PROJECT-BASED INSTRUCTION IN A CANADIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL'S ESL CLASSES: GOALS AND EVALUATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

Research on project-based instruction is common in mainstream education. It conceives the activity broadly, but omits language. It is rare in English as a Second Language (ESL) education, and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory conceives it narrowly, omitting a functional view of language. The present study examines the implementation of project-based instruction in ESL classes in a Canadian secondary school through interviews with Canadian ESL teachers and Chinese ESL students, observations of two projects in action, and examination of students' written work, and school, school board and Ministry of Education documents.

Results indicate that the teachers held and implemented a broad, integrated conception of project-based instruction that includes a functional view of language. They have many more goals than those stressed for project-based instruction in the SLA literature, and have goals that are not included even in the mainstream literature. The teachers evaluated project-based instruction positively, and the researcher's observations support the teachers' evaluations.

However, despite teacher's and students' successes, a number of students evaluated project-based instruction negatively. This discrepancy is discussed using three explanatory models (philosophical, cultural, and linguistic) that the participants may have been using when interpreting project-based instruction.

The study points to the need to develop a rationale which adequately addresses project-based instruction as a functional language learning activity in the context of academic subject matter learning. It identifies problems of cross-cultural interpretation of and communication about projects, and notes difficulties of resolving them. It points out the necessity for an examination of the processes of project-based instruction, noting places of difficulty and success, and considering promising strategies.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This study concerns project-based instruction in a Canadian secondary school’s English as a Second Language (ESL) program. According to Adderley et al. (1975), Alberty (1927), and Holt (1994), project-based instruction was first conceived of by the efficiency expert David Snedden to teach science in American vocational agriculture classes. It was later developed and popularized for teachers by John Dewey’s student (and later colleague) William Heard Kilpatrick, mainly through his 1918 pamphlet The Project Method. The Project Method, the essence of which is wholehearted purposeful activity on the part of the learner, was Kilpatrick’s reconstruction of Dewey’s problem method of teaching (Brubacher, 1947). The problem method called for learning from experience by solving real-life problems. It was seen as an alternative to the traditional teacher-centered way of teaching/learning (Cremin, 1964), and as an attempt to engage students with subject matter, to encourage them to think critically, and to foster their responsibility for learning (Berliner, 1992; Holt, 1994). Dewey’s problem method was based on action as an expression of a basic empirical process which is organized and guided by activity and the questions it raises. The Project Method, then, involves students creating knowledge in order to solve problems which arise while they are engaged in purposeful, real-world activities (Dionne & Horth, 1994).

Kilpatrick was impressed by Dewey’s conviction that schools had to be completely transformed to meet the challenges of rapid economic and social change caused by industrialism. Taking Dewey’s notion of the school as a social environment, Kilpatrick (1925) was critical of traditional education in which the curriculum is divided into different subjects which are taught separately.
As I see it, our schools have in the past chosen from the whole of life certain intellectualistic tools (skills and knowledge), have arranged these under the headings of reading, arithmetic, geography and so on, and have taught these separately as if they would, when once acquired, recombine into the worthy life. This now seems to me to be very far from sufficient. Not only do these things not make up the whole of life; but we have so fixed attention upon separate teaching of these as at times to starve the weightier matters of life and character. The only way to live well is to practice living well. (pp. 108-109)

The challenge was to design a curriculum that was as life-like as possible, “one that would militate for the better life by actually teaching the business of living” (Cremin, 1964, p. 218).

Project-based instruction was seen as an important response to this need. According to Gull (1933), it gained popularity in the United States and some other countries soon after its development. Gull praised it as a natural method of education, even claiming that

It is the means whereby all civilization has come about, and so great is its power that every educational method contains something of its principle. The project method is ... the fundamental method of human beings. (p. 13)

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) educators borrowed the term project-based instruction from mainstream education. In the SLA literature, however, the aim of project-based instruction seems to be more circumscribed. It is to provide learners with extended opportunities for input and output in the target language mainly through group work (e.g., Edwards, Wesche, Krashen, Clement, & Krudenier; 1984, Kagan, 1985; Snow & Brinton, 1988). More concretely, students are to develop accuracy and fluency in the target language through experiential learning in authentic situations involving interaction with native speakers of the target language (Jerald & Clark, 1983).

Project-based instruction was introduced into SLA education in response to perceived inadequacies in Krashen’s input hypothesis. Krashen had claimed that “extended comprehensible input was the most significant determiner of whether a language would be acquired or not” (Eyring, 1989, p.1). He argued that second language learners need extensive exposure to the target language, as is the case when children learn their first language. However, Swain’s (1985) evaluation of Canadian French Immersion students showed that
comprehensible input alone is insufficient. Swain’s study showed that years of comprehensible input did not enable the participants to achieve native-like competence in French, and this led her to propose that second language learners need to produce comprehensible output through meaningful interaction with native speakers. In order to produce comprehensible output, Swain concluded that students needed a variety of communicative opportunities where they could engage in meaningful negotiation and interaction with native speakers in French cultural settings.

One result of this change in perspective was the increased popularity of Brumfit’s (1984) project-based, communicative language teaching methodology. Brumfit claimed that this methodology provides students with the opportunity to develop accuracy and fluency through “emphasis on integrated projects” which arise “from the communicative needs of students within the framework of the project” (p. 123). Fried-Booth (1986) and Candlin, Carter, Legutke, Semuda, and Hanson (1988) also believe that organizing projects is an effective way to create opportunities for second language learners to develop their abilities in the target language by interacting and communicating with each other and with English native speakers.

Many different kinds of projects have been developed to achieve these goals. Examples include informational projects, social-welfare projects, and work-study projects. Informational projects require extensive library research as well as inter-personal contacts where students interview target language speakers on various topics in order to practice their second language skills. Social-welfare projects are organized to investigate the lives of patients in hospitals and people in third world countries. Work-study projects enable second language learners to engage in some kind of work where they can learn the target language in authentic contexts in exchange for their labor. For a detailed discussion of these and other types of projects, see Eyring (1989; 1991), Fried-Booth (1986), and Legutke and Thomas (1991).
1.2 Definitions

Below are working definitions of some of the key terms used in reporting the results of this study: project-based instruction, ESL students, educational culture, Chinese educational culture, and China and Hong Kong.

1.2.1 Project-based Instruction

A variety of terms such as ‘project work’ (Shoring, 1990), ‘project method’ (e.g., Kilpatrick, 1926), ‘project approach’ (Diffily, 1996), ‘project-oriented approach’ (Carter & Thomas, 1986) and ‘project-based learning’ (Peterson & Myer, 1995) are used in the SLA and general literature to refer to both short-term activities such as learning how to use a library or to edit a newsletter and longer term activities such as producing a language handbook (Hawes, 1988). These terms are used interchangeably with project-based instruction in this study to refer to a series of individual or group activities that involve language/content learning through planning, researching (empirical and/or document), analyzing and synthesizing data, and reflecting on the process and product orally and/or in writing by comparing, contrasting, and justifying alternatives.

The above definition of project-based instruction involves language and content learning. It applies a functional perspective and thus draws on a language socialization conception of learning. The researcher believes this broad definition of project-based instruction matches the working purposes of this thesis and connects with Dewey’s emphasis on the functional use of language. A broader definition in the spirit of Dewey could add the important expectation that project activity should be personally relevant and socially authentic.
1.2.2 ESL Students

ESL students in this study refers to “those students whose English language performance is sufficiently different from standard English to prevent them from reaching their potential” (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 129). This was the definition used when the student participants in the present study were assessed and placed in the British Columbia (BC) public school ESL program where the study was conducted.

1.2.3 Educational Culture

It is assumed that “culture is a framework within which members of a population see the world around them, interpret events in that world, behave according to acceptable standards, and react to their perceived reality” (Ogbu, 1995, p. 192). Educational culture then is a framework within which teachers and students see the school around them, interpret events in that school, behave according to acceptable standards, and react to their perceived reality.

1.2.4 Chinese Educational Culture

By Chinese educational culture, the researcher refers to the educational cultures of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. This is the educational culture the student participants in the present study brought with them to Canada. The researcher is aware that there are some fundamental differences in the political and social systems of these countries and (at the time of the study) territory. There have been of course educational reforms in modern China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan resulting in significant educational differences between them. They are together called Chinese because they share a common traditional educational culture.

Chinese education traditionally focused on a finite body of knowledge; that is, the Four Books and the Five Great Classics which could be mastered through memorization. The Four Books and the Five Great Classics which for centuries constituted the main content
to be mastered for the Chinese civic service examinations (Dirksen, 1990; Pratt, 1992; Smith, 1991). The four books are: *The Great Learning* (*daxue*); *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*zhongyong*); *The Analects of Confucius* (*lunyu*); and *Mencius* (*mengzi*). The Five Great Classics are: *The Book of Songs* (*shijing*); *The Book of History* (*shujing*); *The Book of Changes* (*yijing*); *The Book of Rites* (*lijing*); and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (*chunqiu*). The importance of the classics fostered respect for the written word and for literature as opposed to daily speech and the oral tradition (Hou, 1987; Scollon & Scollon, 1994; Smith, 1991; Yang, 1987). These classics, “which viewed acquiring wisdom as the path to personal and social integrity, have traditionally served as the foundations of learning throughout Chinese history” (Ping, 1995, p. 37). It is this old and powerful educational tradition which still determines the basic shape of Chinese educational culture today, whether in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong.

In addition, Chinese immigrants (Canadians) in British Columbia have formed organizations such as the United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society, Chinese Canadian Youth Council, and Chinese Cultural Center. Furthermore, according to Mr. Lam, the chair person of one of the Chinese Parents' Associations in BC, many school districts in the Greater Vancouver area have Chinese Parents' Associations. All of these organizations act on behalf of all Chinese peoples (including immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) in educational, cultural and other matters (G. Lam, personal communication, June 7, 1999; S.U.C.C.E.S.S, 1999). It should also be noted however that in Vancouver, there is a Taiwanese Cultural Center as well. What this indicates to the researcher is that the Chinese people in the province where the study was conducted see themselves as Chinese, as well as Chinese, Hong Kongese, and Taiwanese. In other words, there is evidence for the existence of a single local Chinese community in educational and cultural matters.
1.2.5 China and Hong Kong

The researcher is aware that Hong Kong currently is part of China. But she refers to it as a separate territory because when the student-participants in the present study lived there, Hong Kong was still under the British rule.

1.3 Research Problems

As we have seen, the goal of project-based instruction in SLA education, at least as it is presented in the literature, is to create authentic contexts for language learners to achieve comprehensible input/output by interacting and communicating with each other and with native speakers of the target language (Fried-Booth, 1986; Candlin et al., 1988). In other words, second language learners are to learn the target language by using it in real-life situations. It may be, however, that the SLA literature has not kept up with recent developments in the classroom. The only formal study of project-based instruction in SLA education (Eyring, 1989) was conducted 10 years ago. Since that time significant changes seem to have occurred in both general and SLA education.

Berliner (1992) says that “about every other decade society decides youth cannot think and demands that we teach them to do so” (p. 10). Recent work in the United States, for example, makes the case that schools should avoid transmission teaching and promote thinking skills for all students in all curriculum areas (e.g., Mestre, in press). This concern seems especially evident in SLA education. For instance, critical thinking, research, and analytical skills are all required of secondary level ESL students by TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) as part of their international standards (TESOL, 1997).

It is worth looking at the TESOL requirements in detail. According to the organization’s ESL standards for Pre-K-12 students, Grade 9-12 students should not only be able to use English to participate in social interactions (i.e., to use English in socially and
culturally appropriate ways, keeping in mind the appropriate language variety, register, and
genre according to audience, purpose, and setting), but also to use learning strategies to
extend their communicative competence; use English to achieve academically in all content
areas including using English to interact in the classroom, obtain, process, construct, and
provide subject matter information in spoken and written form; and use appropriate learning
strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge. In order to achieve these objectives,
secondary school ESL students must learn to share and request information; express feelings,
needs, and ideas; engage in conversations; test hypotheses about language; explore
alternative ways of saying things; focus attention selectively; seek support and feedback from
others; select different media to help understand language; use context to get meaning;
follow implicit and explicit oral and written directions; request and provide classifications;
and elaborate and extend other people’s ideas. By using cognitive and meta-cognitive
strategies such as skimming, scanning, previewing and reviewing, note-taking, self-
monitoring and planning, they must also learn to gather, select, connect, hypothesize and
predict, compare and contrast, analyze and synthesize, and interpret and present information
orally, visually, and in written form.

Perhaps more importantly in the context of the present study, similar requirements are
made by the Canadian province in which the study was conducted. According to the BC
Ministry of Education ESL Resource Book (1987), ESL students need help in recognizing
"recurring language and thinking patterns, and the totality of language features which
produce different types of discourse and style" (p. 51). They need to learn thinking skills
such as observation, sequencing, and decision making across the curriculum. These in turn
require the development of specific skills such as describing, identifying, labeling,
comparing, contrasting, forming analogies, measuring, ordering spatially, classifying,
defining, generalizing, ordering chronologically, following instructions, noting a process
relating to causes and effects, predicting, hypothesizing, formulating theories, formulating
personal opinions, making decisions, detecting and solving problems, proposing alternatives, evaluating, recommending, and concluding.

The concern that students learn thinking skills reflects an anxiety about what the future will demand of all of us. Thus it is predicted that the 21st century job market will require “individuals who know how to get access to information, critically interpret this information and, working collaboratively with colleagues from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, use information for creative problem-solving” (Learning Well, Living Well. Ministry of Supply and Services, Canada. Cited in Reeder, 1997).

It is widely believed however that due to their different educational backgrounds, many ESL students need to be explicitly encouraged to develop their thinking skills. The project approach to teaching/learning has been implemented in some Canadian secondary school ESL programs with this aim in mind (Huxur-Beckett, 1997). The project approach is used because teachers believe they can plan and carry out activities with the students in a natural real-life manner (Williams, 1984). Projects can be “designed to engage students in the investigation of authentic problems” (Blumenfeld et al., 1991, p. 369), to foster cooperation among students (e.g., Barrow & Milburn, 1990), to stimulate creative thinking by participation in intellectual activities (Dewey, 1931), to enable students to see the value of learning materials, to enrich students’ academic experience, and to enhance their communication and decision-making skills (Schuldt, 1991).

There has been an increasing number of studies in mainstream education that examine a variety of issues related to project-based instruction. Some of the major findings are that projects can be developed to teach problem-solving, critical thinking and independent learning skills. To take just one example, mathematics and science teachers and students are said to be motivated and challenged by project work. They apparently enjoy learning by doing, and the teachers report an improvement in their students’ mathematics and science knowledge and skills (e.g., Owens, 1997; Ramey, 1997).
By contrast with mainstream education and despite the current emphasis on teaching critical thinking through problem-solving in SLA as well as mainstream education, there has been little research on project-based instruction reported in the SLA literature. Moreover, despite the fact that the essence of the Project Method is wholehearted purposeful activity on the part of the learner, little of the research that has been reported shows what the students themselves think of this method of instruction. While some informal research (e.g., Coleman, 1992; Gardner, 1995; Hilton-Jones, 1988) suggests that project-based instruction results in higher student motivation, improved language skills, and teacher/student satisfaction, the only formal study in the area (Eyring, 1989) indicates that ESL students and their teachers may be frustrated by this form of activity. The teacher-participant in Eyring’s study reported feeling that the students in her project class had less respect for her as a teacher than did the students in her other, more traditional classes. But Eyring gives no explanation as to why her project students may have felt this way. Is Eyring’s finding significant? If so, what explains the apparent discrepancy between SLA and mainstream students’ (and teachers’) evaluations of project-based leaning? This study is a qualitative investigation into these and related issues.

1.4 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore ESL teachers’ goals for and ESL teachers’ and students’ evaluations of the process and results of project-based instruction. The aim is to view project-based instruction as part of Canadian school culture, thus recognizing the participants as active agents whose perceptions of the activity may differ and assuming that the reasons for the differences, if any, are significant. It is said that people collectively construct concepts that objectify their understanding of things. These concepts become a culture which determines the range of ways in which people can perceive, imagine, think about, remember and feel about things (Harré & Lamb, 1986; Piaget, 1928; Ratner, 1997).
The purpose of this study is to contribute to our understanding of what might be called ESL project culture. What does project-based instruction mean to ESL teachers and ESL students? How do they perceive, imagine, think about, remember, and feel about the projects they participate in? The following three research questions are applied to investigate these issues:

1) What are the ESL teachers' goals for project-based instruction for ESL learners?
2) How do ESL teachers and ESL students evaluate the process and results of project-based instruction?
3) What can account for any differences found between the teachers' and students' evaluations?

1.5 The Significance/Relevance of the Study

   The study is significant/relevant in a number of ways. First, it contributes to the SLA literature by expanding our understanding of project-based instruction as it is viewed by secondary school ESL teachers and students. For instance, it explores teachers' and students' conceptions of what counts as knowledge in language classes and how language should be taught and learned. These conceptions (which can change over time and across contexts) help determine their attitudes concerning what they are learning in their language classes and the approaches they take in language learning situations (Kalaja, 1995). This understanding is important because as stated earlier, project-based instruction is believed to be an effective school activity in providing second language learners interactive opportunities to develop accuracy and fluency in the target language and in developing their critical-thinking, decision-making, and cooperative working skills. And yet there is little research reported in the SLA literature which either confirms or disconfirms these beliefs.

   Second, the study is significant/relevant because of its implications for practice, for instance, curriculum design and pre- and in-service teacher training. It is important for
practitioners to understand the perceptions and needs of their clients (i.e., their students), because the student population is changing rapidly in many parts of the world. For example, in 1993 almost 50,000 children immigrated to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994c); it is expected that the annual numbers of immigrant children will remain steady for the foreseeable future (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994b); and thus immigrants will likely continue to represent a significant segment of the Canadian population well into the 21st century (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994b). According to Cummins (1997) and Coelho (1998), more than 50% of the school population in Canadian cities such as Vancouver and Toronto consists of ESL students who have come to Canada from over 130 countries. These immigrants often come from nations, cultures, and linguistic groups that are significantly different from those of the host society, many in search of a better education for their children (e.g., Salzberg, 1998).

However, there are significant differences between the educational system of British Columbia, for instance, and the educational systems in many immigrant students’ home countries (Nann, 1995). A good or better education can mean different things from the second language learners’ and their parents’ perspectives (Gunderson, 1998). Studies have shown that educational tasks can be given divergent interpretations; that teachers, students and parents can have culturally divergent perspectives on a school’s educational agenda (Early et al., 1996) due to their different conceptions of what counts as a good education. For instance, it is not uncommon to hear immigrant students say “I don’t like drawing because it makes me feel like a child,” “The teachers don’t give us homework. They don’t correct our errors” (Huxur, 1997). Clearly teachers’ have good reasons for doing or not doing certain things. For example, they don’t correct every error students make because they don’t want to discourage them from trying new things. They want the students to develop self-esteem. But students and their parents do not seem to understand teachers’ rationale. Obviously, there are different ways of understanding curriculum and school practice among teachers and the
immigrant communities they serve. Talking about a Chinese parent group proposal for a traditional school in Vancouver, Hui (1998) pointed out that “new immigrants to Canada see quite a big difference between what their kids are doing here and what they did there, and there is room for improvement” (p. 15). Hui’s remark only emphasizes Nann’s (1995) claim that there are significant differences between the educational system in British Columbia and those in many immigrant students’ home countries.

There have been some studies of ESL students’ and their teachers’ perceptions of learning and teaching generally (Nunan, 1993), and of teacher intentions and learner interpretations (Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Richards & Lockhart, 1994), also at a general level. (For a review of these studies, see Nunan, 1993.) Exploring ESL students’ and their teachers’ evaluations of a specific teaching/learning activity such as project-based instruction can contribute to our understanding of the possible gaps between a host country’s educational system and the educational systems in which immigrant students were first acculturated in their home countries. Such an understanding can also contribute to successful teaching and learning in the host country.

Third, the study is significant/relevant because of the student participants’ grade levels and ages (i.e., grades 8-12 and ages 13-18). As Gunderson (1998) points out, secondary school ESL students face the most difficulties with their schooling. Research shows that it takes second language learners five to seven years to achieve Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Collier, 1989; Cummins, 1984). However, depending on their age when they arrived in Canada, the student participants in the present study had only three to four years to deal with immigration anxiety and teen-age problems; learn the English language and Canadian school and societal cultures well enough to be mainstreamed; and learn the BC school curriculum and graduate from high school into post-secondary institutions. These tasks can be difficult for ESL students in this age group for several reasons. For example, the students already have achieved school literacy but in
educational systems that can be very different from that of their host country. They may have been trained to do different things through different teaching/learning methodologies. At this age, they have already established a conception of good learning/teaching and effective school tasks. This makes it difficult for them to understand and participate in the different ways of doing things in their new schools. Understanding the experience of this group of students will help host country educators develop appropriate ESL education policies and design suitable teaching methodologies.

Fourth, this study is significant/relevant because it is timely. We have seen that recent research in the United States is making the case that schools should avoid transmission teaching and help students develop their thinking skills (e.g., Mestre, in press). However, as indicated by the current debate about back-to-basics schools (see Pynn, 1998) in Canada, not everyone seems to agree that transmission teaching methods should be avoided. Some parents, in particular some Chinese-Canadian parents, are demanding a more traditional approach to their children's education. In these circumstances, it is timely to explore students’, particularly immigrant students’, perceptions of Canadian school culture. As we shall see, the world they live in is not so easily described as many adults seem to think. But understanding the students’ sometimes conflicting perceptions can be helpful for educators in meeting the needs of immigrant students. The present study makes a contribution to our understanding of these differences.

Fifth, the fact that the researcher shares a similar linguistic and cultural background with the student participants makes the present study significant/relevant. The researcher may have obtained more and even different kinds of information than a researcher from another linguistic and cultural background. This is suggested by the fact that the students who spoke to the researcher in Mandarin always had much more to say (three to four times more) than those who chose to practice their English during the interviews. It is also suggested by the fact that the students shared their affective needs with the researcher.
Speaking in Mandarin, they made comments such as: "It's beautiful here, but I don't like it" and "It is very difficult to make friends. We are afraid of the Canadians. They have blonde hair and blue eyes. We don't know what they think of us. This makes group work very difficult, because we don't know if they want us in their groups." While it can be argued that the students who provided more information may simply have been more outgoing and may have said the same things in English to almost anyone, in the opinion of the researcher, the fact that she shared a similar linguistic/cultural background may have contributed to the amount and kinds of information she was able to obtain. The students seemed to perceive her as one of us, not one of them. And they spoke out accordingly.

Last, and perhaps least, the study is significant/relevant for the researcher because it allowed her to explore some problems she has had as a student and teacher of second and third languages/cultures. The researcher has been learning and teaching in second and third language/culture situations for most of her life. This experience provided her with opportunities to witness many successes and failures among language minority students and made her want to explore possible explanations for these phenomena. Part of the exploration was her Queen's University master's research where she looked at Francophone and First Nations peoples to try to understand how these Canadians survive and perceive their situations (Huxur, 1992). This study is an extension of that inquiry from another angle.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

So far, a brief background to project-based instruction, definitions of key terms used in the study, an outline of the research problems, and a statement of the purpose and significance of the study have been introduced. In this section, some relevant theories will be reviewed to position the study within a theoretical framework. Positioning research in relation to theory is important because, as McMillan and Schumacher (1993) and Pierce (1995a) point out, theories influence the development of the foreshadowed problems in terms
of generating research questions, providing a conceptual framework in which to state the
questions, and reformulating the questions. The theories also influence the procedures,
methods, and approaches applied to carry out the research.

1.6.1 Assumptions about Language

According to Schiffrin (1994), there are two paradigms in linguistics, namely, the
formalist/structuralist paradigm (e.g., Chomsky, 1957; 1965) and the functionalist paradigm
(e.g., Halliday, 1985; 1994; Hymes, 1974). These paradigms make different assumptions
about the nature of language and the appropriate methods for studying language. For
example, the Chomskian formalist/structuralist paradigm assumes language is composed of
rules (Chomsky, 1957; 1965) governing the use of words, phrases, sentences, syntax, and
notions. Research conducted within this paradigm applies psycholinguistic methods to study
language rules and tasks. In doing so however, it ignores the sociocultural aspect of
language and the potentially different human interpretations of the language tasks under
investigation.

1.6.1.1 Functional Views

The functional paradigm consists of a number of different points of view (e.g., Chafe,
1980; Givon, 1989; Halliday, 1985; 1994; Hymes, 1974). The present study takes the
Hallidayan view of functional linguistics that assumes language is a medium for learning
about the world. Language, in other words, is a resource of meaning. It is used by people as
a means of conducting their daily lives. The meanings are culturally and socially situated
(i.e., meaning is contextual). From the Hallidayan functional linguistics point of view,
language use is a purposeful act. It is used in conversations and in writing to achieve specific
purposes (Eggins, 1994). This view is useful for the present study in seeing the role English
plays in Chinese ESL students' language socialization.
1.6.2 Assumptions about Language Learning

Our assumptions about language influence our assumptions about language learning. Thus while the Chomskian formalist/structuralist view of language is related to the language acquisition approach to language learning, the Hallidayan functional view of language is related to the language socialization approach to language learning.

1.6.2.1 Second Language Socialization

Language socialization is a concept enunciated by Schieffelin and Ochs (1986). In contrast to the view that language learning is a matter of learning a set of rules, the language socialization view holds that language learning is the acquisition of linguistic as well as sociocultural knowledge. Language acquisition in other words is a process of language socialization. In this view language is a medium of socialization: “Socialization through the use of language and socialization to use language” (Schieffelin, 1990, p. 14). Ochs (1988) also describes language acquisition as a process of language socialization:

A basic task of the language acquirer is to acquire tacit knowledge of principles relating linguistic forms not only to each other but also to referential and non referential meanings and functions. Given that meanings and functions are to a large extent socioculturally organized, linguistic knowledge is embedded in sociocultural knowledge. On the other hand, understandings of the social organization of everyday life, cultural ideologies, moral values, beliefs, and structures of knowledge and interpretations are to a large extent acquired through the medium of language. (p. 14)

The language socialization view is a useful theoretical framework for the present study because, as pointed out by Schieffelin and Ochs (1986), it treats language as a focus of study as well as a medium of studying. It takes other learning such as content, classroom and socio-cultural knowledge (Mohan, 1986; 1989) into consideration. This knowledge is significant because it is just what ESL students need.
1.6.3 Assumptions about Project-based Instruction

Project-based instruction in SLA education has been studied from the psycholinguistic perspective as an input/interaction task. The aim has been to explore the development of second language learners' linguistic knowledge (their grasp of the structures of language) by their engaging in conversational tasks (Eyring, 1989). However, as Breen (1987) and Huxur and Mohan (1995) point out, task-based research conducted from this perspective neglects the role of social relationships, or what Carey (1997) calls “thruput” in language learning.

1.6.3.1 Socio-cultural Perspective

As Ochs (1990) points out, language socialization “is compatible with a set of theories that are performance or activity based and critical of structuralist views that treat activity exclusively as the product of structure” (p. 304). These activity-based perspectives include the sociological theories of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984), and the psychological theories of Vygotsky (1962; 1978) and Leont'ev (1981). According to Ochs (1990), each of these theorists believes in the creative and generative aspects of social activity or practice. They acknowledge the role of unintended consequences of social activity in restructuring mind and activity. At the same time, each recognizes that psychological and social structures organize social activity, which “parallel the notion that both linguistic and sociocultural knowledge organizes social activity and that such knowledge is the outcome of social activity” (p. 304).

Ochs (1988) argues that “activity mediates linguistic and sociocultural knowledge” and “knowledge and activity impact one another” (p.15). “Sociocultural and linguistic knowledge structures activity, and activity creates (in the case of the novice/acquirer) and recreates (in the case of the member/competent language user) knowledge in both of these domains” (p.16). On this basis, Ochs (1988) formulated her model of language socialization:
The present study regards project-based instruction as an activity that teachers and students carry out to achieve various goals. It takes the language socialization approach from a socio-historical perspective. By taking this approach, the present study sees project-based instruction as an activity or a sociocultural context that provides opportunities for ESL teachers to teach the English language, school and social cultures, curriculum content, and various skills. It is also an activity or context in which ESL students learn the English language functionally by listening to, speaking, reading, and writing English to learn content material (Dewey, 1926; Dewey & Dewey, 1915; Mohan, 1986) and to learn how to learn in Canadian schools and how to survive in Canadian societies.

1.6.4 Assumptions about Social Science Research

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), it is important for social science researchers to clarify the basic belief system (paradigm) which guides their inquiry. Harré (1993) also emphasizes the importance of a clear belief system in social science research. He maintains that a methodology derives from an ontology and epistemology regarding human beings and human association. It is important that researchers have a clear idea about how they see human beings and social interaction. For example, “Are human beings to be taken as active agents using their social knowledge jointly to accomplish certain ends? Or are they information-processing automata, the behaviors of which are the effects of a causal process?” (Harré, 1993, p. 11). For more discussion on this topic, see Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994).
1.6.4.1 Human Beings as Information-processing Automata

Harré (1993) is critical of the positivistic research paradigm that treats human beings as information-processing automata whose behavior is seen as "the effect of a causal process, triggered by the stimuli to which the subjects are exposed. The job of the experimenter is to look for correlations between elementary stimuli and elementary behavior" (p. 14) and to identify central tendencies through statistical analysis. Harré criticizes this paradigm as having a meaning problem. That is, the experimenter assumes that the stimuli created by the experimenter are objective and that all participants understand them in the same way the experimenter does. But, as Harré points out, citing Mixon's (1971) work, different participants may understand the same stimuli differently. Therefore, while the positivistic paradigm may be appropriate to investigate some things, other approaches are necessary when examining, as we are in the present study, a cross-cultural situation where different human interpretations, intentions, and actions are involved.

1.6.4.2 Human Beings as Active Agents

Unlike the positivist paradigm "that supports the status quo through its conception of social and psychological phenomena as universal and invariant" (Ratner, 1997, p. 231), the hermeneutic paradigm follows from a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology. It is a dialectical and analytical approach that involves a continuing critique and reiteration that leads to joint construction (Cranach, 1992; Harré, 1993; Secord, 1990). As Harré (1993) says, the ontological assumption of this paradigm is that human beings are active agents. "Social behavior is the structured product of the joint actions of intelligent and knowledgeable agents acting to further some end or other. It is not the effects of causes" (p. 107). The goals of hermeneutic inquiry are to make sense of an event or situation by attending to the acceptable conventions or norms (social representations) in the actors' communities rather than by trying to discover cause-and-effect relations. Social
representations are “social images, ideas, or theories of the world” (Kruse & Schwarz, 1992, p. 23). It is knowledge that is shared by members of a community. This “taken for granted” knowledge “serves as a common interpretive schema as well as a means of communication” (Kruse & Schwarz, 1992, p. 23). Thommen, Cranach, and Ammann (1992) argue that social systems influence the acts of individual members. Individual action in other words is socially situated.

The present study finds the hermeneutic paradigm useful because of its concern for the study of socio-cultural conventions rather than individual differences. Its view of individuals as active agents makes it important to understand the interpretations of the participants and their evaluations of socio-cultural situations. By taking an ontological stance that human beings are active agents, the present study is able to explore the differences in the teacher- and student-participants' evaluations of project-based instruction and the reasons behind the discrepancies. Though individual differences are clearly acknowledged, they are revealed though different socio-cultural conventions which it is the purpose of this study to explore.

1.6.5 Summary

The present study takes a functional perspective which views language as a resource of meaning within a particular socio-cultural context. It sees ESL learning as a process of language socialization in which Chinese immigrant students learn the target language as well as content area knowledge and skills within the context of a Canadian school culture which includes project-based instruction. By taking the ontological stance that human beings are active agents, the study is open to potential differences in the teacher- and student-participants' evaluations of project-based instruction. It is open to potential dilemmas and tensions which arise for the Chinese immigrant students due their previous experience of a different educational culture.
It is important to understand that the theoretical positioning of the present study is based on the nature of the investigation. That is, by putting itself within certain perspectives, the study does not assume that other perspectives are invalid. In fact, it regards all perspectives as potentially valid depending on the contexts in which they are applied. What is asserted is that the perspectives adopted here are appropriate perspectives given the purpose of the study.

1.7 Overview of Other Chapters

Chapter 2 is a critical review of the literature on project-based instruction in mainstream and SLA education. Specifically, it focuses on the goals and achievements of project-based instruction; some of the concerns which have been raised about the activity, as well as research that has been done in response to these concerns; and on teachers’ and students’ evaluations of the process and results of project-based instruction. The chapter concludes with brief accounts of three models which may help us to understand discrepancies between mainstream and ESL teachers’ and students’, and ESL teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction.

Chapter 3 discusses of the research methodology used for this study. The researcher argues that project-based instruction is a sociocultural phenomenon which is carried out by individuals as active agents. Therefore, multi-methods such as observations and account and discourse analysis are appropriate for the study. Also discussed in this chapter are the reasons for conducting the research; language issues that arose in collecting the data; issues related to the role of the researcher; the procedures used in collecting the data; details of projects observed; and issues related to data analysis procedures, sampling and the soundness of the study.

Chapter 4 presents findings which suggest that ESL classes are sociocultural contexts where activities such as projects are carried out to socialize and to be socialized through
English language. Specifically, the chapter focuses on findings regarding ESL teachers' goals for project-based instruction; ESL teachers' evaluations of the activity; and some ESL students' evaluations of project-based instruction. The findings presented in this chapter show that the teacher participants in the present study had many goals that are not mentioned in the SLA literature. The findings also show that while the teacher participants' evaluations of project-based instruction are positive, student participants' evaluations are mixed. That is, while some students evaluated project-based instruction positively, others had mixed feelings about it.

Chapter 5 presents and discusses findings which suggest that there are discrepancies between ESL teachers' and students' evaluations of project-based instruction. For instance, while the teachers aimed to prepare the students for adult life by teaching them how to learn, the students seemed to be more concerned with immediate goals such as learning some facts. While the teachers taught language in context by integrating it with skills and content, the students seemed to think language should be taught separately. Some background conditions/problem situations and three models are used in an effort to explain the discrepancies. It is suggested that these discrepancies may due to differences in Canadian and Chinese educational and social cultures as well as different linguistic paradigms that the teachers and students were operating under.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of the study and discusses their implications for future research and for ESL teachers. It is pointed out that organizing language and content integrated project work is a difficult task. Second language education research needs to develop a systematic framework for teachers to use in the design and implementation of such project work. It is pointed out that teachers need to be aware that project-based instruction is dependent on the assumptions of Canadian educational culture. Not only do they need to help ESL students understand how to conduct project work, they also have to explain to them the significance of project-based instruction and its sub-activities in relation to students'
general education. It is emphasized that this will present teachers with a difficult task, one which requires complex cross-cultural dialogues.
CHAPTER 2: PROJECT-BASED INSTRUCTION

2.1 Introduction

Project-based instruction seems to be gaining in popularity at all levels and in all subject areas, including SLA education (Hartman and Eckerty, 1995). This chapter reviews the literature concerning project-based instruction. It focuses first on the goals and achievements of the activity in general and SLA education. Comparing and contrasting the findings presented in the two bodies of literature suggests a way research might move forward, namely, by re-conceptualizing the goal of project-based instruction as integrating language and content. The chapter goes on to consider some of the concerns which have been raised about project-based instruction, as well as the research that has been done in response to these concerns. General and SLA teachers’ and students’ evaluations of the process and results of project work are then presented. The comparison highlights dilemmas which, while not unknown in general education, seem to be particularly acute in SLA education, namely, discrepancies between research findings and teacher/student evaluations and between teacher and student evaluations. The chapter concludes with brief accounts of three models which, as suggested in the literature, may help us to understand these discrepancies. The models are discussed in detail in chapter 5 with reference to the findings of the present study.

2.2 Goals of Project-based Instruction

There are many goals in general and SLA education which proponents believe can be achieved through project-based instruction. This section reviews the major goals described in the literature, beginning with those which were first articulated with reference to general or mainstream education.
2.2.1 Mainstream Goals

Project-based instruction is exploratory in nature. What students learn during their project work cannot always be anticipated in advance. Nevertheless, the mainstream literature lists a number of goals for project-based instruction. These include intrinsically motivating students to learn, fostering problem solving, developing independent and cooperative working skills and critical thinking and decision making skills, and in-depth learning of subject matter (Adderly, et al., 1975; Berliner, 1992; Kesling, 1989; Krajcik, Blumenfeld, Marx & Soloway, 1994; Ladewski, Krajcik & Harvey, 1994; Vithal, Christiansen & Skovsmose, 1995). This section reviews these goals and discusses them in relation to the rationale behind project-based instruction.

2.2.1.1 Motivation

According to Berliner (1992), project-based instruction can intrinsically motivate students to learn because it enables them to participate in genuine, open-ended experiences rather than contrived experiences with pre-planned conclusions (Holt, 1994). It motivates students to work harder by allowing them to see the value of the material being covered, by providing practical experiences in safe environments (Schuldt, 1991), and by allowing them to see both theoretical and applied perspectives by requiring them to apply what they have learned (Adderly, et al, 1975; Dewey, 1931; Hoyt, 1997; Kesling, 1989).

It is argued that the student-centered, life-like nature of project-based instruction motivates students by giving them ownership of their learning. It is believed that the learning becomes meaningful because students plan their own projects (Barrow & Milburn, 1990; Kilpatrick, 1925) and in the process make the projects their own (Shoring, 1995). Play projects, excursion projects, and story projects have all been advocated because they are believed to motivate students to learn (Berliner, 1992; Bickel, 1994; Bronars, Jr., 1978; Brubacher, 1947; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988).
2.2.1.2 Problem-solving Skills

As Krajcik et al. (1994) point out, project-based instruction is grounded in a constructivist teaching/learning theory which sees teachers helping students actively construct knowledge (Piaget, 1928) as they work with new ideas on real-world problems. Learners solve these problems using cognitive strategies, tools, and other resources while engaging in activities that require them to develop multiple representations (Kilpatrick, 1925).

The goal of teaching problem-solving skills through project-based instruction is as old as the method itself (Kilpatrick, 1925). As we have seen, Kilpatrick agreed with Dewey that schools should prepare learners for rapid and unexpected changes in direction. He argues that “while we cannot be sure of the precise details of future social problems—and for real education, it is better so—we can within limits foretell that certain unsolved problems will press for solution” (Kilpatrick, 1926, p. 110). He proposes that schools view education holistically by teaching general thinking and problem-solving skills through the project method, and this remains a major goal of project-based instruction to this day (Hoyt, 1997; Kimbrough, 1995; Peterson & Myer, 1995).

2.2.1.3 Critical Thinking Skills

The development of critical thinking skills is one of the goals that mainstream educators hope to achieve through project-based instruction. As we have seen, there is growing concern that youth lack thinking skills (Berliner, 1992; Mestre, in press). In order to learn how to think, however, children need something to think about. That is, they need to work hard and long enough on a particular topic or issue to develop the interest and understanding needed to think deeply and critically about it. Learning to think critically requires planning, observing/researching, analyzing and synthesizing information, solving problems and creating new ideas. Project-based instruction is believed to be well suited to
achieving this goal because it provides students with the opportunity to work on real issues with depth, complexity, and duration (Berliner, 1992; Dewey, 1931; Hoyt, 1997; Krajcik et al., 1994; Scott, 1994).

2.2.1.4 Decision-making Skills

Enhancing students' decision-making skills (making choices/plans) and helping them take responsibility for their decisions is another major goal of project-based instruction (Kilpatrick, 1925; Ladewski et al., 1994; Scott, 1994; Shuldt, 1991). Kilpatrick stressed the importance of allowing children to plan their own projects. In the following exchange he explains why he thought it was important that teachers resist the temptation to plan students' projects for them.

Question: Don't you think that the teacher should often supply the plan? Take a boy planting corn for example; think of the waste of land and the fertilizer and effort. Science has worked out better plans than a boy can make....

Kilpatrick: It depends on what you seek. If you wish corn, give the boy a plan. But if you wish a boy rather than corn, that is, if you wish to educate the boy to think and plan for himself, then let him make his own plan. (Kilpatrick, 1925, p. 212)

Kilpatrick is reminding us that in education children come first. Project-based instruction, being student centered, encourages children to make their own choices about the topics, issues, and even the methods for their projects. It is also believed that when students are allowed to make their own choices they will be motivated to work harder (Wolk, 1995).

2.2.1.5 Independence

Fostering independence is another major goal of project-based instruction in general education, especially at the high school level. This is accomplished through project activities that require students to recognize, define, and solve a problem by planning their work,
locating, analyzing and synthesizing data, and then presenting their work to their peers, each element of which is intended to test their resourcefulness. One rationale behind this goal is that while university students are expected to think and work independently of their instructors, it has been found that pre-college students usually lack the experience and expertise to do so (Cuthbert, 1995; Kimbrough, 1995; Williams, 1984).

