

VANCOUVER'S PRIVATE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE INDUSTRY:  
DISCOURSES AND DEREGULATION

by

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 .....	3
1.1 Introduction.....	3
1.2 Research Methods.....	7
1.3 Conceptual Framework.....	8
1.4 Literature Review.....	11
Chapter 2 The Context of Vancouver's ESL Industry.....	16
2.1 General Industry Overview.....	16
2.2 Private Language Schools .....	17
2.3 Agents and Sales Offices.....	17
2.4 Languages Canada and Predecessor Organizations.....	19
2.5 Government Bodies.....	22
2.6 Teachers' Organizations.....	24
2.7 Canadian Education Centre Network.....	24
2.8 Homestay and Residences .....	25
2.9 Tour Companies.....	26
2.10 Internships.....	27
2.11 Impact on Miscellaneous Businesses.....	28
Chapter 3 Legitimacy and Regulation in the Private ESL Industry .....	30
3.1 Languages Canada's Discourse: Students as Economic Asset, and the Struggle for Legitimacy.....	30
3.2 Media Discourse: International Students as Victims or Criminals.....	33
3.3 Government Discourse: Regulation in Public, Deregulation in Private.....	36
Chapter 4 Shaping Student Impressions: Industry Discourse .....	39
4.1 Private Language Industry Discourse: Naming Schools.....	39
4.2 Private Language Industry Discourse: "Intensive" and Confusing.....	41
4.3 Private Language Industry Discourse: Preparing for University .....	42
4.4 Private Language Industry Discourse: Homogenizing Canadian Families and Culture.....	44
Chapter 5 Conclusions .....	48
5.1 Discourses of Regulation and Legitimacy.....	48
5.2 Naming Programs, Naming Canada.....	50
5.3 Future Research Directions .....	52
5.4 Final Thoughts.....	53
References.....	54



## Chapter 1

### 1.1 Introduction

As an English as a second language (ESL) teacher, I am have the opportunity to see my country and city through the eyes of my students, who are all newcomers to Vancouver. I get a sense of their first impressions of the city, and the things that surprise or perplex them. Some of the students feel the city is a safe one, others are frustrated that our transit doesn't run on time. Many of them are shocked by the number of homeless people on Vancouver's streets. And yet, one theme that has come up over and over in my conversations with my students it their surprise at Vancouver's diversity. They are surprised that their homestay family consists of new Canadians; I have overheard conversations like this one quite often. Student A: "Where is your homestay family from?" Student B: "The Phillipines." Student A: "Oh, of course.". Or I hear comments that combine general frustrations with life in Vancouver with racial assumptions, like the student who complained he couldn't get on the Skytrain because of "all of the Asians who pushed in front of [him]".

It is a challenging task to try to unpack the complex web of factors which influence people's perceptions of a foreign country, and their expectations upon visiting a foreign country. They will have likely seen images of their destination on television, or in film. They may have read about it, spoken to people who've been there, or even been there themselves at an earlier date. Yet when students choose

Vancouver as a study destination, it is a fairly safe assumption that they have done some research on the school that they'll be attending. Potential sources of information about studying in Vancouver might include agents, educational fairs, word of mouth, or even knowing someone who owns a school in Vancouver. In today's day and age, the most ubiquitous source of information is the internet, and likely students have gone online to examine the many potential schools that could cater to their needs in Vancouver. As such, it is worth examining these websites as a possible source of students' attitudes and expectations about life in Vancouver, and about who is a Canadian.

Vancouver is home to many private language schools, as well as a number of public sector programs which are offered through universities for foreign students, and through immigrant-settlement organizations for newcomers to Canada. As a teacher who works in the private language sector in Vancouver, I am interested in examining how our industry is marketed abroad, and how the marketing strategies utilized by industry members construct an image of Vancouver which may or may not be reflective of the reality of Vancouver. As much as possible, I will focus on the private schools delivering English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, as they fall outside of the auspices of institutions such as universities which are generally more regulated and scrutinized by both the media and the general public.



The term English as a Second Language is a somewhat deceptive one, as many students are learning English as a third or fourth language. However, as it is the most commonly known industry acronym, and the one most widely utilized by government, I will use it for the duration of this paper instead of an alternative term, such as English as an Additional Language (EAL) which is a less well-known acronym but likely a more accurate one.

As I considered how the private language industry and its members market themselves to the world, I began to wonder about how our industry is regulated. Does the government have a role in the formation of the international perception of Vancouver to students abroad? Do they regulate the kind of marketing claims that are made? It is apparent to even a casual observer that the private ESL industry is a lucrative one here in Vancouver. What protections are afforded to students who come to Vancouver to study, and what controls does the government place upon the industry to ensure that students' experiences live up to their expectations?

In this graduating paper, I hope thoroughly examine the following questions:

- 1) What roles do the federal and provincial governments play in regulating the private ESL industry in Vancouver? and
- 2) What image of Vancouver and Canadians is created through the marketing materials schools use to advertise their services to students in distant countries?



In order to address these questions, I will proceed in the following manner. In the remainder of Chapter One, I will review the literature available on Vancouver as a locus for ESL instruction and provide the rationale for choosing Critical Discourse Analysis as my research methodology. Chapter Two will focus on outlining the context of the local ESL industry, formed as it is by a web of interconnected businesses, agencies, and government bodies. Chapter Three will examine the relationship between governmental and industry groups in regulating, or in not regulating, private ESL schools, and the resulting insufficient protections for international students. Chapter Three will examine the relationship between the private ESL industry and governmental bodies as disparate as the British Columbia's Ministry of Advanced Education, and the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service. It will also examine the local media's construction of ESL students as both victims and criminals. Chapter Four will examine the marketing materials of various local ESL schools and analyze them for information that they provide about the way Vancouver and our citizens are constructed and presented to the world. The fifth and final chapter will attempt to synthesize the wealth of information provided, and then determine whether my central research questions have been answered.



## 1.2 Research Methods

To evaluate the role of government in regulating the private ESL industry in Vancouver, I will examine all available provincial and federal government websites and reports. Of particular interest to me is information published by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (AVED), as the flow of international students is regulated by CIC, and the private ESL industry in Vancouver falls under the auspices of AVED for regulation at the provincial level.

In order to examine the relationship between government and the private ESL industry, as well as the industry's self regulation, I will examine materials published by Languages Canada (LC). Languages Canada is an organization which represents both public and private language education providers in Canada, and which will be discussed in more depth in Chapters Two and Three.

I will also be examining materials published both in print and online by private language schools themselves. I will be examining these materials to see what kind of image they construct of Canadians, Vancouverites, and diversity in Vancouver. In all cases, I will be using qualitative analysis of published materials to uncover relevant themes which will allow me to address my central research questions.



### 1.3 Conceptual Framework

Language is the primary means of communication we have as human beings, and the language we use has the power to shape and change our reality. Anthonisson (2006) champions Critical Discourse Analysis as recognizing that "language is not a neutral instrument- it has an active interpretative and constructive function, in that the linguistic means speakers choose actually contribute to shaping the entities they are referring to" (p.72). It is vital to recognize that language is not a neutral, but rather a constructive, medium, especially as Luke (1995) argues that "spoken and written language, face to face and electronically mediated, is the principal medium of commercial exchange" (p.5). Critical Discourse Analysis is ideal for examining how language is used to shape relations between government and private ESL schools, and also between schools and potential students, as it addresses the fact that "it is extremely risky to engage in the construction of texts of curriculum, educational policy, and research without some explicit reflexivity on how and whom we construct and position in our own talk and writing" (Luke, 1995, p.40-1). Written and spoken texts construct certain groups in ways that serve the interests of the authors of said texts. As Anthonissen (2006) notes, Critical Discourse Analysis is explicit about its interest in the language of dominance, of power, of sensitive social issues. It set out to disclose how language functions not only in shaping societal patterns, but also in shaping the mindset that underpins and enables individuals and groups to affirm particular social practices (p.76).



