LITERACY, IDENTITY AND POWER: THE EXPERIENCE OF
ADULT EL SALVADORAN REFUGEES IN
CANADIAN GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED ESL AND JOB-TRAINING PROGRAMS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses a concern for the experience of participants in Canadian Government sponsored language and job-training programs for recent immigrants, specifically El Salvadoran refugees. The research has sought to uncover, through interviews with two former students, some of their impressions and insights concerning their participation in a Canadian government sponsored language and job-training program. The interviews were structured to account for historical, cultural, political, ideological and educational events and influences in El Salvador and Canada that contributed to the formation of their subjective experience within the context of the Canadian programs in which they participated.

Analysis of the interview transcripts and notes made during and after the interviews revealed several emergent themes. These were: political activity and war, teachers as leaders, religion, what is good teaching, adjustment to Canada, values and hopes, and the need for ESL and job-training programs. In the views of the two informants, the teacher-student relationship, based on awareness, communication and respect emerged as a very important feature of successful pedagogy.

The findings are related and discussed in relation to Canadian society. The instructional implications are discussed with reference to relevant pedagogical approaches.
## Contents

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. II
FIGURES .................................................................................................................... V
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................................................................... VI

1 INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
   1.2 The Problem Within the Instructional Context .................................................. 1
   1.3 The Problem Within Canadian Society .............................................................. 3
   1.4 The Questions .................................................................................................... 3
   1.5 Justification of the Study ................................................................................... 3

2 LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................................ 5
   2.1 The Problem Within the Literature .................................................................. 5
      2.1.1 Language as a Cultural Construct .............................................................. 6
      2.1.2 Pedagogical Approaches to Literacy .......................................................... 6
         2.1.2.1 Functional Literacy ............................................................................ 7
         2.1.2.2 Progressive Approaches ................................................................... 8
         2.1.2.3 The Genre-Based Approach ............................................................... 11
         2.1.2.4 Content-Based and Bilingual Approaches ......................................... 16
         2.1.2.5 Radical Democratic Approaches ....................................................... 21
      2.1.3 Pedagogical Silencing and Empowerment ............................................... 21
   2.2 Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 31

3 METHODOLOGY ...................................................................................................... 33
   3.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 33
   3.2 Description of Data Collection Methods ......................................................... 35
      3.2.1 Ethnographic Interviews ...................................................................... 35
      3.2.2 Researcher Journal ............................................................................... 36
      3.2.3 Limitations of the Study ....................................................................... 37
      3.2.4 Data Gathering ..................................................................................... 37
      3.2.5 Investigator Bias ................................................................................... 38
   3.3 Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 38

4 FINDINGS ................................................................................................................... 39
   4.1 Biographies ...................................................................................................... 39
      4.1.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 39
         4.1.1.1 Julio ................................................................................................. 39
         4.1.1.2 Pedro .............................................................................................. 40
   4.2 Themes Emerging From the Interviews ............................................................ 41
      4.2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 41
         4.2.1.1 Political Activity and War ................................................................ 43
         4.2.1.2 Teachers as Leaders ..................................................................... 49
         4.2.1.3 What is Good Teaching? ................................................................. 51
         4.2.1.4 Religion .......................................................................................... 59
         4.2.1.5 Adjusting to Canada ..................................................................... 65
         4.2.1.6 Values and Future Hopes ................................................................. 71
         4.2.1.7 The Need for ESL and Job-Training Programs ....................... 74
4.3 Further Thoughts on the Interviews

4.3.1 Response to the Interview Process

4.3.2 Differences Between the Subjects

4.3.3 Language Used in the Interviews

4.4 Conclusion

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 The Societal Context

5.1.1 Introduction

5.1.2 Canadian Society

5.1.3 Postmodernism

5.1.4 Technology

5.1.5 The Need for ESL and Job-Training Programs

5.1.6 Conclusion

5.2 Pedro and Julio: Their Subjective Experiences in the Classroom

5.2.1 Introduction

5.2.2 Frustration

5.2.3 Discrimination

5.2.4 Respect

5.2.5 Conclusion

5.3 The Instructional Context

5.3.1 Introduction

5.3.2 Pedagogical Approaches

5.3.3 The Relationship Between Students and Teachers

5.3.4 Critical Pedagogy

5.4 Conclusion

REFERENCES

APPENDIX A
FIGURES

Figure 1: Martin's (1993) Context of Situation

Figure 2: Cummins (1992) Common Underlying Proficiency

Figure 3: Vancouver School Board Materials and Mohan (1986) Sample Thinking Processes Related to The Knowledge Framework

Figure 4: Vancouver School Board Materials and Mohan (1986) Samples of Language Related to The Knowledge Framework

Figure 5: Vancouver School Board Materials and Mohan (1986) Samples of Key Visuals Related to The Knowledge Framework

Figure 6: Themes Emerging From the Interviews
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The questions under consideration in this study have to do with understanding literacy experiences and their place in the lives of students and what those experiences have to do with identity and power (either empowerment or disempowerment). This question is meaningful especially within the context of a pluralistic society in which political, linguistic and cultural purposes coexist in an explicit or implicit power dynamic. This has enormous implications for pedagogical praxis in terms of how this reality is approached in the classroom. For the purposes of this inquiry I have chosen to explore the experiences of one group, though there are cultural subdivisions within it, namely El Salvadoran refugees.

Their experiences have become meaningful to me as they relate to my own classroom experiences as an ESL instructor at a private language college in Richmond, British Columbia. In practical terms the study was motivated by an interest in learning more about these refugees, especially their language learning experiences in Canada and El Salvador. In turn, it was anticipated that this knowledge would lead to a better understanding of their needs. More generally this inquiry relates to the broader theme of the close relationship between literacy, culture, identity and power.

1.2 The Problem Within the Instructional Context

The classroom experiences mentioned above took place at Fraser Pacific College in Richmond. The vast majority of programs at the College are government funded. These include: Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), Labour Market Language Training (LMLT), a program for helping students on social assistance (RISE), Computer Applications (CA), as well as a few other programs that come and go. Students come from a wide variety of countries, but the main ones in declining rank are: Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Poland, Iran, Russia, Somalia and Latin American countries. The guiding mission of these programs is to
improve the English ability of these students and to help them prepare for and find work. The LMLT, RISE and CA programs all have work placements at local businesses or organizations which are designed to act as a bridge for students as they assimilate and adapt to Canadian work expectations.

Chinese speaking students represent by far the largest group of the College's immigrant population. This is also true within Richmond itself as well as the Greater Vancouver area. The Chinese community is extensive and many come with considerable financial resources and impressive educational backgrounds. Other immigrants such as those from Eastern Europe also come with advanced degrees. These people are generally highly literate in their own language, and although they are frustrated by the employment situation in Canada, they are usually comfortable in the classroom setting and seem confident in their long term goals.

Many of the other refugees attending the college, mainly from El Salvador and Somalia, come into Canadian society under less advantageous circumstances. The local communities for these groups are smaller and less established. Many of these refugees are suffering from financial hardship and carry the burden of a painful past. Furthermore, many of the students are not very literate in their first language.

I have had several El Salvadoran refugees in my classes over the last three years and have noted a certain difficulty they have in adapting to the expectations of classwork and job placements. Many of these students exhibited poor punctuality and attendance. Some have also shown a reluctance to take part in communicative activities such as cooperative projects, collaborative writing, and group activities. Some teachers have complained about hostility and outbreaks of anger. This difficulty in adapting, however, is not consistent. There seems to be a variation between how students respond to the demands and personalities of different teachers. The stress of adapting to a new society obviously affects students' classroom experiences and this will differ depending on the student. I do not want to generalize about El Salvadoran refugees. In fact, I have found them to be very individualistic.
1.3 The Problem Within Canadian Society

The instructional dynamic within these programs and the experiences of students cannot be taken in isolation. It must be recognized that many societal forces will affect the pedagogical experiences of the students in this study. These forces range from political agendas to the omnipresence of the media.

Our society, as it nears the end of the century, is characterized by rapid technological change, economic uncertainty and shifting values. Difficulty finding work is a problem for many Canadians. It is that much more difficult for immigrants that are struggling with a new society and a new language.

How the cultural, linguistic and historical aspects of students within Federal government language and job-training programs interact with the Canadian context and how educators deal with that interaction is an integral part of the experiential dynamic that is informed by a multitude of influences.

1.4 The Questions

Since the contextualization of this study concerns the relationship between literacy, identity and power I have carefully examined the subjective experiences of the two El Salvadoran refugees who were the subjects in this research. What type of instruction worked for them? What cultural interpretations did they bring into their instructional programs? How are we failing to meet our students' needs? How have these students been silenced? How have they been empowered?

1.5 Justification of the Study

I feel that the research recorded here is justifiable on the basis of immediate need. Instructors and counsellors are asking practical questions as to why refugees (El Salvadoran, Somalian, etc.) are experiencing difficulties in language and job training programs. There does
not seem to be a lot of resources available to help, and there has not been a lot of research in this field. Often educators are making decisions on instinct or intuition while at the same time realizing that there is something else there that is not understood. Studies like this might at least help to inform educators concerning their students' backgrounds and better enable them to meet their needs.

Furthermore qualitative studies like this may initiate a second look at the type of pedagogy now practised in adult second language education programs. By inquiring into students' lives and their experiences with literacy in a broad inclusive way, rather than isolating and measuring some aspect of classroom performance, we may be able to look at our attitudes, values and methods more critically with a view to responsive attention and considered instructional flexibility.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Problem Within the Literature

It is interesting to note that while the literature is filled with theoretical analysis and detailed examinations of student behaviour there are relatively few accounts of what student experience consists of as it relates to literacy and literacy instruction. I have been influenced, however, by research done by Janet Giltrow and Edward Colhoun which they described in “The Culture of Power: ESL Traditions, Mayan Resistance” (1992). Their study focused on a group of Guatemalan Refugees living in Vancouver. Although these refugees were all Mayan they spoke several Mayan languages and often had to use Spanish as the “lingua franca”. Like the El Salvadoran refugees these Mayans were familiar with oppression and marginalization in their own country. Learning Spanish for them had not opened them up to new opportunities but had rather coincided with the loss of their land. Spanish was, for them, a symbol of oppression and loss of identity. Giltrow and Colhoun postulate that in Vancouver English had taken on this symbolic manifestation. At the same time it became apparent from their interviews that these Mayan refugees were highly suspicious of the type of methodology being employed by their ESL teachers, methodology which seemed to value testing and breaking language down into tiny decontextualized chunks and measurement which served as a justification for advancement or retention at their present level.

Their study showed, however, that although these people were suspicious of their studies in English they were extremely diligent in terms of their own “self-study” of a Mayan religious text which was written in a language that none of them understood. Language in this instance was closely linked with their Mayan identity. Our assumption as to the utilitarian value of English was in the eyes of these people superceded by a more immediate need which concerns cultural survival and retention of identity. In this case the Mayan dialect they were using had little practical utility as a means of communication but enormous cultural and spiritual value.
2.1.1 Language as a Cultural Construct

Central to the broad theoretical context within which this research is situated is the fact that language from the beginning is a purposeful cultural construct (Halliday and Hasan, 1989). Others (Crowley, 1989; Freire 1987; Giroux, 1988; Kress, 1986; Pennycook, 1989), have commented on the political nature of language and its role in meeting political purposes. Tollefson (1991), for instance, has questioned the US. governments policy of training refugees to take entry level jobs, a policy which will serve the interests of the government by providing a pool of cheap labour but will, he claims, keep them in a cycle of poverty and dependence. Certainly one of the themes coming out of this material is the need for a more critical look at pedagogical methods and their relationship to the lived experiences of the students as opposed to a more traditional positivist approach that may be founded on theoretical assumptions concerning pedagogy that may seem inescrutable, obscure and meaningless to language learners.

2.1.2 Pedagogical Approaches to Literacy

A major concern of this study concerns the notion of literacy. What is literacy and how do or should educators approach instruction? These questions are seminal in terms of conceptualizing pedagogy. Since language is so entwined with culture and identity, it will be useful to consider how various pedagogical theories handle this issue. This is especially important to this investigation where literacy involves many cultures and languages. Are cultures and languages given equal validity or is one dominant culture’s language being given special status? Should utility and standardization be a central factor or should the voices of all groups interact in the classroom? Furthermore, what are the political agendas implicit in different approaches to instruction? I wish to consider and contrast five approaches: a functional approach, a radical democratic approach, content-based and bilingual approaches, a genre approach and a progressive approach.
2.1.2.1 Functional Literacy

The functional literacy approach, as generally understood, seems to be aimed at providing instruction in practical language skills. The goal here is to equip students with the tools they will need to be successful in an industrial or post-industrial society. As stated in a UNESCO document (1966), “Literacy programs should preferably be linked with economic priorities. [They] must impart not only reading and writing, but also professional and technical knowledge, thereby leading to a fuller participation of adults in economic life.” This approach seeks to integrate students into the mainstream of society so that they may succeed in gaining employment and contribute to society. Fundamental to this pedagogical model is an assumption concerning the validity of the dominant language (or its dialect), and its utility in terms of societal success. This is a transmission pedagogy. In other words, it is assumed that the instructor has knowledge which the student needs to know, and instruction consists of helping the student acquire it.

The functional literacy approach is widely practised as a way to help illiterate native speakers and second language immigrants become employable. In fact, Canadian government sponsored language and job-training programs for recent immigrants (LINC and LMLT, etc.) are local examples of the functional approach. Another example cited by Lankshear (1993), was developed at the University of Texas (1975). It is called The Adult Performance Level Study (APL) and lists five content areas with a broad goal pointing to the skills needed for each. They are:

1. consumer economics - to manage a family economy and to demonstrate awareness of sound purchasing principles;
2. occupational knowledge - to develop a level of occupational knowledge which will enable adults to secure employment in accordance with their individual needs and interests;
3. health - to ensure good medical and physical health for the individual and his [sic] family
4. government and law - to promote an understanding of society through government and
law and to be aware of government functions, agencies, and regulations which define individual rights and obligations;

5. community resources - to understand that community resources, including transportation, are utilized by individuals in society in order to obtain a satisfactory mode of living. (p 91)

The functional approach is designed to give people enough English to get them into the work force. A central aspect of the approach is to inform students of societal expectations, such as what employers expect from their workers, how to write an effective resume, etc. While this information is useful, it has no consciousness which encourages the expression of students' cultural and historical values. It assumes that transfer is one way. There is no consciousness that students should be prepared to take part in a democratic society as initiators of change. This approach would seem to be concerned with preparing people for a participation in the economy but no more.

2.1.2.2 Progressive Approaches

Whole language and process approaches to writing developed as a reaction to more traditional structural approaches to language development which stressed mastery of skills and memorizing grammatical rules. Progressives argue that these traditional approaches decontextualize language from meaning and fragment students' educational experiences.

The whole language approach emphasizes that learning should be child centred - involving choice, relevance and ownership - and the teacher's job is to facilitate learning by providing a rich, stimulating, supportive environment in which to learn. People learn best when encountering language as a whole. It is the meaning of language that is important and the purpose of small chunks of language become clear naturally in relation to the meaning being communicated in a particular discourse. Language is viewed as a dynamic and changing social construct (Goodman, 1986), so it is only natural that students should use their own words and discourse styles as they encounter them in their lives. Students' talk is encouraged as a positive part of learning as students and teachers interact in meaningful dialogue. Thematic units are
often part of this approach. Goodman (1986) asserts that the task of a whole language teacher “is to make school a literate environment full of literacy events, with an insightful teacher present to monitor their development toward literacy and help it happen” (p. 24).

Writing in this context (process approach) has been described as an “act of discovery” (Murray, 1972), which helps us find out or make sense of our ideas. Writing in this context is viewed as a way to convey meaning. It is a way of learning and can be applied across the curriculum. The emphasis here is on writing for a variety of audiences and for a variety of purposes. It is important in this model to provide time to compose as many drafts as students may want and need and also time to discuss and confer with peers and the teacher. Publishing student writing into class booklets is also typical in process and whole language classrooms. Student writing can then be seen to be of real value in that it will be read by other people.

Writing about personal matters is given importance in the process approach. Writing is a way for students to work through ideas, feelings and concepts. It can also be an important way for students to build trust with an empathetic teacher (Tchudi, 1987). James Britton (1975) has said that expressive writing (personal writing) is the first type of writing that students use effectively and will remain important throughout their lives. He believes that writing can be seen on a continuum from transactional (or participant), on the one hand, to poetic (or spectator), on the other. It is from the matrix of expressive writing that students will acquire competence in both the transactional and poetic modes. The process approach, then, with its encouragement of child selected themes can be seen in a developmental way as preparing children for more abstract forms of writing when they are ready.

One study (Payton, Staton, Richardson and Wolfram, 1990) seems to support Britton’s developmental hypothesis. It was based on the analysis of student writing in an ESL classroom based on a number of different writing tasks. The findings indicated that the more informal writings in which topics were student chosen, and written to a real audience, especially dialogue journals written to the teacher, but also a letter written to a friend, “elicited the more frequent use of features which were useful in all types of writing” (p. 165). The features considered were quantity, complexity, focus and cohesion.
An interesting aspect to the study was in terms of focus. As one would expect the essay type writing yielded more non-personal writing than did the dialogue journals. However, the tendency to discuss more abstract topics in the dialogue journals seemed to be dependent on the students’ language ability. This would, again, seem to support Britton’s claim that expressive writing can act as a bridge to other types of writing.

Related to expressive writing and student choice of meaningful topics is the concept of “Inner Voice” (Britton, 1975; Tchudi, 1987; Moffat, 1979), which can take over in a student’s writing. Inner voice is the voice of authenticity in a student’s work that is indicative of the student’s implicit realization of the intrinsic value of his/her writing. James Moffat (1979) claims “that the heart of writing beats deep within a subjective inner life...”, so that in his view writing is a way to “discover, develop and render the mind” (p. 279).

An important aspect of the process philosophy is that of student ownership. Student control is considered essential if students are to really find meaning and relevance in their writing. Students choose their topics, and retain control over its development. Teacher intervention, then, must be supportive and unobtrusive in nature. Conferences (Graves, 1982; Bissex, 1982; Duke, 1985), student - student and student - teacher, provide an opportunity for students to get feedback on their writing as it progresses and yet retain control of the process. The teacher’s role becomes one of helping students become aware of their intentions and realize choices that can be made. Direct teacher involvement in terms of the formation of the student’s composition would be discouraged in this approach as teacher interference would amount to taking away the student’s control. Teacher responses to student writing are also directed to meaning rather than mechanics or form.

Writing workshops (Crowhurst, 1979) are also a way for students to get responses to their writing. These are groups of students that gather together to read their writing out loud as a way to give and get feedback, as well as to celebrate their successes. Students are encouraged to take on responsibility for their writing and learning and encourage others in theirs.

In terms of writing development and learning new forms, the process approach seems to be to let the child find his/her own way even if this takes a lot of time. As Donald Graves (1982) puts it:
Writing is such a variable process that there may be several weeks, even months, in which a child demonstrates low productivity and quality. But the good teacher maintains the long term view that the child wants to express, wants to communicate, wants to have people respond to his writing, and walks through these valleys with the child. There is no hurry. There is no need to demand that children become what they want to become and help children become that demand. (p.77)

The message with this approach to writing and to learning is to give students space and allow them to take control of the process. Teachers are urged to respond with encouragement to the meaning that the child is trying to convey and celebrate and share student work in oral readings and class publications. Set the right conditions and students will take the responsibility to write and learn on their own. Students in this educational model are considered to be young authors and their individuality as creators of texts is guarded against a more teacher directed approach.

2.1.2.3 The Genre-Based Approach

The genre-based approach rests on quite different assumptions about what language is and how it should be taught. It has developed in Australia and is grounded on Systemic Functional Linguistics and especially the work of M.A.K. Halliday. Language in this light is seen as a social semiotic system. In this sense, it has a symbiotic relationship with various social contexts so that language users can exploit its functionality in order to meet their needs.