2.2.1.6 Cooperative Work

While students are expected to demonstrate a certain degree of independence in their school activities, these activities as well as their lives outside school often involve cooperating with other people. Therefore, one of the goals of project-based instruction is to develop in students the ability to cooperate with others by working with them, by managing their group work, by organizing, sharing and participating in discussion groups, and by learning to resolve conflicts (Hoyt, 1997; Kilpatrick, 1918). It is also believed that working in groups gives students the opportunity to learn from each other and to learn by having to explain their thinking to others. By engaging in group projects, students learn to discuss alternative strategies, debate critical issues, and make judgments, all of which leads to consolidation of knowledge (Barrow & Milburn, 1990; Dewey, 1924; Holt, 1994; Kilpatrick, 1918).

2.2.1.7 Procedural Skills (learning how to learn)

As mentioned in chapter 1, learning how to learn (or learning to be independent learners) is an important goal of project-based instruction. The original rationale behind this goal was that education should empower all learners, including the poor and disadvantaged. A more recent argument for teaching procedural skills is that in our information age, with its explosion of new knowledge, teaching today’s facts is irrelevant, since they are sure to be superseded tomorrow, while teaching the skills which allow students to access, evaluate and
make sense of new knowledge seems more and more pressing. Fischer (1995) summarizes the arguments for emphasizing the learning process:

No teacher can teach everything in an academic discipline. ... The blowout of potential information on the information superhighway is an indication of the implausibility of a factoid-based approach to curriculum. Education is now a life-long process, and the fact of today will hardly serve to answer the need of tomorrow. Students don’t need to be drilled in isolated facts; they need intellectual space to develop skills for asking pertinent questions and for knowing where and how to find the needed data. (p. A16)

The purpose in developing students’ procedural skills, then, is to prepare them for a life of independent learning and of making their own decisions based on what they learn. It is contrasted with the rote learning of facts that may be outdated and inapplicable in future real-world situations (Barrow & Milburn, 1990; Holt, 1994; Hoyt, 1997).

2.2.1.8 In-depth Learning of Subject Matter

In-depth learning of content knowledge is another goal for project-based instruction. It is believed that students gain deeper understanding of a topic when they are asked to choose, conceptualize, research and reflect on their own projects. In doing so they become familiar with the facts and viewpoints related to a topic, with the methodologies and analytical tools of the subjects in which the topic arises, and with the constraints of time, resources, and labor that researchers face when working on a topic. Project-based instruction also allows students to deepen their understanding of subject matter by providing them opportunities to see the connections between theory and practice (Krajcik et al., 1994; Ladewski et al., 1994; Vithal et al., 1995).

2.2.2 SLA Goals

The major goal of project-based instruction stressed in the SLA literature is described as comprehensible output, that is, practicing the four language skills (e.g., Eyring, 1989;
Fried-Booth, 1986). There has also been occasional mention of developing analytical skills (Gardner, 1995), time management skills (Coleman, 1992), and responsibility (Fried-Booth, 1986; Hilton-Jones, 1988). But these have been presented as secondary considerations and not much effort has been made to ensure that students actually learn the skills. For instance, Coleman (1992) reports that the main goal he had for a video project was to give his students an opportunity to practice the four language skills. Though he also hoped the students would learn time and resource management skills, his survey of students at the end of the project solicited information only about the language skills.

2.2.3 Comparing Mainstream and SLA Goals

Three points need to be made regarding the goals for project-based instruction in general and SLA education. First, the general literature lists many more goals for project-based instruction when compared to the SLA literature. Clearly, the SLA literature needs to catch up with the mainstream literature in terms of its understanding of the potential of this form of activity. Second, the mainstream literature seems to have neglected the goal of language/discourse development within the context of project work. The emphasis has been exclusively on learning content and process without mention of the linguistic contexts in which these occur. Third, both the mainstream and the SLA literature seem to have neglected one of the most important of the early goals for project-based instruction. For even then the emphasis on integrating subjects included the integration of language and content (Dewey, 1926; Dewey & Dewey, 1915).

2.2.3.1 Some Problems with SLA Goals

As we have seen, the goals for project-based instruction in general education include fostering problem-solving, critical thinking, decision making, independent and cooperative working, and procedural skills, as well as in-depth learning of subject matter. But the main
goals of project-based instruction in SLA education are said to be comprehensible input and output, that is, practicing listening, speaking, reading, and writing the target language through projects such as field trips to shopping malls (e.g., Hilton-Jones, 1988) or getting-to-know-you parties (see Eyring, 1989; 1991). A somewhat broader view is provided by Legutke and Thomas (1991). It is true that fostering analytical (Gardner, 1995) and time management skills (Coleman, 1992), as well as responsibility (Fried-Booth, 1986; Hilton-Jones, 1988), are occasionally mentioned in the SLA literature as minor goals, but it is difficult to see how they can truly be goals at all if no effort is made to ensure that the skills are actually learned.

The problem here seems to be a focus on discourse which ignores its context, that is, activity. According to Mohan (1986), this sabotages the "goal of communication by eliminating what is to be communicated about." Students "are presented with talk and writing but not with anything to talk or write about. ESL students are particularly disadvantaged, for verbalism relies on exactly what they lack--a good knowledge of the language of instruction" (p. 46). Project-based instruction, with its emphasis on collecting, synthesizing and analyzing data, and talking and writing about it, seems to be well suited to providing students with purposeful and meaningful activities. Dewey (1926) explains the significance of activity as follows:

The concept of activity is a corrective to verbalism. In activity, words and information are integrated with thought and action. ... Words, the counters for ideas, are... easily taken for ideas. And in just the degree in which mental activity is separated from active concern with the world, for doing something and connecting the doing with what is undergone, words, symbols, come to replace ideas. (p. 168)

What is implied here is that activity combines theory (words and information) and practice (thought and action). Dewey is recommending the integration of verbal, expository learning with practical, experiential learning. The former may be essential for grasping theoretical and symbolic knowledge, but theory needs to be associated with life experience and practical
knowledge (Mohan, 1986) if it is to be of help to students in their day-to-day lives. Projects seem well equipped to serve as contexts for integrating practical learning (they provide experience) and theoretical learning (they provide opportunities for collecting, synthesizing, and analyzing data for students to talk and write about).

Clearly, SLA education, as it is presented in the literature, is not utilizing project-based instruction to its fullest potential. Trips to shopping malls and getting-to-know-you parties may help students practice their language skills, but as we will see in section 2.3.2 below they may not be activities in Dewey's sense of the term. Researchers need to re-examine the general literature, as well as SLA practice, to find out if and how mainstream goals may be imported into SLA education. Skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, decision making, independent and cooperative working, and learning how to learn, as well as in-depth learning of subject matter should be developed across all curricula. In fact, ESL students seem to be specially in need of education in these areas because they may come from different educational cultures where these skills are understood and practiced differently. One of the ways to carry out this kind of education would be to engage students in different kinds of project activity. If the general literature finds project-based instruction helpful in educating students in other areas, there seems good reason to suppose that it can be even more helpful to SLA students. And this point may not have escaped the attention of SLA educators who have come to endorse project-based instruction.

2.2.3.2 Learning Through Language: An Alternative View

Is there an alternative to the view that the goal of project-based instruction in SLA education is comprehensible output? As mentioned earlier, an alternative view should incorporate the concerns for developing critical thinking, problem-solving and other skills expressed in the mainstream literature on project-based instruction. It should also reflect concerns for language learning as well as relate language and subject area content in some
form of language/content integration as pointed out by Dewey (1926). Some of the features of a possible alternative are suggested by research conducted from the language across the curriculum perspective. For example, as can be seen from discussions of language as a medium of learning science by Lemke (1990), Parker (1992) and O'Toole (1996), there is evidence that science educators have begun to acknowledge the intrinsic relationship between language and science. Here, language is not seen as output, but rather for its contribution to learning science:

In schools, as in other settings, it is difficult to separate learning language, learning through language, and learning about language. All three aspects of learning are likely to be going on in science lessons, with explicit focus on certain language features and tacit recognition of others. The language of science is the medium in which science as human activity (and its attributed body of knowledge) is constituted for much of the student population (Rowell, 1997, p.19).

Australian research on genres of writing in the science classroom seems to be one of the major strands in this body of research. Veel (1992) provides an analysis of science genres required in science classrooms, drawing on data from the Disadvantaged Schools Research Project in Sydney. The data Veel analyzed included both ESL students and native speakers of English. For Veel, as for Halliday and Martin (1993), the specialized features of science language have evolved to do various kinds of cognitive and semiotic work that everyday language cannot do. In order to learn these features of scientific language, students must engage with the tools for this scientific cognitive and semiotic work. This provides a specific sense to the concept of language as a medium of learning science. In addition to this, the genres analysis provides for a form of language/content integration particularly relevant to the needs of second language learners, because the analysis of each of these science genres connects a detailed analysis of grammar and the lexis of the features of scientific knowledge or content.

Veel's work on the written genres of science clearly shows the possibility of a different view of project-based instruction where language is regarded as a medium of
learning and is integrated with content through a functional perspective on language/discourse. However, a comprehensive analysis of language as a medium of learning in project-based instruction is still a distant goal, since it must cover language uses other than writing and subject areas other than science. Furthermore, Veel's genres analyses address the final product of science writing. But they are not analyses of processes of science writing. The researcher is not aware of any analyses of the process of writing in science which offer a language/content integration of the kind provided by the Australian genres research. In fact, there appears to be no generally accepted analyses of the process of science writing, or indeed of writing to learn in science in general.

Swales and Feak's (1994) work, Academic Writing for Graduate Students is another such example. Essentially, Swales and Feak present an analysis of "moves" of the research paper genre along with sections discussing functional language issues such as qualifying the strength of claims and the expression of probability. But even Swales and Feak offer only an analysis of the written product of the project. They do not offer an analysis of the inquiry processes of a project and the discourse of those processes. While a great deal can be achieved in language and thinking through project work, the research literature does not provide an available and accepted rationale to explain such achievement.

Rowell (1997) provides a review of research in writing to learn in science education. Her review covers the major strands of research, including a "broad sweep of promises for writing to learn, which includes development of cognitive skills, development of personal expression and self-identity, meaning-making and entry into and social action in specific communities" (p. 23). But she finds that these promises have not yet been fulfilled. As Rowell states,

Research paradigms and theoretical frameworks underpinning enquiries into writing across the curriculum are varied and provide a confusing pattern of findings (Anson et al., 1993; Schumacher & Nash, 1991) ... because of varying assumptions about the nature of learning and the nature of learning science, interpretation of these studies is difficult. (Rowell, 1997, p. 36)
Thus, there presently appears to be no comprehensive and accepted analysis of writing to learn in science. Since such an analysis is not available for the specific case of writing science, it is unlikely to be available for the more general case of using language to learn in the project-based instruction. This lack of a comprehensive and accepted analysis is likely to have serious consequences for teachers applying project-based instruction, for it is likely to make it much more difficult for them to present students with clear, comprehensive, and convincing justifications for the project work that students are engaged in.

2.2.3.3 Some Problems with Mainstream Goals

We have seen that SLA researchers have something to learn about project-based instruction from mainstream researchers. However, if SLA researchers have neglected the development of learning skills and content knowledge by focusing only on language/discourse, mainstream researchers seem to have neglected the development of language/discourse by focusing solely on learning skills and content knowledge.

Inclusion of discourse development in the goals for project-based instruction is important because as Mohan (1986) points out, many educators, when faced with the complexity of modern societies, are attracted by the perceived efficiency of a more formal kind of education that tends toward verbalism and rote memorization of facts in isolation from life experience. Such a notion of education is in danger of ignoring its "social necessity and its identity with all human association that affects conscious life, and which identifies it with imparting information about remote matters and the conveying of learning through verbal signs" (Dewey, 1926, p. 10). Dewey believed that human thought is dependent on participation in forms of culture as well as in factual discourse, which is an organic constituent of practical thought (Tiles, 1988).
2.2.3.4 Simultaneous Development of Language, Skills, and Content

What is needed then is to make the simultaneous development of language, skills, and content as the major goal of both SLA and mainstream education. It is essential to keep in mind that all three are important, that one cannot substitute for the others. As Mohan (1986) points out, "doing is not an alternative to knowing; it is a way of knowing. And activity is not an alternative to talk; it is a context for talk" (p. 46, emphasis in the original). The possibility of simultaneously developing language, skills, and content knowledge is illustrated in *Schools of To-morrow* by Dewey and Dewey (1915).

One example the Deweys provide is of a fifth grade Indianapolis school experiment involving learning by doing. The students built a bungalow on a family farm. They drew up plans, measured the lumber and other material, and calculated the costs for the bungalow and for the fence, brick wall, and cement side-walk they also built. They even sold the family’s eggs, milk, and butter at market to raise funds for the project. These activities provided numerous opportunities to learn English. For instance, the spelling lessons came from the words the students used in connection with building the bungalow. The plans for the completed bungalow, as well as the life of the family it would house, furnished an inexhaustible supply of material for writing lessons and compositions. Even grammar work was interesting because it was done using sentences about the bungalow and farm.

Another example the Deweys give concerns a Chicago school which incorporated teaching English into a printing press project. The school installed a press so that students could print the pamphlets, posters, and other papers the school required. In addition to the interest the students showed in learning how to set up the type, operate the press, and distribute the print material, the project activities proved themselves to be especially valuable in teaching English. For instance, type setting served as an excellent context for drill in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and paragraphing. And because the material was to be distributed to students, parents, and members of the community, students were motivated to
proofread it with a thoroughness they had not given to work that was intended to be read only by their teachers.

The children in the above examples clearly acquired the skills needed to build a bungalow and operate a printing press. But they also acquired content knowledge of English, as well as the language/discourse needed to successfully complete their projects. For the Deweys, the project activities provided contexts for teaching English. The points they stress are that language development is functional and that it is best achieved when it is incorporated in activities that give students the motivation to learn new vocabulary, to spell correctly, to use correct grammar, and so on.

The above examples make it clear that mainstream students can develop language, skills, and content knowledge through project-based instruction. But they also indicate that projects can be valuable activities in SLA education as well. If native speakers can learn the language, skills, and content related to printing and house construction through project-based instruction, it should be possible for ESL students to learn content knowledge and skills (Sokolik & Tillyer, 1992), as well as language, within the context of project work. By engaging in a Social Studies project, for instance, SLA students should be able to learn historical and geographical content as well as historiographical and geographical discourse. They could also learn to make decisions and decision making-related discourse simultaneously. And so on. Students could learn to listen to and speak, read, write, and think in English not just because their teachers tell them to but because they have a reason of their own for doing so.

2.3 Concerns about Project-based Instruction

Project-based instruction raised concerns among some educators when it was first developed and popularized, and these concerns continue to be expressed today (e.g., Bode, 1922; Dewey, 1931; Gramsci, 1971; Hirsch, 1996; Jones, 1922; Morrison, 1931). There are
concerns related to its child-centered nature. Are teachers giving students too much responsibility and perhaps jeopardizing the quality of their education? Other concerns relate to the viability of the activity. Are teachers not worried that projects might degenerate into trivial busy work? There are also concerns about the efficiency of projects and about the value they place on procedural versus declarative knowledge. Do students learn enough to justify the amount of time they spend on their projects? Are they also being deprived of factual knowledge (product) in favor of process knowledge? In this section we review these concerns. Since the concerns about project-based instruction expressed in the SLA literature are not as yet well defined, the review will concentrate on concerns raised in the general literature.

2.3.1 Student Freedom and Teacher Guidance

As mentioned in chapter 1, the Project Method is a reconstruction of Dewey’s problem method that relies on the inborn active propensities of children. The activity principle is employed as a means of motivating learning and clarifying understanding. Children, in other words, learn by doing. Kilpatrick, whose Project Method was mainly used in primary schools, argued that learning should be child-centered. It should be the child not the teacher for instance who plans the curriculum. Metaphors such as “that of the gardener cultivating the soil in which flowers can grow, rather than that of craftsmen making a product (or, more unkindly, filling a bucket with water) were used to describe child-centered learning” (Barrow & Milburn, 1990, p. 38). Teachers were to create conditions in which children could learn through wholehearted purposeful activity.

While Kilpatrick’s emphasis of the role of “inner urge in the prosecution of a project gave the method a great popularity among progressive educators” (Brubacher, 1947, p. 244), it also raised concerns among more traditional educators. Some “essentialists” were “skeptical as to whether teachers were adroit enough to preserve” the inner drive of the
learner and "still bring children's school achievement up to public expectations" (Brubacher, 1947, p. 244). Jones (1922) warned that the Project Method is difficult to implement because it requires a very well organized teacher for it to be successful. Even some progressives were skeptical. Bode (1922) asserted that the Project Method distorts Dewey's notion of experience into "a mystic faith in a process of 'inner development' which requires nothing from the environment except to be let alone" (p. 165). Leaving students alone, Bode concluded, is not a very constructive educational program.

Like Kilpatrick, Dewey cared deeply about children's interests and purposes. But he too was concerned about an over-emphasis on child-centeredness in the Project Method. He was concerned that, while subject- and teacher-centered instruction overestimates learners' receptivity to instruction, the activity-centered instruction advocated in the Project Method underestimates the learners' need for adult guidance. Dewey (1931) maintained that a successful project requires intellectual activity from both teachers and students.

Hatfield (1920; 1923) and Holt (1994) have similar concerns about the Project Method. For instance, Hatfield was just as worried that teachers could become disengaged from their work, merely asking students what they want to do, as he was that in trying to maintain their traditional authoritarian role they could keep students from taking genuine responsibility. Disengagement may have been a consequence of what Holt (1994) calls teacher ambivalence. She notes that the Project Method "tempted teachers to ignore the complexity of authority" by urging them to "avoid interfering with students' natural inclinations. And yet, the superiority of the teacher's knowledge was generally accepted. The role of the teacher was therefore ambivalent, requiring ... subtly hidden guidance toward preconceived ends" (Holt, 1994, p. 87).
2.3.2 Viability

There are concerns that in project-based instruction Dewey’s notion of activity may degenerate into random exercises or thoughtless, mechanical busy work (Brubacher, 1947). Dewey (1931) himself expressed doubts about the viability of many projects. He said that “many so-called projects are of such a short time span and are entered upon for such casual reasons that extension of acquaintance with facts and principles is at a minimum. In short, they are too trivial to be educative” (pp. 422-423). Dewey insisted that the Project Method should be used only “if modified from Kilpatrick’s intent, that is, if accomplished over a long period of time, and if not a substitute for subject matter” (Holt, 1994, p. 79). He advised teachers to design activities that can motivate students intrinsically by truly challenging their native impulses. To do this the learning situations should be of such a nature as to arouse thinking. This means that they must present something new but not be overwhelming. Dewey maintained that “a large part of the art of instruction lies in making the difficulty of new problems large enough to challenge thought, and small enough so that, in addition to the confusion naturally attending to the novel elements, there shall be luminous familiar spots from which helpful suggestions may spring” (Dewey, 1926, p. 184).

2.3.3 Efficiency

Some critics question the efficiency of project-based instruction. For instance, Hirsch (1996) acknowledges that student-centered, project-based (discovery) learning is “sometimes better retained and more accessible” than teacher-induced learning, but he questions the efficiency of the approach. He states that project-based learning “takes more time and is sometimes insecure in its results--insecure not in the durability of what is remembered but in the content of what is remembered” (1996, p. 134). That is, students discover things which are sometimes irrelevant to the task at hand or even wrong. Krajcik et al. (1994), Schuldt (1991) and Scott (1994) also point out that project-based instruction can be time consuming,
especially if it involves group work. Here extra time is needed for meetings required to come to agreements on the design of the project and who is to do what work.

2.3.4 Procedural and Declarative Knowledge

Other concerns about project-based instruction have to do with the value of procedural versus declarative knowledge acquisition. As discussed in section 2.2.1.7, a major goal of project-based instruction is for students to learn how to learn (procedural knowledge). However, some critics maintain that this emphasis is, as one puts it, “antiknowledge extremism” in “the tradition of William Heard Kilpatrick” that invites a “countervailing extremism that repudiates process in favor of knowledge” (Hirsch, 1996, p.126). According to Hirsch, the hands-on process approach is a way of maintaining the status quo because students are kept from mastering “the tools of power and authority” and from gaining “enough traditional knowledge to understand the world of nature and culture surrounding them” (Hirsch, 1996, p. 7). Learning how to learn, in other words, is not enough. Children must also learn about the world they live in.

2.3.5 Standards

Standards seem to be one other issue that attracted concerns in North America as well as in Europe. For instance Hirsch (1996) argues that student-centered project-based instruction disregards standards by not testing and grading students. Teachers do not have clear goals and expectations for their students to work towards. They do not evaluate students’ work appropriately, promoting complacency and skepticism by practicing “romantic egalitarianism” (Hirsch, 1996, p. 182). Questions concerning standards have been central to recent debates about educational policy and initiatives for educational change in a number of countries. For the case of Britain, see Barber (1996).
2.3.6 The Larger Debate

Discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of project-based instruction has long been part of a larger debate between traditional and progressive educators. Kilpatrick's Project Method was based on Dewey's problem method of teaching/learning. Both methods/activities were progressive in the sense of being student-centered, and both raised concerns about student freedom, about methodological viability and efficiency, and about the value of process knowledge. Other educators were also concerned, but they looked for an approach that included the best features of traditional teacher-centered education and progressive student-centered education. For example, Morrison's (1931) Unit Plan was intended to combine the best features of the Herbartian (traditional) method and Dewey's problem method (Brubacher (1947).

It is worth reminding ourselves however that perhaps the most forceful critic of both progressive and traditional education was Dewey himself. He maintained that neither is adequate--in fact he thought both were mis-educative--because neither implies the principles of a carefully developed philosophy of experience. Each extreme, Dewey (1938) explained, is a "misunderstanding of the dynamic interplay between individual impulse and the historical situation necessary to both intellectual and social growth" (Holt, 1994, p. 76). He urged all teachers and educators exploring new forms of education to think in terms of the larger and deeper issues of education rather than in terms of divisive isms such as traditionalism and progressivism.

We have seen that Dewey was critical of Kilpatrick's Project Method, and yet at the same time that he was a strong proponent of project-based instruction. For now perhaps we can agree that progressivism, narrowly conceived, leaves itself open to criticism, but question the assumption of some critics that project-based instruction, at least as it is practiced today, must be narrowly progressive. We will revisit this issue at the end of this chapter and again in chapter 5.
2.3.7 Some Concerns Answered

Despite the concerns that have been raised since it was first developed and popularized, project-based instruction seems to be regaining popularity in both mainstream and second/foreign language education (Krajcik et al., 1994). Recent studies seem to confirm that project-based instruction results in higher levels of student motivation and better retention of knowledge (Hoyt, 1997; Krajcik et al., 1994; Ladewski et al., 1994; Marx et al., 1994; Musthafa, 1997). For instance, Musthafa (1997) examined literacy tasks and children’s engagement in learning in a fifth-grade project-based literature program in the United States. The analyses of classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and samples of students’ work showed that students voluntarily read and wrote more extensively using multiple genres in order to meet the various goals of the project. In SLA education, project-based instruction has been found to be effective in promoting comprehensible output (Coleman, 1992; Gardner, 1995; Hilton-Jones, 1988), and group oral negotiation skills (Eyring, 1989).

2.4 Students’ and Teachers’ Evaluations of Project-based Instruction

As we have seen, recent research seems to give project-based instruction a passing grade. Researchers say that at least some of its most important goals are indeed achievable. Furthermore, many of the concerns raised about project-based instruction may be either a priori or outdated. Some are part of a larger debate between progressives and traditionalists. But does project-based instruction have to be narrowly student-centered? Dewey for one did not think so. Other criticisms seem to arise from early practices associated with Kilpatrick’s Project Method. But are they the best guide to practice today? What about the even earlier but more substantial projects described by John and Evelyn Dewey?

This section reviews the relevant studies on project-based instruction specifically in relation to teachers’ and students’ evaluations of the activity. We have heard proponents and
critics discussing in general terms the goals of project-based instruction. But what about the participants? What do they say about the projects they have participated in? Is project-based instruction endorsed by both teachers and students? Is there a difference between teachers’ and students’ evaluations in mainstream and SLA education?

2.4.1 Teachers’ Evaluations

Studies show that a majority of teachers endorse project-based instruction. They believe it is more effective in teaching problem-solving, cooperative and independent learning, creative thinking and decision making skills, and in providing opportunities for students to feel a sense of accomplishment when compared to more traditional approaches (e.g., Kimbrough, 1995; Krajcik et al., 1994; Ladewski et al., 1994; Marx et al., 1994; Vithal et al., 1995). However, at least one important study of project-based instruction in SLA education (Eyring, 1989) reveals some tensions felt by the teacher participant in the study.

2.4.1.1 Mainstream Teachers’ Evaluations

Ladewski et al. (1994) look at one sixth grade science teacher’s attempt to understand and implement project-based instruction. ‘Connie’ taught a language arts and a reading class in addition to her three science classes. Methods such as semi-structured interviews, videotaping of classroom activities, and participant journal writing were applied in the investigation. Data analysis revealed that Connie encountered some difficulties in classroom management in the large group activities (the students incinerated a computer). But in general she enjoyed teaching project-based science. Features of project-based science such as using computing and telecommunication tools, investigative hands-on activities, and authentic real-world questions attracted Connie. She thought the hands-on activities enhanced students’ understanding of the science curriculum. She also thought project-based
science enabled her to see new possibilities in teaching, to develop new teaching strategies, and to refine her existing strategies.

Krajcik et al. (1994) report on a group of eleven science teachers (ten middle school and one elementary) in the United States learning the project approach to teaching. Data were collected from work session discussions, structured interviews, case reports, e-mail communications, and school visits. In addition, the teacher participants were asked to keep journals. The results of the study show that the teachers liked project-based instruction. They reported that, compared to traditional methods, project-based science was more effective in promoting critical thinking, observation and group work skills. The teachers said that in project-based science individual student thinking was continuously affected by the input of others. Students were pushed to consider increasingly broader perspectives, instead of narrowing their thinking as the unit progressed.

Marx et al. (1994) looked at four middle grade teachers learning to teach project-based science. The data obtained through observations and interviews reveal that, though the teachers had some difficulties making the transition to a new way of teaching, they basically endorsed project-based instruction. They discovered that project-based instruction resulted in more active involvement, more independence from teachers, and more cooperation among students. For instance, according to the teachers, as the result of two units of project-based science, their students showed more interest in their learning by identifying their own research questions. They also reported notable improvements in students learning and retaining new concepts. Students learned new concepts faster, retained them longer, and were able to use them in class discussions.

Vithal et al. (1995) discuss teachers' and students' evaluations of a project-based mathematics program at a Danish University. The researchers interviewed the six instructors who supervised the masters-level program and had discussions with a large number of other faculty and students. Analysis of the data showed a positive evaluation from the supervisors
and from the faculty members who participated in the study. They thought a balanced project-based mathematics program is appropriate for their students because it allows them to learn mathematics in depth as researchers, which they said is difficult to do using a lecture approach. It also allows students to see the connection between the theory and practice by applying their theoretical knowledge to real-life situations.

Students feeling a sense of accomplishment is reported as another reason for teachers’ positive evaluations of project-based instruction (e.g., Diffily, 1996; Kimbrough, 1995; Wolk, 1994). Kimbrough (1995) studied ten ninth and tenth grade students from Denver, Colorado, who participated in a summer Young Scholars Program sponsored by the National Science Foundation. Data collected through participant observation, student interviews, and supervisor journals showed students appreciated getting tangible results from their work. They liked to “show off” what they had done. For instance, one supervisor working with students on a catalysis project said that “The girls were disgusted. It was so disgusting. They had a lot of fun showing it to other groups. Glad at last, to have something to show off” (p. 171).

Wolk (1994) and Diffily (1996) describe similar experiences they had with their students. Wolk was impressed by how much his first, second, and fifth graders learned through project work. He reports a conversation he overheard between a student and her father during a parent/teacher/student conference.

Father: Did you learn anything with this project?
Daughter: Yes, I learned to believe in myself. I didn’t think we would finish it, but we did. (p. 45)

Diffily (1996) describes how accomplished her kindergartners felt when they finished their Museum Exhibit project. The children impressed their families by proudly and confidently showing off their achievements.
2.4.1.2 SLA Teachers' Evaluations

While mainstream teachers' evaluations of project-based instruction are mostly positive, the literature shows that second language teachers' evaluations are more mixed. There is some anecdotal evidence (Carter & Thomas, 1986; Coleman, 1992; Gardner, 1995; Hilton-Jones, 1988) which suggests that teachers may enjoy project-based instruction because it results in higher communicative confidence and greater strategic competence; helps make students aware of their future language needs in terms of lexis and structure; helps promote students' language fluency; and helps students improve their listening, speaking, writing, seminar, and note-taking skills. But Eyring (1989), the only formal study of project-based instruction in ESL education, shows teachers' evaluations may be mixed.

Eyring designed her study 1) to document one teacher's experience implementing project-based instruction for the first time, and 2) to report students' attitudinal and proficiency responses to this form of instruction. She collected classroom data from one experimental group (the project course) and two control groups (the control classes). The project course was composed of ten ESL students in a University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) Service Course designed to upgrade their English proficiency for regular university courses. The two control classes (she does not mention how many students were in each) were composed of similar student populations at the American Language Center in Los Angeles. Although the classes met at different times and were conducted at different institutions, the project course and the control classes were considered parallel because they followed the same curriculum in the same amount of time and were taught by teachers with similar backgrounds. Also, the student participants were similar in terms of age, nationality, and language proficiency.

Susan, the teacher-participant in Eyring's project course, was a graduate student at the time of the study. She had more than two years of teaching experience, had taught abroad,
and spoke at least one other language in addition to her native English. The eleven students in the project course were chosen from a school population composed of 69% graduate and 31% undergraduate students majoring in a variety of (mostly professional) subjects such as engineering and management. Six of the eleven students were Asian (from countries such as Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam) and five were from European and Latin American countries. On average, the student participants had been studying English for 4.09 years before enrolling in the Service Course at UCLA.

The students conducted a project called "A guide to Los Angeles for foreign students" which covered one academic quarter (three months). They worked in groups to plan the project and to do the document research and personal interviews the project required. They shared their findings through oral presentations and participated in both peer and project evaluations. Analysis of the data showed no significant difference in overall language learning strategy or proficiency gains between the students in the project course and those in the control classes. No significant differences were found in listening, reading, grammar, or writing.

Susan is reported to have been impressed by the oral presentation skills that all of her project students gained from their experience and by the fact that they designed a real-life activity as part of the project, writing a Thank You letter to some guest speakers. But she also reported some frustrations and tensions. She found that negotiating the curriculum with the students, which project work requires, was complex and demanding. She felt that it was difficult to come to a consensus about worthwhile topics and assignments. The students did not participate in the course planning enthusiastically. They withdrew, seemed apathetic, and at times made a conscious choice not to participate. While some students supported the ideas generated, others expressed antagonism, and still others were not interested in the idea of project work at all. Susan noticed that more of her project group students were late or absent more often when compared to previous classes she taught using more traditional methods.
Some students complained that they were not learning enough academic skills. Others complained because they did not want to work in groups. Susan is reported to have been astounded that her students were unable to see each other as potential sources of knowledge.

As Susan had never received such a lukewarm response from her students before, she felt overwhelmed, discouraged, and under-appreciated. She felt she had lost the respect shown to her by previous students, even though she was working just as hard to manage classroom activities. Students did not recognize, appreciate, or accept input that was offered to them in a non-traditional form. Some students ignored Susan when she tried to help. For instance, she was not pleased when she noticed that some of the reading material she brought to class was not consulted. These responses from the students led Susan to question her ability to continue with the project and at the same time maintain her students' respect. In the end she decided to “revert to more traditional, teacher-directed activities” (Eyring, 1989, p. 113), adding what she called “regular ESL stuff” such as reading and grammar activities to “give the students something concrete that they can say they have learned” (Eyring, 1989, p. 110).

Despite the tensions Susan felt, Eyring concludes that project-based instruction enabled the student participants to accomplish a great deal. They planned their own projects, conducted library and empirical research, talked to native English speakers, synthesized their data, and presented their findings. And yet the students did not seem to think that these were worthwhile accomplishments. But if this is what they thought, what made them think so? What did they think they should have been learning instead?

2.4.1.3 Discrepancies Between General and ESL Teachers’ Evaluations

This review of the literature on mainstream and ESL teachers’ evaluations of project-based instruction indicates that most of the goals discussed in section 2.2 are perceived to be achievable. The research on mainstream teachers’ evaluations shows that teachers enjoy this
unconventional way of teaching. They point out that project-based instruction results in higher student motivation and longer retention of knowledge, provides opportunities for their students to study a subject area in-depth, fosters problem-solving, critical thinking, and independent thinking skills, and allows students to see the connection between theory and practice. The teachers report that project-based instruction also enables them to see the potential of different ways of teaching. However, the ESL teachers' evaluations of project-based instruction are mixed. While the reports of some ESL teachers seem to indicate that they too enjoy teaching through project-based instruction, the one formal study in the field (Eyring, 1989) shows a markedly different result. The teacher in Eyring's study reported frustrations and tensions in conducting her project.

2.4.2 Students' Evaluations

There are few studies of students' evaluations of project-based instruction. This section reviews the studies that have been done, beginning with those involving students in general education and going on to those concerning students in second language education. As is the case with the studies of teachers' evaluations, more studies of students' evaluations have been done in general than in second language education.

2.4.2.1 Mainstream Students' Evaluations

Studies of mainstream students' evaluations of project-based instruction include Owens (1997), Peterson and Myer (1995), Ramey (1997), and Renuka, Critstiansen, and Skovsmose (1995). According to these studies, most students wholeheartedly endorse project-based instruction. For instance, Owens (1997) studied 73 fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students and their three teachers in the American Midwest to find the process and product of student engagement in a multi-age, project-based, technology-supported classroom. She spent 55 school days taking field notes, collecting project artifacts, and
interviewing students and teachers. The student participants said they liked project-based instruction especially because it gave them access to the World Wide Web, educational CD-ROMS, and word processing software. Students are reported to have developed ownership of their learning. They always gathered around the computers, helped each other, and shared information about their projects.

Peterson and Myer (1995) conducted a comparative study of collaborative project and traditional classes studying “Community Agency Counseling: Programs, Issues, and Policies” at a university in the United States. The researchers employed methods such as group discussions, rating, and open-ended survey questions, which allowed them to compare students’ attitudes towards their classes both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis of their data showed that the project students felt their classes helped them to understand how agencies work and provided opportunities for them to learn the basics of starting and running an agency: “For all 16 Likert-type items on the scale used for course evaluations, the median ratings from the classes using collaborative projects were higher than the mean of the ratings from the three classes in which the traditional format was used” (p. 155). Typical student responses included “I learned a great deal about what goes on beneath the surface of a community agency” and “It gave me some understanding of the nuts and bolts involved in starting and running an agency” (p. 155).

Ramey (1997) studied a group of United States high school students who voluntarily enrolled in a project-based calculus class. She wanted to find out why these students chose to be in the project class rather than the traditional calculus class. Ramey observed the students in class and interviewed them out of class. The results of the study show that the student participants evaluated project-based instruction positively. They reported that they liked project-based calculus because they enjoyed the hands-on application of mathematics as well as the extensive use of technology. They felt they were able to find real-world applications for their calculus. They believed they had improved their problem solving and
critical thinking skills. They also thought project-based calculus was intrinsically motivating and helped develop their skills for working in cooperative group settings.

Renuka et al. (1995) explored how teachers and students interpreted project-based mathematics education at Aalborg University in Denmark. All studies at this university are problem centered. Students work in project groups of four or five, with a faculty or Teaching Assistant supervisor. Students work on projects such as “The traveling salesman’s problem,” “Statistical analysis of systolic blood pressure during a by-pass operation,” and “The four color theorems and the concept of proof.” The results of the study show that with some reservations, students endorse project-based instruction. They reported that in project work they can “do mathematics,” can apply mathematics to other fields (“can see the connection”), and can learn from the process itself (for instance, problem-solving skills). They also reported that project-based instruction allowed them to learn a subject thoroughly through in-depth study. One student said “It takes time to learn through project work, but you do not forget work that has been learned through project work. In project work, you have to understand and cannot get away with only memorizing” (Renuka et al., 1995, p. 208).

2.4.2.2 Second Language Students’ Evaluations

It is clear from the above review that most of the American and Danish elementary, secondary and post-secondary mathematics and science students endorsed project-based instruction wholeheartedly. But ESL students’ evaluations are not so clearly positive. While there is evidence that they carried out their projects successfully, their evaluations express frustrations and tensions (Eyring, 1989). Since there is little research on students’ evaluations of project-based instruction, studies on what Eyring (1989) calls ‘project-like situations’ such as task-based, cooperative, and problem-based learning are reviewed as well.

As we have seen, Eyring’s (1989) study is an examination of one teacher’s experience implementing project work for the first time and of her eleven Asian, European, and Latin
American students' attitudinal and proficiency responses to project-based instruction. Students were involved in identifying project topics, in planning, researching, discussing, writing up, and presenting their project work. The results of the study showed that although students made their own plans regarding what, how, and when to do their projects and seem to have completed all the tasks as required, there were a lot of tensions among them: “They withdrew, seemed apathetic, and made deliberate choices not to participate at times” (Eyring, 1989, p. 113). They said that “allowing so much input and ‘authority’ was not good in an academic class” (Eyring, p. 176). In other words, the students did not appreciate the power given to them to plan their own curriculum.

Many of the students reported a desire for a more traditional way of learning. Some complained about pursuing one project for an entire quarter; some complained that project work was an inappropriate way to learn English; and others complained that they did not learn grammar, writing, or vocabulary. Group work was not appreciated either. Some students felt group work was a waste of their time, while others did not like the fact that they had to work with the same students for the whole quarter.

When the students were asked to rate their favorite activities, the opportunity to talk to their teacher was rated highest. Learning to write essays and papers was rated as their next favorite activity. Grammar lessons also got a high rating: Students specifically requested more grammar instruction. Traditional reading, writing, and grammar activities were considered the real work of learning English. For instance, when “a student who had been absent asked another student about what had ensued the day before, she was told only that they had a grammar lesson (which took 18 minutes of time); the fact that the remaining 87 minutes was spent discussing projects was not even mentioned” (Eyring, 1989, p. 189).

Prabhu (1987) studied 390 eight- to thirteen-year-old ESL students from eight Indian schools where task-based instruction was introduced for the first time. Prabhu’s analysis of data collected in the first year of the study showed that students’ evaluated task-based
teaching negatively. According to Prabhu, students considered communicative activities such as simulated and real-life talk unsuitable because these activities are non-serious and irrelevant. The students asked for more serious work (i.e., more traditional work). Prabhu also reports students' negative evaluations of group work that requires peer-peer interaction. They did not like working in groups because they found it more humiliating to lose face in front of peers than in front of a teacher. Some of them wanted to work individually and resented the fact that they were forced by the teacher to work together.

2.4.2.3. Discrepancies Between General and ESL Students' Evaluations

As is the case with general and SLA teachers' evaluations, the above review of the literature suggests there is a discrepancy between mainstream students' and ESL students' evaluations. The review suggests that on the whole primary, secondary, and post-secondary general education students evaluate project-based instruction positively while their ESL counter-parts evaluate it negatively. However, the studies did not look at the possibility that students may not evaluate project-based or project-like instruction positively or negatively all the time. That is, they may see it differently depending on the circumstances. Furthermore, the reasons for ESL students' negative evaluations were not the focus of these studies. Eyring (1989) simply attributes students' negative responses to project-based instruction to a lack of shared expectations between teachers and students. Prabhu (1987) also mentions a lack of shared expectations. But he then goes on to discuss the challenge of "new forms of classroom activity" and "new concepts of what classroom activities should be about" that the students faced, and the fact that "the teachers' own sense of uncertainty about classroom procedures was not reassuring to them" (p. 23). While these general points may explain to a certain degree the tensions ESL students feel, further study is needed to get at the specific reasons they have for their negative evaluations of project-based and project-like instruction.
2.4.3 Rationale for the Present Study

The review of literature on general and ESL teachers’ evaluations of project-based instruction has revealed some gaps in the SLA literature. There is a need: 1) for more research to understand how project-based instruction has been implemented in second language education in general, and K-12 ESL teachers’ goals for and K-12 ESL teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction in particular; 2) for second language research to look beyond students’ positive or negative evaluations of project-based instruction to discover the conditions upon which their evaluations depend; and 3) for more in-depth discussion of what might be contributing to the tensions ESL teachers feel from their students and the reasons behind ESL students’ negative evaluations of project-based instruction.

2.4.3.1 The Need for More Research

As mentioned earlier, while project-based instruction is gaining popularity in all areas and at all levels of education, empirical research on the use of this activity in second language education is almost non-existent. There is an urgent need for second language research to examine the goals and practices of project-based instruction in ESL education in general, and K-12 ESL teachers’ goals for and K-12 ESL teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction in particular. This can be done through an analysis of relevant province/state, district, school and departmental policies, of observations and descriptions of project activities, of students’ oral and written work, and of teachers’ and students’ accounts of their goals, practices, and results.