Luke (1995) draws on the work of Baudrillard in arguing that "texts, images, and representations have become both the means and objects of processes of commodification" (Baudrillard, 1981)". The words we choose serve to commodify and describe particular groups, and can be used to legitimize specific power dynamics or relationships. This is of particular importance when analyzing government and institutional discourse, for as Anthonissen (2006) notes, this kind of discourse "is seen as a form of social action which reflects the essence, aims, attitudes and functions of a particular organisation, and at the same time constructs all these features of the organisation" (p.82). Critical Discourse Analysis allows analysis of the motivations of organization through the analysis of "textual features such as the preferred styles and communicative strategies, technical registers used, and so on" (p. 82). It is crucial to examine discourse with an analytical eye, as at times institutional discourse "has an intended but improper effect, such as misleading, maliciously concealing, humiliating, or inciting violence" (p. 80). While it is unlikely that private language schools are attempting to incite violence with their marketing materials or lobbying efforts, advertisements for any product are often misleading.

It is equally possible that governments would use discourse to cast their actions in the best possible light. Anthonissen (2006) states that "it is to be expected that many of the discourses in which CDA takes an interest will be from domains of governmental decision-making, or at the interface where government communicates



with other institutions or with lay persons affected by their policies and actions" (p.82). It is precisely this interaction between government and the private language industry which is of major interest to me. As Luke (1995) notes, the purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis "is to disarticulate and to critique texts as a way of disrupting common sense" and that this "disarticulation can involve the analysis of whose material interests particular texts and discourse might serve, how that articulation works on readers and listeners, and strategies for reinflecting and rearticulating these discourses in everyday life" (p. 19). Luke also contends that Critical Discourse Analysis should be of particular importance to educational researchers, as educational research occurs at a junction where institutional, governmental, and private sector interest meet, and where "larger political and economic interests that influence what can be said, by whom and in what terms across and within institutions" (p.3).

Although it is an extremely useful tool with which to examine the discourse of government and the private ESL industry around various issues, Critical Discourse Analysis is not an infallible tool with which to explain student impressions of Vancouver and its citizens. Luke (1995) notes that discourse elements are not fixed and unchanging in meaning, but evolve along with their contexts. Additionally, "discourse unfolds unevenly across institutional sites, and often the "uptake" of particular discourses in local sites and texts is idiosyncratic and unpredictable" (p.



28). Certainly, the contexts of individual students vary significantly across varied cultural and educational contexts, and as a result the way they process or “uptake” ESL industry discourse may vary. When considering the discourse of the industry with government, it is worth noting that the industry’s discourse is likely to be shaped by the orientation of the government in power, and the government’s “uptake” of this discourse will be affected as well.

In the context of this paper, I will be examining a number of specific discourses. Chapter Three explores the fearmongering discourse of the Canadian media, which constructs students as both criminals and victims of crime, and the discourse of Languages Canada towards the federal government, which constructs students as valuable contributors to Canada's economy and itself as the legitimate voice and self-regulator of Canada's language industry. It also delves into the regulatory discourse of British Columbia's provincial government, sends one message to the public, but another to the industry. Chapter Four examines a number of the private language industry's discourses, including how the industry names schools, programs, and even Canadian families and cultures, to create specific students expectations, which may or may not be delivered upon.

#### 1.4 Literature Review

Literature on the topic of English as a Second Language covers an immense variety of topics. Some researchers are concerned with the mechanisms through



which people learn new languages. Others are concerned with particular types of instructional approaches to teaching English as a Second language. Others still are interested in exploring language as a social phenomenon, and its affect on identity. The topics of interest are almost innumerable.

Research is much more limited, however, when it comes to the business of providing ESL instruction as a for-profit enterprise. This is true of the Vancouver ESL industry in particular. Although this is a financially significant industry with a large student population, there is almost no exploration of the private ESL industry of any location. Instead, the literature which focuses on ESL training in Vancouver takes as its subject the same few contexts which are broadly represented in much of the literature around ESL: the public school system, university context, and to a much lesser degree, literacy programs.

The public school system in Vancouver, BC has been the focus of a number of ESL studies. Beckett (2005) examines the impact of project-based instruction on how ESL students were socialized to learn academic and literacy skills. As such, Beckett's study encompassed an instructional method, and an examination of how students were indoctrinated into particular socially valued language practices. Gunderson (2002) studies the mandate and efforts of the Oakridge Reception and Orientation Centre in placing students in the Vancouver School Board's catchment area into appropriate schools and programs within the public school system. Gunderson



(2000) also used the voices of teenagers in Vancouver's public secondary schools to illustrate problems students encountered in acclimating to Canadian schools, and the lack of appropriate accommodations that local schools made to the needs of these learners. Liang (2004) examines the attitudes of secondary school students of Chinese descent towards group work activities in Vancouver classrooms. Toohey and Derwing (2008) analyze statistics from the Vancouver School Board to critically analyze the success rates for ESL students in local secondary schools in the face of provincial government claims about ESL student success rates. Wyatt-Beynon et al. (2001) conduct a case study of an ESL co-op program located in a suburban Vancouver school district which seeks to accommodate the needs of ESL students in secondary schools which attempts to provide students with language and career skills. Zhang, Ollila and Harvey (1998) examined Chinese parents' attitudes to their students' education (in English) in BC.

Local scholars such as Shi (2006) have examined issues such as plagiarism and how they relate to university students' cultural backgrounds. In analyzing the literature on ESL in university contexts, it is more difficult to attribute particular studies to local university contexts, as many authors, like Shi, do not publish the exact location their study took place. Instead, to preserve anonymity, they state that their research was conducted at a "large North American university", for instance. However, given that the Metro Vancouver area is host to two large research



universities, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of the work of local scholars is sited here, even if it is difficult to determine which ones.

Adult ESL learning in Vancouver has been examined from several directions. Cumming (1991) examined literacy among Punjabi-born women studying English in Vancouver. Goh (1996) wrote her master's thesis on the topic of using myth and fairytales in her class of immigrant adult ESL learners. Perhaps the scholarship which is closest to the context of my current project is that of Hodge, whose 2005 master's thesis examines issues of teacher identity among non-native English speakers teaching in the private ESL industry in Vancouver.

As there is a lack of scholarship related to the private ESL industry in Vancouver, I will rely on primary sources for the bulk of my information. Much of the information available about the private ESL industry in Vancouver must be cobbled together from various governmental and industry sources, as well as sources such as newspaper articles. As the focus of my research is a private-sector industry, the available information is limited as there is no obligation on industry members such as private language schools to disclose information about student numbers or earnings. This further reinforces the need for Critical Discourse Analysis in order to decode and deconstruct the non-neutral discourses of government and industry.



## Chapter 2 The Context of Vancouver's ESL Industry

### 2.1 General Industry Overview.

Assessing the size of the private ESL industry in Vancouver is challenging, as available data does not differentiate between public and private ESL institutions, or it focuses on national data, or data only from members of specific organizations.