Since language is a dynamic and evolving sociocultural construct, the functionality of text types, here after called genres, and the situational or cultural contexts in which they occur, is something that has to be learned through experience or by instruction. Genres have been defined as staged goal-oriented social processes (Martin, 1993). They exist in a social context and have a symbiotic relationship with that context so that one can infer what context a genre is created in or for (when exposed to it), and conversely one can infer types of genres appropriate for
particular social situations. They have also been described as artifacts of a particular culture (Christie & Rothery, 1989). Enabling awareness of mainstream genres and their function, and how language operates in these contexts, is of prime concern in the genre-based pedagogy. Access and functionality in these “important” genres will allow students, especially disadvantaged students, to participate successfully in the greater society of which they are a part. As Christie and Rothery (1989) put it:

We refer to the groups of disadvantaged people both in the Australian and British societies – be they battered wives, the poor, the unemployed, many aboriginal people, the chronically ill – many of whose claims for social justice will need ultimately to be developed in the writing of argumentative submissions of many kinds. (p. 5)

The political power of writing and reading as vehicles of change and oppression is a major reason for explicitly learning genres. Understanding how language is used to persuade, win over and silence people is vital if people are to be able to deconstruct language and read resistantly as well as use it for their own agendas. What is needed, then, according to Kress (1986), “is a thoroughgoing demystification of the processes of reading and writing” (p. 117).

The educational model they provide also enables a linguistic analysis which is useful in explaining metalinguistic functions which have relevance in particular pieces of writing. The diagram below illustrates Martin’s (1993) construct. Field, Tenor and Mode are constituents of the context of situation and they contain meaning potentials for a given genre. These metalinguistic functions are designed to facilitate greater teacher awareness of the way language operates in given contexts and, therefore, to enable them to explicitly help students to use language in a deliberate, effective way.
The genre approach dismisses the process emphasis on individual expression in writing. Genres in their view are social systems that writers can utilize to accomplish a social function. In this sense all texts are related to all other texts (Kress, 1986). The Russian linguist H.H. Bakhtin (1986), writing in “From Notes Made in 1970-71” said:

... there can be neither a first nor a last meaning; [anything that can be understood] always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning, which in its totality is the only thing that can be real. In historical life this chain continues infinitely, and therefore each individual link in it is renewed again and again, as though it were being reborn.

(p.146)

For this reason terming young writers as original authors is misleading and unfair as it creates a false sense of originality and confuses students as to what is expected of them (Gilbert, 1990; Kamler, 1992). Before students can start to experiment and become creative with their ideas they need to become familiar with the genre and how the language is functioning within it. Students can, then, “change the genres in the pursuit of their own goals” (Christie and Rothery, 1989, p. 10).

The notion that writing is a natural process that draws on everyday life is also dismissed in the genre view. Many types of writing are not common sense. Science (Martin, 1990), for
instance, has developed a specialized language to deal with uncommon knowledge. These disciplines often delve into realms that cannot be described in terms of everyday life experiences, so specialized terms are invented to convey difficult concepts. Terms like light years, entropy and osmosis are tightly packed terms that need to be unpacked in certain ways to be understandable. This would be very difficult, using the story type genres which process classrooms are accused of being characterized by. For this reason science utilizes specialized scientific genres to explain, categorize, describe, report, predict, etc. This use of specialized genres is also characteristic in the social sciences (Cope & Kalantzis, 1990), and in any special area of study.

Proponents of the genre-based approach criticise the progressive approach due to a concern that important genres were not being learned, especially by disadvantaged students. The problem, they say, is the lack of explicit instruction in the process pedagogy, and their concern that it just doesn’t work (Christie & Rothery, 1989; Gilbert, 1990; Martin, 1993).

Barbara Kamler (1992) did a case study on the writing development of a boy and a girl from kindergarten to half way through grade two. Both children were in the same class and had the same teacher during the duration of the study. Both children came from a reasonably stable family background. Although the children were free to choose their own topics in their “process” classroom, the range of their writing was actually very narrow. She reported that the children were constrained to writing what was familiar to them and gender differences were clearly reflected and perpetuated in their writing. The girl’s writing was typically very descriptive in orientation while the boy’s tended to be action oriented. Free choice in this case actually restricted the range of written output. Kamler sees this as indicative of the need for a more visible, explicit pedagogy in which the consciousness of gender can be “questioned, resisted and challenged” (p.119). A teacher consciousness, she asserts, is the first step followed by intervention. One wonders, though, about the typicality of this process class and whether awareness of different types of genres could not have been encouraged in that milieu.

Clare Painter (1986) noted the patterns of oral language development of her own children, an interest that M.A.K. Halliday (1984) shared in observing his son, Nigel. They noted a
progression from oral language exchanges that were prompted, scaffolded, and responded to, oral monologues that the children initiated on their own. The repeated adult interactions oriented the children in their use of language. If this is the case with oral language development, then why not written development? Writing, Painter points out, is not a natural process, it needs to be explicitly taught. Student writing then, by this account, should involve models, prompts and scaffolding. It should move from teacher modeling, to joint construction, and finally to individual composition.

Another interesting progression in terms of parent-child interaction is the move from a fairly indirect type of dialogue whereby the child learns genres by repeated interaction to a more explicit type of interaction as the child gets older. The following example contained in Painter’s article provides another argument for more explicit instruction in schools. This example happened when David was six years of age.

David has decided he would like to accept a school friend’s party invitation by making the RSVP phone call himself.

D: I don’t know what to say
M: Well, first you say, “This is David” and then you say that you will be able to go to John’s party. (David dials the number and starts talking into the dialing tone)
M: No, wait for someone to pick up their phone and say hello to you
Voice: Hallo
D: This is David. I’m going to come to John’s party.... (after hangs up)
M: There, good. Next time, after you’ve said your name, give them a chance to speak before you go on. (p. 80)

Concerning teacher input into the student’s writing process, the process concern for student ownership and the development of an inner voice, which is typified by the writing conference, is replaced with teacher prompting, and even a discouragement of striking out in new directions.
Christie, Martin and Rothery (1989) comment on the teacher's responsibility.

We do not advocate leaving decisions about what to write as matters of choice for students in schools...teaching is a deliberate activity, and teachers, quite properly in our view do much of the work in charting the general directions their students' learning will take.

(p. 55)

The genre approach, then is one of fairly tight teacher control. The teacher’s job is one of explicitly teaching students language awareness through genres and their analysis. Students are initiated into this process through models and joint construction. Finally, when they are ready students are encouraged to compose on their own.

2.1.2.4 Content-Based and Bilingual Approaches

Bilingual and content-based approaches are concerned with the need to look at students’ total educational needs rather than focusing on their language needs in isolation. These approaches give credence to the sociolinguistic approach to pedagogy that posits that language and content are areas of cultural interface. As with the genre approach the concern is to enable students to succeed in academic tasks. This is especially crucial for second language students as, according to Collier (1987), it takes between 4-8 years to reach national norms on standardized tests.

Because of the time needed to attain academic competence, Cummins (1991) warns against assuming that students who seem conversationally communicative are ready for the rigours of mainstream classes. For this reason he makes a distinction between students that have mastered basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), and those who have mastered the more demanding proficiency, essential for success in school, in conversation and academic language proficiency (CALP). This analysis also recognizes that longer, cognitively demanding, less context embedded tasks are going to be more difficult than shorter, cognitively undemanding context embedded tasks. In other words the more abstract academic tasks necessary for academic success are more difficult and need more time. As Cummins (1991) says, “The
significance for policy and practice rests on the fact that educators’ failure to take account of this distinction (e.g. in assessment and placement decisions) adversely affects minority students chances for academic success” (p. 80).

Cummins also hypothesizes that there is a “common underlying proficiency” that is transferable from the first language to the second. This concept is illustrated graphically in figure 2 below. It has obvious significance as regards the utilization and value of heritage languages in the school system, especially as they relate to “policies that limit the educational possibilities for minority students,” such as the assumption that students will learn best when following an English only policy. On the contrary, Cummins argues that:

schools should attempt to encourage minority students to develop their L1 abilities to as great an extent as possible both to stimulate transfer to L2 and to reap the significant personal and more subtle educational benefits of additive Bilingualism. (p.86)

Cummins' work is especially pertinent considering the rapid growth and diversification in industrialized societies brought on by increased immigration. There are also issues such as low socioeconomic status and under-achievement of some of these groups. It is also made
controversial by the fact that the general public is somewhat nervous about bilingual education and the perceived threat to historical identities.

Language and content approaches are important in attempting to enable second language learners to be successful academically. Mohan's (1986) work in this field is directed towards helping students conceptualize the underlying knowledge structures out of which discourse is generated. These knowledge structures may be common to all cultures, so making them explicit in the content may aid the transfer of knowledge form one language to another. Mohan has schematized these knowledge structures in a knowledge framework which facilitates long term planning and fleshing out the essential knowledge which is inherent within a particular body of knowledge or unit of study.

Educationally, this approach offers the opportunity to integrate language study in a highly contextual way with science, social studies and other content areas of the curriculum. It is an attempt to make the essential concepts understandable and clear so that students can function effectively in content areas and, at the same time, show the relationship of these content areas with language and how it functions in an academically appropriate way. The following two diagrams show how thinking processes and language can be related to the knowledge framework.
Sample Thinking Processes Related to The Knowledge Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>PRINCIPLES</th>
<th>EVALUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• classifying</td>
<td>• explaining, predicting, interpreting</td>
<td>• evaluating, ranking, judging, criticizing, appreciating, forming preferences/justifying opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• defining</td>
<td>• formulating/testing/establishing hypotheses</td>
<td>• understanding goals/analyzing values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• generalizing about descriptions</td>
<td>• inferring conditions</td>
<td>• evaluation criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• understanding concepts</td>
<td>• understanding/applying/developing generalizations, principles, theories, causes, effects, rules, strategies, results, means, ends</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• observing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• describing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• comparing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• contrasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• labeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• measuring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ordering spatially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• naming</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION SITUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• sequencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ordering chronologically, following instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• noting a process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• narrating</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>SEQUENCE</th>
<th>CHOICE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>figure 3 adapted from Vancouver School Board materials and Mohan (1986)</td>
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</table>

Samples of Language Related to The Knowledge Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>PRINCIPLES</th>
<th>EVALUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT VOCABULARY: generic nouns - animals, cars, trees</td>
<td>STRUCTURAL VOCABULARY: cause - is due to, the result of, in view of, etc.</td>
<td>describing emotions - like/dislike, satisfactory/unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRUCTURAL VOCABULARY: possessives - his, her, etc.</td>
<td>condition &amp; contrast - if... then, unless, provided that, etc.</td>
<td>adjectives - good/bad, right/wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>species nouns - kinds, divisions, categories, classes, types, etc.</td>
<td>scale or amount - all, every, none etc.</td>
<td>verbs of volition - want, wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relative clauses - which, who, generally, usually, etc.</td>
<td>prediction - most likely, forecast, etc.</td>
<td>logical probability modals - would, could, might, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT VOCABULARY: active verbs - to be, to have, to feel, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjectives/adverbs - round, large, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRUCTURAL VOCABULARY: relative clauses - who, which, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quantifiers - some, many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>articles - the, an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proportions of place - at, above, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adverbs of comparison - similar to, different from, smaller than, etc.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION SITUATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT VOCABULARY:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relative clauses - who, which, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quantifiers - some, many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adverbs of comparison - similar to, different from, smaller than, etc.</td>
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<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>SEQUENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>figure 4 adapted from Vancouver School Board materials and Mohan (1986)</td>
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This approach also advocates the use of key visuals such as maps, trees, charts, timelines, graphs, etc. (Early, 1990) in an attempt to simplify the concepts without being bogged down by abstract texts and unfamiliar vocabulary. Key visuals make knowledge accessible and provide a point of reference for reading, speaking, and writing about a given topic area. Key visuals are also useful in showing the relationship between ideas. Figure 5 shows how various types of key visuals can be used in conjunction with the knowledge framework.

**Samples of Key Visuals Related to The Knowledge Framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>PRINCIPLES</th>
<th>EVALUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>webs&lt;br&gt;trees&lt;br&gt;tables&lt;br&gt;graphs&lt;br&gt;databases</td>
<td>diagrams&lt;br&gt;graphs&lt;br&gt;tables&lt;br&gt;cycles</td>
<td>rating charts&lt;br&gt; grids&lt;br&gt; marks books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tables&lt;br&gt;diagrams&lt;br&gt;pictures&lt;br&gt;plans/drawings&lt;br&gt;maps</td>
<td>tables with numbered steps&lt;br&gt;flow charts&lt;br&gt;cycles&lt;br&gt;time lines&lt;br&gt;action strips</td>
<td>decision trees&lt;br&gt; flow charts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

figure 5 adapted from Vancouver School Board materials and Mohan (1986)

Like the genre approach, this approach seeks to make learning explicit, though in a different way. While the genre approach seeks to explicate the particular expression of a culturally potent, academically powerful genre and thereby help students internalize it, knowledge structures explicate the cross-cultural underlying concepts that may facilitate a transfer of knowledge form the first language to the second and thereby help students develop language awareness in a given content area. As Mohan (1989) puts it:

... a focus on KSs offers a way to link work on academic discourse, subject matter organization, graphic semiotics, and computers. Thus teachers can work with real content
while developing language awareness of academic discourse; graphics can provide a visual
semiotic which foregrounds knowledge structure without metalinguistic complexity;
information processing programs can guide the manipulation of knowledge structure
operations; and learners can communicate about information while learning to shape text.
(p. 113)

2.1.2.5 Radical Democratic Approaches

The radical democratic approach to literacy (Freire; Giroux; Shor; Macedo; Simon) is
concerned with the power relations in society and education which value certain types of
discourse and devalue others. To be literate in this perspective is to be aware of one's own
historical and social location among others and be aware of one's own power to act for change.
This approach can, therefore, be called a transformational approach. It is concerned with
preparing students to participate in a democratic society.

Radical democratic approaches believe that curriculum should be structured to account for
the lived experiences of students. Education is a highly political act and teachers should not shy
away from taking up societal inequities. In fact it is essential that these issues should be
discussed. Dialogue and problem posing are seen as critical if students are to get a sense of their
own agency in effecting change. The development of a political consciousness, in this view, is
absolutely necessary as a preparation for full participation in a democratic society.

2.1.3 Pedagogical Silencing and Empowerment

Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of the oppressed, 1993) has said that education is not a neutral
process. It is either domesticating or emancipatory. By this he means that education that
domesticates will promote conformity and adherence to the agenda of a particular segment of
society - the power-elite - thereby turning out good workers with the skills needed to be
productive but docile. Emancipatory education, by contrast, is concerned with empowering
students to give voice to their own agenda from the context of their own sociocultural
background so that they may become historically located within the greater society and be in a position to effect change and thereby transform society. This thesis will review some of the literature that deals with how students are silenced in school and how they come to be empowered.

John Dewey is often quoted on the importance for education to be a preparation for life in a democracy. Democracy, by its nature, requires a vigorous and purposeful interaction between members of society in an effort to take part in decision-making. Including all members of society in this process means hearing from many voices and this in turn means that there will be a plurality of views. This being the case there will be differences in the agendas of differing cultures, genders, people of differing socioeconomic levels, etc. Cultural identity is tied up in the recognition (Taylor, 1994) of the distinctness and value of linguistic and cultural groups by society in general. A pedagogy concerned with standardizing education is usually predicated on a concern for utility and efficiency. Too much plurality, it is feared, will lead to chaos and lack of a common purpose. An extreme local example of this was the forced dislocation of native students to residential schools which was an attempt to rid them of their languages and cultures, which were judged to be inferior, so that they might better assimilate with the rest of society. Though this is an exceptional case, attempts to silence students’ voices by giving validity and special recognition to one language/culture/dialect while devaluing others is and has been common as a way of maintaining control of the educational environment.

Michelle Fine (1987) examined the way silencing occurred in a comprehensive public high school in New York City. “Silencing,” she says, “constitutes the process by which contradictory evidence, ideologies, and experiences find themselves buried, camouflaged, and discredited” (p. 157). This silencing is brought on by a sense of hopelessness and a fear of “naming” which by its logic believes that to discuss topics, such as drugs, dropping-out and teen sex and issues of poverty, violence and racism, which may be consuming students in their private lives, is to somehow condone and even encourage these activities. The culture of school differs to a greater or lesser degree from the culture of the home, but it is obviously very different from the culture of low income and second language or minority students. To these students, not naming can be
especially estranging. As Michelle Fine puts it, “To not name is to systematically alienate, cut off from home, from heritage and from lived experience, and ultimately to sever from their educational process” (p. 161). The silencing which she observed in her year long study went on at all levels from parent-teacher meetings to teacher-teacher interactions to classroom practice. There was an attitude that myths concerning the value of education and equality of opportunity should be maintained stoically in the face of actual evidence. This leads to a sense of disempowerment and hopelessness for everyone as teachers teach what they know to be untrue and students listen and also know that it is untrue, so that teachable moments and rich lived experience are passed off in favour of a kind of strange pantomime in which no one comes away feeling fulfilled. The result is that classroom material is often distant and well removed from the experience of students, and the possibility of relevance is lost.

Lankshear (1993) speaking from a Freirian point of view goes further in examining myths that oppress and silence. Lankshear contends that “Through education the world must be presented as something fixed and given, to which humans as mere spectators must adapt, and not as an ongoing challenge to be met in dialogue” (p. 102). Examples of these myths are:

- that people do poorly because they are lazy
- hard work always pays off
- anyone who wants to can make it
- everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed
- you can get a good job if you work very hard

Although there are kernels of truth in these maxims, it is clear that there are wide variations in students’ socioeconomic, linguistic and educational backgrounds which do have an enormous bearing on their success or failure in life. Lankshear also refers to a false generosity, a kind of paternalistic benevolence which keeps people in the debt of the establishment while at the same time admitting no avenue of dialogue or the possibility of change.
Another reflection (Lewis and Simon, 1986) on silencing came out of an examination of the dialogue produced in a graduate seminar on the relationship between language and power. The article coming out of this examination was written partly by the instructor (a man) and partly by a student (a woman). Their inquiry revealed another type of silencing, this time along gender lines. Class discussion, which was about the experience of women was dominated by the men in the class and the women felt that the abstract dialogue typical of graduate courses, though familiar to them, did not resonate with their subjective experiences as women. As Magda, the graduate student describes it:

We came to understand the oppressive relation within which women become the subjects of male discourse. It became clear that the only difference between us and the women in Radway’s study was that as graduate students we lived out and contested the patriarchic social relations under different circumstances. The oppression was no less felt, and the struggle was no less difficult. We were the women in Radway’s study. The women in Radway’s study were us. In a moment of collective insight we understood that we are history, and our history is laid within patriarchy. (p. 466)

The class had become a highly politicized forum in which it was now very important for the women to appropriate and validate their own subjective experiences in their own language. In this case academic discourse served as a way to distance, objectify and abstract the actual lived experiences of these women, an ironic outcome considering the goals of the course were to examine the power dynamics inherent in different types of discourse.

The study mentioned earlier by Giltrow and Colhoun in their article, “The Culture of Power: ESL Traditions, Mayan Resistance” (1992), identifies another type of silencing. In this case a group of Guatemalan refugees faced the loss and devaluation of their own language, culture and identity. Their new languages -- Spanish in Guatemala and English in Canada -- became symbols of oppression and a threat to their identity. Furthermore, their ESL experiences in Canada were marked by a sense of suspicion and mistrust of instructional methods which
valued analytical quantification and lessons which tended to break language down into small
decontextualized chunks. These experiences took them farther away from what they were really
concerned with: the retention of their own sense of identity under very difficult circumstances.