2.4.3.2 The Need to Look Beyond Either/Or: The Dilemmatic Perspective

It is necessary to look beyond students’ positive and negative evaluations of project-based instruction because our response to the reality we face is always more complicated...
than simply liking or disliking it. Our world views are complex. As a result, our everyday thinking, discourse and practice are full of opposing themes and dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988; Lave, 1988).

The “dilemmatic perspective” (Billig et al., 1988; Tracy, 1997) can be traced at least as far back as Aristotle. It has been applied to study the problems that leaders of social movements must confront, the difficulties scientists face in their work, and the problems friends and spouses face in their relationships (Tracy, 1997). The dilemmatic perspective is helpful because it stresses the importance of what Moscovici (1984) calls ‘thinking society’: It explores “the way that thinking takes places [sic] through the dilemmatic aspects of ideology” (Billig, et al., 1988, p. 1) and its “social preconditions. That is, those socially shared beliefs which give rise to the dilemmatic thinking of individuals” (Billig et al., 1988, p. 8).

Tracy (1997) studied academic discourse at an American university departmental colloquium. Specifically, she looked at the discursive practices academics participated in and the ideals that seemed to lie behind them. She found that the academic colloquium involves multiple dilemmas at the individual as well as the group level. Individual presenters seemed to have felt dilemmas such as avoiding looking foolish versus provoking interest and thought, linguistic elegance versus interactional naturalness, theoretical interest versus practical applicability, and positioning themselves in relation to an idea versus presenter neutrality. As members of discussion groups, the academics faced dilemmas such as responding to the quality of a presentation versus the expertise of the presenter, participating knowledgeably versus a willingness to take risks, and setting a playful versus a serious climate.

Liang (1998) examines the opinions and interactions of Chinese immigrant students engaging in cooperative learning in Canadian secondary school ESL classes. Her observations of and interviews with 49 ESL students from grades 8 to 12 revealed that
cooperative learning is not an either/or matter for ESL students. According to Liang, the Chinese students "seemed to be sitting on the horn of cooperative learning dilemmas between cooperation and individualism, between achieving results and sharing understandings of the task, and between using L1 to help with L2 content learning and developing L2 for academic purposes" (p. ii). That is, the Chinese immigrant students liked cooperative learning because it was useful for generating new ideas, but disliked it because it takes too much time to come to a consensus among group members. They wanted to use cooperative learning situations to practice their English, something their parents encouraged them to do in order to exit their ESL program as soon as possible. But the students also felt pressure to speak Chinese to their peers because they were afraid they would be laughed at as showoffs if they spoke English. Also, though they wanted to practice their English when they did their group work, they used Chinese whenever they felt themselves under pressure to complete a task quickly.

In addition to discovering whether ESL learners like or dislike project work as a whole, research needs to be done to explore the dilemmas that ESL learners may encounter during their project work. For instance, the same students may like project-based instruction for the opportunity it provides for practicing English, as the SLA literature hopes it does, but they may also dislike it because they do not seem to be learning what they hoped to learn as the student-participants in Eyring's (1989) study suggest. Or they may enjoy it because it provides opportunities to explore a topic in depth, but at the same time resent it because it seems so unstructured. The dilemmatic perspective allows researchers to explore issues such as these.

2.4.3.3 The Need for Further Explanation of Discrepancies and Tensions

We have seen that the literature seems to point to discrepancies between mainstream and ESL teachers' and students' evaluations of project-based instruction. Mainstream teachers seem to enjoy it, reporting that it results in higher student motivation and longer
retention of knowledge, in-depth learning of subject matter, improved problem-solving, critical thinking, and independent thinking skills. ESL teachers’ evaluations of project-based instruction are not entirely positive. For instance, while the teacher in Eyring’s study reported noticeable improvement in her students’ fluency and presentation skills, she did not seem to enjoy the project work itself. Her students seemed at times tense, frustrated, even angry. She felt compelled to add some traditional components to her project class.

An even greater discrepancy can be found between general and ESL students’ evaluations of project-based instruction. The literature indicates that while primary, secondary, and post-secondary general education students evaluate project-based instruction positively, their ESL counterparts have serious reservations. Even though they seem to be learning what they are intended to learn, they dislike project-based and project-like instruction because they do not think they learn enough of such traditional academic skills as writing, grammar, and vocabulary. What is the problem here? How can the discrepancy be explained?

Discussion in the literature, though suggestive, seems to have just begun. Eyring (1989) and Prabhu (1987) explain the discrepancy as a result of a lack of a shared understanding between teachers and students. Prabhu also points to an implicit restructuring of the power relation between teachers and students or more generally to a non-traditional approach to teaching/learning, and to students’ perceptions that their teachers are not sure what they should be doing. Prabhu (1987) also points out that students evaluated task-based teaching negatively because they were not used to learning that way. But he then seems to take the discussion one step further when he says that “the learners were facing not only new forms of classroom activity but new concepts of what classroom activities should be about” (p. 23). In other words, students were not just being asked to participate in new teaching/learning activities. They were being asked to participate in what they may not at first recognize to be teaching/learning activities at all.
But what forms of instruction, and of teacher/student power relations, are ESL students accustomed to? What does traditional second language instruction mean from the students’ perspective and why do they prefer it? More specifically, why do the Indian students in Prabhu’s (1987) study think that task-based learning is unserious? Why do the Asian, European and Latin American students in Eyring’s (1989) study prefer to learn the traditional way even when they do just as well learning through project-based instruction? In seeking answers to these and other related questions, the discussion needs to go beyond the specific background conditions or problem situations that ESL students face. The discrepancies between ESL and mainstream students’ evaluations of project-based instruction seem to point to differences in educational philosophy, to cultural differences, and to different conceptions of language teaching/learning.

2.4.4 Possible Explanatory Models

The literature on project-based instruction in second language education suggests three possible models for explaining the discrepancies between teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project work. First, it is suggested by Prabhu that students are accustomed to traditional forms of teaching/learning while projects, as we have seen from the general literature, are a more progressive form of teaching/learning. Second, as most of Eyring’s students’ first experience of schools was in their home countries, the discrepancy may be explained with reference to cultural differences reflected in differences in education cultures. Third, while projects integrate language and content, there is the suggestion, in Eyring that, ESL students may have come to see language learning as something distinct from the learning of content.
2.4.4.1 The Philosophical Model: Traditional and Progressive Education

We have seen that the debate concerning project-based instruction in both the general and SLA literature has been conducted using a model in which progressive education is contrasted with traditional education. This seems appropriate because Kilpatrick’s Project Method was based on Dewey’s problem method, and Dewey is associated (even identified) with progressive, child-centered education. But we have also seen that Dewey was critical of progressive as well as traditional education and distanced himself from Kilpatrick’s Project Method. Furthermore, the reasons Dewey gives, reasons which most traditionalists would applaud, are given not to condemn projects but to help improve them. Dewey is in effect saying that his problem method, when fully implemented, overcomes the problems of both progressive and traditional education.

Nonetheless, the philosophical model may help explain some of the discrepancies and tensions in ESL classes regarding project-based instruction. Dewey (1938) says that

If one attempts to formulate the philosophy of education implicit in the practices of the new education, we may, I think, discover certain common principles amid the variety of progressive schools now existing. To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world. (pp. 19-20)

The philosophical model may explain why the teacher in Eyring’s (1989) study reported that her students seemed happier when she introduced the regular (that is, traditional) ESL stuff. What they wanted was to learn from the teacher. It may also explain the students’ complaint about too much authority being given to the students. Free activity was not what they were looking for. But, what about the tensions that arose from uncharacteristic student absences and from apparent disrespect for the teacher? Can this be
put down simply to philosophical differences? And what about the student comments in Prabhu (1987) about not liking task-based learning because they are not accustomed to them?

Are there cultural differences here that go beyond the ideological divisions found within North American education? Could the cultural differences be reflected in differences in school cultures? That is, do ESL students view project-based instruction differently than their North American counterparts because they are accustomed to different school cultures routed in different socio-cultural traditions? Do ESL students from different school cultures hold different viewpoints regarding what counts as learning and teaching? A cultural model, as suggested by Flowerdew and Miller (1995), may help us further understand the discrepancies found in the literature.

2.4.4.2 The Cultural Model: Chinese and Canadian Education

A second model that might explain some of the discrepancies between mainstream and ESL teachers' and students' evaluations of project-based instruction is a cultural model. This model may be useful because some studies have shown that people from different educational cultures hold different views about what is important to learn and how learning should be accomplished. For instance, Burnaby and Sun (1989) report the perceptions of 24 Chinese (PRC) teachers of English on the appropriateness and effectiveness of “Western” language teaching methods for use in Chinese classrooms. The teachers said that many of the activities common in communicative language teaching classes seem more like games than serious learning. This made some of them feel that they were not really teaching when they used such activities. They also mentioned that Western conceptions of education and approaches to teaching are difficult to apply in other cultural contexts. The participants believed there is a culture gap between Chinese and Western education. They said that “Chinese don’t think in the way most Westerners think” (p. 229). Differences between
Chinese and Canadian educational cultures will be discussed in detail in chapter 5 in relation to the findings of the present study.

Lee and Kwan's (1997) study of Hong Kong medical students' opinions of problem-based learning (which is similar to project-based learning) may illustrate this point. Lee and Kwan report their experience of introducing problem-based learning to University of Hong Kong medical school students. From their observations, assessments, and discussions with students and faculty over a period of two years, Lee and Kwan concluded that with appropriate guidance and encouragement, the students could perform very well using the problem-based approach. Most of the students were able to arrange their findings in a logical sequence and give a well-organized and clear presentation of their material showing both breadth and depth of knowledge. They also appeared to be comfortable in integrating clinical findings with basic psychological concepts, and came up with reasonable diagnoses and manageable treatment strategies. They exhibited levels of maturity and sophistication comparable to those found in their North American counterparts. When asked for their opinion, some of the students said they preferred problem-based learning, but a majority preferred a combination of problem-based learning and lectures because they were not used to learning through the problem method.

Similar findings are reported by studies conducted in what Eyring (1989) calls project-like participatory learning situations such as task-based language teaching/learning (Nunan, 1991). Like project-based instruction, task-based language teaching/learning assumes that teachers and students are jointly responsible for creating and sustaining learning through interaction and negotiation (Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Nunan, 1989; 1991). Flowerdew and Miller (1995) is an example of a study conducted in a project-like situation. In their three-year ethnographic study of academic lecturers conducted at a university in Hong Kong, Flowerdew and Miller investigated the experience of ten native speakers of English (from Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia). At the time the data were
collected, these lecturers were teaching Chinese students from a range of departments such as Economics, Law, Electrical Engineering, and Information Systems. Data were collected by means of questionnaires, in-depth interviews, reflective diaries, and participant observations. The lecturers reported difficulties in engaging their students in participatory learning. Their students were extremely deferential and not open to ideas that were not included in their textbooks because they were accustomed to lecture-style classes that closely followed a required text.

Willing (1988) conducted a large scale investigation of the cognitive style preferences of different groups of students and found differences according to the learners’ cultural backgrounds. Out of 517 adult (aged 17-78) immigrant learners of ESL in Australia, 54% of the Chinese participants said they wanted teachers to explain everything to them. Also, 50% preferred to learn English by practicing the sounds and pronunciation. However, 77% of the Arabic-speaking immigrants reported their preferred learning mode as practicing sounds and pronunciation and 77% reported that they would like teachers to explain everything to them.

Considering these findings, it may be useful to examine the discrepancies between general and ESL teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction from a cultural perspective. It will be recalled that according to Ogbu (1995), culture is a framework that influences our understanding of the world around us, our interpretation of events in that world, our behavior, and our reaction to our perceived reality. The cultural differences of concern in the present study are mainly educational ones. While educational systems have many important commonalities worldwide, significant differences also exist (Altbach, 1991; Hing, 1993; Ogbu, 1995). National and regional cultures influence teachers’/learners’ conceptions of the nature of knowledge and of the methodologies through which knowledge is best transmitted and/or acquired (Kalaja, 1995).
It is useful to interpret some of the discrepancies found in the present study in terms of cultural differences. Many Chinese ESL students, for instance, come from an educational culture in which classroom activities are even more highly structured than in traditional Western education, and decisions regarding what, how, and when to learn are made by the national government. This is a very different educational culture from the one which is implied by project-based instruction. Project-based instruction involves students in exploratory learning activities, and in group decision-making regarding what activities to engage in and how and when to carry them out. These and other differences will be discussed in chapter 5 in relation to the findings of the present study. For now we should note that in some other cultures teachers are not free to decide what educational philosophy to apply in their classrooms. Perhaps some of the anger and frustration felt by the students in Eyring’s (1989) study resulted from a conviction that ‘Susan’ was not fulfilling her duty as a teacher.

2.4.4.3 The Linguistic Model: Separation versus Integration of Language and Content

The third model which might be used to explain the discrepancies in evaluations of project-based instruction concerns language learning itself, that is, integration versus separation of language and content. These two models are consistent with different assumptions about language and language learning, that is, the formalist/structuralist paradigm (e.g., Chomsky, 1957; 1965) and the functionalist paradigm (e.g., Halliday, 1985; 1994). As pointed out in chapter 1, these two paradigms have influenced our perceptions about the nature of language and the methods appropriate for studying languages.

2.4.4.3.1 Separation of Language and Content

In second language education, the teaching of language separate from content material or subject matter is consistent with the Chomskian (1957; 1965)
structuralist/formalist paradigm that assumes that language is composed of rules governing the use of words, phrases, sentences, and syntax. From this perspective, language teaching/learning is the teaching/learning of forms and structures of language. That is, the target language is segmented into discrete linguistic items which are taught/learned one at a time in the hope that the learner will be able to put them together when they need to use the language (Long & Crookes, 1992).

2.4.4.3.2 Integration of Language and Content

As discussed in chapter 1, integrating language teaching with content or subject matter in second language education is consistent with the functionalist paradigm (Halliday, 1985; 1994). From the functional perspective, language is a medium of learning. People use it carry out their daily activities. That is, it is used purposefully to achieve specific ends (Eggins, 1994). Learning a language then is not just a matter of learning discrete linguistic structures. It also involves the acquisition of content, classroom, and sociocultural knowledge (Mohan, 1986; 1989). Second language acquisition, in other words, is a process of second language socialization through the medium of language. From this point of view, language is a focus of study as well as a medium of studying. Second language students learning through this approach learn the target language functionally. They learn content, classroom, and socio-cultural knowledge (Mohan, 1986; 1989) by using the target language meaningfully.

2.4.4.3.3 Second Language Socialization through Project-based Instruction

It is clear from the discussion so far that project-based instruction is an activity that provides ESL students with the opportunity to learn English functionally by listening to, speaking, reading, and writing English to learn content material, school and social cultures, and various skills. As illustrated in Eyring’s (1989) study, language becomes more of a
medium of instruction than a subject to be studied. All four aspects of language are taught/learned as an integral part of skills and content learning. Students listen to, speak, read, and write English while learning such things as research skills and content information related to their project. It is a second language socialization activity for ESL students. In other words, ESL students learn a second language, a second culture, and content through their project work. But Eyring reports that her student participants felt frustrated because they were not doing real work. Why were the students frustrated? Why did they request a separate grammar lesson even when learning grammar was involved in all aspects of their project? Could they have a different view of language learning? Is it possible they did not realize that they were doing real work because they held a formalist/structuralist paradigm of language and that in their view language teaching/learning is a separate subject in which one studies and applies linguistic rules?

Yang (1993) surveyed 505 undergraduate students at six public and private universities in Taiwan. The purpose of the study was to investigate students’ beliefs about learning English and specifically about the strategies that should be employed. Fifty-five percent of the students surveyed strongly believed that learning vocabulary, grammar, and translation are the most important aspects of learning English. Forty-five percent believed that practicing listening, speaking, reading, writing and “daily usage” are more important. But despite these differences, all of the students seemed to believe that English is something that should be learned separately from content. They believed they could and should learn English vocabulary, grammar and daily usage, and practice listening, speaking, reading and writing English, rather than learning about something else or learning how to do something else through the medium of English.

Guo (doctoral research in progress) found that many parents of ESL students from Hong Kong and Taiwan hold similar views about their children’s English language learning in Canada. Guo examined parent-teacher communication at a Canadian high school that has
a high ESL student population. She collected data from ESL teachers and six bilingual assistants. The assistants were university graduate students who spoke English and Chinese. They helped organize and participated in the ESL department’s Parents’ Night meetings over a period of two years. The role of the assistants was to provide a means by which the parents and teachers could communicate. The assistants reported that many parents told them they did not feel their children were learning what they should in a high school ESL program, that is, the grammar and vocabulary needed to pass exams required for admission to university and other post-secondary institutions. They said they had to send their children to after-school programs to learn grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing. The parents did not think their children were learning these skills in school because the school’s policy was to integrate language and content, as well as the four language skills, in its ESL program.

It is not just Chinese students and parents hold these beliefs. For instance, Horwitz (1987) surveyed 32 ESL students from various cultural backgrounds studying in an intermediate level English program at an American university. The focus of the study was an investigation of the participants’ thoughts about the most important aspect of language learning. Horwitz’s analysis of data showed that over half of her participants believed learning vocabulary and grammar rules are the most important parts of learning a language.

Kanada (doctoral research in progress) is another study reporting similar findings. This is a case study of one teacher’s attempt to teach Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) in an unconventional way. The focus of the study was on students’ reactions to negotiating the curriculum and learning Japanese functionally by engaging in critical thinking rather than formally by analyzing grammar and working through vocabulary lists provided by the teacher. The participants in the study were 24 second-year JFL students at a Canadian university. All were born in Canada and had previously attended Canadian schools. Kanada’s analyses of interviews, dialogue journals, and classroom discussions show that the students reacted negatively to the experience. While two students did not care how they
learned Japanese, the rest (i.e., 22 out of 24) reported their desire to learn Japanese language more formally. They said a language class is a place to learn a language, not a place to engage in critical thinking.

The belief that language should be learned separately from content is not uncommon in second language education. The opposing belief, that language and content learning should be integrated (sometimes referred to as content-based instruction), has become popular only in the past ten years (Grabe & Stoller, 1997). Still, Snow and Brinton (1997) point out that “content-based instruction is a growing enterprise. Since the publication of Bernard Mohan’s seminal book *Language and Content* in 1986, interest in language and content-based programs has increased dramatically” (Snow & Brinton, 1997, p. xi).

It is believed that integrating language and content exposes students to a considerable amount of language while they learn content. Also, students learn useful language that is embedded in relevant discourse contexts rather than isolated language fragments (Grabe & Stoller, 1997). Language/content integration has been applied in second language contexts at various levels. For example, theme-based, sheltered, and adjunct courses all seek to improve students’ knowledge of academic English as well as grade appropriate content knowledge. There have been reports that integrating language and content results in “improved language learning, improved student motivation, and successful mastery of content information” (Grabe & Stoller, 1997, p. 16). Integration is also believed to help facilitate student-centered classroom activities, allowing students more opportunities to participate in cooperative, experiential, and project-based learning. However, due to its relatively recent entry into the field, a systematic professional training program in language/content integration instructional methodology has not yet been established (Sagliano, Stewart, & Sagliano, 1998).

The linguistic model may help us understand some of the tensions experienced by ESL teachers and students conducting project-based teaching/learning. While integrating language and content can be seen in philosophical terms (i.e., as progressive education) and
in cultural terms (i.e., as North American education), Kanada's study in particular seems to suggest that there may be more involved here than can be accounted for by these models.

2.4.5 Research Questions

The present study examines the implementation of project-based instruction in a Canadian secondary school's ESL classes. It explores ESL teachers' goals for and evaluations of project-based instruction, as well as some Chinese ESL students' evaluations of the activity. It asks such questions as: "What do ESL teachers hope to achieve through project-based instruction? How do they evaluate project-based instruction? How do ESL students evaluate project-based instruction? What discrepancies, if any, are there between ESL teachers' and ESL students' evaluations? What may contribute to the discrepancies between teachers' and students' evaluations? The following specific research questions are used to guide the study:

1) What are the ESL teachers' goals for project-based instruction for ESL learners?
2) How do ESL teachers and ESL students evaluate the process and results of project-based instruction?
3) What can account for any differences found between the teachers' and students' evaluations?
CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study is to investigate ESL teachers' goals for and ESL teachers' and ESL students' evaluations of project-based instruction. The questions used to guide the study are:

1) What are the ESL teachers' goals for project-based instruction for ESL learners?
2) How do ESL teachers and ESL students evaluate the process and results of project-based instruction?
3) What can account for any differences found between the teachers' and students' evaluations?

This chapter discusses the methodology used to conduct the study. It shows how the methodology arose from the interests of the researcher and from the nature of the phenomena she was studying. Specific topics include project-based instruction as a language socialization activity (3.2), the design of the study (3.3), data analysis (3.4) and presentation (3.5), the guiding questions (3.6), authentic activities in natural situations (3.7), participants' language and culture (3.8), and the soundness of the study (3.9).

3.2 Project-based Instruction as a Language Socialization Activity

Activity has been seen by many researchers to be central to the educational process. For instance, Dewey (1926) defined education as the initiation of learners into the activities of society. And Mohan (1986) argues that "the concept of activity is so central to education that education can be defined in terms of activities" (p. 4). Activity is also a central concept in language socialization theory, and has become a unit of inquiry in social science research. But the term activity seems to be used in different ways by different researchers. The
present study adopts Ochs' (1988) definition of activity. For Ochs an activity is "both a behavioral unit, in the sense of a sequence of actions associated with particular motivations and goals... and a process in the sense of praxis" (p. 14). In another words, research on activity will take account of the significance of subjective consciousness in the direction of action, and in addition, the significance of social and cultural influences on action.

3.2.1 Theory and Practice of Activity

Activity, as a sociocultural phenomenon, is seen to have both "theoretical and practical aspects" (Mohan, 1986, p. 43). For Mohan, an activity is a "mode of thought and conduct" that "has a pattern of action" which "involves background knowledge" (p. vi). As discussed in chapter 2, both theoretical and practical aspects of activity are important in education: "Without the practical, students cannot apply what they know; without the theoretical, students cannot understand what they are doing, nor transfer what they know" (Mohan, 1986, p. 43).

Like Mohan, Cranach, a Swiss social psychologist, believes that activity is composed of theory and practice, which he also calls knowledge and action. He understands human action to be "goal directed, planned, intended and conscious behavior, which is socially directed (or controlled)" (Cranach, 1982, p. 36). He says "that all human action and information-elaboration, including knowledge, proceeds simultaneously on several levels constituted by the individuals and their social systems; and that knowledge and action are pillars of human social co-evolution" (p. 10). Thommen, Cranach and Ammann (1992) as well say that social systems control and steer the acts of individual members.

3.2.2 Resources and Acts

Other scholars hold similar views of activity. For instance, Harré, Clarke, and Carlo (1985) see activity as composed of acts and resources. According to them, an act is a
reaction to external conditions. In their own words, it is a “behavior that somebody intended” (p. 83). Resources are “the body of knowledge of legitimate projects, rules and conventions appropriate for persons of our sort in specific situations” (p. 85). Resources, in other words, provide a limited range of legitimate ways of interpreting and reacting to external conditions.

3.2.3 Cultural Knowledge and Cultural Behavior

Spradley (1980) discusses activity in ethnographic research in terms of cultural knowledge and cultural behavior. Specifically, he discusses the importance of studying what people know and do. For Spradley, what people know is cultural knowledge and what people do is cultural behavior. Cultural knowledge serves as a guide in our behavior and in interpreting our experiences. Figure 1 is a graphic summary of the two aspects of activity: theory/practice, resources/acts, and cultural knowledge/cultural behavior.

Figure 2: Two Aspects of Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Cultural knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Acts</td>
<td>Cultural behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.4 Activity Reflected in Discourse

Many researchers have emphasized the importance of discourse analysis in empirical research (e.g., Harré & Gillet, 1994; Harré, 1993; Mohan et al, 1998; Spradley, 1979). Harré and Gillet (1994) define discourse as any intentional use of language. They argue that people display their attitudes and create a social context through discourse or linguistic exchange. Therefore, discourse/linguistic exchanges between people should be treated as a crucial
aspect of empirical research that aims to understand the dynamics of social life. Spradley (1979; 1980) also discusses the importance of discourse in research. To Spradley, language "is the primary means of transmitting culture... that is encoded in linguistic form" (Spradley, 1980, p. 12). He maintains that all researchers should view language as an essential part of all their empirical work, especially those who are exploring culture as "a shared system of meanings, (which) is learned, revised, maintained, and defined in the context of people interacting" (1980, p. 9). According to Spradley, analyzing what people say is one of the best ways to make cultural inferences.

3.2.4.1 Discourse of Action and Discourse of Reflection

Researchers who discuss the importance of discourse in research also emphasize the importance of distinguishing different types of discourse. For instance, in his discussion of the methods to be used in studying action, Harré (1993) distinguishes two types of discourse, namely, discourse that reflects the theoretical aspect of action and discourse that reflects the practical aspect of action. Harré (1993) calls the discourse that reflects the theoretical aspect of action accounts. This is the language we use to talk about what we do. It is, in other words, discourse used to theorize our acts. Accounts provide rules and conventions for us to use when deciding how to act appropriately. Harré (1993) calls the discourse that reflects the practical aspects of action acts. Acts are "language in use as the accomplishment of acts or as attempts at their accomplishment" (Harré & Gillet, 1994, p. 32). According to Harré (1993), social acts are accomplished with discourse acts. In other words, in discourse acts we use language to do things. Making a promise would be an example of a discourse act.

We have seen that Mohan (1986) and Cranach (1982) argue that activity has two aspects, the theoretical and the practical. Mohan (1987) also argues that activity has theory texts and practical texts. Mohan et al. (1998) refer to theory texts as reflection discourse and practical texts as action discourse. According to Mohan (1987), we use theory texts or
reflection discourse to explain the rules of an activity and practical texts or action discourse
to accomplish an activity. All of these researchers argue that it is necessary to collect and
analyze both types of discourse reflected in an activity.

3.2.5 Activity in its Wider Context

As stated in chapter 1, this study looks at project-based instruction from a socio-cultural perspective. Mohan (1986) says that an activity is socio-culturally organized around specific topics. Thus, people from different cultures or from the same culture but at different phases in its development may interpret the theoretical and practical aspects of an activity differently. It is important to acknowledge this fact in conducting socio-cultural studies. As Wertsch (1991) points out, human psychology cannot be studied as if it exists in a cultural, institutional, and historical vacuum. An activity has a history and a context and is itself a context for its sub-elements, which it links together in the following semiotic relationship (Mohan, Liang, Low, & Kanada, 1997).

Figure 3: Semiotic Relationship of Theory/Practice of Activity and its Socio-historical Context. (Adapted from Mohan et al., 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wider context</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place in a community and in history</td>
<td>Theoretical aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practical aspect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: Classroom teaching.

Harré et al. (1985) maintain that an activity is a social action that is planned and carried out by human beings as active agents. It is behavior that needs to be interpreted culturally for it to be meaningful. An act is culturally interpreted meaningful action: "It is as acts that actions have social consequences and depend on social antecedents" (p. 84). Behaviorally
different actions may mean the same thing as acts, and the same action may mean different acts. As an instance of the latter case, according to Taylor (1980), the action of raising eyebrows indicates surprise in mainstream white American culture, an affirmative answer for the Marshal Islanders in the Pacific, and is a sign of disagreement in Greek culture.

According to Spradley (1980) culture is “the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior” (p. 6). “Every human society is culturally constituted” (p.86). Spradley distinguishes “stream of behavior” and “cultural behavior.” He illustrates the difference with an example from a news item: “Crowd mistakes rescue attempt, attacks police” (pp. 6-7). Here a group of Hispanic bystanders see three police officers leaning over a woman who has suffered a heart attack and is lying on the ground (stream of behavior). The police officers were trying to revive her (a cultural behavior). The group of bystanders thought that the police were beating the women (another cultural behavior) and tried to rescue her. This example shows that one stream of behavior as action can be given two culturally different interpretations as acts.

No matter what it is called, the point here is that many theorists maintain that an activity has two components (the theoretical and the practical), both of which are matters of cultural meaning. The importance of this perspective for the present study cannot be overestimated. Students may come to a new educational culture with different understandings of school tasks and different expectations of how a school should be run in terms of class organization and task performance. They may even come with different understandings about their roles as learners and their instructors’ roles as teachers (Mohan, 1991). This implies that a novice learner’s interpretation of academic activity requirements in a cross-cultural situation may be different from an instructor’s expectations. By taking this stance, the researcher acknowledges the fact that learners are persons (active agents) who do things for reasons. They do not automatically internalize how others see them. Instead,
they have the capacity to select images and perspectives to serve their own purposes (Mead, 1956).

This acknowledgment is important in cross-cultural studies such as this one because the participants (i.e., the students and teachers) have different cultures as adolescents and adults, students and teachers, Canadians and (cultural) Chinese. They may interpret what counts as a meaningful school activity differently, and thus act differently, which may result in miscommunication with their teachers that may jeopardize the educational agendas of both groups. For example, project-based instruction as a predominantly North American school activity or stream of behavior may signify a different cultural behavior to the teachers who have been educated and teaching in the North American cultural context than to the students who were educated and had been studying in the Chinese cultural context.

3.3 Design of the Study

As pointed out elsewhere, the present study sees project-based instruction as a language socialization activity. As an activity, it includes both theory and practice, which are realized in theoretical and practical discourse. Guided by this methodological framework, the study was designed to apply qualitative research methods such as interviews, document analysis, observations, and discourse analysis to explore the participants’ goals for and evaluations of project-based instruction. Figure 3 is the graphic illustration of the design of the study.

Figure 4: The Design of the Study: Project-based Instruction as a Language Socialization Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Interviews and documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Observations, documents, and discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different people seem to define qualitative research differently. This study adopts Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994) definition of qualitative research. That is, “qualitative research is multi-method in its focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (p. 2) through observations, interviews, and account/discourse analysis for triangulation. It emphasizes “the socially constructed nature of reality” (p. 4). Guba and Lincoln (1989) describe qualitative inquiry as constructivist (or hermeneutic or interpretive). Qualitative researchers study the meaning of social experience in natural contexts. Unlike positivistic quantitative inquiry “that supports the status quo through its conception of social and psychological phenomena as universal and invariant” (Ratner, 1997, p. 231), the hermeneutic methodology follows from a relativist ontology and a subjective epistemology. It is a dialectical and an analytical methodology that involves a continuing critique and reiteration that leads to joint construction (Cranach, 1992; Secord, 1990; Harré, 1993). As Harré (1993) states, the ontological assumption of this paradigm is that “social behavior is the structured product of the joint actions of intelligent and knowledgeable agents acting to further some end or other. It is not the effects of causes” (p. 107).

3.3.1 Research Site

The study was conducted at Carlton High (pseudonym) in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The school had a high percentage of ESL students. According to the Vancouver School Board (1994), 62% of the student population at Carlton High spoke languages other than English as their first language. Many of these ESL students were new immigrants to Canada from Taiwan and Hong Kong, with a smaller number coming from China.

At the time of data collection, Carlton High used a multi-level grouping system where students from different grades and different levels of language proficiency were randomly assigned to various ESL classes “by the school computer” (ESL Handbook, p. 1). A single
ESL class at Carlton High may have had some students with only a few weeks’ exposure to English and other students with several years’ exposure to English.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedure

The purposeful sampling procedure (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993) was applied for the present study. The procedure was purposeful in that the participants chosen were information rich individuals who could provide insights into the questions under investigation. The participants, in other words, were students and teachers who had recent experience of project-based instruction.

3.3.3 The Participants

The researcher started the study by observing 113 mostly Asian and European students and five Canadian teachers in six ESL classes. The classes were ESL Core, ESL Literature, Transitional Social Studies (2) and English Language Center (ELC) (2). As the study developed its focus, the ESL Core and the ESL Literature classes were replaced by four ESL Writing classes. The replacement occurred because the ESL Core and ESL Literature classes were not conducting project work at that time. Three teachers and 73 Chinese students (58 students from the two Transitional Social Studies and two ELC classes and 15 students from the four ESL Writing classes) were observed. Two of the teachers and all 73 students were interviewed during the main phase of the study.

3.3.3.1 The Teacher Participants

The three teachers who participated in the main phase of the study (hereafter ‘Ms. Jones,’ ‘Ms. Brown,’ and ‘Ms. Green’) did so voluntarily. At the time of data collection, Ms. Jones taught Transitional Social Studies and ELC, Ms. Brown taught ESL Writing, and Ms. Green was a teacher librarian. All three were experienced teachers. Ms. Jones and Ms.
Green received their secondary and post-secondary education in Canada, while Ms. Brown received her secondary and most of her post secondary education in the United States. Of the three teachers, Ms. Jones and Ms. Brown were the major participants. They were observed as they led their students through their project work and were interviewed for the study. Ms. Green’s participation in the study was limited to her instructions to students given in the school library computer room.

3.3.3.2 The Student Participants

The student participants in the main phase of the study were 73 Grade 8-12 ESL students from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China. Like their teachers, all these students volunteered to participate in the study. Forty-six (63%) of these students were from Taiwan, 25 (34%) were from Hong Kong, and 2 (3%) were from China. Forty (55%) of the students were males and 33 (45%) were females. Their ages ranged from 13 to 18. The lengths of these students’ stays in Canada ranged from a few weeks to four years. Table 1 summarizes information about the student participants.

Table 1: The Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Years in Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.4 The Researcher's Role

The researcher was introduced to the students by their teachers as a University of British Columbia (UBC) researcher, who was there to do research about ESL. The role of the researcher was that of a moderate participant observer. According to Spradley, "moderate participation occurs when the ethnographer seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation" (p. 60). The researcher participated in activities such as field trips, group discussions, and lunch hour conversations. She also occasionally answered teachers’ questions and helped students by locating a book or solving a problem, when asked to do so by the teachers.

3.3.5 Data Collection Procedures

The study was conducted from February, 1995 to October, 1997. The methods applied to conduct the study were similar to those used in micro-ethnographic studies. For example, the researcher applied strategies such as observations, field-note taking, formal and informal interviewing, participant observations, and document collection. She was interested in exploring the cultural values and behaviors of different cultural groups in natural settings (see Jacob, 1987; Wolcott, 1992). In other words, the focus of the study was cultural groups rather than individuals. The researcher wanted to find out the meanings of events or situations that may be different to different groups of participants (Schieffelin, 1986; Smith, 1986). Her research questions were developed and refined in consultation with the participants to determine urgent research topics (Johnson, 1992; Spradley, 1980).

Multiple methods such as observations, interviews, and documents were applied to collect data for the present study because as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) say, "no single method can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience" (p. 12). As pointed out earlier, project-based instruction is viewed as a language socialization activity. As an activity, it consists of theory and practice for the teachers and students who organize and
carry it out. The study applied interview and document analysis methods to obtain data about teachers’ theories, and observation methods to obtain data about teachers’ practices. Similarly, interview and document analysis methods were used to obtain data about the students’ theories, and observations, document, and discourse analysis methods were used to obtain information about students’ practices. Figure 4 illustrates the procedures used in the present study.

Figure 5: Data Collection Procedures

In other words, the researcher interviewed the teachers and consulted relevant department, school, school board, and ministry documents to discover the teachers’ goals for and evaluations of project-based instruction and the reasons behind them. She also interviewed the students and analyzed their journals and other written work to find out about their evaluations of project-based instruction. The researcher observed the teachers and students and listened to what they said to discover what actually happens when projects are organized and implemented. She also analyzed students’ written reports of their projects to find out how well they actually do in their project work.
3.3.5.1 Interviews

In her formal interviews with teachers and students the researcher applied the ethnographic interviewing strategy (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993; Spradley, 1980). According to Spradley (1980), “ethnographic interviewing is a special kind that employs questions designed to discover cultural meanings. Such interviews make use of descriptive questions, structural questions, and contrast questions” (p. 123). Ethnographic interviewing is “one strategy for getting people to talk about what they know” (Spradley, 1979, p. 9). The researcher conducted interviews with teachers and students informally as well as formally. Informal interviews occurred during participant observations in class, at recess and lunch time, and on field trips.

The formal interview with Ms. Jones took place at a restaurant over lunch. The formal interview with Ms. Brown occurred in her classroom during a lunch hour. The formal interviews with students took place by appointment at a variety of places, including their teacher’s office and the school library, cafeteria, or corridors. Both teacher interviews, conducted in English because that is the only language they shared with the researcher, were audio taped, transcribed and synthesized for analysis. The student interviews, also audio taped, transcribed and synthesized for analysis, were conducted mostly in English. Some students preferred to be interviewed in Mandarin. The data obtained in Mandarin were translated into English during transcription by the researcher herself. The formal interviews with the students were conducted during and after the researchers’ observations. The formal interviews with teachers were conducted in October, 1997, that is, after the observations and interviews with students were completed.

Before all formal interviews with students, the researcher reintroduced herself as a researcher from UBC. She also told the students that she was interested in studying ESL students because she was an ESL student herself. She reviewed the purpose of the study, and discussed the definitions of seemingly complicated terminologies such as project-based
instruction for consistency. She reminded the students that their participation in the study was voluntary and they could stop participating at any time without penalty. The researcher discussed the importance of the research with the students by pointing out that the information they provided would be helpful for future ESL students. She restated to each student that the information they provided would be confidential. She did this because as Spradley (1980) says, "informants have a right to be anonymous" (p. 23). The students were told that they could speak Mandarin or English during the interviews, most of which lasted about 40 minutes. Fifty-eight of the 73 students were interviewed in pairs. Fifteen students were interviewed individually.

The researcher asked teachers and students descriptive or open-ended questions such as "Why do you organize project activities?" "What do you think you achieved through project-based instruction?" "How do you like learning English by doing projects?" "Could you tell me what you do when you prepare for a project" All formal interviews were audio taped with permission and copious notes were taken. The information gained during the informal interviews was taken as field notes by the researcher. These notes were later synthesized for analysis. The formal interviews from the initial stage of the study enabled the researcher to discover what Spradley calls folk terms which she used in her subsequent interviews and analysis. For example, she found that the student participants used the term study skill to refer to learning strategy and projects to refer to project-based instruction.

3.3.5.2 Documents

As Denzin and Lincoln (1994), McMillan and Schumacher (1993) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) point out, documents are valuable resources in qualitative research. Documents are written texts that provide "unwitting testimony" (Scott, 1990, p. 13) about our values and beliefs. The documents used in the present study include official documents relevant to Carlton High, Vancouver School Board, and BC Ministry of Education ESL and
general education policy. Specifically, they include handouts distributed at Carlton High’s ESL Parents’ Night meetings, the school’s ESL Handbook and ESL Core Course Goals, Vancouver School Board documents such as *Support and Instruction of ESL Students (1996)*, and Ministry of Education documents such as *English as a Second Language K-12 Resource Book (1987)*, *Social Studies 8-10 Integrated Resource Package (1997)*, *Social Studies Grade 11 Integrated Resource Package (1996)*, *English Language Arts 8-10 Integrated Resource Package (1996)*, and *English Language Arts 11-12 Integrated Resource Package (1996)*. Analyses of these documents helped the researcher to see the rationale behind the teacher participants’ goals and evaluations of project-based instruction. Other documents analyzed for the present study included the student participants’ portfolios, journals, and written reports on their project work. The documents collected from the students reinforce the interview and observation data through triangulation.

### 3.3.5.3 Observations

Observation is a strategy used by qualitative researchers to further their understanding of cultural behavior or (simply) to find out what people actually do. In the case of this study, observation strategies were used to see how teachers and students actually conduct their projects, that is, the practical aspect of project-based instruction activity. The researcher followed what Spradley (1980) calls descriptive and focused observation strategies. She began her descriptive observations with a “grand-tour” (Spradley, 1980, p. 77). During the grand tour, she sat in on six ESL classes composed of three teachers and 113 students teaching/studying ESL Core, ESL Literature, Transitional Social Studies, and ELC. The researcher also went on field-trips with the students and teachers. The grand tour enabled the researcher to see what and how ESL students study. It provided her with an overview of the cultural context in which project-based instruction takes place. It helped her to plan for the
focused mini-tour observation where she would concentrate on selected students and selected issues.

After a month's descriptive observation (March, 1995), the researcher started her focused observation in two Transitional Social Studies and two ELC Classes composed of one teacher and 72 students. The focused observation continued from March to mid-June, 1995, for a total of 38 hours. The focus of the observation at this phase of the study was to find out what kinds of projects are organized, how they are carried out, and what the participants say about them. The researcher focused her observations on 58 Chinese ESL students and their teacher. As most of the work was done as homework assignments, the observations during this phase of the study took place in the school corridors and cafeteria, as well as in the classroom.

Based on an analysis of the data gathered during the focused observations and interviews in 1995, the researcher carried out another focused observation from February 23 to April 16, 1996. This time, she observed 72 students in four ESL Writing classes focusing closely on 15 Chinese ESL students carrying out a “Search a Word” project that took up 20 hours of class time and an average of ten hours out of class. The observations took place in the classroom, and in the school and community libraries where the researcher also talked to some students and took field notes.