Skelton (2008) notes, in an article for the Vancouver Sun, that "BC alone had 44,799 foreign students as of 2006, second highest after Ontario at 58,308"<sup>1</sup> (p.1).

However, another article in the Vancouver Sun states that "the number of international students in BC has been increasing steadily from 18,374 in 2004 to 21,900 in 2007, or 19 per cent, according to the Ministry of Advanced Education"<sup>2</sup> (Lee-Young, 2009).

It is indisputable that the ESL industry makes a significant contribution to British Columbia's economy. Languages Canada values the ESL sector as worth \$1.5 billion to Canada (Lacombe, 2009). Watson (2008) estimates that private career training institutions and ESL schools "contribute (directly and indirectly) close to a billion dollars to the economy"<sup>3</sup> (p.3). In order to understand just how lucrative this industry is, it is helpful to examine the web of interconnections between public and private

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1 Retrieved from <http://www.vancouversun.com>

2 Retrieved from <http://www.vancouversun.com>

3 Retrieved from <http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/publications/documents/PCTIA-Review.pdf>



interests in the various sectors that surround and comprise the ESL industry in Vancouver.

## 2.2 Private Language Schools

The number of schools providing private ESL instruction in Vancouver is also somewhat nebulous. The Ministry of Advanced Education's own website states that there are over 100 private institutions across the province offering this kind of instruction<sup>4</sup> ("Private English as a Second..", para. 2). A report prepared for the Ministry of Advanced Education numbers between 150-200 ESL schools in British Columbia, and states that they serve "approximately 100,000 ESL students"<sup>5</sup> (Watson, 2008, p.3). Watson also notes that "because ESL schools are not regulated, official statistics about them are not available" (2008, p. 4). Some ESL schools are members of Languages Canada, an industry association which is discussed in detail below. At this time, private ESL schools in Vancouver are not governed or regulated by any branch of federal or provincial government.

## 2.3 Agents and Sales Offices

The vast majority of the clientele for private language schools in Vancouver is made up of international students. Local schools range in size from small, standalone operations to branches of multinational language schools. Some of the larger

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4 Retrieved from [http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/privatecareertraining/private\\_esl.htm](http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/privatecareertraining/private_esl.htm)

5 Retrieved from <http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/publications/documents/PCTIA-Review.pdf>



language schools may have branches or sales offices abroad, and in that case it is the responsibility of the sales offices to generate a student body for the local ESL school. Most often, however, smaller language schools rely on a network of agents to attract students to their facilities.

Agents are overseas sales representatives who recruit students for the language schools they represent. In the local ESL industry, agents occupy a powerful position, as they secure the students, who, in turn, secure the school's income stream. I have actually seen schools physically cleaned up in advance of agents' visits, as the administration of the school seeks to create the most favorable impression possible on the people who will be their advocates abroad.

The Languages Canada website states that Agents are important partners for Languages Canada member programs. They play an important role in providing advice and information to help students choose which language training provider and program is best for them. They give advice to students about the different programs and course options and about studying in different areas of Canada. They are knowledgeable about program fees, living expenses, visa requirements and are able to make necessary arrangements for program registration, accommodation, travel and often additional services<sup>6</sup> (Languages Canada, "Agents", para.1) and also that agents are often paid on a commission basis by the schools, although students are

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6 <http://www.languagescanada.ca/en/agents>



sometimes charged a fee. The Languages Canada website does not state that this could presumably create conditions where students are recommended to particular schools based on the size of the commission the school is paying the agent rather than the suitability of the school to the student's particular academic needs.

Unfortunately, there are other possibilities for abuse of students. Agents are also unregulated, and Skelton (2008) notes that "types of fraud are facilitated by shady recruiters and consultants who connect immigrants to schools and often provide forged academic documents. In some cases...foreign students actually believe a visa mill is a legitimate school until they arrive and realize they've been conned" <sup>7</sup>(p.1).

#### 2.4 Languages Canada and Predecessor Organizations

Languages Canada is a relatively new organization which represents both public and private language schools in Canada. They also represent programs that provide French as a Second Language programs as well as those that provide English instruction.

Languages Canada was formed in 2008 out of two predecessor organizations. The first of these was the Canadian Association of Private Language Schools (CAPLS). Of the 85 schools who were members of CAPLS, 29 were located in the Metro

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<sup>7</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.vancouver.sun.com>



Vancouver area<sup>8</sup> (CAPLS, "CAPLS Member Schools"). CAPLS members were governed by a Code of Ethics, which included promises to "recognize, respect and promote the diversity of culture and ethnicity inherent in the international education industry"<sup>9</sup> (CAPLS, "Code of Ethics"), and "provide and maintain high quality language training, accommodation (if applicable) and related services, and to employ qualified staff to provide these services" (CAPLS, "Code of Ethics"). CAPLS members were also required to adhere to certain quality standards which governed teacher qualifications, and resolution processes for homestay-student disputes, for example<sup>10</sup> (CAPLS, "Quality Standards", 2005).

The other organization from which Languages Canada originated was the Canada Language Council (CLC). They represented themselves as "Canada's premier language organization representing the two official languages: English and French as well as the public and private sectors"<sup>11</sup> (CLC, "Canada Language Council", para.1).

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8 Retrieved from

[http://web.archive.org/web/20061030154615/www.capls.com/en/study/school\\_search\\_results.asp?filter=true&prov=Any&snav=2](http://web.archive.org/web/20061030154615/www.capls.com/en/study/school_search_results.asp?filter=true&prov=Any&snav=2)

9 Retrieved from [http://capls.com.way\\_back\\_stub/English/about/capls-code-of-ethics.asp](http://capls.com.way_back_stub/English/about/capls-code-of-ethics.asp)

10 Retrieved from

[http://web.archive.org/web/20050302181615/capls.com/English/about/pdf/quality\\_standards\\_2005.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20050302181615/capls.com/English/about/pdf/quality_standards_2005.pdf)

11 Retrieved from <http://web.archive.org/web/20070701012353/http://www.c-l-c.ca/index.html>



Members were required to adhere to an extensive number of standards which were widely regarded by my colleagues in the ESL industry as more rigorous than those of CAPLS. There were 21 members of CLC in the Metro Vancouver area, including a number of university and university-college ESL programs<sup>12</sup> (CLC, "The Province of British Columbia"). The large proportion of public-sector, post-secondary ESL programs is the largest distinguishing factor between the membership of CLC and that of CAPLS.

Languages Canada was formed to "be the voice of the Canadian language training sector" and with the goal of becoming "internationally recognized as a symbol of excellence, representing Canada as the number one destination for quality English and French language training"<sup>13</sup> (Languages Canada, "About Us"). In this respect, Languages Canada is positioning itself as a competitor to better known language accreditation bodies, such as the British Council in the UK. In order to secure its position in the global language industry, it is lobbying the federal government for changes to the process for awarding student visas, including increasing transparency for the visa process, making the visa process easier, and making Languages Canada members the only schools who can provide letters of acceptance, which are necessary for the awarding of student visas under the current

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<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from <http://web.archive.org/web/20070716171141/www.c-l-c.ca/approvedprograms/maps/mapofbritishcolumbia.html>

<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.languagescanada.ca/en/about-us>



process (Lacombe, 2009). The achievement of this last goal in particular would provide Languages Canada members with a very significant advantage over non-members, as they would be the only schools able to offer students a way into Canada. A comparison of the lists of former CAPLS and CLC members with current Languages Canada members reveals that only two organizations that were accredited by CAPLS and/or CLC are not approved Languages Canada programs. It appears that although Languages Canada may tout its "rigorous evaluation process" (Lacombe, 2009, p.7), membership is attainable for the vast majority of previously accredited language schools.

