a normal part of the workplace)  
Heroic form in operation: adjudicator sees student as tragic—desperate |
| 3. “In some pieces of writing, it looks like the student is Okay and in others, it doesn’t.” (AD)  
Interpretation: Focus is on the student being Okay or not—Okay for an ESL student  
Myth in operation: Myth of the English test—the test /PLAR can prove competency and legitimize the ESL student’s presence at the institute  
Heroic form in operation: Ironic—problematic—can’t determine whether student has met the course outcomes or not |
| 4. “It’s mediating between the standards of the institution, the standards of good communication and dealing with a changing population of students who have a kind of expertise in some areas but not in others, it’s just not an easy decision.” (AD)  
Interpretation: Changing population of students refers to a change from native English speakers to multi-lingual classrooms—ESL identifier included  
Myths in operation:  
Myth of standard English—standard English is what adjudicators are expecting and recognize as English competency |
Moments of ESL Identifier Inclusion

Myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat—in areas where they lack expertise like English—so adjudicators feel they need to be careful about granting credit with PLAR for ESL students

Myth of weak English—if ESL students can’t pass the PLAR, it’s due to weak English and adjudicators feel they need to be absolutely sure for borderline cases

Myth of the English test—the PLAR is a test of English competency; the ESL student becomes the test score

Heroic form in operation: Ironic form—AD presents issue as educational quality debate and presents as problematic—no requirement for either heroic or tragic ends

Table 12: ESL Identifier Exclusion in PLAR Story from Associate Dean Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moments of ESL Identifier Exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “The student asked, do I get credit for this, for my writing skills or not?” (AD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation: Student wants to know if the samples of actual workplace writing prove the course outcomes have been met and course credit can be given—focus on the writing samples as constituting proof of learning—no ESL identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroic form in operation: Student presents situation to AD as ironic—jumping through all the hoops but not getting an answer to the PLAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “It says to me that as a leader there’s another issue—we should have a debate; we should have a forum for debating the very difficult decision about what is quality—what is the standard?” (AD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation: Focus on contested notion of the standard not on the student—excluding the ESL identifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth in operation: Myth of standard English—questioning it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroic form in operation: Ironic—shift to focus on educational quality and leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conditions for understanding self and others

The principal condition that the concept of “ESL” student seems to create is the high-stakes nature of any test of English, because it becomes a test of competency. In the student
group interviews, the need to keep proving themselves was a common theme as students described the many English tests they had to take over the years. The test scores became substitutes for the “ESL” students, reifying the concept of English competency and putting the ownership of English in the hands of test adjudicators since they judge whether a person’s English is good enough to pass. From the associate dean’s interview, the issues seemed to be reframed as a leadership challenge. The “ESL” label is posed as a problematic, prompting the desire for debate about educational quality. I use the term “problematic” in the sense of everyday experience being linked into a larger social fabric, what Smith (2005) refers to as, “the translation of an actual property of the social relations or organization of our/people’s ordinary doings into a topic for ethnographic research” (p. 39).

Subject portrayal in student and instructor stories

Students and instructors told different types of stories about students at the institute. Students primarily portrayed each other with a sense of irony and sometimes romanticism when they won out in the end, whereas instructors primarily presented students as tragic. Table 13 identifies the narrative form that was used to portray subjects in each of the stories.

Table 13: Description and Analysis of Story Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storyteller</th>
<th>Policy Issue</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Narrative Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacek (Student 1)</td>
<td>English assessment</td>
<td>Writes English test – great hardship in time and money</td>
<td>Ironic – neither defeat nor victory (puts up with it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel (Student 2)</td>
<td>English assessment</td>
<td>Consults friend who took English test three times; passes first try</td>
<td>Romantic – more capable than society (passes first time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto (Student 3)</td>
<td>English assessment</td>
<td>Observes International students</td>
<td>Ironic – neither defeat nor victory (perseverance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 I use pseudonyms for storytellers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storyteller ¹³</th>
<th>Policy Issue</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Narrative Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamid (Student 4)</td>
<td>English assessment</td>
<td>Observes native English speakers getting much higher marks</td>
<td>Ironic – neither defeat nor victory – 75% in course but grammar is heavily weighted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faduma (Student 5)</td>
<td>English assessment</td>
<td>Worked strategically to develop English for admission; took tests, different institutions</td>
<td>Romantic – more capable than society – shopped around/ tried multiple routes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raj (Student 6)</td>
<td>English assessment</td>
<td>Wrote English assessment and passed but communication course difficult</td>
<td>Ironic – neither victory nor defeat – passes test but finds course difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashkhan (Student 7)</td>
<td>English assessment</td>
<td>Graduated with a diploma but didn’t find communication helpful on the job</td>
<td>Ironic – neither victory nor defeat (perseverance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parm (Student 8)</td>
<td>English assessment</td>
<td>Gets into engineering program but finds communication course hard – no spare time to study in the program</td>
<td>Romantic – more capable than society – shopped around for quickest route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily (Student 9)</td>
<td>English assessment</td>
<td>Took International English, then failed English assessment, went to a different institution and passed, got into original program</td>
<td>Romantic – more capable than society - shopped around, got into program and passed course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy (Instructor 1)</td>
<td>English assessment</td>
<td>Accepts student in course in spite of failure and helps him work hard enough to pass the course</td>
<td>Comedic – transformation – student ends up with a higher salary than the instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Storyteller</strong></td>
<td><strong>Policy Issue</strong></td>
<td><strong>Actions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Narrative Form</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob (Instructor 2)</td>
<td>Plagiarism (ESL)</td>
<td>Tries hard to pass people but wonders how students get into his degree course with such low level skills</td>
<td>Tragic – students defeated by society – caught cheating and punished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie (Instructor 3)</td>
<td>Plagiarism (ESL)</td>
<td>Dreams about better support for students and courses that encourage attitude change</td>
<td>Tragic – students defeated by society – some good processes but not enough support for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danita (Instructor 4)</td>
<td>ESL English assessment</td>
<td>Teaches a mandatory support course – but it’s hard to help them improve</td>
<td>Tragic – students defeated by society – don’t bring drafts to class and have to leave the room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma (Instructor 5)</td>
<td>Plagiarism (ESL)</td>
<td>Instructor tries to get her to admit this is cheating – feels manipulated by tears</td>
<td>Tragic – student defeated by society – ends up leaving the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona (Instructor 6)</td>
<td>Plagiarism (ESL)</td>
<td>Instructor uses electronic means to discover who and confronts students</td>
<td>Tragic – students defeated by society – instructor more capable than students – discovers who they are against the odds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student stories**

In their stories, students primarily seemed to portray a sense of irony, presenting themselves as learning from the difficulties of society and remaining trapped until finally passing the assessments. Students told stories of perseverance, presenting themselves as ironic heroes, focusing on the difficult or problematic without the tragic or romantic end. Although they described being overwhelmed by society, they learned how to navigate their way successfully through the educational system. Irony can be seen in comments about being born in Canada and...
Instructor stories

In contrast, instructors primarily presented students as tragic, being isolated from society and their future workplace by the dynamics of something greater and more powerful than themselves – namely lack of English competence. This can be seen in the focus of instructor stories on “ESL” student plagiarism. Students were presented as desperate to get a credential so they could support their families (Instructor Bob’s story); as lacking the knowledge of the Canadian business world to do the work (Instructor Danita’s story) and/or the ability to do the work without plagiarizing (Instructor Connie’s stories); and as devastated after being caught cheating (Instructor Emma’s story). There is one story with a comedic view for the graduating student who would be making more money than the instructor (Instructor Amy’s story), thereby transforming society. Perhaps, instructors’ focus on the tragic is a reflection of the pressure they feel in adapting to increasing numbers of multi-lingual students in the classroom.

Taking up and negating ESL discursive practices at the institute

In the group interviews, students did not identify as “ESL” students but referred to themselves as immigrants, international students, as having been born in Canada, or as not having English as a first language. However, students who need to prove sufficient fluency to meet the institute’s spoken English requirements look for a course with the ESL label. As highlighted in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, the term “ESL” seems to serve an
administrative function, standing in for students with a variety of English levels and styles and signaling the likelihood of the various myths being in operation. In the group interviews, students referred to doing well on all placement tests except English, perhaps to highlight their skill at taking tests and the fact that their English is good enough for them to successfully complete tests in other subject areas. Several students began their story by stating that they were born in Canada and outlined a challenge they had faced in passing English placement tests or trying to get good grades on communication course work. Although students did not self-identify as “ESL”, they showed an awareness of the label in operation and its collusion with the myth of standard English and its counterpart, the myth of weak English. The ESL label functions as an extension of the myths.

The storylines employed by students, instructors, program heads, and the associate dean suggest very different ways in which people present themselves and others, depending on the role they play in the institution. For example, in requesting the PLAR, Maria presented herself as someone with workplace writing experience, while the instructor and program heads presented her as an “ESL” student wanting a PLAR. These different views affect the way in which the subject is portrayed (heroic, tragic, ironic, comedic form). The associate dean described a PLAR process problem, sometimes describing Maria as an ESL student, but also trying to reframe the issue in terms of mediating between the department standards and a changing population of students. The associate dean also mentioned the desire for more discussion about educational quality. These competing storylines are captured in the graphic below (Figure 7). The blue section represents the instructor storyline and the white section, the student storyline.
When I reviewed participants’ stories, the image of a revolving door came to mind. When students described the need to prove their English competency over and over again, in my mind, I saw them trying to navigate a revolving door that eventually leads into and then out of the institute. When instructors told stories of dealing with cheating and plagiarism incidents, I again saw the image of a revolving door as they went round and round trying to catch and deal with academic integrity. The metaphor also captures the myths of standard English, the English test, ESL students being more likely to cheat and weak English – all of which seem to operate together like a revolving door that might lead in or out of the institute. A person might enter through any one of the revolving door compartments, but he or she will definitely go round and round before exiting. As an analytical technique, I now use the door metaphor to extend the analysis to the sometimes outrageous and point the way toward alternative interpretations.