During observations of the two projects, the researcher saw how the teachers selected project topics and how students negotiated their subtopics with the teacher and among themselves. She also witnessed how the teachers guided the students in brainstorming the research procedures, data analysis techniques, and presentation formats to be used in their projects. She heard students’ discussing a variety of issues, advancing arguments, making choices, and justifying their decisions. She also saw how the teachers teach with and students learn to use a variety of resource materials such as books, magazines, newspapers, dictionaries, thesauruses, indexes, concordances, traditional library card catalogues, and on-
line information search tools in the computer laboratory. The researcher saw how students obtained information from different sources for their projects and how they managed their resources by taking notes and summarizing the information they found. She also heard what the teachers and students said about the different activities involved in each stage of their project work. She saw how teachers helped students to present the results of their project work orally and in writing.

During the observations, the researcher used both the “condensed account” (Spradley, 1980, p. 69) and the “expanded account” (p. 70) formats by jotting down key words, phrases, acronyms, and symbols during or immediately after the observations, and by later filling in the information that she was not able to write out in full on the spot. The researcher also recorded her comments about the participants, the surroundings and anything else that she felt might be useful, creating what Spradley calls a “fieldwork journal” (p. 71). During the focused observations, the researcher also audio taped teacher lectures, student presentations, class discussions, and teacher and student conversations, with permission, whenever she could. Some of the student presentations could not be recorded due to the position of the student presenters: Some groups decided to present through posters that were located in more than one corner of the classroom. Some conversations could not be recorded because they took place at inconvenient times and places such as during a walk to the library or cafeteria.

3.4 Data Analyses

The focus of the data analyses was on the participants’ action and reflection discourse (Harré, 1993) in order to explain, or try to explain, the theory/practice aspects of project-based instruction. As discussed in section 3.2.4.1, reflection discourse refers to the participants’ accounts that explain the theoretical aspect of their action: The language they used to talk about why they organized and did project work and what they thought of it.
Action discourse refers to the discourse acts, that is, the language they used to carry out the project work. The data were analyzed inductively (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993) using Straus and Corbin’s (1990) coding system, Spradley’s (1980) ethnographic micro-analysis, and Patton’s (1990) key events, process, and issue analysis.

3.4.1 Analysis of Interview Data

The inductive analysis strategy (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993) was applied to analyze the data obtained through interviews to identify the participants’ goals for and evaluations of project-based instruction. This was done by identifying recurring themes and patterns that emerged from the data (Spradley, 1980). A name that captured the essence of a “chunk of meaning” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989, p. 418) was assigned to each category. The names of the categories came from *in vivo codes* (Glaser, 1978, p. 70; Strauss, 1987, p. 33), that is, from the words and phrases used during the interviews by the participants themselves.

The search for recurring themes was conducted through the application of the coding system of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), analysis in grounded theory is composed of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, conceptualizing, and categorizing data. Axial coding is a set of procedures whereby, after open coding, data are put back together in new ways by making new connections between categories. Selective coding is the process of selecting a core category, systematically relating it to the other categories, justifying those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development. As the analysis progresses, other data analysis strategies may be applied.

Specifically, all of the audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. Then the data were grouped and regrouped in search of patterns or themes (Spradley, 1980) by
breaking them down and putting them back together into categories such as teachers' goals, teachers' evaluations, students' evaluations, and reasons for the evaluations. The teachers' and students' evaluations were categorized into themes such as positive, mixed, and negative by constant comparison. The reasons for the teachers' and students' evaluations were identified through constant comparison for their representativeness and categorized using terms and phrases arising from the data themselves.

3.4.2 Analysis of Documents

The key issues analysis suggested by Patton (1990) was applied for the analysis of documents which included students' written work. Specifically, after the teachers' goals for project-based instruction were identified from the interviews, the researcher consulted relevant department, school board, and ministry documents to compare the goals given in the documents to those mentioned by the teachers. Data relevant to the key issues or major themes are presented in synthesis with the interview data. Students' written work, which includes their journal entries and written reports of their project work, was also read and analyzed in comparison to the accounts they gave during their interviews. Relevant data are also presented in synthesis with the interview data.

3.4.3 Analysis of Observations

The key events and key processes analysis described by Patton (1990) and the micro-analysis described by Spradley (1980) were used in analyzing the observation data. Specifically, audio tapes of student-teacher and student-student interactions were transcribed as accurately as possible. A very small portion of the data was inaudible. Special attention was paid to the times and contexts of the interactions. Speech in Mandarin was translated into English by the researcher during transcription. The data were then categorized in synthesis with the field notes according to the key events, key processes, and key issues.
relevant to the major themes and categories that emerged from the interview data. Key events here refers to the events that were of critical importance to the study. They were chosen because of their importance, not in the order that they occurred. Key processes refers to some of the language socialization processes of the participants through project-based instruction that had to be described to illuminate the key issues under discussion.

3.5 Data Presentation

As pointed out earlier, our behavior and interpretations of others' behavior are determined by the cultural knowledge we acquire within a particular social system. Culture is “the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior... It is a shared system of meanings, is learned, revised, maintained, and used in the context of people interacting” (Spradley, 1980, pp. 6-9). Culture “is a world of meanings that we bestow on things. This symbolic view of culture parallels Moscovici's (1984) idea of social representation, which derives from Durkheim’s (1915/1995) idea of collective representation” (Doise, Clemence, & Lorenzi-Ciolidi, 1993, p. 93). With this understanding in mind, the data are presented as social representations of Canadian ESL teachers and Chinese ESL students.

According to Cranach (1992), social representations are “social images, ideas, or theories of the world; and the idea that knowledge rests on a social basis. A social representation is organized knowledge on the level of a social system, concerning a certain topic” (p. 10). Social representations can be perceived as “interpretive schemata, belief systems that have the status of ‘représentations collectives’ (Durkheim, 1970). They are existent above and beyond individual conditions as properties of a community or society as a whole or at least of larger groups” (Kruse & Schwarz, 1992, p. 23). A social representation is knowledge shared by members of a community. This “taken for granted” knowledge “serves as a common interpretive schema as well as a means of communication” (Kruse &
Schwarz, 1992, p. 23). Thommen, Cranach, and Ammann (1992) say that social systems influence the acts of individual members. Individual action, in other words, is socially steered and influenced. They believe that:

- Social representations can be materialized and objectivated in rituals, in objects and arrangements, regulations, programs, etc.
- Social systems define themselves through their social representations and thus delimit themselves from other social systems (e.g., by regulations, training programs, ethical considerations, etc.).
- By means of their social representations, social systems provide their members with patterns for the interpretation of the world and thus enable the construction of a common social reality.
- Social representations are objectivated in the individual actions of the system’s members. (p. 194)

According to Doise et al. (1993), social representations can be studied at both the interpersonal and collective level. The present researcher is interested in presenting her findings at the collective level. Using this procedure, the accounts of participants are mixed so that individual differences disappear. By presenting the data in terms of social representations, the researcher is by no means denying the fact that individuals differ in their opinions, attitudes, and stereotypes. Rather, she is arguing that “representations are organizing principles that regulate symbolic relations” and “generate systematic inter-individual and inter-group differences and variations” (Doise et al., 1993, p. 64). The researcher’s aim is to “bring together the views of several individuals on an aspect of their social environment in a single ‘objective’ reality” (Doise et al., 1993, p. 110).

Due to the relatively small sample size, it may be argued that the data gathered from three teachers and 73 students cannot be the social representations of Canadian ESL teachers and Chinese ESL students at Carlton High. It may be further argued that data gathered from mainland Chinese, Hong Kongese, and Taiwanese students cannot be presented as the social representations of Chinese educational culture because they are from three Chinese societies which are different in many ways. However, as we will see in chapters 4 and 5, there is evidence that the information provided by the three teachers can be the social representations
of Carlton High and beyond. For the teachers' goals for project-based instruction seemed to be consistent with their departmental, school, school board, and ministry policies. As pointed out in chapter 1, there is evidence that Chinese immigrants (Canadians) in British Columbia see themselves as Chinese, not just as Taiwanese, Hong Kongese, or Chinese. They have parents' associations and cultural centers that act on behalf of all Chinese people, including those came from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and even those who were born in Canada, in educational and cultural matters (Lam, personal communication; S.U.C.C.E.S.S., 1999).

3.6 About the Research Questions

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this study applies qualitative research methods from a hermeneutic perspective. According to Johnson (1992), hermeneutic research is inductive. That is, the research does not start with fixed hypotheses and the experimental designs by which to test them. The research questions come from field data compiled from participant observations. However, this does not mean that the researcher started without a perspective. Some issues and questions that emerged from the present researcher's previous studies (e.g., Huxur, 1995) and were proposed by Early, Mohan, and Hooper (1989) as well as Mohan (1991), were the guiding questions that formed her perspective for this study. The issues and questions concerned the types of academic tasks that learners of a second language (L2) spend the most time on; the learning strategies applied by them to complete their academic tasks; "the kinds of learning strategies they favor and do not favor" (Early et al., 1989, p. 115); the kinds of learning strategies they need to be taught; and the ways they manage their daily academic lives, including the ways they understand their roles as students, handle student-teacher and student-student interactions in learning, manage their time, take notes and write exams (Early, 1992; Mohan, 1991).
With these issues and questions in mind, the researcher conducted a pilot study in a Canadian secondary school from March to June, 1994. Like Carlton High, the site of the present study, this school is in Vancouver, BC, and is administered by the Vancouver School Board. The researcher employed participant observation strategies to observe 86 ESL students in beginning and intermediate level ESL Mathematics, Science, and Literature classes, and an English Language Center (ELC). She interviewed 16 of these students and two of their teachers both formally and informally to identify urgent issues and questions to be studied further. The 16 ESL students were from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

Analysis of the data collected for the pilot study showed that ESL students favored certain academic activities and teaching/learning strategies over others. For example, some students did not like activities such as drawing and coloring. Others did not like field-trips. These students preferred to read “good stories” instead. Some students reported that while their spoken English had improved tremendously since they came to Vancouver their writing ability remained poor. The students attributed their slow progress in writing to a “lack of grammar instruction.” Findings such as these led the researcher to conduct the present study on project-based instruction. Project-based instruction was the academic activity chosen because it can include many of the things that the participants in the pilot study talked about. For instance, it can include field trips, drawing, coloring, speaking, reading, and writing.

3.7 Authentic Activities in Natural Situations

As stated by Ratner (1997) and others, qualitative methods of inquiry allow researchers to investigate authentic activities that occur in natural situations. This is important because activity which is inauthentic or which occurs in artificial situations is not meaningful. Cranach (1982) asserts that

the actor should pursue genuine and internalized goals. He should experience his action as intended and autonomously guided, at least to the extent he would expect in everyday life. He should not perform under the impression of acting
towards an artificial goal adapted only for the sake of the investigation. In the planning and execution of the action he should be as free as in everyday life; therefore, he should not feel restricted by the particular research conditions; restrictions as they are common in daily performance, for example, by conventions, rules and norms are, however, natural conditions. The actor should be free of anxiety of the research situation, to be observed and evaluated, and should not experience the situation as alienated. (pp. 52-53)

The present study is an investigation of authentic project activities carried out in authentic contexts such as school classrooms, libraries, computer rooms, and field trips. No activities or contexts were created for the sake of the study. All project activities were observed as they occurred.

3.8 The Issue of Language and Culture

As mentioned in chapter 1, the researcher chose to study Chinese students because she believed it was important that she have the ability to communicate with them in their L1 to reduce the limitations that the use of a second language may have posed. Having grown up, studied, and taught in China for almost 30 years and having studied and taught in Canada for eight years, she believed that she had enough knowledge to look at the issues from a broader perspective than a researcher who does not have such experience, and had the linguistic ability to examine the issues with the chosen participants.

Spradley (1980) discusses the importance of ethnographers’ and participants’ native languages in data collection. His concern was to record the participants words verbatim so that “the inner meaning of another culture” (p. 67) can be understood with little distortion. The researcher in the present study paid attention to the language issue by allowing students to speak in either English or Chinese and by recording and transcribing the participants’ accounts verbatim whenever she could. As it happened, most of the data were provided in English, but some were provided in Mandarin.

The researcher had two reasons for allowing the student participants to speak in either language and for transcribing their accounts verbatim. First, as Spradley suggests, she
wanted to obtain a full picture of what the participants had to say. Second, she thought the participants might be able to tell her more if they spoke in their L1, Mandarin. As a Mandarin and an English speaker, she believed that she had the linguistic ability to communicate effectively with the participants during the course of her research. Before all interviews, the researcher explained clearly to each student that they should feel free to talk to her in either language (i.e., Mandarin or English). Most of the student participants chose to speak English mainly because they wanted to practice their L2. However, the participants who chose to speak Mandarin during the interviews and in other interactions provided much more information compared with those who chose to speak in English. Although it would be necessary to conduct a follow-up study to examine this issue more fully and find out who contributed what to the information obtained, the findings of the present study suggest that the researcher's assumption about researchers and participants sharing a common linguistic background was correct.

3.9 The Soundness of the Study

There has been debate over the applicability of conventional criteria to judge the soundness, validity, or trustworthiness of qualitative studies (e.g., Hammersley, 1992; Kvale, 1996). To find a study credible or not depends on the methodological paradigm the reader or the researcher works within. For example, the conventional/positivistic view holds that research findings are valid only when they are repeatable and generalizable. The hermeneutic perspective, on the other hand, has a different understanding of the social construction of reality. Researchers who work within this paradigm, as discussed earlier in this chapter, believe knowledge is socially constructed by active agents (e.g., Harré, 1993). For these researchers, as Hammersley (1992) maintains, "an account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomenon that it is intended to describe, explain or theorize" (p. 69). All knowledge is "reflexive of the process, assumptions, location, history,
and context of knowing and the knower.” From this point of view, credibility depends on the “interpretive community, ... and the goals of the research” (Altheide & Johnson, 1994, p. 488).

In their discussions of the trustworthiness of qualitative research, Marshall and Rossman (1995) suggest four criteria that can be applied to ensure the soundness or usefulness of qualitative research, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The term credibility in qualitative inquiry is equivalent to validity in conventional research. According to Ratner (1997), credibility “is a check on the objectivity of observations and concepts” (p. 202). Typically, “observations do not jibe completely with interview data, sources can be inconsistent or even conflicting” (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 438). But the ample number of sampling, inductive analysis of data (findings that are grounded in the data), discussion of the findings with colleagues, adequate time spent in the field, and the use of “methods of triangulation” (Patton, 1990) should help increase the credibility (or accuracy) of the findings of the present study.

The researcher is aware that each of us brings to our studies our “biases, assumptions, patterns of thinking, and knowledge gained from experience and reading” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 95). Such biases, assumptions, patterns of thinking, and knowledge may prevent us from seeing some important issues. The researcher addressed this problem by using triangulation in analyzing the data. Triangulation is a strategy of using multi-methods of data collection to explore an issue and “comparing statement and behavior that may contradict or complement each other” (Ratner, 1997). Denzin (1978) defines triangulation as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (p. 291). It is a metaphor which comes from “navigation and military strategies that use multiple reference points to locate an object’s exact position” (Jick, 1979, p. 602). Triangulation is a partial solution to the problem of trying to understand a complex reality (Borg & Gall, 1989; McMillan & Schumacher, 1993; Patton, 1990).
According to Patton (1990), there are "four kinds of triangulation that contribute to verification and validation of qualitative analysis" (p. 464). These are methods triangulation, source triangulation, analyst triangulation, and theory/perspective triangulation. All four kinds of triangulation were applied in the present study. Methods triangulation was applied through the use of multi-methods such as observations, interviews, and document analysis. The findings of each method were then compared to verify their consistency. Source triangulation was done by collecting and comparing data from different participants, at different times, and in different places (Borg & Gall, 1989). Analyst triangulation was applied by allowing ample time for the analysis and by discussing the findings with colleagues engaged in similar lines of research. Theory/perspective triangulation was done by checking the data against different explanatory models. The use of all four kinds of triangulation should increase the validity of the findings.

Transferability in qualitative studies is equivalent to generalizability in conventional research. It refers to the applicability of findings of one study to another context. As Marshall and Rossman (1995) point out, transferability is a problematic construct in qualitative inquiry because the naturalistic paradigm does not assume a static social world or universal truth. Rather than forcing the findings of one study onto a different context, qualitative researchers allow their readers to judge the transferability of their findings. For the reader to judge the transferability of the current findings, the researcher clearly and fully describes her theoretical framework and the significance of the study, the participants, research site, and the activities investigated.

Dependability in qualitative research is equivalent to credibility in conventional research. Dependability requires accountability for "changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for the study as well as changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the setting" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 145). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without
dependability)” (p. 316). The researcher believes the application of multi-methods in studying the views of a large number of participants over a significant period of time helps the dependability of the present study.

Confirmability in qualitative studies is equivalent to objectivity in conventional research. Confirmability is established by insuring that the findings are derived from the data and not from the researcher's subjective viewpoint. The issue of subjectivity and objectivity has long been debated among qualitative researchers (see Adler & Adler, 1987; Hammersley, 1992; Johnson, 1992). However, as Kirk and Miller (1986) maintain, objectivity is a goal of qualitative research. If a study is credible and dependable, it should also be considered to be confirmable (that is, objective). Nonetheless, the researcher was aware that she may have more in common with some participants than with others, and was especially aware of the need for the study to be credible and dependable.

3.10 Summary

This chapter discusses the methodological issues raised by the study. It is pointed out that project-based instruction is a socially constructed language socialization activity. It is meaningful only when seen within its socio-cultural and socio-historical contexts and should be studied through various qualitative methods in natural contexts (Ratner, 1997). The researcher elaborates on Mohan’s (1986) notion of theory/practice, Harré et al.’s (1985) idea of resources/acts, and Spradley’s (1980) concept of cultural knowledge/cultural behavior to illustrate why a qualitative approach is appropriate for the present study.

Other discussions in the chapter include language/culture issues in data collection, the researcher’s role, data collection and analysis procedures, and the issue of soundness in qualitative inquiry. It is pointed out that the researcher may have obtained different kinds of data because she shared similar linguistic/cultural backgrounds with the student participants. The researcher’s role was that of a moderate participant throughout the study. Data were
analyzed inductively (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993) using Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) open-coding, axial-coding, and selective coding procedures, Spradley’s (1980) ethnographic micro-analysis, and Patton’s (1990) key events, processes, and issues analysis. It is stated that qualitative inquiry needs its own criteria for judging its soundness, and that it is up to readers to decide if the findings of a study can be generalized to a different context.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS IN CONTEXT

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings for research question one (what are ESL teachers’ goals for project-based instruction?) and some of the findings for research question two (how do ESL teachers’ and students’ evaluate project-based instruction?). The rest of the findings for question 2 are presented and discussed in chapter 5. The findings are presented in the contexts of relevant school policies and of the research on project-based instruction that has been reported in the SLA and general literature. The following code is used in presenting the data:

Plain text = original teacher and student discourse from interviews;
Italic = students’ interview discourse translated from the original Mandarin;
( ) = researcher clarificatory remarks

Other types of data such as field notes and students’ written discourse will be explained as it becomes necessary.

4.2 Teachers’ Goals for Project-based Instruction

As will be seen below, the ESL teachers who participated in the present study reported their goals for project-based instruction to be: to foster life-long learning by language socialization of ESL students into Canadian school and social cultures; to challenge students’ creativity and resourcefulness; to foster independence; to teach decision-making, critical thinking, and cooperative learning skills; to teach students how to learn; and to teach language in context.
4.2.1 Life-long Learning

Ms. Jones and Ms. Brown, the two main teacher participants in the study, both spoke of their commitment to life-long learning. At the interview, Ms. Jones said that:

(Talking about an ESL Social Studies project) ... some of the underlying principles that I embrace also have to do with life-long learning. If I don't think something is going to be useful, I won't do it. Hence the spanking thing (the project topic), because I feel somewhere along the way, Canadian society will benefit from their (students’) having thought or had the opportunity to think about how to grow up and whether they were doing things differently.

Ms. Brown spoke of exposing students to different research modes for use in future classes.

(B=Ms. Brown, R=researcher)

B: This was really, I think of it as just an exposure to different types of research mode that they (the students) want to use in the future... . Different kinds of research, exposure to Social Studies, to literature, to poetry, to newspapers, to magazines, to periodicals, and to computer programs. How to use them so that when the time comes, they have to use it for another advanced class.

R: So, you see projects as preparing them for future?
B: Yes, absolutely. I am familiarizing them for the future.

Ms. Jones’ and Ms. Brown’s goal of life-long learning is consistent with their department’s policy. According to their departmental Handbook:

The ESL staff at Carlton High present a wide diversity of backgrounds and teaching styles. We are enthusiastic, willing to learn, and open to trying new ideas for helping students develop their full potential. Following are instructional strategies we believe in and put into practice in our teaching.

... 2) Life-long learning. We introduce students to critical thinking, independent learning, knowledge framework, key visuals, library exploration, portfolio projects, etc., so that you learn how to learn while studying content knowledge. (p. 9)

The ESL teachers’ goal of life-long learning also seems to be consistent with the goals of project-based instruction in general education. As discussed in chapter 2, life-long learning has been a major goal of the activity since it was first developed in education (see Kilpatrick, 1918; 1925). Life-long learning, however, is not given as a goal of project-based instruction in the SLA literature.
4.2.2 Language Socialization: Canadian School Culture

The teachers reported that one of their goals for project-based instruction was the language socialization of ESL students into Canadian school culture. In fact, projects themselves are seen as examples of Canadian school culture. Ms. Brown said that projects can serve as an excellent activity in the language socialization of ESL students:

Socializing them (ESL students) into the school culture here is naturally the major goal. As I said, it's not just the language they need to learn. A lot of other things are foreign to them, including how the schools operate here. Projects are an excellent way for them to find out how things work. They have to go to libraries, where they find out what kind of books children here read. They talk to people as part of their projects. You know, including older students in the school. They find out things from them.

Ms. Jones added that project work is a feature of Canadian school culture that immigrant students have to learn:

Project (work) is something that our kids do for six years here (in Canada) before they come to us (in secondary school). They know how to do this stuff. But immigrant students have said that they had not done projects before. So, we need to show them how to do it. That's why I do a lot of projects. Group projects and individual projects.

The following table is taken from a handout the Carlton High ESL Department gives to parents on their Parents' Nights. It clearly shows that the department considers project-based instruction to be part of Canadian school culture.
Table 2: Characteristics of the Canadian Educational System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS OF CANADIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM</th>
<th>SKILLS REQUIRED</th>
<th>ATTITUDES REQUIRED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>Accept responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>Time management skills</td>
<td>Be confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>Organization skills</td>
<td>Be optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Group problem-solving</td>
<td>Be cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports</td>
<td>Research skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing creativity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Note taking skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The significance which project-based instruction has for the ESL department is further underlined by the fact that all of the students participating in the present study reported that project-based instruction was not part of their previous school cultures. Students’ comments on this subject can be found throughout chapters 4 and 5.

Language socialization of ESL students into a different school culture per se is not mentioned as a goal for project-based instruction either in the general or the SLA literature. Since learning a different school culture is more common in ESL education, it is understandable that it is not mentioned as one of the goals in the general literature. But it is surprising that a goal which is held to be so important by the teacher participants in the present study should not be mentioned in the SLA literature.
4.2.3 Language Socialization: Canadian Social Cultures

Ms. Jones and Ms. Brown reported that another important goal of their project-based instruction was the language socialization of ESL students into Canadian social cultures. Ms. Jones designed project activities to help her students learn about Canadian social history:

Yes, introducing them (ESL students) into Canadian social culture is my goal, too. I think they need to know that. Many of them have told me that they want to know about Canada. We do lots of projects about culture or cultures of Canada. As you saw from their (project) evaluation, the Chinese students enjoyed researching the contributions the early Chinese immigrants made to the country’s railway industry. And Chinese people and their culture are an important part of our (Canadian) society and culture. It’s important for them to know these facts. Especially the stuff that they can relate to.

Ms. Brown designed project activities to help her students explore contemporary Canadian social culture:

Projects play a big role in the socialization of ESL students into Canadian culture. We went downtown, we went to the library. We looked for a place to eat. We saw clothes in the stores. We met on the weekend, where they would otherwise have been locked in their houses with no place to go. On the weekend, we went to the library together, and did something else together. It’s a big socialization. It is. You’ll be amazed at how some Filipino girls never go anywhere. Their parents work during the day, so they have to stay home. So this opened up a whole..., you know. Once you find the library. Hey, you have a library card, you get all these books. Hey,... Hey! Also they even found books in their own language. Not only in English.

The teachers’ goal of introducing ESL students to Canadian social cultures seems to be consistent with their department’s policies. Consider the following excerpts taken from handouts distributed at a 1996 Parents’ Night For Students. They point to the attitudes expected of students and parents in Canadian culture.

ATTITUDES
1) Accept responsibility (Be responsible) 2) Be flexible 3) Respect and tolerate other cultures 4) Be confident 5) Be optimistic 6) Be cooperative

(from Carlton High’s ESL Handbook:)

Dear parents,
We believe self-esteem is important for achieving success at our school.
The ESL Staff
Children Are Individuals - Children need to be recognized as individuals first.
- Don’t try to shape their life. Guide them.
Listen to Your Teen - Sometimes they just want to be heard.
- They may not want or need your advice.
Unconditional Love - Let your teen know you love them no matter what.
Work on Goals Together - Find out what is important to your teen.
- Tell your teen your goals.
Don’t Compare Your Teen with Others - Help them improve what they want.
Keep to the Rules - When you let them off the hook, it says “I don’t really care.”
Support - Don’t Nag - Speak to your teen like an adult and they will act that way.
Tell Your Teen They Are Special - They are special and most people don’t recognize it.
Use Self-Esteem Language - This is terrible vs. What did you do well? What could be better? - You make me sick vs. I love you and this behavior is upsetting. (p. 17)

The above excerpts are cited as reflecting Canadian culture because, though being responsible, respectful, and cooperative may be common to all cultures, suggestions such as “Don’t try to shape their (your children’s) life,” “They may not want or need your advice,” and “Help them improve what they want” may seem specific to mainstream Canadian culture. In Chinese culture, for example, both parents and children see giving advice and shaping children’s futures as the parent’s responsibility.

The language socialization of students into social cultures is not mentioned in the general literature as a goal for project-based instruction, though it seems it could have been. It is an important goal for all students to learn about other cultures and, as Ms. Brown and Ms. Jones say, project-based instruction may be an excellent means of doing this. Although the language socialization of ESL students into the cultures of the target language is mentioned in the SLA literature (Hilton-Jones, 1989), it is not presented as a major goal. It will be recalled that the only major goal that is mentioned is comprehensible output.
4.2.4 Challenging Creativity

The teacher participants reported that another goal of their project-based instruction was to challenge their students' creativity. They believed that the open-ended nature of projects created opportunities for students to explore a topic fully and in their own way. Ms. Jones said that:

It (a project) calls on their independence and creativity, because there is no end to what they can do. So, it challenges all of their ... creativity. And there are very many close-ended things that are given in schools. You know. Memorize this chapter for Science or jump over these things in Physical Education or whatever. But a project is open. They can hang themselves by working 12 hours a day and doing too much or they can not do enough. But it is a way of allowing them to do as much as they want and can. So, they can really excel. It gives them enough chance to do that.

Ms. Brown said that project-based instruction can challenge students' creativity by taking them beyond the minimum requirements of the assignment.

Projects are wonderful. They challenge students to be creative. Not everybody can do it, but some of them can. For example, with the word power. One woman did something on power that she didn't have, and needed to take. And it became, you know, almost more than a project to her. It became really something that she could take beyond. You know. Beyond English, and beyond a research project. A lot of other projects are like that.

As can be seen from Table 2 in section 4.2.2, challenging students' creativity is also a policy of the teachers' department.

There is no mention in the SLA literature of fostering student creativity as a goal of project-based instruction. This is surprising. Not only is student creativity emphasized in the general literature as one of the major goals of project work (Kilpatrick, 1925), but Krajcik et al. (1994) point out that project-based instruction is believed to help students solve real-world problems by using cognitive strategies, tools, and other resources creatively while engaging in activities that require them to develop multiple skills. The importance of this goal is tied to Kilpatrick's (1925) idea that schools should prepare learners for rapid and unexpected changes in direction which create new problems calling for new solutions. This seems to be a good description of the situation many immigrant students find themselves in.
4.2.5 Fostering Independence

Both Ms. Jones and Ms. Brown said that fostering student independence is one of their goals for project-based instruction. They thought that learning to be independent can be a long and complicated process that needs to be constantly taught and reinforced. Ms. Jones said:

I have other goals for projects, too. ... in my view there is not enough time given to develop the sub-skills that the kids need to survive in the larger society. To train them not to be teacher dependent, to be teacher-independent. So, in a way to become more autonomous. And that process is very complicated. Even with adults, all of a sudden, expect somebody to fly? You can’t. So, it’s a very, very long process, and a lot of attention has to be given to what kind of steps or sub-skills or behavioral goals have to facilitate that or necessitate that or whatever. It’s very complicated. And projects are perfect for doing some of these things.

Ms. Jones later elaborated on how she organizes projects to achieve this goal:

To be independent and to learn those skills themselves is not an easy trick. You have to be on that stuff every exercise you do. What is the purpose of this? And when you finish it, let’s look and see whether we’ve done what we are supposed to do, you know. That’s what I did with the projects you saw.

Ms. Brown also said that ESL students need training to be independent. And like Ms. Jones, she organizes projects to foster independence. She believes that projects can be used to achieve this goal because they involve activities such as research that students must do independently from their teachers:

I want them (ESL students) to learn how to do things on their own. That is one of the things they need training in. They are not very good at that. They can get very dependent, you know. I train them by organizing projects. It’s perfect for doing that kind of thing, because I am not going to do their research for them. They have to do it by themselves. You know what I mean? That’s how they learn to be independent.

Fostering independence is also Carlton High ESL Department policy. For details of the department’s goals, see section 4.2. Fostering independence is not mentioned in the SLA literature as a goal of project-based instruction. In the general literature on projects, however, it is given as an important goal, especially at the high school level. In order to achieve this goal, educators are encouraged to design project activities that require students
to recognize, define, and solve a problem by planning their work, locating, analyzing and synthesizing data, and to present their results both orally and in writing (Cuthbert, 1995; Kimbrough, 1995; Williams, 1984).

4.2.6 Enhancing Decision-making Skills

The teachers in the present study hoped that doing project work would enhance their students’ decision-making ability. They said that decision making is one of the things students have to learn in order to be independent learners. As they point out in the following excerpts, they thought that making decisions can be difficult for any student but is especially difficult for ESL students who are used to having decisions made for them. Ms. Jones believed that she could achieve this goal through project-based instruction because in it students have to make many decisions for themselves. She said:

We have to show students how to make decisions. They are not used to that. I heard a lot from the students. Even coming from Grade 7, in our system, they say “wah, in high school we get to choose the courses. Wah!” So, I don’t think that’s just necessarily coming from another culture. I think it’s part of seeing not only a different system, but also, even being in high school. Because in that process you are being able to figure out, to evaluate things to see if they see the purpose of something. Sometimes, you are up to your bumpy road, you don’t want that. But I think it’s necessary in that process. It’s good for them to experience that nobody’s going to punish them if they don’t do certain things, or they just have to figure out if they want to do certain things. It’s good to give them opportunity to do that kind of thing. I am hoping they get this kind of experience from projects, because there is a lot of decisions to be made in projects. No end to it.

Ms. Brown agreed with Ms. Jones that projects are especially helpful in enhancing students’ decision-making ability because they involve students in making decisions about what to do with the information they gather, for instance, what to include and exclude in their final presentations. (R=researcher, B=Ms. Brown)
R: Ms. Jones talked about how she uses projects to teach decision-making skills. What do you think of that?

B: They (the students) do a lot of things in projects. They have to look for information, manage the information, take notes, decide what to do with their notes. You know, what to incorporate in their final paper and what to leave as it is. They have to make a lot of decisions. They are not going to get it from me. They learn it by doing projects like this. So, yes, I do that too.

No explicit claim for enhancing decision-making skills is found in the SLA literature. Mention is made of time-management skills (Coleman, 1992) and responsibility (Fried-Booth, 1986), but as pointed out in chapter 2, these are presented as minor goals and little seems to have been done to ensure that they were achieved. However, enhancing students' decision-making skills, as well as helping them take responsibility for their decisions, has been a major goal of project-based instruction in mainstream education ever since the Project Method was first introduced into the field (Kilpatrick, 1925; Ladewski et al., 1994; Shuldt, 1991; Scott, 1994). According to Wolk (1995) for example, the student-centered nature of project-based instruction allows students to make their own choices about the topics, issues, and even the methods for their projects.

4.2.7 Fostering Group Work Skills

While the teachers in the present study said that enhancing independence and responsibility was an important goal, they emphasized that it was equally important to foster group or cooperative work skills. They believed that both sets of skills have to be learned if ESL students are to be successful in their new country. In order to achieve the latter goal, the teachers organized group projects which called for the students to exercise cooperative work and communication skills. Ms. Jones talked about the importance of fostering these skills:

They (projects) are important to me for many reasons. For group projects, students have to work together. They have to use group skills. They have to do division of labor, they have to allocate. They learn so many things. They learn many, many skills when they have to do group projects. They have to be mainstreamed. When they do, they need to know these things. They have to know how to work in groups, and make decisions. They have to know how to communicate. And all these can happen in projects. Students have said they
have not had experience working in groups. And they have had experiences maybe in getting information, but not a lot. And it's foreign to their experience.

As seen in section 4.2.2, teaching ESL students cooperative work skills is ESL Department policy at Carlton High. According to the department's ESL Handbook, the first of the "instructional strategies we believe in and put into practice in our teaching" is

1) Cooperative learning. We provide students with opportunities to work in groups of different ages and grades, so that you benefit from peer tutoring and group interaction. Weaker students do not feel defeated by not being placed into a less progressive situation. Advanced students gain enrichment by helping weaker students. (p. 9)

There is no mention in the SLA literature of group or cooperative learning skills being one of the goals for project-based instruction (rather, cooperative learning is seen as a means to SLA). The same cannot be said of the general education literature, however. As discussed in chapter 2, project-based instruction is seen as conducive to group or cooperative work because it can create opportunities for students to learn from each other through discussions and debates over critical issues (Barrow & Milburn, 1990; Dewey, 1924; Holt, 1994; Kilpatrick, 1918).

4.2.8 Fostering Critical Thinking

The teacher participants in the present study made a point of saying that critical thinking was an important goal for them in project-based as well as in other forms of instruction. They emphasized critical thinking because, they felt, their ESL students were not used to it. Ms. Brown, for instance, encouraged critical thinking by asking students to discuss controversial issues that arose in movies, poetry, and in their projects:

Critical thinking is another thing that I do with projects. It's important. These students are not used to that. You saw me doing it. It's always part of everything I do. I show them movies, read them poetry, and organize projects. We discuss controversial issues. They (the students) hear people say different things about it. There. You have critical thinking going. I mean not all students get it. But most of them do. As I said, the purpose was to get them to use the different facilities, and to get them to think differently about words.
Ms. Jones also talked about the importance of critical thinking skills for her students. She said it was especially important for ESL students to learn these skills because some of them come from cultures where they are not nurtured. In addition, due to their recent arrival in Canada, some of the students lack the confidence to disagree or to be critical. Like Ms. Brown, Ms. Jones organized projects around controversial issues such as child abuse.

It (critical thinking) is a very personal and family thing. It's a hard one. Really, because critical thinking is related to freedom in a way too. And that's not nurtured in some countries where our students come from. There has to be a certain confidence and safety involved in the classroom and ... intimacy even towards students to be able to say and feel that it's okay for them to say or contradict. That's why that (child abuse) was the research topic. They had to come up with research questions that were of interest to them to make them. I felt I had responsibility to cover some basic theories, some basic arguments, and give them some thinking that is controversial so that they can have something to bounce their ideas off and say that this person feels this way and that person feels that way. That way, they can think about things critically.

As shown in section 4.2.1, fostering students' critical thinking is Carlton High ESL Department policy. But this is another goal of project-based instruction that is not mentioned in the SLA literature.

Critical thinking, however, is mentioned in the general literature (Berliner, 1992; Mestre, in press). It is believed that in order to learn how to think, children need something to think about. And in order to learn how to think deeply and critically, students need to work on a particular issue long enough to develop interest and understanding through planning, observing, analyzing and synthesizing information, solving problems and creating new ideas. Project-based instruction is believed to provide students with an opportunity to engage in all of these activities (Berliner, 1992; Dewey, 1931; Hoyt, 1997; Krajcik et al., 1994; Scott, 1994).

4.2.9 Teaching Learning

Another goal the teachers in the present study had for project-based instruction was teaching students how to learn. According to Ms. Jones, learning how to learn is important
for ESL students because they come from educational cultures which spoon-feed students, telling them what and how they should learn. But now they are in a different educational culture, one in which there is too much knowledge to memorize. Ms. Jones believed that project-based instruction provides contexts for training ESL students in this area:

Learning how to learn is important. As I said, they need to know how. These kids are used to spoon-feeding. You know. They were given books, told how they should study. But things are different here. There is so much stuff. They can’t memorize all that. They have to know what and how to learn. You heard them. They don’t know how to do these things. And projects are excellent for them to learn that stuff, because they have to do a lot with projects. You know. Researching, analyzing, summarizing, reporting, and that.

Ms. Brown also said that teaching the learning process was one of her goals. She noted that projects themselves are a kind of learning process. Among other things, they teach students what they can and cannot do:

Yes, projects are all about the process, and it’s very important for them. They have to find out what they can and cannot do. That’s how they learn. They find out certain things that they cannot do. They ask and learn. There!

They learn a lot of things in the process. When they did the word project, they had to go on a Sunday to finish work left over from Saturday. They went with another classmate. They had a social outing. You know. That’s important. That’s part of the process. They are learning something about Vancouver. So, it’s wonderful to adapt it (project-based instruction) to an ESL population like that.

The teachers’ goal of teaching students how to learn through project-based instruction seems to be consistent with their department’s goals (see Table 2 in section 4.2.2). The SLA literature, on the other hand, does not mention it as one of the goals for project-based instruction. But teaching learning has always been one of the major goals of project-based instruction in general education. As discussed in chapter 2, the original rationale behind this activity included empowering all learners by teaching them how to learn. And what was true then seems even more true today. Though we live in an information age, many students do not have the skills to access the new knowledge. And it may be, as the teachers in the present study contend, that this is especially true of immigrant students.
4.2.10 Teaching Language in Context

The final goal the teacher participants had for project-based instruction was to integrate the teaching of language, content, and skills. Specifically, the academic activities involved in projects were seen as contexts for students to learn and practice their English.

Ms. Brown talked about library research in the following way:

Also, they can't do everything all by themselves. They have to talk to people. Talk to librarians, ask questions. It's language learning. It's not a separate thing. The whole process is the language development. Even just looking for call numbers. Is it under H or is it under E? The first thing they have to do is the language.

Ms. Jones said she organized projects around current issues to reinforce language learning. She thought this would help her students learn and practice their language skills because they were learning about their project topic by listening to the radio, watching television, and reading newspapers. (R=researcher, J=Ms. Jones)

R: That's linguistic purpose. You do it so that they can hear about it again and again to be able to understand?
J: Oh, yes. If it's a one shot deal, from a vocabulary point of view, they heard it once and it's gone. It's finished. Whereas, if it's built into an issue, the chances of hearing it again will be reinforced. It's all manipulation, right? Tell them that it's going to be on the radio tonight. Ask them to listen and find out what happened.

The teachers' goal of integrating language and content seems to be consistent with their department's policies. As the following excerpt from the Carlton High ESL Handbook indicates, the school's ESL program is based on a language/content integration model. It is also departmental policy to integrate the teaching of the four language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

... the ESL program at Carlton High is based on the integrated language and content approach, and covers subject matter that draws on mainstream content. (p. 5)
Integration of language skills. We do not isolate the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Although each class has its own focus, pace, and activities, it also integrates the four language skills. Duplication of skills is not considered a problem, as it can reinforce the skills and eventually they become their own. (p. 9)

As pointed out in chapter 2, integrating language and content is not listed as a goal for project based instruction in either the SLA or the general research literature. This may not at first seem surprising, given the model's relatively short history in the field. It will be recalled however that this form of integration was advocated by the Deweys as early as 1915, and that the examples the Deweys give of contexts in which integration could occur were early project-like activities (Dewey & Dewey, 1915).