## 2.5 Government Bodies

The activities of private ESL schools in Vancouver are relatively ungoverned, either at the federal or provincial level. The federal government entity that has the most impact on language schools is the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). The importance of this ministry's influence on the private ESL industry locally is with regard to the granting of student visas. Through CAPLS and Languages Canada, the private ESL industry has been lobbying CIC for amendments to the granting of student visas which would place Canadian language schools in a better position to compete with schools in Australia, the US, and the UK.

Languages Canada has also been lobbying the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAIT) for the inclusion of language schools in the EduCanada brand;



DFAIT has also provided Languages Canada with money to “prepare a five-year Marketing Plan for the association” (Languages Canada, 2009, p.5). Currently, only “provincially and territorially regulated institutions have access to the brand but private sector institutions do not” (Languages Canada, 2009, p. 5). The private language training sector also received a Product Export Market Development Grant for \$61,500 in order to participate in overseas workshops and to create promotional materials for trade shows, among other objectives (Languages Canada, 2009).

Several school administrators and academic directors of local language schools have told me that they have occasionally been contacted by the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) for information about students who are visiting Canada on student visas, and who are enrolled at their schools.

In British Columbia, the regulation of the ESL industry, or lack thereof, is the responsibility of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development . Currently in BC, the Private Career Training Institutes Agency (PCTIA) is authorized by the Ministry of Advanced Education to regulate private sector career training institutions<sup>14</sup> (PCTIA, “Private Career”). The Private Career Training Institutions Act, which empowers the PCTIA, does not regulate ESL or other private language schools. As a result, language schools are unregulated in British Columbia.

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<sup>14</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.pctia.bc.ca/contact.htm>



## 2.6 Teachers' Organizations

In British Columbia, the requirements for teacher certification are set by Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Canada. TESL Canada is the "national federation of English as a Second Language teachers, learners and learner advocates"<sup>15</sup> (TESL Canada, "Home Page", para.1). The current certification standards seek to allow teacher qualifications to be recognized across provinces and according to recognized standards <sup>16</sup>(TESL Canada, "National Certification Standards"). This represents a shift of responsibility for teacher certification from provincial bodies such as TEAL BC to the national body, TESL Canada.

Languages Canada members are required to hire teachers who meet TESL Canada's Level One Professional Certification<sup>17</sup> (Languages Canada, "Quality Assurance Scheme"). Not all language schools are members of Languages Canada, however, which means that not all private language schools are necessarily hiring teachers who meet TESL Canada's specifications.

## 2.7 Canadian Education Centre Network

The Canadian Education Centre (CEC) Network is "a private, independent non-profit company that was founded in 1995 with support from the Government of Canada to promote and market Canada as a study destination for international

<sup>15</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.tesl.ca/>

<sup>16</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.tesl.ca/Asset51.aspx?method=1>

<sup>17</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.languagescanada.ca/files/lc\\_standards\\_and\\_specifications.pdf](http://www.languagescanada.ca/files/lc_standards_and_specifications.pdf)



students and as a world-class provider of education services”<sup>18</sup> (Canada Education Centre Network, “About”). They have a number of domestic and overseas offices which provide prospective students with information about various Canadian educational programs, and also host a resource-filled website for potential students at StudyCanada.ca (Canada Education Centre Network, “About”). The CEC network hosts a number of events in various locations for students and agents, providing promotion for their members (Canada Education Centre Network, “About”). This makes the CEC Network a potentially powerful marketing tool for local private language schools.

## 2.8 Homestay and Residences

Once students arrive in Vancouver, they require somewhere to stay. There are three main options open to students. Some students stay with a local family who provides them with accommodations and meals, an arrangement known as homestay. Others live in residences in local hotels which offer them a bedroom, possibly shared, a hotplate, and a washroom. Some students prefer to take an apartment for their stay, and sometimes advertise “takeovers”, where a new student can take over the rental of the apartment and pay a fee for the belongings already in situ.

Schools use one of two main methods to organize accommodations for their students. Some employ an in-house homestay coordinator to manage the student/host

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18 Retrieved Feb. 21, 2009, from [http://www.cecnetwork.ca/public/about\\_cec.cfm](http://www.cecnetwork.ca/public/about_cec.cfm)



family placement and relationship, while others utilize the services of a homestay company. Homestay companies screen homestay families and arrange student placements. There are at least eight independent homestay companies operating in Vancouver at the time of writing. Unfortunately, as this industry is unregulated and private sector, there is a dearth of information available about how many local families benefit financially from the ESL industry through homestay.

There are also two major companies which transport ESL students from the airport to their homestay or residence, companies which focus solely on the ESL market. These airport transfer companies are Language Limousine, and Beaton's Meet and Greet service. As students fly in from all over the world, at all hours of the day or night, some homestay families or schools didn't want to have to pick them up at the airport. Transfer companies receive information from the schools about when the student is arriving, greet them at a visible location, and transport them to their homestays. Usually, students pay their school a transfer fee, and the school then pays the transfer company. Schools avoid complaints from students who are not picked up by their host family, and host families avoid the inconvenience of waiting for flights that are delayed or arrive in the middle of the night.

## 2.9 Tour Companies

Just as there are companies that cater solely to transporting international students to and from the airport, there are tour companies which take them to scenic



BC attractions once they arrive in Vancouver. West Trek Tours and Club ESL Tours are the prominent companies in the industry, and market everything from whitewater rafting and Canucks hockey games to multi-day trips to the Rockies or Vancouver Island. Private ESL schools often employ activities coordinators, who sell these activities to students, in addition to any activities the schools themselves organize.

A number of ESL schools are members of Tourism Vancouver, and as such are allowed to display brochures in Tourism Vancouver locations, and are linked to from the Tourism Vancouver website<sup>19</sup> (Tourism Vancouver, 2009). This allows the schools another venue to reach prospective students.

## 2.10 Internships

Students who study English in Vancouver may also want to gain work experience in an English-speaking environment. As a result, a number of private language schools offer internship programs to students. Students pay to gain this experience, and are placed with local businesses who train them, and provide them with some type of work experience. It is difficult to ascertain how many students access internship programs, how many schools offer internship programs, and which businesses hire ESL interns. These businesses benefit from the students' unpaid labour, and the students gain work experience in an English language context. As the industry is unregulated, there is no way of knowing how worthwhile students find

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<sup>19</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.tourismvancouver.com/visitors/search.php> (search for "ESL")



these internships to be, or how many students are offered positions with companies that they have interned for, or even how many schools offer internships, and what the terms of their agreements with local businesses might be.