What all these different contexts have in common is the marginalization and devaluation of
particular sociocultural voices in favour of one dominant socio-cultural-linguistic voice which is
given special status. The expression of subjective lived experiences is discouraged. Recognition
of non-mainstream groups is withheld. Instead, pedagogy becomes a passive experience where
knowledge deemed to be important is transmitted to the students. Success in this model is
dependent on the mastery of and conformity to established kinds of discourse that are valorized
by society. In "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Freire (1970) says:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and
the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and
makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat... In the banking
concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves
knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing... The more students work
at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness
which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world.
(p. 53)

Dialogue, interaction political awareness and the possibility of change are conspicuously absent
from banking pedagogy.

Empowering pedagogy, by contrast, is concerned according to Roger Simon (1987), with
the consciousness of the possibility of change, which admits that students can be critical
participants in their education. In a pedagogical approach that is committed to the ideals of
democracy and in which the sociocultural reality is recognized, "the curriculum" according to
Ira Shor (1993) "is built around the themes and conditions of people's lives" (p.31). It is crucial
that education coming form this perspective (Freire, 1993; Freire & Macedo 1987; Giroux,
1992; Lankshear, 1993; Shor, 1993) be participatory, socially and historically situated on the lived lives of students, critical and politically aware, democratic and dialogical.

The value of student “voice” has been recognized as important by many educators (Britton, 1975; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux 1987; Graves, 1983; Moffat, 1979; Tchudi, 1987). Voice indicates that the student has struck a chord of meaning in his/her discourse that resonates in his/her subjective experience. Whole language and process approaches, as mentioned earlier, value voice as part of children’s learning. It fits in well with the ideals of that type of pedagogy. However, although whole language and process approaches place a lot of emphasis on personal experience, student control, learning for meaning and voice, they often lack the critical political awareness of the power dynamics of oppression and emancipation and the possibility of personal agency and transformation that proponents of radical democratic pedagogy stand for. In fact, whole language and process approaches may be guilty of unconsciously passing along a hidden curriculum that is just as oppressive in its ideology as more traditional approaches. This is especially true in the prevailing context of popular media — television, radio, magazines etc. — in which the viewer’s experience is removed and non-participatory. According to Chomsky (1994) television and radio programming meets the purposes of those who own and control it, which is

to have a passive, obedient population of spectators in the political arena, not participants, consumers in the commercial arena, certainly not decision makers and participants, a community of people who are atomized and isolated so they cannot organize to put together their limited resources so as to become an independent and powerful force that will chip away at concentrated power. (p.255)

Without an emphasis on the importance and value of lived experience coupled with critical questioning and dialogical analysis, students may be lulled into docility or begin to resist classroom activities that seem to lack relevance.

The genre approach to writing, mentioned already, posits that every culture has genres
(communicative tools), but the genres of the dominant culture are especially important if one is to be enabled to effectively interact and accomplish goals successfully within the society. This is especially true of genres that are needed for academic success. People in support of this approach argue that the problem with progressive education is that it doesn’t work, especially for disadvantaged students from low income and immigrant families whose language at home is very different from the academic genres. According to the genre analysis students learning in a progressive environment do not learn enough genres because they are not explicitly taught genres and how their functionality can be exploited. In fact, explicitly learning academic genres, they claim (Christie, 1990; Gilbert, 1990), can be a liberating experience as students, having learned how to approach a particular type of writing assignment, can concentrate on being creative and meaningful, and can even move beyond the parameters of the genre to enhance its effect.

It is interesting to note that, for the genre adherents, empowerment consists of mastering the genres of the dominant social group which is very different from the Freirian conception which seeks to validate the language of disadvantaged people. However, at least the genre approach is honest and up front about its intentions which are to enable students to succeed in academic tasks. The political power of writing and reading as vehicles of understanding, legitimation and change is a major reason for explicitly learning genres. Understanding how language is used to persuade, win over and silence people is vital if people are to be able to deconstruct language and read resistantly as well as use it for their own agendas. As someone explained it, “You’ve got to learn their language to beat the bastards.” What is needed, then, according to Kress (1986) “is a thoroughgoing demystification of the processes of reading and writing” (p.117), by which he means explicitly teaching socially powerful genres.

Mohan’s (1986) knowledge framework is another explicit approach to literacy for second language students. It approaches literacy from a content based perspective by showing the relationship between language and subject matter content. The framework organizes knowledge into categories that are common to all cultures and makes explicit how the language is used in a given context. These approaches are designed to enable second language students to succeed in
the academic environment and make a bridge between the knowledge that they bring with them - cultural and otherwise - and the linguistic and cultural expressions of their new language. This approach could perhaps be described as bridging languages and cultures by explicating the underlying knowledge structures informing subject matter content.

Similarly, Barron (1991), an English for specific purposes teacher in Papua New Guinea, working with engineering students, realized the importance of making links between the students’ own cultural experience of technology with that of the traditional western approach. His students needed to learn English for use in the study of engineering, though his students came from all over Papua New Guinea, a country which is incredibly diverse in languages. The first assigned task for these students was to design and build a model of a technological product from their own cultural background. Having located themselves in their own cultural and historical contexts, students were better able to see themselves as participants in engineering projects in general, rather than observers of a strange and foreign approach to technology and its accompanying jargon.

Coming to terms with empowering and disempowering pedagogy is a complex and convoluted topic and the various approaches here are not necessarily in opposition. To feel empowered, however, marginalized groups need to be recognized and need to be able to find a place in society. It is only after regaining a sense of historical location and legitimation that people are able to move on to absorb the language of others. Efforts to assimilate native students by sending them to residential schools failed. Many bands have now taken over administration of their children’s education. They have approached it from the point of view of legitimizing and celebrating their own culture. Native languages are being taught and curriculum is seen through the eyes of a native lens. This approach, which accommodates their own experience and traditions will give students the grounding to move beyond their local context and learn the language of mainstream society with a view to participation and initiating changes.

Locating, authenticating and legitimating one's own world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), historically and culturally, is essential if one is to be able to function potently in the wider society. Taking control of and giving value to and expressing one's own subjective experience is
fundamental to an understanding of how society operates and the possibility of critical inquiry and change. This is why it is important for students to tell their stories and engage in dialogue. For example, Freire (1987), in the context of a literacy campaign in Guinea-Bissau, recommended a compilation of oral stories of local residents who had hitherto been considered unimportant. Freire contended that these stories might serve as a place to start in an effort to contextualize and democratize the educational experience of the people.

At stake, though, in the consideration of empowerment and silencing is the question of society in general. According to some analysts our society is becoming less democratic (Finkelstein, 1984; McLaren, 1989). We need to question what schools are for (Feinberg, 1985; Finkelstein, 1984; Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 1989; Taylor, 1994; Wexler, 1989). Some have said that schools function as tools of cultural reproduction. In other words they perpetuate the social, cultural and class divisions in society. Chomsky (1988) has even referred to education as a kind of indoctrination, one that encourages myths about our society, how it operates and what it stands for, in order to obtain consent and acquiescence. In this context literacy has been described (Macedo, 1993) as "instrumentalism," an approach that fails to contextualize educational issues in any meaningful and critical way. This approach can be seen at the literacy level in an emphasis on skills and at the highest level as a narrow disciplinary specialization. As Macedo puts it:

the instrumentalist approach to literacy, even at the highest level of specialism, functions to domesticate the consciousness via a constant disarticulation between the narrow reductionistic reading of one's field of specialization and the reading of the universe within which one's specialism is situated. This inability to link the reading of the word with the world, if not combatted, will further exacerbate already feeble democratic institutions and the unjust, asymmetrical power relations that characterize the hypocritical nature of contemporary democracies. (p. 187)

Do we want schools to function as a kind of corporate training ground to turn out workers to compete in the new highly competitive global economy, or do we value education as a way
for people to learn to be active participants in a democratic society? The latter conception implies community involvement and inclusion of a plurality of voices that need to be recognized, validated and worked with. Education of this sort is perhaps not as efficient as one concerned with standardization, but in the long run it may have a flexibility and resilience that the other lacks.

People are in a position to explore and find relevance in abstract academically powerful types of discourse (genres) only when they have come to a subjective understanding of their own experience and how it relates to society in general. It is difficult to see how students will be able to understand and internalize a discourse that is abstract and foreign and has no resonance within their own life experiences.

The role of the teacher in the classroom carries a high degree of moral responsibility. Teachers need to envisage schools as places where diverse points of view are heard, coming out of social differences that carry stories and traditions. In Giroux and McLaren’s (1986) terms, schools should be thought of as “democratic spheres,” in which the teacher operates as an “emancipatory authority.” As they observed:

emancipatory authority is a concept which demands that teachers and others critically confront the ideological and practical conditions which enable or constrain them in their capacity as transformative intellectuals....the issue of teaching and learning is linked to the more political goal of educating students to take risks and to struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to alter the oppressive conditions in which life is lived. To facilitate this goal, transformative intellectuals need to make clear the nature of the appeals to authority they are using to legitimate their pedagogical practices. (p.226)

In this sense teaching is a highly political act and teachers need a political consciousness that allows them to listen to and validate views reflecting diversity and resistance to the system as it stands. This, of course, entails that teachers need to be committed to the democratic ideals of a pluralistic society founded on dialogue and the inclusion of many views rather than as mere
conduits of sanctioned knowledge. This type of pedagogy assumes that classrooms will be a setting of struggle and conflict, a place where students will take up issues and disagree. This also means that teachers will have to take a political stand in as much as they will have to defend an approach that may seem messy and may be perceived as being dangerous by administrators.

An empowering pedagogy needs to encourage and foster the consciousness that change is possible through struggle on our own and with others. In other words it should be transformative. As Simon (1986) says:

> It is the experience of the reality of lived difference that critical pedagogic practice must claim as the agenda for discussion. This means both students and teacher must find space within which the experience of their daily lives can be articulated in its multiplicity.. In practice this always implies a struggle - a struggle over assigned meaning, a struggle over discourse as the expression of both form and content, a struggle over interpretation of experience, and a struggle over self. But it is this very struggle that makes possible new knowledge and practice. It is a struggle that makes possible new knowledge that expands beyond individual experience and hence redefines our identities and the real possibilities we see in the conditions of our lives. (p. 469)

In this respect, some (Bartolome, 1994; Giltrow and Calhoun, 1992; Pennycook, 1989) have put forward the opinion that educators have been more concerned with methods and quantitative analysis than with sensitivity and responsiveness to the subjective experience of students. Students are all different and no one method is likely to be appropriate for all students, and perhaps a fixation on methods will distance teachers from the political, cultural and historical awareness that informs particular teaching dynamics.

2.2 Conclusion

In considering the experience of literacy I have tried to emphasize the importance of students' subjective experience because it is through that complex and convoluted experience --
including cultural and historical influences, interrelations with other people and manifold shades of meaning - that students will find relevance and meaning. Various approaches to literacy have been mentioned, and they all can help students to learn language, but these approaches need to be used in ways that validate and include unique individual voices rather than trumpeting a superior standard that must be adhered to. It is also important that literacy should develop a political consciousness that is participatory and critical. Explicitly learning academically appropriate discourses is important if students are to be successful societally and educationally. Explicit approaches are therefore empowering, although they should be approached within the context of cultural and historical inclusivity and a willingness to question the status quo. Critical awareness needs to be encouraged through dialogue and an educational flexibility that is responsive to the issues that affect student lives.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

I have attempted to summarize several theoretical approaches to literacy which are practised to a greater or lesser extent, in terms of language education in general, and second language education in particular. I have also tried to emphasize the relationship between language and culture.

Since literacy has many different connotations I would like to define literacy as it relates to and is considered in this study. In doing this I would like to borrow from Paulo Freire’s conception which considers literacy to be, not just the isolated skills needed to learn a language, but all the sociocultural knowledge that an individual uses to locate him/herself in his/her historical political context. In this sense literacy is about human agency and empowerment; the ability to critically discuss issues and participate democratically to effect change. Language, of course, is an integral expression of an individual’s ability to interact within and transform society. In his book, “Literacy: reading the word and the world,” Freire comments on his conception of literacy:

The concept of literacy here should be taken as transcending its etymological content. Literacy cannot be reduced to experiences that are only a little creative, that treat the foundations of letters and words as a purely mechanical domain... I will try to go beyond this rigid comprehension of literacy and begin to understand literacy as the relationship of learners to the world, mediated by the transforming practice of this world taking place in the very general social milieu in which learners travel, and also mediated by the oral discourse concerning this transforming practice. This understanding of literacy takes me to a notion of a comprehensive literacy that is necessarily political. (p.106)

In terms of this inquiry, I have considered literacy in the comprehensive grounded sense which Freire has articulated. This being said, the research methodology I chose had to be
capable of approaching the subjective realities of my subjects, which have informed their lived experiences. This, of course, was an ambitious task considering the complex cultural, historical, attitudinal, situational factors involved.

3.2 Qualitative Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is a qualitative one. Since culture is such an integral part of the concept of literacy I am concerned with the social and experiential dimensions of the lives of the informants in the study. If literacy involves the interplay of intercultural subjectivities and the collision of varied ideologies and circumstances, then it would seem that a qualitative approach makes sense in terms of uncovering the salient aspects of these peoples lives as they relate to their experiences with literacy. In order to do this it is necessary to look at their lives holistically, at least so far as that is possible. As Lutz (1986) puts it:

Important to my thesis here is that the more we limit our ethnographic focus, the more likely we are systematically to limit our ability to discover some extremely important variable affecting the phenomenon which originates outside our narrow focus. Thus, seriously to limit the focus of ethnography in education is to compound a problem that such research should alleviate. Are there important and recurring conceptual variables that emanate outside the face-to-face, pupil-teacher transaction -- or even the classroom or school interaction -- that affect such often researched topics as classroom discipline, pupil achievement (learning), or curriculum structure? Can we ever understand, predict, affect, or control these educational processes unless we discover that these relationships exist? (p.111)

A quantitative approach which focused on a narrow aspect of behaviour, vis a vis proving or disproving a hypothesis, would be too limiting in the context of this study, which could be
termed "exploratory" in nature. The research undertaken in this study sought to investigate within the context of the informants own cultural parameters.

The research methodologies which have been developed by anthropologists to study and learn about cultures, from within, are ethnographies. Generally I have borrowed from this tradition in terms of its approach, though in a limited way, which could not be considered a full ethnography.

3.2 Description of Data Collection Methods

3.2.1 Ethnographic Interviews

In terms of gathering data I relied mainly on ethnographic interviews. I used Spradley's (1979) book *Ethnographic Interviews* as a rough guide in the planning process. I interviewed two students fairly intensively. Although I was not able to offer my informants payment for their time in the form of money, the interviews were an opportunity to improve on their oral fluency. The two informants were both men. Their fluency in English (upper intermediate to lower advanced) was good enough for the purposes of the interviews. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

I chose to use former students for two reasons. Firstly, it was easier to organize and recruit former students than it would have been to trace and find informants that I did not already know. Secondly, these students and I had already built a rapport and we were reasonably comfortable with each other.

I was concerned that it might be difficult to organize the interviews in a way that would ensure a quiet private space, away from other people. I was open to doing them wherever the informants wished. I was also prepared to include family members and friends if this would have made for a more comfortable environment, which I considered central to the success of the interviews.

It was expected that there would be some variation in terms of cultural interpretations from
my two subjects (Julio and Pedro), as they had somewhat different backgrounds. Both, however, came from urban areas and both spoke Spanish as their mother tongue.

In terms of my approach, I encouraged Julio and Pedro to include biographical details of their lives, their values, their educational backgrounds in El Salvador, their views on literacy and language, and their experiences in Canada, especially concerning language programs and other interactions with government agencies and employers. There views were stimulated and guided by adherence to a prepared set of interview questions. Generally though I gave them the opportunity, and encouraged them, to take the interviews in whichever direction was meaningful to them. I wanted to learn what was important to them, as opposed to trying to prove or disprove a specific hypothesis. Later, I identified significant themes in the data that was meaningful to the inquiry. The guiding objective was a greater understanding of Pedro and Julio's experiences as they related to their language development.

These interviews were also an opportunity for them to ask me questions about aspects of their ESL and job-training experiences that they may have found confusing or counterproductive. It was intended that the interview process should be a positive and enriching experience.

3.2.2 Researcher Journal

Although my primary data was collected from the interviews as described above. I kept a journal of my own perceptions, interpretations and reflections of the interviews. I am aware that as the initiator of this study my own interpretation of these peoples' experiences cannot be claimed to be objective. My plan was to interpret their experience by and through an examination of my own. I have attempted to weave in my own reflections with those of my informants. In doing this I have been, however, mindful that it is their experiences that are the primary focus of the study.
3.2.3 Limitations of the Study

This research was intended to be an honest investigation into the lives of two people set against the reflections of one researcher. It took place in one geographic area under unique historical circumstances. For these reasons it is limited and it would be unwise to generalize the findings to include all refugees or even all El Salvadoran refugees.

The informants in this study are not native speakers of English. Their English language ability, as mentioned earlier, ranges from the upper intermediate to lower advanced levels. Every effort was made to understand the intent of informant utterances. It is, however, unavoidable in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic interactions such as this, that many subtle nuances of word or gesture become lost or misconstrued. Successive interviews allowed me to reflect their comments back to them for clarification. Every effort was made to be as true to the informants' meanings as possible.

3.2.4 Data Gathering

The data was gathered from interviews over a period lasting from February 20, 1995 until April 14, 1995. I interviewed Pedro three times and Julio twice. Interviews were approximately one hour in length. The reason for successive interviews was to provide time for reflection and the analysis of previous interviews. It also allowed informants to become accustomed to the interview process and to give them time to ruminate in regard to future interview sessions.

The location of interviews was decided on jointly, with the subject's wishes coming first. Small quiet coffee shops, as it turned out, were preferred.

Each interview was tape recorded with a small cassette recorder. Notes were also kept. The agenda for each interview was guided and directed by a set of prepared interview questions which served as a rough guide. The questions are included in the Appendix.

Following each interview I made reflective and analytical entries in a journal. These entries sought out salient themes and directions for future interviews. Transcriptions will also be made from each interview.
The gathered data was analysed thematically as it related to literacy and pedagogy and generally as to what could be learned from their testimony. Extensive quotations are included in Chapter Four (findings). I have included many quotes from the interviews as I believe their words often speak for themselves. The transcripts of the taped interviews, however, contain many repeated words and false starts, etc. I have attempted to edit their comments to enhance readability, but I have sought to stay true to their intended meanings. The themes are then related to the literature and discussed.

3.2.5 Investigator Bias

It would be untrue to assert that I am a totally unbiased researcher. I approached this study from a position of support for these refugees. It seems to me that they have lived lives that have been challenged in a way that is out of the experience of most Canadians. In attempting to understand their lives, I have needed to stretch my own perceptions and analyse my own responses to events that have had an impact on my own life.

3.3 Conclusion

Despite all the limitations that have been mentioned, this study sheds light on the literacy experiences of two refugees who have been involved in government programs. Qualitative studies like this, offer an analysis of lived experience, through the lenses of the informants’ own interpretations, that broad surveys and statistical analysis of student responses to specific skills cannot hope to capture.

If this study can contribute a partial understanding of these refugees experiences, in and out of the classroom, then hopefully, it might contribute to a greater awareness of cultural and political inter-relationships in the classroom, and a re-examination of pedagogical practices.
4 FINDINGS

4.1 Biographies

4.1.1 Introduction

The two informants on which this study is based, Pedro and Julio (not their real names), are both male El Salvadoran refugees. Both participated in the hospitality program at Fraser Pacific College, a program that combined English language instruction with preparation for work in the hospitality industry including a work placement. Both were in classes that I taught so I knew them fairly well before interviewing them.

Both men shared the experiences of life in El Salvador during a period of turmoil, bloodshed, and oppression. In terms of their personalities, attitudes, and general approach to life, however, they were very different.