Extending the analysis through speculation on speculation itself

What might be revealed by extending the analysis to the outrageous? The storylines discussed previously and the program head discussion suggest that institute practices with
English tests or cheating, metaphorically open or close doors. What other types of metaphorical doors might be useful in this exercise? I explore these questions through the use of alternative types of doors as section headings. For a narrative strategy, I use the “Rashoman Effect” (named after the movie by Akira Kurosawa; see Wolcott, 1994, pp. 21-22), because it plays with the idea that there is not one version of any event but a different version for each viewer. I develop a short narrative from the point of view of different students, teachers, and administrators. I begin with events that were described by participants in the study and in some cases stretch them beyond what was described. By extending the analysis to the outrageous, I engage in what Wolcott, (1994) called a form of speculating on speculation itself, or a form of noting the implications that one might draw without actually drawing them. Wolcott indicates that this technique is good for raising doubts or questions not easily dismissed. In that spirit, I explore the following questions: In what ways is the English testing process valid or artificial? When might cheating or plagiarism go unnoticed or not be seen as problematic?

Test of institute English

A. Bi-fold Door  (Standard for space saving)

1. He shuffles into the test room with its blue tables in long rows, sets his bag on the floor, and plops into a chair near the front. In front of him is a bundle of yellow papers that make up the test, face down, so he doesn’t touch it. His neighbours have green tests, their neighbours have yellow, and so on alternating across the room. It’s the typical tactic of different test versions to prevent copying. As if you could copy on a writing test; it’s probably a lame topic about what you did on your last vacation and it’s not likely you’d want to write the same thing as your neighbour. He doubts his neighbour’s English is any better than his own, not from the look of her.

   The invigilator puts up her hand to get everyone’s attention and outlines the test rules. He feels like he is on a flight getting ready to taxi down the runway with the stewardess going over the safety procedures. He never listens to the safety talk. Then he hears “go” and the crisp sound of papers being turned over. He begins the test.

   Two weeks later, he gets his test result in the mail. On the thin strip of paper is his name, student number and the test result. It says “U” so he goes to the website to look up the meaning. It says “unsatisfactory”. “Maybe I should have written about a different vacation”, he thinks.
He wonders how he might prepare for another attempt. It’s only English; it’s not like physics that you can study for in advance. Maybe one of his friends can help, one who failed that test several times before passing. Or, maybe he’ll just call the program head and complain.

B. Energy-efficient Door (For peace of mind)

1. She enters the room excitedly with her heals clicking on the polished linoleum floor. The sun streams into the room through a large skylight in the center. A circle of chairs waits invitingly and she thinks of that routine on the TV show, “The Friendly Giant”, the part where the giant is getting ready to read a story and wants everyone to get comfortable. She picks the soft, cozy chair with the pink cushion on it. Right away, a young woman introduces herself as Sharla saying that she will be looking after her today. Sharla offers her a choice of pens, pencils, erasers, coloured paper, dictionaries and beverages and asks her to make herself comfortable in a warm friendly voice as the journey will begin shortly. She’s arranging her things when another attendant brings around warm wet washcloths. “This is nice”, she thinks to herself. Sharla sits down beside her and starts explaining the need to collect a sample of her writing. They explore possible writing topics and she agrees to write about her favourite subject – TV shows and picks up a piece of pink paper. “There’s no hurry”, Sharla’s warm friendly voice reminds her, “Let’s discuss your ideas first and make a plan for how you want to organize your essay”.

After the writing is finished, Sharla goes through the work with her and reads aloud the parts that are strong. They do sound good and she marvels at the creative nature of the writing process. Good writing is like art; it captures the feeling and sense of your thoughts. She’s inspired that she has been able to be artistic in English more and more often.

Discussion.

The vignettes present two versions of English testing in order to address the question: In what ways is the English testing process valid or artificial? While the second version is exaggerated, it does shed light on the standard institute process described in the first version. The first version reifies the test, and the score represents the student’s ability, while the second version implies testing as a complex social process in which all participants have a stake. (I use the standard bi-fold door metaphor since this door is good when you need to save space, when you put function ahead of form.) The second version seems to portray language as a social phenomenon since testing involves more than producing content and is done within a relationship. (I use the energy-efficient door metaphor because it combines function and form with the social outcome of creating peace of mind.)
Test of academic integrity

A. Relief Doors with Bevel Panels  
(Common place, cheap imitation of art)

1. The job advertisement says that a brief description of your teaching philosophy needs to be included so the man goes to Google and types in “teaching philosophy”. He looks through the various links and finds a statement that sounds good, copies a portion of it, and pastes it into his cover letter. So does the woman applicant, and she’s chosen the same paragraph that nicely captures her philosophy. “I couldn’t have said it better myself”, she thinks. Of course, when the selection committee members read the two cover letters, they notice the similar statements, Google them, and find the source. They agree that the paragraph very nicely captures an important element of teaching and fits with the institute’s strategic plan. But why did the applicants plagiarize?

2. The student was hoping to make money by selling his course notes to students in the subsequent intake. After all, buying his course pack would save them from having to take notes and help them prepare for tests. Although the administrators he spoke to wouldn’t come right out and support the project, they saw that students share material all the time and appreciated his entrepreneurial spirit. Sales were OK, thanks to some instructors who let him announce the sale at the beginning of their classes. Then that pesky math instructor complained about not having her permission to use her course material. “Oh well”, he thought, “It worked.” He didn’t really mind discontinuing sales; they weren’t that good and he was getting bored.

3. The instructors were given a deadline for handing over their course material so that it could be sent to an international partner in Asia. As was the custom, the deadline was too soon, but that wasn’t what stuck in the craw of some of us. There were both intellectual property and copyright issues, and when we brought it up, administrators rolled their eyes. Their line of reasoning was something about the need to provide samples to the partnering institution so that they could guarantee course integrity (when they taught our courses). I got around the issue by providing a course outline (which is available publically on the web, anyway) and annotating it with page references to the text-book. There was no way I was going to hand over my entire course binder.

B. Push-release Door  
(Satisfying feeling of using gentle pressure to achieve the desired result)

1. He was devastated by the low mark on his first communication assignment and the instructor had offered to discuss it with him so he agreed to come to her office. He usually didn’t talk to his instructors and going to their offices wasn’t something he ever imagined he would do. She turned out to be quite helpful and nice, even though everyone said she was tough. First, she showed him a couple of models of good writing and discussed their features. Then, she asked him to read his work out loud to her and nodded and moaned at the good parts. Truly, she did moan, and he had to admit it made him feel hopeful.

She gently asked him about a couple of parts and he confessed that he had found them on-line and liked the ideas. She said she liked them as well and praised him for doing the extra research. Then she spent about an hour exploring with him how to put the ideas in his own
words. And, it worked! She was satisfied and so was he. He confessed that he really did like writing (especially in his native language) and was excited about being able to make his English writing match the thoughts he had in his head. She seemed pretty excited, too, and told him about the writing center where peer tutors could work with him in the same way on all his writing assignments. She offered to take him there right away, but it was late and he had to get home.

Discussion.

The multiple vignettes about cheating and plagiarism address the question: When might cheating or plagiarism go unnoticed or not be seen as problematic? The first few examples are actual incidents that were mentioned in the program-head group interview and suggest that the notion of academic fair play is not as straightforward as it would seem. (I use the metaphor of relief doors with bevel panels since they are mass produced and economical with a touch of commonplace artistry.) The second vignette, the push-release door, although slightly exaggerated, captures the best moments of teaching when an instructor and student connect and inspire each other. (I use the push-release door metaphor since it is a feat of engineering that requires the right touch to bring a satisfying result. Too much or too little pressure will not operate the door correctly and frustrate the user.)

These scenarios reveal how institutional efforts to deal with “academic conduct” frame the issue as conduct of students, focusing on student behaviour while overlooking the complexity of behaviours within the institutional context. The examples suggest a suppression of the conflicts that arise in the context of institutional relations and the negotiation of meaning that occurs during those moments of conflict. If we accept Sondergaard’s (2002) view that identities and social categories are constructed through exclusion of the binary “other”, then we can see how conflict might be a valuable resource for bringing about recognition of complexity. Suppression of conflict at the institute reifies false dichotomies between public and private, both in terms of sources of information or ideas and in terms of roles played by different people at the
The vignettes suggest the assumption of fixed notions of public and private information and the assumption that when it comes to academic conduct, student behaviour is more public than employee behaviour. Given that the institute programs involve technical communication, conflicting ideas about plagiarism could provide the opportunity for rethinking plagiarism in the context of workplace practice. For example, Reyman (2008) noted that industry professionals engage in a variety of composing behaviours that do not fit the model for single-authored, original works, and therefore, that academic definitions of plagiarism do not work in the field of technical communication. Typical workplace behaviours such as using templates, relying on existing designs and layouts, collaboratively creating written works, cutting, pasting, and repurposing existing content, show that the roles of writers change depending on the workplace project. Reyman advocates greater dialogue among academics and industry professionals, and with its industry connections, the institute would be in a good position to further understandings of the concept of plagiarism through dialogue of this sort.

This chapter has addressed research question three: What English language storylines are made available to students, instructors, program heads, and the associate dean? I have tracked the inclusion and exclusion of ESL storylines in policy moments at the institute, focusing on policies of PLAR, plagiarism, and English placement testing. This led to a speculation on speculation itself through the metaphor of revolving doors that lead into and out of the institute. I have suggested that suppression of conflicts is an important feature of relations of ruling at the institute, a feature that masks social and economic power differences.