4.2.11 Beyond Comprehensible Output

The general goal the teachers in the present study hoped to achieve through project-based instruction was to prepare ESL students for life-long learning. Specific goals included the language socialization of ESL students into Canadian school and social cultures, challenging their creativity, fostering independence, and teaching decision-making, cooperative learning, critical thinking and general learning skills. The final goal they had was to integrate the teaching of language and content. The teachers' goals for project-based instruction seem to be consistent not only with their department's goals, but also with their School Board's and Ministry's goals. For instance, according to the BC Ministry of Education (1996b, 1996c, 1996d, 1996e, 1997), the Metro Vancouver School District's Parent Handbook (n.d.), and Vancouver School Board (1992; 1994; 1995; 1996), the goals of education in British Columbia and Vancouver include self-acquisition and free expression of knowledge, internal motivation, self-discipline, and life-long learning. Learning is student-centered. Students are to learn how to learn, think critically, solve problems, and be creative.
The Ministry (and School Board) goals for ESL education include teaching students to learn and think in English (Ministry of Education, 1987). In order to achieve this goal, the Ministry encourages British Columbia ESL teachers to apply the language/content or language-across-the-curriculum approach in their teaching. This approach is seen to provide multiple opportunities for practicing language functions and structures in natural situations. It builds upon the notional/functional syllabus that “marks a radical departure from the grammar/structure approach to second language curriculum design; it begins with notions and language functions rather than language structure” (Ministry of Education, 1987, p. 6). ESL teachers are expected to teach their students communication and research skills that enable the students to acquire information from original sources in English and to use that information to communicate with others. Communication skills include listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and presenting. Research skills include locating, understanding, and summarizing information from sources such as newspapers, television programs, recipes, menus, magazines, and schedules (Ministry of Education, 1987; Vancouver School Board, 1992; 1996).

As pointed out earlier, the teachers’ goals take us far beyond comprehensible output, the goal stressed in the SLA literature for project-based instruction (e.g., Eyring, 1989; Fried-Booth, 1986). But the teachers’ goals are not idiosyncratic. Not only do they reflect their department’s goals for the ESL program as a whole, they are also consistent with the goals listed for project-based instruction in the general literature, and with the goals of ESL education in their school district and province. It should also be noted that the teachers had three goals that are not included in either the SLA or the general literature. They are: the language socialization of students into the school culture; the language socialization of students into social cultures; and integrating the teaching of language and content. Though they did not explicitly mention motivation and in-depth learning of subject matter, two goals often listed in the general (but not the SLA) literature, some of their comments quoted in
section 4.2.4 suggest that neither is far from the teachers' minds. Project-based instruction, because it is open, challenges not just students' creativity but their willingness and ability to explore a topic in depth, even 12 hours a day.

We have seen that the major goal of project-based instruction, according to the SLA literature, is to provide second language learners extensive exposure to the target language (Brumfit, 1984; Candlin et al., 1988; Eyring, 1989; Fried-Booth, 1986; Hilton-Jones, 1988). We have also looked at several anecdotal reports on attempts made to achieve this goal, and have seen that these involve descriptions of different types of project activities organized for second language learners to practice their language skills by talking to other people (i.e., comprehensible output). See Eyring (1989; 1991) and Fried-Booth (1986) for details. However, it is clear from the findings of the present study and from the review of the general literature that comprehensible output need be only one of many potential goals. Perhaps researchers in SLA should re-acquaint themselves with the general literature on project-based instruction and investigate more fully the beliefs and practices of those ESL teachers who utilize the activity in their classrooms.

4.3 Teacher's Evaluations of Project-based Instruction

In the previous section we presented data related to the goals the teacher participants hoped to achieve through project-based instruction. In this section we present data concerning the teachers' evaluations of the activity.

4.3.1 Teachers' General Evaluations

According to data collected from interviews, the teachers' evaluations of project-based instruction are generally positive. Ms. Jones had high expectations for her students during their project activities and, as she indicates in the following conversation after a class presentation, was pleased with, if not uncritical of, the results. (R=researcher, J=Ms. Jones)
R: What do you think of their (the students') project performance?
J: In general, some are more gratifying than others. And generally I have to say... depending on how much I follow up, it's more or less successful. It depends on the project. But I have to say I think they are extremely gratifying for both students and me. I have asked them to do individual projects, and I have given them group projects, and some worked better than others. I think it can be really amazing. In general they do well.

Ms. Brown said that although student results differ from year to year, in general all students learn, the unexpected as well as the expected. Some students doing a writing project were "absolutely dazzled" by what they learned about Shakespeare.

And, in the past, last year, looking back on it, I didn't get as many outstanding papers as I have got in the past. Last year I felt that they were more mundane. But still they learned. And they learned what they hadn't expected to learn. Discovering that there was this guy named Shakespeare, who wrote so much that, you know they were absolutely dazzled by it. But they'd always find a little poem or sonnet or something, you know, or a piece in a play that they really 'hey!' you know? 'This sounds wonderful.' 'This is like that poem, you know, by the Chinese philosopher.' You know, that kind of thing. Just getting into it, and making them their own, essentially, is important to me.

Ms. Brown was generally pleased with her students' work. She talked about how well they could do even in difficult circumstances.

Yes. In general, I am pleased about what they can do. Last year, I had two students join the class late. Just before we started the project. But they did very well. I mean, their work was not the best. But, for someone who was very new to us. It was amazing to see what they could do. Yes. I am proud of them.

This general finding from the present study seems to confirm the results of studies that report mainstream teachers' evaluations of project-based instruction (Krajcik et al., 1994; Ladewski et al., 1994; Marx et al., 1994; Vithal et al. 1995). However, it runs counter to the experience of the ESL teacher in Eyring's (1989) study (see chapter 2). It will be recalled that Susan encountered so much resistance from her students that she had to add to the project work what she called "traditional ESL stuff."
4.3.2 Student Creativity

The teachers in the present study also talked about some of the specific qualities of their students' project work which particularly pleased them. As indicated in section 4.2.3, both teachers mentioned how creative their students could be when they took their project work beyond the basic requirements. The following excerpt from field notes captures Ms. Brown's pride in her students' creativity. She talks about how much emotional meaning the words hurt, power and blue could have for three of her students. (B=Ms. Brown, R=researcher, S=student)

B: (Showing the researcher the cover-page of a student's written summary of the 'search a word' project) Isn't that creative? It's amazing. Isn't it great to see what they can do?
R: Yes. They look cute. Why is the Mickey Mouse holding a baseball bat?
B: Ask him. Tell us what it means, (S). Why is he (Mickey) angry?
S: Because my word is 'hurt.'
B: Oh, he can definitely 'hurt' anything with that bat. (Talking to the researcher alone) Do you know why he chose the word 'hurt'? His father is a bit abusive. These kids are truly amazing. Some of them really take this project seriously. I had a student researching the word 'blue' because she was having some tough time adjusting. And another one did her research on 'power' because she felt her controlling father had too much power over her. See what I mean. It's very gratifying.

Ms. Jones was also proud of her students' accomplishments. Her pride is shown in her comments quoted in section 4.2.3 as well as in the following excerpt from audio-taped field notes taken in a June 6, 1995, class. (It should be noted that Ms. Jones had previously told her students that their presentations should be creative.) (J=Ms. Jones, R=researcher)

J: What do you think?
R: I am impressed. They did so well.
J: Yes, they amaze me. One group actually did too well. Don't you think?
R: Which one? The group that had a color pie chart?
J: Yes. Looks like they had a big help from somebody on that. But they are good. Some of them can do that kind of stuff on their own. Really.
R: They were very good. All the presentations were excellent.
J: They do well. Did you look at what they wrote?
R: Not, yet. I was thinking if I can borrow their work and look at them at home. Do you think it's okay to ask the students?
J: I think so. Remind me to mention that in class. You can give them (the students' work) back next time.
The teachers’ pride in their students’ creatively incorporating art work and computer graphics in their written reports seems to be consistent with the objectives Carlton High hoped to achieve in its ESL Writing course. One of the handouts distributed at a September 29, 1996, Parents’ Night meeting lists one of the ESL Writing course objectives as “students will learn to combine art work, magazine pictures, or computer graphics with writing to present their projects creatively” (ESL Core Course Goals, p. 3).

We have seen that fostering student creativity is given as a goal for project-based instruction in the general literature and that it is also mentioned by the teachers in the present study as being one of their goals. Given the findings presented above, the fact that creativity is not given as a goal for project-based instruction in the SLA literature seems problematic. Recall that the importance of this goal is tied to Kilpatrick’s (1925) idea that schools should prepare learners for rapid and unexpected changes in direction. Ms. Brown had at least one immigrant student who took the opportunity presented by a search a word project to explore the depression she felt adjusting to life in a new country.

4.3.3 Unexpected Learning

The second thing the teachers emphasized as being good about project-based instruction is what is sometimes called incidental learning. They reported that project-based instruction is particularly satisfying because in the process of doing the work students can learn many things not directly related to the topic of their research. Ms Jones said:

Well, organizing interesting projects is a tough thing to do. You want them (the students) to be excited and learn some serious things. But it’s worthwhile. There’s a lot of stuff to learn in the process. You know what I mean? They may not learn enough about the topic that they are doing their projects on. But they learn other things. They find out about things. Even just finding out that they don’t like something is learning.
Ms. Brown also talked about the importance of incidental learning, though here the term incidental may be misleading. For Ms. Brown knows that some of her students will learn as much about research itself as they will about the topic they are researching. (R=researcher, B=Ms. Brown)

R: Did you think you achieved your purpose in doing this project?
B: Yes, I did.
R: In general, you were happy about what students did?
B: Yes. Yes. I mean you are going to get different levels of environment. But you are going to shake them up a bit. And you are going to get them to recognize this is a dictionary, this is a thesaurus, and this is a periodical, which they never encountered before. These are the magazines, and these are rooms where the magazines are in. They've gone in, and they've found other magazines of interest to them. They found other information that had nothing to do with their paper. But, they learned other things.

Ms. Brown later expanded on this point:

Well they did learn a lot about their word, and there was learning that took place that was unexpected learning that you cannot, you know, say this is what the end result is going to be with this kind of learning, because there is the whole thing that happens in that kind of a process. So, they may be, they may feel, oh, it's really hard to do, you know. I can’t do this. It’s part of the process to find out that there are difficulties that they have. To find out the various books that I ask them to research the word in are, and how they are used, and whether they have an index, or glossary, and how to use those. Those are all the things that they had to learn. And that was in the process.

Other studies have reported that teachers comment positively on the opportunities project-based instruction creates for enriching student learning. But their comments seem to be directed more towards the variety of activities projects can encompass and the positive effects this can have on the students’ understanding of the topic being explored. For instance, Connie, the teacher participant in Ladewski et al. (1994), enjoyed teaching project-based science because she thought the hands-on activities in project work enhanced her students’ understanding of the science curriculum. Ms. Jones and Ms. Brown’s comments about students learning unexpected things, for instance about their own likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, seem to be new.
4.3.4 Beyond the Basics

Analysis of the data gathered in interviews reveals that the teachers in the present study evaluated project-based instruction positively. They felt that their students generally do well in their project work, and commented specifically on their creativity and unexpected learning. Their general satisfaction with project-based instruction confirms the majority view in the general literature. For instance, the teachers in Krajcik et al. (1994), Ladewski et al. (1994), Marx et al. (1994), and Vithal et al. (1995) evaluated project-based instruction positively because they believed their students benefited from it by learning problem-solving, critical thinking, cooperative and independent learning, and decision-making skills. The teachers in the present study did not mention all of the above as reasons for enjoying project-based instruction. (Though this fact, and the fact that many were goals they held, should not lead us to conclude that they were not achieved.) Nor did they mention an increase in student awareness of their future language needs as noted in Carter and Thomas (1986), Coleman (1992), Gardner (1995), and Hilton-Jones (1988). But the two reasons they do give are not mentioned by other teachers whose views are reported in the literature.

There are two points that should be made here. First, it will be recalled that Hirsch (1996), Krajcik et al. (1994), Schudt (1991), and Scott (1994) all question the efficiency of project-based instruction. They are concerned that students learning through this form of activity waste their time finding out information that their teachers could tell them directly. Hirsch (1996) is also concerned that students sometimes discover things that are irrelevant to the task at hand and even wrong. Have the critics missed the point of project-based instruction? It is interesting that the teachers in the present study see project-based instruction in much the same way as the critics do but evaluate it differently. When they emphasize student creativity (using color pie charts for example) they are emphasizing the value of things their teachers may not be able to teach them directly. And while the critics
seem to fear the irrelevant (and the mistaken) the teachers here positively welcome it as unexpected learning which may be as important as the expected learning.

From their remarks quoted in section 4.3.3, the teachers in the present study seem to have a larger goal for project-based instruction than the critics may realize, one that goes beyond covering a particular unit in Social Studies or Writing. Both Ms. Jones and Ms. Brown comment on unexpected learning such as discovering one’s likes and dislikes, or strengths and weaknesses, when challenged by a project to learn on one’s own. They said that students “may not learn enough about the topic that they are doing their projects on” but they learn other things which are “part of the process.” The implication is that they think self-knowledge may be as important as subject knowledge. Could project-based instruction have efficiencies of its own, efficiencies the critics have not taken into account?

The second point to make is, simply, that both teachers evaluated project-based instruction positively. This is of interest because in the SLA literature teachers’ evaluations of project-based and project-like instruction are mixed. While some anecdotal reports (Carter & Thomas, 1986; Coleman, 1992; Gardner, 1995; Hilton-Jones, 1988) suggest that SLA teachers may enjoy project-based instruction, Eyring (1989), the only formal study conducted on project-based instruction in SLA education, shows teacher evaluations to be mixed. It will be recalled that Susan, unlike the teacher participants in the present study, reported student resistance, absenteeism, non-co-operation, and disrespect.

Could this difference be due to Susan’s insecurity organizing a project for the first time, while Ms. Brown and Ms. Jones had several years’ experience of project work before the present study began? According to Prabhu (1987), one of the reasons for his 8-13 year old students’ negative evaluations of task-based learning was their teachers’ uncertainty about classroom procedures. Or could the difference be due to the fact that the student participants in the Eyring study are adults who pay for their courses and expect value for money, that is, in this case, mainly immigrant students preparing to start post-baccalaureate
But how do the student participants in the present study evaluate project-based instruction? As we shall see in the following section, the findings, if not unprecedented, do seem unexpected.

4.4 Students’ Evaluations of Project-based Instruction

As shown in the previous section, the two teacher-participants in the present study evaluated project-based instruction positively. Student evaluations on the other hand were mixed. Seventy-three students were interviewed for the study. Of these, 13 (18%) said they liked projects, 18 (25%) had mixed feelings, and 42 (57%) said they did not like projects. In this final section of chapter 4 we will present the evaluations of the students who liked project-based instruction and those who had mixed feelings about it. The evaluations of the students who did not like projects will be presented and discussed in chapter 5.

4.4.1 Students’ Positive Evaluations

Students who liked project-based instruction said projects provided them with opportunities to seek information beyond their textbooks and to get below the surface meaning of things. Its multifaceted nature made learning more fun than teacher-centered instruction during which “students fall sleep.” Some students also felt that project-based instruction enabled them to improve a variety of specific skills, while a few said projects provided them opportunities to feel a sense of accomplishment.
4.4.1.1 Projects are Fun

The comments made by the four students below are representative of the comments made by all 13 students in this group. They help us understand what is fun for the students and the significance fun has for them.

Projects are good. It's lot of fun. When you do project, you don't just sit there. You go to libraries, downtown. You look at things, talk to people. Yeah. It's good.

In general, I think project is fun, because you look at one book, learn something, read another book, learn something else. It's fun. Also, you go to the library, talk to your friends. It's fun.

*I think you learn more by doing projects. It's fun. Like in Taiwan, teachers talk all the time, students fall asleep. In this way, you go to lot of places to look for things, it's fun.*

Projects are interesting to me. Like, especially, when I research the dictionary, I didn't know there are so many meaning this word has. When I looked at the Bible, my word is “proud,” I thought it is a bad word, but the Bible told me it is good word. The Bible gave me two ways to thinking about this word. So, I think it's interesting.

The researcher's field-notes seem to confirm what these students said. For instance, one day she talked to a student in the school library who seemed to be very happy working there. The researcher asked how she was doing with her project and she said she was pleased with it.

*I am happy about my project because I talk to people in the library. I can't do that in class, in classroom. I like to talk to people. ... I like bibliography, too. I didn't do it before, but it's fun. My friends in regular (non-ESL) class told me it's good. They have to do bibliography, too.*

These student interviews seem to confirm what their teachers said about project-based instruction. For instance, both teachers talked about projects allowing students to socialize among themselves and with other people, and about learning unexpected things in addition to the things they had to learn to complete their projects. None of the studies reported in the SLA literature give fun as one of the reasons students have for positively evaluating project-
based instruction. Owens' (1997) report on project-based calculus, however, is an example from the general literature which shows how motivating fun can be.

4.4.1.2 Opportunities to Learn and Improve Various Skills

Some students liked project-based instruction because it gave them opportunities to learn and improve their research, computer, writing and presentation skills. The following is an excerpt from one student's written summary of her project. In it, she explains how the search a word project helped her to learn library research skills such as how to locate resources through microfiche and periodicals:

Researching my word—miserable, I learned how to use microfiche and periodicals with useful steps. I also now (know) how to record the information of bibliography. ... I really appreciate our teacher gave us this chance to realize how important the libraries are because they provide a lot of knowledge to people. Now I have the researching skills for the next researching project.

Another student also reported liking project-based instruction because it helped him to learn research skills. He said he needed to learn these skills because he had not done research at school in Taiwan:

I think projects are good. We do lot of research in projects. I think that's good. In Taiwan, I did not do research. The teacher gave us the book and information. All information in the book. Here you have to do research. So, I think I should know how to do research. I know that in doing projects.

None of the other studies in the SLA literature report students liking project-based instruction because it helps them improve their research skills. But this finding seems to confirm what the teachers in the current study said in their evaluation of project-based instruction. As seen in the previous section, the teacher-participants reported that they liked project-based instruction because it allows students, among other things, to learn how to use library facilities.

A few students also reported liking projects because they could use their computers. One student said:
Projects, I like. When teacher say do project, I draw picture on the computer. Draw the graph. I write, word-processing, in the computer. I use my new computer to do that. I e-mail my friends, too. It’s good. I like it. Sitting in the classroom, boring.

Another student said she liked using computers because her teacher seemed to like what she did with them:

I like it (projects). I make funny pictures for my projects. I use my computer. Teacher say do anything. Make your project fun. I do that. I make chart for presentation. I write in big and small words. Some in black, some in green colors. Teacher like it.

Learning to use computers is stated as a core goal in ESL courses at Carlton High. Similar findings are reported in Owens’ (1997) study of student engagement in a multi-age, project-based, technology-supported mathematics classroom. The students participating in the Owens’ study reported liking project-based instruction especially because they had access to the World Wide Web, educational CD-ROMs, and word processing software.

Many students said that they liked project-based instruction because it helped them to improve their language skills. One student reported that her writing skills improved while she worked on her projects. (S=student, R=researcher)

S: I don’t know, but so many students don’t like to do the projects, … but I think it’s okay. I feel the things I look up for project help me improve my writing. … At least I learned one thing. My writing skills is improved.
R: How does doing projects help you with your writing?
S: I feel it help.
R: Yes. But how? How is writing for a project different from other writing? Can you not improve your writing when you don’t do projects?
S: No. It’s different. In project, you have to write something yourself. The teacher don’t tell you.
R: Don’t tell you what?
S: Information. Because you find the information, read them, summarize them, and write them up. So, you take notes, write down things. You practice writing.

Another student said there is a lot of note-taking involved in doing projects. She did not like taking notes, but she thought it was a useful skill to have and that it helped improve her writing and vocabulary:
It's (project) okay. I learn taking notes. I don’t like. Copy many things, it’s boring. But, taking notes useful, because you can give people information. You can learn new words. Improve your writing, because you are copying things.

Improving writing skills is not mentioned in the SLA literature as one of the reasons for students’ positive evaluations of project-based instruction. On the contrary, the students in Eyring’s (1989) study did not think that the writing they did as part of their project work was real writing. However, it is believed that writing can become more interesting if it is done as part of a project because then students have a reason to write. This is discussed in Dewey and Dewey (1915). It seems the students in the present study would agree. Having to take a lot of notes as part of their research projects helped improve their writing.

One student reported that working on projects helped her to practice thinking in English:

I learned how to think in English. Now when I look at things, I write it down in English. Don’t think in Chinese. Project helped me to practice thinking in English.

Other students reported that their communication (i.e., presentation) skills improved as the result of doing projects. One said,

I like projects. It’s interesting. Especially, the presentation is good for communication. Like, I learned lot of grammar in Hong Kong. I think it’s good. But, my speaking was not good. Presentation my projects helped me to improve my communication. Yeah. It’s good.

Others implied that projects helped them to learn content through language. The following is an excerpt from a student’s written response:

The definition of ‘hurt’ found in the dictionary is like this “hurt -- to cause physical injury or pain to oneself, an animal.” “To feel pain in part of one’s body.” “To cause pain.” I found this in a dictionary called “Oxford Advanced Learner.” After doing some search on the word “hurt,” I discovered much interesting stuff about it. For example the word “hurt,” does not represent only physical injury but also mental injury. Authors used hurt in their poems or poetry occasionally to show their feelings.

Thinking in English is not mentioned by the teachers as a goal for project-based instruction, but as pointed out in section 4.2.11, thinking in English is one of the goals the BC Ministry
of Education (1987) hoped ESL students would achieve. The teachers mentioned helping students improve communication and other language skills as one of their goals for project-based instruction (see section 4.2.10). Recall that Ms. Brown organizes projects in which students “can’t do everything all by themselves. They have to talk to people. Talk to librarians, ask questions. It’s language learning. Not a separate thing.” Improving communication skills is also department policy (see Table 2 in section 4.2.2). Indeed, at the time the present study was conducted, Carlton High scheduled ESL Oral and Drama courses to help ESL students improve their communication skills.

4.4.1.3 Opportunities to Feel a Sense of Accomplishment

Some students liked project-based instruction because it provided them opportunities to feel a sense of accomplishment. As can be seen from the following examples from interviews, they were happy they could complete projects that at first had seemed overwhelming.

When I was doing it, actually, I think, I thought this project was annoying me a little bit. I thought. So many researching. I couldn’t finish all my research in class, had to go to library after class. When I put them together, I fell (felt) like I did my best. Because I thought, my ability was not good. But when I put them together, I saw so many information is there, and felt like success when I finished the project.

I liked typing it (the summary report for the project) in on the computer. It was interesting. And corrected what I worked. If I see it, happy because I did so many thing. I was try to find many dictionary, I draw picture, and collect them all, and make this project. I was kind of happy.

Some students expressed a similar feeling in their written evaluation of one of the projects observed for this study. For instance, one student wrote:

I found out a lot about words finding in how to find the books and what should I have as my information to research a word. While going around finding all those information I found out that I should find as many things or information as I can to write my paragraph. It would be much easier if I have all the information to write an essay not(t) on only doing research on words but also projects researches and labs.
Fostering a sense of accomplishment is not mentioned by the teacher-participants as one of their goals for project-based instruction, though it is clearly implied in the importance they place on students presenting their work to their peers. But, as discussed in chapter 2, student accomplishment is one of the factors that leads to positive teacher evaluations of project-based instruction (e.g., Kimbrough, 1995; Diffily, 1996; Wolk, 1994). It will be recalled that Kimbrough's (1995) Denver, Colorado 9th and 10th graders showed off their work to other students; that Diffily's (1996) kindergartners impressed their relatives by proudly and confidently showing off the results of their Museum exhibition project; and that Wolk's (1994) first, second, and fifth graders also felt accomplished, especially the student who reported to her father that she had come to believe in herself.

4.4.1.4 Summary of Students' Positive Evaluations

The students who evaluated project-based instruction positively said they liked it mainly because it is fun (more fun than teacher-centered instruction) and because it allowed them to learn and improve their research, computer, writing and presentation skills. Some of the students also reported liking projects because they provided them opportunities to feel a sense of accomplishment. The reasons students provided for their positive evaluations of project-based instruction seem to be consistent with the researcher's field notes, their teachers' evaluations, departmental policy, ministry goals, and the general literature (Ministry of Education, 1987; Owens, 1997; Kimbrough, 1995; Diffily, 1996; Wolk, 1994).

The students who liked project-based instruction also seem to have liked it for the right reasons. They thought projects were fun mainly because of the opportunities they provided to get out of the classroom and to learn things for themselves: "You go to libraries, down-town," "you go to lot of places to look for things," "you look at one book, learn something, read another book, learn something else," "The Bible gave me two ways to thinking about this word." The skills they learned were broadly speaking either language
skills (writing, oral presentation) or research skills (including computer skills). Finally, the students' sense of accomplishment relates to their perception of how much they were able to do on their own: "If I see it, happy because I did so many thing," "But when I put them together, I saw so many information is there, and felt like success when I finished the project."

4.4.2 Students' Mixed Evaluations

As pointed out earlier, 18 (25%) of the students interviewed for the study reported mixed feelings about project-based instruction. The students liked and disliked it at the same time. While some students expressed themselves in general terms, citing a variety of reasons for both liking and disliking projects, others singled out specific features of project work which they had mixed feelings about. For example, they talked about learning through projects versus learning from textbooks, individual versus group projects, learning to do research versus the amount of time research takes, and learning to think critically.

4.4.2.1 Generally Speaking...

The following excerpts from interviews with three students show how the same student could be both positive and negative about project-based instruction during the same forty-minute interview. (R=researcher, S=student)

R: How do you like to learn by doing projects?
S: I think it's good. You can learn many things. Like find books in the library, how to speak in front of classmates. Like the eye-contact. I don't know. Sometimes I don't like it. Too much work. I don't know what I learn doing projects.

R: What do you think of learning by doing projects?
S: I am not sure if learning by doing projects is a good way to learn. Some projects are interesting, and others are not. I like history projects because I like to learn about people. Other projects, I don't like them.
R: How do you like learning by doing projects?
S: It's okay. I think projects are useful because there are lots of projects in the regular classes. But sometimes, it's hard, because you can't find books. I don't like it. I like teacher telling me.

The first student begins by saying he can learn many things doing projects. But almost immediately he goes on to say that he is not sure what he learns. The second student is not sure projects are a good way to learn. She likes some projects but not others. The third student would prefer a more traditional form of teaching but knows that students in regular (non-ESL) classes do a lot of projects.

4.4.2.2 Learning through Projects versus Learning from Textbooks

While some students expressed their mixed feelings at a general level, others provided specific reasons for their dilemmas. The following examples from interviews illustrate how some students seemed to be torn between project learning and learning from textbooks. (R=researcher, S=student)

R: What do you think of learning by doing projects?
S: I think I like to do project. I like to go to library, drawing pictures, write up, and make a book. But, sometimes, I don't like. I don't feel I learn anything. I think textbooks are better.
R: Why do you feel you don't learn anything?
S: I don't know. Textbook is better than project. But, project is fun. You can do many things.
R: Like what?
S: Like going to library, draw pictures, computers, and talk to people.
R: Why is a textbook better?
S: I don't know. I think it is.

This student was clearly bothered by the fact that she was not learning from a textbook but would not (or could not) explain why she felt this way. The student in the following example felt the same way and was able to give his reasons. (R=researcher, S=student)

R: How do you like learning by doing projects?
S: It's okay. Learning from textbook is better, because you know the important points. But when you do projects, you don’t know that because there are too much.
R: You don’t think doing projects is useful?
S: Sometimes doing projects can be useful because you can learn something that textbook doesn’t have. It’s good. You can do a lot. Like, I think projects helped my communication skills. When we make presentations of project, I practice my speaking. It’s good. But, like when we doing research, we spend lot of time look for things. I think we learn more from the textbook.

R: So, you think learning from textbook is better?

S: Yes. I think so. We did projects in Hong Kong. The teacher gave us information. We found information from textbooks. That way, you know you did the main points.

This student also seems to be torn between learning by doing projects and learning from textbooks. He liked projects because he could learn things that are not in the textbook and because projects helped him to practice his English. At the same time, he said learning from textbooks is better because that way he would be learning the “important points.” He also seemed to be worried that in doing projects he spent a lot of time looking for things before he found them.

4.4.2.3 Group Work versus Individual Work

Some students seemed to be having a problem deciding if they preferred group projects or individual projects. They could not decide because both seemed to have advantages and disadvantages.

Group project, I don’t like. Sometimes when four or five of us doing group projects, we don’t talk about study. We talk about somebody else. It’s okay, too, sometimes. When we work with foreign friends (native English speaker classmates) it’s okay. We speak English. When we work with Chinese people, we speak Cantonese. I don’t like.

This student liked group projects when they included native English speakers because she could practice her English. She did not like them when the group consisted only of Cantonese speakers because then they would spend their time talking about people they know. Other students were in the same dilemma but for different reasons.

I like to do projects alone. I don’t have to wait for other people to have time to look for things. Depends on the people, too. Sometimes you can get more ideas. I like it.
I think group project are good. Classmates can share. Somebody do the information, somebody write it up, and somebody can present it. But, sometimes, it’s problem. Some people don’t do their work. You wait for them, call them, and you have to do it alone. Then, I don’t like group projects.

The first student preferred individual projects because she thought she could do the work more efficiently herself. But she acknowledged that sometimes group members contributed ideas. The second student said much the same thing as the first but with a different emphasis. He preferred group projects in which group members share the work. But he acknowledged that it could be frustrating because sometimes group members don’t do their jobs.

4.4.2.4 Learning to do Research versus Learning More Important Things

A few students said they liked project-based instruction because they learned research skills. But at the same time they resented the fact that project work can be so time consuming, taking time away from learning more important things.

I think it’s (learning by doing projects) okay. We learn research skills. My friends in the mainstream said they have to do project in mainstream. .... Certain topics like research, like news articles, like special events happened, I’m not interested. Because we have nothing to do with it. Sometimes boring. Some topics like tax some people do it, not important. They should teach school things.

Some students expressed their mixed feelings towards project-based instruction in writing. The following excerpt is from one student’s written evaluation of one of the projects observed for the present study.

There are advantages and disadvantages of this research method (project-based instruction). This advantages are that it teaches me the ways to do research. ... This disadvantages are that its very time consuming. It takes up a lot of time. Sometimes I felt very frustrated because I was unable to find the information. It’s also a very boring method. I wonder why people do not b(p)ut all the information in one book so that we do not have to go through so many books just to get information which is almost similar in most of the reference book.
The dilemmas these students faced seem almost palpable. The first student did not doubt the value of learning how to do research. But he did doubt the value of what he learned from the research. He did not think news articles and tax were “school things.” The second student seems not to doubt and then to doubt the value of learning how to do research. Thinking about the frustration and boredom it involved leads him to wish someone else had done the work and published it in a (text)book.

4.4.2.5 Learning Well versus Learning a Lot

Some students reported mixed feelings about project-based instruction because it made them think. Projects challenged them in a way the simple textbook-based work they were used to doing in their home country did not. But they were not sure they liked this because it took a lot of time to do one project. (R=researcher, S=student)

S: Projects make you think. You can use Q-cards, but you can’t memorize when you do projects. Improvise, too. It’s good. Not like Taiwan. You have to memorize, eh, what is it? *Gudai de dongxi.*

R: Classics?

S: Yeah, yes. Classics. It’s (projects are) interesting. But, we have to spend lot of time doing one project. That I don’t like.

The following student makes a similar point. She compares project work in Canada with school work in Hong Kong.

Projects, I don’t know. I think... Like in Canada, the teacher always lets you do lot of projects to think and get your ideas and feelings down. But in Hong Kong, the teacher usually tells the students the important points and the students have to remember them or write the important points several times. All the assignment in Canada have to think before you write it. It takes lot of time. But in Hong Kong, you can easily answer all the questions by finding some words and sentences in the textbooks. So, it takes less than half hour to finish one assignment. But we have to do a lot more homework in Hong Kong. In Canada it’s different. So I get so anxiety and embarrassing every time I do presentation of project in front of the class.

It is clear that this student was in a dilemma when she tried to evaluate project-based instruction. On the one hand, she liked it because it made her think and challenged her to learn skills such as doing presentations that she did not have before. On the other hand, she
felt uncomfortable about it because it was time consuming and too challenging. That is, it made her feel nervous and anxious. She was nostalgic about her Hong Kong school experience which was more efficient because her teachers there indicated the main points; she could find the answers to her assignments in her textbooks; and because she did not have to present in front of her classmates.

4.4.2.6 Students in Dilemmas

As discussed in chapter 2, studies in mainstream education report that students like project-based instruction while studies in second language education show tensions among students' in their evaluations of project-based instruction. However, the data presented in this section suggest that project-based instruction is not a matter of either/or for students. That is, the same students may evaluate project-based instruction positively for some reasons and negatively for other reasons. This finding confirms Liang's (1998) report on the opinions and interactions of Chinese immigrant students engaged in cooperative learning in a Canadian secondary school.

Liang's analysis of observation and interview data collected from 49 ESL students revealed that the Chinese students found cooperative learning dilemmatic for many of the same reasons the students in the present study found group projects dilemmatic. For instance, they liked cooperative learning because it was good for creating ideas, practicing their English, and sharing the workload. At the same time, they felt that coming to a consensus among group members was time consuming; that some people do not do their fair share of the work; and that if they happened to work with people from the same linguistic group for several reasons (but not, as in the present study, to gossip about mutual acquaintances) they tended to speak in their L1.

The finding of the present study regarding the dilemmatic aspect of project-based instruction also confirms Tracy's (1997) findings. It will be recalled that in her study of
academic discourse at a departmental colloquium Tracy found that the academic colloquium involves multiple dilemmas at the individual as well as at the group level. For instance, individual presenters seemed to have faced dilemmas such as provoking thought versus linguistic elegance, and theoretical interest versus practical applicability. The findings of the present study suggest that project-based instruction is much like every-day life. Both are dilemmatic because both are complex (Billig et al., 1988; Lave, 1988). And this may be especially true for some immigrant students who have grown accustomed to different forms of school activity in their home countries. It seems necessary then to avoid viewing project-based instruction as an activity which is simply good or bad.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter we have presented the ESL teachers goals for project-based instruction as well as teachers' positive evaluations and students' positive and mixed evaluations of project-based instruction. Analysis of the data shows significant discrepancies between the teachers' goals and the goals of teachers reported in the SLA literature. That is, the teacher participants in the present study had many more goals than those stressed in the SLA literature. The teachers' goals seem to be consistent with their department's, school board's, and ministry's goals and with the goals for project-based instruction reported in the general literature. On the other hand the teachers had three goals that are not stressed in the general literature, namely, the language socialization of ESL students into a particular classroom culture, the language socialization of ESL students into a particular social culture, and teaching academic language in context.

The teachers' evaluations of project-based instruction are positive. That is, the teachers are generally satisfied with their own and their students' achievements in project work. The student participants' evaluations of project-based instruction showed some discrepancies. For example, only 18% of students evaluated project-based instruction
positively. They seemed to be happy with their project work. Twenty-five percent of students had mixed feelings about projects. They liked them for some reasons and disliked them for other reasons. But 57% of the students evaluated project-based instruction negatively. According to these students, as we will see in chapter 5, project work is not a good way to learn.

The teachers' positive evaluations of project-based instruction contradict Eyring's (1989) and Flowerdew and Miller's (1995) findings, but confirm the findings reported in the general literature. The students' mixed evaluations, both as a group and in some cases as individuals, confirm the findings of previous studies (e.g., Eyring, 1989; Liang 1998). In chapter 5, we will examine what made 42 students evaluate project-based instruction negatively through the analysis of their accounts, the process of their project work, and possible models that may help explain the discrepancies between the teachers' and those students' evaluations.
CHAPTER 5: TENSIONS, DISCREPANCIES, AND POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The data presented in chapter 4 establish a discrepancy between teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction. While both teachers evaluated the activity positively, only 13 students (18%) agreed with them. Of the rest, 18 students (25%) had mixed feelings about projects. That is, they evaluated it positively for some reasons and negatively for other reasons. We will see in the present chapter that the researcher’s observations seem to confirm the teachers’ evaluations. That is, not only were students learning what the teachers intended, their final oral presentations and written reports were impressive. We will also see that despite their apparent success, 42 students (57%) evaluated project-based instruction negatively. According to them, it is not a good way to learn.

This chapter explores the discrepancy between teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction by first presenting the reasons students gave for not liking project-based instruction. The teachers’ positive evaluations are then confirmed by the researcher’s observations. But if the students achieved the goals their teachers had set for them, why were so many dissatisfied? Possible explanations for the discrepancy between teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction are discussed with reference to the three models proposed in chapter 2. Is the discrepancy to be explained by different educational philosophies (traditional versus progressive), different educational cultures (Chinese versus Canadian), different models of language learning (language/content integration versus separation), or some combination of the three?
5.2 Students’ Negative Evaluations

Over half of the student-participants in the present study seemed to be frustrated with the student-centered and apparently unstructured nature of project-based instruction. They thought teachers did not care about their learning because they left them largely on their own. They also seemed to be frustrated because they were spending too much time learning things that were not relevant to them. They felt that projects did not help them learn the vocabulary and grammar they needed to pass key exams.

5.2.1 Too Hard, too Much, too Boring

Some of the students, who evaluated project-based instruction negatively, said they did not like projects because the work was too difficult, there was too much of it, or it was boring. Many of these students used the word hard. Some were clearly referring to specific aspects of project work. For instance, as can be seen from the following excerpts from interviews, some students found the in-class oral presentations especially hard.

Research projects are my least favorite. It’s too hard. The presentation part of it is scary. Sometimes, you are very nervous and you can’t say what you want to say. Everybody looks at you. I am afraid I can’t express myself very well, and people don’t understand me.

No projects. I scare projects. Presenting projects is hard. I feel like my English is not good enough. I feel like losing face in class. Feel like I am losing marks for whole group.

Other students said that they were overwhelmed simply by the amount of work involved in doing projects.

Doing projects, all projects are henmefan (very troublesome). I hate it. Henmefan. It takes lot of time. I have to look for lot of information. I don’t like it.

I don’t like projects. It’s hard. Research..., like, you have to find a lot of information, books, dictionaries. Like, and make stuff. And also we can copy the book. It’s hard. The important points. Lot of information. Don’t know which is important.
Getting the information for the project is hard. It takes a lot of time to look for the information, organize the information, rewriting it in your own words, integrating the information. You have to be very detailed. And I don't know how to say some things.

No, I don't like it (project). You have to go to the library and find all the information. Then, you have to summarize them. You have to choose which is important and which is useless, and ... very difficult.

Some students gave more details of the difficulties they faced when they were asked by Ms. Brown to write about their experiences during a Search a Word project.

In doing my research for this word, I did encounter some difficulties. First, I couldn't find some of the dictionaries list in our library. The school library didn't have the "Concordance to Shakespeare." I had to go downtown library. It took me whole day to find the word "funny." Also, in some of the reference books, such as the concordance to the Bible they do not have the word "funny" and I have to use other word which have the same meaning with the word "funny". Finally I had to spend a lot of times just to copy the information from the reference books. This is very tedious.

I think this word we have to find dictionary, it was too many, like it has many dictionary for this. Example this, it has too many. When I find this book. I need to find all the book about it. I think it's too many to find it. It needs too much time, because they (there) are too many dictionaries there to find. It was boring, cause I have too many work, and I don't know well if I did it.

Are these weaker students complaining about things they find difficult to do?

Possibly. As we have seen, the ESL program at Carlton High groups together students of differing English proficiency. In these multi-level classrooms, students who are less competent linguistically may naturally find some activities more difficult, and thus boring.

5.2.2 Too Much Time

In chapter 4, we saw that some of the students with mixed feelings about projects said that they liked them because they acquired research and thinking skills but disliked them because they were time consuming. Some of the students who evaluated project-based instruction negatively also mentioned time as one of the reasons for their dislike of projects. They seemed to be under pressure to move on as quickly as possible, and project work was slowing them down.
To find too many dictionary, is the same word, the same meaning, we didn’t need it. If the meaning is more, we need it.

*I don’t want to do projects. Projects take too much time. I am sixteen. I have to finish high school. When we do projects on one word for two months, I don’t have time to learn enough things to finish.*

I think we didn’t have to do this project, because it doesn’t contain many information. We didn’t learn many information. This project is not interesting like other projects, because this one we have to find things from the dictionary. Just one word. So many time. We just copy. It’s boring. ... We should learn more. We don’t have time.

Some of the students made it clear that the pressure they were feeling was coming from their parents. (S=student, R=researcher)

Projects are wasting of time. My mom’s waiting for me to finish and go back. If we do projects all the time, I can’t learn more and finish. My mom should go back. My dad is in Taiwan.

S: I don’t think I learn anything from project. I just spend too much time doing it. We do one project, it’s over. We don’t think about it later.
R: What do you mean?
S: We just spend two months doing research. We don’t learn anything. I want to go ELC. My mom said I should go to ELC.
R: Why does your mom say you should go to ELC?
S: Because I am in ESL for two years. And my mom says I learn English faster in mainstream. My friend didn’t speak good English last year. Just like me. They moved to White Rock. No ESL there. He speaks much better English than me. So, my mom says I should go mainstream.

These students seemed to be under self-imposed and parental pressure to learn as much as they can in the shortest time possible and then to move on to the next stage of their education. From their point of view, project-based instruction was preventing them from doing this. Similar comments will be presented later in this chapter.