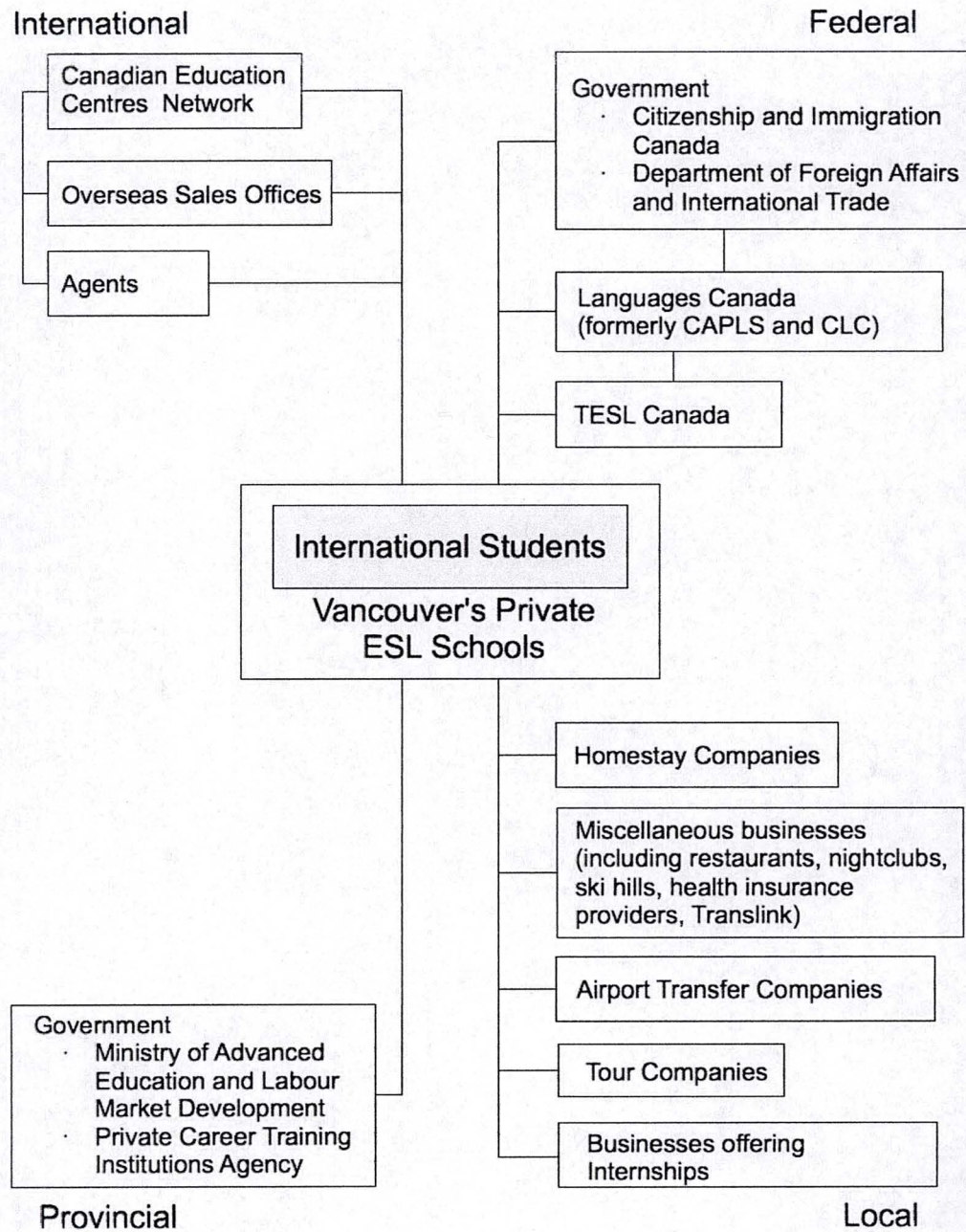
### 2.11 Impact on Miscellaneous Businesses

The private ESL industry provides money to the local economy in many other, less measurable ways. Many ESL schools are located in Vancouver's downtown core, and scores of local businesses benefit from selling inexpensive lunch items like sandwiches and pizza to the throngs of students on their lunch break. Students shop for clothes while they are in Vancouver. They buy season's passes to the local mountains during the ski season. They go to local nightclubs and eat in local restaurants. They also pay for health insurance, and there are companies that cater to the insurance needs of ESL students as well. They purchase transit passes and use public transit.

The value of the private language sector is difficult to evaluate and open to dispute, but considering the scale of the industry, it is safe to assume that it makes a very significant contribution to the economy of the Metro Vancouver area. Figure 1 illustrates the various public and private sector entities connected to international students, and Vancouver's private language schools.



Figure 1. Connections to Vancouver's Private Language Schools





## Chapter 3 Legitimacy and Regulation in the Private ESL Industry

### 3.1 Languages Canada's Discourse: Students as Economic Asset, and the Struggle for Legitimacy

As a new organization, Languages Canada is currently working to legitimize its status, and to affect change in a number of policy areas. One key area of concern to its membership is immigration policy, and the granting of student visas. Languages Canada's view of the current student visa situation is presented in Lacombe's draft position paper "Immigration Issues- Affecting the Language Training Sector".

Lacombe (2009) recounts the efforts of predecessor organization CAPLS to lobby for change to Canada's immigration policy, and notes that "these past position papers were addressing issues that are similar, with a few exceptions, to the issues that the language training sector in Canada is still bringing forward and requestion answers and solutions from the Federal Government" (p.3). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Languages Canada is a new organization, and as such must establish recognition and legitimacy for itself. By reminding the federal government of previous position papers, Lacombe situates Languages Canada as the rightful voice of the private language industry in Canada, the one who is "still" bringing forward concerns to government.

In lobbying the government, Languages Canada highlights several key messages about itself as an organization. Lacombe (2009) writes that Languages Canada's position paper focuses on "the issues of immigration and its effects on the language



training sector and [is] doing so on behalf of public and private language training programs" (emphasis original, p. 3). Languages Canada's advantage as a lobbying body is that it represents public and private sector interests, an advantage that particularly works in favour of private language schools, which are frequently criticized in media reports such as Skelton's, examined below.

Lacombe (2009) also spotlights the financial value of the industry, stating that "according to the Conference Board of Canada, Canada's language training sector is a \$1.5 billion industry" that provides "direct employment for approximately 14,000 Canadians" (p.4). By focusing on the scale of the industry, Lacombe tells the government that the industry is a sizeable force in Canada, and that its needs must be addressed. Lacombe's discourse is not free of attempts to generate a sense of anxiety or urgency. Lacombe argues that "as strong as Canada is, this is not the time to be complacent. The competition is working hard to increase its market share and many of these countries have developed national accreditation schemes...[and] are all nipping at Canada's heels for a share of the lucrative market" (p.5). The threat for Languages Canada is not presented by students from other countries, but by other countries' ESL industries.

Languages Canada's discourse directly opposes Skelton's on the matter of the availability of student visas. Whereas Skelton's article paints a picture of Canada as a laissez-faire nation that grants student visas with little consideration, Lacombe's



(2009) position paper argues that Canada needs to become "the easiest country to get visas/study permits rather than the most difficult" (p.5). Languages Canada recommends that Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) build "a class of consistent policies and guidelines for private/public language training schools that supports the sector while ensuring the safety and security of our immigration policies" (p.5) and a "transparent visa process, so that bona fide students are not summarily dismissed without some review process" (p.6). In Languages Canada's discourse, students are "bona fide", consumers who will go to another country to study if Canada's visa policies are not flexible and efficient enough (Lacombe, 2009). Lacombe's position paper mentions that "Canada is losing vital market share in countries such as Columbia and China where our competitors have streamlined their visa/study permit process and bonafide [sic] students are choosing these countries over Canada" (p.6). Whereas Skelton implied that Chinese students are a source of potentially fraudulent behaviour, for Languages Canada Chinese students are valuable commodities for Canada's language industry, and by extention for our country's economic well being.