I have explored institute language practices to see what they reveal about processes of administration and governance, and have argued that institute language practices reveal an unequal distribution of social goods like academic integrity and language proficiency, and that
various language myths operate as forms of domination through a discourse of control and homogeneity. English language storylines that include the ESL label serve to suppress conflict which could lead to a more politically-informed understanding of languages and language learners. In the final chapter (Chapter 7), I discuss the extent to which the storytelling process I used in this research proved to be a generative form of bottom-up policy making and educational leadership.
Chapter 7: Restoring Balance: Storytelling as Talking Back to Policy

...there is growing recognition that the ethnography of language policy is about how people themselves actively create, contest, and mediate LPP at multiple levels.

(Hornberger & Johnson, 2011, p. 285)

In Chapter 7, the final chapter in this dissertation, I partially follow the pattern for a concluding section by recapping answers to the research questions and by coming up with some recommendations. I argue that participants can be seen to be talking-back against institute language myths and making alternative storylines available. In addition, I develop dialogic exercises to bring differences into dialogue as a form of reconstruction for more humane language practices. I present recommendations in the form of a wish list from my associate dean’s journal, and I discuss issues of validity and ideas for further research. These points address the readers’ expectation for a concluding chapter.

However, I also disrupt readers’ expectations by using the concluding chapter to answer the final research question and by introducing new storytelling data. In Chapter 7, I address research question four: How does storytelling function as a generative form of bottom-up policy making and educational leadership? This research question demands conclusions about storytelling as a research process, as a form of policy making, and as a form of knowledge. Therefore, reflecting my bottom-up approach to educational leadership, I present my conclusions as an answer to this key question. I follow this chapter with a reflective piece of writing in the form of an afterword which imagines the way forward given what I have learned.

Through this institutional ethnography, I have explored multiple levels of English language policy at the institute, from stories about people’s everyday experiences to policy
documents, and revealed ways in which people have actively created, contested and mediated policy. In this concluding chapter I address the ways in which storytelling proved to be generative and argue that my approach to storytelling created space for reflection, which led to a more complex understanding of language practices at the institute. I use the term “talking back” to capture moments of resistance, moments when, through their stories, people identified themselves as subjects acting upon the world. The following phrase from Freire was identified by the educator bell hooks (1994) as an early influence on her: “We cannot enter the struggle as objects later to become subjects” (p. 46). She credited him with giving her a political language and the construction of an identity in resistance. She later went on to write a book with “talking back” in the title. Inspired by hooks, I argue that my research is a form of talking back as it highlights moments when people and policy documents have something to say to and about one another (Levinson & Sutton, 2001), and it showcases policy as a cultural practice, a practice in which people at the institute used storytelling to claim their identity in resistance. In this chapter, I recap moments of resistance and agency as they unfolded through storytelling, showcasing it as a generative form of bottom-up policy making and educational leadership.

**Storytelling as policy planning**

My method of storytelling involved having participants talk to each other and then record each other’s stories. Once I began to review the stories, I thought there was a gap between the written versions and the rich oral stories I had overheard. I was aware that a story changed when it moved from oral to written form, and that the role of storyteller was probably different than the role of narrator or story writer. When participants told their stories, they used rhythm, tone, volume, and other features of their voice and body to express their experience. When I read the written versions, I saw an emphasis on content, just the facts. To me, the oral and written

traditions proved to be very different, and as a writer I often state ideas out loud so that I can hear what it is I am trying to put into writing. In hindsight, I wonder if I should have taped and then transcribed the participants’ stories myself so that I could have captured features of the storyteller’s voice. This may have resulted in me using the stories in their original form rather than rewriting them, but may have diminished the experience of participants because they would need to be listeners only. Perhaps their experience was richer for the dual roles they played as both listener and narrator. Perhaps this fostered a deeper form of sharing and listening for them and allowed for a greater degree of reflection.

In spite of possible limitations to the way I used storytelling, I argue that storytelling proved to be a useful form of language policy planning at the institute. Through stories, participants revealed the dilemmas of their everyday experiences as they make their way through and go about the work of the institute. As their stories unfolded and were shared, participants reflected on their experiences and explored a more complex understanding of academic issues. The interviews were commandeered as alternative narratives were articulated and participants talked back to policy. For example, program heads said, “we don’t teach courses, we teach students”, asking if standards of education were realistic for each student, and, “there is a fine line between collaboration or teamwork and plagiarism”, identifying the difficulty in naming an act of plagiarism. Thus, at the everyday level, policies that affect English language learners were revealed as sites of struggle and change. If we view policy as both process and product (Taylor et al., 1997) and “policy processes as inherently political in character and involving compromises, trade-offs and settlements” (p. 26), and “policy making as an arena of struggle over meaning” (p. 27), we can see that English language policy in the institute usually involves high stakes. If we view learning English as a high-stakes endeavor, we can see that all assessment will be political.
The high-stakes nature of English at the institute is captured in the following excerpts from people’s stories.

- As a new immigrant, I waited a year before studying English and graduated from an English program but had to take an English placement test at the institute and failed. (Student Faduma’s Story)
- Finally I passed the communication course with 75% but felt I was undermarked compared to students whose first language was English. (Student Hamid’s Story)
- Usually students admit copying. One time a student said he didn’t know how else to do the work and thought he had done a good job. (Instructor Connie’s Story)
- I explained to them that it was okay to collaborate but that the content and organization of their assignments was too similar and a form of plagiarism. (Instructor Fiona’s Story)
- The student needs to pass. And their only hope is to find a few more marks somewhere…It’s too late for that, the help should take place in the context of a course and in an ongoing relationship, not some counting of marks. I’m usually quite frustrated by these [marks reassessment] forms. (Associate dean’s Story)

As can be seen in the excerpts above, students described the many times they had to prove their English competency and meet English standards, and their comments reveal policy as a set of high-stakes rules for admission or grading as well as policy as a process for gaining acceptance into and graduation out of the institute. Instructors told stories about plagiarism policy in a way that highlighted the rules (i.e., students have to do their own work), which shows policy as product, but they also described everyday behaviours at the institute (i.e., students admit copying; instructors explain what’s okay and not okay), which reveals policy as an everyday process. Finally, the associate dean presented marks reassessments of communication
coursework as problematic because “it is hard to find a few more marks” (policy as product) when looking at writing. This led to questioning what type and how much English is enough to pass and how one would recognize “enough” English (policy as an everyday process). When trying to determine if a student’s grade can be increased, the associate dean struggled with meaning and the resulting decisions are a form of policy making.

Storytelling proved to be a powerful method for surfacing the everyday struggles with policy, and the sharing of stories led to a new awareness for participants. Furthermore, the pulling together of the stories in this dissertation is a form of mapping of the social processes related to language policies – the coordinating of policy texts with people’s activities – and a vehicle for making them accessible to participants and others outside the institution. I support the view inherent in Smith’s institutional ethnographic approach that knowledge of how forms of domination are being put together can make resistance possible. I explore the forms of resistance that surfaced in the next section.

**Talking back to policy by rethinking institute language practices**

I argue that the group interviews gave participants the opportunity for contestation and rethinking of their ideas about plagiarism, and in the process they articulated a more complex understanding of context which led to a questioning of language practices at the institute. As program heads were discussing the student and instructor stories, they acknowledged and challenged the operation of the various institute myths. For example, challenges to the myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat led to recognition of copying as a useful form of modeling. Similarly, challenges to the myth of the English test questioned complex social phenomena like language competence.
Challenges to the myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat

From program head interviews, the following comments show reflection on the notion of plagiarism and exploration of working together and copying as useful tools for learning. I argue that this discussion is a challenge to the myth that ESL students are more likely to cheat because it explores the notion of cheating and challenges the idea that people cheat because they lack English language competence.

- With art, you learn by copying work done before by others, it’s a vehicle for learning. For writing, it’s helpful to copy from a model.
- In the workplace, I know some wives of engineers who proof-read their husband’s work; everyone knows in engineering, writing isn’t a strength; in reality, the person who gets ahead in a job knows where their weaknesses are and gets others to read their work.
- When I was in university, I had to write a computer program and students collaborated. The instructor said that two of the programs matched exactly, but as long as both students could explain individually to show their understanding, it was ok.
- I encourage people to collaborate; learning from peers is helpful and enriches learning; we collaborate in the work-place all the time, we share ideas.

Similarly, a political exploration developed around what counts as plagiarism and who gets to judge as program heads shared stories about some forms of plagiarism being invisible and almost socially acceptable at the institute. Their comments below capture this political exploration:

- Some administrators didn’t look at where students are selling instructor notes, a form of plagiarism; they don’t recognize a “problem” and stand up for it.
- Once we had two teaching applicants with PhD’s and they both had the exact same submission for their “model of education”, a requirement we ask for; the two had copied
material from another source in their cover letters without citing the source; how many people around the institute didn’t see it as a problem?

- Instructors were told to submit all course materials so that our international partners could use them; the administrators thought we should just send our material; it was another copyright issue they didn’t recognize.

- If the program leaders don’t see things as a problem, they miss the opportunity to have a conversation with the student; they don’t deal with instances of plagiarism.

*Challenges to the myth of the English test*

Through the group interview, program heads reflected on institute practices around testing of English competence, which provided the opportunity for a wider perspective that included political pressures at the institute. The comments below capture their political reflections:

- If operating on the job is important, then what is our English assessment asking people to do? Is the test not testing workplace communication skills?

- There is pressure on the instructor to take students; the test keeps people out–don’t see it as helpful.

- Why let the student in if he isn’t going to pass? We do need standards for a reason; students get better when they have a reasonable skill set before they are let in the program.

- A program area may have contempt for your subject and want to let anyone in; or is it a numbers game (need more students).

- There is such aggressive recruitment for students, competitive with other institutions.
• There is the budget; programs must fill all seats; they need full capacity, and even overages in all first year programs; this allows for attrition and helps balance the budget; this pressure is only going to get worse; why take the money if a student is going to fail? Then they have to make up the course by taking a full load in the program plus taking the make-up course.