5.2.3 Irrelevant

The teachers’ main goal for project-based instruction was to prepare students to be life-long learners. The students, however, seemed to have more immediate needs in mind
and they were frustrated by what they saw as irrelevant to them. One student seemed to be impatient to end her general education and begin vocational training:

> I don't need projects. I want to learn about Canada. Places and people. I want to work for airports. Tell people about Canada. I think I can read books about that.

But other students were impatient to take the next step in their general education and felt that project work was not giving them the skills they needed to get there. (S=student, R=researcher)

R: If you want to go to mainstream, why don’t you go?
S: My teacher say no.
R: Why would she say no?
S: She say my writing is not good.
R: Why don’t you like projects if your writing is not good?
S: Teacher don’t teach me writing when I do projects. We just spend too much time doing projects.

S: I don't like research. Projects. I don't need it. I want to improve my English. I want to go to ELC. I want to go to mainstream. I don't think projects are useful.
R: What's useful for going to ELC and mainstream?
S: English. Wenfa (grammar) and xiezuo (composition).
R: Projects can be useful in universities. There are a lot of them there. Aren't you going to a university?
S: No. I am going into accounting. I'll be working in my dad's factory.

It can be seen from these examples that the students, like their teachers, seemed to have goals. And they were measuring what they accomplished against what they hoped to achieve. Just as the teachers evaluated project-based instruction positively because it helped further their long-term goals, these students were evaluating it negatively because they were not getting what they required to satisfy their immediate needs.

5.2.4 Basics

One of the teachers' goals for project-based instruction was to challenge students' creativity and resourcefulness. But the students said they wanted to learn the basics. They also seemed to have a different conception of creativity than their teachers. For instance, as
noted in chapter 4, adding computer graphics and drawings to written reports is considered by the teachers and their department to be potentially creative. But according to the following excerpt from interviews, at least one student thought drawing a “kindergarten thing.”

*Like last year, we had a teacher. She liked to ask us to draw pictures for our projects. She also made us color the pictures. She thought it was cute and creative. But I think it’s like a kindergarten thing. She criticized some people because they didn’t do well. Actually, people didn’t do well because they thought it was boring. You don’t learn English by drawing pictures. They should teach us useful basic things like how to speak and write English. Not drawing.*

Other students made it clear that they thought being creative depended on their first learning the basics.

*I don’t want to do projects. Teachers don’t teach in projects. They say we should do what we want. They tell us to *chuang xin* (be creative). I don’t know how. I don’t want it, too. I don’t even know *jiben de dong xi* (basic things) like writing good paragraph. So, I like teachers teach me *jiben de dong xi*. I am just ESL. I don’t want to *chuang xin*. I do that when I go to university.*

*Teachers say we should do creative projects. But, the information I find for project is so hard. I understand just a bit. How can I be creative if I don’t even understand what I read. I am only a high school student. Teachers should teach now, and I’ll be creative when I learn a lot.*

These students felt that what they needed to learn in school were the basics, that is, from their point of view, vocabulary, grammar, and writing good paragraphs. An older student put the point this way:

*The problem is teachers don’t really teach when we do projects. And I don’t think it’s good. We are new here. We need to know a lot of basic things. Everything. Starting from ABC. How to read, write, and speak in English. We need these. We can’t just do projects, read newspapers, and talk. Basic knowledge is very important. You can tell by looking at how the younger classmates write. They may speak fluently, but their writing in English is awful. Full of errors. That’s because they don’t have the basic knowledge in grammar and vocabulary. We, the older classmates, are a bit shy in speaking. But we write much better composition. We use our basic skills we learned in Taiwan before we came here. So, I think basic skills are very important. I don’t think you get that from projects.*
The issue of basics versus creativity in project-based instruction has been widely debated in the general literature but is not discussed in the SLA literature. And yet the issue arises in a particularly acute form here where it appears that ESL teachers and students may have different conceptions of creativity, may evaluate it differently, and may assign to it a role in different stages of the students’ education.

5.2.5 More Information

Project-based instruction, by its nature, is process oriented. In addition, the teacher participants in the present study regarded project work as valuable experience for ESL students because schooling in their home countries was product oriented. Indeed, one of the projects (Search a Word) was specifically designed to emphasize process. The process of doing projects was also thought to be useful for acquiring language, skills, and for socialization. However, as can be seen from the following excerpts from interviews, the students seemed to want less process and more product, that is, less research and more information.

I like Socials project. We research about Canada, China, people, like children, women. I want to know about this. I learn information in Socials project. Doing projects about one word, boring.

This project is boring. Not useful. I want to learn more information. Like how many people are in Canada.

One word project is boring. It doesn’t have many information. I want to learn more information.

We shouldn’t have done projects in this class. It’s ESL Writing. They should teach us information about writing. Like how you make your writing good. Like, information. Not projects.

Many students mentioned the Search a Word project, which will be described in detail later in this chapter. For now, it should be noted that the project was organized for students to experience the process of doing research, not as a means of gathering information on a topic of interest. Thus the topic was just one word. Also, the project did not require
students to understand everything they read. There would be time later to reflect on what they had found. But apparently some of the students did not understand the purpose of the project. They thought that because they did not understand everything, the work was not useful.

Projects are not useful, because when I do projects, I don’t understand. That’s not useful. We just spend lot of time doing it.

Research projects are not helpful in learning English. You just look at things and take notes. You don’t have to understand things when you do projects.

A similar point was made by some students in their written report about the Search a Word project observed for the study.

I didn’t like this project. It’s too boring. Just found the dictionary. Lot of dictionaries. Too many words. Lot of new words, I don’t understand it even if I find them.

I don’t like this project. The Bible was hard. I don’t understand what it says. Shakespeare, okay. My cousin told me about him. So it was okay. Other information hard, I understand half. Too many new words. I asked my friends. Still I understand half, because my friends didn’t know it either. I think it is not useful if you don’t understand the information. I want to know the information.

These students wanted to learn the facts. That is, they wanted new information which they could assimilate quickly. They did not see the point of doing the research which is needed to establish the facts. Nor did they see why their teacher might have asked them to consult material which they could only partially understand.

5.2.6 Critical Thinking is not for Children

Fostering critical thinking was one of the goals the teachers hoped to achieve through project-based instruction. As pointed out by Ms. Jones, the teachers organized projects around controversial issues such as capital punishment and Quebec sovereignty in order to achieve these goals. However, the students who evaluated project-based instruction negatively did not think that the issues were their concern.
Some projects, don’t teach you things I want to know. Like, somebody killed, I can see it on TV. Don’t make us do it at school.

Last year, we did a project about Quebec. It’s about separation. I don’t think it’s useful for children. The government can decide. If the government decide Quebec separate, it’s okay. It’s not useful. I want learn English.

It is obvious from their comments that some students did not share their teachers’ purpose in conducting these projects. Where their teachers saw controversial issues which created opportunities for critical thinking, the students thought the issues were irrelevant to their studies. Similar comments were made by two students during a lunch time conversation with the researcher. (June 17, 1995: R=researcher, S1=student 1, S2=student 2)

R: Did you like today’s discussion in class?
S1: Yes, it’s okay.
R: How about you (S2)?
S2: It’s okay except I am not sure why we had to talk about the law. If the government has a law about something, we should follow. I am sure the law was made by lots of knowledgeable people. Why should children talk about it?
R: Why do you think the teacher asked you guys to have the discussion?
S2: I don’t know.
S1: I am not sure.
R: Wasn’t it about being critical of things? To be critical thinkers?
S2: Yes. But I am sure people came up with the law carefully. Who are we to question it? We are just children.
S1: It was a good practice of oral English, though.

We have seen from the discussion in chapter 2 and the teachers’ goals presented in chapter 4 that fostering critical thinking is believed to be one of the most important educational objectives that can be achieved through project-based instruction. But, as the comments above make clear, some students feel that critical thinking is something for adults. Though they did not say so in so many words, perhaps these students feel that critical thinking, like creativity, is something that depends on first acquiring the basics. If that is the case, they may not share with their teachers the same conception of critical thinking. Though the students do not question its importance, they seem to think that critical thinking should come after not during their education.
5.2.7 Teachers Should Teach

It is clear from chapter 4 that the teachers believed it is important for their students to acquire independent learning skills and that project-based instruction is an excellent means of achieving this goal. However, as will be seen below, some of the students did not think projects were a "school thing." They thought they could do them on their own, with the help of a librarian. When they are in school, they said, teachers should teach.

I like the teacher give me the information. I don’t want to waste time. I like to copy down the information. Create some paragraph.

In projects, teachers don’t care. They say students do everything. You do the project, they say excellent. They give you lot of time. They don’t give you pressure to study hard.

We shouldn’t do many projects. The teachers should teach more, and more from the textbook.

Projects are not good. They are not school thing. You can do it on your own. Library people can show you.

I don’t think it’s necessary to do projects. It is not useful. It’s not necessary for the school to teach us this. The library people can help you. Schools should teach things other people can’t teach. It’s a waste of time to do this project for two months.

When we do projects, teachers don’t care. They don’t teach anything. I like studying in the classroom. I like teachers teach. No project.

Projects are no good. Teachers don’t care in projects. They say students do everything. You do the project, they say excellent. It’s not excellent. I want the teacher tell me my mistakes. But, in projects, they say you do it.

In project-based instruction, the teacher’s main roles are those of resource person and facilitator. However, as can be seen from the above examples, these roles were not appreciated by some of the students. They wanted more direct teacher involvement in their learning. There also seemed to be a desire for more teacher attention. This finding confirms Eyring’s (1989) study where the teacher participant felt that her facilitator role was under-appreciated by her project students.
5.2.8 Teachers Should Teach From Textbooks

Some students evaluated project-based instruction negatively because it does not rely on the use of textbooks. They said that without textbooks they did not know the "important points." They seemed to be suggesting that academic learning should be done through textbooks. Project learning resources such as newspapers and television programs were not considered "school things."

Learning from textbook is better, because that way you know the important points. But when you do research (project), you don't know that.

No textbook in projects. I don't like it. I don't have textbook, I don't know how to study. No important points. In projects, you read newspaper and magazine. No good.

One thing I don't like about project is we have not textbook. Teacher say we should read the newspaper, watch TV, talk to the library people, and ask classmates. I don't like that. Newspaper is not school thing. Textbook is school thing. You can read newspaper and watch TV at home. When you are at school, the teacher should teach from textbook.

Eyring's (1989) study did not identify the lack of a textbook as a possible reason for students' negative evaluations of project-based instruction. However, this finding of the present study seems to confirm Flowerdew and Miller's (1995) report that university students in Hong Kong were reluctant to make use of information not included in a textbook. The role of textbooks in Chinese education will be discussed more fully later in this chapter. For now, it is important to point out that school texts, unlike newspapers and television, are thought to be authoritative. This is not just a matter of factual accuracy. More significantly, as some of the students participants in the present study said, textbooks are thought to contain the important points.

5.2.9 Group Projects Waste Time

We saw in chapter 4 that promoting cooperative work was one of the goals teachers had for project-based instruction. As Ms. Jones pointed out, one of the things she did to
promote cooperative learning was to organize group projects. However, as we will see below, some students felt that group work was inefficient, while others said they could not rely on other group members to do their fair share of the work. We also saw in chapter 4 that both teachers and some students talked about project-based instruction providing opportunities for students to socialize. But some of the students who evaluated project-based instruction negatively seemed to see socializing as a waste of school time.

I hate projects. You don’t learn anything. You just having fun talking to people.

I like to do project alone, because when you do it in group, it wastes time. There is more arguments. That’s no good.

_I like to work individually on project. I think it’s most efficient way to study._ In group, sometimes, we chatting to each other. Talking.

I don’t like working in group projects. I like to do it alone because some people don’t like to work. If you work with your friends, it’s okay. No, I like work by myself.

I don’t like to do projects. It’s very hard. Like I did projects with four people, they didn’t do anything. The boy didn’t do anything. The girl, I had to talk to her a lot. I did the project most. I wasted time asking them to work. I didn’t learn much.

This finding of the present study confirms the findings of some studies reviewed in chapter 2. For example, students in Eyring’s (1989) project class also expressed their dissatisfaction with group projects, though the reason in that case was not wanting to study with the same group of people for a semester. But some of the Chinese immigrant students participating in Liang’s (1998) study did report disliking group work because of the time it takes to come to agreement among all members of a group and because some group members may not do their fair share of the work.

5.2.10 ESL is for Learning English

Teaching English is of course an important goal for ESL teachers and their department at Carlton High. They integrated teaching English with teaching culture,
creativity, and critical thinking through activities such as project-based instruction.

However, as we can see from their evaluations of project-based instruction, learning English seems to have been the major (sometimes the only) goal of many of the students in the ESL program. (R=researcher, S=student)

Projects are not useful. Because doing research (projects), you forget what you did. You can gain information, but you don’t learn language.

In ESL, I think they should teach conversation, grammar, and how to make sentences. They shouldn’t give us projects, make us draw pictures, and field trip. I want to go ELC. I need improve my English.

R: You said you don’t like projects. What would you do if you were the teacher?
S: I give them (students) more homework about grammar, words, and I will teach them how to write sentences, and stories.

R: You said you shouldn’t do projects in ESL. If you were the teacher, what would you do?
S: I teach them (ESL students) more idioms, grammars, because in ESL I didn’t learn that. I don’t understand.

My favorite strategy is reading and writing. Reading you learn vocabularies and grammar. In writing, you practice grammar.

*The most useful things from ESL is vocabulary and grammar. We memorized a lot of vocabulary in Taiwan. Certainly, because we didn’t practice them by speaking English, we forgot most of them. But when we started using them here, they came back very easily. The grammar we learned in Taiwan is useful here, too, because they don’t teach you grammar here. We are using grammar we learned in Taiwan. So, I don’t think ESL is very helpful.*

It is interesting to note that students seem to see projects as separate from learning language. They reported disliking project-based instruction because they did not think they were learning English. Though all of their project activities involved listening to, speaking, reading, and writing English, with attention to vocabulary and grammar, these students said they did not learn conversational or written English or English vocabulary or grammar. The students’ perception that “ESL is for learning English” is also expressed in their journal entries.
Dear Jason,

September 12,

I have been in Canada for half a year. ...I am sure that you have heard the word E.S.L. (English as a Second language) which is courses almost all newcomers have to take. I thought, as many people do too, it means you have to spend a whole day studying and speaking English and improve your English language skills. But we do so many things like field-trip, do projects, go to libraries. I think it's too bad. Too bad we don't just learn English all the time. Learn conversations, reading, and how to write good composition. I hope I am in ELC when see you next time.

Jim.

Some other students expressed similar perceptions when they talked about their favorite courses. The following excerpts from interviews illustrate this point. (R=researcher, S=student)

- **R:** What's your favorite course?
- **S:** Socials?
- **R:** Why Socials?
- **B:** Because I learn a lot of difficult vocabulary in Socials. Like people's names, places, and names of animals. Words that you don't use every day. Actually, I learn that in ESL Science class, too. Like the words you use in the lab. You don't say that at home.

- **R:** What's your favorite subject?
- **S:** ESL Literature.
- **R:** Why is that?
- **S:** I learn beautiful vocab in ESL literature. We read stories. I learn how to write in beautiful vocab, too. I like it.

Some students seemed to evaluate their teachers and themselves in terms of how much English language they taught/learned. For instance, one student wrote in her journal that she liked one teacher because she helped her to speak more fluently.

June 10,

Dear Jack,

I got your letter. Yes, I am in Canada for six months now. I am in ESL. I have a good teacher. She is very nice. She makes me feel comfortable to speak English. She is Socials teacher. My speaking skills improved in her class. I like her. She gave me a lot of opportunity to speak English. ....

Annie.
During the interviews, many students expressed their desire to exit ESL and enter ELC and mainstream classes. They thought they were ready for them because their English language skills were good enough.

I think I should go to ELC because I learned lot of vocab. I can speak well, too.

I hope my teacher let me go to transitional Socials next year. I think I learned enough English to go.

My teacher won't let me go to mainstream Socials. She says I am not ready. I think I am ready. My English has improved a lot. I can speak and write well. My grammar is good, too. I have a tutor. She teaches me grammar. I don't know why she (the teacher) won't let me go.

These findings seem to confirm Eyring's (1989) study where she reports how one student remembered only the 18 minute grammar lesson from a one hundred minute class. Like the student in Eyring's study, the participants making the above comments did not seem to think anything else other than English language skills is important. For instance, none of the students who thought they were ready to go to transitional or mainstream Social Studies classes mentioned their knowledge of Social Studies content as a criterion for their being ready to do so.

5.2.10.1 Teach Language Separately

As indicated by their comments in the previous section, students seemed to be suggesting that language should be taught separately from content. Some students made this point explicitly, saying that they prefer the four language skills to be taught separately.

(R=researcher, S=student)

R: You are not happy with the ESL here. What would you do to make better if you were the principal?
S: I ask teachers to teach speaking skills, writing skills, and vocab separately.
R: You are not happy with the ESL here. What would you do to make it better if you were the principal.
S: If I were the principal, I think I would make a class that students could learn specific things. Like in Socials. We try to do grammar, history, geography. I think I would do it one thing in one class. Like teach writing and grammar in English class, because when you learn a lot of things in one class, you don’t really learn it well.

I don’t like ESL here. They do everything together. Like projects, field trip, Socials, writing, and... I like them to teach me one thing at a time. Last year when I was at another school, they did that. It was good.

This finding is contrary to the teachers’ goals and to their department’s, school board’s, and ministry’s goals to teach language and content in an integrated manner. But it confirms Eyring’s (1989) findings, where the student participants complained that they did not learn grammar and writing by doing projects. The students’ accounts also seem to confirm the findings regarding ESL students’ beliefs about language learning made by Guo (doctoral research in progress), Horwitz (1987), Kanada (doctoral research in progress) and Yang (1993). Most of the participants in these studies reported learning vocabulary and grammar to be the most important aspect of learning a second/foreign language.

5.2.10.2 Reasons for Wanting to Learn Language Separately

The students provided a number of reasons for wanting separate grammar and vocabulary instruction. For instance, some students said they preferred writing over doing projects because they got written feedback on their writing but not on their projects. Others said that they needed to learn grammar and vocabulary in order to pass some key examinations. They said that they did not think projects were useful because they did not help prepare them for these exams. (S=student, R=researcher)

When writing, you can practice your grammar. I have to have good grammar because when I write, the teacher checks my grammar. Then, she tells me if my writing is good enough to go to ELC.
S: Projects are not useful. You don’t learn from it.
R: If you don’t think you learn anything by doing projects, what makes you feel like you learned?
S: Like writing. How to write paragraph, poem. When I want to go to ELC teacher give me test about writing paragraph, not project.

R: You just said projects are useless. Could you explain what do you mean by that?
S: Because when you want to go the university, they make you take LPI (Language Proficiency Index test) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). No projects in LPI and TOEFL. My sister finished this school. For two years, she can’t pass TOEFL. Her friend said no project in LPI, too.
R: What do you think you should learn to write those tests then?
S: Vocab. Lot of vocab and grammar.

This finding seems to confirm Guo’s (doctoral research in progress), Horwitz’s (1987), and Yang’s (1993) findings. The participants’ in Guo’s study reported that parents of ESL students sent their children to private schools to learn the vocabulary and grammar necessary to pass exams such as LPI and TOEFL. ESL students in the Horwitz (1987) and Yang (1993) studies reported that they believed vocabulary and grammar learning is important in language learning.

5.2.10.3 ESL Prevents Subject/Content Learning

While some students reported not liking project-based instruction because it integrates too many things, others did not like ESL classes because they thought they prevented them from learning subject matter or content material. One student said the following at the interview.

I don’t like projects. Want to go to regular class. I want to learn Socials. I want to go to University.

Other students made similar comments in their journals. For example, in a letter to a friend (written in her journal), one student wrote about how ESL classes prevent students from learning subject matter such as history and geography.
Dear Ray,

How are you? I know you are studying hard in Hong Kong, but so am I. Before I came to Vancouver, I thought the education in Vancouver is very similar to the one in Hong Kong. ... After I studied here for a period, I found that everything is very different than what I had expected. For example, we have a course for English beginners here, and it is called ESL or ELC. This course enables students to develop their English skills, but it is also a wall which blocks the students from learning subjects like history and geography. ...

Yours,

Meiling.

Another student made similar comments in her journal. She is writing about her wishes for the following year.

Now is 1995, in 1996, I wish two things will happen. The summer of 1996, I hope my uncle and aunt can come to Vancouver. January of 1996, I wish I can transfer to regular class from E.S.L. I am so happy. Finally, I can learn real things. Like Socials and English.

As we saw in chapter 4, the teachers and their department had adopted a language/content integration approach in their ESL program. That is, they taught language and content simultaneously. As pointed out earlier, all students were given copies of the Handbook that states this policy. The policy was also explained to students and their parents at Parents' Night meetings and carried out by teachers during projects (see the next section of this chapter). We also saw that the department clearly labels its classes ESL Social Studies, ESL Science, ESL Literature, and so on. In fact, the three students whose comments are quoted above were all in an ESL Social Studies class. For some reason however, they did not seem to think they were learning Social Studies content. How do we explain these students' perceptions?

5.2.11 Summary

According to the 42 students who evaluated project-based instruction negatively, projects are “too hard”, they involve “too much work.” Also, they did not think they were learning the “basic” facts and skills in the most efficient way possible, that is, in the way
which would get them to the next stage in their education as soon as possible. They thought that ESL classes are for learning English, not for doing projects and going on field trips. And they reported their preference for learning language and content separately.

Why did these students evaluate project-based instruction negatively? What could have influenced their thoughts? Is it possible that they were reacting to the value of certain particular projects rather than project-based instruction as a whole? Students’ accounts such as “the same word, the same meaning, we didn’t need it. If meaning is more, we need it”, “I think we didn’t have to do this project, because it doesn’t contain many information. We just copy information, it’s boring”, may lead us come to a hasty conclusion that these students may be reacting to a particular project rather than project-based instruction. However, it is important to point out that while some students referred to some particular projects that were fresh in their minds when they were interviewed, many of them spoke of projects in general. In addition, as we will see in the next section of this chapter, there is more to the projects the students referred to than looking for one word and copying down its definitions. The projects took some time and they covered a range of relevant content. Many students were engaged in a number of subactivities. There seems to be more to students’ negative evaluation than simply reacting to some poorly organized bad projects.

5.3 Projects in Action

So far, we have presented the goals the teacher participants had for project-based instruction and the teachers’ and students’ evaluations of the activity. In this section we examine project work in action. Specifically, the two projects observed for the study are first outlined and then, using excerpts from the researcher’s field notes, an account is given of what the teachers and students actually did during the course of the projects. The account is given in the context of the teachers’ goals for and evaluations of project-based instruction.
5.3.1 The Projects

The researcher observed the teacher and student participants while they were engaged in two projects. The first project, called Child Abuse, was conducted by Ms. Jones in two Transitional Social Studies and two ELC classes between May 13 and June 17, 1995. The second project, called Search a Word, was conducted by Ms. Brown in four of her ESL Writing classes between February 23 and April 16, 1996.

5.3.1.1 Project I: Child Abuse

In groups of four, students worked on an interview project called Child Abuse. They first researched questions such as "Is spanking child abuse?", "Is physical abuse worse than verbal abuse?", "Are girls punished more than boys?", "Do hockey players prefer to physically punish their children?" The research involved reading newspaper articles (either brought to class by the teacher or found by students outside class), and listening to radio and watching television programs. Before starting their interviews, each group was asked to write out a list of their research questions, participants, sample size, hypothesis, and methods and share them with the class explaining the reasons for their choices. For instance, the group of students who wanted to explore whether spanking is considered child abuse decided to find out if age affects people's perceptions. They decided to do this by interviewing ten grade 8 (13-year-old) and ten grade 12 (18-year-old) students. Their hypothesis was that age does affect people's perceptions. Specifically, more 13-year-olds would perceive spanking as child abuse because they are less mature, don't understand what is good for them, and are resentful of their parents' discipline.

After sharing their research design with the class, groups were asked to conduct their interviews as homework, and then analyze and report their findings in the form of an in-class oral presentation. The presentations were followed by teacher-guided class discussions. With an occasional reminder from the teacher to make eye contact, students presented their
research impressively. They compared and contrasted their findings with what they had read, and provided their own viewpoints about issues with supporting arguments. For instance, the group that researched the question of whether spanking should be considered child abuse concluded that their participants did not think it was. They explained their findings to their surprised teacher, who thought spanking is child abuse. The students argued that the teacher's thinking is different from Chinese immigrant students' thinking. They explained that some Chinese parents spank out of care and love. It is their way of disciplining their children to become "dragons" (i.e., successful).

5.3.1.2 Project II: Search a Word

The purpose of this (mainly) individual project was to help students learn how to use the research facilities in school, community, and city libraries. Specifically, students were to learn how to use reference materials such as books, magazines, dictionaries, and traditional card catalogues as well as on-line information search tools. The focus of the project was the learning process.

The project began with the whole class brainstorming for suitable words. After they came up with a list of words such as happy, hot, cold, frightened, and joyful, each student was asked to choose a word that they wanted to research for the next two weeks and to tell the class the reasons they had for choosing one word over the others. The students were then given a color-coded instruction sheet they were required to follow in order to complete the project. The instructions included what reference material to look for and what had to be done once the word was found. For example, students were told to write down the titles and page numbers of articles that contained the word, the names of the authors, and the journals. Students were also asked to keep a written record of all the details, including the surprises and challenges, of what they found during their research, and to write a paper about their research at the end of the project. Though students were given suggestions as to how they
might organize their paper, they were strongly encouraged to be creative, to show off the information they collected. They were told that the paper should include two introductory paragraphs, where they would write about the most interesting things they discovered about their words; three to ten main-body paragraphs, where they would describe (narrate the story of) the process of their research; and one or two concluding paragraphs, where they would write their reflections about the project. The students were also asked to write about how they liked this method of learning (i.e., project-based learning), and whether they were frustrated with and/or amazed at their ability to manage the work and write a paper. In addition to the written instructions, the teacher and a teacher librarian, as well as librarians at the community and city libraries, assisted the students throughout their research to encourage successful completion of the project.

5.3.2 Teaching Canadian School Culture

It will be recalled that the teacher participants said that the socialization of ESL students into Canadian school culture was one of their goals for project-based instruction. According to the researcher’s observations, the teachers did in fact teach the skills and language necessary to participate in project activities. To take just one example, Ms. Jones posted the following figure in her classroom (written on a flow chart) and referred to it often during her students’ project presentations.
The following excerpt from field notes shows how Ms. Jones reinforced one of these skills. Ms. Jones is instructing students to discuss and decide in their groups if parents should spank their children. She says,

You have three minutes for the discussion. After that, you report the result of your discussions to class. When you report, pay attention to eye contact or you’ll get ZERO.

It should be noted here that class presentations were rare in the students’ previous educational culture. In addition, some cultures (e.g., Chinese) do not encourage eye contact. Ms. Jones seems to be teaching her students one of the basic skills they will need to succeed in the Canadian educational system.

### 5.3.3 Teaching Canadian Social Cultures

As the following example from observation data shows, the language socialization of ESL students into Canadian social cultures is not just something teachers say they do. This can be seen from the following example where a group of three students presented their research findings. (SP=student presenter, S1=student participant 1 in the class discussion, S2=student participant 2, S3=student participant 3, J=Ms. Jones, R=researcher)
SP: My research question “Is spanking child abuse?” ... 55% people said no and 45% said yes.
J: Oh, really? Who did you interview?
SP: Ten girls, ten boys.
J: Where? From this school?
SP: Yes.
J: Who are they? Are they all Chinese?
SP: Yes. Some from Hong Kong. Some from Taiwan.
J: What do you think?
SP: I don’t know.
J: What do you think, class? Is spanking not child abuse in Hong Kong? In Taiwan?
S1: Depends. If my father spank me because he want me to be a good person, and if I am not, it’s okay. It’s not abuse. He should spank me.
J: What about other people? What do you think... (S2)?
S2: The same.
J: That’s interesting. How about other people? Do you all agree that spanking is not abuse?
S3: If you don’t hit hard. It’s okay. My father spank me because he want me to study hard. He want me to go university. He care. If he didn’t care, he won’t spank.
J: Really? Do you hear that... (R)? What do you think?
R: I know that it is considered abuse here, isn’t it?
J: Yes. Didn’t you read about the RCMP arrest in Ontario? That’s what all this is about.

It should be noted that the students’ background readings and discussions clearly showed that spanking is inappropriate in Canada. Ms. Jones is helping the students clarify an important difference between some aspects of Canadian and Chinese social cultures.

5.3.4 Challenging Students’ Creativity

Challenging students’ creativity is also given as one of the teachers’ goals for project-based instruction. The following excerpt from field notes shows how Ms. Brown encouraged her students to be creative.

Let’s go over the second page of the instruction sheet. Does everybody understand this? What’s on the sheet are just some suggestions to give you some ideas. It’s just one way of doing things. I want you to be creative and come up with your own strategies to write your final papers. I know you can do it. Be creative. Include some humor, sarcasm, and anything else that makes your papers interesting.

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Ms. Brown gives specific examples to clarify what she means by creativity. For instance, she tells the students to include some humor or sarcasm in their final papers. But the important point is that the strategies they use should be their own. The students are to present their results in a form they think will make them interesting.

5.3.5 Engaging Students in Critical Thinking

The teachers did not just talk about critical thinking, they actively encouraged their students to think critically. For instance, consider the way Ms. Jones pursued the discussion about parents spanking their children. (J=Ms. Jones, S4=student participant 4, S5=student participant 5, S6=student participant 6, S7=student participant 7)

J: I'd like to continue that discussion about spanking and child abuse. Is that okay with everybody? Your finding is bothering me. I mean, is spanking really acceptable in Hong Kong and Taiwan? Tell me. Let's discuss it. I want to know.
S4: It's okay if you don't spank hard.
S5: Yes. Parents don't want to hurt anybody when they spank. They care.
J: Is it true, everybody? Why would people spank their children if they care?
S6: Because they want them to study hard. Be a good person.
J: So, are you telling me that parents who don't spank don't care about their children? How about talking to them? Is talking not caring?
S6: Yeah. They (children) don't know. They are too young. Sometimes they do bad things and in trouble.
S7: Yes. They are just children. If you talk to them and say "Okay. I think it's bad, but you can decide," they do bad things. Parents should stop them.
J: By spanking them?
S7: Yes, if the child not listening. Like some children steal things and take drugs? They do that because they are not afraid of their parents. If the parents spank, they are scared. And they don't do bad things.

The above example shows Ms. Jones attempting to engage students in critical thinking. Though the responses from the students may seem stubbornly one sided, they went through the exercise of thinking about, stating, and defending their points of view against criticism. Given the continuing questions from Ms. Jones, and her statement that "your finding is bothering me," they were forced to consider a different point of view regarding the issue
under discussion. And it is just this consideration of different viewpoints that Ms. Jones is demonstrating.

5.3.6 Teaching Research Skills

One of the ways to teach students how to learn is to teach them research skills. The necessity for ESL students to learn research skills is mentioned by the teachers as one of their goals for project-based instruction. It is also their department’s policy. The following excerpt from field-notes taken in the school library on March 6, 1996, shows that research skills were being taught seriously. The students have already done a key-word search of journal article titles as part of their Search a Word project. Ms. Green, a teacher librarian, is now helping them locate a journal article.

*Mademoiselle* is the name of the magazine. Now, if you want to find out, to see if we have the magazine in the library, I want you to take a look at this list (referring to the library catalogue for periodicals) to see if we have the magazine. Take a look at this list and tell me if we have this magazine. Okay, it says January, 1992. It means that we have the issue January 1992. If it says September, 1994, that means that anything before 1994, we don’t have. Do you understand? If I know that we have the magazine, and I want to look at an article, what do I do? I go to the periodicals’ room. I look for the magazine *Mademoiselle*, and I look for September, 1995. Okay, on what page do I find the article? Very good. Page 88. So, I turn to page 88 and I find the article. (Showing the pages to the class) Okay, that’s how you find articles in the magazine. Also, after you find the magazine, we have only one magazine, and two of you want to read it. What do you do? You can also find the article on the microfiche. (Showing a sheet of microfiche to class, and explaining) They give you a number, 14H2479. When you know this number, you can find the article in the microfiche. You just have to look for that number. Now, each one of these black boxes represents one page.

In this example, Ms. Green is giving instructions to students on how to find their words. After students had found a magazine that had the sample word in an article title, Ms. Green instructs them on how to interpret the result and find the magazine. In the next example, also from March 6, 1996, field-notes, Ms. Brown picks up where Ms. Green left off and helps some students locate the resources they are looking for. (B=Ms. Brown, S1=student 1, S2=student 2, S3=student 3)
B: Do you have the microfiche number? Okay. What's the number?
S1: 77k... 1995.
B: I don’t think they have ’95. (S2), show her where to find ’95. (To S3)
Let’s check it. What’s the number? I can’t read upside down. Tell me the
number. What’s the microfiche number? Read it. Just read me the number.
76. Can you read that? 76 D? 76 what?
S3: D.
B: Can you find D? Here’s 76J, here’s B, here’s C, and here’s D. What
number do you need, after that?
S3: 244.
B: Okay, can you find 244? Let’s keep going and see what they have. What’s
that? 248? 2458. This is from 2352 to all the way to 2450. So 244 is going
to be here. I hope. Try it. Is it here?
S3: Yes, here.
B: Okay. Now you put it here and read. Do you know how it goes?
S3: Yes.

We can see that teaching research skills is a serious, hands on matter at Carlton High. The
teacher librarian offers detailed explanations, and the teacher walks the students through the
process.

5.3.7 Teaching Language and Content

The teachers perceived project-based instruction to be an excellent activity for
teaching/learning language in context or language and content. From the data presented so
far, it is clear that, due to its open nature, project-based instruction is indeed a good activity
for simultaneously teaching/learning language, subject matter, and a variety of skills (i.e., for
teaching/learning language functionally). The following excerpt is from a March 5, 1996
lesson by Ms. Green on locating resources in the school library.

Press ‘E’ and press ENTER. Use your down arrow key and highlight #25. Tell
me what that looks like. Is it a title or an author? Do you see the word
‘abstract?’ What does ‘abstract’ mean? Okay. Press ENTER to see what it
means. Okay? You see that? It means ‘summary.’ You can look at the
summary to decide if you want to read the article.

The above example shows how Ms. Green taught content (how to locate resources
using computers) and language at the same time. Ms. Green taught students the
command for ‘Enter’ and how to highlight while doing a computer search. She also
taught them the meaning of the word 'abstract.' Something similar occurs in Ms. Brown’s April 16, 1996 lesson on Bibliography.

Book with two authors. They have the word ‘and.’ But it has three or more. You only have to put the first name on the list. On the book. For the article. The first name, and then you write ‘et al.’ E-t, a-l. Those are two little Latin words meaning ‘and others.’ Okay?

Here the purpose is to show students how to construct a bibliography (the content). But that purpose also served as a context for language teaching. Ms. Brown taught her students the meaning of the Latin phrase ‘et al.’ The following excerpt is from Ms. Green’s March 6, 1996, instructions on how to find words using the school library computer database.

The students were in the computer lab learning how to find their words in magazine articles and on microfiche. Ms. Green, the teacher librarian wrote on the board:

Why does he get angry? (Includes related article on verbal abuse and counseling) by Sondra Forsyth. il vol. 101
Mademoiselle Sept. ’95. p. 88 (3)
80H 2297
ENTER FOR ABSTRACT/HEADINGS
(Talking to the students. She explains what she wrote on the board.) Now I’d like you to highlight ‘CD ROM.’ Highlight ‘INFOTRAC.’ Okay, now everybody press ENTER once, press ENTER once. Can you see ‘INFOTRAC?’ Now everybody, do you see the green box? Stop right here. That’s right. Press ENTER once. Now, I know that all of you have a terrific word. It may be ‘happiness,’ it may be ‘anger,’ or it may be ‘sadness.’ Now I am going to ask you to enter a word as an example so that you know how to use it. After I show an example, then you can enter the selected word. Okay?

Everybody, please enter the word ‘anger’ on the computer. Anger? Now, when you see the blue box, stop. Right here. Stop. Okay. This means you can find many articles. Now I want you to press ENTER once only. (Talking to a student) ‘Anger’, not ‘angry.’ Okay, now. Now, I’d like you to highlight #25 using the down arrow key. Now tell me what is the title. Okay, very good. Who is the author? Right. Sondra Forsyth. Okay, ‘il’ means this article has some pictures.

This example illustrates how Ms. Green showed students how to conduct a computer search for the words they were researching. But she also taught the language that goes along with research. For instance, she explained what ‘il’ means. Ms. Brown also helped the students learn the language of research. Consider the following conversation with a student. (B=Ms. Brown, S=student)
B: How are you doing, (S)? Are you okay?
S: I don't know what 'OCC' means?
B: Let me see. What does that say? Does it say what it means?
S: I don't know.
B: Let me see. It means 'occasionally.' See here. It says here. It means 'occasionally.' Do you know what 'occasionally' means?
S: Yeah...
B: What is it?
S: I don't know.
B: It means 'some-times.' Anything else?
S: Yes. "BPo."
B: Look at the book and tell me what it says.
S: I can't find it.
B: Is it not there? Let me see. You are right. It's not here. It means 'Black Poetry Book.' O.K.?
S: Yes. Thank you.
B: You are welcome.

This is another example of teaching language in context. That is, Ms. Brown is helping the student to understand what 'OCC' and 'BPo' mean in the context of the students' project work, the content of which is ESL Writing. As discussed in chapter 4, teaching language in context was one of the goals teachers had for project-based instruction. The examples above show how they actually worked to achieve this goal.

5.3.8 Teaching Thinking Skills and Language

From the descriptions of the two projects and some of the excerpts from classroom observations given above, it is obvious that teaching/learning thinking skills and the language/discourse that goes along with them frequently occurred in both Ms. Jones and Ms. Brown's classrooms. This was done from the initial brainstorming sessions to the students' final presentations through identifying, labeling, describing and solving problems, formulating and testing hypotheses, and forming and defending personal opinions. The following excerpt from the brainstorming session at the beginning of Project I (Child Abuse) shows how Ms. Jones helped her students with some of these skills. (J=Ms. Jones, S1=student 1, S2=student 2, S3=student 3, S4=student 4, S5=student 5, S6=student 6)
J: Did people read the papers? I want us to brainstorm for the group projects. You know it's on child abuse, right? Let's come up with some research questions. What kind of questions do people want to research?
S1: Spanking?
J: Spanking and child abuse? Is that what you want to call it? Let’s make it a question. How do we do that? Tell me. What do you want to call it?
S1: Is spanking child abuse?
J: Okay. That's a good question. Who do you want to interview?
S2: Some classmates.
J: Yes, that's fine. Students from this school, your friends, parents. Anybody. People who can help you. Do you know how many people you want to interview?
S3: 10?
S4: 15?
J: Yes, 10 to 20's fine. Don’t interview more than 20. You can’t handle it. I want you to remember that you have to have a hypothesis. What else?
S5: Present it in class.
J: Yes. You will present it in class. We have to share. When you present, I want you to tell us your results or findings, however you call it. Anything else you should do?
S6: Discussion and conclusion.
J: Right. Discussions and conclusions. Can people remember this? Remember how to do the discussion?
S5: Discussion questions.

During the brainstorming, Ms. Jones wrote down on the board words and phrases such as research questions, hypothesis, subject, sample size, findings, results, and discussion questions. By doing that, she not only reviewed the necessary steps and thinking skills involved in doing projects, but also the language/discourse that is needed to carry them out.

5.3.9 Presenting Successfully

The researcher’s observations confirmed the teachers’ evaluation that ESL students generally do well with their projects. Though the researcher knew that some of the students had been in the ESL program for over two years, she was still impressed by the quality of their work. The students seemed to know all of the steps involved in doing research projects and how to do each one well (though not without the occasional reminder from the teacher). For instance, as can be seen from the following excerpt from observation data, all of the students remembered to go through all of the steps of a conventional presentation, beginning...
with the research question and continuing with the hypothesis, findings, discussion, conclusions, and question period. They even remembered to thank the audience for listening and asking questions. (SP1=student presenter 1, SP2=student presenter 2, SP3=student presenter 3, SP4=student presenter 4, J=Ms. Jones, A=audience member)

SP1: Our research question is “Are girls punished more than boys?” Our hypothesis was “Yes.”

SP2: We interviewed 12 classmates. Six girls and six boys. 53% said “no” and 47% said “yes.”

SP3: Discussion (pointing at the word ‘discussion’ on the flow chart paper). I think, no, we think, the answer is almost the same. And because parents love their boys and girls the same. Girls are the same naughty as boys.

SP4: Our conclusion is “boys and girls punished the same.” Do you have questions?

J: Explain it to me. What do you mean by ‘boys and girls are punished the same?’ Your finding is 53% of your subjects said ‘no.’ How can it be the same?

SP4: Only 6%. It’s okay. Almost the same.

J: Does everybody think so?

(The rest of the presenters all nodding) Yeah.

J: Anybody else have a question for them?

A: Why is your hypothesis ‘yes’?

SP1: Because some people like boys. More questions? O.K. Thank you.