4.1.1.1 Julio

Julio is forty-five and has been in Canada for nine years. He lives in Vancouver with his wife and four children. Julio attended the hospitality program at Fraser Pacific College, and recently he completed a bakery training and ESL course at Vancouver Community College.

Julio is a very likable man. In class he was always cheerful and positive and quick to laugh. I have never heard anyone say that he was hard to get along with or difficult. In class he was a good contributor to class and group activities, as well as being diligent. He is also not the sort of person who lets things bother him. He doesn't worry about making mistakes. He says that in Spanish they say, "You are aventabo. No scared of nobody."

In El Salvador Julio was a heavy equipment operator in the coastal port city of Acajutla. Julio made a point of emphasising that he really missed his job a lot. Like Pedro, he describes many horrors and injustices and a deep sadness at events in his country.
Unlike Pedro, however, Julio looks forward, not back. He has his family -- a wife and four children -- in Vancouver and is thankful for being here. Julio likes sports, especially watching the Blue Jays on TV, and music. He is not particularly interested in politics and doesn’t want to worry about what's going on in El Salvador. As he puts it, pointing out the window at Cambie Street, “This is my street now.” Julio wants to learn more English, support his family and build a life in Vancouver. The past is the past.

4.1.1.2 Pedro

Pedro has been in Canada for two years now and is currently working at a 7-Eleven convenience store. In his spare time he plays music and writes articles for Spanish language newspapers.

Pedro is a serious man with a keen interest in politics, literature, music, religion and current affairs. In El Salvador he attended the National University where he studied English and psychology. He also taught English and psychology in a secondary school. In classes at Fraser Pacific College, Pedro was often described by teachers as seeming aloof. At times he was reluctant to participate in class activities, and he clashed with certain teachers, while having a good relationship with others. He poured a lot of energy into his written compositions which were often written with a flourish, both in the way he wrote (the style), as well as in his handwriting which was almost calligraphic in its presentation. On occasion, he sought out materials and help that he felt he needed. In one-on-one discussion out of class Pedro was interesting, knowledgeable, articulate and had a good sense of humour.

Pedro had a happy childhood. He grew up in a small city near the capital, San Salvador. His father was in the army and the family was middle class. He loved school and had a secure family life with good neighbours and friends. He described his neighbourhood as the kind of place where children would sit and listen to their elders relate the numerous legends and stories which are part of the folklore of El Salvador.
In grade seven Pedro experienced a major shift in his life as the country entered what he describes as a “period of turmoil.” This period involved death squads, fighting, economic hardship and the tearing apart of friends and family. He describes it as a dark period when nobody knew who their friends were any more. Union resistance was strong both in industry and at the universities. Pedro recounted, for instance, his own experiences with unions at the National University in San Salvador. It was a time of public protest against government policies and American involvement. Though Pedro chose not to detail the circumstances, he is in Canada as a refugee because he was a victim of death squad persecution. Some of the horrors he describes, involving children fighting with guns, fathers being killed in front of their families, teachers being killed in front of their classes, etc., are truly appalling.

When Pedro left El Salvador he went first to Grand Rapids, Michigan where he had been accepted with a scholarship at a bible college. At Grand Rapids he decided not to attend and took the train to Seattle before coming to Vancouver.

Pedro has mixed feelings about being in Vancouver. He likes Canada, but he can’t forget his past. He describes his time here as a kind of therapy in which he can distance himself from his past and come to terms with it. Ultimately Pedro would like to return to El Salvador to be with his family and help the country to achieve peace.

In terms of the interviews, I found Pedro to be eager and thankful to participate. He was anxious to tell his story and he had a lot to say. It was obvious that Pedro had thought a lot about his life and took seriously his participation in its various chapters. There was a consistency in his views that transcended the various aspects of his life such as religion, politics and education, and came through in his enthusiasm and his carefully crafted articulation.

4.2 Themes Emerging From the Interviews

4.2.1 Introduction

I have selected themes that emerge from the interviews. I have chosen them from a consideration of both informants. It must be noted, however, that of the two, Pedro’s interviews
were longer and more clearly articulated, partly because his English was more fluent and partly because he really seemed to enjoy the opportunity to express his views and have them taken seriously. Although Julio was a good informant, he seemed somewhat concerned with putting on a good face. Pedro was eager and willing to dig deeper into his experiences. Both will be quoted and there is no intention to give greater or lesser importance to either. The following figure shows the themes graphically.

figure 6

**Themes Emerging From the Interviews**

- Values and Future Hopes
- Adjustment to Canada
- Political Activity and War
- What is Good Teaching?
- The Need for ESL and Job-Training Programs
- Teachers as Leaders
- Religion
4.2.1.1 Political Activity and War

The civil war and political injustices were certainly the most powerful and consistent themes to come out of the interviews. Both informants spoke emotionally, and their experiences were never very far under the surface. Both describe the time before the war as relatively peaceful. At the time the troubles started, Julio was a twenty-eight year old heavy equipment operator, and Pedro was a high school student. They describe a gradual worsening of conditions which led to protests and then tighter government controls and persecution. As Julio puts it:

- Yeah the prices of food. No raise in money for the job. The starving... The troubles start in 1978.

- the problems started in 1978?
- Because in 1969 we had problems. The war in Honduras, my neighbour country, right?
- Yeah?
- Yeah. Later than that the country no working very well. Problems, problems, problems. In 1978 all people was afraid protest, ah, the unions on the street, stop the traffic, ah, the army on the streets. Very, but no kill nobody yet, no kill nobody... Uh very quiet. Ian in 1975 it start, sorry in 1968 they start to kill people.

- 1978?
- Yeah in 1975 it start. In 1978 they started killing people. The army, the army come into an hospital. You know like Vancouver General Hospital... The army come over the hospital, killed nurse, doctor, ah, patient. Patients were there. The army, the army is killer, killer number one. The army was the arm of the government.

- Why did they want to do that?
- Because the people were, you know, demonstration of the street. They go on the street, you know, rah, rah, protest. "WE NEED MORE MONEY, WE NEED MORE MONEY" you know? ...The army start bap, bap, bap, bap. The people go where the hospital is closed. Go into the hospital. The army comes in to kill them. You know, many people died!
- This is when the organized revolt started?
- Yeah, one killer at that place was a general. Name is General Ramero. Killed [unintelligible] people. (Julio, April 6, 1995)

Likewise Pedro believes that 1979 was the year that events in El Salvador really started to deteriorate.

- Many students began to disappear and found them killed in the street, highway, house, etc. Many teachers disappeared, killed in the same school in front of students. You know taken out of the houses and killed in front of the wife and childrens. Terrible, terrible experiences for many of the people who can remember them. 1979 was the first time that the government and the armed forces began to work together. It's in this time that all the police were working and the Guardia National. And the armed forces kind of taken control in this kind of situations because many [unintelligible] some [unintelligible] like Coca Cola. Many people began to hate everything that was come from the United States. The flag. The base. It was the point of many attacks from the guerrillas, the members of the University, unions, everything. (Pedro, February 20, 1995)

American involvement and the political advantage of a small but powerful group of El Salvadorans were blamed by both informants for creating the political and economic turmoil. Both have a strong sense of injustice and oppression deliberately asserted for political and economic advantage. Julio mentioned fourteen families that control El Salvador. Pedro was also aware that the wealthy and powerful were manipulating events. He says:

- The rich men was every time involved in everything. The rich men played a [unintelligible]. They were playing too, because the rich men and the military were together, every times together, because the more benefit's were for them, for the rich men. (Pedro, February 20, 1995)
United States involvement was seen by both informants as corrupt and self-serving. Julio describes America as “a big alligator.” According to Pedro, El Salvadoran soldiers were trained at Fort Benning in North Carolina to counter the guerilla resistance. The inequitable business relationship was described by Julio in the following way.

- United States give 10¢ for take it out ten thousand. You know what I mean? Julio C. doesn’t care United States. Julio C. can be dead but Jimmy Carter’s people have to live. It’s true. Milk every morning, juice... Julio C., no. Water! Water and eat beans. They no: chicken, turkey. [laughs] (Julio, April 6, 1995)

Another aspect that stands out politically is the prevalence of unions in El Salvador. It would certainly seem that this was not a case of the government taking control unopposed. Julio was part of a very powerful union (Industrial Union for the Port of El Salvador), which was dangerous for the government “because Acajutla union was very strong.” He said, “The unions very important in my country because they are defence, defend the poor people’s rights. You know?” Similarly, Pedro was involved in unions at the National University, which he claims were very strongly speaking out against government policy.

Perhaps the most moving and chilling aspects of these interviews were the actual descriptions of the cost that the civil war had on the El Salvadoran society. Families were broken apart, children learned to hate, people could not trust each other, and violence and terror were a part of life.

- But the worst thing is in the middle of the years nobody believes in nobody. Nobody talks with nobody because someone can kill you in the midnight. We were afraid of the midnight. The darkness began to be hating us. We were very strange about it. Some time you might hear the door on your house. Somebody might be going through your house. Shouting in the midnight. Perhaps your last night with your parents or your son were killed over
Nobody was expecting the night was going to be happy... Terrible stories... for live in those days. (Pedro, February 20, 1995)

- A terrible experience! The children in kindergarten, for example, found about car bombs. It's terrible! How the teacher can explain what's going on? She has to explain things that [unintelligible] They get a nightmares very bad nightmares. Probably parents can't believe this kind of change, illnesses cause. Terrible experiences! They can't realize yet. Terrible changes that nobody can tell you, because if I tell someone in Canadian government or something like that, can never believe me cause never had experience about it. (Pedro, February 20, 1995)

- Why do you think that all of a sudden there was this turmoil. What was the initial cause?

- [pause] Ah yeah. Every time I wonder why my people changed. When we didn't know about guns. We didn't know what means M-16 or AK-47. We didn't know about it. But you cannot realize according to my speech how a nation can change from a night to another day. You never expect changes in the world, but you will know if you have to experience them. Nobody knows. But how did our people change? Because the war was begin. Many people were killed. Many of our children were born... They didn't know about peace. They only knew about guns, shots, kills, something like that, killed parents. They learned self-defence. They learned how to react to this kind of situation. Horrible situations! For example, I didn't tell you the story of my uncle, how he was killed. I still love him. I going to tell you how he was killed, how it was hard for me to take his hand cutted, his money. How do you think I carry that? I gonna be called illness about that. I have to self defence. I have to learn to defence. I don't know how to shoot M-16, I don't know how to shoot AK-47. The people learn to hate. Nobody understands that. Even this recording. The people listen to this recording got to understand how the people begins to hate. They learn to hate. They learn to defence. They learn to react. They learn to do everything for to keep alive.
- It sort of spreads out? [meaning hate begets more hate]

- Yes exactly! That's the point. That's the point! And you can say they are cured? They are not cured. They even know how to get a training, for example, when I start this meeting I start talking about US, but you didn't tell me why I was interested in US because this nation learned, preferred to my people to kill themselves. Can you believe that? huh? (Pedro, March 3, 1995)

That the war affected both men is undeniable, but they seem to deal with it differently. Julio has his family in Canada and wants to forget about the past tragedies. He isn’t interested in going back to El Salvador and he doesn’t want to try to improve the lot of his former country folk. Pedro, on the other hand, does not have his family here, and still finds it difficult to forget. In fact he doesn’t want to forget. The war is something he has to deal with.

- That is the reason why even many people can’t forget that experience. Why still war is danger. Many people were [worn] by it... Even I forget everything. I pass, I pass, I don’t want to forget anymore but, for example, in my night, it comes to me again. It’s almost hard for someone, like me, or someone, ever forget these terrible experiences.

- Probably can’t forget it.

- Oh yeah! Until you die! That’s right. Very true. It’s walking beside you. You have to learn to walk beside you. No forget it! (Pedro, March 3, 1995)

Pedro is especially disturbed when he considers the effect of the war on children. He laments that they are caught up in events that they don’t really understand. Their lives are insecure and dangerous. Pedro related the following story in an emotional voice. It deserves to be told. Prior to this story he was warning that Canadians are too unaware politically, too accepting of the status quo.

- I going to tell you some story. I never told before until now. I've seen childrens killing soldiers. Can you believe that? It was in 1982. A bridge was keeping with the guards, the
National Guards, soldiers. Many childrens carrying shotguns coming out from the forest and taking for surprise. The battle took about 2 hours. The children killed about ninety-one soldiers.

- Ninety-one?

- Ninety-one soldiers in about half an hour. How did they do it? They supposed to be. How did they do it? Suddenly I saw a kid about ten years or nine years old taking a guns, hiding in a place with coloured rocks, taking a handgun and killing every single one by one. Taking by surprise in a midnight. How he did that? That is the question. Childrens fighting the mans.

- Were most of the children that old? Nine or ten?

- From nine to eighteen. They are still childrens. How did they do it? How come? Never can explain it before. For example, then it was very shocking. Our childrens killing for survival. That means they were oppressed. It's a depress subject that they were living these times, these times. The war is still waiting! It's still waiting. They never finish. It's never going to be finished! (Pedro, March 10, 1995)

War often seems to be an alienating experience that causes a moral confusion. It involves experiences and behaviours that are unfamiliar to those of peace time. Pedro is wrestling with how children can become caught up in war and hate and survival. How do people come to do horrible acts of violence? How does a peaceful country suddenly become warlike? I don’t have any first hand knowledge of war. I’ve only been able to observe how it affects other people that I’ve known. My own life experiences have been rather pale by comparison.

I suppose everyone reacts to war differently, but I think there is something particularly difficult about a civil war. It is clear from the interviews that the war is a defining part of Pedro and Julio’s lives. Their experiences have also given them a political awareness of the power relationships which caused the turmoil which was such a part of their history. It has also, especially for Pedro, prompted them to deal with major existential issues like hate, compassion, God, and death.
4.2.1.2 Teachers as Leaders

This section could probably be combined with "What is good teaching?", but it is valuable to make special mention of the political aspects of teaching and the responsibilities that teachers have, not only to teach the curriculum, but to advocate for their students and positive social change in the context of the community and society as a whole.

Both Julio and Pedro felt that they had good teachers in El Salvador. Pedro -- being a teacher himself -- was very proud of his former teachers who he described as heroes.

- For me my teachers were my heroes. For me my teachers were very amazing. I learned everything from my teachers from my childhood to my teenagers. Well I feel every time we were spent was for teachers because every one of us we feel that this teacher is doing the best for us. I remember that I got a teacher, a lady teacher. She told me all the time, Pedro, doing everything you do, you have to be doing it well. It doesn't matter how many wrong things you do just do your best and you will learn it. She told me.

- You feel that your teachers were very committed?

- Very committed. Very fortunate for the students. They feel like we feel today. We were part of it. Still when we were teenagers we visited them. We made contact with them to talk with them about what we were child. Making joke you know, very nice.

- Was there any emphasis on your education..

- Yes, Yes. They gave me a base for my education, a formal base. A formal basis about what really did I wanted. You know, from my childhood, they told me to take my own decisions for myself. It doesn't matter what's going on happens. (Pedro, February 20, 1995)

One aspect that came out of the interviews, especially with Pedro, was the role of teachers as leaders and initiators of change. I had assumed that teachers working under the shadow of a repressive government would tend to be very careful about discussing events in a way that might be considered critical of the government's policies, and indeed Pedro said that many teachers
were targets of persecution. However, according to him, teachers took a very proactive approach -- in and out of the classroom -- to the war and to people's rights.

- It's interesting that you say that the teachers were very involved in this.

  Of course Ian, of course. They were striking too. The university was striking and all the schools and Colleges were striking too. For this reason many teachers were killed. Do you know the movement, "Andes 21 de Junio?" You've never heard about that?

- No.

- The purpose of this movement was to protect the teachers involved in the war involved in the political situation.

- To protect the teachers involved in the war?

- Yes. To make a positive ideas to end the war. There was a purpose to "Andes 21 de Junio."

  It's got a very nice history. Some day we got to make a special day to talk about "Andes 21 de Junio."

- It's a group?

- Yeah, it's a group. It's a union. Let me tell you something it's a, the union is special for the teachers. This union came to form part of many unions. They were fighting against the war... The unions they were fighting together. Making strikes, marches, political protests against injustice and the rules in the nation. It's a bad history. It's a black history, how the settlers came to be part of the guerrillas. Why 12 years were telling you why many people was killed on both sides. The guerrillas were blamed for many people were killed, too. I don't say that both sides were right. No, of course many people can say things about it. I can tell my own history. How I can see. How I lived in this terrible experience. (Pedro, February 20, 1995)

Union activity as seen above was very important in terms of resisting the governments policies. This was also true at the University level where students and professors worked together to maintain funding.
Because if you get a more unions they support, for example, the income they have to ask for the government every times. We were fighting for years that we get enough money support from the government. In this case the professors and the students were united. You know they can be separated. Mostly then, I was belonging to the language department, the English department. Most of the teachers belonged to the union to support all the students who didn't have any money to keep going. So this was more effective. This was working fine. Very nice, well organized, even during the hard times. (Pedro, March 3, 1995)

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the aspect of this that is interesting and impressive is the vehemence with which teachers and students pushed for change within the union environment. This meant writing, discussing, reading and planning for the purpose of making changes. Apart from what they actually learned in school, it shows that El Salvadoran students and teachers -- at least by Pedro's testimony -- have a history of using and valuing language as a means of resistance and effecting social change.

4.2.1.3 What is Good Teaching?

For Pedro and Julio good teaching comprises, not so much methodology, but the sensitivity and respect of the teacher to student needs. The relationship of teachers with their students is very important. Both students were in the "hospitality program" which included a work placement in a suitable context.

Julio felt he was in the wrong program and he spent a long time trying to get into another program, which proved difficult to do. He found this to be the most troubling part of his studies. As he put it, "The hospitality I don't like because for me I'm never going to be a waiter. Never. OK?" In the end he didn't take a work placement.

Pedro, on the other hand, had no problem with the program per se. The aspect that he had the most problem with was, "to think as the teacher thinks." "To take more assignment like the teacher really wanted. Those were my troubles." Pedro felt that he was in some way on the
wrong wave length and was being discriminated against.

- Every time was hard for me to think like he was thinking. And I sometimes. He would say. I feel, I felt myself that he was trying to say some discriminations against people. Uh, uh, I felt that. I, I, I not sure he was really that. But I felt myself a very discriminative people.

- You mean, you thought you couldn't, you didn't know what he wanted you to do?

- Oh, Ian! No, he didn't really want it, that, but he have to. I have to think like he really want it. For example, an assignment, homework, or even during the class, to try to understand. Why he pay more attention to the Russian people or Chinese people or people from the Union Soviet or ex-Union Soviet or something like that. Taking more opinion for to do some. Eh Pab. You know Pablo? [not his real name]

- Pablo?

- Pablo, every time got a fight with him because, he telling me he was taking a discriminative sense, here in the class. This environment was very, not very comfortable with him. For be honest with you, I hated this class. Every time I was sitting there I was saying, “Oh my God I have to be with this teacher. I've had it,” or something like that.

- You thought that he didn't

- Take care what you really want. That's what I mean. He didn't take care if you bring your assignment or if you learn it or not. That's a what I mean. (Pedro, March 3, 1995)

Julio also believed there was discrimination.

- The Europa people sometimes have discrimination for Latin American people. But this is true, because sometimes I feel all right, but ah, to me nobody has to give me... Because you tell me something I want to feel sick all right? No, no, no. I never. No I never. Only watch. (Julio, April 14, 1995)
Both feel discrimination at the College. It seemed to bother Pedro a great deal while Julio just shrugs it off matter of factly. It would seem that discrimination was something that El Salvadoran students were especially sensitive to at the College. Whether the discrimination they sensed was real or imagined, it is important to recognize that this was something they both perceived and considered when they thought about their learning experiences at the College.

Being a teacher himself, Pedro said that he studied his teachers and their approaches to instruction. He wanted to learn the way they taught. He feels the teacher's role is an important one. Teachers are highly respected in Latin America and the relationship between teachers and students is a special one.