• An entrance level is hard to measure, there are so many branches, you can’t always say what level they are at.

• You have to look at each person individually and give timely support, good features and weaknesses; don’t just record 3/5 or U.

**Talking back to policy by making alternative storylines visible**

I argue that the group interviews provided the opportunity for alternative storylines to surface as participants discussed who or what needs adjusting, and they allowed for reflection on a more complex understanding of fair academic practices (testing and plagiarism).

Students and faculty spoke about communication courses and argued for the opportunity for students to succeed as a building block for future learning. Students suggested that courses needed to be adjusted to allow all students to succeed, and instructors focused on adapting to different students’ needs. The comments in Table 14 capture the beginnings of an open-ended dialogue, which envisions a learning environment that adjusts to a changing population of students. This discussion can be seen as a form of talking back to the policy of set curriculum and grading standards, envisioning a more complex notion of curriculum to meet the needs of students.
Table 14: Alternative Storylines: The Course (Not the Students) Needs Adjusting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>The course needs adjusting so that ESL students have a fair chance of succeeding.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I felt I was under marked compared to students whose first language was English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After graduating, I worked for a year but never used the English that I studied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The course was especially tough on grammar and the program didn’t schedule spare time for studying English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The program didn’t schedule enough time for studying English so some of my classmates copied from previous year’s work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty15</th>
<th>We should give students the opportunity for small successes to build on.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You need to say to students “but look at where you’ve come from” – to help them see the learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have to look at each person individually and give timely support.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, students and faculty discussed English language proficiency and how much English is enough for success at the institute. The comments in Table 15 capture a questioning of the concept of English language proficiency and the utility of tests that are used to measure it at the institute. In this discussion, participants talked back to policy by highlighting their agency, showcasing how they mediate or work around systems.

Table 15: Alternative Storylines: What English is Being Tested?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>I failed the English test at the institute, so I went to a college and passed the test there.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I couldn’t understand my English test result because it only said “unsatisfactory”, so I took a test at a college and was assessed at a Grade 12 level there.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 I use the term “faculty” to indicate instructors and/or program heads. This is partly in recognition of the dual role program heads play at the institute but also to protect the identity of participants.
Faculty

The student had proven his ability to speak and write effectively in a summer job, so I accepted him in my course even though he had failed the English placement test.

An entrance level is not just one test result.

Is there a disconnect between the English test and the actual skills? Is the test not testing workplace communication skills?

Finally, the comments in Table 16 capture how official forms mediate practice in regards to marks reassessment and prior learning assessment (PLAR) of communication skills. The associate dean talks back to policy by envisioning a different way of handling these academic issues preemptively through hallway dialogues.

Table 16: Alternative Storylines: I Wish there was No Form at All

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associate Dean on Marks Reassessment</th>
<th>Whatever help we could be, it’s too late for that; the help should take place in the context of a course and in an ongoing relationship, not some counting of marks. I’m usually quite frustrated by these forms.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I try not to let the form dictate the conversation I have with the student. I try to really get to know the student and what’s going on and …I should probably…talk to the faculty and find out what’s going on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think my frustration with the form is it is too neat and tidy and the situation is really quite messy. I wish there was no form at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes I fantasize about having everyone in the room…the instructor the students, and myself in the room and we’re just talking, but that’s sort of not allowed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associate Dean on PLAR</th>
<th>There was no form for me to fill out, but I had a distraught student and I needed to come up with a solution. So I said to the student, “What do you think the resolution is, what would work for you?” And she said, “I just need an answer right away, do I get credit for these writing skills or not?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel like I need to handle the process preemptively, not wait until some official forms come to me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the things I’m trying to do is mingle with people in the hallways more. And I think I really need to nurture that kind of – the educational conversation taking place in the context of the everyday experience…if I’m there, I’m their colleague so that I can help facilitate solving things at the lowest level.

**Talking back to policy through writing as a form of inquiry**

I argue that writing and rewriting of stories is another form of resistance through dialogue, a form of self-report data considered as talk-in-interaction (Frith & Kitzinger, 1998). The participants talked to each other, wrote up each other’s story, and checked the written version for themselves. And the stories were constructed in a social context through interaction and dialogue. When I rewrote the stories, this was a form of dialogue between me and the data. I wanted to put the stories in a form that would facilitate further dialogue about the content. This was particularly important for the program heads’ focus group, as program heads are also teachers who routinely evaluate writing. I didn’t want them to focus on the writing as a problem, instead of the writing as meaningful stories. When the rewrites were shared with program heads, the dialogue continued as they reacted to the stories, and the stories were retold again in the writing of my dissertation. The stories have become a participant resource (Frith & Kitzinger, 1998), built together through dialogue and reflection, and they reveal the policy of everyday actions at the institute.

**Space for educational leadership – Reconstruction**

I argue that storytelling provided opportunities for leadership as a form of resistance. If leadership is viewed as a function of behavior rather than position, it is possible for there to be leaders at all levels of the institute. Through storytelling, participants articulated the spaces where institute language practices are contested, the spaces where there is opportunity for agency
and change, and the spaces for leadership. Participants revealed moments of agency through their stories that talked back to policy, and in this dissertation, I have tried to bring the stories in dialogue with one another.

Heeding Saukko’s (2003) warning that deconstruction is insufficient for developing a more complex understanding of the social world, I take an additional step toward dialogic politics. Through provocative questions about real institute events, I create the space for future dialogues during which people may become critically aware of the discourses that underpin their actions, and with this more complex understanding, they may be able to imagine other ways of being. The dialogue without a preconceived end in mind would be a form of political action, a critical conversation between different ways of experiencing the world, and therefore a form of dialogic politics. Saukko (2003) refers to a self-reflexive dialogue that illuminates both empowering and disempowering elements of discourses. In previous chapters, I have deconstructed policy texts and the policy of everyday actions at the institute, identifying the effects of language myths that seemed to be in operation. The language myths not only affect English language learners, but everyone at the institute, since the identifying of people by language type buttresses social inequalities. Dialogic politics, therefore, is an important next step in my work.

Inspired by participants’ stories, I have created a set of exercises for dialogic politics which include a provocative question/scenario and outcomes that represent actual events at the institute. These exercises showcase moments of resistance and change, and they are designed to be used with further groups at the institute to promote dialogue. After creating these exercises, I wrote the following notes to myself in the form of a wish list or set of recommendations to myself:
Wish list

- Improve English testing process – validate the test instrument, provide a practice opportunity for students, give meaningful feedback
- Encourage dialogue between program advisory committees and course instructors to prepare students with the English skills they need for actual workplaces
- Challenge institute myths around language
- Trouble the concept of ESL
- Recognize the institute’s multi-lingual context
- Celebrate diversity as a resource for learning

(Associate Dean’s journal)

This list starts out with very practical, process oriented improvements and ends with more open-ended, conceptual changes in thinking. As an educational leader and an educational researcher, I believe my contribution and influence will come through promoting public dialogue, through questioning and challenging the everyday discourse and actions at the institute, through leading an exploration of reconstruction.

I have developed exercises for dialogic politics from participants’ experiences. These exercises highlight dilemmas that participants faced in the stories and reveal the constrained agency of various people at the institute. The exercises recap the findings of my research and get the dialogue started. Each exercise contains a short scenario which ends with a question. These scenarios are based on everyday experiences at the institute and portray what I am calling “the inequality policy of everyday actions” in relation to English testing and plagiarism. They illustrate the complexity of situations that the players face at the institute. The outcomes are based on my associate dean journals, capturing actual events as they unfolded, and showcasing how various people exerted agency. Some exercises have more than one possible outcome, and a couple of them have no outcome specified.

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16 I adopt a technique used in the novel beatrice & virgil (Martel, 2010). At the end of the novel, there is a section with games that describe real events from the Holocaust. Each game is made up of a short explanation of a heart-breaking scenario in a box on its own page. Each ends with a provocative question that takes your breath away.
English testing and plagiarism exercises for students

Scenario Number One

You have successfully met the English entrance requirement for admission into an institute program. During your first term, on communication assignments you get so many deductions for your grammar that you are failing. The instructor suggests that you need to upgrade your English to meet the course standards. Do you complain?

Scenario Number Two

You are told to write an English competency test. You pay and write the test. You are told that your English is “unsatisfactory”, but you can write the test again. You pay and write it again. You are told to upgrade your English. You upgrade your English. You are told you have met the English entrance requirements and are accepted into a program. In the program, you are told your English level is too low to be successful. You don’t understand. What action do you do next?

Outcomes for scenarios number one and two

You complain to the program head who talks to the dean who adjusts the course marks at the end-of-term marks meeting.

You complain to the program head who assigns a new instructor for the course next term.

You withdraw before the deadline so it doesn’t affect your transcript and take the part-time studies version of the course at night with a different teacher.

You work hard but fail the course (which gets recorded on your transcript), and you take the part-time studies version of the course at night with a different teacher.

Scenario Number Three

You are put into groups to work on an industry-sponsored project. Individually, you need to hand in a progress report for your communication course and your group members schedule a meeting to collaborate. Do you attend?
English testing and plagiarism exercises for students (continued)

Outcomes for scenario number three

You attend the meeting and collaborate. When the course instructor returns the graded reports, yours does not have a grade on it and you are asked to come to the office to discuss your work.

You do not attend the meeting and complete your project on your own. When the course instructor returns the graded reports, everyone in your group gets a good mark except you because of your English errors.

Scenario Number Four

You are working hard with the other members of your project group and feel everyone is contributing equally. You are good with numbers so review all the group’s calculations to ensure accuracy. Another group member is better at English than you are and writes up the data. You each have to write your own reports to document the project work. When the communication instructor gives the reports back, everyone gets theirs except you. The instructor asks you to stay behind after the class. Once the other students have left the room, she turns to you and asks a question. What is that question?