Languages Canada does not overtly discuss the fact that some people may attempt to enter Canada under false pretenses as students, but they do recommend that an electronic monitoring system track student attendance, so that CIC can be notified electronically and without undue burden of any students who fail to attend



class (Lacombe, 2009). This would provide schools with an automated way of reporting potential fraud to CIC. In my conversations with school administrators, several have expressed confidentially that they report non-attending students to CIC of their own volition, for fear of repercussion should there be any negative consequences which later arise from conduct of the non-attending students.

Languages Canada also seeks certain concessions from the government which would have direct financial benefits for their members. They request that "Languages Canada accredited language training programs become the only providers who can give Letters of Acceptance...for student permit applications for English and French courses" (Lacombe, 2009, p. 7). Languages Canada members would then become the only ones who could attract international students, as Letters of Acceptance are necessary for the granting of student visas by CIC. Languages Canada argues that its rigorous accreditation process and code of ethics mean that students who attend its member institutions are protected in a way that students who attend other institutions are not (Lacombe, 2009). The subtext to this discourse is that Languages Canada is a legitimate representative of Canada's language industry, and that it serves as a regulatory body for the language industry, both public and private.

### 3.2 Media Discourse: International Students as Victims or Criminals

The granting of student visas in Canada is a contentious issue. Recent media reports have criticized the rules governing the granting of student visas as too lax.



The ESL industry, as represented by Languages Canada, is lobbying for a more transparent visa-granting process, one which would favour their members. In doing so, Languages Canada is also attempting to secure their position and increase their power in the Canadian ESL industry, a natural step for a new, unknown organization to take.

Vancouver's major daily newspaper is the Vancouver Sun, a publication with a distinct right-of-centre bias. In his article "Student Visa Fraud Rampant", Skelton (2008) argues that "Canada places so few restrictions on foreign students and the schools that attract them that it has left the student-visa system open to widespread abuse and fraud" (para. 1). The article cites an internal government review as stating that " 'There is no requirement for [foreign] students to actually attend classes despite the fact they are in Canada to study,' " as they will not be deported if they do fail to attend. Skelton quotes the government report as saying that current visa regulations " 'opened up the opportunity for non-genuine students to use the study permit as a means to secure work in Canada...[and] have also opened up an avenue for individuals who are seeking general entry into Canada for an extended period of time to do so under the guise of being a student' " (para. 10). The article argues that students are sometimes complicit in fraudulently entering Canada as students, but that at other times they are victims of "bogus schools that operate as 'sophisticated visa mills'" (para.14). Students victimized by visa mills have no recourse, for as Skelton



notes, private ESL schools are not regulated by the provincial government (2008).

Skelton quotes federal MP Ujaal Dosanjh as saying " 'It is not appropriate for us to be saying we are allowing in international students, yet they have no obligation to go to school,' " (2008, para. 21).

The discourse in this article, and the government review, constructs international students as both innocent victims of "bogus" schools, but also as "bogus students with no intention of studying" (Skelton, 2008, para. 14). This is a direct contrast to Languages Canada's discourse of the "bona fide" student. Who are these potentially deceptive students? The article notes that while 80% of student visa applications are approved overall, "93 per cent of those from Korea and 99 per cent from Taiwan" (para.7) are approved, with somewhat lower rates of approval for Chinese and Indian students. The selective inclusion of information about only these few nationalities, combined with the article's inclusion of information about four Chinese students who were suspected of having entered the country fraudulently, seems designed to imply that Asian students are these undesirable students, these "others" who use any means possible to enter Canada. The article excludes mention of any data concerning the numerous European students who enter Canada to study at private language schools each year, for example. Instead, Skelton's discourse focuses only on Asian students, who must, the reader infers, be the real threat to Canada. Even the nature of the threat to Canada is unspecified by Skelton. There is no



connection to any crimes international students commit, or any negative repercussions that arise from the fact that some students might come to Canada under false pretenses. Instead, the article engages in directionless fearmongering.

### 3.3 Government Discourse: Regulation in Public, Deregulation in Private

The private language industry in British Columbia is not regulated. The provincial Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (AVED) regulates other private post-secondary institutions under the Private Career Training Institutions Act, however private institutions that provide only language instruction are exempt from the act (Ministry of Advanced Education, "Private English..."). Private language schools may choose to be join the Private Career Training Institutions Agency of their own volition, however they are not required to do so.

In 2008, the Ministry of Advanced Education commissioned a report to examine and make recommendations on a number of topics related to the Private Career Training Institutions Act. The "Private Career Training Institutions Act Review" by John A. Watson recommends that private ESL schools be brought under the Act. Watson (2008) notes that

Everyone I spoke to from outside the ESL sector, including the PCTIA board and the BCCCA, feels there should be some form of regulatory oversight of ESL schools. Some ESL schools did not support regulation as they argue they have



taken steps within the sector to establish a voluntary quality assurance process. (p.13).

Although Languages Canada presents itself as a regulatory body, Watson found that the Consuls of Korea, China and India all had concerns about the lack of regulation of BCs private ESL industry (2008). These concerns could pose a threat to the flow of students to Canada's language schools, but Languages Canada positions the major threat to the industry as being the lack of competitive student visa policies, not the lack of industry regulation. For Watson, "what is needed to ensure quality and accountability in this sector is registration and quality assurance by PCTIA" (p. 13), and some type of quality assurance process in the form of pre- and post-program language testing. For Watson, international students are not perpetrators of fraud, or sources of income, but instead are, "because of their limited English, their unfamiliarity with their rights in Canada and because they are far from family, friends and trusted advisers,... particularly vulnerable" (p.20) and in need of regulatory measures for protection.

One might expect that Watson's feedback regarding the need for regulation of the private language industry in BC would be met with government action, however as yet the government has not taken regulatory steps. The current government of British Columbia has worked to privatize and deregulate many aspects of life in our province, and as such it is not particularly surprising that they would not increase



regulation for industry, regardless of recommendations. This message has been received by the private language industry. Languages Canada reports that their organization's efforts in lobbying the BC government have been successful; they were able to get a commitment from the ministry that they were willing to recognize Languages Canada and the work we have done, especially in the area of quality assurance, and would like to meet with the organization in the future. The minister indicate that "the current BC government was not one of regulation and he made a solid commitment not to reregulate the language schools"("Board Report",p.4).



## Chapter 4 Shaping Student Impressions: Industry Discourse

### 4.1 Private Language Industry Discourse: Naming Schools

Given the proliferation of language schools in the Vancouver area, it would be challenging for a student to pick only one. Some trends exist in the naming of language schools which attempt to convey particular messages to potential students.

A number of schools have chosen names which are particularly British in flavour.

These schools, for example Bodwell Language School, King George International College, St. Giles International Vancouver, and Tamwood International College, seek to create an image that projects legitimacy for their programs by making them seem British.

Another group of schools seek to create an image that could be construed as more businesslike. They do this by selecting names that are often shortened to acronyms. Some examples of this naming convention are the Canadian as a Second Language Institute (CSLI), ELS Language Centre, iTTti Vancouver, Language Studies International (LSI) Vancouver, LSC Language Studies, and EF International Language Schools Inc. The image that is created is different from that of the pseudo-British names, but the deliberate use of abbreviated forms and acronyms creates names that feel shorter and more efficient.

The third major naming convention followed by private language schools in Vancouver is the most problematic, as it involves the use of the term "college". British



Columbia is home to a number of publicly funded colleges that provide post-secondary education for students, including university transfer programs and diplomas. Yet many of the private language schools that call themselves colleges do not offer programs which are widely recognized, or useful to international students seeking post-secondary education in Canada. Private language schools named Canadian College of English Language (CCEL), Columbia College, English Bay College, Pacific Gateway International College, and Vanwest College seek to create a particularly grand image of their institutions.