- **You studied the teacher?**
- It's because I learned about the teacher. I learned the way that they teach the class. Do you remember that I used to be a teacher too?
- **Yup, uh huh.**
  
  *For this reason I takes my own think about, because I used to be a teacher too. I want to learn about it, feel a deep respect about it. Like good friends, a very close friends, even be a teacher. Remember that older students, what's the name, keep their eyes, keep their eyes in their teachers. The teacher has to forget that. It doesn't matter if they are adults or teenagers or children. It doesn't matter.*

- **Doesn't matter?**
- It doesn't matter, students always keep their eyes on their teachers. Seeing the teachers like the second parents, reverent, counselor or something like that. More experienced, that teach them. You know what I mean?
- **Yeah, sort of.**
  
  *That's a point of view. Many students can't understand because this is the... Canadian point of view. I'm taking the point of view of Latin American point of view. Latin American point of view is like that, that I'm telling it right. Why we feel respect for a teacher, because in my country we feel it.*
Julio is not as serious or as intense in his scrutiny of his teachers. For him, though, the relationship of the teacher with the class is also very important. Teachers need to be prepared and patient. They also need to speak clearly and have a sense of humour.

- No, I mean, uh, the way the teachers taught, was it effective, did it help? Was it good teaching or bad teaching?
  - Yeah it's good. Most teachers have teach very well you know. Yeah ah, but the woman that speak very clear is Florence. [not her real name]
  - Florence? Florence is the most clear? So you learned a lot off Florence?
    - Yeah! Probably she had a little more patience, patience for the students all right? Maybe she believed they don't understand very well, you know, probably, probably, but she prepared, is good teacher. Yeah. Florence always had good humour, all right. Ah, smiling. I can make her a little joke. [laughs] (Julio, April 6, 1995)

Julio also found it important to be studying something other than just language. He didn't like the hospitality program because he didn't want to be a waiter, but in his program at Vancouver Community College he didn't enjoy his English classes, though he thought the bakery part was great. He says he wants to take more content-based courses possibly in the culinary arts or plumbing. As he puts it, "Yeah, you know before I told you I never want to be a waiter because to waiting I not going to learn nothing. But bakery, yeah. Plumber, culinary arts, it's different." (Julio, April 6, 1995) It is probably also true that students taking strictly English classes find it somewhat difficult to gauge their progress, whereas learning is more tangible in something like bakery training.

Pedro on the other hand didn't seem to be overly interested in learning a trade. He is interested in language itself, teaching and politics.

- What about the teaching methods which teachers used?
  - Methods?
- **Methods, yes, the methods teachers used.**
  - I hate methods.

- **Hate methods?**
  - I don't like. I like more literature.

- **More what?**
  - Literatures.

- **OK**
  - Novels, words, take my own interpretations. Take my own opinion about it... That's I like it... That's what I like it. To keep, to write articles, to write poems, to make music, to read music, the same. That's I like it. Compose music and to write a novel, that's a used to do it. (Pedro, March 3, 1995)

For Pedro a relationship of trust and respect seems to be the most important aspect of teaching. Teachers, he feels, need to be very sensitive to the needs of the students and what it is they want. Being able to voice his concerns and have them taken seriously is a part of the respect he looks for.

- **Do you feel that you were able to voice your concerns in class? If you had a problem with the teacher or something you were doing, did you feel there was an opportunity for you to talk about it?**
  - If the teacher gave me the chance? Yes of course, depending what kind of point you get it. You get a teacher, a professor how major it is or not. It depend on the teacher. Some teachers didn't, some teachers did.

- **Sort of depends on the teacher?**
  - The teacher, yes.

- **All right. The next question is probably the same thing, but did you feel your concerns were taken seriously? If you had a problem and you went to the teacher or counselor or whatever, were you taken seriously?**
- For me the teacher listen to me is very important because the first day they have to witness is to [catch]. It's your idea of what do you really want it and the teacher do it for you. It's the first thing, the first day they have to win it. If you want it you will get the second one. That is take your respect. Take your, what you really want it. Try to be understandable with each other. Try to make a very comfortable way to know each other. You get what you want it really.

- You're saying respect should be a two way thing? Someone shows respect for you, you show respect for them.

- Yes, it's most important, the teacher has to respect the student, too.

- Sometimes this didn't happen?

- Yes, sometimes it didn't happen.

- Same thing at the Immigration place?

- Yes, every time you will find people like that. You have to handle it of course.

- So this is something that is very important to education?

- Very, very important: respect! If you don't get it you will loose your temper and you will get nothing. (Pedro, March 3, 1995)

In the following quote Pedro explains how he thinks that teachers should learn about student's needs at the beginning of a course and perform the function of a resource person.

- The most principal thing that the teacher has to do is when he starts some class in this College is to make a really a nice study in the students, what do they really needed and try to help them this way and this gap what they really needed. You know what I mean?

- Yeah, I know.

- So, you have to. For example every time I used to tell you, "Ian, you got a comparison/ contrast?" and you know this kind of material. You say, "Yeah, I will get it." You see because I knew what I really wanted. I really wanted was my gap. (Pedro, March 3, 1995)
In the above quote, Pedro was referring to a request he made to me, for materials on writing a comparison/contrast essay, which he felt he needed. By gap, he means a gap in his knowledge of English. He feels that nurturing the relationship should be an ongoing part of the teacher's job. He seems to attribute this to effort and commitment on the teacher's part.

- **But what advice would you have for the teachers and the people who have set up the program? What could they do to make it better.**

- Well it's key... If you’re working as a teacher give one hundred percent as a teacher. If you’re a student will get all you really want it.

- **Same thing for a student and a teacher?**

- The same thing because when both parts do the same thing the teacher learning methods is going to be reaching one hundred percent. Every [incomprehensible] from the College could be really amazing. All the students have be get it all that they really want it. Their life going to be very improve it, going to be improve it for skills: reading, composition, hearing and writing. It means the teacher feel a very satisfied about the work has done before, because has done the percent that is required to do. Both sides, teacher and student. It's like we’re working for in the College, giving one hundred percent result is very nice, very, very nice. I don't know if you are really agree with me or ? [laughs]

- **Yes, I agree with you. I think think that's very true.**

- Because being the year we're talking here, I heard a lot of complaints. I heard a lot of complaints. I heard a lot of problems, because some teaching was not good enough for students. Some students were not doing enough for the teachers. So the class was very boring, lack, and you didn’t learn anything. For these reasons, you know, you're never going to reach one hundred percent. You really want it but eighty percent, eighty-five percent is going to be enough for the course. To make a relations every month is a very nice method for to realize how it's working, getting along with both sides. It's very important that they consider about it. A relationship is make you realize how it's going work, how the work is going. So a relation for yourself, for the students themselves, and for
the College. It's very nice. Think very considerations for the relationships.

- So the relationship is of number one importance to you?

- The relationship, yes. (Pedro, March 10, 1995)

On further reflection, though, Pedro gave another reason for some of the complaints and frustrations that El Salvadoran students experienced with the teaching at the College.

- Let me tell you something, that's what I felt here in my first. Sometimes I felt the teacher didn't care about really the students really wanted. Why many Spaniards got a complaint here in the year what I'm studying? Why? And I realized that we saw this because the Spanish people where we comes from it's really hard way for to keep alive.

- It's what?

- A really hard way for to keep alive. It means different styles of ways for you keep money, for to get study, or to learn something. It's hard for us! And when come from this country they want to learn everythings. Perhaps people I hear or perhaps keeping alive there. So when they didn't feel they were learning enough or perhaps the teacher, they weren't giving enough knowledge to them, they got a frustrated. They got a big frustrations! (Pedro, March 10, 1995)

So it would seem from the last entry that the history that these students bring with them is important. It affects and informs the way they experience their studies here in Canada. It was important to them that teachers listen to them, that they have a voice, that they be taken seriously. Joking with the teacher, building relationships, treating each other with respect, making extra efforts, evaluating rapport and needs, opening and encouraging channels of communication, these are the things that Pedro and Julio found important for successful teaching.

It is interesting that many of the same problems that Pedro and Julio point out in terms of the student - teacher relationship could also be said of the relationship between teachers and the
College's administration. During the period of time when Julio and Pedro attended the College there were a number of factors which had a deleterious effect on College morale. The federal government imposed a two year wage freeze on all salaries which led to a lot of dissatisfaction. The College was put on the market and there was a feeling that jobs were not very secure. The government's policies in terms of what programs it was prepared to sponsor were unpredictable, and so the number of students enrolled, and the programs that it offered, were unstable. The Principal, who had a very open, communicative rapport with staff members, took semi-retirement and the administrative posture changed in her absence.

The result was that there was a communication break-down. Difficulties weren't discussed. Teachers felt that they didn't have a voice. Suggestions and complaints were not responded to. Staff members felt as though they were taken for granted and resentments began to affect the ability to work together. I can only imagine how administrators felt, but I believe they came to feel isolated and threatened by an uncooperative staff.

Since that time things have stabilized somewhat, but the reason I bring this up is that it parallels, very closely, Pedro's description of the way students felt during that period. A refusal to communicate and consider the concerns of others, leaves people feeling devalued and snubbed. This is surely very important in a multicultural, multilingual setting where people with very different histories struggle to be recognized and accepted. Failure to listen and value and nurture relationships can lead to bad feelings which, in a setting such as a language college, can have racial and cultural overtones, as well as an obvious negative effect on learning.

4.2.1.4 Religion

El Salvador is very much a country in which Roman Catholicism has a strong influence. Religion emerged as a strong theme in the interviews.

The church in El Salvador has a grass roots support that Canadians are not really familiar with. The church, in fact, has not only a theological function but also serves as a political intermediary between the government and the people. As such, the relationships between
church, the people and the state have a tension and sense of importance that should not be underestimated.

Although both Pedro and Julio refer to God and religion many times, their opinions are quite different. Julio acknowledges the influence of Catholicism on his country, but asserts that he is not religious. He says:

- Yeah I am nothing, no religion.
- But most people are Catholic?
- Yeah, because I think that religion is for keep the people quiet. Accept everything. For me is not correct. (Julio, April 6, 1995)

However when asked what kind of books he likes to read he says:

- I read the bible.
- The bible?
- Yeah, the bible. I read authors like ah, J. Benitez. You know J. J. Benitez?
-No.
- I read ah
- novels or stories or...
- No knowledge, knowledge about God.
- about God?
- Not religion. Religion I don't like. You know why I don't like?
- You said before because you think it's a way to control the people.
- [laughs] Yeah.
- But you like to read about, to think about, ah, you like to think about God in your own way maybe?
- Yeah [laughs]. The book or what?
- Well, you said you like to read the bible and think about God so you must be religious in
Ian, sometimes I like to read ah, ah, propaganda is religion but not because I interested, interested to get, ah, that religion all right? Only because, only for read. Only to know what propaganda is religion. (Julio, April 6, 1995)

Julio, however, is quick to point out the positive influence of Rivera Y Damos, the Archbishop of El Salvador, who was assassinated in 1980, an event which acted as a catalyst for resistance to the government's policies and was a contributing factor to the civil war. "This Bishop," Julio noted, "defend the poor people's rights." He continues:

He was inside that, he saw, not angels, not justice, injustice OK? Injustice of the soldiers, ah, fighting the people, innocent people. You know he saw. He said, "Please leave in peace my people! In the name of God, please, I tell you, please leave my people!" Yeah Listen, I am no Catholic. I told you before. I told you before. But I get it. I like a little bit Catholic for that. (Julio, April 6, 1995)

Later in the interview I asked Julio if he could tell me about someone he admires, perhaps a hero. His reply was revealing:

- Well, my hero no is a person. My hero is God.
- Is what?
- God because he save me. Ian, when someone lives in a civil war it's terrible. Only God is with you. Nobody else.
- That's different from when you said you're not religious?
- Yeah different. Yeah it's true. I don't believe in religion but I believe in God. (Julio, April 6, 1995)
So, by my interpretation it would seem that Julio’s reaction against religion is directed towards the dogma of religion that seeks to fix religious practice by adherence to centralized control and institutionalized practice. The above quotation would seem to indicate a strong spiritual awareness.

Pedro was more emphatic about being a religious person and the place of religious practice in his life. He makes this clear in the interviews.

- I am very religious. I consider myself very religious. Religion is deeply part of my life. To believe in God is faith is part of my life. To believe in God is part of my life. That’s the one reason I live. I’m alive. Taking a faith in God. Asking for miracles every day. [sings] “Expects a miracle every day, expects a miracle when you pray.” You know this song?
- No.
- Come on give me a break! [laughs] The Latin American people is very religious. Don’t forget that. (Pedro, March 10, 1995)

We also discussed the differences in the way religion is practised in Canada and in El Salvador. In the following two segments both Pedro and I express our views.

- Is there any difference? Well, I think the way religion is practised in Canada is different from the way it’s practised in
- Oh, a huge difference! Quite a difference. People here even believe in God. Some of them take the church like a part of their Saturdays. No, like a something real in their life. Something like it be a main part of life. I found many people here that they’re really don’t need to be part of a church... Like the God of their lives got something like a came from formulas. Canada doesn’t know about [incomprehensible]. They have everything here but they’re looking for God. They got everything here, but for these reasons the God thing here is considered like a second hand, something like second hand.
- I think that the difference maybe is that in Canada the church has become almost
irrelevant to people whereas in somewhere like El Salvador or Mexico the church still is speaking to the people.

- Speaking to the people. Right.

- Whereas I don’t think it is in Canada. I think the church is a hierarchy. It's like a political institution.

Institution.

- And it's speaking down to the people and it's rigid and static and unchanging.

- Unchanging.

- And I don’t think that's religion.

- Me, too. I don’t think so. (Pedro, March 10, 1995)

Like Julio, Pedro stressed the role of the church in El Salvador in helping the people. The distinction between the role of the church in Canada and El Salvador is more telling here as its role is more political in El Salvador. The church's role is one of listening to and advocating for the rights of the people. Owing to its wide influence in El Salvador, the church has a lot of power and serves as a nagging irritant to government policies.

- But, in El Salvador, is the Catholic church seen as a liberating force? Do they help the people?

- Yes, of course. You have to remember that the Catholic church is playing a principal role in the behaviour of the many people. Do you remember that the Monsieur Rivera was killed?

- Rivera, was it?

- Yes. Monsignor Rivera E. Ramos.

- Yeah, I remember that.

- OK, the church play a very specific role in this kind of situation. Remember that the Catholic church was against the government policy.

- Against government policy?
- Yes. It was in favour of the peoples, with the peoples. It was popular with the people. Many people was supporting them and the church was supporting the people. You know they were working together, many peasants with the Catholic church in fighting in the mountains against the government.

- Were they helping in the fighting?

- Yes, they were playing a very important purpose in this kind of war, and is still playing a very specific clue, a specific key for the political situation in my country.

- So this man was killed, this Monsignor Rivera?

- Yes, he’s a Bishop.

- Because he was a leader and a very strong man?

- Leader. Very strong hopes in this times. Very strong hopes. Many people was behind him.

- And he spoke out angrily against the government?

- Of course.

- So what is it like now? You have to be very careful what you say?

- In those times, yes, you had to be very careful, but through this man many people can speak... He was a voice of the people... Of course he was really untouchable. For these people the government was very afraid about him. The government [unintelligible] the death threat to kill him because this man was untouchable, was playing a good for the people.

- So, the people must have been very outraged when this happened?

- Many groups rose up. Many people, they were more strength. The groups they were working more specifically, not just only in the mountains, not just only in the cities for the church, for the Catholic church. More popular for them. (Pedro, February 20, 1995)

It seems to me that Julio, Pedro and I have all made the distinction between religious experience and the way organized religion is practiced. Julio believes in God but doesn't condone the institutional practice of religion, even though he admires the work of the Catholic leadership in El Salvador in their efforts to stand up for the people. Pedro emphasised the
aloofness of Canadian religious practice which strikes him as isolated from the rest of life rather than as a central part. It would certainly appear that in El Salvador the church served the function of listening to and supporting the concerns of people who were experiencing hardship. As such, their role has many similarities and shares many responsibilities with that of teachers.

4.2.1.5 Adjusting to Canada

Coming to Canada and adjusting to the new society was obviously a big change for both Julio and Pedro. Their attitudes toward life in Vancouver and the experiences they have had, though, are quite different. This is probably partly due to differences in personality, sense of identity and circumstances.

For Julio it means leaving an intolerable and dangerous life to start a new life.

- **When you left El Salvador, were you glad to leave?**
  - Political problem, right? Ah yeah, political problem. Nobody can live with that. So ah, I feel my family and myself, we feel very nice, very well here. Canada is a good country. Really, really is... a better life. I feel very well here. I think, God, he still loves me.
  - **God still loves you?**
  - Yeah because he send me, my family and myself to here. (Julio, April 6, 1995)

Julio doesn’t want to go back to El Salvador. He is safe in Canada. He has his family here and this is where he wants to put down roots. In fact he can not understand other El Salvadoran immigrants who start to get restless and want to return to their country.

- **Bad! Bad! I don’t know, Ian, I have to respect the Pedro’s feeling alright, but I don’t know why the people think in the past. The people come here, ah, Ian, after six months or ten months, “I want to go back to El Salvador, back on my street.” Yeah, well, the street is always there. The street is there. You know? It’s not mine. It’s not yours. It’s there, the**
street. [pointing out the window] Cambie is my street. Main Street is my street. Fraser
Street is my street... I say you no back to my country. Never!

- Never go back?

- No come back to my country. No visit because my God left from my country. He forsaked
my family life and myself all right? I don't go to looking for again the danger. You
understand me? No come back! I am feel very well here. No come back. Canada is a big
country, good country. (Julio, April 6, 1995)

Pedro also considers family to be of paramount importance. As he says, "Family is most
important you have. It is what you live for, the family." Unfortunately, Pedro lives in Vancouver
without his family members. Pedro came to Canada, not to start a new life but to get a
perspective on the events of his life. As he puts it:

- Not start a new life because if I come here to Canada. It's not for start a new life. No, no,
no, no! I don't think of that. You can start your life even in your house whatever country
you are. Perhaps it's to teach myself... You are the first guy, first person, that talk me how
or why do I leave my country. I came here for to know myself more, for concentrate, to see,
to take the point of view of all my past in different ways.

- To look from a distance?

- Yes, because I decided to come out, you know, and take my country in differing ways.

Taking my hand for to help them, not for to reject something.

In adjusting to Canada, Pedro's experiences have not been easy.

-Are you happy to be in Canada?

- [long pause] Good question! Not at all.

- Not at all?

- No. Not at all. I like Canada. When I say not at all, I'm talking about myself, not other
people. Other people going to say, "Yes, of course, it's a wonderful, it's a paradise". It's like if you go to Victoria you say it's a paradise... It's a nice place. But I think, when I say not at all is, in this case, I... not telling you it's bad to be here. Canada is whatever people really want it. It's a peaceful climate. I learned to live in a peaceful climate here in Canada.

- Peaceful climate?

- Has been very therapy, therapy, therapy necessary to see myself. When you got a time for to see yourself you know the times. When someone got a purpose to come here, you will get it stay longer because you continue to want it: You get it, you don't speak, don't speak any more because the goal you set it for... Life is a purpose. If you don't have a purpose in your life you don't have nothing. For believe in. You got a goal. You set goals in your life. Every people has got to think seriously in life. Well, I got a goal. I say, "That's the way of [silence] come here." I've been here... over two years. I think it's been very nice. To be longer here, take more time here, perhaps, perhaps that could help. (Pedro, March 3, 1995)

Pedro obviously takes his time here seriously. He talks about goals and a purpose in life. It seems these goals are not fully realizable in Canada though. He seems to see his time in Canada as a time of preparation.

- OK, so you’re talking about purposes. So, what do you see now as your purpose? What’s your goal?