There is no outcome for scenario four.

Scenario Number Five

The instructor suggests that you need more help with your English if you want to improve enough to pass the course. You hire an English tutor and spend many hours together working on your final term paper. You get a zero on the paper and are told to go to the instructor’s office. What do you say?

There is no outcome for scenario five.

Scenario Number Six

After you graduate, you receive a survey in the mail asking for feedback on your student experience. Anonymity is guaranteed. What do you say?

There is no outcome for scenario six.
**English exercises for faculty**

**Scenario Number One**

You are new to the institute and return the first graded assignment to students. The lead instructor for the course reviews the marking and tells you the grades are too high. You are told to deduct more marks for English grammar errors to keep in line with the department standards. What do you tell the students?

**Outcome for scenario number one**

*You invite students to review multiple drafts of their work with you before you grade it. You base marks on students' ideas, effort, and the working relationship you've developed with them when assessing the final product. You allow students to rewrite graded work for a higher mark.*

**Scenario Number Two**

You are new to the institute and have two peers observing your teaching as part of your probationary review. They praise your teaching and classroom management skills, but they comment on how students are speaking languages other than English in your classroom. They suggest that you need to control this tendency to maximize student learning. How do you respond?

**Outcomes for scenario number two**

*You hold in your anger and the next time you are being observed, you carefully script the class to minimize the need for students to talk to each other. When you are discussing the review with your supervisor, you ask if it might be useful to allow students to help each other in their native language for part of the class.*

*You hold in your anger and write a research paper on multiple languages as a resource for learning English. You hand this in for one of the courses you are taking toward a graduate degree in education and receive a high mark. This gives you the confidence to speak up at the next department meeting. You ask a question about the possibility of “other” languages being a resource for learning English.*

**Scenario Number Three**

You have won a raffle prize and get to eat lunch with the president of the institute. What do you talk about?

*There is no outcome for scenario three.*
Leadership exercises for associate deans

Scenario Number One

You are eating your lunch when a student knocks on your office door. You let him in and he tells you he is concerned about the International students in his class. He says, they are discouraged and feel there is no hope for passing their communication course. They are spending more and more time on their communication assignments, but their marks are going down. He says they had graduated from a six-month English preparation program at the institute and were told they had met the English entrance requirements. He says they are really smart and getting high marks in their other courses. He asks what can be done. What do you tell him?

Outcome to scenario number one

You tell the student you will talk to the program head and associate dean responsible for the program to explore options. After discussion with your colleagues, you jointly decide to allow students to drop their lowest course mark to boost their grade point average when they are being considered for the co-op program. You also agree to change the instructor and to mentor a new one so that the course standards are better aligned with student success.

Scenario Number Two

You are copied on an email to the deans’ council. It says that student representatives are complaining that some of their classmates can’t write a proper sentence but are passing their communication courses. They complain that “language-challenged” students get leniency in communication courses but “non-language-challenged” students don’t get leniency in math. They suggest that the institute is accepting these international students to address a financial deficit. The faculty members say that these “marginal” students prevent “really good” students from joining institute programs and jeopardize the positive word-of-mouth endorsements. What action do you take?

Outcomes to scenario number two

You hold in your anger and deconstruct the email for a research paper you are writing as part of your graduate degree in Education. You receive praise for your identification of the modes of ideology operating in the email and relations of language and power. You realize there is not much possibility for change unless you share this research with colleagues, and you wonder how to begin.

You hold in your anger and work hard to garner institute support for peer-led conversation groups and a drop-in writing center so that students can get support with their English language learning.
Leadership exercises for associate deans (continued)

You let go of your anger and notice the pervasiveness of multiple languages in use every day by employees and students at the institute. You begin to imagine the possibilities of this rich environment as a resource for improving the world.

Scenario Number Three

You have won a raffle prize which is a private lunch with the president of the institute. What do you talk about?

There is no outcome for scenario three.

In addition to the reflections above, it is my intention to share some of these exercises with various groups at the institute: program heads as part of my regular group meetings as an associate dean, other faculty and administrators at the institute as part of a public presentation of my research, and perhaps faculty department meetings for the various departments under my management. My intention is to keep the discussion going as a form of reconstruction.

Issues of validity and ideas for further research

In this study, I have collected participants’ stories in order to reposition policy review from a top-down exercise to a bottom-up exercise by listening to the perspective from people’s everyday experience and capturing moments of policy as struggle and change. I have reviewed everyday experience as a form of policy and repositioned policy review nearer to those most affected. Given my agreement with the view that policy is a practice of power (Levinson & Sutton, 2001), my work has explored the way policy actors at the institute make policy as a cultural practice.

In the earlier chapter on methodology (Chapter 2), I identified various types of validity relevant to my work, including outcome validity (integration of research knowledge into
people’s everyday knowledge), catalytic validity (discovering opportunities for agency), process validity (problems are framed to permit ongoing learning), and I discuss these further now. I argue that discussion that developed during group interviews was a form of reorientation and refocusing. Participants were energized during the story-telling and review process and began showcasing the moments of agency when they transformed reality (i.e., working around a bureaucratic barrier) as well as envisioning a more complex understanding of their everyday experiences (i.e., fairness of academic practices). For some participants, the work-around was achieved by writing an English test at a different institution, while for other participants, the discussion of challenges led to a questioning of everyday notions of fair practices. The group interviews proved to be catalytic for participants and for me as an associate dean and insider researcher, and they proved to be an effective method for promoting dialogic politics. Taking the dialogic exercises back to groups at the institute will allow the dialogue to continue.

For me, participating in this research, both as a storyteller and the story writer, has provided not only a map of institute language policies in practice, but also a broader view of the notion of policy itself. By connecting everyday experiences with a larger context, I have developed a deeper understanding of how language practices are interconnected with world-wide social issues, an awareness that does not need to stop with the institute and its provincial environs. For example, Skutnabb-Kangas (2008) explores linguistic genocide, claiming that “linguistic and cultural diversity are as necessary for the existence of our planet as biodiversity” (p. ix), and in response, I have created a set of dialogic exercises that could be used at the institute (see Appendix E). These exercises should be of interest to an institute whose vision includes supporting the environmental and social prosperity of the province, and whose strategic priorities include sustainability, broadly defined. My larger perspective was made possible
through storytelling and reflection, which connected everyday experiences to institute policies, and connected autobiography and history. These discoveries are the catalysts for exercising agency, for creating, contesting, and mediating language policy at the institute.

Furthermore, questions that have arisen from this research provide ideas for further study at the institute. From the exercises in Appendix E, questions about linguistic diversity provide direction for thinking about alternative practices which could be explored through participatory action research. For example, students, faculty, and administrators could be asked to brainstorm practices that recognize, protect, and promote linguistic diversity, could be invited to try them out in the classroom, and they could document the experience from multiple perspectives. In addition, groups could be asked to suggest ways that the multiple languages in use every day at the institute could be used as a resource for learning, and a study of the languages in use in the workplaces of the province could supply useful data about multilingualism in practice. These suggestions could be tried and the experience documented from multiple perspectives. These participatory action research projects could be topics of debate in institute newsletters, professional development workshops, on-line publications, and beyond, showcasing the institute’s culture of inquiry.

Dialogue is central to the kind of grassroots policy-making that I have researched, and it is the dialogic process that will be generative in any institution. But the dialogue needs to be informed by acceptance of a social responsibility for institutional practices as a form of policy. What people do and say at the everyday level is part of institutional policy, and educational leadership means engaging in dialogic politics to come up with better social alternatives.

As one of the dialogic exercises in this chapter, I asked what to say to the president of the institute if given a private meeting. As an educational leader, I would invite the president into the
dialogue through the stories of people at the institute and their everyday experiences with language policy as practice. And, I can.
Afterword

In the following story, I revisit language policies in practice at the institute, struggling with the idea of coming up with recommendations in consideration of what I have explored in this research.

I’ve spent six years working on my EdD degree, four of which have focused on the “research”. Why is it called research? If “re” means “again”, have I been searching again, searching the familiar for new meaning? Is this work educational leadership through re-searching language policies in practice at the institute? Re-searching, and then what?

English language placement testing

English language testing has been passed around the institute like a hot potato. One year, I argue to keep it in my area so that it is controlled by the language-teaching faculty. The next year, I argue to give it to the admissions staff in order to reduce expenses in my budget. For the last year, English testing has been part of our international division, and now it’s been returned to my division so it falls on me to make testing economical yet valid and reliable. I also want it to be fair, useful, respectful of the diversity of Englishes in the world, and maybe even emancipatory, but these words don’t appear anywhere in my marching orders. I will have to settle on “not too painful”. Or will I?

We sit around the board-room table in the executive office, which is a suite of offices housing the President, Vice Presidents, and senior administration. It is my favourite meeting space on campus because the yellow wood paneling gives off a warm glow, and the deep green carpet creates a pleasant acoustic. It is on the top floor of the two-story building and affords a pleasant view of the mostly bungalow style, suburban campus. It is one of the few meeting rooms with windows. Today there are representatives from both education and student service areas and the group is tasked with reviewing enrolment processes. To frame the issue, a flow chart has been prepared showing all the possible steps that applicants complete in their quest to become students. The chair of the meeting slowly unfurls the flow chart asking his neighbour to help hold it open, who asks the next person, who asks the next, and the chart goes from one end of the table to the other. The room goes quiet; the chair takes a deep breath and says “OKAY, now you know why we need to meet. We need to simplify this process.”

I sit there thinking to myself that we would need a longer table if the chart included the many times students take a test to prove their English language competency.