As Watson (2008) notes, many international students coming to British Columbia may have limited English skills. This is particularly true of students coming to study English. The ability of private-sector businesses to call themselves "colleges" when they do not provide the academic services a student could reasonably expect from a college creates a likelihood of misunderstanding and chance of disappointment. By using the label of "college," businesses seek to attract students by tapping into students pre-existing ideas of colleges as legitimate places of higher learning. In the case of Canada's private ESL industry, this marketing strategy also capitalizes on Canada's reputation as a respectable and well-regulated country. It is difficult not to regard this deceptive discourse as what Anthonissen (2006) labels as "disordered" communication which "has an intended but improper effect, such as misleading" (p.80).



#### 4.2 Private Language Industry Discourse: "Intensive" and Confusing

When examining the naming of the language programs offered by various schools, it is apparent that one of the most ubiquitous words used in program names is "intensive." The connotation to the word is clear: if a student were to read that a program is intensive, he or she might reasonably expect that there would be a lot of hours of instruction each week. Many schools offer programs that they label as "intensive," yet this term has no agreed upon meaning, and what is considered intensive varies greatly between schools. At International Language Academy of Canada (ILAC), students can choose between the Intensive and Power English programs; the former offers 30 lessons per week, and the latter 38 lessons per week, allowing students to progress "30% faster"<sup>20</sup> (ILAC, "General English"). Like many other schools, ILAC highlights the number of lessons per week, rather than hours of instruction, which is understandable given that the lessons themselves are only 45 minutes long. At Intrax International Institute, students may enroll in the Standard, Intensive or Super-Intensive programs, which provide 20, 28 and 35 lessons per week respectively, again of 45 minute duration<sup>21</sup> (Intrax, "English Programs"). Often the information about the length of the lesson is not clearly located, or must be calculated by examining a timetable, for example. In the case of International House, the amount of instruction is even more obscure, as their programs (Semi-Intensive, Semi-

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<sup>20</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.ilac.com/programs/general\\_english\\_cambridge.php#](http://www.ilac.com/programs/general_english_cambridge.php#)

<sup>21</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.intraxinstitute.edu/adult-programs?subject=english>



Intensive Plus, Intensive, and Intensive Plus) are differentiated by the amount of period C, D and E classes they offer, making it almost impossible to determine hours of instruction<sup>22</sup>. Some schools, however, are more straightforward about their hours of instruction, and prominently feature the number of hours of instruction each week. For example, at Zoni Language Centre, students have three similarly named offerings from which to choose: the ESL Super Intensive, ESL Intensive, and ESL Semi-Intensive, which provide 30, 20 and 15 hours of instruction each week. The lack of standardization of terms and the popularity of descriptors like “intensive” means that students who want to compare programs must really read the fine print in order to understand just how much instruction they can expect, especially when assessing what constitutes a lesson.

Languages Canada's Quality Assurance Scheme (2009) states that promotional materials must “present a clear, accurate and current description of the program options and services offered by the institution” (p.9). I would argue that the clarity of the promotional materials for many schools is inadequate, especially for readers who may reasonably be expected to have difficulties with English.

#### 4.3 Private Language Industry Discourse: Preparing for University

Many international students come to Vancouver to improve their English prior to entering university. Some students need to meet language requirements for

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<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.ihvancouver.com/academic/academic\\_02.php](http://www.ihvancouver.com/academic/academic_02.php)



universities in their home countries, but the plethora of programs offering TOEFL or IELTS test preparation makes it clear that many international students are seeking entry into North American universities. The private language industry offers numerous programs which claim to prepare students for study in Canadian universities. Bodwell College, for example, boasts of their partnership with the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). Their website states

Bodwell Language School has established an educational partnership with the University of Northern British Columbia. This internationally renowned university will accept students who have successfully completed our program. So plan, prepare, study, excel, and experience a Canadian University by attending Bodwell Language School<sup>23</sup> (Bodwell College, "University Preparation").

There are scant details about this claim available on the website. There is, however, a line in the promotional materials that states "students that apply to this exciting program will receive a conditional offer of admission to UNBC, provided that the academic admission requirements are met"<sup>24</sup> (Bodwell College, "8 Months"). Given that all regular admission requirements must be met for students to attend UNBC, it is unclear what particular advantage Bodwell provides to students hoping to access a Canadian university. However, often private language schools receive a commission for directing students to a particular university (anonymous source, personal correspondence). The financial advantage for Bodwell is clear; they are

<sup>23</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.bodwell.edu/language/ep\\_upp\\_v01.html](http://www.bodwell.edu/language/ep_upp_v01.html)

<sup>24</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.bodwell.edu/language/unbc-bodwell\\_onesheetweb.pdf](http://www.bodwell.edu/language/unbc-bodwell_onesheetweb.pdf)



selling the idea of guaranteed admission to a university, in spite of the fact that the fine print makes this less of a guarantee, and they are likely receiving commission for any students they send to UNBC. UNBC, in turn, gains international students who pay much higher fees than domestic students, which is a strategy increasingly employed by universities in the face of cuts to government funding. It must be stressed that although Bodwell College is the example used here, they are by no means unique. Many, if not most, Vancouver area private language schools offer some form of university or academic preparation programs, although the claims made about these programs in their promotional materials varies considerably.

#### 4.4 Private Language Industry Discourse: Homogenizing Canadian Families and Culture

As mentioned in Chapter 2, many students choose homestay accommodations for the duration of their study period in Vancouver. In talking to my students, it is apparent that many of them are surprised by the cultural diversity of Vancouver, and consequently of their homestay families. Private language schools promote homestay through their websites, using words and images, which taken together may contribute to the image students form of Canadians before they arrive.

Homestays are much touted by the private language industry as a way for students to experience "Canadian culture". Canadian as a Second Language Institute (CSLI) describes homestay as "an ideal way to experience a new way of life and to



improve all aspects of your English language communication... and enrich your cultural experience"<sup>25</sup> (CSLI, "Homestay"). Figure 2 shows a photograph taken from their website, featuring a "typical" Vancouver family. In this case, the family is a multigenerational, Caucasian family gathered in front of a Christmas tree. The international student(s) is located in the centre of the picture.

Figure 2- From "Homestay," webpage of Canadian as a Second Language Institute (CSLI). Copyright



2006 by CSLI.

Eurocentres Vancouver advises students that "In your homestay, you will get to see how a typical Canadian family lives and actually participate in daily Canadian life."<sup>26</sup> ("Homestays and Residences"). Figure 2 accompanies this text, again picturing

25 Retrieved from <http://www.csli.com/accommodation/homestay.html>

26 Retrieved from <http://languagecanada.com/en/Homestays%20and%20Residences:%20A%20Place%20to%20Call%20Home>



a Caucasian family with the student, this time posed in front of the entryway to a their home.



Figure 2- From "Homestay and Residences," webpage of Eurocentres Vancouver. Copyright 2006, by Eurocentres Vancouver

I reviewed the images used on all local Languages Canada private-sector members' homestay webpages. With the exception of one company's website, all of the family images used to promote homestay were of Caucasian families.

Most of the language used to advertise homestay focused on the linguistic benefit to students of homestay, and also the cultural benefit. Promotional language like that used by International Language Schools of Canada (ILSC) is typical for the industry: "Staying in a Homestay in Canada will give you an excellent opportunity to practice your English conversation skills and experience Canadian culture and family



life."<sup>27</sup> ("Accommodation Options"). The biggest problem with this discourse of cultural benefit is the way that it presents Canadian culture as a unified whole.