Throughout the group presentations, the researcher was impressed by the attractive graphics and sophisticated language the students were able to use apparently with ease. For instance, some of them (with a little help from their Q cards) used words and phrases such as “interviewed,” “my hypothesis was,” “the result shows,” “moreover,” “however,” and “on the one hand.” (SP1=student presenter 1, SP2=student presenter 2, SP3=student presenter 3, A=audience member, J=Ms. Jones)

SP1: (The whole group presenting from an impressive graphic on the overhead projector) Okay. Our research question is “Is physical abuse worse than verbal abuse?” Our hypothesis was “Yes, physical abuse is worse than verbal abuse.”

SP2: We interviewed 16 people. Eight male and eight female. Our result show “It’s same. Physical abuse is not worse than verbal abuse.” People can’t decide which is bad, worse. Because on the one hand, physical abuse hurts your body. However, verbal abuse hurts you, too. Hurts your feelings.

SP3: Yes, hurts for long time. Our conclusion is, don’t hurt anybody. Not physically and not verbally because it both hurts. Any questions?

A: Why do you think it’s the same? I think verbal abuse is worse because I think verbal abuse comes from hate. You say bad things to people when
you really hate them. Physical abuse sometimes happen because the person
is just mad. He can’t control himself.

SP1: I don’t know.
SP2: I think it the same. People don’t hit people they like.
J: Good. Any more questions? Okay, next group then.

Equally impressive performances can be seen in the students’ written work. Project II
(Search a Word) was not presented orally in class, but Ms. Brown arranged for students to
share their work. Although Ms. Brown had to extend the project from two to almost seven
weeks, in the end most students seemed to have completed their work successfully and
impressively. Consider the following written presentation by Andrew.

The Research of Difficult
by Andrew

I have chosen a word “difficult” for my writing research. I chose this
word because when Ms. Brown wanted me to choose a word on the board, I felt
difficult. When I think of the word difficult, I will think of pineapple because it
is difficult to open a pineapple and eat it.

I went to the library and used a book called Junior Thesaurus in other
words to find the synonym. The meaning of difficult is: - not easy, requiring
effort or laborious, troublesome, ... (a few more definitions here), hard to deal
with, or please.

I looked up my word in another kind of dictionary called unabridged
dictionary. The things I found in the unabridged dictionary are - hard to be
made, ... (more definitions). It’s very easy work but I need to copy a lot of
words.

I looked up my word in a index the bible. I found which pages and
which paragraph had my word, and at last, I found it. It says GE 14. I got the
bible and here was word I found: Is anything too hard for the lord? At the time
pointed I will return on to thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall
have a son. I can’t find any word about difficult so Ms. Brown told me to use
hard instead. The word “difficult” really gave a difficult time.

The next step was to check my word in the Concordance to Shakespeare.
I have asked Ms. Brown about why I needed to check my word in the
Concordance to Shakespeare and Ms. Brown said I needed to check the word in
the Concordance to Shakespeare because he’s a very special person. He wrote
thousands of poetry and they were all excellent and he was good at writing story
and staged drama. Romeo and Juliet is written by him. ... I used the Harvard
Concordance to Shakespeare and find a book called Tempest. Then I checked
the book in the computer and got the book. I still can’t find the word difficult ...
so I used the word “hard” instead again. I found a passage called “My father is
at study.” Here’s what it about. Work not hard... (a paragraph citation here).
The school library didn’t have the books I need so I went the downtown with
some of my classmates and Ms. Brown.

I looked up my word in the Granger’s Index to Poetry. I can’t find the
word “difficult” again so I used labor instead. I found the poem “The train
Runs Late to Harlem" that contained my word. It was written by Watts Rivers. (The citation of the poem here)

At first I didn’t know how to use the Granger’s Index to poetry, then Ms. Brown told me to the card catalog to find. When I found the word the book I was looking for, I am so happy.

I look up my word in dictionary of quotation and I found out the word “difficult” was really difficult to find the passage, ... This time I used the word “labor” instead. ... (a couple of quotations here) I have found the first one written by Francis Bacon and second one was written by J. A. F. Thibaul. This was very easy work.

I looked up my word in Infotrac. It’s a computer program about how to find magazine that I need. I found the articles. ... The first one is about a show “The City” began 12 years ago. .... (Description of the article here). The second one is about a boy called Peter Jay’s Parent put him in psychotherapy within a week of his return from Atlantic City. I needed a lot of time to checked them in the computer but it wasn’t hard.

Finally I looked up word in the Oxford English Dictionary. The dictionary didn’t have the history of my word and the changes that has gone through. Here is what I found: (Copied definition of the word “difficult” here).

I have learn many things in this research. I think I can finished the work the works because I still remember what Ms. Brown has taught when she brought the class to the library. I learned how to used library, I learned how to use Infotrac, use the card catalog to find the books I need and how to find quotations and poetry. This research make feel better. If I have any questions I didn’t know, the library will taught me.

Bibliography
Cabell Greet, William et al. Junior Thesaurus in other words II. Scott, Foresman, 1969.
(Five more references were listed)

This is a rather long excerpt from a student’s written work. It is cited as an example of how successfully and impressively many students finished their projects. As can be seen from this excerpt, many students were not only able to go through all the steps required for the project, they were also able to write about their experience in detail with humor and creativity. Certainly, due to the multi-level grouping in the ESL program, not all students could write as much or as well as Andrew. The next excerpt is an example of the work of students with lower language proficiency.
CONCLUSION:
My word is sad that is very (easy?) to find but I finish it very slowly. I am sorry. I think I can learn some way to find the meaning of some word. Especially I learned how I can use computer to find information about the words which I need to find. I had found the correct meaning of my word that means sorrowful or unhappy.

By ‘Bob,’ Apr. 3. 1996.

Unlike Andrew who has strong introductory and concluding paragraphs with supporting details, Bob’s written report is composed of some notes about four sources, a bibliography in note form, and the above one-paragraph conclusion. Nevertheless, considering the length of time he was in the ESL program (he was one of three student participants who had been at the school for less than six months), Ms. Brown was pleased with the result, as she pointed out in an interview with the researcher.

5.3.10 Showing Frustrations

As we saw earlier in this chapter, there were frustrations and tensions in some students’ evaluations of project-based instruction. Similar frustrations were noted during the researcher’s observations. For example, on March 19, 1996, students were asked by Ms. Brown to work in the classroom on their bibliographies. The researcher noticed that few of the students were attentive or seriously engaged in their task. Ms. Brown went around the classroom and asked some students why they were not working on their bibliographies. One student said that he didn’t have to because his friends in regular classes told him that they don’t do bibliography in mainstream. Three other boys sitting with the student joined in the conversation and agreed that they didn’t need to be serious about doing the bibliography well because it’s not relevant for their studies in mainstream.

Other students also found their project work irrelevant, but for different reasons. For instance, on March 15, 1996, on the way to the school library, the researcher overheard a conversation between Ms. Brown and a student who looked and sounded unhappy. The conversation went something like this. (S=student, B=Ms. Brown)
S: Why are we doing this project?
B: You tell me. Why do YOU think we are doing it?
S: I don’t know.
B: Don’t you think it will be useful?
S: Useful for what?
B: In your future studies. For example, when you go to college.
S: Right, like I AM going to college.

After the student left, Ms. Brown told the researcher that she deliberately did not tell students why she organized this project. She wanted the students to find out for themselves.

Nevertheless, what the student seemed to be suggesting is that it is unlikely she will be going to college and if she is not, she does not see how the project is relevant to her.

One of the reasons students gave for their negative evaluations of project-based instruction was the linguistic difficulties they faced. That is, they did not understand some of the material they were reading for their projects. According to the researcher’s field notes from March 27, 1996, students did indeed seem to be struggling with their reading.

One student found his word ‘hysterical’ in a Time magazine article on White-water and Clinton. He was highlighting and looking up every new word he came across in his English-Chinese dictionary. There seemed to be lots of them, at least one new word on each line. There was an older peer tutor helping him with the article, and he interpreted almost every word into Chinese for this student.

Three weeks earlier, on March 5, 1996, the researcher recorded the following conversation in the school library between Ms. Brown and a student. (B=Ms. Brown, S=student, R=researcher)

B: You don’t look too happy. How are you doing? Is everything okay?
S: Yeah.
B: Looks like you’ve done so much already. Look (R).
S: Right. I am writing unabridged dictionary.

The student appeared angry and sarcastic when she spoke to Ms. Brown. Later she told the researcher that she was angry because what she had to read for her project was too difficult. The researcher had already noted that some of the literature the students were looking at did indeed seem to be very difficult for them.
5.3.11 Not Wanting to Learn from Peers

In their evaluations of project-based instruction some students expressed their desire
for more teacher attention. They said they did not like to do projects because when they did
their teachers “did not care” about what they learned. The researcher discovered that the
students could express this desire in other ways as well. This can be seen from the following
excerpt from the field notes. (R=researcher, S=student)

R: You didn’t show your work to your neighbor when the teacher asked you to
check each other’s work. Did you not do your work?
S: I did.
R: Then, why did you not show it to your neighbor?
S: I don’t like it.
R: Don’t like what?
S: Don’t like show my homework to him (his neighbor).
R: Why not? What’s wrong with showing your work to him?
S: He’s not a teacher. He’s ESL. Like me. I want teacher to do it.
R: I see. You don’t want him to do it because he’s ESL. Would you let a
student check your work if he is not ESL? If he spoke English as his native
language?
S: I don’t know. Maybe.

This conversation took place in the classroom during the time when the students were asked
to check each other’s work. This student refused to show his work to his neighbor because
he did not think him qualified to check it. He thought checking the work was the teacher’s
job.

5.3.12 Summary

What is the significance of the researcher’s observations? For the researcher herself
her observations confirmed the teachers’ view that project-based instruction is an activity that
can provide contexts for students to learn many things. For instance, during the two projects
observed for this study, the researcher saw students learning Canadian school and social
cultures, as well as learning and using the language/discourse of research (participants,
hypothesis, interviews, findings, and discussions). The students worked cooperatively, made
decisions, and learned how to do research through interviews and library document analysis.
They also learned Social Studies and Writing curriculum content. And they learned how to use research facilities and equipment such as computers, card catalogs, and microfiche.

Clearly the knowledge the students acquired during their project work, though it was not gained easily or without some frustration, went far beyond the goal which is stressed in the SLA literature on project-based instruction, namely, comprehensible output. In fact, the researcher was left wondering how much more the students might have achieved if the main cause of their frustration (i.e., not fully understanding and/or accepting the purposes of their projects) could somehow have been mitigated.

5.4 Three Explanatory Models

We have seen that the teachers evaluated project-based instruction positively. That is, they were satisfied with the process and results of their projects. We have also seen that the researcher's observations confirmed the teachers' evaluations. Given the goals they had established, the teachers seemed to be leading the students in the right direction and doing it well; and the students seemed to be carrying out all the steps of their projects successfully and knowledgeably. But despite this apparent success, the students did not whole-heartedly endorse project-based instruction. Over half of them said that project-based instruction is not a good way to learn. And some of their stated frustrations were also observed by the researcher. What can explain this discrepancy between the teachers' and students' evaluations of project-based instruction? The remainder of this chapter discusses three possible models, as well as some background conditions, that may account for the difference.

All three models have some application to the data. They illuminate some parts of the data, but they do not all apply equally well. As we will see, the traditional/progressive model has notable weaknesses. All three models suggest mental models which teachers, students, and others may be using to interpret project-based instruction. Mental models are "deeply
ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (Senge, 1990, p. 8).

5.4.1 Background Conditions/Problem Situations

Some of the discrepancies between teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction may be accounted for by background conditions or problem situations. One discrepancy that may be accounted for in this way is the teachers’ conviction that project-based instruction helps them to achieve their goal of preparing ESL students for adult life in Canada and the students’ belief that projects are not a good way to learn. While many students agreed with their teachers that project-based instruction is a good way to socialize, learn computer skills, learn to think critically, and to improve their communication and writing skills, they also said that projects take too much time away from the learning they need to do to get out of ESL. And they said they were under parental pressure to exit ESL, enter mainstream, pass TOEFL, and enter university as soon as possible. This may be explained as a background condition or problem situation because as new immigrants, it is understandable that the students’ and their parents’ first priority should be to enter mainstream Canadian society via mainstream schooling and university.

Exiting ESL, going to ELC, entering the regular (non-ESL) program, and passing TOEFL are all important for these students. As pointed out in chapter 1, due to their particular age, the students have only a few years to learn English, learn Canadian school and social cultures, learn the regular curriculum, and prepare themselves for post-secondary education. Immigrant students and their parents think post-secondary education is crucial for their success in their new country. In these circumstances, it is understandable that the students feel pressure to learn English as quickly as possible, feel that project-based instruction is not an efficient way to learn the language, and see some of the topics they worked on as irrelevant.
A second discrepancy that may be accounted for by background conditions or problem situations is the teachers’ positive evaluation of project-based instruction because it allows them to challenge students’ resourcefulness as opposed to the students’ negative evaluation of the activity because “projects are too hard.” As we have noted, the Carlton High ESL department has adopted a multi-level grouping system. A single ESL class may have students who have considerable (as many as eight years’) exposure to English and some experience of Canadian education and students who have very little knowledge of English and almost no experience of Canadian education. In circumstances such as these, it is natural for some students, especially those who do not fully understand what they are reading, to feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to do for their projects.

A third discrepancy that may be accounted for as a background condition or problem situation is the teachers’ goal to foster independence as opposed to the students’ desire for more teacher attention. As new immigrants, these students may be going through culture shock or culture stress. For some of them, closer interaction with their teachers may have been reassuring. Immigration is a stressful experience for anyone, but it is especially stressful when the home and host languages/cultures are fundamentally different. In the process of integrating into their host societies, second language immigrants or foreign language learners face stages of culture shock or culture stress as Larson and Smalley (1972) call it. These stages are referred to as the honey moon stage, the culture shock stage, the gradual or tentative recovery stage, and the full or near recovery stage. At the honey moon stage, individuals are excited about the newness of their surroundings; at the culture shock stage, they start to discover the reality of the cultural differences which work against their self images and security; the gradual or tentative recovery stage is when individuals find solutions to some of the problems they face and search for solutions to other problems; and the full or near recovery stage is the time when individuals accept the fact that they are in a new culture and decide to adapt to or integrate into it (Brown, 1994).
In-depth discussion of these stages of integration or acculturation, including the length of each stage, the likelihood of all immigrants going through all four stages, and whether all immigrants fully recover from culture stress, is beyond the scope of this study. Although the student participants might have been at different stages of the integration process, considering the fact that most of them had been in Canada for one to three years, many may have been at the culture shock or culture stress stage. They might have come to realize how difficult it was going to be to survive and thrive in their new linguistic/cultural environment. They might have been stressed from family responsibilities such as interpreting and taking care of younger siblings in the absence of adults, and from the pressure to bring pride to the family by entering a reputable post-secondary institution. As Brown (1994) and Lambert (1967) point out, under such circumstances, individuals begin to experience feelings of regret and fearful anticipation. They feel the need to search for familiar things, to seek out and rely on the support of others, and to complain about local customs and conditions. This may be one reason for the student participants in the present study to desire closer attention from their teachers. They might have hoped that things would get easier if only their Canadian teachers ‘cared’ as much as their teachers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China.

5.4.2 The Philosophical Model: Traditional versus Progressive Education

Can the discrepancy between the students’ and teachers’ evaluations of project-based instruction be explained in terms of a difference between traditional students and progressive teachers? We saw in chapter 2 that Eyring (1989) suggests but does not explore a philosophical interpretation of differences between Susan, the teacher participant, and her ESL students. We also saw that a similar interpretation is used by some anti-progressive educators and activists, including some Chinese parents in British Columbia, to support their arguments for traditional schools (Coleman, 1998; Hirsch, 1996; Pynn, 1998). When we
look more closely at the findings from the present study, however, we will see that the explanatory power of the philosophical model is significantly limited.

When this model was introduced in chapter 2, the researcher was careful to distinguish Dewey’s views from some popular ideas about progressive or student-centered education. The reader will recall that Dewey (1938) distanced himself from some of the educational practices of his day which were associated with Kilpatrick’s Project Method. He thought they were too trivial to be truly educational. And in analyzing both traditional and progressive education, Dewey insisted that neither was adequate because neither applied the principles of a carefully developed philosophy of experience.

There is a wide range of interpretation of what might be considered by various commentators today to be significant negative features of progressive education, but the following list discussed in chapter 2 captures a number of major objections: the teachers do not have clear standards and expectations for the students, and the students are not instructed in these standards; the students are not required to work hard towards these standards; the teachers do not evaluate student work appropriately and do not require the students to meet these standards (e.g., Hirsch, 1996; Holt, 1994).

The findings of the present study contradict each one of these objections. The standards for project work were specific and explicit and were communicated to the students. The requirements for a research presentation were given in detail and the students appeared to understand them. Expectations for student work were high; students complained that the work was too hard, not that it was too easy (see sections 5.2.1 and 5.3.10). Evaluation took the form of a final presentation of the project work by the students. The researcher’s observations of their work indicated that the students had met quite challenging standards. All of the evidence suggests that the projects the students participated in were far from being trivial.
As we saw in Chapter 4, project-based instruction is identified by both teacher and student participants as part of the work of the Canadian school. We also saw that the teachers were implementing in their classrooms policies which had been adopted by their department, school, school district, and province. In addition, the teachers seemed to be acting appropriately to prepare ESL students for future success in the Canadian educational and social systems, and students seemed to be learning what they were intended to learn.

It is worth reminding ourselves just how much the students were observed by the researcher to have been learning. In Project I (Child Abuse), they learned Canadian school culture; learned and used the language/discourse of research (e.g., participants, hypotheses, interviews, findings, and discussions); worked cooperatively, making decisions about what to research, who to interview, and how to present their results; learned part of the Social Studies curriculum and its significance (that there can be different views on social issues like child abuse); learned the Canadian way of thinking on an important issue and taught their teacher the Chinese way; and heard, spoke, read, and wrote in English functionally and meaningfully. Project II (Search a Word) also provided students with the opportunity to learn Canadian school culture. And the students also learned to make choices and provide reasons for their choices; learned that there are multiple sources for reference materials and how to locate them; learned how long it can take to explore the meanings and origins of just one word, and perhaps its implications; learned the significance of research (e.g., how one word can be found in many sources with different meanings); learned research skills including how to make notes for later use; learned how to reflect on their research experience; learned the discourse that is necessary in the context of research (e.g., Concordance to Shakespeare, INFO-TRAC, etc.); learned writing-related content such as who Shakespeare was and what some of his works were; and they learned English functionally and meaningfully (e.g., interacting with native speaker librarians and others, reading authentic materials, and writing a research report). Furthermore, the observation data
gathered in the classrooms, computer room, and library showed that the students learned how to use research facilities and equipment such as computers, card catalogs, and microfiche. The students learned all this but were still not happy. Why not? It seems odd that students should evaluate negatively an activity/methodology in which their teachers were experienced and competent and one from which they learned so much and so well.

It is true that some of the features of the project work that truly reflected Dewey's educational views did seem to be problematic for the students. These features were different from some of the more traditional practices that many of the students seem to have grown accustomed to in their home countries. For instance, while the teachers aimed to challenge students' creativity, the students wanted to learn the basics. They wanted to learn how to write a paragraph, not draw pictures. If the teachers aimed to put the students at the center of the classroom activities, the students wanted the teachers to be the center of activity. They wanted the teachers to tell them what they know, not “waste time” finding it out for themselves. If the teachers aimed to help the students acquire learning skills, the students wanted information, that is, facts. They wanted the answers to questions they might be asked on examinations. If the teachers' goal was for students to learn from personal experience (e.g. to find out what they could and could not do), the students wanted to learn from textbooks. Finally, while the teachers tried to foster the skills needed for students to learn from each other, the students said they preferred to work on their own.

Superficially, these discrepancies would seem to give some credence to a traditional versus progressive interpretation. But these features of project work are not the radical departures from conventional practice that they may have been in Dewey's day. They are instead familiar expectations of learners in many parts of the Canadian educational system. Furthermore, the students wanted to succeed in mainstream classes, and they were aware that they would be expected to engage in practices like these in their future education. In sum, considered as a hankering after familiar traditional practices, these features of project work
seem quite inadequate in themselves to account for the strength of the negative evaluation that students expressed.

In using the philosophical model, we seem to be applying a North American template to a cross-cultural situation. And in doing so we are unlikely to be able to account for differences in the evaluations of project-based instruction between Canadian teachers and Chinese students that arise from differences in educational culture. What interpretations can be gained from a cultural model?

5.4.3 The Cultural Model: North American and Chinese Educational Cultures

We have seen that there seems to be more to the teachers' general satisfaction and to the students' frustrations than can be accounted for by the philosophical model. Specifically, there is more to the students' desire to learn from authority and the teachers' hesitation to act as authorities, and to students' valuing product more than process and their teachers' valuing process, which for them is the product, than a difference between traditional students and progressive teachers. There are, as Gardner (1989) points out, significant differences in Western and Eastern views on issues such as the basics versus creativity, process versus product, and learning from teachers and texts versus learning from experience and peers. It is now time to explore these differences more fully. For instance, we said earlier in this chapter that the students and teachers seemed to have different mental models regarding the basics and creativity. It is now time to ask, when the students say “teach me the basics, we can be creative later,” are they speaking from a different cultural as well as a different philosophical perspective from their teachers?

5.4.3.1 Creativity versus The Basics

As indicated by the interview and observation data, one of the reasons the teachers gave for evaluating project-based instruction positively was that it is, in their view, a good
way to foster student creativity, while some of the students felt that projects are not a good way to learn because they distract them from learning the basics. A cultural model may help explain this discrepancy. Both Gardner (1989) and Hsu (1981) argue that Chinese and Western cultures “embrace two radically different solutions to the dilemma of creativity versus basic skills” (Gardner, 1989, p. 7). Western educational culture holds a “revolutionary” view of creativity, “The young Westerner making her boldest departure first and then gradually reintegrating herself into the tradition,” while Chinese educational culture holds an “evolutionary” view, “The young Chinese being almost inseparable from the tradition, but, over time, possibly evolving to a point as deviant as initially staked out by the innovative Westerner” (Gardner, 1989, p. 282).

According to Gardner (1989), Western society, America for example, “has defined itself in opposition to the past, to tradition. It has looked to its frontier and to its youth to forge new and unanticipated ways of living” (p. 280). In this context, the acquisition of basic skills is postponed for a later time. Or rather, independence, critical thinking, distinctiveness, and communication skills come to be seen as basic (Gardner, 1989). Chinese societies on the other hand have been historically oriented towards tradition, honoring individuals who have mastered the classics. The Chinese believe basic skills are more important than creativity for school children. They say children must learn to walk before they learn how to run. In schools any given lesson is closely built on numerous previous lessons. From this point of view, individuals need to acquire a considerable body of basic skills before they can be creative (Gardner, 1989; Pratt, in press).

According to Pratt (in press), Chinese people believe in a common proven basic/foundational knowledge that must be mastered by all. This basic/foundational knowledge is respected both in school and later in the work place, where people are often promoted depending on how much of this foundational knowledge they possess. Chinese students are encouraged to engage in creative activities only after extensive modeling on the
work of masters according to certain rules. Chinese sayings such as “once you read ten thousand books, your pen performs wonders” (du po wan juan shu, neng xing qian li lu) and “when one can memorize 300 Tang poems, s/he is sure to be able to compose her/his own even though s/he is not a poet” (shu du tang shi san bai shou, bu hui xie shi ye hui zhou) illustrate the importance of extensive modeling in Chinese educational culture. One recalls the student in section 5.2.4 who said: “I understand just a bit. How can I be creative if I don’t even understand what I read. I am only a high school student. Teachers should teach now, and I’ll be creative when I learn a lot.” For holders of this perspective, the Western way of doing things is like “putting the cart before the horse” (Gardner, 1989, p. 252).

When the students in the present study spoke of the basics, they may have meant what the Chinese consider must be learned by all students as a first step within a larger learning process. This seems to be quite different from the basic facts and skills we associate with Western traditional education. More than just the names, dates, and places of traditional History and Geography, for example, Chinese students in Canada may expect in-depth study of key people, great events, and the main ways of life, that is, the “important points” or basic/foundational knowledge anyone must have if they are to understand Canadian society. What they may not expect is to spend a considerable amount of time studying just one contemporary social issue. And more than just the vocabulary and grammar needed to put together a coherent English paragraph, they may expect in a Writing class to be asked to model their work on key passages from great writers, Shakespeare for example. They may not expect to study a concordance to Shakespeare.

5.4.3.2 Process versus Product

The teachers wanted to help students acquire the time management, organization, group work, problem-solving, and research skills that are essential for survival in mainstream Canadian education. But students said they wanted to learn facts such as “how many people
are there in Canada” and “information about how to write a paragraph” (see 5.2.5).

According to Gardner (1989), the emphasis on the learning process in Western educational culture goes back to Socrates who “was obsessed with quality of thought and reasoning” and cared little about “superficial performance” (p. 262). As shown in the discussion of the student participants’ present and past educational cultures and pointed out by Gardner, Western educational cultures stress understanding through analyzing, criticizing, arguing, and synthesizing, while in cultures where Confucius (roughly a contemporary of Socrates) is the honored scholar factual knowledge and performance are stressed (Gardner, 1989).

In Chinese educational culture, theoretical knowledge is valued more than practical learning skills. Chinese perceptions of intelligence may shed some light on the student participants’ desire for more information over procedural skills. As discussed in Chan (1996), in Chinese societies, a bright/smart child is referred to as congming, that is, as having acute ears to receive and analyze information accurately and sharp eyes to be sensitive to external objects. “Thus, listening and seeing are considered to be two important components of becoming intelligent. Touching, tasting, and smelling by making direct contact with the skin, the tongue, and the nose respectively are considered to be comparatively less important in understanding the external world” (p. 94). Other Chinese words that describe intelligence include zhili, zhineng (having the power to know) and zhihui (having a lightening heart or a fast mind). The character zhi in both zhili and zhineng indicates knowing the sun, and the hui in zhihui means comet. As Chan (1996) explains, the Chinese characters for intelligence contain the sun and the comet because the universe was so distant and mystifying in ancient times that individuals who knew something about it were believed to have exceptional ability.

Starting from ancient times, Chinese education has had little regard for practical skills. According to Mencius, “those who labor with their minds govern others; those who labor with their hands are governed by others. Those who are governed provide food for
confucius categorized people into three types (i.e., superior (shang), medium (zhong), and inferior (xia)). Other terms he used include tiancai (talented or made of heaven’s material), rencai (ordinary or made of human material), and yongcai (mediocre or made of fool’s material). The talented were supposed to work with their minds and govern others, while those who were ordinary worked with their hands and were governed by the talented (Thøgersen, 1990). In addition, as mentioned by Pratt (in press) above, Chinese people believe in the importance of proven basic/foundational knowledge that must be mastered by all. From the dominant Western or North American perspective, however, the basics are seen to be relatively transitory and only of peripheral importance. Because foundational knowledge is seen as less certain, less stable, more contentious, and subject to interpretation, students are encouraged to learn problem-solving and critical thinking skills, which are seen to be valuable throughout their lives. Therefore, while the basics might be important, the process of learning how to learn is considered even more important (Pratt, in press). It may be that perceptions such as these have contributed to the teachers’ goals and actions to teach students learn how to learn and the students’ desire for factual knowledge.

In-depth discussion of the effectiveness of Chinese and Western pedagogies is not the focus of this study. However, it is important to point out here that the Chinese emphasis on the facts does not mean ignoring comprehension just as the Western emphasis on process does not mean ignoring the facts. Acquisition of factual knowledge requires comprehension and the learning process results in factual knowledge. But the difference in emphasis is
clear. Just as the Chinese emphasis on students’ acquiring basic/foundational theoretical knowledge may stem from their belief that this is what is truly known, the Western emphasis on basic procedural knowledge may stem from their belief that this may be the only lasting knowledge we have.

5.4.3.3 Student Independence versus Dependence on the Teacher

The teachers aimed to foster independence by teaching critical thinking and decision-making skills through project-based instruction. The students on the other hand complained that they don’t like projects because the teachers “don’t care” what they learn. We have seen that there are important differences between Canadian and Chinese educational cultures. For instance, in Canada there is a greater emphasis on a student-centered or transformative approach to learning, while in Chinese countries and territories there is a greater emphasis on a teacher-fronted or transmission approach to learning. But is there more here than just a difference between teacher-centered and student-centered forms of education? Are there not also different cultural views on teaching and teachers’ roles, and learning and learners’ roles?

5.4.3.3.1 Teaching and Learning in the West

According to Gardner (1989), the transformative approach to teaching values student independence. It has evolved from Rousseau, Dewey, and Piaget’s belief that children are born with a natural ability to understand, which is relative to different stages of their development. They should be allowed to construct knowledge through exploration in their own ways and at their own pace. When this approach is used, teachers become facilitators and co-explorers rather than masters of knowledge (Gardner, 1989). This student-centered approach is a reflection of a democratic society in which power is not given to a single leader because “checks and balances are desirable” (Gardner, 1989 p. 273). While older people and past practices are respected, such societies look to the young and the new for inspiration.
Newer and better ideas are constantly being sought. The educational culture in these societies naturally values independence and self-motivation. From this perspective, teachers are facilitators who provide opportunities for students to explore freely and to make discoveries for themselves. It is up to the students to decide what, when, and how to learn. Children are treated as equals and encouraged to make choices at a very young age. They are the hope of the future.

5.4.3.3.2 Teaching in Chinese Culture

In Chinese educational culture, teaching is viewed as a matter of delivering content and developing character (Chyu & Smith, 1991, specifically about Taiwanese education; Guo 1996, specifically about Chinese education; Lee, 1991, specifically about Hong Kongese education). Teachers are seen as "encyclopedia" (Guo, 1996, p. 22) who transmit or provide knowledge and are role models of moral characters. They are expected to be specialists in the subjects they are teaching, and thus are the natural center of the classroom (Guo, 1996; Pratt, 1992; in press). "Spoon-feeding," or "duck-feeding" as the Chinese say, using a transmission approach whereby teachers lecture and students listen, is still common (Guo, 1996; Jiang, 1988, Ogbu, 1995). Teachers are respected, obeyed, and regarded as caring and loving in the same way as the students' parents are (Guo, 1996). Teachers assist students with comprehension by providing models, patient explanations, written learning resources, and translations when necessary. Teachers with high expectations, who are strict but caring, are considered the most effective (Lee, 1991). Teachers and administrators are concerned about students' clothing, hair-length, health, their daily home life, and their potential for the future. Respect, similar to that given to parents and grandparents, is also given to teachers and principals. It is believed that "this experience is important for the children to help them move their emotional loyalties to a larger group than that of family and friends" (Chyu & Smith, 1991, p 109).
Learning in Chinese Culture

Learning in Chinese educational culture is viewed as the acquisition of knowledge or skill from others; as fulfilling a responsibility to society; as a change in understanding of something external to the self; and as a change in understanding the self (Pratt, 1992). Students are considered to be receivers or consumers rather than creators of knowledge. They expect external structure and close teacher guidance and modeling in their education (Ogbu, 1995). They expect teachers to initiate questions, and to learn in a quiet, individual, and low-risk environment where they will not lose face by making mistakes in front of others (Guo, 1996; Lum, 1993). Furthermore, most Chinese children are still brought up in traditional Chinese families where they are not supposed to challenge authorities (Wong, 1995). Chinese students are "extremely deferential, reluctant to give their opinions even when asked" (p. 357), perhaps because of the "Confucian perception about the need to 'maintain face,' group solidarity and the inappropriacy of shining in front of one's peers" (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995, p. 358).

The Rationale Behind Chinese Educational Practices

According to Gardner (1989) and others, the rationale behind such practices is that Chinese societies have been hierarchically organized for centuries. The leader of the society has always been clear, and everybody else fits in relation to the center of power. In traditional Chinese culture, the people must look in two directions. That is, upward toward those who hold authority, and backward to the practices of the past. This orientation results in worshipping (admiring) authority and the older figures in a family and society. It is assumed that the older and more powerful person knows what the younger person should learn and how they should behave. The older authority figure's role is to transmit this acceptable knowledge and appropriate behavior to the young. When there is an authority in a room, for example, others don't talk unless they are asked to. These notions are reflected in
schools. In classrooms, the teacher is the sun (i.e., the center of activities), and students are
the planets which revolve around the sun. As authority figures, teachers decide what their
students should learn and how they should learn and behave. Students accept and act
according to their teachers’ decisions because they trust their teachers’ ability to direct them
towards the right path (Gardner, 1989; Ho, 1996; Hsu, 1981).

Furthermore, Chinese children are socialized into a culture where filial piety (xiao),
submission, and obedience to one’s parents and elders are strongly emphasized irrespective
of whether the demands or requests at times seem unreasonable (Gow, Balla, Kember & Hau
1996; Ho, 1996; Wong, 1995). Chinese parents are strict with their children regarding
responsibility, and they give them independence at a much older age when compared to
Western children. The consequence of such socialization is the submissiveness and
dependence of Chinese students who “tend to seek constant approval and confirmation from
their teachers” (Gao, Ting-Toomey & Gudykunst, 1996, p. 115). Such respect for or worship
of authority figures results in the transmission approach in education which has been
dominant in such Chinese societies as Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong. Students seldom ask
teachers questions while the class is in session, “as questioning might be thought of as saying
that the teacher had not taught well because there were still unanswered questions” (Scollon
& Scollon, 1994, p. 17).

Given this background, the student participants in the present study were unlikely to
have been trained to question adults’ decisions and acts. Nor were they likely to have been
trained to make decisions about when and how to learn, or to be critical of what others,
especially adults, have done. They were accustomed to having decisions made for them. As
some ESL students said at the school’s Parents’ Night meetings, they don’t know what to do
with freedom or independence. This explains student comments (presented in section 5.2.6)
such as “If the government has a law about something, we should follow. I am sure the law
was made by lots of knowledgeable people. Why should children talk about it?” “I am sure
people came up with the law carefully. Who are we to question it? We are just children.”
What they are saying here is not that they do not want to think, but that they were trained to
trust adults (experts) to do their job well. Their job as students is to learn “school things”
from teachers. They can be critical when they earn the right to do so, that is, when they grow
up.

We should look again at other comments students made (presented in section 5.2.7)
when they were explaining why they think teachers should teach. But this time we should
keep in mind that they were likely to be speaking from their Chinese cultural experience.
“We shouldn’t do many projects. The teachers should teach more.” “In projects, teachers
don’t care. They say students do everything. They don’t give you pressure to study hard.”
“I like the teacher give me the information. I don’t want to waste time. I like to copy down
the information.” “When we do projects, teachers don’t care. They don’t teach anything. I
like studying in the classroom. I like teachers teach. No project.” Again, the researcher
suggests that what the students are saying here is not they do not want to learn, but they want
to learn from an authority, that is, the teacher, someone they believe has proven knowledge
they can transmit to them. They believe it is the teacher’s job to motivate them to learn with
encouragement and pressure, and show them “the right, beautiful way” of doing things. Such
trust in teachers’ authority may have contributed to the students’ negative evaluations of
group projects and their reluctance to share their work among group members as well. As
they said, “they did not want to waste their time” by “talking about somebody else” with
“non-authority” classmates.

5.4.3.4 Learning Resources versus Textbook Learning

Project-based instruction was valued by the teachers because it encouraged students
to examine a variety of potential learning resources. However, the students expressed a
desire to learn from textbooks. As Pratt (in press) points out, basic/foundational knowledge
in North America is open to question. What is not in question is the value of students learning how to learn. In this atmosphere, there is less emphasis on textbooks generally, and even when they are prescribed or recommended there is less reliance on them by teachers. Textbooks have become one of many different kinds of learning resource, and the emphasis is now on the teacher and teacher librarian helping students to make use of different resources in their learning and help them reconstruct knowledge presented in the texts (Ben-Peretz, 1990).

According to Noble (1990), Saskatchewan Education (1987), and Thompson (1981), there are a number of reasons for the use of a range of resource materials in North America. For instance, as a democratic society, people are critical of many things they read, see, and hear. They challenge authority. People from various backgrounds (cultural, religious, ethnic, etc.) demand representation in education. Though prescribed by provincial or local educational authorities, many textbooks used in Canadian schools are imported. They do not represent the local viewpoint, nor do they include sufficient local content. According to Neufeld (1999), some American commercial texts are not so much written by educational experts as edited by in-house professionals, and the numerous errors they contain are often brought to the teacher's attention only by their students. Under such circumstances, textbooks are seen to be inadequate and resource materials such as maps, drawings, newspapers, and even TV debates on local issues become necessary (Saskatchewan Education, 1987; Thompson, 1981).

Furthermore, resource materials other than textbooks are used to meet students' individual needs in North America. Resource-based learning is believed to be conducive to different interests, varying learning styles, and different abilities. According to Saskatchewan Education (1987), resource-based learning makes provision for exceptional students, and encourages students to be imaginative, creative, curious, and active learners. It helps students to become life-long learners by allowing them to develop skills in finding,
generating, evaluating, and applying information. It promotes team spirit by allowing teachers and teacher librarians to work together in developing a variety of student projects.

From the Chinese perspective, on the other hand, the educational process involves transmission of knowledge that is pure, beautiful, and proven/authoritative from generation to generation; developing new ideas through acquiring the old; and leading students towards moral superiority. Such authorized knowledge is expected to be transmitted to students systematically by teachers through prescribed textbooks (Garrot, 1993; Ping, 1995; Trueba, Cheng & Ima, 1993). As pointed out by Ping (1995), Chinese “revere books as the embodiment of knowledge, wisdom and truth” (p. 39), and thus textbooks are strictly followed by teachers and students. Teaching without textbooks may be perceived as casual and ineffective (Pratt, in press). A poem about books written by a Sung dynasty (960-1127) emperor is still widely cited by Chinese parents and scholars:

To enrich your family, no need to buy good land,
Books hold a thousand measures of grain.
For an easy life, no need to build a mansion,
In books are found those houses of gold.
Going out, be not vexed at the absence of flowers,
In books, carriages and horses form a crowd.
Marrying, be not vexed by lack of a good go-between,
In books, there are girls with faces of jade...

Textbooks are used at all levels from kindergarten to graduate school. Because there is little debate over what is ‘proven’ basic/foundational knowledge, textbook writing is delegated by the government to groups of experts whose work teachers and students follow closely as the primary determinants of the content of school subjects and of teaching methods (Lin, 1988; Postiglion, 1991).

The students in the present study may have been speaking from their cultural understanding of the importance of textbooks when they made comments such as “Learning from textbook is better, because that way you know the important points”; “Teacher say we should read the newspaper, watch TV, talk to the library people, and ask classmates. I don’t
like that”; “Newspaper is not school thing. Textbook is school thing. When you are at school, the teacher should teach from textbook.” It is difficult to imagine a wider gap than that which exists between the Chinese textbook and the North American leaning resource. While one is a government publication written by academic experts and studied closely by teachers and students working together, the other is potentially any material that a teacher or a teacher librarian believes has content that may help some students working on their own to develop their learning skills. Perhaps nothing could make a Western teacher happier, or a Chinese teacher more miserable, than a student who found an error in a textbook.

5.4.4 The Linguistic Model: Language/Content Integration versus Separation

So far, nothing has been said about the discrepancy found between the teachers’ goals/evaluations and the students’ evaluations of project-based instruction regarding language and content. That is, the teachers aimed to teach language in context through subject matter, which they thought was well served by project-based instruction, while the students seemed to have a mental model of language learning which separates it from learning content. When the students said “We shouldn’t do projects. ESL is for learning English,” they seemed to be assuming that language is a subject that should be learned separately from other subjects. The idea that language could and perhaps should be learned in the context of learning other content seemed to be new to them.

We have seen that subject integration has its origins in progressive educational philosophy. Kilpatrick (1925) thought that “we have so fixed attention upon separate teaching of (different subjects) as at times to starve the weightier matters of life and character. The only way to live well is to practice living well” (p. 109). And the way to do that, Kilpatrick said, was through the Project Method. Also, we will see below that the student participants in the present study had several years’ experience in their home countries of studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a separate subject. But it seems to be a
mistake to assume that the differences in the teachers' and students' perspectives on language learning can be adequately explained using either the philosophical or the cultural model. At the heart of the discrepancy seem to be different conceptions of language.

5.4.4.1 Language/Content Integration

As we saw in chapter 4, teachers said one of their goals was to teach language in context through project activities. This goal of the teachers seemed to be consistent with their department, school board, and ministry policy of language education that aims to teach ESL students to learn and think in English (Ministry of Education, 1987; Vancouver School Board, 1992; 1994). This goal was derived from the language/content integration approach that builds upon the functional view of language that "marks a radical departure from the grammar/structure approach to second language curriculum design" (Ministry of Education, 1987, p. 6). Specifically, the purpose of the language/content integration approach is to teach language through regular school subject matter such as Social Studies and Writing. The form this policy took in BC was different from a policy based on notions of comprehensible input or output. Based in the tradition of Halliday's functional grammar, it did not aim to replace the language teacher with the content teacher, but rather to coordinate the work of language teachers and content teachers via the functional analysis of discourse in context.