- Where? Here?

- No, anywhere. Canada or El Salvador or wherever? Where do you see your life going?

What's your purpose?

- Well, first of all, my life to go forward. Take more times... with my family... And to prepare myself, to prepare, I mean, when I say prepare, it mean, I mean ah, professional, professional. Helping your people. There are many people in your country... They want a your help. That's the problem. I prepare here in Canada. I preparing. It doesn't matter if I take only a course from Fraser Pacific College or wherever, but I took experiences. That
experience I gonna keep and share with these people that even had a chance to come here didn't know about. Why do people come here and stay so long here? Perhaps selfish or something like that. Why take experiences away from own country to teach them? Purpose to keep alive in your life. They got a terrible background, terrible background, terrible past... so keep this knowledge due to these experiences and tell them what did you learn when you were in other countries. What kind of experience did you get it? What kind of experience gonna help them? This is it.

- You want to share?

- Share! Share, Ian... These people are never going to get a chance to come to Canada, and when you prepared they going to tell you, "How is Canada? What did you learn?" I will be very proud to tell them I learned my experiences.

- That's good!

- That is the thing. That's the reason I say that I'm thankful that, to bring me here in this beautiful place. I would like those people, those poor people, living here and eating. Many of those people are starving. They don't have any chance to be living here. When you are here eating your meal, don't think only of yourself. Pray for those people that don't have it. Some day they will get it. Many people only eat once a day... When you get some experience, you got to think of, not only you, first of all, other people. I was seen a suffering. When I was younger, when I was a child, my parents was not so poor but was in the middle class. Every time tell me, "Don't think only of the people that are beside you. Use your [incomprehensible] every times think how they do." (Pedro, March 3, 1995)

Pedro's goals then are obviously closely tied in with his past history and his sense of responsibility and what he can do to help. Part of his past history, of course, includes his vocation as a teacher, his activity within unions at the National University, his belief in the value of language -- as evidenced by articles he has written -- and his concern for the future of his country. These aspects impinge on his present experience in Canada as his interviews show.
Initial adjustment to Canada, including dealings with the Canadian government, was quite different for the two men. Pedro had problems with the Canadian government. He felt that he was "not accepted" by the immigration officials. In other words the officials did not initially believe his story which he found very frustrating and demeaning. He felt that they had treated him almost as if he was begging to come to Canada and as someone to be suspicious of. This made him angry.

-So you felt they didn't trust you or?

- I feel that they didn't trust me. I feel that they were treating me like a, like a martyr or something like that, like a... thieves... I didn't like it. If they didn't trust me, like I told to my lawyer, they don't know. The Canada people don't know about our, our political situations. They didn't believe it. How can they understand the people who come here to claim like a refugee here. It's hard for them to understand, to even believe it... They can't understand it. They say, yes, yes, you just stay here or you have to go back to your country, wherever. I say, "I don't care." I don't like your country. You guys I going to take my time that I want it. That's it! For me it doesn't matter. Give me a resident, citizenship... I never been interested to get citizen, even American citizen. (Pedro, March 3, 1995)

Julio, in contrast, feels that he has been well treated by the Canadian government and he is thankful for being given the opportunity to be free and build a new life. Julio expressed genuine concern that things have not worked out so well for Pedro.

- Pedro thinks he's going back to the country?

- I think so. He says he wants to go back.

- What? Has he brought his family already? No?

- I don't think so.

- Poor Pedro! Poor Pedro! Maybe he misses his family a lot... Pedro has a big problem. He waited, sit, somebody work for him. He sit, waiting for somebody move for him. He needs to make something!
- He's waiting?
- I am move myself. I never sit when I need something. It's different because I know Pedro, what he think about... Problem is my family. It's true. Then move! You know the people has to move. I went to the main office, head office, immigration, Ian. When I was one year here, no eight months. Yeah. I went, I spoke Mr., I don't remember his name. He told me, "Your family come enough, 15 days, 2 weeks, because you come almost every day and call. You have called me every day. You come here to ask." Pedro, no!

It is interesting to note that for Julio one of the problems that he has experienced is the loss of the Spanish language, especially in his children. The following exchange illustrates this.

- So your kids go to school in Vancouver and they speak [English]. Their English is just as good as their Spanish?
- My kids speak English very well. [laughs]
- Speak Spanish very well too?
- No! My youngest girl has the Spanish very bad. She says, well in Spanish says, "What time the Chinese restaurant close today?" In English. In Spanish, "A que hora cieren cerinterno chino?" Ah, what time is it close Chinese soup? [laughs] Yeah, Spanish, very bad. (Julio, April 6, 1995)

Julio also notices the same thing in his own studies in the bakery training and ESL classes at Vancouver Community College.

- Yup, practical, practical, but the first week, Ian, I feel stranger, stranger myself all right. I never, I never have before in my life had to learn everything in English all right. I know, I knew almost everything in Spanish, but it's difficult. It was difficult for me to translate from Spanish to English all right, however I learn, and then now, I know everything in English. I forgot the Spanish names. It's funny, eh? [laughs] (Julio, April 14, 1995)
Both men are involved in the El Salvadoran and Spanish speaking community in Vancouver. Pedro writes newspaper articles for Spanish language newspapers and also takes part in musical gatherings, in which he sings and plays musical instruments. Julio, likewise, sings in a Latin American band. Music and dancing are apparently a big part of El Salvadoran culture. At major celebrations in El Salvador, it is common to cordon off a street and dance until dawn.

The identity of both men, it would seem, is tied to their past experiences and their individual conceptions of their place within the larger community. Being away from his family and not being able to share and contribute to the betterment of his people is obviously difficult for Pedro.

Adjusting to the challenges of life in a new country must surely tax the sense of self-identity that each man carries around. Their past experiences and the values they have brought with them from El Salvador juxtapose with a different language, culture and socio-political matrix. It is not surprising that this presents a challenge, one that different people will experience differently.

4.2.1.6 Values and Future Hopes

It should be clear at this point that Pedro and Julio each have different hopes for the future of their lives and somewhat different values (they are, at least, vocalized in a different way though the underlying sentiments may be similar).

Julio, as has been mentioned, wants to get a good job, possibly as a baker, and improve his English. He also expressed interest in the possibility of taking other training in the culinary arts and plumbing.

Julio spent a good part of the interviews talking about his family. His eldest son is twenty-three, married, and has taken the culinary course at Vancouver Community College. His sixteen-year-old daughter is a student at John Oliver School and is very involved in acting in the drama club. His thirteen-year-old son is in grade eight and his youngest daughter is in grade four. His wife has found it difficult to take courses or obtain employment as she suffers from migraine.
headaches. It is very clear that Julio's values and hopes centre around his family. He seems, from my perspective, like a man who is content. He puts it this way:

*Poor or rich people, same hole. Your judges, supreme judges is God. Justice is same for poor people, same for rich people. For him there is no discrimination. For him is. Ah, I tell you, for God, all humanitarian people are friends.* (Julio, April 6, 1995)

For Pedro, though, things are not so easy to rationalize. He takes his life and his role in it very seriously. We have seen that his studies, his religious faith, politics, the role of the teacher and relationships are all very important and carefully considered. There is a common thread that runs through Pedro's interviews as evidence of his value system. Interpersonal relationships based on respect would seem to be, for him, extremely important. This entails having a right to speak and express opinions and having someone there to listen.

In expressing his political views he is aware of the unequal power relationships and the injustice in his country. He is aware of the unwillingness of the El Salvadoran government to listen and dialogue with the people. For this reason he has considered it important to actively pursue an improved situation through union activity.

In articulating good teaching he has stressed the relationship between the teacher and students and the willingness to listen to and respond to the needs and concerns of students. He emphasised that good teachers work at building a respectful relationship that accounts for students' needs.

In explaining why he is a religious person, he emphasizes the experiential aspects of people coming together to deal with their lives. It is important, to him, that the church in El Salvador had the role of listening to the people and recognizing and assuaging the pain and suffering that was so prevalent at the time he was there. It is, also, equally important that the church gave voice to the people's sense of injustice and was a catalyst for opposition to the government's exploitive policies.
This dialogic relationship is what Pedro seems to consider to be the basis of respect between people. It is the bedrock of successful relationships in a whole range of contexts. The following exchange gives voice to this view.

- **Tell me about your last article. What did you write about?**
- **Was called “There Are Still Thieves in Our Country.”**
- **That’s what it was called?**
- **Yes. Well, I wrote how the process of the peacemaker going to our country. How some rights, some human rights are broken, how some people, some lives, are really having killing, how are still some ex-soldiers, some ex-guerrillas are still fighting to receive their payment cheques. And how they going to confront the couple of years that the Governor still has it. Four years of government. They have another 2 years. How they going to confront the next couple of years if the economy, they keep it alive. It's going down all the times.**
- **Going down?**
- **Yes, so how they going to survive. That's my article and I put it there in my own point of view, my own opinions. How can be improved if they really considered the voice of the people, the voice of the bottom people. Take the time to listen to them. For to make a really conscious, the realities of our country. Getting out on the street, getting out on the village and colonist taking his voices.**
- **Taking voices?**
- **Yes, hearing them. This is the most important point of view that the government have to be taking during the civil.**
- **Listen to the people?**
- **Listening to people, Ian! It's to listen to people. They never expect nothing because they never listen.**
- **Same as what you said about teachers.**
- **Yes, the clue for this kind of thing is listened. Listen and react. React to the process. This
is most important. To sit down with them at the table and talk to each other face to face.

What is the point? What can I do and what can I not do? This has to be. Bring and sit down here and say what you really want it. What can I do for you. That's the most important point isn't it? (Pedro, March 6, 1995)

I have to agree with Pedro on this. Communication, listening and speaking, are so central to any relationship, but, though seeming simple, it is often extremely difficult to realize. There are so many factors coming into successful communication, whether it be between husband and wife, father and son, teacher and student or teacher and administrator. However, when I think back over the teachers who made the biggest impact on my life they were the ones that would listen and consider other points of view as well as sincerely express their own. This is, of course, completely different from assuming the posture of listening out of duty, or as a step in quelling dissent and responding in a way which is considered prudent and reveals little.

4.2.1.7 The Need for ESL and Job-Training Programs

This theme did not take up a lot of time in the interviews, but it was stressed, especially by Julio. Both felt thankful for having had the opportunity to take part in their language and job-training programs. They both believe in the value of education and training and both feel they need it to be successful in Canada.

They also felt that Canadian work experience is necessary to get work in Canada, as employers usually require Canadian work experience, so they felt the work placements were useful. As Pedro said of his hospital placement, "I got three things: experiences, improved my English and how to approach the work here in Canada."

Julio stressed emphatically that these programs are a life line for immigrants to Canada. At the end of his interviews I asked him if there was anything he would like to say. This was his reply:
- Yes, I would like to tell the people... to help the people learn English training, to learn the language. It's a wall, you know, wall? It's a wall for immigrant people, English. Without English nobody can move. The people need that. (Julio, April 14, 1995)

4.3 Further Thoughts on the Interviews

4.3.1 Response to the Interview Process

It was significant and gratifying to me to receive such enthusiastic participation in the interviews. I was worried, prior to the process, that this would be a lot to ask and that Pedro and Julio would be too busy, or not want to participate. Both, however, were happy to help.

Pedro, whom I interviewed first, was eager from the start. He seemed to see this as an opportunity to teach about his country and to express his views on a variety of matters. Pedro claimed that coming to Canada has been, and is, a kind of therapy for him. These interviews, I think, also served this type of purpose. Pedro loves to talk and the interviews provided an opportunity for him to think over and verbalize many of the things he has been thinking about. At the end of the interviews I think he was sincere when he said, "OK, Ian, thank-you to you for giving me the chance to share my knowledge with you. Perhaps you getting a good subject." He is, of course right. I did get a good subject.

Julio, though not as eager to delve into his past in the kind of detail that Pedro was, was none the less an enthusiastic participant. He also likes to talk and enjoyed the interviews.

A central message of Pedro’s was the need for listening and having the opportunity to speak and be taken seriously. These interviews provided that opportunity, and as such, I feel they were a good educational experience not only for Pedro and Julio but for me as well.
4.3.2 Differences Between the Subjects

As has been mentioned and as is evident from the interview segments shared in this chapter, Pedro and Julio are quite different in their personalities, and in their attitudes to life, though they also, of course, share many similarities. However, rather than detracting from this inquiry, I feel it is very much to be expected. People are different and perhaps this is worth noting. Classrooms, ESL and otherwise, are places of diversity.

4.3.3 Language Used in the Interviews

Both Pedro and Julio had some difficulty expressing themselves in the interviews. Julio, especially struggled at times, as his fluency and comprehension were at a lower level than Pedro. Often they both made grammatical errors. However, at times the language they use has a powerful ability to convey meaning. Perhaps it is effective because it is novel and unusual, but many phrases are beautiful and descriptive. Consider the following examples.

*We were afraid of the midnight. The darkness began to be hating us.* (Pedro, February 20, 1995)

*Because believe it or not this was a very nice part of my life. Try to put away all the worries and try to myself peaceful, and remember the love things that someone that loved me tried to tell me.* (Pedro, February 20, 1995)

Julio's dialogue, though not as fluent as Pedro's, was quite creative and although it doesn't come through in the transcripts, his delivery made use of tonal variation and strong facial and gestural expressiveness. Throughout, he was animated and used humour and pathos effectively. For example, Julio invented the following imaginary dialogue to illustrate the differences in government sensitivity between Canada and El Salvador. It was told with a sense of drama.
Very difficult, to live on society. In my country, everyone is ah. I am at Ajutla airport, El Salvador, Um, my country:

"Excuse me, are you the immigrant?"

"Yes, I am."

"What can I do for you?"

"My name is Tat tat tat. I am going to that city."

"Are you have the proper documents?"

"No, Sir, I don't got them."

"Where do you come from?"

"Canada."

"I don't know you! Who are you?"

This is my country.

4.4 Conclusion

The interviews have revealed Pedro and Julio to be fairly different in terms of their characters and their attitudes while at the same time sharing many similarities in their past histories. I have attempted to select the themes from the interviews which were most important for their lives and for their participation in their programs. It is true that this sample is very small and that other people might interpret their testimony in different ways. It would be surprising if they didn't. However, the themes have been strongly and enthusiastically expressed and the small sample allows a depth of understanding that might not be possible in a larger study. I feel that the approach used here is an extension of what should happen in the classroom and that is a dialogic process of inquiry into the values, issues and historical and situational factors which inform the living realities of students and teachers.
In the next chapter I will attempt to relate Pedro and Julio’s experiences and the themes that have emerged from the interviews to the questions that were set out in the introduction. I will also discuss the findings in terms of other research and literature in literacy and learning.
5 DISCUSSION

5.1 The Societal Context

5.1.1 Introduction

Pedro and Julio's experiences in their ESL and job-training programs have shown clearly that in order to have any real understanding of the ecology of the classroom, we need to inquire into the narrative histories that inform the individual and collective experiences of the students. The war, union activity, religion, cultural values and events of various kinds have all left their mark and will continue to influence their lives and perceptions.

However, Pedro and Julio are now living in a different society, one that is characterized by rapid change, conflicting values, economic uncertainty and high unemployment. How they interact with and participate in their new environment with its varied mix of expectations, politics, economic realities and so on will obviously be of major concern to Pedro and Julio and those who wish to help them. For this reason Canadian society, and the role of literacy education within it, will now be considered.

5.1.2 Canadian Society

It has often been said of Canadian society that it is difficult if not impossible to define. The vast area and the relatively small population divided into geographically distinct areas makes it nearly impossible to conceive a clear sense of what being a Canadian means. Add to that the omnipresence of the United States and its media bombardment into every facet of Canadian life and the conception becomes even more tenuous. Only an awareness of a historical, political, and institutional distinctiveness give us any sense of being unique.

Most Canadians have experienced major changes in their lives in gender rights, family structures, and geographical and vocational relocations. When I was growing up, in most families, the mother stayed home and the father worked and, economically, this was a viable strategy. Today this usually isn't possible. At that time employment was easy to find and there
was a sense of optimism. The future looked good. There was a sense of belief and faith in society and the direction in which it was going. Today, on the other hand, the mood is more pessimistic. There is an uncertainty about the future. Many people find themselves unemployed. There is a lack of faith in public institutions and the motives of politicians. Public debt, diminished social programs, a weakened labour movement, and a shifting economy make for a much different public mood.

In terms of technology the changes have also been stunning. Whether or not technological advancements have had a positive net effect on our lives is debatable. However, the rapidity of change has certainly had a disorienting effect on society. Mechanization and computerization has made a large segment of the work force redundant. Toffler (1971) has described "future shock" as a more disturbing phenomenon than culture shock. The society that Pedro and Julio are entering is culturally and technologically different from their own as well as being highly competitive and rapidly changing.

5.1.3 Postmodernism

If we put this into a wider perspective, however, we can see that Canadian society is meeting with many of the same experiential patterns as other post-industrialist, late capitalist societies. These patterns have sometimes been referred to as Postmodernism. As James Berlin (1993) observes:

Postmodern experience is marked by fragmentation, incoherence, and the lack of a stable center or foundation for experience. Ours is the age of the sensational and the spectacular, as we are daily bombarded by sensory stimuli, most of which is committed to selling a product or service. These incoherent images are paralleled by the apparent lack of nucleus to the spaces in which we live, as urban areas are dislocated to accommodate the new economic arrangements... The speed of communication is matched by the speed of our lives: fast foods, fast cars, and fast trends placing us constantly in flux. Shopping in the neighbourhood supermarket represents this time and space compression, with products
from across the world assembled for purchase. The same compression is reproduced historically as styles of the past in clothing, architecture, and art are appropriated indiscriminately, merging past and present into an eternally now "pastishe," to use Jameson's description... For those with the necessary means, life is made up of one manufactured event after another, a simulated production of other places and times. The result is the detachment of life from the concrete material and social conditions of our own historical moment. (p.249)

For recent immigrants like Pedro and Julio this presents a real challenge. Not only are they coming from a difficult past, the society they are adjusting to must seem confusing in it's complexity as it changes and restructures constantly. Traditional ways of life -- religious, occupational, educational, political, etc. -- have been breaking down and are expressed and experienced in new ways. Canada has had a high unemployment rate for the last thirty years. People's jobs have become redundant in many areas that were once key. These include forestry, agriculture, manufacturing, fishing, etc. This redundancy is sometimes due to causes, such as diminished resources, increased mechanization, and relocating jobs where wages are lower. National economic plans are breaking down in favour of meeting the interests of multinational corporations. People who have always worked find themselves unemployed. For young people such as Pedro and Julio finding work is a difficult, onerous, and sometimes humiliating process. Many of their ESL and job-training classmates at Fraser Pacific College came to Canada with extremely high levels of education, including PhD's and advanced degrees in Engineering, Medicine, etc. Finding work for these people can be depressing to say the least, as their qualifications are often not recognized and they are sometimes too old or financially unable to re-qualify in Canada.

In the "new economy" there is an alarming lack of equitability. The gap between people with money and those who are hanging on is widening and the new conservative agendas are seeking to accelerate the process. We can observe sports stars, television talk show hosts and corporate leaders who earn millions of dollars each year while at the same time "ordinary"
workers watch helplessly as their standard of living steadily decreases even as they are asked to accept a larger share of the public debt. As Berlin puts it:

Workers tend to fall into two categories. The first consists of higher-level managerial positions enjoying large salaries, benefits, and job security. The second group is made up of poorly paid, expendable slots that bear the brunt of the rapid shifts that corporations make in quickly responding to changing market conditions. The isolation of workers in smaller and less stable units, in addition, results in a significant reduction in the ability of workers to organize for better wages, benefits, and conditions. (p.249)

Of course, many workers find that their work has become redundant. Workers in the Atlantic cod fishery, for instance, or forestry workers in British Columbia face an end not only to a livelihood but also a way of life. In the past, resource-based jobs provided employment for Canadians and new immigrants. Will Pedro and Julio have the opportunities, they need, to reach their employment potential as participants in the new economy, or will they be relegated to the working poor?