Canada is a multicultural country, and Vancouver is especially so. It is inaccurate to describe Canadian culture as a unified entity. Students experiences with "Canadian culture" can vary widely depending on the homestay family they are placed with.

When photographs and words create a false image of Canada as a place of unified culture and ethnicity, it is unsurprising that many students are unprepared for the plurality of life in Vancouver.

Fortunately, not all schools ignore diversity in marketing homestays. ILSC, for example, advises students that

Your Homestay family in Canada will be different from your own, so we ask that you be prepared to adjust to a new household routine, different foods and new rules... Please keep in mind that Canada has a very diverse cultural makeup with citizens with a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds" ("Accommodation Options").

By explicitly mentioning Canada's diversity, companies prepare better prepare students for life in Canada, and better adhere to Languages Canada's code of ethics, which states members must "Recognize, respect and promote the diversity of culture and ethnicity inherent to a program's employees, students, and peers" (Languages Canada, "Code of Ethics").

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27 Retrieved from <http://www.ilsc.ca/accommodation-homestay.aspx>



## Chapter 5 Conclusions

### 5.1 Discourses of Regulation and Legitimacy

The private ESL industry in Vancouver exists at the intersection of a number of discourses, which must be unravelled in the attempt to gain understanding of the industry and its issues. The mainstream media's discourse focuses on systemic abuses, and characterizes international students as potential criminals, looking for an opportunity to illegally enter Canada. This attitude is not surprising, given that mainstream media outlets often engage in fearmongering as part of a larger "if it bleeds, it leads" ethos. However, media accounts such as Skelton's (2008) do bring to light issues around Canada's visa process, and the lack of regulation of the local private ESL industry.

The discourse of industry seeks to combat the media discourse which characterizes the language training sector as prone to abuses and dangerously unregulated. This discourse is a conscious effort to fight back against what are perceived to be a plethora of negative media reports, particularly in British Columbia. In their February, 2009 Board Report to Members, Languages Canada posits that their press release "led to some good media coverage, especially in Vancouver and Victoria, where past negative media needed to be challenged" (p. 3). Languages Canada seeks solutions to industry problems by cementing its own power base and self-regulatory powers, and opposes government regulation of the private



language industry. This position is evident in the discourse they use to legitimize their position by lobbying for preferential status with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. It is also apparent in their internal discussion of assurances from the BC provincial government regarding continued lack of regulation. Yet Languages Canada tries, in its discourse with government, to create a sense of urgency and anxiety to force the government to act. Their immigration position paper is rife with language which underscores the need for immediate action on their recommendations by positioning inaction as having a tremendous cost to the industry, and therefore Canada.

The government's position on the private ESL industry seems somewhat contradictory. In Canada, the regulation of educational institutions is the jurisdiction of the provincial government. Although they investigated the need to regulate the ESL industry by commissioning the Private Career Training Institutions Act Review, the provincial government has not acted on the recommendations of the review. In fact, the BC government has committed to Languages Canada that they will not reregulate the language training sector. One wonders what purpose government reviews have when the expert opinions contained within are ignored. The provincial government of BC has two discourses on the subject of regulation of the private ESL industry, the public discourse which appears to consider regulation, and the private discourse which assures industry regulation will not happen.



The problem with self-regulation is that it provides insufficient protections for students. Languages Canada seeks to serve a regulatory function with its quality assurance scheme and code of ethics, but not all private ESL institutions belong to Languages Canada. Students of these schools are wholly unprotected in the event that their school fails financially, or that their school is a less than legitimate business. As Watson (2008) found when interviewing local Counsels for countries which send international students to Canada, the lack of regulation of the private ESL industry does reflect negatively on British Columbia. Counsels are often called on to attempt to resolve problems between unregulated industry members and their nationals, and have a substantial amount of influence in encouraging or deterring students from attending Vancouver's ESL programs (Watson, 2008). If self-regulation is not successful, the private ESL industry will ultimately pay the price in reduced revenue and enrolment, as diplomats direct students to better regulated countries.

## 5.2 Naming Programs, Naming Canada

Students coming to study English in Vancouver face a bewildering number of options, from schools to programs to accommodation choices. The ability of students to make choices is impeded by language concerns, and by naming conventions which play on students' lack of language proficiency. Colleges in British Columbia are no longer exclusively public institutions of higher education; as there is no regulation of the use of the word college in BC, colleges can also be private language schools



which do not provide any meaningful credential to students. This use of "college" devalues Canada's reputation for educational excellence, as the term no longer means what it used to in terms of educational quality and quality control.

Students who wish to compare programs face further impediments when trying to decide between competitive programs. Again, words are the source of this conflict. What does an "intensive" program really mean? How can a student evaluate a program when information may be provided about hours of instruction, lessons, or periods, especially when a lesson can be anything from 40 minutes to an hour long? If Languages Canada is truly serious about its members providing accurate information to students, perhaps it should provide some guidelines for how programs are described accurately. Languages Canada might also consider attaching a meaning to overused terms like "Intensive", so that students can better assess their options.

The private ESL industry must also address the way it promotes homestays. With few exceptions, the language used by private ESL schools to describe the homestay experience presents Canadian culture as a homogenous entity. The inaccuracy of this implication means that students arrive in Canada expecting to live with some kind of generic (white) Canadian family. As the images used on school websites depict, almost exclusively, homestay families as Caucasian, it is likely that students expect a Caucasian family. Vancouver's multiculturalism means that students are likely to live



with a non-Caucasian family. It is unfair to students to be deceptive about Vancouver's population, and it is unfair to homestay families who, through no fault of their own, don't measure up to student expectations. It is in the interests of all concerned to depict Vancouver's diversity in ESL marketing materials.

### 5.3 Future Research Directions

The private ESL industry in Canada, and particularly Vancouver, is replete with opportunities for research. This industry is worth \$1.5 billion to Canada, yet it is almost totally unexamined. Research could take any number of interesting directions. Students could be surveyed or interviewed to better understand their expectations about life in Vancouver, their program of study, and the source of those expectations. Programs could be evaluated to determine the efficacy of instruction, and how well private university preparation programs actually prepare students for academic life in an English language university.

It would also be interesting to consider how student identities are affected as students learn English in private language schools; for many students studying in Vancouver has a highly social aspect. Further research might consider, for example, how student's preconceived notions about people of other nationalities are changed or challenged by studying with students of those nationalities.



Teachers stories are also untold. Very little has been told about the challenges of balancing academic and economic interests in the classroom, which is an ever present issue for teachers in the private ESL context. Are the qualifications for teaching ESL stringent enough, and is enough professional development available? The private language industry is so unexamined that there are a multitude of directions research could take and still be original and valuable.

#### 5.4 Final Thoughts

As a teacher at a private language school, I have a vested interest in the success of this industry. The private ESL industry in Vancouver is in a state of flux. Languages Canada has appeared to replace previous industry bodies and unite public and private language schools, and is actively lobbying for change to immigration regulations which would benefit the industry. The responsibility for teacher certification has transferred from the provincial organization, TEAL BC, to the federal organization, TESL Canada. A provincial government election is a few short months away, which could impact whether the private ESL industry remains deregulated, or if it is regulated once more.

It is my hope that at this crossroads, my industry proceeds in a way that values the rights and needs of students in a meaningful way. I hope for continued success, and hope that increased integrity will be a part of that success.



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