Communication course marks reassessment

Recently, I was saddled with administering marks reassessments for 10 students in the same course. They came to visit me one at a time with their stories of the difficulty understanding why they received the marks they did on their writing assignments. One student described his experience as being like walking through a mine field. “You never know when you are going to
suddenly set off a mine”, he complained. I kept thinking that the real issue is the quality of teaching, but the process forced me to adjudicate through marks reassessments. So, each student’s exams were remarked by a new instructor, final grades were recalculated, and a couple of students ending up passing the course. The main barrier to passing was a clause on the course outline that stipulated students had to achieve at least 50% on both the mid-term exam and the final exam in order to pass the course. You couldn’t pass the course if you failed one exam, even if your combined grade was a pass. Many students passed one exam but not both, which is why they asked for a reassessment of the exam they failed. However, the reassessment did not help most students pass the course, only a few. I was disturbed by the hardship this requirement imposed on students, especially those for whom English was not a native language, and I ruled that it is unfair. I was “corrected” by the registrar’s office who informed me that the marks reassessment process did not allow one to cancel conditions published on a course outline. In the end, the dean convened a special meeting with the registrar and deemed the final exam to be unfairly difficult, so final exam marks weren’t counted in student grades. Everyone’s grade was reassessed, more students passed the course, and the resulting failure rate was more in keeping with that in other courses. I was told to move the teacher into a different course, which was a whole different challenge.

Plagiarism

Who is responsible when students cheat at the institute? Are students responsible for being unethical, instructors for not making it harder to cheat, the institute for not having higher standards for entrance? Answer: whoever is the easiest to blame.

As an associate dean, it’s up to me to determine the penalty for plagiarism. Generally, an instructor informs a program head about suspected plagiarism, the program head meets with the student, and the student gets a zero on the assignment. Then, I review the case and determine if the penalty is suitable and write to the student to document the outcome. Often, associate deans also put a note on the student’s academic record so that future acts of plagiarism can be viewed in the context of past actions. And, here’s a secret: I don’t put notes on students’ records because I think getting a zero on an assignment is punitive enough. Some people might judge me as being soft and say that I am undermining the accuracy of student records, and maybe even allowing students to get away with cheating. I believe that a note against a student is too punitive, and there should be more attention paid to creating conditions in the classroom that limit opportunities for plagiarism, like changing assignments every year or working through drafts of essays with students. Sometimes I want to put a note on an instructor’s record, only management is restricted by collective agreements when it comes to recording information about faculty.

Prior learning assessment of communication skills

In my opinion, the institute’s prior learning assessment process (PLAR) is such an expensive way to prove you have met the objectives of a course, and odds are stacked against students with native languages other than English when it comes to proving communication course objectives have been met. It costs something like two thirds the course tuition for a PLAR, and each course is paid for and assessed separately. Learning objectives for communication
courses do not include native-speaker fluency in English, yet in practice prior learning assessments have involved comparing the work to that of a native speaker. In effect, you have to pass for a native speaker in order to be successful, and the underlying assumption is that it is always good for you to study more English. But, of course, educational institutions are always going to be trying to sell you on further education. When proving competency in English at the institute, you never know which move is going to send you back to learn more English. And the whole experience leaves you wondering how much English is enough to move on, and who gets to decide?

Languages that count

I sit quietly at the meeting, listening to a detailed discussion on how many subject areas to include in the list of “breadth courses” for credit in degree programs. At issue is the need for a simple process so that admissions staff can give automatic transfer credit to students with previous post-secondary experience, and admissions has asked for a list of subject areas for which course-by-course adjudications won’t be necessary. The list contains a nice mix of general arts and humanities courses like anthropology, literature, and history which add breadth to institute programs in health, engineering, and business. I notice that languages are not included, so I ask about foreign languages, but I don’t like the loaded term “foreign”. I think about the term “modern languages”, but don’t like the implication that some languages are archaic just because there are few left alive to speak them. I try “language studies”, but that sounds too academic and misses out the whole point about the world being multi-lingual. Ideally, I’d like to be able to give students credit for learning their native language as English speakers get credit for English courses. After all, multi-lingualism brings breadth to the perspectives taught in the English-medium classrooms of the institute. After some debate, the group settles on “languages other than English”, and I celebrate success in broadening our notion of breadth to include languages. At the same time, I wonder about a better term, a term that does not put English at the center.

Leadership

I make my way toward the office door, close it slightly to retrieve my jacket and scarf hanging on hooks in the corner, turn out the light, and let the door close gently behind me. It’s been a tiring day, and as I reflect on all the meetings that took place, I realize that I have more questions than answers today. Being an associate dean at the institute is like that most of the time. It seems nothing is happening except the same old talk and you ask the same old questions, but then some day when you least expect it, you get an answer: you realize that people are talking differently, and something has changed after all. It is important to keep asking the same questions about valid, defensible educational ends and who gets to decide them.17

I head down the long hallway, the route I walk every day. I realize I am holding my breath, as if I am waiting for something to happen, so I breathe out, deeply expelling the same air I’ve been breathing all day. The janitorial staff has changed shifts, and the evening group is now walking down the hall toward me. They are speaking a language I don’t understand, and I enjoy their camaraderie. Students are packing their bags and heading out of a computer lab,

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17 Thanks to Stack et al. (2006) for posing this question.
while exchanging tired pleasantries in a language I don’t understand. Outside the elevator another student is talking loudly into his phone in a language that is foreign to me. Is he telling his family he will be staying late to work on a project or letting them know he will be home soon? All around me the multi-lingual air is filled with people on the move. I sigh and smile to myself realizing that the air will never be the same, if I learn how to breathe more deeply.
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Appendices
Appendix A: Student recruitment flyer – Generic version

Language & Policy Study - Student Recruitment
This research has been approved by the research ethics boards of UBC and the Institute.

HAVE YOU HAD EXPERIENCE WITH INSTITUTE LANGUAGE POLICIES?

Earn $50.00 for sharing your story in a 2 hour small group session

Have you had experience with any of the following Institute language policies?

- English language placement testing
- Communication course marks reassessment
- Plagiarism or putting ideas in your own words
- Prior learning assessment of your communication skills

I am collecting language policy stories from Institute students as part of my thesis research for a doctorate in education from UBC.

In groups of three you will tell your story and record another student’s story on a laptop without using the student’s name and your name as writer will not appear on the story. Your instructors will not read your story nor will this activity count toward your course grades.

I will share stories with program heads from A department, B department, C department, E department, and F department without identifying you in any way. The group will discuss implications for language policy and practices at the Institute with the aim of better meeting the needs of students.

TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CONTACT PATRICIA SACKVILLE BY PHONE OR EMAIL BY SEPTEMBER 22ND, 2009

Dr. Deirdre Kelly
UBC Principal Investigator
Educational Studies
Email: …
Phone: …

Patricia Sackville
UBC Doctoral Student
Institute Associate Dean,
Email: …
Phone: …
Appendix B: Instructor recruitment flyer – Generic version

Language & Policy Study – Instructor Recruitment
This research has been approved by the research ethics boards of UBC and the Institute.

WANT TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH INSTITUTE LANGUAGE
Earn $50.00 for sharing your story in a 2 hour small group session

Have you had experience with any of the following Institute language policies?

- English language placement testing
- Communication course marks reassessment
- Plagiarism or the need for students to put ideas in their own words
- Prior learning assessment of communication skills

I am collecting language policy stories from Institute instructors as part of my thesis research for a doctorate in education from UBC.

With two other instructors, you will tell your story and then write up another instructor’s story on a laptop without using names.

I will share the stories with program heads from A department, B department, C department, D department, and E department without identifying you in any way. The group will discuss implications for language policy and practices at the Institute with the aim of better meeting the needs of students.

Your opportunity to talk back to policy!

TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CONTACT PATRICIA SACKVILLE BY PHONE OR EMAIL BY OCTOBER 9TH, 2009

Dr. Deirdre Kelly
UBC Principal Investigator
Educational Studies
Email: …
Phone: …

Patricia Sackville
UBC Doctoral Student
Institute Associate Dean
Email: …
Phone: …
Appendix C: Program head recruitment flyer – Generic version

Language & Policy Study – Program Head Recruitment
This research has been approved by the research ethics boards of UBC and the Institute.

DO YOU LIKE READING STORIES?
Earn $50.00 for discussing stories in a 2 hour small group session

Read stories from instructors and students about Institute language policies including:

- English language placement testing
- Communication course marks reassessment
- Plagiarism or the need for students to put ideas in their own words
- Prior learning assessment of communication skills

I am collecting language policy stories from Institute students and instructors as part of my thesis research for a doctorate in education from UBC.

Join four other program heads to review a small collection of student and instructor stories. Pick one that stands out for you and tell the group about it. Then discuss implications for language policy and practices at the Institute with the aim of better meeting the needs of students.

Your opportunity to talk back to policy!

TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CONTACT PATRICIA SACKVILLE BY PHONE OR EMAIL BY OCTOBER 16TH, 2009

Dr. Deirdre Kelly
UBC Principal Investigator
Educational Studies
Email: …
Phone: …

Patricia Sackville
UBC Doctoral Student
Institute Associate Dean
Email: …
Phone: …
Appendix D: Knots: Student and instructor stories - Rewrites

Knots

Student and Instructor Stories on English Language Policy Issues at the Institute

Prepared by: Patricia Sackville
March, 2010
**Instructions**

Please read through these student and instructor stories about their experience at the institute with language policies including English language placement testing; communication course marks reassessment; plagiarism or the need to put ideas into your own words; and prior learning assessment of communication skills.

Please pick one story that stands out for you and be prepared to explain why it does. You will be joining four other program heads to discuss the implications of the stories for improving the institute’s language policy and practices.
Students
Student story #1 – Rewrite

I was born in Canada and got a C in English 12 and passed the provincial exam.

I was born in Canada and got a C in English 12 but had to write the institute’s English writing test because I didn’t have a C+ in English.

I was born in Canada and got a C in English 12 but had to write a second English writing test because I didn’t get the equivalent of a C+ on the first writing test.