A recent newspaper article, 2010: A Vancouver Odyssey, (The Vancouver Sun, April 15, 1995), paints a bleak picture of a future Vancouver in which the gap between the two categories mentioned above will get much larger. The article recounts Vancouver writer Douglas Coupland on his predictions on the future of Vancouver.

Mr. Coupland drew a map of next century Vancouver, a surreal privileged enclave, well-insulated from all that is typical and suburban and eastern. The highest-price ocean-front real estate would be called Bondi Beach and Pacific Pallisades, the West End was Honolulu, Santa Monica and Kew Gardens, False Creek was Marina del Rey. And everywhere east was prosaic: Scarborough, Mississauga, Brooklyn, Queen's and Milwaukee. (p. D1)
Further on in the article another writer David Beers commented on the future in a similar way.

It is not hard to imagine Vancouver itself becoming a new kind of exclusive development for the global winners, an executive city that walls itself off from the poor, who are banished to the suburbs. (p. D5)

In this postmodern, postindustrialist era, capitalism is characterized by larger and larger multinational corporations that are able to control and manipulate industries and economies. These corporate entities are, of course, motivated by profit, not the emancipation of workers. The influence they have on political issues -- including education -- is enormous and their influence does not stop at national borders. Pedro and Julio both recognized this in the interviews. Pedro, for instance, mentioned that United States involvement in El Salvador was, "a business, only a business." He noted that corporations such as Coca Cola became symbols of oppression. His country's people were manipulated by international market forces and political hegemony.

Of particular interest to literacy, in the context of this study, is the influence of the media, much of which (the vast majority), is controlled by a few corporations which have their own political agendas and which tend to reproduce the power dynamic existing in our society. Control of the media obviously means having access to powerful tools which can manipulate and sway public opinion as well as stifle it by the choice of images, text, dialogues, etc. In their article, "Critical literacy and the postmodern turn," McLaren and Lankshear (1993) put it this way:

The turmoil of late capitalism is perhaps best displayed by the surging impulses of media images -- from which the postmodern subject can hardly escape the cruel insistence of their ever-presentness -- and the tragic liaison between the media industry and the viewing public, the former arrogating the right to legislate, produce, and serve up the latter's daily reality. (p. 384)
The use of the media to invoke national myths such as national destiny, patriotic duty and the protection of freedom in the world as tools for oppressive hegemonic agendas is not difficult to find examples of. Ronald Reagan's "Soviet evil empire" was used effectively to garner support for his "Star wars initiative," and the invasions of Grenada and Iraq were widely supported through the use of carefully selected images and righteous rhetoric. The same is true of the Falkland Islands war in which Margaret Thatcher's popularity ratings were very high. The emotive response to patriotic rhetoric is an effective way of blurring the critical perusal of underlying and motivating political interests. The fact that Oliver North is considered a hero by many Americans even though he deliberately carried on activities hidden from Congress is an illustration of this phenomenon. A central function of the media is, as Noam Chomsky (1994) puts it, to "manufacture consent."

The media, however, also seems to cater to a passive voyeuristic infatuation with sensationalism. The O.J. Simpson case receives hours of daily coverage and stories about mothers who kill their children and serial murderers seem to hold a strange and disturbing fascination for viewers judging by the coverage they receive and the proliferation of programs catering to these topics. Soap operas and situation comedies which take up such a lot of television viewing time seem to pull people in without carving off any real social issues. Newspapers, like television, are becoming more visual and the stories more abbreviated. Coverage of events also is often centred on scandals and tragedies.

Pedro realized the limited political awareness in Canadian society and commented on it in the interviews:

Perhaps the Canadian people is sometimes very closed... To know about other people, very closed. Some of them are but they are very few, very countable, very countable. I think the Canadian people is very closed to know what political means. But the reason why when something happens here is only to say it's fact. A fact what the government's doing, a fact because they exactly don't know what. (Pedro, March 3, 1995)
Perhaps his role as a newcomer to Canada gives him an objectivity that we, as Canadians, lack. The media is an influence that recent immigrants will have to deal with, however. It exerts considerable force and it is pervasive. It is influential in the formation of cultural identities. What people identify with in terms of content and ideology often consists of the inculcation of consumer desire and images of beautiful successful people. The relationship between media identifications -- which are very selective -- and school experience is a significant one. Aronowitz (1989) puts it this way:

The relationship between schooling and media representations of vocational and cultural aspirations has become symbiotic, to the extent that the curriculum is almost entirely geared to presumed occupational requirements of modern corporations and the state. The dependence of what counts as education on the collective cultural ideal is almost total. These occupational requirements, especially in large parts of the service sector, are not so much technical as they are ideological... School learning is organized around behaviors required by types of bureaucratic work as well as the rewards offered by consumer society for performance according to established corporate norms. (p.205)

If we accept that there is a "symbiotic" relationship between media depictions of culturally desirable lifestyles and schooling, then perhaps we should start to deconstruct the depictions critically. As an ESL teacher, I realize that much of my students' English language exposure comes from the media in the form of popular TV programing and advertising. It needs to be considered how these potent social forces are affecting our students, who, like Pedro and Julio, are locating themselves within a new cultural and political dynamic. There is a need to bridge the cultural and historical differences of life in their own countries and life in Canada. Ignoring the influence of the popular media on their lives would be to miss the opportunity to engage a pervasive and influential aspect of their daily experiences with language.

Critical educators have called for the need to examine serial episodes, news reports, rock
videos, popular movies, newspaper and magazine articles, etc. as cultural artifacts. A critical examination can reveal underlying power structures as well as the way language can be used for rhetorical purposes. Why are certain stories aired? Whose interests are being supported here and why? Whose culture is being depicted? How are sexual and racial roles being depicted? These questions can, of course, also be applied to school curriculum and textbooks (Apple, 1993). Gee (1993) has also called for English programs to be more concerned with rhetorical texts of the type described above and less preoccupied with what might be termed high culture which is removed from contemporary issues of cultural identity and the way language is used to motivate change or garner support for existing power dynamics. As Giroux and Simon (1989) put it in "Popular Culture as a Pedagogy of Pleasure and Meaning":

As teachers committed to the project of critical pedagogy we have to read the ground of the popular for investments that distort or constrict human potentialities and those that give voice to unrealized possibilities. This is what the pedagogical struggle is all about -- opening up the material and discursive basis of particular ways of producing meaning and representing ourselves, our relations to others, and our relations to our environment so as to consider possibilities not yet realized. This is a utopian practice, to be embraced for its urgent necessity and scrutinized for its inherent limitations. (p.25)

"Reading the ground" is especially important in an adult ESL class. The wealth of unique perspectives makes for interesting and original discussion. The teacher's job is, as Pedro puts it, to "listen to what the students really want it." This means listening to and being aware of student concerns. It also means being aware of media and historical influences that affect student lives. These influences, of course, are not only from the histories of the students, but are also part of the complex Canadian society in which they are now a part.

5.1.4 Technology

One of the areas where change is the most significant from both a societal and an educational point of view is access to information. This is another area where not having access
and the knowledge necessary to use it will limit an individual's ability to participate in and influence societal forces.

Digital communication and storage is a big part of modern life. The advantages, of course, are extremely fast communication and the ability to store huge amounts of information (text, images, sounds, video clips, etc.) on a very small disk. This type of technology has been promoted as a cheap and efficient way to make knowledge accessible and to open up dialogue. It has the potential to serve as a medium of communication that is participatory and democratic. The disadvantage, however, is that in order to participate in these dialogues requires access to the technology on which they depend, which limits access. This is a criticism that could be levelled against any technology including pen and paper, however, considering the disparity in standards of living, and access to computers, modems and telephone lines. The availability and affordability of this type of technology could exclude a lot of people.

This has become an issue in libraries, which traditionally provide equal access to information and resources. However, with the proliferation of digital information the principal of universality is coming into question. As Brian Campbell (Todd, The Vancouver Sun, May 20, 1995), director of information planning for the Vancouver Public Library, says, "Libraries are increasingly being called upon to pay for information each time they use it rather than owning it and having it available" (p. D11).

It would seem that, as digital information becomes more and more pervasive, access to knowledge and the ability to create it in digital form will become more restricted. One of the initial appeals of the Internet was its chaotic structure. It was not really under the control of any central organization. However, commercialization is vigorously being pursued just as its mass popularity is starting to take hold. In "Data Trash: The Theory of the Virtual Class", Kroker and Weinstein predict the existence of a "virtual class" which will be able to exert control, politically and economically, to the extent that it will be "wired shut."
The democratic possibilities of the Internet, with its immanent appeal to new forms of global communication, might have been the seduction-strategy appropriate for the construction of the digital superhighway, but now that the cybernetic grid is firmly in control, the virtual class must move to liquidate the Internet. It is an old scenario, repeated this time in digital form. Marx understood this first: every technology releases opposing possibilities towards emancipation and domination. Like its early bourgeois predecessors at the birth of capitalism, the virtual class christens the birth of technotopia by suppressing the potentially emancipatory relations of production released by the Internet in favour of the traditionally predatory force of production signified by the digital superhighway. (p.7)

As Kroker and Weinstein point out, technologies have emancipatory and oppressive possibilities. Pedro expressed a desire, in the interviews, to learn more about computers. He enjoyed using the college's computers for his writing projects. Being a teacher himself, and one who writes articles, etc., for newspapers, he could see the advantages to using a word processor. He could probably also benefit from using the internet to exchange information on the El Salvadoran political situation, for example, which he is still very much interested in. Julio is, perhaps, content to not participate in this technology. However, the emancipatory possibilities of new technology should be explored and guarded, so that people who want access and training will have that opportunity. I am not sure if the need for training and access to new technologies is being realized by ESL and job-training programs. There seems to be some movement in that direction although funding is hard to come by. Certainly, purchasing a computer, buying programs and paying for Internet connections would pose serious financial problems for most refugees.

5.1.5 The Need for ESL and Job-Training Programs

A further point that needs to be made in reference to this discussion is the issue of employment which continues to be a significant and socially destructive aspect of modern western societies and specifically Canada.
As has already been mentioned, this is always a major concern of immigrants and Julio rated English language and job-training programs as being of crucial importance for people like him. He appreciated the fact that he has had the opportunity to take part in them and wants to emphasize that they are very necessary. Pedro, though not as emphatic, is an equally strong believer in the need for education.

These programs are a costly part of the government's immigration program, and those of us who work in these programs are aware of the pressure that the government is under to cut costs in pursuit of a balanced budget. It would be unfortunate, however, if this were to happen.

In the American context Tollefson (1991) has noted that failing to provide adequate training will only marginalize immigrants and create a poverty-stricken under class. We know that industrial and resource sector jobs are not available as they were in the past. Service sector jobs which are available, often pay so poorly that they relegate workers to the role of the working poor. To succeed in today's society requires an education.

For immigrants, who often come with excellent qualifications, it is especially important to have the opportunity to make the transition to a new work environment. These people have a lot to offer. Not helping them would be irresponsible, but it would also be a poor investment.

5.1.6 Conclusion

I have considered the Canadian societal context at some length because it is vital that Pedro and Julio come to terms with it in some way. Their past histories in El Salvador continue to influence their experiences in Canada. Likewise, Canadian societal forces will exert their influences. The point I wish to make here is that Pedro and Julio find themselves in a certain type of society, one which may not be characterized by overt violence, but which none the less is rife with cultural, political, and economic forces. In some ways adult ESL students participating in language and job-training programs are in an excellent position to analyse the power dimensions of our society. Pedro and Julio showed a political awareness in the interviews that was refreshing. Indeed, one of the rewards of teaching in these programs is the plurality of viewpoints and depth of understanding that is evident in class discussions, group work, student
writing, etc. Participants in these programs have rich, interesting histories. Their insights and experiences make for fertile language opportunities. The way that their own sense of identity interfaces with this society, and all that goes with it, is key to their adjustment to Canada. Their pedagogical experiences have the potential to create opportunities, that can open up new possibilities, by encouraging an active, participatory, critical consciousness, one that is open and inclusive rather than simply seeking to domesticate.

I will now turn to a consideration of the significance of Pedro and Julio's subjective experiences as they relate to their language and job-training classes.

5.2 Pedro and Julio: Their Subjective Experiences in the Classroom

5.2.1 Introduction

What seemed most powerful about the interviews were the experiences and feelings of the two men. Both had been witness to atrocities and been involved, in some way, with the turmoil in El Salvador. In terms of their circumstances and their personalities, however, they were very different. They saw their lives through very different lenses.

5.2.2 Frustration

Frustration was an aspect of their lives that was evident from the interviews. Julio really misses his job in El Salvador as a heavy equipment operator and Pedro very much misses his job as a teacher. Here in Canada, those possibilities seem hard to fulfill. Julio is resigned to working as a baker or in the culinary field and seems happy to be in Vancouver living with his family. Pedro, though, wants to meet some of his goals, which he feels, need to be realized in his own country. Working in a convenience store is fine for the moment, but this does not fit in with his sense of purpose, which involves sharing and helping in El Salvador. He takes this sense of purpose very seriously and it is difficult for him to be in Canada, even though he sees his time here as a valuable preparation.
5.2.3 Discrimination

Feelings of discrimination in the classroom were experienced by both men. Pedro also related similar feelings from other El Salvadoran students. Julio mentioned discrimination against old people as being a problem in Canada. Both of them felt that some teachers discriminated against El Salvadoran students. Some teachers, they felt, were willing to listen and build a relationship with students while others were not. Perceptions of a teacher paying more attention to Russian students, or not really caring whether lessons were understood, frustrated Pedro, who found this very difficult to accept.

Of course, it is possible that good teachers can be perceived as being discriminatory towards certain students or groups of students without meaning to be that way. Teachers sometimes "click" with certain students and not with others. We have learned about Pedro and Julio and their thoughts about teachers and their classes. Other students will, no doubt, have different views. Although El Salvadoran students seem to respond negatively to authoritative teachers, some students feel uncomfortable if teachers are not authoritative. Many are used to an unquestioning adherence to the teacher's agenda. Education, to them, often means the "banking" model mentioned by Freire (1993). These students feel uncomfortable -- at least initially -- when they are asked to examine issues critically and to express their opinion. Freire (1993) referred to this as the "fear of freedom which afflicts the oppressed" (p.28). Not all students respond to instruction in the same way and many are working through problems in their own lives, involving finances, children or the stresses of adjustment to Canada. Teachers also sometimes feel harried, over-worked, and under-appreciated. It is significant, however, that discrimination was a real part of Pedro and Julio's classroom experience.

Pedro made the connection between complaints by El Salvadoran students -- including discrimination -- and their backgrounds in El Salvador. He noted that, "where we comes from it's a really hard way for to keep alive." They had to struggle to stay alive, make money and study. Education in El Salvador is a privilege. It, therefore, seems to follow, as Pedro noted, that, "when they didn't feel they were learning enough or perhaps the teacher... weren't giving enough
knowledge to them, they got... frustrated. They got a big frustration!” (Pedro, March 25, 1995)

Perhaps El Salvadoran people, having experienced a lot of overt discrimination and violent oppression in El Salvador, are sensitive to it in Canada, where they feel, as refugees, that they are situated in a vulnerable position on the margins of Canadian society.

5.2.4 Respect

The degree to which respect emerged as a central need for these men is difficult to overestimate. Both valued relationships, especially the family. "It is what you live for," according to Pedro. An extension of this seems to be the relationship between the teacher and their students. Respect is central to this relationship. For Julio this involved speaking clearly and sharing a joke. For Pedro it meant listening to the students and being aware of their needs. It involves dialogue, caring about student needs and making an effort to do the best job possible. It really seemed that Pedro's philosophy might be simplified to "good begets good and bad begets bad." Good teachers make a concerted effort to meet the needs of their students and the students sensing this, respond with their own effort. In this, education involves, it seems, a moral and a political component.

An interesting aspect of this is the consistency of Pedro's views in not only education, but also politics and religion. The governor has not shown respect for his people. The oppression he stands for is based on selfishness and a refusal to listen to the people. The effects of this lack of respect led to all the resistance that Pedro and Julio described, as well as the violence used to quel it. The Archbishop, on the other hand, gives and receives respect. He is aware of the suffering of El Salvador's people and listens to their words. He then uses his position to challenge the injustices of the government. When he was killed, this atrocity -- signifying a complete lack of respect -- galvanized the resistance in El Salvador and generated hatred.

For me, a very moving part of the interviews was the significance of the change in El Salvador from a reasonably peaceful and happy place to one which became rife with oppression, violence and hatred. As Pedro says, "You cannot realize, according to my speech, how a nation can change from a night to another day." There still seems to be a sense of disbelief in terms of
how these things can come to pass. He continues:

"The people learn to hate. Nobody understands that. Even... the people listen to this recording got to understand how the people begins to hate. (Pedro, March 3, 1995)"

Julio also was sensitive to oppressive practices that are blind to the suffering they cause. These practices are characterized by lack of respect and lead to suffering and resistance. His description of the United States as the "big alligator" attests to this.

"Julio C. can be dead but Jimmy Carter's people have to live. It's true. Milk every morning, juice... Julio C., no. Water! Water and eat beans. They no: chicken, turkey. [laughs] (Julio, April 6, 1995)"

Both men came into their programs with a sensitivity to oppressive practices, born out by their own experiences. Each man deals with it in his own way, but these experiences are a part of their identity. They need to be accounted for in the classroom. Both men, and at the risk of generalizing, other El Salvadoran students, dislike authoritarian approaches to language training. They may not always be skilled and tactful in seeking to have their needs met, but they do want to be listened to and treated with respect.

In dealing with their lives, I think it is worth pointing out, that although Julio and Pedro have different personalities and circumstances, they are also at different stages of adjustment to Canada. Julio's been here longer than Pedro and he has his family here. He has made the mental move to Canada and his concerns are here now. His children are involved in school and drama groups, etc. Julio noted that his children's English is better than their Spanish.

Pedro is still, very much, working through, and coming to terms with, the events of his life. He doesn't have his family here, which must be of great concern to him, considering his comments on the importance of family. He also sees his purpose -- teaching and helping his people -- in terms of El Salvador, not Canada. He has obviously given these matters a lot of
thought and in terms of teaching, and making an impact, he is right to assume that he could provide a real service to his own people. One wonders, though, if Pedro's situation might change as he stays on in Vancouver. It would be interesting to interview him again in a few years.

5.2.5 Conclusion

Whatever happens to Pedro and Julio, I think it can be said that their subjective experiences, regarding their lives, and their time in their programs, is key to their success in learning language. Both men were motivated to succeed and worked hard. We have seen, though, that sensitivity to the teacher's role, and its potential for respect or oppression, was of concern to them. These men were sensitive due to political events in their lives. Students, in general, are sensitive to the same subjectivities. No one wants to feel that their own experience is being devalued. Everyone wants to feel that they are being treated with respect.

5.3 The Instructional Context

5.3.1 Introduction

Having examined the themes generated by Julio and Pedro's interviews and considering the society in which they are participating, instructional implications need to be considered. What type of instruction should Pedro and Julio, and other immigrants be receiving?

5.3.2 Pedagogical Approaches

Several pedagogical approaches to literacy were mentioned in Chapter One. All of them are valid approaches that have helped students learn to use language effectively. I do not wish to advocate one particular approach over any other. It would be counter-productive, in my opinion, to limit students' language learning experiences by adherence to one approach. Students can benefit by experiencing many approaches. Furthermore, consideration of individual students often reveals the necessity of being flexible. Different students learn in different ways. Students
with learning disabilities will need to be accounted for, just as we need an awareness that students from different countries have experienced different methodologies and different student and teacher roles. The teacher's task is a complex one.