5.4.4.2 Language/Content Separation

In Chinese educational culture on the other hand foreign/second language and content are taught separately (Li, 1991; Pennington, 1995). In China and Taiwan English is the main foreign language in the secondary school curriculum. (It is of course an official not a foreign language in Hong Kong.) As is the case with the rest of the curriculum, the English language curriculum is centrally controlled. Due to the belief that knowledge is something that can be accumulated, language proficiency is measured by the amount of vocabulary
memorized, grammatical accuracy, and the number of texts mastered by students (Dzau, 1990). Having a large vocabulary and firm foundations in grammar and translation are considered most important (Chyu & Smith, 1991; Yang, 1993). As a result, students are more concerned with increasing their vocabulary by memorization and understanding different sentence structures through analysis of words and phrases than with focusing on the practical aspects of the language under study (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Ping, 1995). Even in Hong Kong, where English is used as the medium of instruction in Science and Mathematics, the focus of the secondary English program is morpheme and sentence level grammar. A typical Hong Kong English class is product oriented where the teacher generally assigns a piece of writing to be completed by the student (Postiglion, 1991).

Foreign language teaching in Chinese countries and territories has been influenced by approaches such as immersion, the communicative approach, and audio-lingual methods. However, due to teacher beliefs about knowledge and teaching/learning, class size (usually 40-50), and pressure of examinations, a combination of audio-lingual and traditional teacher-centered grammar translation methods and teaching from prescribed textbooks are all prevalent (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Campbell & Young, 1993; Dunkelblau, 1996; Lum, 1996; Guo, 1996). Another common method of teaching foreign languages in China is intensive reading which focuses on analyzing individual words, phrases, and sentence structures (Ping, 1995). In Taiwan, teachers are strongly oriented to a directive, transmissional model of teaching/learning, rather than a facilitative, interpersonal model. Instructional methods in most secondary schools are pure grammar-style (wenfashi) and serve to prepare students for university entrance exams (Young & Lee, 1987). Communicative- and activity-based approaches are also used in foreign language classes, but only as warm-up exercises and at game times. They are not considered serious ways of teaching and learning (Burnaby & Sun, 1989). Students study to take exams and ignore courses that do not prepare them for the exams (Li, 1991; Pennington, 1995).
Given such reports in the literature, it is easy to hastily interpret what students in the present study said about project-based instruction and language learning as a cultural matter. That is, it may be argued that the student participants said they wanted to learn “vocabulary and how to write a good paragraph” because they are Chinese. That is how the Chinese learn English. However, as pointed out in chapter 2 and earlier in this chapter, it is a mistake to interpret this as simply a cultural matter. The belief that language should be learned separately from content and skills is common even in Canadian education. For example, as discussed in chapter 2, students who are educated in Canada seem to share similar views about language, content, and skills learning with the student participants in the present study (e.g., Kanada, doctoral research in progress). The language and content integration approach in second language education is relatively new. It has become more popular (Grabe & Stoller, 1997) only since the publication of Bernard Mohan’s Language and Content in 1986 (Snow & Brinton, 1997).

5.4.4.3 Two Perspectives and Practices Influenced by Two Linguistic Paradigms

What we have here then seems to be a discrepancy that results from two educational perspectives that result in turn from two different views of language, that is, a structuralist view of language implicit in the practices of the more traditional structuralist language teaching classroom, and a functional view epitomized in the work of functional linguists such as Halliday (Halliday, 1985; 1994). Some of the differences between these points of view are discussed in detail in chapters 1 and 2. From the structuralist perspective, language learning is the acquisition of a set of rules, while from the functionalist perspective, language is a medium of learning. For Halliday, language learning involves both learning language and learning about the world. Hence, we have the language/content integration perspective and practices influenced by the functionalist paradigm, and the language/content separation perspective and practices influenced by the structuralist paradigm.
The teacher participants in the present study seemed to be working within the functional paradigm. From what they said in chapter 4 and what they did in section 5.3, the teachers saw project-based instruction as an excellent way to teach language, skills, and content. They taught ESL in a language/content inter-related manner by organizing projects. They aimed at and worked towards the language socialization of ESL students into Canadian school and social cultures and critical thinking and group work activities. They taught Social Studies and Writing content as well as research and communication skills through the English language. In the projects described in this study, Ms. Jones was teaching the language and content of sociological research by asking her students to research an issue that was likely to interest them and from which they could learn something important about contemporary Canadian society, while Ms. Brown was teaching the language and content of linguistic research by asking her students to research a word that had personal significance to them. The assumption is that English is something we use/learn in different contexts, and at Carlton High students, appropriately enough, are using/learning academic English.

The student participants on the other hand seemed to be operating under the structuralist paradigm. Most of the students had considerable experience in learning EFL as a separate subject. English was a separate object of study, one to be broken down into its component parts such as vocabulary and grammar structures, and learned bit by bit. All their project activities were carried out through listening to, speaking, reading, and writing English using vocabulary and grammar skills. However, the students said they did not want to do projects. They wanted to learn how to speak and write in English. As we saw in section 5.2.10, they said “projects are not useful. ... You can gain information, but you don’t learn language.” “In ESL, I think they should teach conversation, grammar, and how to make sentences.” “They shouldn’t give us projects, make us draw pictures, and field trip. I want to go ELC. I need improve my English.” How is it possible that one can gain information in a language but not learn the language? It is true that there was no explicit grammar
instruction, but how is it possible that the students did not learn conversational skills and "how to make sentences" while all their work was done by speaking English to each other, to the teachers, and to the librarians? How is it possible that the students did not learn how to write sentences when part of what they had to do was to write a report about their projects? How is it possible that the students did not improve their English for ELC while all they did was to prepare for ELC through project work, again by listening to English, speaking English, reading in English, and writing in English during their project work?

What the teacher participants in the present study did is clearly more than comprehensible output, the SLA view of project-based instruction. They were teaching so much more. Why did the students not see that they were learning? How can they say that they "do not like projects because they do not learn English by doing project"? It appears that because the teachers and students were operating under different assumptions about language and language learning, the students did not quite see the connection between the language and Social Studies and Writing content. For instance, not all students in the present study saw the need for all the issues that the two projects were intended to explore. One student even said he did not like ESL at Carlton High because "they do everything together. Like projects, field trip, Socials, Writing, and.... I like them to teach me one thing at a time." While some students said that the projects were organized to prepare them for mainstream classes, others said they were intended to help them improve their communication skills (speak English in public, with eye contact, etc.). None mentioned the learning of discourse, thinking, and decision making skills. Nor did they see that by doing projects, they were actually learning how to speak, read, and write in English.

5.4.4.4 Could it have been Explained?

If the discrepancy between teachers' and students' evaluations of project-based instruction may have been due to the different assumptions they held about language
learning, could the teachers have explained the different assumption to their students? Yes, they could, and they did. For instance, all students were given copies of the school’s ESL Handbook that describes the integrated language learning approach Carlton High takes. There were also some explanations given at Parents’ Night meetings. Apparently, general explanations through literature and Parents’ Night meetings are not enough. More specific systematic explanations seem to be necessary.

It is likely that students expected some equivalent of the daily, detailed, and prominent commentary on language development that is provided by the traditional structural language teaching that they were familiar with. In these traditional classrooms, students are given clear targets for learning when teachers explain grammar and vocabulary. Students have at least the illusion, if not the reality, of assessment of their progress towards these targets when teachers mark the errors in their work. But there was no evidence in the project work that the teachers provided a frequent, detailed language commentary on specific features of individual students’ language development. One reason is that under present circumstances, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to provide such a language commentary for project work. The language commentary in the traditional language classroom is the central objective of the class. It is supported by textbook and curriculum and driven by highly routinized practices of language assessment, particularly of grammatical errors. But in the case of project-based instruction, there was no functional language textbook available that deals with projects. Nor were there any appropriate standardized and routinized forms of language assessment.

A second reason may be that organizing and carrying out language/content integrated projects can be a difficult task. The fact that such projects take a relatively long time to carry out and a lot can be included in such projects may make it difficult for students to see the significance of the separate activities in relation to the whole project. Due to the complexity of organizing projects and the number of things that can be done in them, teachers as well
may be overwhelmed and loose sight of the relationships of the separate activities to the whole project. They may not be able to articulate everything they are doing with project-based instruction to their students, that is, teaching everything including language, content, research and thinking skills, and the discourse of those skills.

A third reason for the lack of adequate explanation on the teachers' part may be due to the lack of a systematic framework in second language research literature for teachers to apply in project-based instruction. As mentioned earlier, due to the relatively short history of the language/content approach in second language education (Grabe & Stoller, 1997), there is no accepted systematic framework for teaching language/content (Sagliano, Stewart & Sagliano, 1998; Snow & Brinton, 1997). As pointed out in chapter 2, the importance of language in content areas such as Science has begun to draw the attention of general educators as well (Lemke, 1990; Parker, 1992; O'Toole, 1996; Rowell, 1997). For instance, Veel (1992) provides a genre analysis, a form of language/content integration particularly relevant to the needs of second language learners. Veel's analysis is relevant to second language learners because the analysis of each of these science genres connects a detailed analysis of grammar and lexis of the features of scientific knowledge or content.

Veel's work shows a clear possibility for a project-based instruction that integrates language, skills, and content. However, it is clear from Rowell's (1997) review of research in writing to learn in science education that there is no comprehensive and accepted analysis of writing to learn in science. If such an analysis is unavailable for the specific case of writing science, it is unlikely to be available for the more general case of using language to learn in project-based instruction. This lack of a systematic framework is likely to make it much more difficult for teachers to present students with clear, comprehensive, and convincing justifications for the project work that students are engaged in.
5.4.5 Summary

Some background conditions or problem situations and three possible models are applied to account for the discrepancies found between teachers' and students' evaluations of project-based instruction. It is argued that students' negative evaluations are in part due to time and parental pressures and to the linguistic and content difficulties of recent immigrant ESL students in secondary schools. It is then noted that because the student participants came from an educational culture that appears to be more traditional than their present school culture, their accounts can easily be misunderstood as reflecting the North American debate between traditional and progressive educators. However, the findings of the present study contradict the common criticisms of progressive education such as that progressive teachers do not have clear standards and students are not required to work hard. The findings show that the teachers in the present study do have standards which they made clear to their students. They had high expectations for their students and students worked hard to meet the challenges they faced.

It is then argued that a cultural model helps us to understand, perhaps at a deeper level, some of the discrepancies found between the teachers' and students' evaluations of project-based instruction. For instance, the cultural model helps us to understand that the student participants were asking for the basic, proven, authoritative knowledge that must be learned by all, while their teachers seemed to be operating under the assumption that what is more important is the learning process. The cultural model helps us to understand why the students may have been frustrated by less teacher involvement in their education and a lack of prescribed textbooks. It is also helpful to understand that it is not that the teachers did not care or did not provide the basic training for the student participants to advance as they claimed. Rather, they cared enough to provide the students with the basic skills that they thought were important for their academic survival in Canada. However, due to cultural
differences, what the teachers considered important “school things” were different from what
the students considered important “school things.”

Finally, a linguistic model is applied to account for discrepancies found between
teachers’ and students’ evaluation of project-based instruction regarding language and
content. It is argued that the discrepancies are due to the different linguistic paradigms that
the teachers and students were operating under. It is suggested that this difference is of such
profound importance that some of the students seemed to be suggesting that since they were
in an ESL program, they should be learning English language only (i.e., grammar,
vocabulary, conversation, reading, and writing skills). Content material such as Social
Studies should be learned after they learn enough English to graduate into mainstream
classes where that content is supposed to be learned.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This study examined the implementation of project-based instruction in a Canadian secondary school’s ESL classes. Specifically, it explored some ESL teachers’ goals for and evaluations of and some Chinese ESL students’ evaluations of project-based instruction. It asked such questions as: What do ESL teachers hope to achieve through project-based instruction? How do they evaluate project-based instruction? How do ESL students evaluate project-based instruction? What discrepancies, if any, are there between ESL teachers’ and ESL students’ evaluations? What may contribute to the discrepancies between teachers’ and students’ evaluations? The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1) What are the ESL teachers’ goals for project-based instruction for ESL learners?
2) How do ESL teachers and ESL students evaluate the process and results of project-based instruction?
3) What can account for any differences found between the teachers’ and students’ evaluations?

6.2 Summary of Findings

Two major findings emerged from the analyses of data collected through interviews, observations, and documents. That is, there were discrepancies between 1) the teachers’ reported goals for project-based instruction and the goals reported in the SLA literature; and 2) the teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction.

6.2.1 Discrepancies Between Teachers’ Goals and SLA Literature Goals

One major finding of the study is that there is a major discrepancy between the teachers participants’ goals for project-based instruction and the view of the activity as it is
The general goal the teachers in the present study hoped to achieve through project-based instruction was to prepare ESL students for life-long learning. Their specific goals included the language socialization of ESL students into Canadian school and social cultures, challenging students' creativity, fostering independence, teaching decision-making, cooperative learning, critical thinking and learning skills, and the teaching of academic language in context. Furthermore, the goals the teachers had for project-based instruction seem to be consistent with their department, school board and ministry's goals for ESL as well as general education in British Columbia (Ministry of Education, 1987; 1996b; 1996c; 1996d; 1996e; 1997; Vancouver School Board, 1992; 1994). The teachers' goals also seem to be consistent with the goals given for project-based instruction in the general literature (e.g., Ramey, 1997; Owens, 1997). However, the teachers' goals go far beyond that of comprehensible output, the goal stressed for project-based instruction in the SLA literature. The teachers even had three goals that are not stressed in either the SLA or the general literature (e.g., Eyring, 1989; Fried-Booth, 1986). The three goals are the language socialization of ESL students into the target school culture, the language socialization of ESL students into the target social cultures, and teaching academic language in context.

The SLA literature lists comprehensible output as the major goal for project-based instruction. Project-based instruction has been applied to provide second language learners exposure to the target language (Brumfit, 1984; Candlin et al., 1988; Eyring, 1989; Fried-Booth, 1986; Hilton-Jones, 1988). Other goals such as culture leaning (Hilton-Jones, 1988), resource management and communication skills (Gardner, 1995), have also been mentioned. But there is little evidence in the studies that an effort was made to ensure that these broader goals were achieved. It is clear from both the findings of the present study and the review of the general literature that comprehensible output is merely one of many worthwhile goals of project-based instruction for second language students. As the teacher participants in the present study and other teachers in general education have done, project-based instruction
can be used for the language socialization of ESL students into the target school and social cultures, challenging students’ creativity, fostering independence, and teaching decision-making, critical thinking, and cooperative learning skills.

The teachers in the present study evaluated project-based instruction positively. They reported that their students generally do well in their project work and achieve the goals the teachers set for them. The researcher’s observations supported the teachers’ evaluations. The analysis of interview and observation data suggests that the teachers’ goals for project-based instruction were indeed achieved. The students seemed to be following all the necessary steps to complete their projects, and their oral and written presentations indicated that they had completed their assignments successfully, having acquired the knowledge and skills they were intended to acquire. For example, the researcher’s observations suggest that, through their project work, the students learned Canadian school and social cultures, brainstormed ideas, collected, analyzed, summarized, and presented data orally and in writing. During this work, they learned to make decisions, to work cooperatively, and were encouraged to think critically and do creative work. They learned how to locate resources in the library through card catalogs and computers. They also learned the content of the Social Studies and Writing curricula. And they did all this in English. They learned the skills, content material, and language or discourse that is necessary to talk, read, and write about these skills and content. What the teachers and students did seemed to be consistent with Dewey (1926), Dewey and Dewey (1915), and Mohan (1986), as well as with the TESOL (1997) and BC Ministry of Education (1987) requirements discussed in chapters 1 and 2. That is, teachers provided much needed contexts for language/discourse learning so that their students have something to read, talk, and write about, and ESL students learned planning, decision-making, information gathering, analyzing, synthesizing, and presenting skills orally and in writing.
The discrepancies between the teacher's goals and the goals given in the SLA literature points to a major problem. That is, there is no generally available, accepted, and detailed rationale which adequately addresses project-based instruction as functional language learning in the context of academic subject matter learning. This is needed for both first and second language learners across the curriculum, but it is lacking. Just as the discussion of project-based instruction in the SLA education fails to deal with the nature of projects as inquiry into subject matter, so the subject matter research literature on project-based instruction fails to give an adequate account of the role of language/discourse in projects. In both cases, the connection between research processes and discourse processes is overlooked. This is particularly ironic in that more than half a century ago Dewey's work created a context for project-based instruction in which it could be seen as an alternative to teaching language as a thing by itself, a context in which project-based instruction could be seen as the functional development of language and literacy in the process of inquiry across curriculum (e.g., Dewey & Dewey, 1915 discussed in chapter 2).

As discussed in chapter 2, Swales and Feak's (1994) work on the analysis of moves in the research paper genre along with the sections discussing functional language issues would have been helpful for the teachers and students in the research presentation phase of the projects considered in this thesis. But even Swales and Feak's work is inadequate because it offers only an analysis of the written product. It does not offer an analysis of the inquiry processes of a project and the discourse of those processes. While teachers were able to encourage students to achieve a great deal in language and thinking in their project work, research literature has yet to provide teachers with an accepted rationale to explain such achievement.
6.2.2 Discrepancies Between Teachers' and Students' Evaluations

A second major finding of the study is a discrepancy between ESL teachers' and students' evaluations of project-based instruction. The teachers' evaluations of project-based instruction were positive. As pointed out earlier, the teachers reported that their students generally do well. The researcher's observations supported the teachers' claims. However, despite their successes, the students' evaluations of project-based instruction were mixed. Specifically, only 13 (18%) of the 73 student participants said they liked project-based instruction. They thought it provided them opportunities to learn in a new and fun way, freedom to explore on their own, and time to learn interactively. Eighteen (25%) of the students had mixed feelings about project-based instruction. They seemed to be torn between fun and freedom on one hand and getting the work done as quickly as possible on the other hand. The remaining 42 (57%) students evaluated project-based instruction negatively. According to them, the activity distracts them from learning the information they need to advance their education. They did not like doing projects because they did not get enough attention from their teachers and because they were not learning enough English vocabulary and grammar.

It is worth reminding ourselves that although some students referred to certain projects during the interviews, their evaluations included project-based instruction in general, and were not limited to a particular project. There seem to be more complicated reasons for students' evaluation than a negative reaction to a particular project.

6.2.3 Interpretation of the Discrepancies Between Teachers' and Students' Evaluations

The discrepancy found between teachers' and students' evaluations of project-based instruction was discussed mainly using the three explanatory models proposed in chapter 2. Each of these models has implications for the mental models that the participants may have been using to interpret their work. Some of the findings were also discussed as background
conditions or problem situations which face many immigrant students learning through project-based instruction. It is argued that a philosophical model may partially explain some of the discrepancies such as the teachers’ goal to teach students how to learn and the students’ desire to learn basic information. However, it does not explain all the findings. For instance, as discussed in chapters 2 and 5, project-based instruction is criticized as an activity that neglects students’ need for teacher guidance (e.g., Bode, 1922; Holt, 1994) and not having standards (e.g., Hirsch, 1996). But the findings of the present study show that teachers guided their students closely and had clear standards to be achieved. Furthermore, it is argued that this model is inadequate in explaining the findings of the current study because it applies a North American template to a cross-cultural situation.

It is then argued that a cultural model helps to further our understanding of some of the discrepancies found between the teachers’ and students’ evaluations. For instance, it was pointed out that when the Chinese students asked for basic, proven, authoritative knowledge that must be learned by all, they were asking for much more than what a North American traditionalist would call basic facts and skills. Indeed, though the teachers were traditionalist enough to help the students to acquire basic research skills, the students were asking for something that would have made doing original research irrelevant. And that, given their ultimate goal, the teachers simply could not do. The cultural model helps us to understand why the students may have been frustrated by less teacher involvement and the lack of prescribed textbooks in their project work. It is not that the teachers did not care to provide the basic training for the students to advance, as the students claimed, but that the teachers had a different idea of what the students needed for their academic survival in Canada. Due to cultural differences the teachers and students had different ideas about what are the important “school things.”

Finally, a linguistic model is applied to account for the discrepancies found between teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction regarding language and
content. It is argued that the discrepancies may be due to different linguistic paradigms that make different assumptions about language and language learning. The teachers appeared to be using the language/content integration approach in teaching ESL. The students, however, seemed to be interpreting their language learning experience based on a language/content separation mental model. Due to these differences in their assumptions about language and language learning, the students did not seem to realize that, by doing projects, they were learning thinking and research skills as well as the language/discourse related to these skills. They did not see that they actually learned vocabulary, and practiced their vocabulary and grammar to collect information for their research through interaction with their teachers, peers, librarians, and others. They spoke and wrote English to present their projects. Another possible contributor to this discrepancy may be the lack of discussion of this issue in the research literature. That is, although the teachers aimed to teach language in context/through content, in accordance to their departmental policy, they did not have a systematic framework to promote a shared understanding of this potential.

6.3 Implications for Further Research

Further research should develop a rationale which adequately addresses project-based instruction as a functional language learning activity in the context of academic subject matter learning. A more adequate rationale should include both first and second language learners, while recognizing the differences between these two groups. It is inadequate to assume that the major goal of project-based instruction for second language learners is comprehensible output. It is also inadequate to overlook the language implications of project-based instruction/learning for first language learners.

As we saw from the descriptions of the projects observed for this study, project-based instruction can be used to teach students thinking skills such as describing, arguing, sequencing, evaluating, and making choices, and the language/discourse that goes along with
these skills. It may also be used to teach students to use the target language to learn content material. That is, teaching language and content simultaneously may be achieved through project-based instruction. This means that we can do much more than just foster comprehensible output with project-based instruction. We can provide opportunities for second language learners to do much more than talk because they have to say something in the target language. As both Ms. Jones and Ms. Brown, the teacher participants in the present study mentioned, we can provide opportunities for students to see the significance of their project work. We can provide them with opportunities to discover their academic potential. All these activities should provide second language learners ample opportunities to use their target language functionally in demanding academic contexts.

Further research should examine the processes of project-based instruction, noting places of difficulty and success, and considering promising strategies. Organizing and carrying out language/content integrated projects can be a difficult task. The fact that such projects take a relatively long time to carry out and a lot can be included in them may make it difficult for students to see the significance of the separate sub-activities in relation to the whole project. Therefore, not all students may like project-based instruction as a whole even if they like parts of it. For instance, students participating in the present study liked project-based instruction because it helped them improve their oral English. But they did not endorse it as a whole because they felt overwhelmed and frustrated by the amount of work involved in their projects. It is easy to feel self-accomplished by doing something short and uncomplicated such as learning a list of grammar points or vocabulary. This is much easier than having to learn new curriculum content in a new language. But what students want may not be what they need. What is easy may not be the best use of their school time. If we are to be responsible researchers and educators, we should look for strategies which help students to become more engaged in productive learning.
Due to the complexity of organizing projects and the number of things that can be done in them, teachers as well may be overwhelmed and lose sight of the relationships of the separate activities to the whole project. Therefore, they may fail to become fully conscious of what they may already be doing, that is, teaching everything, including language, content, research and thinking skills, and the discourse of these skills. If they are not fully conscious of what they are doing, they may not be able to articulate the language/content issue to their students. For instance, the teachers said and it was stated in their ESL Handbook that Carlton High applies a language/content integration approach in its language teaching. This was explained to students and their parents at Parents' Night meetings; it was put into operation by teachers during project work (see 5.3.7 & 5.3.8), and one might therefore expect students to see the significance of project work as language/content integration. However, the evidence indicates that many students drew upon their prior experiences of language learning and reinterpreted projects as a deviation from the serious practice of language teaching and learning. For some students, even the apparently obvious case of ESL Social Studies was similarly reinterpreted.

It did not seem as though exposure to language/content integration within a general policy framework significantly altered this reinterpretation. This suggests that students' prior conceptions of language learning may dominate and reinterpret the evidence before them, just as students' prior notions of science concepts dominate and reinterpret the evidence before them in science classrooms. If this is so, then it may be necessary to implement carefully designed instructional strategies to alter students' prior conceptions of language learning, just as carefully designed strategies for science concepts have been developed in science education. These strategies will need to be based on an accepted systematic language/content framework for project-based instruction. However, as pointed out elsewhere, due to the relatively short history of the language/content approach in second language education (Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Sagliano, Stewart & Sagliano, 1998; Snow &
Brinton, 1997), an accepted systematic language/content framework for project-based instruction does not yet exist. Further research is therefore required to address these issues.

It would also be interesting to conduct a follow-up study to find out if the student participants in the present study found project-based instruction applied in their mainstream and college-level classes. If they did, if and how has their evaluation of project-based instruction changed? That is, did they see the usefulness of what they learned through project-based instruction in their ESL classes? If they did, do they now evaluate project-based instruction more favorably as a result?

Finally, further research should examine the mental models the teachers and learners bring to project-based instruction. It should examine the discourse processes where these models are made more explicit, in particular, dialogues where teachers and learners discuss and negotiate their differences regarding project-based instruction. The findings of the present study suggest that the different attitudes of teachers and students towards project-based instruction relate to differences in assumptions about the educational processes of projects. Closer scrutiny of these assumptions suggests that project-based instruction can be seen as raising questions of educational philosophies, cultural differences, and questions of language learning and language teaching. Furthermore, research should aim for a deeper understanding of the assumptions inherent in project-based instruction and of the differing assumptions of teachers and learners. But in addition, research needs to explore dialogues where these differences are discussed and negotiated in the classroom. In other words, the present study began by researching teachers and learners as participants in projects, but it has ended by also emphasizing a further need for researching the role of teachers and learners as negotiators of projects. Accordingly, while the next section of the chapter discusses implications for teachers, it has implications for researchers concerned with teachers and learners as negotiators, because it suggests a number of the research issues that illuminate the role of negotiation.
6.4 Implications for Teachers

The findings of this study suggest that second language teachers need to realize that project-based instruction has a great potential for teaching languages meaningfully. It can be applied to teach language, content, and a variety of skills, as well as the discourse necessary to use those skills and to talk and write about the content material learned. However, teachers must understand that, as a cultural phenomenon, project-based instruction may not be appreciated by all second language learners all of the time. They must realize that their students may find certain aspects of project-based instruction interesting and useful but other aspects overwhelming, irrelevant, or a waste of their time. They need to realize that, as active agents, their students may come to them with goals, needs, and socio-cultural knowledge different from theirs. They should be aware that such differences may cause dilemmas and conflicts that need to be managed. Otherwise, teachers may have excellent tasks and methods they use to achieve valuable educational goals, but which cannot be achieved because the learners do not see them in the same way.

6.4.1 Make Goals and Objectives Explicit

As pointed out elsewhere, project-based instruction in ESL classes is a complicated matter. It is not easy for students to see all the relevant points. Therefore, it is advisable that teachers make their students explicitly aware of their goals, objectives, practices, resources, and the significance of the separate activities in relation to the whole curriculum (Nunan, 1995). This may sound trivial or too obvious because we tend to assume that this is something that every teacher does. However, the researcher did not notice such explanations being given in her observations of the two projects. And in their studies of classroom interaction, Block (1996) and Nunan (1996) found that not many teachers started their lessons by explaining the pedagogical terrain to be covered. Teachers may have good
reasons for not explaining everything they do. For instance, as reported in chapter 5, one of the teachers in the present study, Ms. Brown, told the researcher that she deliberately did not explain the significance of project-based instruction because she wanted the students to discover it for themselves. But the problem is that not all students will take the trouble to do so. Some students will expect teachers to explain it to them. According to Nunan (1995), there is evidence that students' interests and motivations can be enhanced “when the purpose and the rationale of instruction is made explicit to the learners” (p. 136).

To do this, there is a variety of actions that can be considered. Specifically, in organizing projects, second language teachers can explicitly discuss the significance/potential of project-based instruction with their students. Let them know the learning that is taking place through project work. For example, spell out the fact that by doing projects, students learn content material (e.g., Social Studies), thinking and research skills as well as the language that they need to communicate the content material and describe the skills. They can even explain this functional approach to language learning. Tell the students why it is desirable to learn English this way as opposed to separating language from content. They can make use of teachable moments to remind students what they are learning. They can remind the students that they are engaged in learning all aspects of ESL. For instance, they are listening to, speaking, reading, and writing in English at different stages of their project work. They can tell the students that they do all this with the vocabulary, grammar, and skills they ask for. They can even show the students the vocabulary they learned in their projects by making a list if that appears to be needed.

Many educators feel that there is no better way to learn than by actually doing. Therefore, one other thing that teachers can do is to organize their students to dialogue with other students. Specifically, they can design activities such as in-class participant observation activities. These can be organized to enable junior (new) ESL students to see and experience what and how senior (veteran) ESL students study. In-class observations can
also be organized for senior ESL students to see and experience what and how mainstream
students study. Visits to local college and university classrooms can also be added to such
activities so that ESL students become aware of what to expect in their post-secondary
education. Such awareness may ease the tension caused by conflicting mental models. For
instance, when ESL students see that project-based instruction is used throughout their ESL
program, on into their mainstream schooling, and increasingly in colleges and universities,
they may see that it is simply a fact of their new educational culture, and perhaps also that it
reflects something important in their new social culture.

In the view of the present researcher, explicitness seems to be an important and
necessary step. However, we should not gloss over some of the difficulties of making goals
and objectives explicit, and these difficulties indicate where further work might be directed in
the future. The first of these difficulties is, as we have discussed above, that there is no
generally available, accepted, and detailed rationale which adequately addresses project-
based instruction as a functional language learning activity in the context of academic subject
matter learning. That is, there is no adequate explicit rationale for teachers to draw on.
Simply telling students that their language input and output will help their language
development does not seem to work. Another difficulty is that a number of actions that can
be taken to make goals and objectives explicit involve learning from other students and from
experience, rather than learning from the authoritative teacher and text. But this is the one of
the major problems that students are having with learning through project-based instruction
in the first place. A further difficulty is that the mental models of teaching and learning that
the students bring to bear on project-based instruction seem to be deep-seated and persistent
even in the face of explicit instruction. Some of the research in science education is
illuminating in this regard.

Science education researchers such as Mestre, who take a constructivist view of
learning science, state that science learners are not information processing automata (Harré &
Secord, 1993) or “blank slates upon which knowledge can be inscribed” (Mestre, in press); instead, they approach new ideas with a variety of preconceptions and conceptions that will affect how they interpret the knowledge that the teacher is attempting to convey (Cole, 1998; Kohonen, 1992). Similarly, second language students participating in the present study appear to have come to the second language learning situation with mental models that may be different from those of their teachers and schools: Mental models that guide their acts and actions in their learning; mental models that may take a long time to change, creating tensions between themselves and their teachers which may jeopardize the educational agendas of both. Mestre (in press) found that students come to schools and even universities with many incorrect notions that they use to explain scientific phenomena. The problem with these incorrect notions is that many are resistant to instruction. Students retain a considerable number of their erroneous beliefs following lessons in which lucid explanations are provided for the phenomena in question. What is required in these circumstances? Mestre gives a detailed account of what is necessary to overcome misconceptions:

Students possess misconceptions that are in conflict with the scientific concepts targeted for instruction. ... teachers need to possess considerable knowledge of science content in order to be able to determine whether the concepts held by the students are misconceptions. Further, when a misconception is identified, a teacher needs to be able to induce dissatisfaction in students in order to initiate the process of conceptual change. To create dissatisfaction requires that the teacher be able to challenge students by providing discrepant events that illustrate inconsistencies between their belief and scientific phenomena. When discrepant events are presented or experienced, students need to debate and discuss the scientific concept in view of both of their beliefs and the discrepant events. The teacher then needs to help students appreciate the value of scientific conception in terms of its consistency with other scientific concepts and of interpreting other phenomena and making predictions. Finally, the teacher needs to guide students in reconstructing their knowledge. (Mestre, in press, p. 31)

Applying this to project-based instruction, it suggests that changing a student’s present mental model or conception would at a minimum require: (a) a very clear and explicit understanding of the rationale for project-based instruction; (b) a clear identification of the conflicting mental model or models that the students hold; (c) detailed strategies for helping
students appreciate the importance of the rationale and the value of project work in their own learning. The present study has suggested some of the conflicting models that students may hold. It will require future research to find detailed strategies which may be of value for helping students appreciate project-based instruction.

There are further complexities that need to be addressed. For instance, there are important differences between mental models of scientific understanding and the mental models under discussion in the present study, in which cultural understandings are implicated. One of these differences relates to the nature of contrasts in understandings between cultures. Here we must take a culturally pluralistic or "polycultural" (Cole, 1998) viewpoint that avoids the automatic assumption that the point of view of the majority or host culture is necessarily correct and therefore to be inculcated by instruction. The philosopher Charles Taylor (Taylor, 1997; 1999) has drawn attention to the role of cultural dialogue in culturally pluralist societies.

6.4.2 Identify Dilemmas and Conflicts

First and foremost, teachers should recognize that there are divergent cultural beliefs about and interpretations of education. These beliefs and interpretations may have a lasting effect on students. Secondly, they need to identify the potential dilemmas and conflicts that result from divergent cultural beliefs. As the teacher participants in the present study did, teachers can see schools as learning organizations (Senge, 1990) where different perspectives are shared among teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Such learning organizations, especially those composed of multicultural communities, need to learn "how to learn" together (Senge, 1990, p. 3).

One way to learn how to learn is through "diversity dialogues" (Taylor, 1997; 1999). A diversity dialogue, or dialogue across differences as Burbules and Rice (1991) refer to it, can be beneficial in a number of ways. It broadens our understanding of others and
ourselves. It "heightens our sensitivity to the diversity of human cultures, and to how the ‘same’ thing might look and feel quite different to members of different cultural groups. It prepares us for the possibility of radical misunderstanding, and it should make us extremely modest and cautious about imposing an interpretive frame from one group onto another” (Burbules & Rice, 1991, p. 405). It broadens and enriches our self-understanding by forcing us to consider our beliefs, values, and actions from a fresh standpoint. It deepens our understanding of differences and offers us a path to establish consensus. Such a practice can enrich and invigorate our educational thoughts and practices, and enable students and their parents to function more successfully in our schools and society.

6.4.3 Teachers as the Leaders of the Dialogue

Teachers play a pivotal role in education. Parents entrust most of their children’s education to them. Students seek knowledge and inspiration from them. Administrators and curriculum developers trust them to implement school and curriculum policies intelligently and humanely. As individuals who run the schools by seeing and teaching the students daily and implementing curriculum and other policies, they have a tremendous influence on all aspects of students’ lives. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers play the central role in the diversity dialogues. They can organize diversity dialogues in such forums as small group discussions, whole class discussions, debates, individual conversations between students and teachers, students and students, teachers and teachers, teachers and parents, departmental Parents’ Night meetings (as the teacher participants in the present study did), school-wide parent-teacher meetings, focus group discussions that include representatives from students, teachers, researchers, multicultural workers, school councilors, school board members, parent associations, and the community.

Because of linguistic and cultural differences among participants, some of these forums may be inappropriate to solicit and share ideas. Whichever forum is chosen to carry
out the dialogues, it is important to have what Burbules and Rice (1991) refer to as "communicative virtues that help make dialogue possible and help sustain the dialogical relation over time" (p. 411). According to Burbules and Rice, these virtues include tolerance, patience, respect for differences, a willingness to listen, allowing others to speak, and the ability to express oneself comprehensibly. Otherwise, we will be running the risk of imposing one voice upon the others.

6.4.4 Dialogues with Students

Obviously, the most important individuals that teachers should dialogue with in their search for common ground is the students. As Pratt (1990) points out, students are experts at being students. They have specific wishes and desires as to what and how to learn. It is important for teachers, curriculum designers, and policy makers to find out and understand those desires and wishes. One way to seek understanding is by asking, listening to, and answering questions. This can be done through teacher/student dialogues where the teachers find out their students' wishes and desires, their perceptions about schooling in general and specific academic activities such as project-based instruction. This does not mean that teachers should accept students' views in all cases, because as pointed out earlier, what they want may not be what should be taught. But, teachers can at least find out what and how the students want to learn (Nunan, 1995). Such dialogues also allow the students to understand their teachers' perceptions of teaching/learning and their plans for their education.

6.4.5 Dialogues with Parents, Researchers, and Other Teachers

Dialoguing with other parties such as parents, researchers (as the teacher participants in the present study did), and other teachers can also help teachers in their search for possible dilemmas and conflicts. Dialoguing with parents is important because they are an
indispensable asset in ESL children’s education. They know their children best. As adults, they can better articulate the dilemmas and conflicts their children go through. Dialoguing with researchers personally, as well as reading the research literature, is another way for teachers to identify dilemmas and conflicts. Researchers can share their knowledge about what’s written in the research literature and professional journals that should not be ignored (Cherryhomes, 1988). Teachers can also dialogue with each other. They can dialogue with teachers from the same department, other departments, other schools, other districts, and other countries. By doing so, they can find out how others are dealing with similar issues, what other possibilities are available in handling similar situations, and the foundations for such practices.

6.4.6 Dialogues Should be On-going

By proposing dialogues among different parties, the researcher is not suggesting that the teachers at Carlton High did not have dialogues or did not arrange for their students to learn from each other. In fact, they had regular ESL Parents’ Night meetings where teachers, students, parents, school and school board administrators, and researchers met. They had their ESL Handbook and other literature available for students and parents. They had regular student evaluations of their ESL program as a whole and of specific ESL courses. They had friendship clubs and student learning assistants. The teachers also invited researchers who conducted studies in their classrooms to report their findings at their departmental meetings. And they incorporated the information they gained at these meetings into their teaching. However, the fact that the present study found discrepancies between teachers’ and students’ evaluations of project-based instruction suggests that there is a need for further, on-going communication. It indicates that more needs to be done.

The differences between ESL students’ previous and present educational cultures may be so great that it can take many years for students and their parents to realize that what is
considered important in Canadian schools is different from what is considered important at home. Therefore, an on-going dialogue between teachers and students may be necessary to communicate about specific activities such as project-based instruction. For instance, as pointed out earlier, teachers can tell their students why they think conducting projects is important for ESL students. The teachers can ask their students to tell them what they think of project-based instruction and why. If the gaps between the students’ home and host countries’ educational philosophies, cultures, and conceptions of language and language learning are as great as the present study suggests, a dialogue across these differences must be continuous, long term, concrete, and detailed. All aspects of the new form of schooling are potentially a source of conflict and tension for both students and teachers.

6.4.7 Managing Dilemmas and Conflicts

Once teachers have uncovered different beliefs and values and identified potential dilemmas and conflicts by dialoguing with different parties, what should they do with the knowledge? They can create opportunities for different parties to negotiate the differences and arrive at a shared common ground (Taylor, 1994; 1997; 1999). Negotiation of differences and arriving at common grounds is necessary because it allows us to achieve important goals (Taylor, 1997; 1999) that we mutually hold. It must nevertheless be said that while dialogues may be a precondition for the resolution of differences and dilemmas and conflicts may be a spur to rethinking differences, neither dialogue nor dilemmas and conflicts guarantee that the resolution of differences is an improvement on the status quo. Project-based instruction raises issues which are fundamental questions of education. Researchers and educators must always inquire critically into the quality of the resolutions of these issues.
6.4.8 Dilemmas and Conflicts as Driving Forces

Finally, it is important to point out that the discrepancies found between the teachers' and students' evaluations of project-based instruction should not necessarily be viewed as being negative. Rather, if we are correct in saying that the dilemmas and conflicts resulted from profound philosophical, cultural, and linguistic differences they should also be seen as essential seeds for productive thoughts (Billig, et al., 1988), for improvement and change (Cole, 1998; Mao, 1965). The existence of dilemmas and conflicts indicates the existence of thought and learning. It means that the students were noticing and thinking about the differences between their old and new educational cultures. It means they were learning. It also forces us to become reflective practitioners by examining our own mental models. Our knowledge of these dilemmas and conflicts will help us to view project-based instruction in a different light and to conduct more research on it. Thereby, the dilemmas and conflicts can become a driving force for change and improvement (Cole, 1998; Mao, 1965). As Mao (1965) points out, dilemmas and conflicts are good because they are "the essential and continuous principle in the development of all things" (p. 266). That is, if there are no conflicts or dilemmas, there will be no development.

In chapter 1, we saw that the essence of Kilpatrick's Project Method is wholehearted purposeful activity on the part of the learner. In chapter 5 we found that because of their different philosophies, cultures, and conceptions of language and language learning, the student participants in the present study did not fully understand the purposes their teachers had in conducting projects. Though the students accomplished what their teachers hoped they would in the projects, one is left to wonder how much more they would have learned had they shared their teachers' purposes. Project-based instruction has an open structure. Students like Andrew clearly learned a great deal, while some others seem to have held themselves back. It is important that students and teachers negotiate a shared common
purpose for their projects. For this reason alone dialogue across different cultures seems to be essential. But such dialogue also seems to be an important part of the students’ (and teachers’) education. For what they are learning are each others’ philosophies, cultures, and conceptions of language and language learning.
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