I was born in Canada and got a C in English 12 but had to take a spoken English test because I didn’t get a C+ in English.

I was born in Canada and got a C in English 12 but had to take a spoken English test with two other students who couldn’t speak much English and the invigilator looked at me with surprise.

I was born in Canada and got a C in English 12 but had to take a spoken English test with two other students who couldn’t speak much English and the invigilator shrugged and said it was policy.

I was born in Canada and got a C in English 12 but had to take a spoken English test with two other students who couldn’t speak much English and the invigilator gave me 100%.

I was born in Canada and got a C in English 12 but had to take two writing tests and a spoken test which cost me $340.00 and three days off work.
Student story # 2:

I must pass this English test or I can’t study electrical engineering.

I must pass this English test or study English for 8 months.

I must study to pass this English test but there is no sample to study.

I must talk to my friend who has failed this test three times to see if she can help me study.

If I pass the test, I get to study English for only half a year instead of 8 months.

When I study English they will teach me how to write; they don’t cover listening or speaking.

I need to listen and speak in order to learn engineering but when I study English, they will cover writing.

I am not good at English tests but I must pass this test or I can’t study electrical engineering.

I want to be a good engineer so I must study hard to pass this English test but there is nothing to study.
Student story #3 – Rewrite

I was born in Canada and have above average English but lose a lot of marks on grammar in my technical memos, letters, and reports.

I was born in Canada and have above average English and lose a lot of marks on grammar in my technical writing assignments but I don’t lose as many marks as the international students.

I was born in Canada and have above average English but lose a lot of marks on grammar and see that a lot of students copy from the assignments of students who have already taken the course.

I was born in Canada and have above average English but lose a lot of marks on grammar and see that students who fail three courses in a single term are removed from the program.

I was born in Canada and have above average English but lose a lot of marks on grammar and see that the course needs to be adjusted so that students who have difficulties with English have a fair chance of succeeding.

I was born in Canada and have above average English and lose a lot of marks on grammar in my technical writing assignments.
Finally, I passed the communication course with 75%.

I passed the communication course with 75% but felt I was under marked compared to students whose first language was English.

I passed the communication course with 75% and felt I was under marked compared to students whose first language was English and I had passed an English competency test before I was allowed in the course.

I passed the communication course with 75% and felt I was under marked compared to students whose first language was English and I had passed an English competency test even though I had completed grade 11 and 12 in BC.

I passed the communication course with 75% and felt I was under marked compared to students whose first language was English and I had already passed an English competency test even though I had completed grade 11 and 12 in BC and had taken an English placement test in high school when I was a new immigrant to Canada.
Student story #5 – Rewrite

As a new immigrant, I waited a year before applying for education in my new country.

As a new immigrant, I waited a year before studying English through a part-time studies program that did not have an admissions test.

As a new immigrant, I waited a year before studying English and graduated from the program but had to take an English placement test before I could apply to one of the institute’s programs.

As a new immigrant, I waited a year before studying English and graduated from the program but had to take an English placement test at the institute and failed.

As a new immigrant, I waited a year before studying English and graduated from the program but had to take an English placement test at the institute and failed so I went to a local college instead and passed the English placement test there.

As a new immigrant, I waited a year before studying English and graduated from the program but had to take an English placement test at the institute and failed so I went to a local college instead and passed the English placement test there and then took courses to earn my high school diploma to ease further admissions issues.

As a new immigrant, I waited a year before studying English and graduated from the program but had to take an English placement test at the institute and failed so I went to a local college instead and passed the English placement test there and took courses to earn my high school diploma and ease further admissions issues but I need further credits to meet the prerequisites of the institute’s programs.

As a new immigrant, I waited a year before studying English and graduated from an English program but had to take an English placement test at the institute and failed so I went to a local college instead and passed the English placement test there and took courses to earn my high school diploma and ease further admissions issues but I need further credits to meet the prerequisites of the institute’s programs and I am enrolled in a first level English course at the institute so that I can try for admission into a full-time program.
Student story # 6 – Rewrite

English is my first language and I graduated from Grade 12 with a high “advanced” English mark.

English is my first language and I graduated from Grade 12 with a high “advanced” English mark but that was more than five years ago so I had to retake several high-school level courses at the institute to meet the prerequisites for my program.

English is my first language and I graduated from Grade 12 with a high “advanced” English mark and that was more than five years ago so I had to retake several high-school level courses at the institute to meet the prerequisites for my program but they didn’t make me take English.

English is my first language and I graduated from Grade 12 with a high “advanced” English mark and that was more than five years ago so I had to retake several high-school level courses at the institute to meet the prerequisites for my program and they didn’t make me take English but I had to write a communication assessment in my first communication course.

English is my first language and I graduated from Grade 12 with a high “advanced” English mark and that was more than five years ago so I had to retake several high-school level courses at the institute to meet the prerequisites for my program and they didn’t make me take English but I had to write a communication assessment in my first communication course and I found it hard.

English is my first language and I graduated from Grade 12 with a high “advanced” English mark and that was more than five years ago so I had to retake several high-school level courses at the institute to meet the prerequisites for my program and they didn’t make me take English but I had to write a communication assessment and I found it hard and I found the communication course more like a second year level.
Student story #7 – Rewrite

I had to write three competency tests to get into a technology program at the institute.

I had to write three competency tests to get into a technology program and passed two easily but failed English.

I had to write three competency tests to get into a technology program and passed two easily but failed English so I had to go to summer school to take English 12.

I had to write three competency tests to get into a technology program and passed two easily but failed English so I had to go to summer school to take English 12 and finally got into the technology program but found the communication course difficult.

I had to write three competency tests to get into a technology program and passed two easily but failed English so I had to go to summer school to take English 12 and finally got into the technology program but found the communication course difficult and after graduating, I worked for a year but never used the English that I studied.

I had to write three competency tests to get into a technology program and passed two easily but failed English so I had to go to summer school to take English 12 and finally got into the technology program but found the communication course difficult and after graduating, I worked for a year but never used the English that I studied and now I am in a degree program and have to study English again.
Student story #8 – Rewrite

My first language is French and I wanted to study at university but I would have to wait for the next English assessment.

My first language is French and I wanted to study at university but had to wait for the next English assessment so I came to the institute where I could take an assessment right away and get into an engineering program immediately.

My first language is French and I wanted to study at university but had to wait for the next English assessment so I came to the institute where I could take an assessment right away and get into an engineering program immediately and in my first term, the communication course was not easy.

My first language is French and I wanted to study at university but had to wait for the next English assessment so I came to the institute where I could take an assessment right away and get into an engineering program immediately and in my first term, the communication course was not easy and especially tough on grammar.

My first language is French and I wanted to study at university but had to wait for the next English assessment so I came to the institute where I could take an assessment right away and get into an engineering program immediately and in my first term, the communication course was not easy and especially tough on grammar and the program didn’t schedule spare time for studying English.

My first language is French and I wanted to study at university but had to wait for the next English assessment so I came to the institute where I could take an assessment right away and get into an engineering program immediately and in my first term, the communication course was not easy and especially tough on grammar and the program didn’t schedule spare time for studying English so some of my classmates copied from previous year’s work but got caught.
Student story # 9 – Rewrite

I have been in Canada two and a half years and I passed the international student English program at the institute but had to take an English assessment when I applied for a technology program.

I have been in Canada two and a half years and I passed the international student English program at the institute but had to take an English assessment when I applied for a technology program but couldn’t understand my result because it only said “unsatisfactory”.

I have been in Canada two and a half years and I passed the international student English program at the institute but had to take an English assessment when I applied for a technology program but couldn’t understand my result because it only said “unsatisfactory” so I took an English assessment at a local college and was assessed at Grade 12 English with a C.

I have been in Canada two and a half years and I passed the international student English program at the institute but had to take an English assessment when I applied for a technology program but couldn’t understand my result because it only said “unsatisfactory” so I took an English assessment at a local college and was assessed at Grade 12 English with a C so I got into a technology program and had to take an on-line communication course.

I have been in Canada two and a half years and I passed the international student English program at the institute but had to take an English assessment when I applied for a technology program but couldn’t understand my result because it only said “unsatisfactory” so I took an English assessment at a local college and was assessed at Grade 12 English with a C so I got into a technology program and had to take an on-line communication course and the instructor made the expectations clear and gave detailed feedback so I could focus on areas where I was weak and I passed the course.
Instructors
Instructor story #1 – Rewrite

It all started when the phone rang...

An engineering program head began telling me about a student, Joe, who he wanted to let into his program as a direct entry (code words for starting in second year and being given credit for first year). Joe was good, real good, and had proven himself in a summer engineering internship. However, he had failed the institute’s English language placement test and was given marching orders to take several language development courses first, before he showed his pretty face again. The gate had been closed and I was given the chance to open it for him: I could accept Joe in my first term communication course, in spite of his test performance, so he could prove his ability and then move smoothly into second year.

Did I feel pressure? I won’t lie; I did. I wanted to be helpful but protect Joe from possible failure. I drew a quick Venn diagram in my head, three circles, and I searched for the space where they overlapped. The institute – the test protects students from failure in their courses; the student – the test sets me back; the program head – the test result contradicts my experience of working with this student. So far, no overlap. Then it hit me. Obviously, the student had already proven his ability to speak and write effectively on the job (the stated learning objectives of the institute’s communication courses). In my mind, Joe had passed the test, so I accepted him in my course.