Students need explicit instruction so that they can succeed in the academic world. They need to be able to write essays, business letters and reports. Learning these genres and the details that are expected can be empowering. It can make the difference between doing well in a university or college, or in getting a good job.

However, it is also important for students to use language freely, to develop their own voice. Language can be an important part of developing ideas, learning and working through feelings. Being inventive and playing with language, experimenting with rhythm and sounds and metaphor should be encouraged as a valuable and creative part of the human need to express ourselves. It is important for students to develop language awareness, to deconstruct and analyse what the language is doing and why it is or is not effective.

Though often pitted against each other, explicit and progressive approaches do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive domains. In fact, they can complement each other very well and even overlap.

Subject matter proficiency is obviously key to the success of students and in the case of second language students (actually in all students), the connection between language and content is of crucial importance. Mohan's knowledge structures, as mentioned earlier in Chapter one, help organize content into a cross-cultural framework that helps students make the connection between knowledge in particular content areas and the language which attends it. Key visuals help to make the content explicit so that language does not become a daunting burden.

A good teacher will make sound decisions based on curriculum requirements and the needs of the students. However, perhaps by considering the benefits of various methods or approaches we tend to take our focus off our students, who come with different identities and purposes, different histories, different ideologies and different languages. Classrooms, especially ESL classrooms, are places of diversity. This diversity and the related ideologies need to be addressed, especially in programs which aim at helping adult immigrants adjust to the
complexities of a new society. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make final choices concerning methodology without careful consideration of the individuals involved.

Positivistic approaches to language instruction and research have failed to account for the political, ideological dimensions of the classroom (and its related issues outside the classroom), by treating instruction as a neutral topic, by quantifying and depersonalizing data and by a focused narrow view of pedagogic practice (Pennycook, 1989; Wexler, 1989). This approach tends to treat pedagogy (and often the subject matter content), as a set of scientific truths that are provable and timeless facts apart from the people involved. Pennycook (1989) puts it this way:

In recent years a growing number of questions have been raised about the paradigms and ideologies of the social sciences. Doubts have arisen about some of their most basic tenents, especially the predominant positivist (or scientist) orientation, that is the tendency of the social sciences to model themselves after the physical sciences through use of the empirical-analytic approach, thus claiming to arrive at objectivity through the development of standardized, quantitative techniques of analysis... Closely connected to claims that the knowledge thereby produced is neutral and objective has been the removal of the personal and the political from the investigation of human issues. (p. 594)

Research that generalizes and quantifies tends to lose touch with what is most important and revealing about learning, and that is the subjective lived experiences of the participants. The disadvantage, however, of qualitative studies that do focus on subjective experience, such as this one, is that they are not very generalizable. Each person is unique and has their own complex narrative history that is like no other. It is within the telling of particular life stories and perceptions of unique events, though, that we can recognize in others authentically experienced aspects of ourselves, which are at the heart of a moral sensibility which motivates the desire to communicate with others, which is, in turn, the impetus for literacy in the first place. This is the reason that literature and art can move us deeply and resonate with the truth of lived experience in a way that a narrow numerical rendering of an isolated phenomenon cannot.
In Giltrow and Colhoun's (1992) article, mentioned earlier, it was evident that to understand the literacy problems of a population of Guatemalan Mayans living in Vancouver required much more than an analysis of their language performance. Language was for them tightly bound up in issues of identity. Understanding their situation required an inquiry into the subjectivities of these people, their history, their culture and their hopes for the future. It also revealed that some of the assumptions that we may sometimes make regarding the utility of English were not shared by these Mayans whose views of language were symbolically connected to colonial oppression.

In this study the histories and circumstances of the subjects were quite different. However, the value of seeking to understand the subjective experiences of Julio and Pedro was revealing and the findings were useful. A gratifying part of this study was that Julio and especially Pedro were enthusiastic. They wanted to tell their stories and the point of the research seemed obvious to them. It was simply to understand their experiences and how they felt about them.

5.3.3 The Relationship Between Students and Teachers

What came out forcefully in the interviews was that, to them, it is the relationship between the teacher and the students that is of paramount importance. The relationship, to them, is tied into other concepts such as communication, sincerity, humour, hard work and respect. Content was important, especially to Julio - who was in a hospitality program though he did not want to be a waiter, and who later was very pleased in a bakery program - but it needed to be moderated from within the relationship of the classroom in which everyone's needs were considered.

For Julio being a good teacher entailed being prepared, speaking clearly, being patient, and having a sense of humour. Julio saw his classes and learning English as a means to an end. He wanted to get a good job. Being comfortable with the teacher was important to him.

For Pedro language was an end in itself. His opinion of methods was negative and blunt. "I hate methods." (March 3, 1995) What he does like involves expressing himself, " to write articles, to write poems, to make music, to read music, the same. That's I like it. Compose music and to write a novel, that's a used to do it." (March 3, 1995)

Creating opportunities for Pedro and Julio to learn, involved in their minds, the need for a
lot of dialogue. Communication is very important as it is an integral part of a respectful relationship. As Pedro says, "Very, very important: respect! If you don't get it you will lose your temper and you will get nothing." (March 3, 1995)

This concept of respect is a highly political issue, one that transcends the concerns of the classroom. Perhaps that is why it is so important in the classroom. Both Pedro and Julio -- as well as other El Salvadoran refugees who have attended the College -- have lived politically charged lives. They are well aquainted with privilege and oppression in their own country and they are sensitive to those same forces here in Canada. Nobody likes to feel like they are being treated without respect, but it is not surprising that they are suspicious of authority (as was noted with Pedro's experiences with immigration officials), and thankful when they feel that they have been treated with respect (as was the case with Julio in regard to his job-training).

Respect for Pedro was a common theme that was present in his opinions on politics and war, religion and education. Respect means being allowed to express opinions. It means caring about what people want and how they feel. Failure to accomplish this was, in the El Salvadoran case, the cause of a civil war, alienation and hatred. Respect is empowering. Lack of respect is disempowering. For a teacher respect also involves listening and being aware of student needs, dealing honourably with issues of contention, being a resource, encouraging opinions, creating a responsive creative curriculum that provides the opportunity for a lot of dialogue.

It is also very significant that Pedro was himself a teacher in El Salvador. His comments on teachers as leaders, against oppression, and as agents of change, is perhaps, evidence of the social role of teachers, not just as technicians, but as involved professionals fighting for a democratic society. This critical aspect of the teacher's role is worth noting, especially in lieu of the societal dimensions of our society. Being a teacher is a political profession. We can work to maintain or reproduce the status quo, or we can advocate for students and confront the social inequalities in our society.

This aspect of teaching involves the classroom dynamic, of course, but also the way the programs are administered. In chapter three I mentioned the lack of stability in federal government sponsored programs. In Auerbach's (1995) article, *The politics of the ESL*
classroom, she describes a teaching dynamic that could have been written for many of the private language colleges in which Canadian government language and job-training programs are delivered:

What is the reality for adult ESL teachers who want to begin to make some of the changes discussed in this chapter? On the one hand, the participatory approach puts a heavy burden on practitioners, demanding a level of critical inquiry, creativity, and productivity that is beyond that required with a text-based or pre-determined curriculum. Teachers must identify issues, create materials, and constantly reinvent the curriculum. On the other hand, they typically work long hours, with minimal pay and no benefits, often patching together several part-time jobs, and they rarely have job security. There are few opportunities for professional development, and those that do exist rarely focus on participatory approaches to teaching. Although the burden for change is on practitioners, there is little support for them to make changes; like their students, they are disempowered and marginalized at the lowest ranks of their profession. (p. 29)

5.3.4 Critical Pedagogy

Considering the avowed priorities of our society, including global competitiveness and paying off the public debt, there has been a rhetorical appeal to emphasise educational programs that will, as their mandate, prepare students to be effective workers in the highly competitive international marketplace. This rhetoric, of course, points the way to a society where the corporation and the balance sheet, rather than equality and democratic decision making, will be the motivating factors. It would seem that now is a time when a critical consciousness needs to be a part of the educational process, as a counter weight to the conservative agenda.

Pressure to reduce spending for public programs is intense. Private schools are on the upswing as services decline in public systems. There is pressure for a two tier health care system and access to information technology is in danger of shutting out people that can't afford it. The media are controlled by a few large corporations. More and more decisions are made in a distant city, often in another country. At some point we, as individuals, need to ask ourselves where we
stand in terms of these issues.

A political consciousness is vital for teachers. It is important for us to know where we stand in respect to educational issues, and because these involve unequal power dynamics in society, we also need to be concerned with those issues and be prepared to take them up in the classroom. We need to be concerned with making opportunities for the expression of alternative voices, voices that have been absent or devalued. We need to create what McLaren and Giroux (1986) call "democratic public spheres."

In the classroom, then, we need to listen carefully — as Pedro suggested — to what is of importance to the students. We need to encourage dialogue and provide an environment where students can locate themselves historically, while at the same time adjusting to their new country. This historical location was, as we have seen in the interviews, very important for Pedro and Julio. We need to realize, as teachers, that we have a role in the educational process that has the potential to empower and create — as Freire (1990) pointed out — emancipatory possibilities, or conversely disempower and marginalize in a pedagogy that seeks to domesticate. Both of these possibilities were evident within the context of Pedro and Julio's interview comments.

The curriculum we create, then, needs to be responsively developed out of a dynamic dialogic interaction with the students. Many of their concerns require explicit instruction on matters of practical concern for success in Canadian society. These might include, for instance, writing a resume, dealing with an insurance claim, or how to talk to and what to expect from their child's teacher. Issues such as strikes, the tax system and the Canadian school system (one that comes up often and is much criticised) provide excellent opportunities for language development as well as serving as a point of comparison from which to compare cultures and work through the historical dislocations and disorienting, sometimes confusing, sometimes frustrating, experiences of life in Canada.

Often the media have a strong effect on new immigrants as it has on others. As has already been noted, it is a powerful and omnipresent part of everyday life. These influences need to be taken up critically and analysed as cultural artifacts. We need to take up questions like: Who is producing media events? Who are these events intended for? Why are they produced? What
rhetorical devices have been used? Who has been excluded? When applied to topical news reports, for example, these questions can be the catalyst for interesting and fruitful dialogue often leading to focused writing projects. Of course, the media event under analysis must be chosen for its relevance to the experience of class participants. As Sholle and Denski (1993) put it:

The media must be "deconstructed where it hurts;" that is, we need to connect this critique to everyday life and those areas of student experience to which they are actively committed. Ideology critique is counterproductive at best when it simply draws upon an academic jargon to find various myths, and so on. Instead, we must question naturalized knowledge, pinpoint areas of ideology that students connect to and that make a difference in their lives. We must take seriously the experiences through which students constitute their identities and draw upon them as a means for criticizing the dominant culture. (p.312)

In critiquing media events, or relevant issues of concern to students, it is equally important to develop their own voices through written and oral discourse of different types, including video production, debates, letters, and poster sessions, to mention a few examples. These approaches which encourage the investment of student histories and personal commitments have much to offer in terms of the respectful relationship, that Pedro emphasised, and the possibility for sincere interaction and expression. Unfortunately the grammar and skills-based approaches which treat language as a neutral code, are still a big part of the delivery of adult ESL programs, partly due to the reasons which were quoted earlier by Auerbach.

5.4 Conclusion

I have attempted to relate Pedro and Julio's experiences in El Salvador and in their classrooms in Canada to the need for an approach to literacy that is critical and responsive to students and their needs as they struggle to become a part of their new society. They are, due to
their histories, sensitive to the political power dynamics of the classroom and in society.

One of the aspects of their testimony that was most interesting and moving were the descriptions of events in El Salvador: children killing soldiers, death squads, and soldiers following protesters into a hospital, to give three examples. These events, described with expressive emotion, and the concern shown for their country and its people -- together with the need they seemed to have to tell their stories -- speaks volumes about who they are as people. In many ways it is the stories rather than the analysis that really makes the impact. The process of dialogue which this research consisted of in some ways is the message.

This raises a problem relating to the theory/practice relationship that is recognized by Giroux and McLaren (1989):

One major problem facing the recent outpouring of critical discourse on schooling is that over the years it has become largely academitized. It has lost sight of its fundamental mission of mobilizing public sentiment toward a renewed vision of community; it has failed to recognize the general relevance of education as a public service and the importance of deliberately translating educational theory into a community-related discourse capable of reaching into and animating public culture and life. (p. xiii)

This animation of public culture and life and culture is achievable by validating other voices, especially by hearing other people. As Pedro (March 6, 1995) put it:

...the clue for this kind of thing is listened. Listen and react. React to the process. This is most important. To sit down with them at the table and talk to each other face to face. What is the point? What can I do and what can I not do? This has to be. Bring and sit down here and say what you really want it. What can I do for you. That's the most important point isn't it? (Pedro, March 6, 1995)
Listening to and reacting to students like Pedro and Julio is what makes teaching ESL a pleasurable and stimulating job. The dialogue created in the interviews and the depth of meaning conveyed is, I think, reason enough to pursue a critical, dialogic, democratic approach to pedagogy that encourages a plurality of voices and, in which, a large part of the teachers's job consists of learning about, validating and helping the students to achieve their goals. It is, helping students to acquire and develop their English, but is also helping them, as Freire (1993) puts it, to develop a consciousness that allows them to see themselves "as women and men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human." (p. 48)

Accommodating students like Pedro and Julio in their programs involves a lot of tensions. There are students interacting in the same classes who have very different histories, cultures, languages and circumstances. These students may have very dissimilar needs. Their approaches to life and learning are often diverse, yet, the teachers task involves building trust, engaging the students in dialogue, and creating language learning opportunities. This involves a complex and constantly shifting social dynamic. It is difficult to answer the questions which were posed in the introduction of this thesis in a definite way, according to an unvarying set of first principles. Listening to students, responding to needs, encouraging critical discourse and building relationships which encourage communication and understanding are, unfortunately, rather vague concepts. What this research does show, however, is that although these concepts are vague, they are none-the-less very important in the lives of at least two El Salvadoran refugees.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- **Name:**
- **Length of time in Vancouver:**
- **Length of time away from El Salvador:**
- **Courses taken since coming to Canada:**

**Before coming to Canada**

- How many places did you live before coming to Canada? How long in each place? Rural or urban?
- Describe your home in El Salvador?
- When you were young were your brothers and sisters able to go to school? Who went to school and who didn’t? Why? How many years?
- If you didn’t go to school what did you do? Who did you learn from?
- Did some of the people who didn’t go to school learn to read and write? How?
- In your town or city, how did you find out about local, national and international events?
- What did you do in El Salvador when you were of working age? Did this require reading and writing? Explain?
- If Spanish is your second language, when did you speak Spanish and when did you speak your native language?
- Describe a typical week in your country. How was language being used?

**School in El Salvador**

- Can you tell me about your first school in El Salvador?
  - What did it look like?
  - How many students attended?
  - Tell me about a typical day.
  - Does anything stand out in your memory?
  - Tell me about your teachers.
• I'm interested in how you learned in that school. Can you tell me about what type of activities were typical?
• Were your lessons in Spanish?
• Were other languages taught in school?
• Did religion play a role at your school? Tell me about that.
• What did you do before school?
• What did you do after school?
• What did you learn from members of your family?
• Can you tell me about a typical evening while you were growing up?
  • What languages were people speaking?
  • What would the various members of your family be doing?
  • What would you be doing?
• Did anyone tell you stories when you were young? Who?
• Can you think of one?
  • How did these stories differ from the ones that you heard in school?
• What were you interested in at that time?

Religion
• What role did religion play in the life of you and your people?
• What language(s) were services held in?
• Were religious writings a major part of your religious practice? Explain
• How did most people feel about religion? (i.e. something that you had to do; liberating; repressive)
• What was the role of language? (Songs, sermons, reading, writing, prayers etc.)

Politics
• How did politics affect your life? Explain
• Were you and your family politically active?
• Tell me about the political system, parties, interests etc.
• Who had power and influence in El Salvador? Who didn’t?


Language

- What would you read in the course of your daily life?
  
  What reading material?
  
  What importance did these reading materials have?
  
  What languages?
  
  What purposes?
  
  What motivation did you have to read these materials?
- When did you write in the course of your daily life?
  
  for what purposes?
  
  to who?

Leaving El Salvador

- Why did you leave El Salvador?
  
  How did you come to the decision?
  
  Describe how you felt?

- How do other El Salvadoran people feel about emigrants?
- Would you like to go back?

Living In Canada

- Are you happy to be in Canada?

- Do you think you made the right decision?

- What is good about your life in Canada?

- What problems do you have in Canada?

- What places do you often go?

- Are you working now?
  
  How do you use language in your job?
  
  Does language hold you back?

- Describe a typical day and to what extent you use language.

- Is improving your English a goal for you now? Why?

- What is important for you now? (work, family, politics, etc.)
• How do you feel about the English language and Canadian society?
• Do you feel that you are loosing your own culture? Explain
• Are you a part of an El Salvadoran community in Vancouver? Describe it.
  - events
  - organizations
  - newspapers
  - community cohesiveness
  - important issues
• Do you feel isolated in Canadian society?
• What stresses do you have in your life?
  How do you deal with them?
• What do you find odd or strange about Canadian society?
• Is your work experience in El Salvador recognized and valued by Canadian employers?
• Do Canadians seem interested in learning about El Salvador?
• What do you miss most about El Salvador?

**ESL and Job-training Programs**

• What ESL and job-training programs have you participated in since coming to Canada?
• What aspects of ESL did/do you find the most difficult?
• How do you feel about your participation in these programs?
  - valuable?
  - enjoyable?
• How do you feel about the teaching methods used in the programs?
  - were they effective?
  - did they seem relevant?
  - how did they differ from methods used in El Salvador?
  - what type of classroom activities did you find the most useful?
• How did you feel about participating in multicultural, multilingual classes?
• As a student from El Salvador and a linguistic and cultural minority, did you feel isolated or
marginalized in classroom activities?

- Walk me through a typical day in your last program.
  - How did you feel at each point in your day?
  - What did you like?
  - What did you dislike?
  - What was stimulating?
  - What was a waste of time?

- Did you feel that your personal life and your time spent in class were completely separate, or did they overlap?

- Did you feel that you were able to voice your concerns in class?

- Did you feel that your concerns were taken seriously?

- Did you feel that instructors made time for you:
  - during class
  - after class

- Was the content of your classes appropriate? Did you learn what you needed?

- How often did you feel that you were learning something that was not important? Tell me about that?

- Tell me about your work placement. (if applicable)
  - how were you received?
  - were your work assignments: useful, interesting, challenging, boring?
  - were you given enough (too much) responsibility?
  - were your skills and past experience accounted for?

- Did you ever seek extra help or explanations for things that you found unfair or confusing? If so, were you satisfied with the response(s) that you received? Explain.

- What aspects of these programs were not useful to you? Explain

- What aspects of these programs were useful to you? Explain

- Has your participation in these programs helped you to get a job?

- Can you think of any bad experiences that you had in an ESL or job-training program?
• What changes do you think would improve these programs?
• Do you have any questions for me regarding these programs?

_Dealings with the Canadian government_
• Do you feel that you are or have been well treated by the Canadian government? Explain
  - immigration policies
  - job training
  - ESL
  - social welfare

_The fight for liberation in El Salvador_
• Do you feel like forgetting about the political situation in El Salvador or do you feel like helping the struggle from afar?
• What can we in Canada learn from the El Salvadoran situation? Explain

_Personal Information_
• What do you like to do in your free time?
• Ideally, what would your life be like?
  - jobs
  - living circumstances
• What is important in your life?
  - family
  - religion
  - creativity
  - fitness
  - etc.
• Tell me about someone who is important in your life. Describe her/him.
  - Why is this person important to you?
• Tell me about someone you admire. Describe her/him.
  - Why is this person important to you?
The Interview process

• Have you enjoyed these interviews? Why or why not?
• Is there anything you would like to say to conclude?