I proved to be right, after a few hiccups. Joe failed his first exam and explained how depressed and deeply discour aged he was. He felt like giving up. I encouraged him to continue and worked with him and he did pass the course with a 61%, his lowest mark in his program. The next term, he got a 65% in his communication course and I was happy to shake his hand at the convocation ceremonies when he graduated. Just as I was about to turn away, feeling satisfied and relieved for him, he called me back. “I’d like to introduce you to my new employer”, he said professionally. I shook hands with the president of a very well-known engineering firm and got a lump in my throat when I realized Joe’s salary was going to be considerably higher than mine.
I was told to expect students to produce accurate grammar, connected sentences and paragraphs, transitional expressions – you get the picture of typical academic writing. My students are working on degrees, after all, unlike most students here at the institute who are aiming for a diploma. In my first term, I had thirty students in my English class. Many were students from other countries who felt challenged by the demands of the course and I was feeling a little overwhelmed by the course and environment myself. Things were about to get even more difficult.

During an exam, I caught several students cheating. Four or five students had brought in pre-written essays based on the course readings and copied from them during the exam. Since students were allowed to use their textbook and course notes, it was not immediately obvious that they were copying from outside materials, but they kept looking away quickly when I walked by so I knew something was wrong. I collected both the exams and the pre-written essays and found they had essentially copied from them, changing very little. Students got a zero on the exam and failed the course.

During the next term, it happened again with different students. This time, one student admitted he was desperate to gain his credential and be able to support his family and that he had buckled under the pressure. He admitted the cheating and withdrew from the course.

We all seem to agree that getting a degree means you should have a good command of the language of instruction, but some people feel the need to resort to plagiarism and cheating to survive these demands. I wonder about the credentials people used to get into their programs at the institute and how they earned those credentials if they cannot meet the requirements of classes here.
Instructor story # 3 – Rewrite

I like the way the engineering technology program handles allegations of plagiarism. First of all, they want to know about incidents of alleged plagiarism and may punish the students.

1. They convene a meeting with the instructor, program head, and student.
2. They ask the instructor what made them suspect there was a problem.
3. They let the student respond with their explanation.
4. If the student admits it was wrong and blames it on lack of time and feeling stressed, the program head responds that it is precisely when you are stressed, that you need to be ethical, reminding students that they need to pass the test of ethics if they want to be an engineer.

Usually, students admit it. One time a student said he didn’t know how else to do the work and the thought he had done a good job. This suggests problems in determining who is ready for a program of study. Maybe the program should consider raising the test score required for admission. Also, students should be supported with courses on plagiarism and academic ethics. These courses need to deal with attitudes and benefits, to attempt to shift attitudes rather than just prescribing.
Instructor story # 4 – Rewrite

When I emailed the twenty students to tell them they were going to be in a support course, I wanted to say it in the most positive way, so I said they had been “selected”. They were excited at first and then found out that they had failed the diagnostic making this support course an extra requirement for them. They were sad and upset but accepted their fate professionally.

I get to work with them four days a week but there is no model so I do what I can to help them improve their English. I ask them to rewrite their work because I believe this is a good way to learn English but some of them don’t bother and I don’t want to police them or give marks for this work. I try to motivate them with open-book quizzes or by giving them partial answers in, for example, a close type exercises. For their first memo assignment, I asked them to write to the dean about the benefits and challenges of the support course but most students couldn’t understand the assignment. I was trying to test them on their formatting skills – using lists, headings, and subject lines – but they couldn’t even understand the question. Students like the grammar exercises because they feel they can to better by practicing grammar.

The students are nice and hard-working but even they admit they don’t have the background in Canadian business and they don’t get the structure of how ideas are organized in workplace documents. They like the one-on-one support but don’t have the time to dedicate to this course. She loves working with them and enjoys getting to know them. At four times a week, it is quite personal.

Sometimes, I make corrections for them so they can see a perfect document as a reference. I use this to prepare them for the writing assignments they’ll do in their regular communication course. One day I asked them to bring a draft of an assignment so we could work on it in the support course. To police them, I said they would have to leave the class and forfeit the attendance mark if they didn’t bring a draft. Four students had to leave and it was very embarrassing for them.
Instructor story # 5 – Rewrite – Those Crocodile Tears

Origin

_The allusion is to the ancient notion that crocodiles weep while devouring their prey._

_Crocodiles do indeed have lachrymal glands and produce tears to lubricate the eyes as humans do. They don't cry though. Whatever emotion they experience when finding and devouring prey we can be certain it isn’t remorse._ Wikipedia

It was in a rainy, dark, night school class for students who had failed their day school course. As usual, I gave an in-class assignment so that I could be certain that students did the writing themselves. And I marked it against the highest standards since this was repeat material for the students. To be fair, after I returned the work, I offered students the chance to rewrite it at home. I gave them the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and even the opportunity to pass the assignment, but they had to submit both versions of their work so I could track the changes.

The woman in question, made such dramatic changes to her work that I puzzled over what could have happened. The revision contained five paragraphs when the original only had two; the revision was flawless when the original was riddled with grammar and sentence errors. I asked the woman to meet with me after class. I asked her to explain the difference and she praised my absolutely wonderful teaching that had allowed her to improve her writing skills dramatically after a single lesson. I have to admit, I was flattered – but only for a moment. When I asked her to elaborate on the revision process she had followed, out popped a flicker of an admission – someone had gone over it for her to help with grammar – only the minor stuff. I suggested that this help meant that the writing was not hers alone and she disagreed. I tried to educate her on institute policy on plagiarism and the need to credit all sources and I knew I was on firm ground here. Then I added in a gentle reference to cheating, and I quickly followed it with the offer to give extra help to this woman. Before I even had time to finish breathing out my sigh of relief, the tears started and she told me she had quit her job to concentrate on this course which she absolutely had to pass. Thinking as quickly as I could for a solution, I suggested she write me a memo explaining why asking someone to correct your writing and then handing it in as your own was an unfair academic practice. (I believe I used simpler words at the time but carefully avoided the word “wrong”).

She left my office that night and never wanting to return to class. I emailed her to see what was happening and I could practically hear the tears and sniffling as she told me how bad I had made her feel, how she wasn’t sleeping properly, that her whole life was ruined, and she was not coming back. But she did return to one more class when she realized she couldn’t get a full
refund – that’s the institute rule and nothing to do with me. She sat in class and glared at me the whole time. I tried to talk to her after but the tears came back as she said we had different definitions of cheating and that I was being really unfair. She refused to do any more work and walked away before I could say anything more. Strangely, even though she dropped the course, she came to two more classes but wouldn’t do any work. Whenever I looked at her, her eyes would get all red as she glared at me. I explained she was welcome to audit the course but she disappeared. I felt so manipulated as if I could alter standards of education just to suit her needs.
Instructor story # 6 – Rewrite

I had already marked two sets of assignments and handed them back. When I was half-way through the third group, I got this sinking feeling that I had read some of these same details before in someone else’s work but I couldn’t pin point whose. I didn’t give the student a mark and asked him to come to see me. At first he denied that he had worked with anyone else; then suddenly he named a person, then changed his mind and named another student. This was not going to be easy.

Then I realized I had them. I asked all students to submit their work to the institute’s electronic Share-In drive. As computing students, this was a common practice and one I should have adopted a lot earlier. I met with the two students whose work was similar. I explained to them that it was okay to collaborate but that the content and organization of their assignments was too similar and a form of plagiarism.

When I went home and told the story, my spouse called me Columbo.
Appendix E: Dialogic exercises based on *Linguistic Genocide in Education*, (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008)

“Linguistic and cultural diversity are as necessary for the existence of our planet as biodiversity” (p. ix).

If you accepted this argument, what do you think the institute could do to recognize, protect, and promote linguistic diversity? How might this argument support the institute’s “sustainability” agenda? How might it support the institute vision: “integral to the economic, social and environmental prosperity of the province”?

“Deficiency-based” models – invalidate the linguistic and cultural capital of minority children and their parents and communities – they make the resources of dominated groups seem handicaps or deficiencies, instead of valued and validated non-material resources, or they render them invisible and therefore not possible to convert into material resources and positions of structural power” (p. x)

If we think of all languages as a form of capital, how might we recognize the linguistic capital that students are bringing into the classroom? How might we recognize the linguistic capital of our staff? How might recognition help convert this capital into material resources?

“English and other dominant languages tend to be projected as the languages of modernity, science and technology, success, national ‘unity’, democracy, and other such positive features” (p. xi).

In what ways do language practices at the institute reinforce this idea? In what ways do they challenge this idea?
“The relationship between the dominant and the dominated is rationalized so that what the dominant group and its representatives do is always presented as beneficial for the dominated – serves to legitimate and reproduce unequal access to power and resources and present those with more access as ‘helping’ those with less” (p. xi).

Think of the words we use to describe our language practices with students. Make a list and turn to your partner to discuss.

“One necessary tool in the remedies could be linguistic human rights (LHRs). It is claimed that the duty of human rights is to overrule the law of supply and demand and to remove price tags from people and from basic necessities for their survival and for a dignified life, including education, and linguistic human rights are central to this” (p. xi).

How might you word the linguistic human rights of institute students? What do you think a student’s individual educational LHRs should be?

“Formal education does not make the bulk of dominant-group high-level multilinguals, or truly multicultural, or even appreciative of linguistic and cultural diversity. Education systems reflect monolingual reductionism – monolingualism is seen as normal, inevitable, desirable, and sufficient” (p. xii).

Think of examples of monolingual practices at the institute. How might we behave differently?

“Possible LHRs: everyone has the right to
Identify with their mother tongue(s) and have this identification accepted and respected by others

Learn the mother tongue

Use the mother tongue in most official situations (including schools)

Profit from education, regardless of what her mother tongue is” (p. 502)

Review the list of linguistic human rights and think of ways that these would impact daily life at the institute.

“One way of forcing voluntary monolinguals to see what their monolingualism costs the rest of the world is that we multilinguals for a while give them back their own medicine. First we could have a policy whereby in all official situations nobody is allowed to use their mother tongue. Everybody has to us a second/foreign language. Then stop learning (or at least using with them) their languages.” (p. 666).

Imagine a day at the institute where this policy is in effect. How would you go about your work on this day?